

Assessment of the Creative Writing Elective at the Philippine Science High School - Main Campus

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Abstract - The study is an assessment of the effectiveness of instruction in the Creative Writing elective at the Philippine Science High School - Main Campus primarily based on the quarterly periodic examination (which are based on novels) results of the CW students. Since numerous studies show that writing and reading are inherently related, and the CW students were given extra exposure to literature and the opportunity to examine and explore their own reading and writing processes, it could be assumed that students with a CW elective would perform relatively better in the quarterly periodic examinations than their non-CW peers (Batch 2019). The study compared the quarterly examination averages of the CW class of 15 students with the eight non-CW sections of about 26-29 students each, where the CW class ranked 5, 2, and 1 in the first three quarters of AY 2018-2019. A Likert scale survey was then administered to the CW students to identify the strengths and areas of improvement in the instruction, such as whether the CW elective helped them prepare for their periodic examinations. A Small Group Analysis was afterwards conducted to clarify and process the recurring responses in the questionnaire and to identify concerns that were not addressed in the survey. Finally, an interview with the instructor was conducted to address the CW students' concerns and responses in the survey and SGA. A number of recommendations based on the analysis of the results were provided in the conclusion, including articulating the curriculum's Content Standards, Performance Standards, and Target Learning Competencies; providing the students with activity rubrics; emphasizing the PSHSS Mission-Vision in the course; and incorporating the results of the survey and SGA into the instructional process, among others.

Keywords – assessment, curriculum, creative writing

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Science High School—Main Campus, the flagship campus of the Philippine Science High School System, is a Service Institute of the Department of Science and Technology established in 1964 by virtue of Republic Act 3661, also known as the PSHS Charter. The Charter mandates the PSHS to offer free secondary course scholarship to students with high aptitude in science and mathematics and prepare them for careers in related fields.

PSHS students are known to be academically adept in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). At the same time, they are expected to develop into well-rounded individuals whose education is “humanistic in spirit, global in perspective, and patriotic in orientation,” as the

PSHS System's Mission states. Moreover, PSHS students, as the PSHSS Vision declares, are trained “to become globally-competitive Filipino scientists equipped with 21st century skills and imbued with the core values of truth, excellence, and service to nation.” These values are constantly emphasized even in, if not especially by, the Humanities courses at the PSHS-MC.

One of these courses is the Creative Writing elective for Grade 10 students, better known at the Main Campus as *CreW*. Its Course Description states that “Creative Writing in English is an introductory course to the writing of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry in the English language. Classes will be held in workshop style, which involves both reading and writing. Students will be first exposed to both classical and contemporary stories, poems, and essays in

order to provide a background for their writing experience. Students will then be given numerous

opportunities to write their own work using the process-writing approach in small groups. The course also aims to teach the students how to edit literary texts for publication, and how to conceptualize a literary folio. At the end of the school year, the class will spearhead the publication of the school's literary folio *Dalumat*."

With this extra exposure to literature and the opportunity to examine and explore their own reading and writing processes (not to mention their assumed personal interest in the course since the students are allowed to enroll in their chosen elective), it is probable that CW students would fare better in their English 4 periodic examinations compared to their peers who have enrolled in other elective courses but who also have to take the same departmental periodic examinations. This point of inquiry will be the crux of this paper—*Do Creative Writing students perform in the English 4 periodic examinations better than their peers?* In addition, there is the prospective question of *What other avenues could be explored to further improve the periodic examination results of Creative Writing students?*—both of which lead to the assessment of the Creative Writing curriculum itself. Other relevant questions, such as *Is the CW curriculum aligned with the Mission and Vision of the PSHS?* might materialize as the study progresses, but for now these are the most pertinent points of inquiry.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This inquiry is interesting because of its possible results. If the results show that CW students do not have an advantage over their peers in the periodic examinations, then we could look into possible strategies that could be utilized to maximize their exposure in CW and use this to their advantage in the periodic examinations. If there is an apparent advantage on the side of the CW students, then perhaps an English Reading Club, apart from the Creative Writing Club, could be established at the PSHS-MC to cater to those who need more support and mediation to get better results in their English 4 periodic

examinations, aside from accommodating those who truly are passionate about reading. In any case, there is the overarching aspiration to put emphasis on the

PSHS Mission and Vision to make the students truly aware of their roles as young scientists who are expected to be *truthful, excellent, and patriotic*.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

There are six linked methods in this qualitative-quantitative inquiry, each one necessary to establish a hypothesis that could be the beginning of further studies in the future.

