

Fall 12-7-2022

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Pause and Possibility:
Pre-Service Teachers' Perspectives on Creative Writing Clubs
Honors Project

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Abstract

Creative writing clubs can enrich the lives of writers and facilitators. These clubs provide many opportunities to enrich their members' academic, social, and personal development (Clifton, 2022; Siskel & Jacobs, 2011; Lawton, 2021). This project uses a focus-group study of five pre-service Integrated Language Arts teachers to explore the teachers' perspectives on advising creative writing clubs. Their insight informs a web-based teacher resource, [Creative Writing Club Hub](#). Major findings are that participants harbor low self-efficacy towards creative writing and that the most effective method for encouraging them to advise these clubs may be to create a creative writing community among educators. The resource provides information to inform and inspire educators and will become a springboard for that community.

Key words: creative writing, extracurriculars, education, pedagogy

Introduction and Research Questions

In Elizabeth Acevedo's novel *The Poet X*, protagonist Xiomara attends her high school poetry club and marvels at how "writing can bring such strange strangers into the same room" (Acevedo, 2018, pg. 183). The poetry club becomes the safe but challenging space where Xiomara finds her voice. Having participated in creative writing clubs since 2013, I have also seen these groups gather "strange strangers." Excitement for my high school writing club, which met every Friday, used to pull me out of bed on Mondays. The club attracted a conglomerate of personalities, including my brother. In the slanting afternoon light, I read my overwrought dramas right after his *Nickelodeon* dreamscapes. Somehow, we both left the club feeling recognized and appreciated. Because of this experience, I know that creative writing clubs offer intellectual stimulation and validation for a variety of students who can learn alongside each other. Now, I hope to use this project to share my passion for creative writing clubs with other pre-service English teachers.

There are many reasons why creative writing clubs are important. These clubs can provide academic enrichment by expanding students' experience with English Language Arts because they allow students to engage with writing in safe, generative spaces that allow for more risk-taking than classrooms. Often, general writing classrooms over-emphasize notions of correctness, which can stifle the creative energy needed to produce quality writing and intrinsic interest in writing (Jury, 2010). Class time is further limited by its stretch among many commitments (Gallagher, & Kittle, 2014), with reading comprehension often taking precedence over other language arts skills in response to testing requirements (Belas, 2016). They can also promote students' social development by providing a communal space that transcends social barriers (Bigalk, 2014; DeMark, 2016; Siskel & Jacobs, 2011). Further, as low-cost

extracurriculars, they may improve students' attachment to school, increase students' exposure to positive adult mentorship, and provide a positive environment for young people to socialize and express themselves (Covay and Carbonaro, 2010; Hensch, 2020; Eccles et al., 2003; Philips et al., 2021). Overall, these clubs furnish many opportunities to further students' academic, social, and personal development.

Despite these many benefits, few creative writing clubs are available to students. Research about their exact prevalence is scarce, but they clearly do not have the cultural prevalence of clubs such as Mock Trial or Speech and Debate. Sometimes, they are established under regional organizations such as *Power of the Pen* (in Northeast Ohio) and *Young Chicago Authors*. In absence of consistent access to these organizations, single-school creative writing clubs rely on teachers who are informed and inspired to advise them. Consequently, these clubs may be rare in part because teachers lack that needed information and inspiration.

Several factors may leave teachers, especially early-career teachers, uninterested and underprepared for hosting creative writing clubs. In Bowling Green State University's teacher preparation program for Integrated Language Arts grades 7-12, pre-service teachers take far more literature classes than writing classes. Creative writing courses are not required, and they are difficult to fit into the heavy course load required by the program. Additionally, pre-service teachers receive very little information about extracurricular roles at all. Unless students have a pre-existing interest in creative writing clubs, it is unlikely that the teacher preparation program at BGSU will impart any desire or preparation to establish them.

This project centers around the creation of a resource for pre-service teachers that will provide useful information about creative writing clubs so that they might be more inclined to lead them. To create this resource, I engaged in human-subjects research to perform an audience

analysis. Through a focus group of pre-service teachers at BGSU, I sought insight into what some pre-service teachers already know, think, and believe about creative writing clubs.

Grounded in the findings from the focus group, I created an online teacher resource that responds to participants' questions and concerns. Although the paper for the Honors Project maintains a traditional format, I designed the teacher resource in such a way that I can add to it as I gain experience and insight throughout my career. The research questions I explore are:

What does a sample of pre-service Integrated Language Arts teachers already know, understand, and believe about advising creative writing clubs?

What information would equip and inspire pre-service Integrated Language Arts to facilitate creative writing clubs in their future careers?

My goal for this project is to increase the likelihood that the pre-service teachers will host creative writing clubs, making them available to a wider variety of students. The project also provides insight into pre-service teachers' thoughts and beliefs about creative writing clubs for other researchers. It primarily engages the disciplines of education and creative writing.

Literature Review

Introduction

Preliminary research reveals some avenues of information that might benefit teachers interested in advising creative writing clubs. First, a strong body of scholarship explores extracurriculars broadly, including their benefits and the nature of teachers' participation. Next, literature on the pedagogy of creative writing justifies its importance for adolescent learners, as well as opportunities and challenges unique to creative writing clubs. Using Social and Emotional Learning, Third Space Theory, and Disciplinary Literacy as lenses, I will explain the benefits of creative writing clubs. For challenges, I include Cassandra Lawton's (2021a)

framework. Finally, existing creative writing organizations provide examples of what creative writing clubs can be.

Extracurriculars: Benefits and Teachers' Participation

Robust scholarship has indicated that extracurriculars are enriching for students. Defined simply as educational experiences that occur outside of the scheduled school day, extracurriculars can vary broadly from sports to academic clubs like Mock Trial to niche clubs initiated by students (Hensch, 2020 & Eccles et al., 2003). Eccles et al. (2003) performed a longitudinal study that found that students who participated in clubs showed higher levels of educational attainment and reported liking school at higher rates than students who did not participate in any clubs. They interpret the findings to suggest that the extracurriculars strengthen students' connections to school through contact with peers and positive adult mentors (Eccles et al., 2003). Philips et al. (2003) reiterate the connection between extracurriculars and higher educational attainment, and they report that schools in poverty-affected areas have fewer extracurricular activities than schools with higher socioeconomic privilege. Convey and Carbonaro (2010) affirm this finding, and they hypothesize that extracurricular participation may advantage privileged students because of the opportunities to develop noncognitive skills, especially during elementary school years.

Although many studies attest to the benefits of extracurriculars for students, fewer focus on the adults who facilitate them. Hensch's (2020) study provides insight into teacher involvement in extracurriculars at one suburban district, and her findings characterize how and why teachers tend to participate. Hensch (2020) finds that most of the teachers she interviewed facilitated clubs to strengthen their relationships with their students, while many did so to continue pursuing their interests in the activity, and some facilitated because of external

pressures such as administrative suggestions or perceived need. These responses underscore how extracurriculars offer many tangible benefits to students and teachers but sometimes become burdensome responsibilities.

Studies have found that teachers' participation in extracurricular activities can have mixed effects on their professional commitment. Brown and Roloff (2011) studied the effect of time commitments beyond what is required for teachers, called Extra Role Time (ERT), and teacher burnout. Using conservation theory, Brown and Roloff (2011) propose that ERT contributes to burnout because it often demands that teachers expend their resources, such as time and energy, without sufficient returns. Hensch (2020) acknowledges that teachers admitted that extra-role responsibilities sometimes interfered with their teaching instead of enhancing it. This was because of time and energy the responsibilities took away from their lesson planning or classroom presence. Schlosser and Balzano (2014) offer an example of the opposite; in this study, math teachers participated in game-based math workshops as training for running math clubs in their schools. Teachers reported that the experience strengthened their content knowledge, invigorated their interest in their content areas, and strengthened their pedagogies (Schlosser and Balzano, 2014). Though this was a very supported environment, it is common to hear that teachers experiment with new ways of teaching through extracurriculars. The expense of time and energy, then, must be weighed against the improved rapport with students, the extracurricular's benefits for students, the improvements to teaching, and the teacher's level of personal fulfillment from participating.

