

Please cite as Thadphoothon, J. (2020). Blending Education with Tourism through Creative Writing in the English Language. Proceedings of ED-APHEIT 2020, 1-2 February 2020, Nakhorn Ratchasima Province, Thailand, pp. 352-360.

การบูรณาการการศึกษากับการท่องเที่ยวผ่านการเขียนเชิงสร้างสรรค์ในภาษาอังกฤษ

Blending Education with Tourism through Creative Writing in the English Language

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Abstract

In this paper, the writer discusses why creative writing in the English language has a role to play in fostering closer ties among peoples in the ASEAN region and beyond. Our stance is that creative writing, writing with constraints emailing two salient elements: creativity and imagination, is doable even with beginners. We strongly believe that creativity is crucial in human development in all dimensions. As the working language of ASEAN and the language of choice for creative writing activities, English has additional roles in building international relations and cross-cultural education, supporting the socio-cultural pillar of ASEAN. English as the official language of the region has a role to play beyond being the language of the meetings and official documentation, that is, as a language to express one's cultural identity, and in this case through creative works. I also explain how creative writing has been used to promote regional integration and collaboration under a creative writing group called "The Asian Teacher-Writers Group". The paper also provides examples of the group's activities, meetings, and material published. It entertains the exciting possibilities of integrating education with tourism.

Keywords: Creative writing, English, The Asian Teacher-Writers group, Educational tourism

Introduction

It is the writer strong belief to assert that creative writing has a role to play in bringing peoples together. When I say creative writing (CW), I mean the CW in English, considered or regarded as a global language. As a member of the Asian Teacher-Writers Group, originated in Bangkok Thailand in 2003, I would also like to give a few examples of the activities that we did to explain how CW has been used to foster greater ties between peoples of different cultural backgrounds. When we do creative writing, we do it in English and we have many good reasons for doing that. When I say creative writing, as far as I am concerned, I would conceptualize it as a kind of writing that reflects one’s creativity and imagination, and it is writing with constrains. Creative writers work within such constraints and try to stretch the possibilities of meaning and syntax. Creative writing, therefore, entails at least two components: creativity and imagination. Peoples across the globe may differ in many aspects, but they share one thing in common: that is, their creativity manifested through written works or other sign systems. CW is indeed a sign of advanced civilization.

English is not new to the ASEAN peoples, as mentioned, it is the second language in three member states, namely, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. In this paper, I discuss the role of English in ASEAN, based on the role prescribed by the ASEAN charter. English has another role to play, that is, to promote closer ties among the peoples in the ASEAN region, which could also be done through creative writing activities. English actually unifies peoples and reconciles differences.

We strongly believe that creativity is crucial in human development in all dimensions. In this paper, the focus is on how creative writing activities promote people-people cultural exchange and how our activities, perceived as educational ones, promote creative tourism in the region.

Based on my experience as a member of the group mentioned earlier, doing creative writing works in English would allow us to build personal as well as international relations, including cross-cultural interaction. In many aspects, the activities of our group operate at the people-to-people level, promoting the socio-cultural pillar of ASEAN. Yet, we recognize the criticisms of the English-only approach to creative writing, in particular, we acknowledge the argument that English could be regarded as the language of colonization and using English is a new form of imperialism, hence, the need to embrace multiculturalism (e.g. Phillipson, 2009). Our stance is that English is the most important global language of the 21st century, and its role as a ‘lingua franca’ has more advantages than shortcomings.

English as a Global Language

David Crystal has been credited as the first person who coined the term ‘English as a global language’ in 1997 (Crystal, 1997). In the book, he noted that the emergence of English as a global language is unprecedented; it is a unique phenomenon in the history of humans. The use of English in the ASEAN region

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is a common and noteworthy event, as some member states were closely associated with either the UK or the USA in their histories.

Starting from there, we recognize the role of English as a common language for international communication. We also recognize its role as a language of high social mobility and agency. For example, in Thailand, in the past, English was the language of the well-educated and the elites. Later, it has become the language for all. So, English remains prominent a major global language.

Next, I shall explain why CW should be done in English.

Why Creative Writing in English?

Before addressing the issue of CW in English, I would like to address one misunderstanding in the business of language teaching, that is, that creative writing is too difficult for young learners. This myth has created countless losses of opportunities in students across the world. It is not true that CW is suitable only for advanced language learners. You can provide creative writing activities for learners from beginners to advanced, from native speakers to non-natives or EFL learners (Maley, 2015). Several useful teaching ideas and activities can be adapted to suit young learners as well as beginners.

