

報告

クリエイティブ・ライティング ——日本人大学生に英語で書くことの楽しさを教えるための優れた教授法——

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要約：この論文は、日本の大学における英語授業のシラバスに「クリエイティブ・ライティング」を導入するきっかけとなることを目指している。日本の学生の英語能力を向上させるだけでなく、英作文能力における自信を得る手助けをするための、おもしろく実践的なツールとしての「クリエイティブ・ライティング」のコンセプトを述べる。さらに、作家であり英語講師でもある Suzanne Kamata により徳島大学イングリッシュ・サポーター・ルーム（ESR）において特別企画プログラムとして行われている「クリエイティブ・ライティング」の実施過程とこれまでの成果についても述べる。

(キーワード：英語、大学教育、ライティング、授業以外の学習、英作文、文学、創作)

‘Creative Writing’ —Efficiently Teaching Japanese Students the Joy of Writing in English

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Abstract: This paper aims to make a cause for introducing ‘Creative Writing’ classes in the English syllabus of Japanese universities. It will describe the concept of ‘Creative Writing’ as an exciting and useful tool not only to improve Japanese students’ English writing skills in general, but to also help them gain confidence in their writing skills. This paper will also describe the proceedings and preliminary results of a ‘Creative Writing’ class held as an extra-curricular special program at Tokushima University’s ‘English Support Room (ESR)’ under the guidance of published writer/English teacher Suzanne Kanata.

(Key words: English, higher education, writing, studying time outside regular classes, writing in English, literature)

Introduction:

Out of the four skills ‘speaking’, ‘listening’, ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ which students have to master in order to reach a functional level of English (or any other language), ‘writing’ seems according to surveys among Japanese students to be the most unpopular one. Due to the sizes of university classes ranging from 25 up to 50 and more students, even English teachers tend to teach rather spoken communication in their classes than writing, as the thorough correcting of written assignments is an extremely time consuming affair, which even with the best of wills cannot be accomplished by one teacher who might be responsible for 100 or more students per week.

This neglect of teaching students how to write in English is actually a graver problem than it appears to be on first sight: While in spite of the overall acknowledged importance of English, most Japanese students seem still convinced that they won’t be needing English after graduating from university, even

those few who consider the possibility of having to use English have mostly in mind ‘having to speak’ rather than ‘having to write in English’. In times of the internet and with e-mail being the fastest and most convenient communication tool, this assumption of having to only use spoken English is more than wrong. The following example should be more than sufficient to show how wrong this assumption actually is: This author has also had extensive experience in teaching business English at several companies. While all his students were highly interested in learning spoken English, all of them admitted to the fact that in their daily work they would mainly have to use written English.

‘Writing’ is also essential for any learner of English to not only improve the learner’s ‘speaking’ and ‘reading’ skills – it is also an important means to develop a ‘feeling for the English language’ itself, something that cannot be learnt by simply studying grammar, vocabulary or practicing speaking English

as often as possible: In spoken communication the speakers have to react fast in order to keep a communication flowing and minor gaps can be overseen. A writer on the other hand has the time (and duty) to reflect deeper about the meaning of the words and phrases he/she puts to paper and hereby writing teaches students the correct and appropriate use of words and expressions in different situations. With this being said/written, the author of this paper would argue that acquiring such a ‘feeling for English’ cannot be done so efficiently in classes that focus mainly on ‘spoken English’/‘oral communication’.

In a first step, this paper will now describe the concept of ‘Creative Writing’, showing that ‘Creative Writing’ is not just about writing, but helps students to also improve, among others, their communicational skills.

In a second step this paper will then describe an ongoing ‘Creative Writing’ course of 13 units, held at Tokushima University’s English Support Room (ESR) and its results at the time of composing this paper.

(1) What is ‘Creative Writing’ and can ‘Creative Writing’ be used in the English education of Japanese universities?

As ‘Creative Writing’ touches a very broad field with basically no limitations and has by now still not been sufficiently researched, it should come as no surprise that there is no generally accepted definition of the term ‘Creative Writing’. A very rough agreement, based on how ‘Creative Writing’ is generally described in widely available ‘writers’ guides’, would allow the following description/‘definition (?)’ of ‘Creative Writing’ as follows:

‘Creative Writing’ is writing short stories, poems, novels, epics, screenplays, personal essays, movie/TV scripts and even songs. ‘Creative Writing’ does not include academic writing, journalism, textbooks and technical writing.’

