

Take Action: Time for Creative Writing

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Identify Your Concern/Research Your Concern

Students at the middle grade school level are receiving some time to write academically, usually in the Language Arts classroom, but are receiving substantially little time, if any, on writing freely in an environment that is not going to be correcting and marking what writing pieces they produce. Without this freedom creative writing will be discouraged as students will see this type of writing as unimportant since even the school ignores this activity.

In *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, Kelly Gallagher identifies ten factors that contribute to the increasing number of adolescents who are struggling to write:

1. Students are not doing enough writing.
2. Writing is sometimes assigned rather than taught.
3. Below-grade level writers are asked to write less than others instead of more than others.
4. English language learners are often shortchanged as well (low expectations of students in general).
5. Grammar instruction is ineffective or ignored.
6. Students are not given enough timed writing instruction or practice.
7. Some teachers have little or no knowledge of district and state writing standards.
8. Writing topics are often mandated with little thought about the prior knowledge and interests of the students.
9. Teachers are doing too much of the work. Students are not doing enough work.
10. Teachers need help assessing student writing (9-13).¹

From Gallagher's points of view it is obvious he is referring to writing within the classroom. If a teacher were to take these suggestions to heart and do them, the classroom environment would still be preparing students for some sort of assessment. Therefore they are not in an environment that exists to specifically help and encourage them to be better writers without a rubric.

The curricula for many grade levels has some stress on creative writing but teachers are likely to find themselves in the position of teaching creative writing as a unit and not as a year long activity. This is understandable given the amount of curricula to cover for any one class, let alone if the teacher is teaching several subjects.

Find Out Who Supports Me

There are several people willing to aid my efforts in creating a book club where students are free to use their hobbies as a vehicle to transport their ideas into stories unto paper. Through role playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Magic: The Gathering*,

¹ Gallagher, Kelly. *Teaching Adolescent Writers*. 2006. Stenhouse Publishers, 2006. Print.

Shadowrun, and many others storylines of epic proportion can be made as is evident with the numerous, and extremely popular, texts in print from game rules and expansions to series of novels based upon the worlds within these games. In an effort to allow students to play and write their stories in various forms of text I am supported by two Language Arts teachers and encouraged by the principal of Ridgeview Middle School.

Create a Plan

The plan of action begins with finding support. Once support is found rules, dates, times, and activities must be planned and interest must be sought out and participation encouraged. Posters are a sure way of announcing an event, lacking the materials one can rely on announcements if the office staff are willing to allow time for such. Parental permission is a concern not to overlook, even though students in my situation are not leaving school grounds I am sure parents would like to know what their children are doing! Lastly is how to leave an impression. How are people to know about the club's success? In my case a website that allows students to show-off or share their work through the publication of a Blog, since it is free and operable by only one person. This is another reason for parental awareness as names, schools, or any kind of information that may appear in a student's story could be innocently breaking someone's privacy, or safety. Another factor to plan for is supplies. Students will need a duo-tang, pencils, erasers, sharpeners, and in the case of this project where hobby games play a part in the setting for stories some gaming dice are needed and in the case of lower grades some preplanning for character creation and game leader selection will be needed to save time. Of course, this is only if hobbyists participate, my personal goal. All in all, supplies can cost anywhere between \$40-\$50 depending on how much you feel like spending on dice (sold at gaming and hobbyist stores).

In the case of my plan I have found supporters, an announcement will be made, rules written, and sessions will be occurring twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays 2:45 until 3:45. Mini-lessons (no marking!) will be on typical grammatical errors that are made thoughtlessly and often. These lessons are there to provide the students with an opportunity to get more out of a writer's club than simply the chance to write freely and creatively, a chance to improve upon their own skills as young writers.

Take Action

Taking action will happen anytime a teacher feels like taking action. A writer's club in some areas doesn't exist and there are always children who want to write, but do not have the opportunity to do so. My own Take Action will happen over the course of my seven week practicum. With that in mind a writer's club could make an excellent impression on a community even if a substitute teacher were to form one in an area where they are filling in for extended periods of leave.

Evaluate the Plan

I cannot identify any area where I may encounter problematic issues in the course of this Take Action plan. By notifying those that have the most influence (principal, parents) and those who can help the plan go smoothly (teachers) I have covered any bases where problems could have erupted, if anywhere. Even if students later would like to have their stories removed from the Blog contact information on the Blog would be made available for future use.

Apply Your Learning

At this point in my Take Action plan I can only speculate on the effectiveness, and therefore what I will learn. However, what I have learned is how easy extra-curricular activities can be to set up and arrange and how much they are welcomed. With such acceptance and general enthusiasm from others it has been a positive form of reinforcement and I actually am looking forward to trying this Take Action plan in my hometown when I get back.

Celebrate Your Success!

Since there is no cost associated with this club funding would have to come from fundraising or my own pocket. As a student this is not a viable option, for myself at any rate. For future reference, though, I would like to be able to have a pizza party or some such celebration with prizes for best story shared and a multitude of other activities. As a way of celebrating, however, I intend to allow the students and entire session to talk about their stories with each other and to read each other's work. After all, when one writes something, one writes it to be read.

Do You Write?
Play DND?
Magic?
Shadowrun?

If so, come and join the Writer's Club in the Healthy
Living Room each Monday and Wednesday from
2:45 until 3:45.

Just bring yourself, writing supplies and dice are
supplied, but if you want to bring your own, that's
just fine, too!

We look forward to seeing everyone there.