

FLOW

Foreign
Language
Opportunities
in Writing

Edited by
Jan Majer and Łukasz Salski

Malgorzata Adams-Tukiendorf

University of Opole

WHY DO LESS CREATIVE STUDENT WRITERS WRITE LONGER TEXTS?

Abstract

When teaching academic writing in English the issue of creativity understood as experimenting, exploring and transforming language and ideas within the required writing task while keeping the audience and purpose in mind is rarely, if ever, considered. Still, there seems to be a relationship between the creative potential of a writer and the quality and quantity of their writing. The main aim of this article is to ponder upon the results of a small scale study on the relationship between students' creativity as measured by KANH questionnaire and their lexical fluency in academic writing. The results seem to suggest that student writers who appear less creative write longer texts. The author discusses possible reasons for such a case, finding answers in research on creativity as such and creativity in writing specifically.

1. Introduction

Creativity is a complex notion which receives attention of researchers from various domains – art, psychology, education, to mention just a few.

As we read in Popek (2008), in 1980s the main theory that tried to explain the notion of creativity was cognitive psychology, which sought the difference between creative and non-creative individuals within the sphere of thinking. Creativity was linked with divergent thinking, while convergent thinking was perceived as non-creative. One important assumption of this theory was that a creative act is conscious and purposeful and the process of creation goes through established stages of generating and formulating a problem, analyzing it, generating ideas to solve it, assessing them, choosing one solution from amongst them, and then applying it and verifying the result. The enumerated stages reflect a general model of thinking (intellectual sphere), which can be found applied in the theory of writing where writing is understood as a multi-stage process, although the process itself is nonlinear. The writer starts with becoming aware of the task (the problem) and its requirements, then researches the topic,

generates ideas to develop it and writes the first draft of the text, which will be later revised. The revision process helps to assess the validity of generated ideas and their cohesion as well as the strength of topic development (supporting details), which then leads to writing the second draft (cf. applying the solution). Finally, the draft is verified as a product in reference to the requirements of the task.

1970s and 1980s was the time when creativity in writing was tackled mostly by researchers and practitioners who propagated the process approach to writing (e.g. Emig, 1971; Elbow, 1973; Perl, 1981; Moore, 1983; Nystrand, 1974). As the person of the writer was considered central in the context of writing, researchers started to investigate the extent to which individual differences between writers – including their creative potentials – were relevant in the process of writing. For instance, Perl (1981) stressed that it was important to realize individual preferences in approaching the writing process; she also underlined, however, the importance of creating a supportive environment which would enable a student writer to write freely and be creative, though she did not define the notion of creativity as such. The supportive writing context should, according to Perl, include e.g. choosing own topics, expressing own voice and using own knowledge to develop those topics as well as sharing own thoughts and ideas with peers, becoming thus more aware of the real audience. She implied that as a result learners would produce deeper and more detailed and interesting texts. Moreover, Moore (1983) implied that creative learners approached the writing task differently, which was confirmed in his study in the assessment of the level of originality and imaginativeness in text (measured on a scale 1-9 by two panels of independent judges, where the first panel received no instructions or definitions of how to understand originality, while the second panel was informed that originality meant an infrequent or divergent response, in contrast to craftsmanship that was defined as how well the text was organized and developed, while aesthetic value was understood as how memorable the text was). The study's results confirmed that the more creative student writers, namely those who showed more varied manipulation of objects, i.e. seeking deeper relationships between them (a pre-writing task involving creativity), received statistically higher scores for originality and aesthetic value in comparison to the less creative colleagues as assessed by both panels of judges and significantly higher score for craftsmanship as assessed by the second panel. As Moore stated, "The way a student approaches a writing problem is directly related to the originality of a product" (3).

Another theory that tries to explain creativity is the interactive theory of abilities that considers the influence of one's personality (including emotions and motivation – the characterological sphere) and the social environment on

both cognitive abilities and such special abilities (talents) that do not have to derive from the cognitive abilities, which then results in more or less creative behaviour (Popek, 2008). To clarify, creativity understood as creative behaviour or a creative act is influenced by such interacting factors as intellectual capabilities, special abilities or talents, emotions, motivation and socio-cultural environment (family, friends, school). Interaction among such factors is a dynamic process which may be observed at the level of individual or group differences.

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), creativity is “bringing to the existence something genuinely new that is valued enough to be added to the culture” (p. 25). In his view it is not that much the person’s personality but rather the judgement of the professionals in the field that plays a role in validating the product of creation as deserving the label “creative”. He acknowledges that there are certain people who might be called *personally creative*, “who experience the world in novel and original ways” (p. 25); he is more interested, however, in those who produce something regarded by others as creative while at the same time not necessarily showing themselves any signs of creative personality. To him, creativity is in the product not in the person. To him having a creative personality and producing something regarded as creative (novel, original, and applicable) are two different, unrelated forms of creativity, each measured with the use of different tools and which should be thus considered separately.