School climate and administration also has a significant influence on teachers' participation in extracurriculars. Brown and Roloff (2011) advise that consistent administrative support can intervene in ERT's contribution to teacher burnout; teachers reported more

fulfillment when administrators acknowledged and appreciated their contributions and made accommodating decisions for them. Çınar (2019), studying teachers' perspectives on extracurriculars in Turkey, affirms the importance of administrations and school climate. The teacher-participants expressed widespread dissatisfaction with extracurriculars, citing teacher and administrator under-investment, lack of access to facilities, and overcrowding as common inhibitors to their success. Hensch's (2020) participants also noted dissatisfaction that extracurricular responsibilities often fall to a few, especially novice, teachers. These findings support the project's emphasis on enlisting administrative support for initiating any extracurricular.

Creative Writing

The definition of creative writing can be nebulous. For this project, it is understood to be writing that is more imaginative rather than practical or truthful (McNeil, 2020). James Britton's separation between transactional and poetic writing lends greater clarity; transactional writing focuses primarily on accomplishing a task and is governed primarily by the expectations of the audience, while poetic writing expresses abstract ideas and allows the writer greater liberty (as cited in Zemelman and Daniels, 1988). While these distinctions are not exact, they point to the general idea that the writer has more agency over the content and style of a creative piece. For my purposes, I will define a creative writing club as a community outside of a class that unites to combine imagination with language. This avoids the pitfalls of excluding creative nonfiction and limiting the club to words on a page rather than oral creation through podcasts, radio shows, or spoken word poetry. Genres commonly associated with creative writing are short stories, poetries, and plays, though there are many more possibilities.

Studying creative writing offers many benefits to students. This statement may seem obvious; Deborah Appleman (2013) asserts that most language arts teachers embrace creative writing “as a useful way to unlock creative potential, to foster students’ love of language and to offer a powerful outlet for self-expression” (p. 25). She states, “[w]ithin the teaching profession, the capacity for creative opportunity to liberate minds and hearts goes largely unchallenged” (Appleman, 2013, p. 25). Correspondingly, the Ohio Learning Standards (2017) mandate a narrative unit in every grade; clearly, the state agrees that students should be able to write a story. Yet, the status of creative writing in American secondary education is still precarious.

Creative Writing in American Classrooms

Creative writing has a varied presence in American classes. Some common arguments for incorporating creative writing in the classroom are that it might lower writing apprehension, motivate students to write, aide them in developing their authorial voices, and offer some therapeutic benefits (McNeil, 2020). Many skills that align with creative writing, such as using figurative language and writing in the narrative genre, align to Ohio State Standards (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). Despite this, recent researchers confirm Zemelman and Daniels’s (1988) observation that schools tend to emphasize transactional writing skills over poetic ones. Purcell et al. (2013), interviewing Language Arts teachers about their classroom practices related to writing, found that 93% of the participants assigned short essays and 77% percent of them assigned research papers, but only 67% ever assigned creative writing such as writing short stories, poetry, or plays (p. 15). McNeil (2020) confirms that creative writing instruction continues to be rare in secondary schools. One reason for this could be that standardized testing has motivated an increased focus on reading over writing in first-language classes, a tendency noted internationally (Belas, 2016, McNeil, 2020, and Broekkamp et al.,

2011). A reason for this could be that standardized testing in the United States features argumentative, rather than narrative, writing.

The research suggests that when creative writing is present in classrooms, it poses significant challenges for teachers and students alike. Teachers may have difficulty justifying creative writing units and assignments because the students' products are difficult to assess (Jury, 2010; Wood, 2016). Because a holistic judgment of the entire piece would be subjective, teachers may be tempted to grade creative writing on lower-level issues such as grammar, spelling, and minor craft conventions (Jury, 2010). These markings do not advance students' understanding of higher-order writing skills and may discourage them from writing completely (Jury, 2010). Student reluctance is another barrier that teachers may face; students may feel underprepared and uncomfortable with the demands of creative writing. McNeil (2020) found a significant decrease in writing confidence among her students after delivering explicit creative writing instruction. Although Covid-19 interfered with McNeil's (2020) unit plan, the mixed results of her study reflect the inevitably mixed-response that creative writing assignments will receive in a general Language Arts classroom, especially from students who have had few opportunities to write creatively before.

Three Theoretical Frames for Creative Writing Club Pedagogy

Many of these challenges are specific to incorporating creative writing into general language arts classrooms. Creative writing clubs offer one way for students to experience creative writing outside the constraints of a classroom setting. This project relies on three major theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing the cognitive, emotional, and cultural benefits of creative writing clubs: Disciplinary Literacy, Social and Emotional Learning, and Third Space Theory.

Disciplinary Literacy

Many of the academic benefits of creative writing clubs can be contextualized within the frame of Disciplinary Literacy; creative writing clubs may simply produce stronger writers. Timothy and Cynthia Shanahan (2008) introduced disciplinary literacy to accommodate the increasingly complex literacy demands of various academic disciplines (as cited in Dobbs et al., 2017). To prepare students for success in each discipline, teachers need to invite them into the discipline's unique ways of communicating (Dobbs et al., 2017). From this point of view, creative writing clubs can be fruitful academic spaces where students learn to think like writers. Broekkamp et al. (2011) support this possibility when they suggest that a greater awareness of the reasons behind authorial choices may explain the quantitative relationship they found between creative writing skills and literature reading skills. Teachers might capitalize on students' interest in writing to introduce deeper instruction about creative writing than would be possible in a general classroom, and this instruction may strengthen students' writing and reading skills. These clubs might also increase students' understandings of other skills of professional writers, such as engaging in the writing process, learning from mentor texts, commenting on others' works, and publishing. Overall, the Disciplinary Literacy framework reflects that creative writing clubs may expose students to the skills and habits of professional writers.

Social and Emotional Learning

Creative writing clubs can also build on skills associated with Social and Emotional Learning. The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2022) identifies five major domains of social and emotional skills: Self-Management, Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making. Creative writing clubs offer many opportunities for students to develop in these domains. For example, students can practice

self-management skills, which include self-discipline and goal setting (CASEL, 2022), through sustained effort on their stories and ideas. Because writing relies on so much intrinsic motivation, it offers a fruitful space for students to rely on internal measures of progress and success.

Creative writing also has much potential for students to build self-awareness through reflection and imaginative exploration. Writing can even be a starting point for Social Awareness if young people use writing to interpret the world around them. Young Chicago Authors [YCA], a creative writing organization discussed below, is an excellent example of how creative writing might enable greater social awareness through the sharing of experiences (YCA, 2022). The organization even lists social and emotional learning as one of its goals (YCA, 2022). While the Social and Emotional domains span many types of skills and activities, a club focused through this frame might focus primarily on using writing as a tool that helps students gain greater understandings of themselves and the world around them.

Third Space Theory

Situating creative writing in a club setting may also allow students to construct a space they see as their own within the larger school setting. This possibility corresponds to Third Space Theory. The theory, originating in Bhabba's (1994) *The Location of Culture*, defines the Third Space as the space colonized people invent for themselves within the institutions imposed by their oppressors (as cited in Benson, 2010). While originally conceived as a form of political resistance, Moje et al. (2004) bring the theory into education as a way of increasing student engagement by acknowledging the knowledges that students bring to classroom spaces (as cited in Benson, 2010). A club that resembles a Third Space would allow students to have the most agency with the teacher acting in a facilitative and supporting role. This is especially true when

students' linguistic and cultural knowledges differ from those of the school. Students might experience a sense of belonging in the club that they do not find elsewhere in the school.