Creative writing can be done in any sign system, including English. In fact, every language has elements to create creative stories and creative works. Thai, for example, has its own literary works. One might ask why CW should to be rendered in English. The simple answer is the status of English as a global language and its role as the region's lingua franca or common language. We can cite the ASEAN charter or other research papers. But the plain fact is that it is the language widely used and the language of global education. Most schools and colleges offer English courses. Hence, it is everybody's language – the lingua franca to express one's history, cultural identity and imagination.

Besides, tradition has it that English is the language of technology, commerce, and education. The language is well-researched and its tradition in literature is strong. English is a second language in three ASEAN countries: the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. Its widespread instruction in the region has been noted (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Our group has several aims, one of which is to create effective instructional materials. The poems and stories as well as CW activities (we call them teaching ideas) are aimed at making English not boring and relevant to their contexts. This is in line with what Kirkpatrick has proposed for a multilingual model of English education. He wrote that “ Rather than a course in American or British culture, the ELT curriculum can provide a course in regional cultures. (p. 10).” With regard to the content and methods, in Malaysian context, Mukundan (2006) has urged English teachers to produce their own instructional materials.

The Asian Teacher-Writers Group

Our CW group began as a small group facilitated by Prof. Alan Maley (As of today, ours is still considered a small group by any modern organizational standard). We have about 25 members, with new members joining and older member opting out. After all, ours is a voluntary community and loosely structured. One of the websites that one can find out about our activities is below.

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<https://flexiblelearning.auckland.ac.nz/cw/index.html> - which is a webpage hosted by Auckland University in New Zealand. This website is under the care of Tan Bee Tin, one of our active members.

The activities of the group can be classified into three broad areas.

1. In-group workshops – where members get together in the agreed destination (e.g. Nepal), exchange ideas, yarns, and practice creative writing skills.
2. Running of workshops or conferences – Occasionally, we provide CW workshops for other associations or clubs. Sometimes, we co-organize academic conferences.
3. Publications – which can be classified into two groups (1) publication of works related to CW matters and (2) publication of academic papers or research

Here are some concrete examples.

In-group workshops

The main activity of the group is the CW workshop. This is when members and associates get to engage in their learning, entailing both theory and practice. We would write several types of verses and short stories. In addition, as most are either language teachers or those working in education, we also hold forums and group activities. This workshop often lasts for several days. Normally, we would have a writing trip, an excursion to places of significant values such as historical parks or temples. This would help trigger one's Muse in writing. After all, inspiration is not easy to please.

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As mentioned earlier, our members are somewhat informal and voluntary. Each workshop would welcome new faces, in addition to old ones. Every workshop would usually result in a publication. Every CW workshop participant would contribute their writings to the publication.



Figure 1: Our workshop in Pokhara, Nepal (2019)

The photograph above shows some of the members of the recent CW workshop in Pokhara, Nepal in late November 2019. Our week-long workshop were participated by ten international teachers and scholars across Asia.

Workshops and Conferences



Figure 2: Our conference in 2009

We often shoot two birds with one stone. Within a week-long workshop, we usually organize or help to organize workshops for English teachers, including organizing ELT conferences. This is how we function within the wider community of ELT/ESL professionals. Several papers and research studies have been published. Two of which are presented below:

Tan Bee Tin, Towards creativity in ELT: the need to say something new, *ELT Journal*, Volume 67, Issue 4, October 2013, Pages 385–397, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cct022>

Thadphoothon, J. (May 2017). Let’s Rap and Learn English: Promoting English Language Learning through the Rap Music Activity. Paper presented at the Faculty of Liberal Arts. King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Lat Krabang, Bangkok, Thailand

Publications

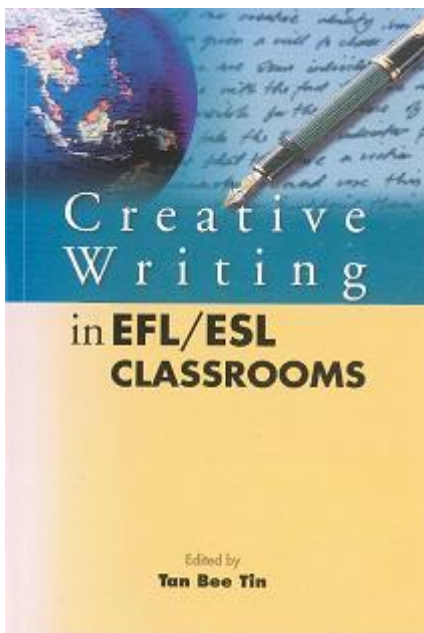


Figure 3: One of the books produced by group members

Content matters. Our group pays special attention to the content as well as the language, in addition to creativity and imagination. As the CW works that we have produced are locally and regionally situated, they are mingled with scents and sounds of the locals. The language, too, embraces the use of regional variations, regarded as a desirable characteristic by Andy Kirkpatrick (2011) who has proposed a model called the multilingual model, in the context of English as a lingua franca in “multilingual settings”. As mentioned earlier, under the model, local content in English with regional vocabulary, has its place in the students’ learning process. English needs to be localized.