A personal trait of “creativity” is not what determines whether a person will be creative. What counts is whether the novelty he or she produces is accepted for inclusion in the domain. (...) the trait of personality may help generate novelty that will change the domain, but it is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for it. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996: 28-29)

This theory is parallel to the social theory of writing, in which again cognitive abilities of a writer are seen as influenced in the process of writing by outside factors. The most influential outer factor is the reader or the whole discourse community who decides upon the value of the final product (text). When we consider teaching academic writing, there are two aspects which need to be recognized. The first one is the structure and cohesion of text (cf. the notion of genre in Swales, 1990) and the second is the text content including the treatment of the topic and the ideas selected to support it. The text structure is required to be modelled according to the rules set by the discourse community. For instance, an academic essay is expected to be of a certain length, divided into paragraphs organized around a certain model of organisation, such as e.g. the pattern of research paper with an introduction, literature review, study, results, discussion

and conclusion. The text needs to be supported with references to acknowledged sources and the style of writing needs to comply with a generally accepted level of formality. In this aspect novelty is not expected, if not unwelcome. The text content, on the other hand, is expected to include references to earlier publications in the field, neatly synthesized; a certain degree of novelty in the treatment of the topic may be anticipated, however. The academic writer is to demonstrate that they have something to contribute to the field. Still, to what extent what they argue can be actually regarded as novel remains at the experts' discretion.

In the context of the social approach to writing writer's creativity seems pushed aside while fulfilment of the expert discourse community's expectations becomes vital. Writers are expected to learn how to write appropriately in their particular disciplines by mastering the genres preferred by the discourse community to which they belong or aspire to. In their article on student academic writing Allison and Mei (2001) reported that university students write to meet some general institutional expectations or those of their teachers' and thus "fear to step out of the accepted and expected framework" (62). As they write to please their teachers, they also realize that their writing is by no means expected to be innovative; what is more, as it was noticed by one student participating in the study, "some lecturers don't really like new ideas" (64). The authors also stress the fact that the nature of the task of writing an academic essay may even further enhance such a response because it is the teacher who is both the audience and the assessor and thus it is the teacher who sets guidelines. In many cases such guidelines are actually helpful, provided they are clear. Still, when following them closely, some students find them restrictive, leaving no room for originality or personal voice. For instance, setting a word limit may prompt students to follow the "principle of least effort" (cf. Brown and Yule, 1983). In their final remarks, Allison and Mei (2001) postulate finding balance in academic writing between the teacher's expectations and creativity, between student conformity to narrow conventions of academic writing and their need to explore both form and content.

Nevertheless, regardless of the fact whether the writer is overtly considered in the approach to writing or not, they are still very much involved in it, together with all their inborn or acquired differentiating variables with writing itself remaining predominantly a problem solving activity that involves the writer in processing the information at different cognitive levels. The writer needs to formulate the problem and then search for solutions, which involves both generating ideas and evaluating them until the final product is ready to be presented to the reader. In the context of academic writing, the problem itself is usually well known to the students since it has been already formulated by the

teacher or the audience (e.g. writing an essay to compare or contrast two theories). Depending on their psychological construction that reveals itself in individual differences among learners, however, the student writers may approach a writing task differently. Moreover, as Ward et al. (1999) suggest, the way one approaches generating ideas and then evaluating them depends also on the nature of the task. Accordingly, they differentiate between simple and complex tasks or those that are conceptually focused and those that are relatively ambiguous (192). The task activates such mental processes that match its constraints, for instance searching memory for earlier performed tasks of similar nature, making associations, restructuring the existing knowledge of how to perform a given task, or transforming knowledge from one domain into another. Nonetheless, the human factor also plays a certain role here. Different individuals may interpret task constraints differently thus engaging in particular cognitive processes to a varied degree. Although Ward et al. (1999) stress that creative thinking based on generative and exploratory processes is available to everyone (the normative nature of creativity), they also state that creative and non-creative thinking represent a continuum and movement on the continuum depends on “the extent to which generative processes, exploratory processes, and preinventive structures [mental structures activated on which cognitive processes operate] are involved” (193).