Lawton's Framework for Challenges

Despite their many benefits, creative writing clubs pose unique challenges for educators. In the words of researcher Cassandra Lawton, "Many people want to start creative writing clubs, but they don't want to do it wrong" (personal communication, 2021). This ambivalence is appropriate because there are many concerns that facilitators of these clubs are likely to encounter. After interviewing twenty-three facilitators of community-based creative writing groups, Lawton (2021a) identified three categories of challenges: individual, group, and organizational. Lawton's (2021a) research, though focused on community-based creative writing groups, provides a useful framework for discussing the challenges that facilitators face. The research about school-based creative writing groups presents two additional categories of challenges: Sensitive Content and Competition. The term "challenge" has a negative connotation, but these topics warrant in-depth discussion because they are rich spaces for exploring the tensions and possibilities that make facilitating these clubs exciting and rewarding.

Individual

Facilitators should start by anticipating and mitigating any barriers to interested members' involvement with the club. Lawton (2021a) categorizes individual challenges with those that relate to participants' ability to engage with the club. A participant may have physical barriers that prevent them from accessing the space, such as a lack of transportation or reliable internet access (Lawton, 2021)a. This is especially relevant in school settings, as many students rely on the bus system to get to and from school. Students may also be hungry or antsy after a long day at school. Students may perceive non-physical barriers to participation as well, such as

low-writing confidence, a lack of literacy skills, or tension with the values espoused by the club (Lawton, 2021a). A creative writing club can provide a remedial space for students otherwise alienated by school-based literacy practices, but facilitators should be aware that they need to actively take measures to include and nurture these participants. Critical, jargon-heavy feedback may be one source of alienation, as could the facilitator's expectations that students will be silent and sit still. Finally, facilitators should be aware of how students' many differences—especially social and cultural differences—may make them more or less able to engage in the club, depending on how these differences are welcomed and accommodated.

Group

Once the individuals come together in the club, the facilitator also needs to consider how these individuals combine. Lawton (2021a) addresses group-level challenges such as low cohesion and low attendance. The individual challenges explored above will likely contribute to these issues if they are not addressed. Teachers especially may need to be aware of writing groups developing cliques that make it difficult for out-of-clique writers to participate. Lawton (2021a) reports that a lack of shared understanding of the group goals, boundaries, and expectations can also lead to low cohesion and low attendance. Intentional policies may address these situations, such as developing group norms for how feedback should be given, how to demonstrate active listening, and how to build up—instead of compete with—other members of the club. Additionally, Lawton (2021a) recommends that having one general purpose for the group, such as short-story writing, poetry, or song-writing, can actually make the group more successful than having an openly defined focus. For school-based groups, facilitators may want to loosely organize the club around certain activities or genres.

Organizational

Some challenges originate from outside of the club entirely. Lawton (2021a) categorizes these challenges as “organizational.” For community-based creative writing groups, she stresses the importance of finding partnerships and grants to cover costs and enlist membership (Lawton, 2021a). Although facilitators of school-based creative writing clubs should absolutely seek these opportunities as well, they will at least need to enlist the support of their administrations. This is crucial for the reservation of meeting spaces (in school-based clubs), coverage of costs for printing and food, and trusted support. As demonstrated by Brown and Roloff (2011), administrative support is crucial for preventing extra-role time from leaching into teacher’s energy reserves.

Competition

The controversy of competition is intertwined in the pedagogy of creative writing clubs. Two prominent creative writing organizations, *Young Chicago Authors* and *Power of the Pen*, both focus on interscholastic competitions. These competitions bring students of different schools together around their love for writing, and they create high-energy events that spread excitement and enthusiasm (Siskel, J. & Jacobs, 2011). Competition tends to be highly valued in American extracurriculars, and it can provide opportunities for students to be recognized. Some may also consider coping with competition to be a disciplinary skill for young writers, given the cut-throat publishing industry and the competitive nature of poetry slams. Proponents of competition may argue that strategies to minimize the damage of losses—such as emphasizing the exercise and experience over the competition’s results—are sufficient to discount them (Siskel, J. & Jacobs, 2011). Some writers, though, argue that competition is not truly as innate to the discipline of creative writing as it appears. Cassandra Lawton (2022, personal communication) explains that writers are often not really competing against each other directly; they develop

parallel to each other. Regardless of the disciplinary value of competition, educators should be ever-aware of its alienating nature, especially for young writers. Intra-club competition especially can undermine creative writing clubs' potential to build communities of writers.

Sensitive Content

Sensitive content poses one additional challenge outside of Lawton's (2021) framework. Facilitators of high school creative writing clubs need to be prepared to address the possibility that students may generate content in the club that may not be deemed appropriate for the school setting. Most seriously, they need to think about how they will respond to "violent writing," defined by Brown and Buskey (2014) as writing that includes depictions of abuse, self-harm, gory/shock violence, and actual plans to commit violent acts. Brown and Buskey (2014) point out that it is often difficult to delineate when students' writing is merely a free exercise of a creative mind from when it is a reflection of inner turmoil. Through interviewing several teachers on how they approach violent writing in the classroom, Brown and Buskey (2014) encountered a variety of responses that ranged from outright censorship to full tolerance. They recommend that teachers receive training on detecting when violent writing corresponds to real circumstances, and that they develop strong relationships with school psychologists and administrators. These relationships will help teachers understand when writing suggests a situation that should be acted on and what action should be taken.

It is also important that teachers make students aware that, no matter how safe and trusting the writing club is, the teacher has an obligation to report evidence of abuse or serious suicidal ideation. According to the Children's Bureau (2016), mandatory reporters such as teachers are obligated to file a report if they learn any information that suggests a child is at risk of "physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably

indicates abuse or neglect of the child” (p. 48). The process for reporting suspected abuse may vary per school district, but teachers looking to start creative writing clubs need to be especially familiar with that process because students might, intentionally or not, disclose this information in their writing.

Existing Creative Writing Organizations

Several organizations already recognize the potential of creative writing clubs, and they provide models, resources, and opportunities for educators just beginning to get involved. Bob Boone founded the organization *Young Chicago Authors* when he realized that the surrounding school districts did not offer creative writing instruction (Young Chicago Authors [YCA], 2022). The organization serves as a safe and expressive space for youth who “face violence and segregation on a daily basis” (YCA, 2022). Through writing workshops that culminate in slam poetry competitions, the organization’s three goal categories relate to “artistic learning and expression,” “social and emotional learning,” and “academic success and foundational skills” (YCA, 2022). This organization provides an inspiring model of how a creative writing organization can extend beyond individual and academic goal into helping students gain greater social awareness and undertake acts of service. Though much of the programming is geared towards students and educators in the Chicago area, it does provide insight into its pedagogy and activities that are accessible to anyone. The website for this organization, as well as the documentary *Louder Than a Bomb* (Siskel & Jacobs, 2011), which showcases its pedagogy, are invaluable resources for educators becoming involved in creative writing clubs.

Club facilitators may also be interested in exploring *Power of the Pen*. Lorraine B. Merrill founded *Power of the Pen* in the 1980s after realizing that schools did not provide extracurricular enrichment for students who liked to write (Power of the Pen, 2021). Based in

Northeast Ohio, the organization offers interscholastic writing tournaments. The tournaments consist of 3-4 rounds of individual, prompt-based writing evaluated by judges. Its stated mission is to help students “find and develop a creative voice that is uniquely their own” (Power of the Pen, 2021). After registering and paying the yearly entrance fees that range from three hundred fifty to seven hundred dollars, teams have access to instructional aides and participation in district and regional tournaments (Power of the Pen, 2021). Teachers employed in Northeast Ohio may encounter Power of the Pen in their schools, or they may be interested in advocating for their schools to invest in this organization. Teachers considering *Power of the Pen* should note that the organization is focused primarily on competition among young writers.

