Designing an online Creative Writing workshop: group activity

Collection: Online teaching

Resource: Workshopping online

Approximate duration

2 hours

Learning outcomes

1. To reflect on ways in which the Creative Writing workshop might be supported by technology.
2. To have available an extended repertoire of tools and media for engaging students in writing exercises.

Introduction

Workshopping student writing takes place regularly in a Creative Writing course. In this exercise we are going to look at how the process of workshopping student writing might translate into an online experience. The activity starts with a discussion about the group's experiences of workshopping. The group then divides and comes up with ideas for a workshop of its own. Then, we look at three different ways in which student writing is being worked on/evaluated/discussed online by Creative Writing practitioners as a stimulus for thinking about how a workshop idea could be taken online. This then leads to a final comparison of ideas and closing discussion.

You could easily arrange for a couple of laptops in the room for students to watch the videoclips and enough copies of the reading for all participants. Alternatively you could jig the activity and let the participants view the video and text in their own time prior to the session or between this and a follow-up session.

The activity

1. Start the activity by asking the group about the purpose of workshopping. You could do this part either by dividing the class into small groups or as a class discussion. Take the time to elicit some examples of different workshopping approaches from members of the group. Which style works best? Why is this? Do different approaches work in different contexts...e.g. undergraduate vs postgraduate? Screenwriting vs Poetry?

2. Ask the group 'what doesn't work as well in the workshop? What are the limitations they encounter in the workshopping format? What do the students think? What does the feedback from your end of module/course surveys tell you?

3. The next step involves splitting the group into two halves and asking each half to draw from their own experience and come up with a context and a pedagogical approach they might use as part of a face-to-face Creative Writing workshop. This can be as constrained or unconstrained as you wish. This aspect of their approach is going to be turned into an online activity shortly.

4. Ask each group to swap their ideas with the other group. The other group then decides how they might transfer this idea to an online environment. To help stimulate their thinking about the approach they might use, and technologies they might employ, to achieve their learning outcomes make the following clips and readings available for the groups to look at. Timing for this will depend on group size and enthusiasm!

5. Bring the groups back together to report their plans to the other group as a class leading to a closing discussion about the benefits or otherwise of these kinds of approaches.

Materials

1. Real-time workshopping online

Spurred on by the appalling waste of paper, and the limited conceptions of editing, involved in many Creative Writing workshops, Steve May at Bath Spa university introduced *Etherpad (a free online resource) to selected groups of Creative Writing students at Bath Spa University. Etherpad is a web-based collaborative real-time editor,

and instant editing(i.e. it allows multiple access to one document at the same time). Noted benefits:

- The added levels of feedback;
- The diminishing preciousness of writers about their work;
- The value of the "thing" writers could take away with them after the session.

You can view the film on Vimeo now (http://vimeo.com/21299743).

 Using Etherpad for Creative Writing workshops
(http://vimeo.com/21299743)

*The EtherPad technology employed in this videoclip has been integrated into a number of newer tools on the web since this project took place. One popular one is Typewithme (http://typewith.me/)

2. Online workshops and discussion forums in the Creative Writing Classroom

Jackie Pieterick and Candi Miller from the University of Wolverhampton asked the question: Can discussion forums be an effective tool for engaging more experienced undergraduate students in writing communities and the Creative Writing ethos? Their chapter in an English Subject Centre Good Practice Guide to using discussion forums published in 2010 provides a wealth of answers to that question. You can follow the link to the guide on the Issuu website below (p31- 39) (http://issuu.com/englishsubjectcentre/docs/onlinediscussion)

3. Running poetry workshops by web conferencing

In this short clip (13 minutes), Michael Symmons Roberts talks about how the Creative Writing workshop is reconfigured for an international group of students who never actually meet face-to-face. This talk formed part of an English Subject Centre day long conference on *Creative Writing: Teaching & Technology

Teaching Poetry Online - Michael Symmons Roberts
(http://vimeo.com/24747013)

* You can watch other videoclips from the presentations on this day on the English Subject Centre website.

Links & References

- The Writing Workshop for Dummies: how the new teacher can mentor first-time writing students
- Online Discussion in English Studies: A Good Practice Guide to Design, Moderation and Assessment (HEA English Subject Centre Report Series, No. 21, 2010). ISBN: 978-1-905846-40-5.
- TypeWith.me - a replacement for EtherPad, providing live document sharing

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Area of Activity 1:** Design and planning of learning activities and / or programmes of study.

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.
http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/

Resources in the Online teaching Collection

- Online teaching: introduction to the collection
- What are VLE's good for?: resource overview
    - What is a VLE and why use it?: group activity
    - What is a VLE and why use it?: individual activity
- The design of online activities in English Studies: resource overview
    - Evaluating online activities in English Studies: group activity
    - Evaluating online activities in English Studies: individual activity
- Designing learning with new media: resource overview
    - Exploring new media and its potential in teaching: group activity
    - Exploring new media and its potential in teaching: individual activity
    - Designing an online activity in English Studies: group activity
    - Designing an online activity in English Studies: individual activity
- Teaching with digital archives: resource overview
    - Teaching with digital archives: group activity
    - Teaching with digital archives: individual activity
- Online discussion in English Studies: resource overview
    - Should online discussion be assessed?: group activity
    - Should online discussion be assessed?: individual activity
- Workshopping online: resource overview

- **Designing an online Creative Writing workshop: group activity (*you are here)**
- Designing an online Creative Writing workshop: individual activity