As theories behind creativity and writing seem to overlap, the author of this paper decided to research both constructs so as to ascertain the nature of the relationship between them. The aim of this article is thus to shed some light on the influence of writers’ creative potentials on their texts. To investigate how the creative potential of student writers affects their writing, a small scale study was conducted, in which creativity was understood, in line with Popek (2008), as an act dependent upon individual features of both character and intellect. Popek (2008) explains that creative behaviour is rooted in individual capabilities that develop with age and comprise three distinct elements of human psyche, namely the cognitive, the emotional and the motivational sphere. Intellectual and special capabilities (talents including creative performance) develop on the basis of such spheres. These elements interact and form combinations which are characteristic for individuals (individual types of talent). Furthermore, they are integrated through personality and social environment. Thus the theoretical model of creativity needs to recognize two sides – on the one hand inner factors such as writer’s personality that conditions inborn capabilities (intellectual, creative and special talents) and on the other writer’s motivation to perform as well as outer factors such as family, school, or friends that significantly influence the activation and development of inner capabilities.

For the purposes of this study the following hypothesis has been posed:

H1: student writers' creative potentials affect texts' length.

Additional research questions have been considered to study the context of academic writing in more detail.

Q1. What is the role of students' creative potentials in academic writing?

Q2. What is the role of essay writing as a task in academic writing?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Data were collected from 34 second year students of English Philology who took part in the study as part of their academic writing course. The sample consisted of 14 male and 20 female students. The students were informed about the nature of the study and agreed to take part in it by filling in a questionnaire and submitting their papers; they were not made aware, however, of the particular study's focus.

2.2. Measures

Fluency in writing. Writing fluency was measured on the basis of word frequency (total number of words in text, Wolfe-Quintero et al., 1998; cf. four aspects of creativity in Torrance Test, where the mean number of words per response is considered to be a measure of elaboration in a creative performance while fluency is the total number of different responses, Torrance, 1974).

Creativity. Questionnaire KANH (Popek, 2008) was used to ascertain students' creativity as based on the interactive model of creativity, which incorporates the following aspects: personality, motivation and environmental conditioning. The questionnaire is based on the assumption that a creative pose comprises two spheres: cognitive (intellectual) and characterological (personality, emotions, motivation). The first one derives from intellectual predisposition of a person which in the questionnaire is recognized from two opposing angles. Intelligence, sensitive perception, good memorization, independent information processing and production of new ideas using intuition, imagination and divergent thinking are labelled as heuristic behaviour (*nota*

bene: it is a broader concept than just divergent thinking, which was earlier considered a substitute construct to creativity, cf. Runco, 1991). The opposite to the heuristic behaviour is an algorithmic behaviour, which comprises convergent thinking, copying, reproduction, analysis and logical reasoning, lack of new ideas, low level of reflectivity, and a generally intellectually passive behaviour. The second sphere tested in the questionnaire is the characterological one, which is based on a person's features of personality spanning from non-conformist to conformist poses. A person characterized as non-conformist would be usually independent, active, flexible, open, confident, perseverant, tolerant, reflective, critical, bold, and spontaneous, while that characterized as conformist would display such traits of character as dependence, stereotypical thinking, inhibition, defensive pose, intolerance, lack of criticism, low level of persistence and low self-confidence. It is important to mention that a person may behave differently in different situations (cf. the role of social conditioning or the influence of the social environment), that is why when interpreting the results it is well-advised to consider the whole spectrum of interacting variables.

The questionnaire contains 30 statements for each sphere (60 items altogether). It uses a scale from 0 to 2 where 0 means the statement does not apply to the person at all (*this is not me*) while 2 means that the statement fully reflects the person (*this is me*). As each tested sphere is represented on a continuum (from the conformist to the non-conformist behaviour K-N and from the algorithmic to the heuristic thinking A-H), the results may be considered both separately – showing how strong particular areas are, or jointly – showing a general tendency of a person to be creative or non-creative. For example, one person may have scored 11 points in the conformist pose and 15 in the non-conformist one, which may mean that depending on the particular outside situation the person may show either conformist or non-conformist features of character, which is in agreement with the dynamic theory of personality claiming that one of human characteristics is possessing features of opposing values (Popek, 2008).

The questionnaire is a valuable measure as the researcher may examine individual aspects looking for the one that is dominant, such as the heuristic vs. the algorithmic thinking (the intellectual sphere) and the conformist vs. the non-conformist behaviour (the characterological/motivational sphere) or the researcher may want to see which pose – creative or non-creative – is dominant in a given person or in a given group. In such a case the results for the creative pose (K+A) and for the non-creative pose (N+H) may be added, showing thus the strength of each pose, where the higher the score the stronger the pose. The third option is to represent the values on a continuum from -30 to +30 for each sphere and then to subtract one value from the other (N-K and H-A). The

positive value would then indicate the creative pose, while the negative the non-creative pose.

2.3. Materials

Students taking part in the study completed their KANH questionnaires in class at the beginning of their academic writing course and were informed about the course content and organisation. They worked on two academic essays – one per semester (see the second essay assignment in Appendix – a letter to students). Data were collected from three drafts per semester. There were two in-class preliminary drafts to help students generate ideas on a general theme (the first essay was written around the theme of change and the second around the theme of balance). These were handed in to become a point of reference for next drafts' evaluation. Then mid drafts and final drafts were collected. The researcher collected six texts altogether from each participant in the whole study.