Before addressing the question ‘Can ‘Creative Writing’ be used in the English education of Japanese

universities?’, a short look at the origins of ‘Creative Writing’, as well as clearing up with a seeming misconception concerning ‘Creative Writing’ shall procure the reader with some further information why this author regards ‘Creative Writing’ as a subject which should also to be taught at Japanese universities:

Considering the long history of literature itself, the concept of ‘Creative Writing’ is actually a rather new way to approach writing (for professional writers but also non-professionals interested in acquiring writing skills). While formerly literates were working on their own, trying to figure out what kind of writing (techniques) were working or not, developing in solitude ways of putting their literary visions on paper, the midst of the 20th century saw the beginning of a development, where writers began to organize meetings/workshops where ideas on writing (or rather: how to write) were exchanged, debated as well as tried out.

This concept of groups discussing/practicing writing turned out to be extremely popular and soon these writers’ workshops were not only limited to an exclusive circle of professional, already published authors but began also to include aspiring writers and people who simply enjoyed letting their creativity flow through the channel of writing: Nowadays, as a simple research on the internet will reveal, ‘Creative Writing’ workshops are nothing extraordinary, having produced literally hundreds of acclaimed bestselling authors. Furtherly, ‘Creative Writing’ is also being taught in high schools and universities (in English speaking as well as non-English speaking countries.)

A big misconception about ‘Creative Writing’ seems to be that ‘Creative Writing’ is seemingly restricted to professional writers or people who intend to ‘turn professional’ only. In reality and as already mentioned above, ‘Creative Writing’ is open to everyone who enjoys writing or wishes to let his/her creativity flow free.

It is this element of ‘being creative’ which in this author’s opinion makes ‘Creative Writing’ an

especially efficient and exciting tool for use in the English language education of Japanese universities. In sharp opposition to the traditional English language education at Japanese schools and universities, which focuses on grammar and translation, ‘Creative Writing’ encourages students to let their creativity flow free, instead of having to only think about correct spelling and grammar (working on this is something to be done outside of the ‘Creative Writing’ sessions.). As a result of this approach, students can gain confidence and learn to enjoy writing in English. What makes the concept of ‘Creative Writing’ as an English teaching tool at Japanese universities even more appealing is that even students with weaker English skills can participate and improve their English.

(1a) What is being taught in ‘Creative Writing’ and how is this done?

‘Creative Writing’ offers an abundance of possible topics, which can be chosen freely depending on the interests and needs of course participants. To give just one example: In an introductory course for students who have never had any experience with ‘Creative Writing’, it might be best to start with the most essential basics for writing a work of fiction and treat topics like ‘Plot / Character Development’, ‘Developing Scenes’, ‘How to Write Dialogues’, ‘Writing Interesting Metaphors/Avoiding Clichés’, ‘Narrative Points of View’ etc.. Even poetry, ranging from traditional forms over Slam Poetry to song lyrics would be a possible topic which could be taught in such a course. As this author already mentioned above: These topics are just a small selection out of an abundance of possible topics, which gives the teacher of ‘Creative Writing’ courses the opportunity and freedom to design a course perfectly fitting to the needs and wishes of his/her students.

As to the question ‘*How is ‘Creative Writing’ being taught?*’, this author would like to quote four points from an abstract by author/teacher Suzanne Kamata for her presentation on ‘Creative Writing’, held on January 6th, 2012 at Tokushima university’s ‘Daigaku

Kyouiku Konfarensu in Tokushima (大学教育カンファレンス in 徳島)’:

- By studying the works of other writers
- By imitation of other writers’ works
- By using prompts or assigned themes
- By peer critiques

In order to learn more about the craft of writing fictional texts, it is certainly no surprise that this will involve the studying of the writing techniques of other writers. Although it would be desirable for students who participate in a ‘Creative Writing’ course to do some literary research on their own in order to learn more about how other writers manage to create certain literary effects, this kind of ‘study’ is also being done in class. In each ‘Creative Writing’ session, students will be confronted with samples of the writings of authors of different literary backgrounds which are used as illustrating examples for topics introduced in those sessions. While this kind of studying will in the beginning focus mainly on writing techniques, another aimed for and often reached side effect is that students’ interest in reading books is being (re-)kindled.