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Contrary to the stereotyped notion of writers or creative writers, our approach is very much the people-oriented one. Here we bring peoples together. Usually our members are from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Creative writing is not just coming up with ‘products’ it also about following a process of writing. In the process, teachers as writers would learn from one another. Maley (2015) has this advice to new creative writers:

Talk to people who are interested in writing or in what you have written. But make sure they are people you can trust – to tell you the truth about your writing, and not to use it as a weapon against you among your other friends. It is always a good idea to get another opinion about your writing: it is far easier to spot someone else’s faults than it is to spot your own.

Maley (2015, p. 80)

It seems that CW has the potential to promote economic growth as well as intellectual one, not to mention the growth of GDP. On reflection, CW is not an individualist and isolated enterprise, rather, it is a highly socialized one. It has several educational benefits, especially deep and meaningful learning. CW, hence, creates opportunities or motivation for peoples to travel to different places and get together and do their discussions and produce creative written texts. One may, however, entertain the thought of linking education with tourism. We have heard more and more the term ‘educational tourism’.

In the next section, I shall explain the bleeding of the two, tourism and education.

Education and Tourism

Under this section, I would like to discuss one remaining issue, namely the relationship between education and tourism. It must be acknowledged that tourism has become a term used in many contexts, including health and wellness. We might have heard the term like health tourism, where foreign visitors come to Thailand for good health and healthcare and relax at the same time. Equally popular is the concept of work and travel – the combination of work and tourism. What is gaining a momentum across the globe is also the concept of tourism and education. Some have called this mixing ‘edurism’ – the marriage between education and tourism. An *edurist* is a person who travels to other places to study, learn, and see places at the same time. This is a point of departure from the general term of ‘tourist’.

It is not only possible but desirable to travel and learn about things or people at the same time. We travel to learn; we learn as we travel. No wonder tradition has several sayings regarding this relationship. One example is this: To travel is to broaden one’s mind. Traveling fosters other transversal skills such as tolerance and empathy.

With the accessibility of the Internet and smartphones, we now can travel and study at the same time. Many tourists come to Thailand, for example, to learn Thai cooking or Thai herbal medicine or massage.

Some European tourists travel to Myanmar to practice and learn about mindfulness and meditation. There is always learning opportunities awaiting people who desire to learn something new and worth learning. With new digital technology, nowadays, more people start talking about perpetual learning or anytime-anywhere learning. Some even suggest the merging of face-to-face and online self-learning.

As a matter of fact, a small-scale investigation conducted by Thongsin and Thadphoothon (2020) found that Thai university students have integrated digital technology into their educational and personal lives. Elon Musk might have called them ‘cyborgs.’ We found that the students generally watched YouTube videos to learn the English language. They downloaded translation applications to help them learn the language or do their assignments. Google translation was found to be the most popular application, followed by YouTube. The general trend was that university students were highly active users of smartphones and applications. They have been using them for all kinds of purposes, from entertainment, work, and education.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper discusses the link between education and tourism, and the need to embrace creative writing in education. It offers a conceptual framework for looking at educational tourism, a new frontier in tourism and education. Creative writing in English at the international level has several benefits, including the potential to boost tourism and cultural exchange, the foundation of any strong regional community like ASEAN. The Asian Teacher-Writers Group is given as an example of an effort to create forums of knowledge exchange and cross-cultural learning. The paper also discusses the possibilities offering by digital technology in bridging the gap between education and tourism. Indeed, the topics of creativity and technology are two new frontiers in years to come.

Recommendations

1. Creative writing has the potential to make both education and tourism more creative and productive. Teachers, especially English language teachers, should integrate CW in their lessons. At the same time, out-of-class language learning and activities should be promoted.
2. English language teachers, native and non-native alike, need to keep up with new technologies, especially AI machines. They may need to incorporate other elements in their teaching, including tourism and entertainment.
3. Efforts should be made to foster teacher-teacher collaboration and meetings across Asia. This should function within the context of professional development and academic advancement.

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