The writing task chosen for the purpose of this study was an academic essay based on sources (considered the most common college-level writing assignment, Gradwohl-Nash et al., 1993), which can be deemed authentic in the academic context (authentic learning tasks enhance creativity, see Woolfolk, 1998). Moreover, there was an element of novelty in the task. The students' previous experience in writing was rooted in writing short essays without relying on sources. This time they were expected to write longer essays based on sources (novelty enhances creativity, see Woolfolk, 1998). Thus, they had prior knowledge and experience in general writing (e.g. they knew that the text should have an introduction, body and conclusion, they knew how to write in paragraphs, their command of English matched advanced level of proficiency, which ensured good language base for academic writing); now they were to use that in a new writing context. The task itself could be also considered complex (the students were to go through several stages before they produced the final product), with a clear structure (the students were informed about the task constraints, namely focus areas to be assessed in the final draft: thesis and topic development, style, source documentation) as well as the time framework for submitting particular drafts for organisational purposes (see Appendix – a letter to students). However, they were free to choose their own topic within the general theme, which was to enhance their intrinsic motivation to write. They were informed that they could modify or change the topic completely if they wished to do so in the process of writing. In that regard, the task may be considered divergent, leaving space for generating various ideas.

The preliminary texts (in-class writing), the middle drafts and the final drafts were measured for their length (total number of words); due to the fact that students practiced quoting sources in their writing, the second and the final drafts, however, were measured twice each – the first measure was the total number of words altogether, while the second was the total number of words excluding all quotations. The text length was a dependent variable, while creativity measured in two spheres (characterological and intellectual ones) was an independent variable. The writing task was considered a moderator variable.

2.4. Analysis

In the study the researcher calculated the descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation) for the particular creativity poses in the study group as well as for the sums of K+N and A+H, and the subtraction of N-K and H-A. Moreover, a linear correlation (Spearman rho correlation coefficient with the level of statistical significance established at $p \leq .05$) was calculated to seek a relationship between the participants’ creativity and their performance in academic writing. The results were additionally displayed graphically in tables.

2.5. Results

Creativity: descriptive statistics. Comparing the results with a standardized representation the following levels of creativity were observed in the group (see Table 1; the standardized scale carries the following meaning: results 5-6 are average, 7-10 are high; and 1-4 are low, see Popek, 2008: 55, cf. Brzeziński, 1984: 175).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for creative/non-creative pose (N=34)

| creativity | mean | sten (norm) | level of creative behaviour |
|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| v1 K | 8,47 | 4 | low Conformism |
| v2 A | 12,38 | 4 | low Algorithmic |
| v3 N | 18,97 | 6 | average Non-conformism |
| v4 H | 18,21 | 6 | average Heuristic |
| SUM | | | |
| v1+v2 K+A | 20,85 | 4 | low non-creative |
| v3+v4 N+H | 37,18 | 6 | average creative |
| SUBRTACTION | | | |
| v4-v2 H-A | 5,82 | 6 | average creative – heuristic |
| v3-v1 N-K | 10,5 | 7 | high creative – non-conformist |

The study group shows a stronger tendency to be creative, with the score of 18 points for both the non-conformist and the heuristic behaviour ($sd=3,5$), and lower scores for the conformist (mean=8) and the algorithmic (mean=12) behaviours ($sd=3,5$). With the scores added (in the interactive theory the variables are the sum of parsed variations), the final result for the study group is on average 20 points for the non-creative pose (K+A) and 37 points for the creative pose (N+H). Such a result shows only a general tendency without considering the influence of particular aspects (intellectual predisposition, special abilities, and motivation to act creatively); what transpires is a mixture of various predispositions and outside environmental factors. In order to examine even closer creativity in the study group, the researcher performed another calculation. Both spheres were considered to form a continuum and the strength of a particular pose was examined on the basis of a subtraction rather than a sum of particular values of the same sphere. In this particular case, the positive score represents the creative pose, while the negative score – the non-creative pose. The fact that the study results point to the positive score displays the students' tendency to be creative rather than non-creative in both spheres.

Examining the results of both separated and joint variables is meaningful as it leads to a better understanding of the representations of each sphere in both poses. This particular group of students is a good example of people with features characteristic for both poses, the creative and the non-creative. That means that students can both copy someone else's work as well as produce their own; or that they can conform to the authority of the teacher, for example, but that they can be also quite independent. Nonetheless, the general results show a stronger tendency among student towards assuming the creative pose, which means that they are more often creative than non-creative.