The first method involves the PSHS-MC CW syllabus vis-à-vis the DepEd K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum for Senior High School-Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) Strand (Creative Writing).

The second method involves data gathering. The English 4 periodic examination results of both CW and non-CW students (all of whom are in Grade 10) for quarters 1-3 of AY 2016-2017 will be collected from their respective teachers. The scores per section will be averaged and then compared against the average of the CW students. While it is hardly fair to compare the average scores of 15 students against more or less 225 as pointed out in the Scope and Limitations, this inquiry has to start somewhere. However, any juxtaposition resulting to a pronounced disparity between the two groups will definitely be interesting.

The third method is the assessment of the CW elective based on the Course Evaluation tool formulated by the University of California at Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning. The tool will be modified into a Likert-type scale to survey CW students to produce raw, hard data.

The fourth method is also data gathering, still involving the CW students, through Small Group Analysis (SGA) formulated by the Vanderbilt University.

The fifth method is an interview with the CW elective instructor regarding the syllabus, the results of the Course Evaluation Tool, and the course in general. The results of the SGA will also be discussed with the instructor.

Review and discussion of the gathered data is the final method and will be employed in each of the other five previously mentioned processes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. As of this writing, what appears to be the DepEd K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum for Senior High School-Academic Track in Creative Writing is for both Grades 11 and 12. The syllabus is quite comprehensive—it does not only present the Content but also the Content Standard, Performance Standard, and Learning Competency. The Content does not identify focal literary works but particularizes on learning topics. For example, in “Reading and Writing Poetry,” there are three subtopics, namely *elements of the genre*, *elements for specific forms*, and *other experimental texts*. These subtopics are further outlined into two (sometimes three) more levels. On the other hand, the PSHS-MC CW syllabus outlines the four academic quarters by literary genre (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, other forms) and presents a list of focal literary works (and their authors) without identifying the learning topics. The syllabus also does not include Content Standards, Performance Standards, and Learning Competencies. What it includes (but is missing in the DepEd syllabus) is the basis of grades (output such as exercises, essays, and workshops) and their corresponding *per cent* value.

2. I have collated the Q1, Q2, and Q3 English 4 periodic examination scores of Grade 10 PSHS-MC students from their respective teachers. The Q4 scores were no longer included because doing so would leave insufficient time and opportunity to conduct the survey and the SGA. The scores were averaged by section (28-29 students in each of the eight sections) without the scores of CW students. The CW students’ periodic examination scores were also averaged. The CW class was considered as the ninth section.

In Q1, the highest possible score (HPS) was 100. The CW class was ranked #5 based on each section’s average score.

In Q2, the HPS was 75. The CW class improved and was subsequently ranked #2.

In Q3, the HPS was 100. The CW class improved further and was now ranked #1. It might be important to note that one CW student missed the 3rd periodic examination and only 14 scores were averaged for the CW class in this quarter.

3. The Course Evaluation Tool used in this inquiry was based on the course evaluation questions bank formulated by the Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning of the University of California at Berkeley. Some of the questions in the original tool were not included and some were modified to suit the context of the CW course at PSHS-MC.

The survey was conducted on 29 March 2017, during one of the writing breaks of the CW class. All 15 CW students were present and able to answer the questionnaire. The survey has four categories, namely Instructor-Specific Questions, Course-Specific Questions, Student Self-Evaluation Questions, and Open-Ended Questions. Categories 1 and 2 have subcategories where the questions focus on particular qualities and aspects of the teacher and the course. These two categories present the students with five options based on the Likert-type scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The survey has 60 items in total. In discussing the results, I will only highlight the ones where there are significant variations in responses and the items where the extremely positive responses (Strongly Agree) fall below 9 (or below 60% of the total number of respondents).

