

## **Creative eWriting for Basic Education: A Project Profile**

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### **Introduction**

First, I would like to give the structure of this presentation. In the Introduction, I will clarify three major concepts namely-- creative writing, ICT, and self actualization and its relevance to academic achievement. Then in the main part, I will discuss the activity book for young writers which paves the path towards ewriting and epublishing-- its contents, status. In the conclusion, I will offer recommendations that seek support from FIT-ED, DepEd, and National Book Development Board.

When we talk of creative writing, what do mean exactly? And also, what do we mean by ICT and paradigm shifts, among other terms? I will provide us with working definitions for our common terms of reference.

Creative Writing is a process of retrieving and filtering / distilling materials from the writer's inner resources to produce a significant and unique work of his imagination, using language as tool.

The writer's inner resources are his dreams; memories; experiences; personal interests; and reactions to people, places and events around him. By drawing particulars and details from any one or a combination of these, he organizes his thoughts and impressions and write on a theme or subject he has decided upon. After which, he will revise, edit, then publish. When he revises, the writer makes decisions about how to improve his work-- by adding, deleting, replacing, and rearranging. In editing, he checks spelling, punctuations, subject-verb agreement, consistent verb tense, and word usage or vocabulary. He self-edits and may request fellow writers to edit his work, which is called "peer-edit." Students usually have their teachers to edit their writings.

We talk of paradigm shift as we talk of creative ewriting at the same time. There are many synonyms for paradigm but the closer to what we mean here is "model," "pattern," and "principle." The prefix "e" in ewriting mean "electronic" as differentiated from "manual." Writers used to work with pens and typewriters before. With the advent of ICT or information and communication technology, writers now work with word processors or electronic typewriters that have memories and thus can store digital copies; and of course, with personal computers and laptops or notebooks that can store gigabytes of data and print manuscripts as well when connected to a printer.

Still the "e" means more than writing with the use of computers. Essentially it implies the more exciting part of ewriting, which is epublishing. Ewriters also epublish-- on the Web and on compact discs or CDs, as well as audio cassettes or audio books. And this is the paradigm shift we refer to. The advent of digital technology enables writers to make a dramatic change in the way they do things and at the same time opens the door to immense publishing opportunities.

Whereas before, even an excellent writer has to wait for years for a publisher to print his book, now he can self-publish whatever he wants, whenever he wants; make revisions on his book at any time-- in digital and cost effective format as contrasted with the expensive traditional paper-based publishing. ICT has allowed us to achieve so many things that we once thought impossible.

At this point we seek to have a working definition for ICT. What is ICT? Information and Communication Technology is the overall convergence of computing, communication and contents. When ICT is mentioned, what immediately comes to mind is the Internet, which combines computing (web servers, browsers), communication (internetworking among computers, servers, and devices) and contents (web sites or homepages. New cellular phones ae being used as platforms to browse the Internet. The phrase Information and Communication Technology was coined by Stevenson in his 1997 report to the UK government and promoted by

the National Curriculum documents for the UK in 2000. (*Sources: Rahando & Kartasasmita, Indonesia, 2002, ICTWork.org*)

It is such a tremendous blessing to be living in this digital age, when people can communicate and share their creative works with people around the world in real time within seconds using their computers and Internet connection. This is a time when it is possible to enhance achievement and self actualization to a greater degree that is unheard of before the advent of ICT.

Which brings us to get to know the work of psychologist, A. H. Maslow and what he wrote about self actualization in "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943).

The basis for writing activities as a method to enhance achievement can be tied to Maslow's hierarchy of needs-- need for psychological wellbeing, need for safety, need for love and belonging, need for self esteem, need for self actualization, need for understanding, and need for aesthetics.

Maslow argued that even if all other needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what he is fitted for. A musician must compose and perform music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need is what we call self actualization.

The term self actualization was first coined by Kurt Goldstein. It refers to the desire for fulfillment, for man to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.

Not all people are inclined to writing. But during the basic education years, teachers must encourage students to at least explore creative writing as one of the avenues for self-actualization. Teachers must exert conscious effort to create the ambience of an adventure for writing in the same manner that biology teachers announce to the class that they are going on a nature trekking soon. Writing is really an adventure. It is a journey into the inner self of the writer. And who knows what immense wealth of self-discovery awaits the young writers! And they will be forever grateful to their writing teachers who have initiated them into such an adventure.

There are many genres or types of creative writing such as poetry (lyric, narrative); fiction (short story, novel); creative non-fiction (essays, autobiographies); and postmodernist (can be a combination of genres).