Fluency in writing: Descriptive statistics. The results show a general tendency for the increase in the text length from one draft to the other and from one semester to the other (see Table 2). The observed differences are statistically significant at $p \leq 0,05$. When the length was considered in regarding texts with and without quotations, it turned out that students on average had 13% of text in someone else's words in the first semester and on average 11% in the second semester, which complies with a general rule regarding the allowed amount of quotations in academic texts (average 10%).

Table 2. Fluency in writing – total number of words (N=34).

| Text | mean | sd | median |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| v5 (in class 1) | 409,5 | 132,2 | 415 |
| v6 (middraft 1) | 1119,4 | 323,7 | 1030 |
| v7 (middraft 1 – Q) | 973,8 | 273,3 | 919 |
| v8 (final 1) | 1185,9 | 351,8 | 1157 |
| v9 (final 1 – Q) | 1026,4 | 332,9 | 1092 |
| v10 (in class 2) | 213,3 | 98,9 | 200 |
| v11 (middraft 2) | 1364,2 | 712,0 | 1112 |
| v12 (middraft 2 – Q) | 1200,4 | 685,1 | 977 |
| v13 (final 2) | 1420,0 | 514,8 | 1294 |
| v14 (final 2 – Q) | 1264,1 | 507,6 | 1077 |

1 – semester 1

2 – semester 2

Q = quotations (in words)

Spearman correlation for individual variables. A linear correlation between individual variables showed a certain tendency. First of all, there is a positive correlation between the non-creative algorithmic behaviour (A) (the intellectual sphere) and the papers written in the second semester (the mid-draft and the final text for both versions – with and without quotations) (see Table 3). The stronger the non-creative algorithmic behaviour the longer the texts. The results are statistically significant at $p \leq 0,05$. Second of all, there is a negative correlation between the creative heuristic behaviour (H) (the intellectual sphere) and the in-class written text in the second semester (see Table 4). The stronger the creative heuristic behaviour the fewer words in the text. The results are statistically significant at $p \leq 0,05$.

Table 3. Spearman Rank Order Correlations (new.sta) (N=34); algorithmic behaviour (A) vs. text length.

| | Spearman R | t(N-2) | p-level |
|------------|------------|--------|---------|
| V2 and V11 | 0,463 | 2,961 | 0,01 |
| V2 and V12 | 0,354 | 2,143 | 0,03 |
| V2 and V13 | 0,504 | 3,301 | 0,01 |
| V2 and V14 | 0,340 | 2,050 | 0,04 |

Table 4. Spearman Rank Order Correlations (new.sta) (N=34); heuristic behaviour (H) vs. text length.

| | Spearman R | t(N-2) | p-level |
|------------|------------|--------|---------|
| V4 and V10 | -0,363 | -2,203 | 0,03 |

Spearman correlation for joint variables. When creativity variables were considered jointly, either as a sum or as a subtraction showing the strength of the non-creative and the creative poses, the following results were obtained (see Table 5 and Table 6). There is a positive correlation between the non-creative pose and two texts written in the second semester (the full version with quotations). The stronger the non-creative pose the longer the text (the total number of words). The results are statistically significant at $p \leq 0,05$. Moreover, the tendency already revealed in the correlation of individual variables of creativity and confirmed in the sum of variables comprising both poses was again observed in the subtraction. There is a negative correlation between the creative pose and the length of the two texts written in the second semester (the full version with quotations). The stronger the creative pose within the intellectual sphere the shorter the text. The results are statistically significant at $p \leq 0,05$.

Table 5. Spearman Rank Order Correlations (new.sta) (N=34); sum: K+A

| sum | Spearman R | t(N-2) | p-level |
|---------------|------------|--------|---------|
| V1+V2 and V11 | 0,332 | 1,991 | 0,05 |
| V1+V2 and V13 | 0,370 | 2,258 | 0,03 |

Table 6. Spearman Rank Order Correlations (new.sta) (N=34); subtraction: H-A.

| subtraction | Spearman R | t(N-2) | p-level |
|---------------|------------|--------|---------|
| V4-V2 and V11 | -0,347 | -2,099 | 0,04 |
| V4-V2 and V13 | -0,413 | -2,572 | 0,01 |

2.6. Discussion

The results confirm the expected relationship between the creative potential of student writers and the length of their academic essays. The revealed tendency for the less creative students to write longer texts, however, necessitates a more thorough analysis.

Creativity may be analysed from various perspectives. Feldman (1999) enumerates several dimensions of creativity, which may be grouped into

dimensions “within”, such as cognitive processes (intellect) and social/emotional processes (personality), and dimensions “without”, including family aspects (growing up and current situation), education and preparation (formal and informal), characteristics of the domain and field (subject within which one creates), social/cultural contextual aspects and historical forces, events, trends. In the context of the study under discussion, cognitive factors (the intellectual sphere) showed their influence upon fluency in writing, thus creativity should be considered from the perspective of cognitive processes involved in the creative performance.