In the first category, under the subcategory Presentation of Content (Figure 1), the respondents were almost unanimous in rating the instructor positively (The instructor effectively presented concepts and techniques: Strongly Agree: 13/15; The instructor presented content in an organized manner: Strongly Agree: 14/15; etc). It is the questions involving the PSHS Mission and Vision where the respondents were divided:

Table 1. Survey on the PSHS Mission-Vision in relation to the CW course

Presentation of Content	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The instructor reiterated the PSHS Mission in relation to the course (“education that is humanistic in spirit, global in perspective, and	6	5	3	1	0
The instructor reiterated the PSHS Vision in relation to the course (“prepare scholars to become globally-competitive scientists with 21st century skills imbued with the core values of truth, excellence,	6	4	4	1	0

It could be said, based on these results, that the instructor would have to be more conscious in reiterating the PSHS Mission and Vision to CW students and in articulating the importance of these in relation to the course which, in turn, could lead to the students’ realization of the course’s relevance in self-determination and nation-building.

For Category 2, under “Application & Specific Skill Development,” five items have below 9 extremely positive responses. The first is about the course providing guidance to become a competent professional. This result could perhaps be attributed to the fact that PSHS students are expected to become scientists and not writers and could not see the link between the two. Nevertheless, PSHS students are presumed to be proficient in all aspects of their academic life. The second item pertains to ethical issues involved in writing. The responses are generally positive but one notably responded in the extreme negative. Perhaps the instructor could include “Ethics in Writing” during class discussions. The third item refers to the PSHS core value of serving the nation. Here, the responses are scattered. Noticeably, three students answered in the negative. The fourth item focuses on the course’s connection to the students’ development of

presentation and communication skills. While the responses are overwhelmingly positive, two students rated the item “neutral.” The final item in this area is concerned with one of the main points of this inquiry: the course’s link to the English 4 periodic examinations. There were eight positive, five neutral, and two strongly negative responses. Perhaps it could be said that regardless of the CW students’ periodic examination results, they should at least have a feeling that the course was helpful in preparing for their examinations.

Category 3 focuses on student self-evaluation questions, where there are three focus items, the first one being on student attendance. Based on the results, only one had more than or equal to nine (9) class absences from the beginning of the academic year until the conduct of the survey; the rest had positive and extremely positive responses (0-4 class absences). The second item concerns the amount of time spent on the course on a weekly basis. Considering the activities included in the item, such as class attendance (55 minutes/week), reading assigned literary pieces and other texts, and writing papers, among others, it would be fair to set 4-5 hours/week as an ideal time spent for the CW elective. Given that criterion, the responses are

considerably positive. The third item is on the students' own satisfaction with the efforts they had so far given to the course, where the results show that most of them felt satisfied with their efforts in the elective. The only other point to be made in this part of the inquiry is the hope that the two neutral and one dissatisfied responses would be improved because after all, the students were given the freedom to choose

their own electives.

Category 4 has three open-ended questions. The first item asks the students to identify what they consider to be the strengths of the course. Responses include

- the instructor
- the opportunity to improve writing and language skills
- appreciation and influence of literature to real life and people
- fun class and community

The second item makes the students identify area(s) where the course could be improved. Some of the most common responses are

- having more exercises and workshops
- field trips and other "outside the classroom" activities
- availability of printed lecture/lesson handouts
- more well-defined comments and instructions in workshops and in the production of the folio
- more time in the CW elective by offering it to Grade 11 students

The final item asks the students to provide feedback for students who might want to take the course when they are eligible to take elective courses. The most common feedback concern attitude, such as

- commitment (to the assigned workload)
- equanimity (the ability to take constructive criticism)
- time management (start working on assigned requirements early)

4. Small Group Analysis (conducted on 29 March 2017)

After the survey was conducted, the CW class was then divided into six dyads and one triad to discuss, as a group, a few questions. What is presented in this inquiry are recurring

responses and not the entirety of the groups' answers. The first item asks the groups to "Quickly identify what your group sees as the primary learning objective of the course." The common answers include

- for the improvement of writing skills and capabilities (style, expression, etc.)
- for the appreciation of different genres of literature (fiction, non-fiction, poetry)
- to develop critical analysis

The first two responses are somewhat subsumed in the PSHS CW Course Description.