Postmodernist writings are born with in the current digital age. Personally, I would like the beginning writers to be postmodernist, to experiment with style and genres where they can find their own, true voices. To write as they are, as they think, feel, and believe and not in imitation of a favorite writer or teacher or someone else. To express the things they truly feel, in the manner they are comfortable with and are honest with. Not necessarily in English. If they want, the young writers can write in Tagalog, Iloko, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, Visaya, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Ilonggo, Butuanon, etc. First of all, they have to find their voices and their tongues! This is the first step in the creative process. Then for their English class, they can translate. A French postmodernist writer, Raymond Federman writes in both English and French in a single work. In his prose, poetry is also found. Critics call his writings "literature of exuberance"!

**Creative Expressions: Prompts and Activity Book for Young Writers / Paving the Path for eWriting and ePublishing**

Background

Creative Writing can begin as early as in grade one, when a child is already able to compose simple sentences and group them into short paragraphs to make a friendly letter or a narrative; or put together words to express ideas and feelings in verse form. Ideally, there should be a series of creative writing activity books from grade one up to 4<sup>th</sup> year high school.

In 2000, I developed a writing activity book for 4<sup>th</sup> year public high school, entitled *Creative Expressions*. Why public school? Because I was inspired by the batch 2000 graduating class of Baco National High School Annex in Molino, Baco, Cavite to which my eldest daughter belonged. I submitted the manuscript for evaluation to the then DECS 2000 Call for Supplementary Learning Materials in English. DECS was then under Sec. Andrew Gonzales.

Only a few points were needed for it to meet DECS passing grade but unfortunately, to the DECS evaluator, there were some contents that were allegedly inappropriate, which I will discuss later. I made necessary revisions and then self-published it in 2001 but it was too late to make it to the list of the DECS-approved supplementary learning materials and I was told to wait after five years to resubmit it for another round of evaluation. During DECS Sec. Raul Roco's term, I pleaded via email to have this same book re-evaluated so that if approved, I can recover my investment. But I got no response and I was so discouraged to follow up. Up to now I am still paying for the printing cost that I incurred as a personal loan at a very high interest rate. It was really a disastrous business attempt. A private publisher, Ebookspecial.com offered to make a digital version and sell it on the Internet. But the market was not ready for ebooks. After the Sept 11 tragedy in the US, my online publisher closed shop. As of now, I have given away 50 complimentary copies and 50 donation copies to Libro ni Loren Foundation. The digital version included in the Literature CD being offered by STII-DOST at cost to the general public was supposed to have been downloaded by the Ayala Foundation last July in some 100 servers of public national high schools. A thousand print copies of this book *Creative Expressions* are waiting to be distributed.

## Goal

The purposes of the book are stated in the foreword and notes to the students, teachers and parents. It was 2000 when the foreword was written and it foreshadowed the current demand for fresh graduates - excellent communicators by call centers that continue to grow in various parts of the country, offering attractive salaries. The major requirement is very good communication skill in English. A very good oral communication skill is of course anchored on clear thinking and competence with the written word. For instance, this presentation for this Congress resulted from something that began as a script-- written on paper, encoded on and then printed from the computer.

For the student, this book is like a roadmap to the adventure of writing, an adventure that leads to self discovery and understanding of life's realities, with original readings that mirror the lifestyle and concerns of the current generation.

For the parents and teachers, this book is their potent tool to empower the young people. With their support-- specifically by making possible the publication of the young writers' works and distribution of those works even in digital format (CD or diskette) to save printing costs, in neighborhood bookstores, academic bookstores, supermarkets, public libraries, local parishes and barangays-- they will be giving the children the best gift they can ever receive, which is the gift of self esteem that comes from a sense of achievement. Marketing can be fun and the proceeds of the sale can be used for another exciting epublising project. It is also an exciting idea to create a web version of the CD compilation. The individual young writers can have their own web pages.

I suggest that each school must have a copy of the Microsoft Office Tutorials CD by Dr. Tom Murray of Lynchburg College in Virginia, US. In fact, the tutorials were supposed to have already been downloaded by the Ayala Foundation into the servers of 100 public high schools in the

country. Among the lessons is how to create web pages and web sites using Microsoft FrontPage of different versions. I have a few copies with me which Dr. Murray has authorized me to distribute at cost so that more copies can be produced to benefit more users. Students, teachers and parents can learn how to create their own web sites by studying Dr. Murray's Microsoft Tutorials.