Proposed Activity and Methodology

Creative writing clubs pose promising opportunities that can strengthen students’ relationships with literacy, but they are not widely available. This project seeks to create a digital resource built to inform and inspire pre-service teachers to facilitate these clubs in their careers. Through a focus group and a literature review, this project explores two research questions:

What does a sample of pre-service Integrated Language Arts teachers already know, understand, and believe about advising creative writing clubs?

What information would equip and inspire pre-service Integrated Language Arts to facilitate creative writing clubs in their future careers?

Focus Group

To address the first question, I conducted an hour-long focus group with 5-12 pre-service teachers. Curry (2015) notes that focus groups often reveal how a specific group of people talk about a certain topic. A focus group is an appropriate method for this project because it deals with the attitudes of a particular group of people, pre-service language arts teachers. Unlike in

surveys or individual interviews, the focus group method allowed participants to build off each other's ideas, which accounts for the participants' varied levels of experience with creative writing.

Participants were recruited from a convenience sample of the 2023 cohort of Integrated Language Arts majors at BGSU. This is consistent with Curry's (2015) recommendation to select participants with some similar characteristics for a single focus group to allow for more comfortable discussion. By choosing participants from my graduation cohort, I ensured that the group had existing rapport since we had shared many classes together. Prior to contacting participants, I completed BGSU's Human Subjects training. Through the training and the human subjects application, I ensured that I gain informed consent from participants that meets Sim and Waterfield's (2019) criteria of informed consent resulting from appropriate disclosure, comprehension, competence, and voluntariness. Participants read and signed a letter explaining the focus group, had an outline of questions ahead of time, and knew their right to withdraw their participation at any time without penalty.

The questions for the focus group focused on participants' prior experiences with creative writing clubs, their attitudes towards the clubs, and their perceptions of the knowledge they need to feel comfortable facilitating the clubs. A more detailed list of questions can be found in Appendix A. The focus group took place over Zoom, and I recorded the session. I analyzed the data by reviewing the transcript and performing a thematic analysis that characterizes the pre-service teachers' insights (Curry, 2015). I did this by color-coding recurring topics and making note of the nuances of participants' ideas when appropriate, especially noting points of agreement and dissent (Sim and Waterfield, 2019). Although the convenience sampling and the

small sample size limits the generalizability of the results, this analysis broadened my understanding of pre-service teachers' needs beyond my own experiences.

There are some limitations to the study group design. Most importantly, the scope of the study is smaller than recommended. Focus groups often include 3-5 strata of separate focus groups (Curry, 2015), but this study is limited to one strata. My lack of experience with moderating focus groups and analyzing data may also interfere with the results. Additionally, I did not collect demographic data. This prevents me from analyzing how participants' identity markers, such as race, sexual orientation, gender, country of origin, and class influence their views on the issues. Even without this data, I can confirm that all of my participants identify as White, four identify as women, and one identifies as nonbinary. The overrepresentation of White women reflects the majority of the population I recruited from, but it still limits the scope of perspectives in the conversation. Finally, setting the focus group on Zoom may have interfered with the generativity of the discussion. Considering that the study's goal was to inform the focus of an instructional resource rather than to determine conclusive information about pre-service teachers, these limitations were unlikely to significantly interfere with the effectivity of the project.

Digital Resource

To respond to participants' ideas, I used insight from the literature and my own experiences to compile resources and information about facilitating creative writing clubs. The literature review already references several bodies of knowledge that I found important to address, but my participants further guided my research.

My research findings are published through this report and a multimodal digital resource that compiles knowledge and resources that seem to best address my participants' concerns.

Takayoshi and Selfe (2007) define multimodal texts as those that “exceed the alphabetical and may include still and moving images, animations, color, music, and sound,” and they can also be understood as texts that combine the linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural, and aural modes of communication (Gagich, 2020, p. 66). My digital resource, a Wix website, combines modes of communication by including images, colors, links, and videos when appropriate. A resource like this may be more likely to be used by my audience of early-career teachers, especially because they are already inundated with more traditional reading. Additionally, Dunwoody (2007) advises that writers need to be aware of the tendency of online audiences to engage in “fast and frugal” information processing, which will make them more inclined to skim for information they need rather than read pages thoroughly (p. 66). By making my resource easily navigable through hyperlinks, I hope to enable my audience to sort through my information to find what will most easily suit their needs and interests. Finally, a malleable digital resource will allow me to create something that I can manipulate over time as I gain insight and experience.

Results

Participants

The focus group included five participants in their third year of BGSU’s Adolescent to Young Adult (AYA) English Education program. Their pseudonyms are Mary, Alex, Jessica, Lauren, and Zoey. As I discussed in limitations, all of my participants identified as White, four identified as women, and one identified as nonbinary. They knew each other from their shared classes, and each of them was deeply invested in English education. Within their degree courses, though, they had very limited experience with writing. During their time in the program, BGSU only required three classes that focus on writing for the English education program: University Writing, Advanced Composition, and Foundations of Teaching Writing. Because of the many

other requirements in this degree, pre-service teachers have extremely limited opportunities to take non-required courses of their choice. Subsequently, the participants had no formal experience with creative writing from their undergraduate classes.

Participants brought in different levels of experience with creative writing from their personal lives or their K-12 education. Mary had the most experience with creative writing. She experienced several poetry units throughout her K-12 education. At the time of the focus group, she wrote poetry for fun and participated in one of BGSU's creative writing organizations. Lauren also participated in one of BGSU's creative writing clubs, and she had an assignment in high school that asked her to write a single page every day. Jessica did not write frequently at the time of the focus group, but she participated in Power of the Pen noncompetitively in middle school, and she took a creative writing elective class in high school. Alex (who uses they/them pronouns) participated in poetry units in K-12 education, but they had always preferred academic writing. Zoey remembered having to write an introduction to a book in 4th grade, an experience which was challenging and stressful. Despite these variations, all participants suggested that their prior experience with creative writing was marginal.

Themes

Results from the focus group are organized by prominent themes that surfaced throughout the conversation. These themes are self-efficacy, the value of writing, goals, making space, community, the writing process, and mandatory reporting. Each theme will be described as it appeared in the conversation followed by a brief discussion of its significance.

Self-Efficacy

Participants' responses suggested that almost all of them have low self-efficacy about creative writing; many of them do not feel like they can do it well. Perhaps most succinctly,

Lauren stated, “One huge challenge [about creative writing clubs] is that I feel like a hypocrite teaching it because I am not good at this,” “I feel like I can’t lead them where I haven’t gone,” and “[t]rying to teach them how to write short stories when I haven’t written one I’m proud of is [not good]. So, huge self-efficacy issue.” Other participants pointed to this challenge as well. Alex mentioned that they have always felt uncomfortable with creative writing; their strength in academic writing makes creative writing “a point of insecurity” and “daunting.” They explained that they used to think, “[c]reative writing is something that artistic people are good at. I’m good at academic writing.” Jessica explained that she took a creative writing class in high school, but her “self-consciousness” made her dread the class. She went on to say, “[c]reative writing is something you get better at with time, and. . . I never really had time to experience it.” Mary noted that “a lot of people don’t feel like they are comfortable teaching” creative writing. This self-efficacy issue surfaced early in the conversation and reappeared throughout.