The third response is substantiated by the survey—to critically read and think and engage with the material—though perhaps this needs to be more specified and directed towards their English 4 subject *if* it is to have a positive effect on their periodic examination results.

The second item asks, "What aspects of this course and/or the instruction would you identify as most helpful to your learning? How are these aspects helping you to learn this course?" The following are the most common responses:

- workshops, constructive criticism/peer critiquing: shows areas of improvement; shows what works and what does not
- readings, discussions, and exercises: helps in differentiating good from bad writing; helps develop literary interpretation skills; sets standards of quality; shows various writing styles and forms
- teacher: teaches "tools of writing" for different genres of literature; entertaining; provides constructive criticism and an expert's feedback

The responses summarize the aspects of instruction that the students thought to be the most helpful in and how these contributed to their learning, and these three aspects form the vital triad of teacher, material, and activity. The students' awareness of and focus on these aspects of instruction is worth noting.

The final item asks "What modifications to this course do you believe would help you to learn more effectively? Why do you believe these changes would improve your learning?" The following are the most common responses:

- more workshops for further improvement of work, especially for final drafts
- more exercises, especially collaborative ones; exercises on the *Dalumat* theme itself
- printed handouts of lecture/lessons
- other related activities such as field trips for travelogues, writing workshops outside the school (seminars), joining writing competitions, online presence (like blogs) for interaction with other students (including non-PSHS individuals)
- clearer and more concrete comments from the teacher for better revision of drafts

The students' answers to the SGA were discussed with them for clarification and possible enrichment, especially the third item. Some respondents considered additional exercises

as a possible source of bonus points. Looking at the survey and the SGA, it is worth noting that the responses in both activities appear to validate each other. The responses are very similar if not repeated, implying what the students consider the most important aspects of the CW elective. In addition, when asked if they felt they had any advantage over their non-CW classmates when it comes to the periodic examinations and English 4 in general, the students identified vocabulary and critical reading skills as the two areas where they thought they were ahead. They also found essay submissions in their English 4 classes relatively easy due to the rigorous training they had in CW. In relation to this, the students pointed out that the CW instructor also being the English 4 teacher was also an advantage.

5. Interview with the CW elective instructor, [name redacted] (conducted on 1 June 2017)

The comments given and concerns raised by the CW students in the survey and SGA, especially the question "What modifications to this course do you believe would help you to learn more effectively? Why do you believe these changes would improve your learning?" were brought to the attention of the CW instructor for feedback and clarification, if necessary. The instructor addressed the following points:

- The students (half of them) had difficulty meeting deadlines, even with the very first activity. Much as he wanted to give the students more time for workshops and assign exercises, he

felt that the students would not be able to submit them on time before they could move on to the next lesson or activity. According to him, he had already increased the fiction exercises from 2 (in the previous years) to 5 for the present class, but the same issue persisted: problems in meeting deadlines. He pointed out that perhaps the reason why the students felt that the workshops and exercises were not enough was because after submitting their pieces at the end of Q3, their focus was already on the production of *Dalumat*.

- The class was given physical handouts of lessons. It also had an Edmodo group where all the teaching materials could be posted and shared, but the online group met with some technical issues along the way, which he eventually deleted. And while the class had a

Facebook account, the instructor was reluctant in having them post their written works online, especially the non-fiction pieces. The same reason goes for the students' wish for online presence through blogs due to "ownership" issues and if they could "handle the public."