If the school computer does not have a CD ReWriter yet, this can be purchased at less than P3,000 with accompanying software such as Nero Burning ROM Version 6.0. A blank CD costs only P 10 when purchased in bulk. In 1996, would you believe that a blank CD costs P 500 and a CD ReWriter costs P 37,000! Now there are so many enabling technologies that are affordable and it is so exciting to be learning and living in this digital age. Writers can now afford to publish their own works in digital format. It would be an exciting endeavor. The students can design their own CD covers and posters to promote their CD compilation of writings. For posterity sake, please remember to apply for ISBN with the National Library and have also the works of the young writers copyrighted with the National Library. Two copies of the ebook on CD have to be deposited with the National Library.

### Content

This book is designed to allow students to be creative on their own terms. There are no rules for writing, only reading selections and guides to inspire and help them begin.

It contains a foreword, note to the student, and note to the teachers and parents; ten writer's tips, ten warm-ups, 50 reading selections that act as creative triggers or writing prompts, and 50 writing activities that serve as a sort of roadmap or guide for the young writer. The subjects are divided into five categories, each with ten sub topics. The five categories are-- Autobiography, People in My Life, My Favorites, Places and Events in My Life, and Young Scientist. The first four subject categories draw much from the writer's inner resources, from childhood memories.

The last category gives importance to ICT, which at the time of the book's development was still an emerging technology in the Philippines. Now ICT is being explored to its fullest potential specially for education, as evidenced by this "First National ICTs in Basic Education" being held here and now.

When *Creative Expressions* was developed in 2000 and printed in 2001, it was meant to be a "stand-alone" supplementary learning material for 4<sup>th</sup> year public high school English. Many turn of events occurred since then. Online or electronic writing and publishing gained grounds. Now many public schools maintain homepages or web sites in free domains like Yahoo Geocities, created by teachers and students who are ICT enthusiasts. Students have become more and more knowledgeable about Internet applications as email and chat, cyber games, and surfing.

Useful as it is now, the book needs to be updated and repackaged to make it more attractive to target users. Since the developer-publisher is still recovering from financial loss incurred in the printing of the book that did not make it to the DECS list, she can come up with a CD version that the modern young writers can use in their computerized writing center in school.

Since there is dramatic paradigm shifts in the world of writing brought about by ICTs, greater participation is also expected from the English teacher. She may want to participate in the writing activity also so her students can relate to her as a writing peer, be inspired by her and not be afraid of her, become someone with whom they can discuss the pains as well as the joys of writing; and not someone they are afraid of because her job is to find errors and deduct grade points.

The grammar proficiency lessons are taken cared of by the language component of the English subject. If the student's language skills are sound, then the student has sufficient tools to engage in creative writing. When already engaged in such kind of writing, the English teacher must also shift gear. Instead of putting much weight on grammar accuracy, she should instead act as a

writing coach-- bring out the best in her student-writers, induce the flow of their creative juices, use technology tools for the reluctant writer. These tools can be downloaded from <http://www.classroom.com> or the educators site of Adobe.com.

Trying to empathize with the concerns of the "generation now," the reading selections in *Creative Expressions*, as a whole are an honest exploration of the current milieu from the typical young persons' point of view-- sometimes seemingly irreverent and disturbing but eventually a courageous struggle for the triumph of goodness and love, and for becoming excellent citizens of the world.

This seemingly "irreverent and disturbing" part of the book perhaps accounted for the withholding of the few necessary points by the DECS evaluator which could have resulted in its approval and inclusion in the list of approved supplementary leaning materials for public schools.

With your permission I would like to tackle very briefly this matter since I know many officials from the DepEd are also here and discussion of what is acceptable content can help a lot the educational content developers or textbook and supplementary learning material writers like me who may find themselves in similar situation. For four years now, I am intellectually disturbed by the DECS evaluator's reluctance to confront issues that are important to a young person's growing-up years. I am bothered not just as a writer but also as a parent because I have such high regard for the public school system. My two older children were educated in public schools. I would like our public school system to continue giving excellent education to the Filipino youth despite its many problems. We know we want our children's education to be holistic; not just to get them jobs after graduation, but to enable them to become intellectually capable and emotionally stable as well, humane, compassionate, broadminded and with strong sense of freedom to pursue the truth.

May I cite at least two such controversial contents namely-- (1) *Pagmamano* or Kissing the Elders' Hand in Reading Activity No. 36 entitled "He Would Rather Be Free"; and (2) Passionate kiss and Innocent kiss in Reading Activity No. 6 entitled "Memories of Coral Town".