Participants’ responses revealed that creative writing provokes insecurity for many English teachers, which is the most surprising and significant finding of this study. Jessica and Alex’s responses posed two insightful reasons for this. Jessica attributed her low self-efficacy to her limited time and experience with creative writing, a condition shared by all other participants. Alex surfaced a separate but related reason when they referenced the separation between “academic” and “artistic” writing. Combined, these comments reveal that creative writing is not approached as an essential part of the English curriculum. This finding aligns with research on the writing genres most prevalent in American schools; more hegemonically validated genres such as research writing and literature analysis are emphasized over narrative and creative writing (Zemelman and Daniels, 1988, Purcell et al., 2013, & Belas, 2016). This is true even though narrative writing is one of the three main genres emphasized in Ohio’s state

standards (Ohio State Standards, 2017), and creative writing necessitates rigorous critical thinking skills (Clifton, 2022). This conversation suggests that the exclusion of creative writing from English course content left the pre-service teachers feeling daunted by the genre and underprepared to make links between academic and creative writing.

This finding carries strong implications for the resource I created. First, it bolsters the exigency behind the resource. The separation of creative writing from the general English curriculum has produced competent and passionate pre-service teachers who have low self-efficacy related to this specific genre. If English teachers do not have positive and affirming experiences with creative writing, they may go on to perpetuate the inaccurate separation between academic and artistic writing. It also underscores the need to establish a welcoming and experimental tone for the resource, as the intention is to provide support where there is a gap in teacher candidates' preparation and confidence.

The Value of Writing

Participants also commented on perceptions of the value of creative writing. First, they explored how they see creative writing being devalued by others. Mary observed that the pressure to “teach to the test” may make teachers feel like they have less time to spend on writing. Lauren echoed this concern, explaining that some people might view creative writing as “not what even what you’re being tested on or that’s not what the workplace seems to want from you” so it may not seem worthwhile, especially if students do not view it as “fun.” Jessica built on the idea of practicality, noting that when considering the writing professions, many people “just don't consider [them] like a super practical career.” Participants also noted that creative writing tends to take a marginal role in English classrooms. Lauren described it as a “blip on the screen,” and Zoey shared that she sometimes saw creative writing as a “separate entity” from the

regular English curriculum. Alex noted that the culture around writing, as they experienced it, was very regimented and rooted in specific requirements for AP testing. Jessica gestured towards the significance of the culture around writing as well. She shared that when she thinks about motivating students to read, “I think about filling my classroom with books, sharing with them when I'm reading at all times, putting up posters and things that have to do with reading.” For writing, though, she observed: “classrooms get decorated with ‘write a five paragraph essay posters’ instead of something that's like, inspiring.” To her, these discrepancies indicate the need for classrooms to build a more inviting culture around writing.

Others shared how creative writing has gained modest significance in the classroom. Jessica noted that her mentor teacher used a narrative unit as a way of “getting students comfortable with writing,” and Lauren described how her mentor teacher had students write their own “boasts” modeled after a passage in *Beowulf*. Alex pointed out that this text-based approach to creative writing “would have helped me as a student because I very much separated” academic and creative writing. The participants observed that creative writing seems to surface in the classroom as a way to ease students into more traditional parts of the curriculum, such as essay writing and literature study.

The participants also articulated their own understanding of the value of creative writing. Lauren called creative writing “almost the epitome of English. . . because . . . my entire academic history places a huge value on fiction. But we can analyze it for all the craft moves and whatnot. But there's just insecurity of like, Can I do this or not?” Mary praised the ability of creative writing to help students tell their stories where there are fewer rules so students might feel more “like speaking their own voice,” which she noted is especially important for Queer students and Students of Color. Alex pointed out that creative writing can allow neurodivergent

students another avenue to express themselves. Alex explained that they know people who struggle with “articulating their words in like an academic sense, but . . . they can write poetry like it's the easiest thing.” Zoey described that creative writing is “therapeutic in a lot of ways,” and she mentioned that the writing process, which will be discussed in its own section, is a useful—and transferable—skill that students can practice through creative writing. These comments reveal how the pre-service teachers are conceptualizing the benefits to creative writing on their own.

Participants’ discussion of the value of creative writing emphasizes the need for my resource to justify investing time and energy in creative writing. Their comments align with existing literature that demonstrates how creative writing is not afforded as much cultural and academic currency as it could be (Belas, 2016, Clifton, 2022, Lawton, 2021a, McNeil, 2020, Purcell et al., 2013, & Jury, 2010). At the same time, their own opinions reveal their agreement and openness to the powers of creative writing, especially its social and therapeutic benefits. Together, this discussion reveals that pre-service teachers are mindful of belligerent sentiments towards creative writing, but they are ready to embrace its benefits. In my resource, I am sure to advocate for the benefits of creative writing clubs and address their challenges.

Goals

Participants frequently discussed goal-setting and measurement when imagining creative writing’s role in their future careers. The problem of grading writing surfaced as one of the first hurdles to incorporating creative writing in the classroom. Zoey speculated, “the standard for how we grade it seems so subjective, like I think that's where maybe teachers shy away from it.” She went on to suggest,

[b]ut for students, I also think . . . it's a vulnerable thing to like, say, these are my ideas. Like I'm not putting on the facade of like, academic right? Or Zoey as a student. These are things that I'm thinking about, or I'm curious about or I'm imagining and. . . there's a vulnerability and a risk to being imaginative in the classroom today, I would say.

For Zoey, the issue of grading weighs heavily on students because creative writing tends to be more personal than other kinds of academic tasks. Lauren posed grading for completion as a response to this challenge, and Jessica saw the lack of pressure to grade as one of the first benefits to approaching creative writing in a club setting.

Beyond grading, many participants expressed goal-oriented views on creative writing. Lauren shared that she struggles to see a purpose for her own writing, and “my brain is so quickly trained for so-whats.” She also pointed out that people tend to automatically think of novels when they talk about creative writing, but the one-page assignments she was assigned in high school felt much more achievable. Jessica built on this point, praising *Power of the Pen* for allowing students to create short pieces. Alex shared that their mentor teacher used writing prompts that resonated with the themes that appeared in the class’s Shakespeare unit, which they pointed out were still “grounded in the text.” Zoey wondered, “Can you establish a purpose for creative writing? Like, is that in and of itself wrong to do because then it's not creative?” Contrarily, towards the end of the call, Lauren suggested that goal-based prompts such as “create fear” would appeal to her purpose-oriented sensibilities. Assessments and goal-setting came up frequently, suggesting some tensions between the free-thinking stereotype of creative writing with the purpose-driven nature of education.

This discussion of goal-setting reflects research that explores the tension between creative writing and assessment. Educators often see conflict between creative writing and

traditional assessment practices (Jury, 2010; McNeil, 2020). At the same time, creative writing does offer teachable content (Clifton, 2022). This might include the parts of the writing process, the traits of effective writing, how to read like a writer, and how to respond to others' contributions effectively (Clifton, 2022; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Culham, 2005; Bunn, 2010). Additionally, the CASEL (2022) framework adds social and emotional learning goals such as improving social awareness and self-regulation, allowing educators to justify club activities with non-cognitive standards. This aligns with Cassandra Lawton's (2022, personal communication) explanation that creative writing clubs can address many types of goals, ranging from the professionalization of creative writing (writing to get published) to its therapeutic benefits. This research confirms but also provides solutions for participants' concerns about goal-setting.

My resource harnesses participants' concerns about goal-setting to provide clear goal orientations that expand notions about what a creative writing club can be. The three goal orientations I am developing are academic, social, and personal goals. Respectively, these are aligned with my frameworks of disciplinary literacy, third space theory, and social and emotional learning. By educating my users about these different goal-orientations, I hope to demonstrate that creative writing clubs can have a broad range of focuses that are adaptable to the interests of facilitators and participants.