Answering the question why less creative student writers write longer texts may require a consideration of two aspects – the perspective of a person, which is personal/individual differences between more and less creative individuals, and the task chosen as a moderator variable.

Novice writers. What do we know about the participants of the study? Those were young adults (on average 20-21 years old) who had some prior experience in general writing; their experience with academic writing, however, began only when the research was launched. Thus they may be called novice academic writers with little experience. Creativity in any domain requires time spent on learning and practice (a critical period of preparation before one becomes an expert; cf. 10 year rule for mastering the domain, Feldman, 1999). This means that their products should not be expected to be novel or original; still their inner intellectual or characterological constructions may at some point either help or inhibit them in performing creatively. Gardner (1993) stresses that when one has an inborn talent, one need to focus on it and train how to best use it to their advantage. Only then it may flourish. In our context, it may be essential to provide the students with plenty of practice in writing academic texts so that they can broaden their expertise and become the future generation of academic writers capable of using their creative potential. This, however, would require a separate longitudinal study to monitor if creative potentials of the students reveal themselves in any aspect of creativity in text. For now it is more important to consider why the text length differed in the case of creative and less creative student writers. Possibly, it might have been due to one’s cognitive style (preferences in thinking) which may in turn be responsible for differences in responding to a particular task (cf. Policastro and Gardner, 1999).

Idea generation and evaluation – creativity as a process. Policastro and Gardner (1999) suggest that creative individuals have a more accurate sense of domain relevance; in other words they are better at distinguishing what is important and relevant from what is not (see also Boden, 1990; Davidson and Sternberg, 1984). Similarly, Groborz and Nęcka (2003) point to the role of evaluation as a crucial process in creative problem solving. A creative

individual, on the one hand, easily generates ideas and, on the other, can successfully judge which ideas are worth developing and which need to be abandoned. It may be presumed that in this study the students had the same level of expertise – all of them were 2 year students of English Philology. Thus, if they had a similar prior experience in writing in English but the texts differed in length, it might be that the less creative student writers could not balance these two cognitive processes effectively and were less successful in distinguishing relevant and irrelevant information, consequently producing longer texts (the difference in length was statistically significant).

Thinking style and task type. According to O'Hara and Sternberg (2000: 208) "thinking styles are preferences in using mental abilities, not mental abilities themselves". In this study the students' thinking preferences were established based on a reliable psychological tool KANH (Popek, 2008). The group was on average creative with a strong tendency of being non-conformist and an average tendency of being heuristic in their thinking. On the other hand, it was the non-creative algorithmic thinking that correlated with the text length. The algorithmic behaviour represents preferences in tasks that require copying, reproduction, analysis and convergent thinking directed towards complying with the task constraints and seeking the one solution that is considered correct. Individuals in whom this behaviour was dominant would be more dependent on the teacher, would prefer following clearly defined rules and using the teacher's way of solving a problem as a model to imitate (cf. executive thinking style O'Hara and Sternberg, 2000). Can it be the case that the essay-writing task offered to the students in the study could have been interpreted differently by different students?

Essay writing is a common educational evaluation device (examining knowledge in a subject area); it is also commonly used as a medium for practicing academic writing. If it is a part of a formal examination, it takes a form of a knowledge-based task (students are to prove their knowledge of a subject via written performance). If it is used as an independent project in which every student chooses their own topic, researches sources and synthesizes the information from these sources, the task setting is much different since it allows a different degree of freedom and, probably, lets creativity come to play a more important role. Assuming that students with the dominant algorithmic behaviour interpreted the essay-writing as a task in which they not only needed to comply with the established requirements of text organization but also needed to develop the ideas thoroughly, which usually meant they had to write a lot, they would do their best to satisfy that requirement. As O'Hara and Sternberg (2000) imply, students with different intellectual tendencies may approach writing differently. Their thinking styles may predetermine how they tackle particular tasks. "A

match between the student's thinking style and what he or she is asked to do should result in higher performance than should a mismatch" (198).

As the group studied here was as such rather new to the concept of academic writing, the novelty of the situation could only have strengthened the conformist behavior, usually characterized with a low level of criticism and dependence on the teacher's evaluation, which could then result in writing longer texts, though not necessarily of higher quality. The aspect of quality could be considered in a follow up study in which a correlation between text quantity and text quality could be considered in reference to both tendencies – the creative and the non-creative – as displayed by the study group.