Imitation of other writers’ works by taking a (famous/well-known) story by another author and then rewriting it for example by using a different narrative point of view or with different elements than those featured in the original story, is according to Suzanne Kamata also an efficient and proven way of acquiring writing skills (in the ‘Creative Writing’ course held at Tokushima University’s ‘English Support Room’ (ESR), of which a description can be found below, participants were asked to rewrite the Japanese fairytale of ‘Momotaro’ and produced impressive results.).

The third point ‘using prompts or assigned themes’ can be illustrated with some of the following examples: Prompts (or, if one were to use student fears evoking terminology: ‘writing exercises/drills’) like ‘*Write about an important person in your life*’, in which students have a limited amount of time to produce a written piece, are a very useful and enjoyable way to get students accustomed to writing

(especially in the first units of a new course), as well as to practice topics introduced in this day's teaching unit. For example, in order to show students, that sentences are having different structures and make them experiment with these structures, one prompt/exercise asks students to write a story, starting each sentence with a different letter in the order of the alphabet.

By learning and practicing certain writing strategies, students will not only improve their own writing skills, they will also be able to analyze the techniques and strategies other writers use in their works, hereby being led to assess and appreciate literary works. Furtherly, as 'Creative Writing' also encourages students to read the works of other authors, as this will help them to get a deeper understanding of how certain effects are being achieved, giving students ideas for their own writing.

Lastly, 'Creative Writing' classes are not only about learning writing techniques and silently producing a written work: 'Creative Writing' classes also teach oral communicating skills, as well as help students gain self-esteem and trust to others. This is being achieved by point 4 of Suzanne Kamata's list: 'By peer - critiques'.

An essential part of each 'Creative Writing' session is the students' sharing of their written results with the class and class members giving the writer/presenter a feedback. This feedback is not to be misunderstood as criticizing the writer in a way like 'I loved your piece' or 'I hated it because your writing was boring', but is intended to be a means where students share their feelings and opinions in a respectful way in order to help the writer to improve his/her skills. This feedback should never be about the contents of the written piece presented, but instead about the technical aspects of the writing or the effects the written piece had on the readers/listeners, e.g. what they were feeling during the presentation. Teaching students how to respectfully give such a feedback is an essential part of any 'Creative Writing' class and helps students acquire a valuable communication skill which they can also use

outside of the classroom environment. In case of Japanese students who are usually very shy and hesitant when it comes to stating their opinions, learning this kind of skill should prove to be an especially gratifying aspect of a 'Creative Writing' class.

As writing is also a very personal affair with the writer (consciously or unconsciously) putting personal feelings into his/her writing, this sharing the result of a written piece written involves a lot of courage and trusting in the group the work is being presented to. Receiving a respectful feedback in a way just described will help students to gain self confidence in their (English) writing skills, but might also be an important means in helping shy students to overcome psychological barriers like being to hesitant to speak in front of groups.

In order to give the reader of this paper an insight into the practical aspects of 'Creative Writing', the following segment will now describe parts of an ongoing 'Creative Writing' course

(2) Observation of an Ongoing 'Creative Writing' Course Held at Tokushima University's 'English Support Room (ESR)' and Its Preliminary Results

This 'Creative Writing' course was planned on the background of Tokushima University's 'English Support Room (ESR)' trying to offer its users interesting extra-curricular English learning programs (this 'Creative Writing' course was one out of three special programs, the other two programs being a 'Pronunciation' class and a class on 'Polite English Communication Strategies'). Having managed to invite published author and experienced English teacher Suzanne Kamata to teach this course turned out to be especially rewarding, as participants appreciated the experience of being guided by a professional author.

This 'Creative Writing' course was given a first test trial during late summer semester, consisting of four 60 minute units, with five students participating. During this test trial only writing prompts as described

above were assigned. The positive feedback given by the students at the end of this trial time led to an enlargement of this program to thirteen units of 90 minutes held throughout the winter semester. By the time of the writing of this paper this course had just finished its seventh unit.