Making Space

Participants commented on their ability to make space for students' voices and facilitate creativity. Jessica pointed out "[e]ven if you're not the expert in creative writing, and you feel vulnerable as the facilitator . . . creating that space and being there for [the students] shows that there's value in what they're doing." Alex touched on this point in response to Lauren's ambivalence about managing a club where the students have more expertise than her. Alex said

that they would be the staff member associated with a creative writing club even if they are not comfortable with creative writing, explaining,

I don't know how much I would be able to actually, like, contribute. I think it would be more of just like a 'I'm here to supervise,' that kind of thing. And I think that that's okay. And I don't think that you have to be like, necessarily the expert or master in the room. As long as you're there just to make sure that everyone's safe.

Alex does not see expertise as expressly necessary for providing this opportunity for students. Zoey explored this as well. When asked what advice would make her more likely to host a creative writing club, she shared this insight about facilitation:

I think, like, being a facilitator, in that position is really what's needed. . . it's like kind of the same thing when if your friend is really upset . . . they don't need you to tell them what to do or how to do it. They just need someone to listen. So, I think taking that approach of like, Hey, you're not teaching creative writing. You're there just to like, give them a space, give them advice if they ask for it, and be there to listen, and create that community.

The idea of providing space also surfaced in response to the participants' views on what they would want the goal of their creative writing club, if they ran one, to be. Alex stated, "I think just creating a space that's like welcoming and . . . that's safe for students to like feel free to like express themselves, to put their ideas down on paper to share, to converse with each other." In response to the benefits of hosting a creative writing club, Zoey discussed the possibility of experimenting with different methods of writing to "help students find a voice." This resonates with Mary's comment that creative writing clubs can be important for Students of Color and

Queer students to express themselves. These participants saw the young writers as the essence of the club, where their role as the teacher-facilitator might be more marginal.

The comments about making space reveal that participants see facilitation as a way of resolving their ambivalence about their own self-efficacy and also a method of empowering students. Recent scholars in creative writing communities stress the leader's role as a facilitator who guides the experience rather than an expert who distributes knowledge (Lawton 2021a; Chavez, 2021). This mentality acknowledges the knowledge and expertise brought in by club members, which can alleviate pressure on the facilitator and create a more empowering space. If students are given enough control over the club, it may become a "third-space" where students can merge school culture with their youth cultures to generate knowledge and insight (Benson, 2010). This can be especially important for marginalized students, whose ideas, ways of thinking, and language patterns are so often erased at school (Johnson, 2017). This possibility suggests that open-minded facilitators who can create positive communities may be successful with running creative writing clubs, even if they do not feel like experts in the craft.

Community

Participants similarly reiterated that creative writing clubs can provide opportunities to build community within the school. This finding distinguishes itself from their idea of *making space* because it relates more to the students' experience of the group setting rather than the teacher's role as a facilitator. Several participants referenced Zemelman and Daniels's (1988) concept of building "a community of writers," having read several chapters from the textbook of the same name in the class Foundations of Teaching Writing. Jessica noted that it may be more practical to establish this community in a club setting because, as Alex also pointed out, "the people who are there want to be there and they're passionate about writing." Jenna speculated

that a creative writing club might become a “magnet” for students who are “dreamers or imaginative.” Alex also shared that they would consider facilitating a creative writing club because “building a network of writers is a very powerful thing.” Jessica confirmed these observations with her own experience in *Power of the Pen*, which gave her the opportunity to experience writing in a low-stakes environment (since she did not compete) and learn from her peers who shared their work. Zoey also commented that a major benefit of a creative writing club could be to build rapport with students. These comments suggest that pre-service teachers saw creative writing clubs as opportunities to build positive relationships with and among their students.

Participants also suggested that having a community of other teachers engaged in creative writing clubs might be one of the biggest motivators for them to try starting a club themselves. Lauren first suggested this idea, noting that she would want a “creative writing club among professional” teachers. Zoey built on this idea. When asked what would make her consider leading a creative writing club, she answered, “having either being in a club for adults myself, being in a cohort of teachers who are in other districts,” or “subscribing to something that had blog ideas or posts or a community of people who are teaching clubs that are meeting you know, biweekly, every month something like that. So I think just having other people who are doing the same thing to talk with.” Jessica also mentioned that the conversation in the focus group, especially when participants brainstormed different ways of engaging students in writing, motivated her because “as pre-service teachers like we need to hear like, you can step away from like the norm of what was given to you and get innovative.” At the end of the meeting, participants collected numbers for the possibility of having a “creative writing night” with each

other. These conversations suggest that strong communities might not only be a fruit of creative writing clubs, but it may also be an important ingredient for encouraging their prevalence.

Participants' impressions of creative writing communities are consistent with the research. Facilitators, members, and scholars consistently report that creative writing clubs build tight-knit communities among students and facilitators (DeMark, 2016; Bigalk, 2014; Johnson, 2017; Siskel & Jacobs, 2011; Lawton, 2021b). Research on school-based extracurriculars links after school clubs with students' higher educational attainment and improved relationships with school and teachers (Covay and Carbonaro, 2010; Hensch, 2020; Eccles et al., 2003; Philips et al., 2021). Participants' desire for a creative writing community of their own is also consistent with research into extracurricular programming. Schlosser and Balzano (2014) describe an experimental math camp that enriched teachers' passion for their content area, and an important piece of the program's success was that it provided monthly workshops to the teachers who implemented it. This research and participants' comments suggest that the most effective method for encouraging teachers to advise a creative writing club may be to provide a creative writing community for them first.

Writing Process

Participants frequently discussed the writing process. The writing process typically includes periods of pre-writing, drafting, peer-review, revision, editing, and publishing. Zoey shared that if she led a creative writing club, she would emphasize the "process of getting there and not necessarily the end product" of the writing. She shared that the process may be more valuable because the "innovation" involved in the writing process "can translate into a plethora of careers." She imagined the creative writing club to be a space to "workshop," "get feedback," and "display your work if you want to." This corresponds to Jessica's observation that *Power of*

the Pen was a positive environment because it allowed students to share their work if they wanted to or to simply listen to their peers. Lauren emphasized the importance of creative writing clubs' ability to give students experience with sharing and peer-review. She shared that if she ran a creative writing club, one objective would be for students to learn "how to respond, respectfully, to other people's contributions." The group also had ideas about how to expand the process of drafting and creating a final product to accommodate students' diverse interests and aptitudes. Alex emphasized the importance of letting students choose the writing style that suits them best, whether that be poetry, prose, short stories, or another format. Alex also mentioned that if they ran a creative writing club, they would be most interested in encouraging students to "try something new" with regards to style and format. Jessica suggested that she would be interested in allowing students to create "video essays or podcast episodes," explaining that the emphasis should be on creativity building rather than simply producing a traditional written product. Lauren noted she would find it important to expose her group to diverse mentor texts from populations similar to and different from themselves. These comments suggest that participants saw creative writing clubs as ways to expose students to the writing process.

Participants' discussion of the writing process suggests that they see creative writing clubs as a way of enriching students' experience of English content. Their discussion of the writing process suggests that students could use more opportunities to draft, revise, share, and publish their work, which is consistent with the overuse of teacher-generated assignments (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988; Purcell et al., 2013). They also stress the importance of encouraging students to experiment with genre, style, and modality. In traditional English education, experimentation can be hard to encourage because of the pressure to evaluate and prepare students for testing (Jury, 2010). Participants also mention widening the cannon of

mentor texts to include more diverse experiences and viewpoints. This reflects Bishop's (1990) idea of texts as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors." Although this idea is gaining prevalence in education, the literary canon still tends to favor White men over other demographic groups (Chavez, 2021). In the elective space of a creative writing club, facilitators may be in a position to expose students to authors of different backgrounds. This will expand students' cultural and self-awareness, and it may also enrich their writing as they are exposed to novel story-telling traditions and artistic styles. Overall, the conversation around the writing process revealed that participants see creative writing clubs as a way to allow students to experiment and explore in ways that they do not in the traditional classroom.