3. Conclusion

In this article the main focus was on observing a relationship between student writers' creative potential and their writing. The results of the study point to the following conclusions. First of all, the creative potential of a writer reveals itself in the product, at least on the surface (text length), even though a writer may not be an expert in a particular field. Second of all, the type of task in which a student-writer is engaged may influence the approach to tackling that particular task and solving the problem embedded in it. The ensuing differences in the task performance may be then related to one's preferences in cognitive processing of the task at hand. Finally, it is vital for the teacher to be aware of the individual differences among learners – creativity being one of them – and adjust their approach to teaching academic writing according to these differences so that the talents of the individuals or of the group are well-considered and strengthened. As Weisberg (1999) rightly put it, "some broad limits are set by genetic factors, but if the persona is capable of carrying out the activity, then, with sufficient deliberate practice, he or she can reach highest level of performance" (233). It appears that creative potentials of student writers may constitute valuable assets in their writing. Creative individuals are usually more flexible, autonomous and capable of thinking critically, which should be respected, if not nurtured (cf. Aik Kwang, 2003). If the creative potential is appreciated in academic writing then with time and training the more creative individuals will use their potentials more consciously and produce texts that are succinct but at the same time showing a high quality and originality.

References

- Aik Kwang, Ng. 2003, "April. A Cultural Model of Creative and Conforming Behavior." *Creativity Research Journal*, 15(2/3). 223-233.
- Allison, D. and W. Siew Mei. 2001. „Academic writing. Whose expectations?” *RELC Journal* 32(1). 52-72.
- Boden, M. 1990. *The creative mind*. New York: Basic.
- Brown, G. and G. Yule. 1983. *Teaching the spoken language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brzeziński, J. 1984. *Elementy metodologii badań psychologicznych*. [Basic methodology for psychological research]. Warszawa: PWN.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1996. *Creativity. Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: HarperParrenial.
- Davidson, J. E. and R. J. Sternberg. 1984. The role of insight in intellectual giftedness. *Gifted Child Quarterly* 28. 58-64.
- Emig, J. 1971. *The composing processes of twelfth graders*. Urbana: Ill. NTCE.
- Elbow, P. 1973. *Writing without teachers*. New York: The Oxford Press.
- Feldman, D. H. 1999. "The development of creativity." In Sternberg, R. J. (ed.), *Handbook of creativity*, 169-186. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardner, H. 1993. *Frames of mind. The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic.
- Gradwohl-Nash, J., Schumacher, G. M. and B. W. Carlson. 1993. "Writing from sources. A structure-mapping model." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 85(1). 159-170.
- Groborz, M. and E. Nęcka. 2003. "Creativity and cognitive control. Explorations of generation and evaluation skills." *Creativity Research Journal* 15(2and3). 183-197.
- Moore, M. 1983. *The Relationship between the Originality of Essays and Variables in the Problem-Discovery Process: A Study of Creative and Noncreative Middle School Students*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (10 Oct, 2009).
- Nystrand, M. 1974. "EJ Workshop. Can creativity be taught?" *English Journal* 63. 65-68.
- O'Hara, L. A. and R. J. Sternberg. 2000. "It doesn't hurt to ask. Effects of instructions to be creative, practical, or analytical on essay-writing performance and their interaction with students thinking styles." *Creativity Research Journal* 13(2). 197-210.
- Perl, S. 1981. "Creativity and the Composing Process: Making Thought Visible." Paper presented at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the Conference on

- College Composition and Communication (Dallas, TX). Retrieved from ERIC database. (10 Oct, 2009).
- Perry, D. 1974. *Creativity in Writing: A Sequence of Readings for Secondary English Teachers and Departments*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (10 Oct, 2009).
- Policastro, E. and H. Gardner. 1999. "From case studies to robust generalizations. An approach to the study of creativity." In Sternberg, R. J. (ed.), *Handbook of creativity*. 213-225. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Popok, S. 2008. *Kwestionariusz twórczego zachowania KANH*. [Creative behaviour questionnaire KANH]. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Runco, M. A. 1991. *Divergent thinking*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Swales, J. M. 1990. *Genre analysis. English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Torrance, P. 1962. *Guiding creative talent*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- 1974. *Torrance test of creative thinking*. Lexington, Mass.: Ginn.
- Ward, T. B., Smith, S. M. and R. A. Finke. 1999. "Creative cognition." In Sternberg, R. J. (ed.), *Handbook of creativity*. 189-212. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolfe-Quintero, K., Inagaki, S. and Hae-Young Kim. 1998. *Second language development in writing: measures of fluency, accuracy, and complexity*. Technical Report 17. Manoa, Hawaii: University of Hawaii.
- Woolfolk, A. 1998. *Educational psychology* (7th edn.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Appendix

March 15, 2009

From: M. Adams-Tukiendorf

To: 2nd year students (Department of English)

Re: academic writing classes

Assignment for semester 4: writing an academic essay based on sources

General Theme: BALANCE/IMBALANCE

In the writing process follow the steps enumerated below:

Step 1: Free write on the general theme (already done in-class)

Step 2: Choose and narrow a topic.