#### He Would Rather Be Free

In this reading activity, Mark, a typical teenage boy in search of identity and trying to assert individuality, explains to his mother why he wants to do away with the tradition of *pagmamano* or kissing his elders' hand as a sign of respect. Mark said this practice originated with the unjust *frailies* during the Spanish regime in the country when kissing the hands of the Spaniards priests and governors was act of slavery and servitude. Mark said he does not want to engage in this humiliating custom that traces its root from a cruel past. When pressed by his mother that Mark should kiss his grandma on the cheek instead, he again refused, recalling that Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss. In the end, with his mother's patient and honest attempt to understand the young man, Mark promises to kiss his grandma's hand the next time she visits. And the mother expresses appreciation for her son's independent mind without giving up respect and obedience to people who care for him.

I was really disappointed that the DECS evaluator missed the message of the story. Here are two people of different generations exerting honest efforts to understand each other and respect each other, and each one is swayed into each other's side by their respective good example. This is a win-win situation.

In the writing activity that follows, the young writer is guided into going back to Philippine history. He is also reminded that the truly independent person must also be free from the destructive memories of his past. And then the writer is encouraged to write about the freedoms that teenagers cherish in a democratic country like the Philippines.

### Memories of Coral Town

This is about Ralph, another young man on the threshold of adulthood. He is with his mother in winter North Carolina and in the cold, he remembers the warmth and fun of one summer at Coral Town Beach Resort in Nasugbu, the memory of two young women asking each other what is an innocent kiss and what is a passionate kiss. In the States, he thinks young people loses their innocence earlier than their Asian counterparts. He misses the Philippines but his uncle adopted him when his father died. His mother and he too believe that a better life awaits him in the US than here if he stays. He wants to finish his studies, get a good job so he can support his mother and siblings. He feels responsible for his family now that his father is dead. Sex is actually the least of Ralph's concerns. But the DECS evaluator was so upset by the sight of the phrase "passionate kiss" like she or he had seen something pornographic. This reading selection is trying to empathize with a young person who is giving up the joys of his youth too soon because of his country's economic problems which directly affects his family. Children of economically challenged families cannot enjoy their youth long enough because they have to think of their future, give up the warmth of home and country, and suffer winter of the heart and soul.

In the writing activity that follows, the young writer is encouraged to write about the happiest event in his or her life. The more mature writer can be inspired to delve deeper. But the writing guide does not scare away the less ambitious writer. Just writing about his happiest moment is enough.

Actually this book is a masterpiece of balance in everything-- serious but light, sad but inspirational, fun but meaningful. In fact, one of the readings is about "Finding Meaning in Everything", which is about a literature mentor who inculcates the redeeming value of great writings. Literature helps mankind understand themselves and unravel life's complexities while at the same time discovering the beauty of everyday life.

### Status of the Book

As of now there are 1,000 print copies of this book unsold, as I have already mentioned earlier. A hundred copies were donated to Libro ni Loren Foundation and given as complimentary copies to individuals and friends. The public schools for which it is intended will not buy unless it is included in the DepEd list of approved learning materials. As I said, *Creative Expressions* missed the few evaluation points needed for approval probably due to the controversial content I just discussed. A digital copy was supposed to have been downloaded by the Ayala Foundation to 100 servers of public high schools.

If ever DepEd will again issue a call for submission of books for evaluation next year, I will try to resubmit, hoping it will find its way into the hands of a more broadminded evaluator.

It has a web site at <http://www.geocities.com/youngpinoywriters> that encourages young writers to submit works for online publication.

### **Conclusion**

Creative Writing is indeed one of the most self actualizing activities. Parents and teachers should not miss this very exciting tool of empowerment for young people. All sectors of society must give support to it. For instance, the National Book Development Board (NBDB) and National Book Store may consider awarding writing grants to educational writers and content developers. Beach resorts and hotels may want to offer retreats and residencies for educational writers with free meals and board for let's say two weeks to two months.

We hope the DepEd will recruit book evaluators who have wide range of interests that include ICTs and have conscious efforts to understand the interests and concerns of the youth not only in the Philippines but globally because the world is getting smaller. The Asian youth know and empathize as well the concerns of their counterparts in the Middle East, Africa, US, Canada, Europe. We also hope that FIT ED will make this ICTs Congress an annual event.

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It is my hope that *Creative Expressions*, imperfect as it is, will pave the way for many more projects that will optimize ICTs for educational purposes.

Thank you so much for listening.

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