Mandatory Reporting

Finally, mandatory reporting surfaced as a concern within the group. Mary shared that her mentor teacher had to report a student to the school for a poem about smoking cannabis. The teacher knew the student would get in trouble with his mother, who was "not a nice person," but she was obligated to make the report. This situation reflects the reality that students may disclose information that needs to be reported or acted upon if they are allowed to write freely. Lauren shared that her mentor teacher emphasizes her role as a mandatory reporter with the students. Lauren speculated, there is a "legitimate fear and there's probably some emotional heaviness that creative writing can bring. But I also feel like that is an avoidable one of sorts" and that "you don't have to feel super guilty if you've told them" about the obligations of a mandatory reporter.

Participants' comments about mandatory reporting reveal their emerging understanding of a crucial conflict between students' artistic freedom, their safety, and the impact of their writing on the group. Facilitators need to be prepared to balance students' artistic freedoms with their own ethical and legal responsibilities to report potential threats to students' safety and well-

being (Brown & Buskey, 2014; Ohio Revised Code, 2022). This can be especially challenging because of the prevalence of violence in student writing, which even trained risk-management experts have difficulty categorizing (Brown & Buskey, 2014). The issue becomes more complicated when one considers the implications of a student's writing triggering a trauma-response from another student (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Ultimately, Brown & Buskey (2014) recommend against censorship except in extreme situations; providing an outlet to explore violence in the safety of writing can help students process real trauma and open a pathway to help. A facilitator who overuses censorship also determines "appropriateness" on behalf of the members, robbing them of voice and agency. This can be especially destructive when a racially and/or economically privileged facilitator censors content that appears in the lived experiences of club members. Lawton (personal communication, 2022) recommends discussing violence with the group directly by treating it like a craft move. She suggests discussing violence in the context of students' media and having them analyze its effect. Many sources also recommend the group norm of stating content warnings before reading violent material (Lawton, 2022, personal communication; University of Michigan, 2022). It is crucial to explore this complex issue in my resource, as facilitators' handling of sensitive content can have lasting impacts in the lives of club members.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications

Participants' themes indicate several key insights into the research questions of this project, which are as follows:

What does a sample of pre-service Integrated Language Arts teachers already know, understand, and believe about advising creative writing clubs?

What information would equip and inspire pre-service Integrated Language Arts facilitate creative writing clubs in their future careers?

Related to the first question, participants revealed that their attitudes towards creative writing clubs are overall positive but their experience with them is limited. First, they feel like they did not have enough exposure to creative writing at all, but they see it as valuable. Their comments, especially under *self-efficacy*, *the value of writing*, *the writing process*, and *community*, suggest they believe that creative writing is not approached in Ohio schools, but that it could have many benefits, especially in a club setting. Among these benefits, participants particularly favored the ideas of building community, providing a space, promoting experimentation, and exposing students to diverse authors and genres. Their lack of exposure to creative writing clubs leaves them ambivalent about whether they are qualified to advise one, but they are open to the idea of facilitating a safe space for young writers.

The discussion revealed that community, rather than information, may be the most effective tool for equipping and inspiring pre-service teachers to facilitate a creative writing club. Because participants' experience with creative writing was so limited, it may be necessary for them to join a creative writing community before they feel comfortable hosting one. This space might allow them to build positive connections with imaginative writing, igniting a passion that they can share with students. Even so, participants' open-mindedness towards the idea indicates that they might be open to hosting a club if they have some information to help them. Their comments suggest many ways that my resource might appeal to their interest and concerns. Emphasizing facilitation and making space may appeal to their self-efficacy and interest in

giving students agency and voice. Including information about the many possible goals of creative writing clubs may validate and extend participants' perceptions of the club's many potential benefits. Adding research to this discussion may help participants build their own case for creative writing clubs, which may alleviate their concerns about the value of creative writing. Openly addressing the challenges of creative writing clubs may help participants feel more prepared to host them.

Recommendations

My resource, which can be accessed [here](#), addresses participants' insights with an inviting tone, a user-friendly organization, and targeted content.

The website, *Creative Writing Club Hub*, maintains an inviting tone that encourages users to embrace the idea of creative writing clubs. This is explained through the first page, which can be viewed in Appendix C. The tagline, "create a space for the love of language," establishes this tone on the first page. The words "create" and "space" are meant to evoke the sense of choice and possibility, while the phrase "for the love of language" may evoke both joy and exigency. Read one way, it may simply encourage educators to think of creative writing clubs as a way to promote students' enjoyment of language. Other users may be keen to the phrase's parallel to "for the love of God," which might evoke a slight sense of urgency. This duality is meant to indicate that creative writing is joyful and fun but needed, creating a balance between staying inviting and creating a sense of importance. At the top of my welcome page, I use several key words to appeal to my audience: "enrich," "explore," "literacy," "community," "mental health," and "facilitators." These words may appeal to educators who are looking to benefit their students but who may feel intimidated by a new practice. The encouraging language poses creative writing clubs as a possibility that or may not be right for the user, which may make them more

likely to engage with the resource than if the language was more forceful or exigent. Throughout the resource, I attempt to use the simplest and most concise language possible so that my information is easy to access. The categories of “academic,” “social,” and “personal” goals reflect this well; though I address my frameworks of disciplinary literacy, social and emotional learning, and third-space theory within each section, creating these simple headings helps invite users into the information. Overall, the inviting tone of the resource adapts to participants’ lack of self-efficacy related to creative writing clubs.

The website’s user-friendly organization promotes a sense of choice and control. First, I organized the reasons for creative writing clubs into three categories, “Academic,” “Social,” and “Personal” (Appendix D). Through buttons, explanations, and a consistent color scheme, I establish that creative writing clubs may focus on one or more of these three functions: writing itself, getting along with others, or mental health. Within the headings, I create additional goals to elaborate on how users can address each goal to a varying degree. For example, they may be interested in using creative writing as a bridge towards students’ overall academic performance, or they might be interested in helping students pursue creative writing seriously. Although these are both “academic,” they vary in intensity. A facilitator may be comfortable helping student focus on writing while feeling unqualified to help them submit to literary magazines. By ordering the subgoals from the least to the most intense, I hope to show potential facilitators that there are worthwhile goals for their club that do not require them to be invested beyond their interests and perceived abilities. This is responsive to the findings about their self-efficacy as well as their expansive ideas about what a creative writing club might do. Each section contains a description of how that goal might look, research to support that a creative writing club can meaningfully contribute to the goal, and links to activity ideas. Another way that I purposefully

organize the website is through the “FAQ” page, which has linked questions at the top. This allows users to modify their experience by deciding to scroll through the whole page or selecting their question of interest.

The content of my resource also responds to the conversation by connecting participants to information meant to address their interests and concerns. The most obvious example of this is the “FAQ” page, which addresses questions that the participants raised (Appendix E). Jessica seemed frustrated with the idea of having students just come in and write, so I used the question “What is a creative writing club?” to demonstrate the breadth that these clubs can take. Mary and Lauren discussed the issue of mandatory reporting, so I dedicated a section to sensitive content. Their discussion of the value of creative writing, as well as my inference that they may need more information about whether they can be compensated for running a club, is addressed through the question “Is this worth my time?” Finally, I address their low self-efficacy through the question, “Am I qualified?” By amplifying Lawton’s (2021a) recommendations for facilitators, I hope to communicate that passionate and open-minded educators may be well-positioned to run creative writing clubs. Participants’ conversations also influenced the material I included about the goals, as they seemed interested in using clubs to promote students’ mental health and explore their identities. This motivated me to include the goals “Social Awareness,” “Social Justice,” “Self-Exploration,” and “Self-Awareness.” These sections are meant to uplift the ways that creative writing clubs can boost students’ understanding of themselves and others, as well as their ability to take concrete actions for social change.