Step 3: Use library sources. You are expected to rely on at least 5 academic sources.

Step 4: Assemble a preliminary bibliography. Use APA format.

Step 5: Decide on a thesis. Make a formal outline.

Step 6: Write the draft of your essay.

Step 7: Revise, edit and proofread. Focus on three aspects: topic development (use headlines to distinguish particular sections), style, and source documentation (in-text references, quotations, references at the end)

Step 8: Prepare the final draft.

Each of you is expected to see me 3 times – the first meeting is focused on your preparation process (up to step 5), the second meeting is devoted to discussing your draft mentioned in step 6, while the third meeting – to discussing your final draft mentioned in step 8.

The following aspects will be considered for assessment:

Topic development with clear thesis statement, topic sentences and details in the body (including examples, paraphrases and quotations from your sources). Use my comments in the drafts and those I give you during our individual meetings to work on this part.

Style of your writing – we aim at academic style which is formal, with complex structures and sophisticated, academic vocabulary. To help you in this aspect I leave reading/study materials in the library:

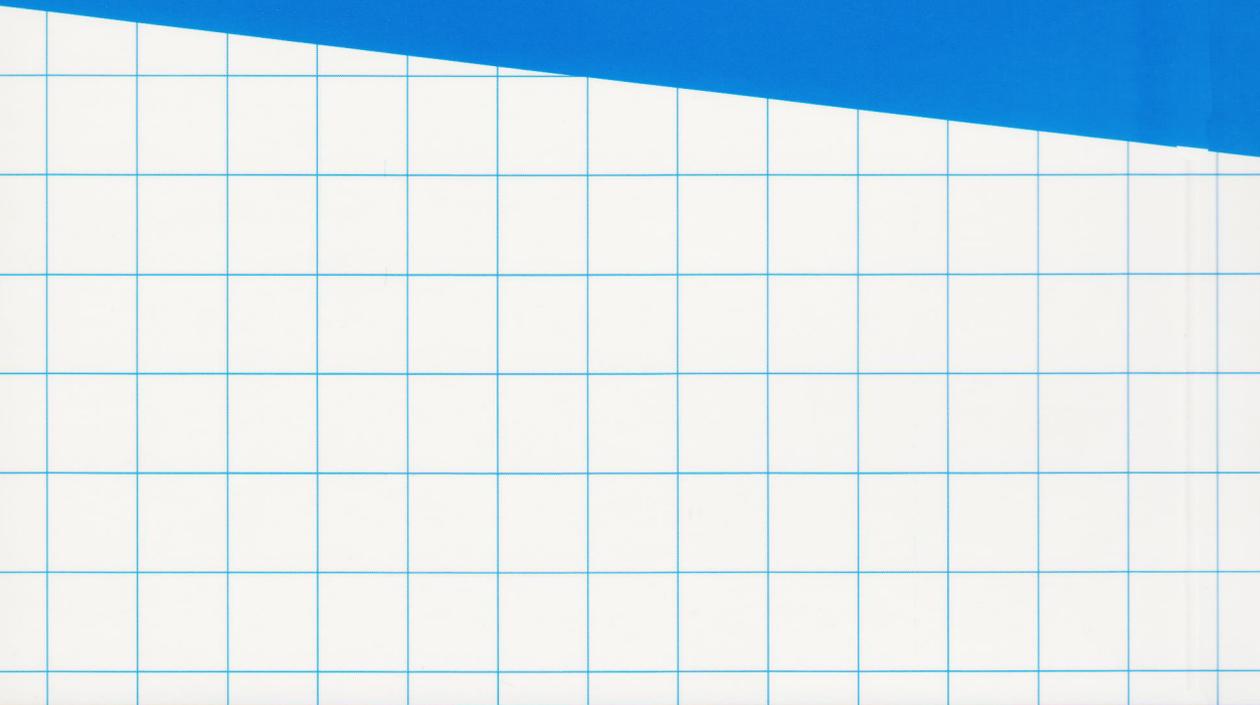
Heinkel, E. (2004). *Teaching academic ESL writing*. **Chapter 11:** Rhetorical features of text: cohesion and coherence.

Heinkel, E. (2004). *Teaching academic ESL writing*. **Chapter 12:** Hedging in academic text in English.

Source documentation – we aim at correct use of APA format. To help you with this I leave a reading material in the library: *APA research style crib sheet*. You may also find this material on-line at: <http://www.docstyles.com/apacrib.htm>

If you have any questions, please, don't hesitate to contact me via e-mail.

Best regards, M. Adams-Tukiendorf (maadtu@gmail.com)



Please visit our website at
www.wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl

ISBN 978-83-7525-564-5