- Some students get offended by criticisms during workshops, and this could not be totally avoided, although he mentioned a couple of students who are good at dispensing criticisms without the writer feeling offended.

- In terms of incorporating the PSHS Mission-Vision in the CW elective, class 2012 used science as content/metaphor. He encouraged CW students to use their scientific background and science as poetic devices in their output, especially physics, astronomy, and chemistry mostly in poetry. The instructor, however, mentioned that sometimes the students would say that one reason why they took the CW elective in the first place was so that they could "escape" from the sciences. He also said that he tried to immerse the students in values such as rational and scientific thinking.

- The students' passion and willingness to work since the students are free to choose their own electives are the strengths of the CW elective.

- The instructor would like for the CW class to go field trips as the students wanted, but the logistics and the fact that they are still minors who need parental consent might prove too challenging. As

a last point, he said he would have to improve the test he gives out to those who want to take the

CW class average of 71.20 (over 100 points) in Q1 is fifth in nine sections (CW being the ninth

HPS/H PA	Charm	Elec-	Gluon	Gravi-	Muon	Photon	Tau	Truth	CW
100.00	72.63	74.50	73.56	73.56	62.80	63.83	70.96	64.20	71.20
75.00	54.26	56.00	54.15	53.50	48.79	50.87	52.41	52.29	54.87
100.0	75.41	73.73	72.30	76.81	70.32	74.33	75.67	77.00	80.00
91.67	67.43	68.08	66.67	67.96	60.64	63.01	66.35	64.50	68.69

course if only for diagnostic purposes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

• In terms of numbers, the CW class of Batch 2019 seems to have a slight advantage over their Grade 10 peers in terms of periodic examination performance. As shown in the table below, the

Table 2. Batch 2019 Periodic examination average, Quarters 1-3

The CW class ranked first in a total of three quarters with an average periodic examination score of 68.69, followed by 68.08, with the lowest average being 60.64. However, there appears to be more room for improvement considering that 91.67 is the highest possible average (HPA).

• The inclusion of focus literary pieces and expected output every quarter in the existing PSHS-MC CW syllabus is commendable; however, it is recommended that a more comprehensive syllabus or course outline be developed to articulate its Content Standards, Performance Standards, and Target Learning Competencies, at the least. This would help both the instructor and the students to have a clearer vision of the direction of the course. It is also proposed that the improved syllabus include and highlight the PSHS Mission-Vision and core values of truth, excellence, and service to nation.

• Another recommendation is for the CW course to consider providing the students with a set of rubrics for writing activities, in addition to the instructor's directions, whether individual or by genre (fiction, non-fiction, poetry), so that the students would have a more concrete articulation of the instructor's expectations and assessment. This way, the students themselves would be able to remember hard instructions, monitor their own progress, and know what they need to work on, if any.

section) where the highest average is 74.50 and the lowest 62.80; a Q2 average of 54.87 (over 75) put them in second place to 56.00 with the lowest average being 48.79; and an average of 80.00 (over 100) in Q3 put them in first place, with 77.00 being the next highest average and 70.32 being the lowest section average.

• The SGA identified a primary learning objective that was not quite captured in the CW Course Description: to critically read and think and engage with the material. Perhaps this perceived primary learning objective of the course should be emphasized in such a way that the students consciously take advantage of their CW elective to prepare for and do well in their quarterly periodic examinations, since English 4 is a Literature/Reading course and is directly related to the art of writing. This consciousness might help the students not only in their writing activities but also in their reading comprehension skills.

• As a final recommendation, it might be prudent to establish a Reading Club at the PSHS-MC (and perhaps, eventually, within the PSHS System) not only to help students do well in their English 4 periodic examinations but more importantly, to provide them with a venue where they could discuss and share their ideas and various readings of literary pieces (novels, in particular) with their peers/classmates and Club Adviser. This could also help in the development and improvement of their reading comprehension skills, which is one of the most challenging competencies to enhance in one's academic life in particular and communicative relationships in general.

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