There are several parts of my resource that I will continue to develop. Mainly, I will continue to add activity ideas and community. Right now, I emphasize social skills and general academic ideas. In the future, I want to add more disciplinary-specific ideas, as well as ideas

about how to leverage creative writing clubs for social awareness and social change. Two ideas that I will develop soon are workshopping and selecting diverse mentor texts. Following the recommendations of my advisors, I will also recruit insight from published authors. To promote a sense of community, will add posts to the blog so that users can see more of my authentic voice. Addressing Lauren's direct advice, I want to show that I am experimenting too and that showing up imperfectly is better than not showing up at all. Ultimately, I would like for my website to host an online creative writing community for educators. Its ultimate form will likely be a Zoom-based creative writing group specifically for facilitators.

Beyond My Project

Others may be better positioned to address these implications. Most significantly, teacher preparation programs should attend to participants' limited experiences with creative writing. This issue extends beyond this project; English teachers should be able to find joy in imaginative writing, just as they do reading fiction, if they are responsible for teaching it. It is not surprising, though, that many of these participants do not. At BGSU, most AYA Integrated Language Arts majors need to take 18 credits a semester, bring in credits, and enroll in summer classes to graduate on time. Of these credits, only two classes focus on pre-service teachers' writing (the university writing class and Advanced Composition). One additional class, Foundations of Teaching writing, focuses on writing pedagogy and psychology but requires very little actual writing.

There are opportunities for education majors in the creative writing department for students who have space in their schedules to take them. ENG 2040: Imaginative Writing could be a strong fit for pre-service teachers. This class functions as an introduction to the craft of creative writing. For students who would like more challenge, ENG 3430: Picture Book

Workshop and ENG 4250: Graphic Novel Workshop are both open to all majors. Because of packed schedules and a lack of awareness, though, these classes are often unknown to education majors. If participants did not enjoy imaginative writing before coming to college, it is unlikely that their experiences at BGSU will change their perspectives or increase their confidence.

The teacher preparation classes could also prepare students for extracurricular responsibilities, which were not discussed during my time in the program. A class or even a seminar topic about extracurricular opportunities might be very useful for pre-service teachers. This might prepare them to fit their interests into clubs, navigate administrations, explore community partnerships, and seek compensation for their time. By attending to extracurriculars, teacher preparation programs might increase teachers' willingness to provide these opportunities to students. Just as importantly, this education may also prepare pre-service teachers to manage these responsibilities in ways that energize, rather than drain, their commitment to the profession. This may be a worthwhile topic in the class *Teaching as a Profession* or as a Friday seminar topic teaching junior year.

Finally, pre-service teachers may be able to help each other by promoting and creating opportunities to engage with creative writing. Positive experiences with creative writing in college might equip pre-service teachers to bring these experiences to their students. At BGSU, pre-service teachers interested in creative writing may enjoy editing for *Prairie Margins*, joining *BG Inklings*, attending the annual Winter Wheat writing festival, and attending the weekly readings at Prout Chapel on Thursday nights. There is also a strong literary presence in Bowling Green as there is in many communities (Lawton, 2022, personal communication). Anyone interested in creative writing should know that there are many writers who take the craft beyond

themselves and the page; libraries, bookstores, and coffee shops tend to be frequent hosts of community-based literary activities.

However, there is a strong case for having a tight-knit group with similar goals. At BGSU, there is not yet a creative writing group for pre-service teachers specifically. Jessica shared that even the brief focus group discussion with her peers made her more interested in hosting a club in the future because the group brainstormed innovative ways to approach creative writing. Ultimately, a creative writing community for pre-service teachers may be the most effective way to increase these teachers' self-efficacy and encourage them to start creative writing clubs in their careers. There is a promising platform for this community available in BGSU's emerging Language Arts Club.

Conclusion

Creative writing clubs offer constellations of possibility. With minimal costs in materials and preparation, these clubs can advance students' academic, social, and personal development. These clubs offer promising opportunities to early career teachers looking to build rapport with their students, get involved in their schools, and increase their passion for their content area. However, their lack of exposure to creative writing clubs may make them pause. In my focus group, I found that pre-service teachers see potential in creative writing but harbor feelings of low self-efficacy related to the subject. Through my resource, *Creative Writing Club Hub*, I hope to provide the information and inspiration they need to become involved in these clubs. Especially now, these clubs will become life-sustaining for students and the educators who run them.

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. We are all here because we have displayed some level of interest in the pedagogy of creative writing. Let's start with a general question: What purposes can creative writing serve for people?
 - a. You can answer for yourselves, your students, or anyone who does creative writing
2. Creative writing is often considered a solitary activity. What (if anything) can be gained by centering it in a group setting such as a club or a class?
3. How have you seen creative writing incorporated in the 7-12 educational setting?
 - a. What have you noticed about these opportunities or experiences?
 - b. What are the advantages of the approaches you have seen?
 - c. What are the limitations of these approaches?
4. What challenges does creative writing pose for teachers in the 7-12 educational environment?
5. Of the many approaches to engaging students in creative writing--such as enrolling in competitions or teaching creative writing within the regular English class--this study focuses on creative writing clubs. What, if anything, can be gained from the club/extracurricular atmosphere as opposed to classes or competitions?
6. Does the club environment pose any extra challenges that are not present in other creative writing opportunities, such as the classroom environment?

7. Imagine you have just gotten hired for your first job. Your school does not have a creative writing club or any other opportunities aside from local essay competitions. Would you try to start a club?
 - a. What would be your first steps? What would you see as the main objective of the club?
 - b. What activities would you plan for?
 - c. What, if anything, would be intimidating?
 - d. What, if anything, would be exciting?
 - e. Who do you imagine would come to your club?
 - f. What could you do to ensure that students with different abilities, perspectives, and priorities can participate?
8. What other information do you feel like you need to know before you facilitate a creative writing club?
9. What other insight do you have that might help pre-service teachers consider hosting creative writing clubs in their careers?

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

First email subject line: Participation Request for Focus Group on Creative Writing Clubs

Second email subject line: Reminder: Participation Request for Focus Group on Creative Writing Clubs

Hello, [name]:

My name is Stephanie Altier, and you may recognize me from your classes in the AYA ILA program. Based on your participation in those classes, I have identified you as a potential participant in my Honors Project on pre-service teachers' attitudes towards hosting creative writing clubs.

My goal is to create a resource that can help early-career teachers learn about the possibilities and challenges of hosting creative writing clubs. First, I need to know what prior knowledge, experiences, concerns, and ideas my audience has. Your participation in an hour long focus group conversation over Zoom would help me characterize and address my audience more accurately.

If you are interested in participating, please read the informed consent form attached, print it, sign it, upload it, and send it in an email attachment at saltier@bgsu.edu. Know that your participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time, and do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns.

You can reach me at saltier@bgsu.edu or by calling 937-738-3696 and Dr. Murnen at tmurnen@bgsu.edu or by calling 419-372-7983. You may also contact the Chair of the

Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board, at 419-372-7716 or irb@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stephanie Altier

Appendix C

Welcome Page



Appendix D

Three Goals

Through my research, I found that creative writing clubs tend to primarily focus on students' academic, social, or personal development. Although every club will likely provide every kind of benefit to some extent, choosing a primary goal will help you market your club and prioritize activities.

Click on the boxes below for research and ready-to-roll ideas. Explore each section, or focus on one that seems right for you and your students!

WHAT WOULD MY CLUB DO?

Explore the buttons to get ideas for each type of goal.

Academic Social Personal

Appendix E

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These questions may be on your mind as you consider advising a creative writing club. Follow the linked questions for more information!



- [What is a creative writing club?](#)
- [Am I qualified to lead one?](#)
- [Is this worth my time?](#)
- [What should I do about sensitive content?](#)



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