This time there were seven participants from different backgrounds: Three students (one first year student and two third year students), two exchange students from Korea and China (who due to conflicting schedules couldn't participate regularly) as well as two teachers (one part-time German teacher and one fulltime English teacher). The English level of participating students ranged from upper beginner to advanced learners' level. As this author claims that 'Creative Writing' is worth to be put into the English syllabus of Japanese universities, the following observations will from now on focus only on the results reached by students participating in this course and not the two participating teachers.

(2a) Course program: Focusing on 'creativity' and not on correct grammar and spelling.

In the first unit, participants were asked about their reasons for taking the 'Creative Writing' program. The answer given most was '*because I want to improve my writing skills.*' Interestingly though it turned out, that none of those students answering like this had actually in mind, writing 'creatively' but were rather interested in acquiring more fluency/grammatical correctness when writing English. Mrs. Kamata's following announcement, that when it came to working on writing assignments during the course's sessions, students should not care about spelling and correct grammar (as this could be reworked outside of the sessions) but instead put their creativity first was received with astonished frowning.

All students admitted that up to now they had never had any experience with writing 'creatively', be it in junior high school, high school or in university, although one student mentioned to write a diary which might not necessarily qualify as 'Creative Writing' but

showed at least minor experience in using written English outside the classroom.

The 'most shocking revelation' was, when students were asked whether they enjoyed reading novels or other books, all participants admitted to not care at all for literature or reading in general!

With these conditions given, the course started with an introductory session in which the teacher once again made it clear to participants that during writing practices the priority would be set on 'letting creativity flow' instead of producing flawless English. Participants were also told that the course's ultimate goal would be for each participate to produce a story or another piece of written work, which should be in such a form that would allow for publication in form of a planned 'ESR English Literary Journal'.

This being said, the course's first unit dealt with 'beginnings' of a story: Students were explained how the beginning of a story or novel is of utmost importance, as this beginning would make a possible reader decide, whether he/she would be interested in the story or not (or rather: make a reader decide whether to buy a book or not!). Students were then given a handout featuring the first sentence of several novels and short stories by different authors, from different periods. The handout didn't tell the book's/story's title and author's name. The students were then asked to decide on their three favorite beginnings and share with the group what appealed to them for choosing these beginnings, followed by an analysis of the beginnings not chosen by anyone.

After this, a short writing assignment was given, asking the participants to write three sentences which they might use as the beginnings for stories they would like to tell. Having had sufficient time to write, participants were then invited to present their 'beginnings', receiving individual feedback from the teacher as well as other participants. The rest of the session was spent with continuing to write on their freshly started story.

The second unit featured 'Six word stories': Starting with such a six word story written by E.

Hemingway (*For sale: baby shoes, never worn.*) participants were asked to think about their emotions when reading this story and what the background of this story might have been.

Participants were then given further examples of these kinds of six word stories, showing them that even with a seemingly impossible small amount of words a story could be told. Students had then the opportunity to write their own six word stories and share them with the group. As a final practice of this session, students were asked to choose one of the six word stories and render them into a short story.

The following units three to seven featured topics like ‘Plot’, ‘Character’, ‘Settings’, where participants learnt how to create an interesting story arch, characters and scenes. The course also dedicated one unit to the topic ‘Showing vs. Telling’, where students learnt how to create and use images/metaphors instead of describing situations/conditions only with adjectives. Furtherly, the course treated ‘poetry’ in one session.

In the finals session before Christmas break (by the time of the writing of this paper) students were introduced to ‘ways of ending a work of fiction’. In the same session, the concept of writing a story with a limited amount of words was ‘enhanced’ to a 30 word story.

(2b) Preliminary Results

The course was exclusively held in English. The participants were in the early phase – due to this new learning experience – at first obviously unsure about the fact that priority was not put on grammatically flawless English but rather put stress on them coming up with written pieces they enjoyed writing. This could be seen especially during the first few units, when students, who were still insecure how serious this ‘enjoying writing over correct grammar and spelling’ policy would be taken, were using rather frequently dictionaries. Interestingly, from the fourth unit on, none of the students bothered to use a dictionary anymore, rather trusting in their vocabulary

knowledge and working with the vocabulary they had available, which clearly showed that participants had started to gain some of the course’s aimed at ‘self-confidence when writing’.

The same could be seen, when it came to presenting written work done as an assignment during the course or writing done at home: At first shy and hesitant to read, participants became increasingly confident and even eager to share their writings. It became also obvious, that participants were actively using what they had learnt in the course and experimenting with these newly acquired skills. This could also be seen in the fact that participants were writing on their pieces outside the regular sessions. The general quality of the written assignments done in class or at home was also of a quality level, this author has rarely seen in seven years of teaching English on university level. This does not only include the displayed creativity of the contents of pieces written by the participating students, but also the level of students’ command of English: While there were at times minor cases of admittedly bumpy grammar, there were never any instances, when a written work was incomprehensible.

Students also admitted that their attitude towards writing had changed to the positive: One student mentioned that in his case, writing had formerly an air of being a boring pointless matter, but that due to his participation in this ‘Creative Writing’ course, he sincerely found himself having come to enjoy writing in English. Judging from the steadily increasing quality of his written pieces presented during the ‘Creative Writing’ sessions held so far, this does not appear to have been an empty claim.

It is also noteworthy to report signs of participating students’ changing attitude towards reading/literature due to their participation in the ‘Creative Writing’ class: In unit six and seven, students were asked to present writings of authors (Japanese as well as foreign writers) they enjoyed and tell the group what it was that appealed to them: In spite of the fact that all participants claimed during the course’s first unit that they didn’t have any interest in literature, the students’

presentations showed some rather unexpected results, with one student even presenting selections from Ambrose Bierce's 'The Devil's Dictionary', which might be a prove that at least some participants might have started to pick up reading/dealing with literature again.

By unit seven, students had also begun working on a longer piece intended for publication after the end of the course.

(2c) Examples of Pieces Written by Participating Students

Following now are some examples of pieces produced by a student (Kazumasa Matoba), who participated in the course:

In the example to be found below, students were asked to rewrite a scene from the Japanese fairytale 'Momotaro'. Participants were free to re-work the story in whatever way they wished. As can be seen, the student decided to write the story from a rather different perspective than that of the hero Momotaro and give the story's finale a very special 'twist':

#Momotaro Revised Version

The ogre watched them from his castle in Ogres' Island. A human and three different animals were reaching the castle. The ogre was very happy because nobody and nothing had knocked on the door of his castle. Preparing for a party and making millet cake, the ogre was ready to welcome them. The next moment, however, the human and three different animals were rude enough to break into the ogre's castle. The ogre was surprised at their rudeness, especially at Momotaro's face. His face was familiar to the ogre. "I have seen him somewhere before." the ogre thought. They fought each other. As you know, Momotaro won and the ogre lost! Momotaro looked for treasures and he found the ogre's diary. The diary had a faint smell of peach. Momotaro opened and read. The diary said --- "On October 1. Finally the long years of effort achieved fruition! I did it!! I finally managed

to create a human from a peach seed!!! I will throw this peach into the river in minutes but I want him to come back here someday."

This story was written during the fourth session of the course, with the student not using a dictionary. As can be seen, there are some grammatical mistakes, but none of these mistakes are so grave as to turn the story incomprehensible. Here the 'Creative Writing' policy of reminding students not to worry about grammar and correct spelling, but to rather let their creativity flow and just write, shows its obvious efficiency: Within 30 minutes the student produced an enjoyable, humorous and entertaining version of Momotaro written in not perfect, but more than acceptable English! Seeing the humour displayed in this story, as well as its funny twist at the end, it is more than obvious that the student who wrote this piece most certainly enjoyed this assignment.

Just to give the reader an idea of how different things can be in a class, where students are not familiar with the 'don't worry about correct grammar and spelling' policy, the author would like to use an example from his past classes, before he learnt about 'Creative Writing': For a classroom activity students were asked to write five questions they would like to ask a famous person during an interview. In all classes, producing just these five questions took most students close to 25 minutes, as virtually all of them were too fixed on trying to write grammatically impeccable sentences. Even more frustrating than the overly long time necessary for writing five questions was the result, as most of the questions produced were far from interesting, creative or original (something essential for making the then following classroom activity a fun activity).

Another fine example of the refreshing efficiency of 'Creative Writing' and the creativity displayed by students when they are given a chance to do so, can be found below: One session of the 'Creative Writing' course dealt with the topic of 'Showing vs. Telling'. Here students learnt about the literary technique when

describing emotions, conditions etc. to not just simply use an adjective, but instead to create a picture or metaphor. In the following example, the task was to create such a picture for the expression ‘she was beautiful’. One of the results produced was this piece, written by Kazumasa Matoba:

*‘Sandra always works hard for her children.
She does the dishes and does the laundry everyday.
Her hands are not soft, but she never cares.
Everything she does is for her children.’*

What makes this piece especially impressive is, how the student created with rather simple vocabulary – which even students with only basic English skills should be having available – a highly moving and memorable image. This example demonstrates also, that even students with lesser English skills can participate in ‘Creative Writing’ and by playfully/creatively using the restricted means they are having available should be capable of producing interesting results.

Finally, this author would like to present the result of a fun activity done as a writing assignment during the course’s sixth session. Here students were asked to write a ‘story’, beginning each sentence with a letter of the ABC. This assignment made students not only use a range of vocabulary they wouldn’t usually use, but also experiment with different sentence structures. Once again, grammatical mistakes and misspellings can be found, but the overall result is a ‘story’ whose contents any reader can fully understand.

#ABC stories (by KazumasaMatoba)

*‘Actually, I hate the color of my house.
Because my brother chose the color.
Colors always make us happy.
Depending on a person who chooses a color, colors
always make us unhappy.
Even if my sister chooses a color for my house,
For me it will always be the most uncomfortable color*

*in the world.
Grandmother, what should I do?
Her voice was never heard by me.
In contrast to Grandfather’s voice.
Just a minute!
Kleenex, I will use to wipe off the color of my house.
Let’s do it,
Mother!!
No other color in all colors is more beautiful than
white.
On the roof, I will start to wipe off.
“Patience, me” I talked to myself.
“Quick!!
Remember to wipe off the color of your house” my
mother said.
Saying the words to me, she escaped from the house.
Trying to wipe off the color makes me sad.
Unexpected feelings of mine, I confused.
Vacuuming the feelings, I talked to myself again.
“Write a letter on the door! It is the only way to put up
with the color of my house.”
“X” is the right word on my roof.
“You are the best boy in your world!”
Zeus said to me in my dream, watching my behaving.’*

Conclusion

This paper described the theoretical and practical aspects of ‘Creative Writing’, suggesting that this approach of teaching writing in English might also be a tool to be used in the English education at Japanese universities.

With all the points mentioned above, it has clearly been demonstrated that ‘Creative Writing’ is not just about ‘writing only’. Starting off as a course seemingly focused on ‘only teaching how to write in English’, ‘Creative Writing’ appeals to students’ creativity and produces results beyond just improving students’ English writing skills, but also helps them to gain confidence in their English writing skills.

Writing prompts used regularly in class get students used to writing in English. As these prompts put students’ creativity over the need to write a

grammatically flawless masterpiece without any misspellings, even students with lesser English skills can participate without worry and produce a written piece. With this approach, writing loses its frightening atmosphere and becomes enjoyment.

Another point which still has not been mentioned, but needs to be noticed is the following: In order to improve a written piece produced in class, re-writing and re-arranging is an essential part of the process of 'Creative Writing'. This working on pieces written during 'Creative Writing' sessions is done outside of the regular lessons and manages hereby to achieve the demand by universities, that students spend also time with studying outside of their regular classes (something which according to regularly held evaluations, students openly admit to not doing.). In case of 'Creative Writing', students who understand that rewriting is a part of improving a written piece will take the time to work outside of their regular class on their pieces, especially if they work on something they personally enjoyed writing in the first place. Seeing again, how this rewriting improves the overall quality of their work will automatically lead to further extra-work on their products.

By sharing their written pieces with their classmates, as well as reviewing their classmates' works and receiving themselves a feedback, students learn to communicate in a respectful and appropriate manner. Presenting one's written piece and receiving feedback can also help to overcome shyness or the psychological barrier to communicate with fellow students.

'Creative Writing' also leads to students appreciating literature, even encouraging them to 'read books', something which in general does not seem too popular with many students nowadays.

With all these results (of an ongoing course by the time this paper was written), it has been demonstrated, that 'Creative Writing' offers new and fascinating prospects: 'Creative Writing' teaches students not just writing in English, but leads them to enjoy writing. 'Creative Writing' furtherly helps students also to

improve their communicational skills in general. Based on these merits, 'Creative Writing' should indeed be considered to becoming a part of Japanese universities' English education programs.

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