

**APPLYING PRACTICE-ORIENTED RESEARCH TO DESIGN AND  
DEVELOP A COURSE MODULE ON CREATIVE WRITING**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Most of studies investigating creative or artistic practice tend to follow a specific model of research. This model emphasizes examining 'academic knowledge within the chosen conceptual framework of a particular creative field, and critically reflecting on the practitioner's subjective or tacit as well as their explicit knowledge' (Batzoglou, 2012:13). This research study is closely aligned to the same. The purpose of current research is to investigate and comprehend the nature of Creative Writing pedagogy, thereby leading to the design and development of a practice-oriented course module, which could mean a strategic establishment of the writing practice in the Institute of English Language and Literature at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. The area of studies has been a non-researched and non-specialized field in the institute thus far, and the study therefore highlights why it is imperative to plan basic research into the more practical genre of creative processing for the IELL students.*

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**Keywords:** Artistic Research, Creative Practice, Creative Writing Pedagogy, Modular Instruction, Module Design, Practice-Based Research, Practice-Led Research

**INTRODUCTION**

Since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much research associated with creative arts disciplines has progressively correlated with academic research (Nimkulrat, 2012). According to the Hanze Research University of Applied Sciences (2014), within artistic research, practitioners combine the art of creative production with reflective research skills to gather knowledge about artistic practices, and use interventions while conducting academic research into their art. Tools and knowledge of materials are also supplied by artistic research, 'which in turn benefits the creative process, in the making of art – a composition or a performance' (Hanze Research University of Applied Sciences, 2014). Borgdorff (2006) refers to this as research in the service of an artistic practice, and suggests this is where new art and practical knowledge about the creation of such art stem from.

Additionally, such investigations do yield reliable and valid “replicability” of findings, which can be utilized by other artists researching their specific domain as well (ibid). With regards to the context of such research, Devlin (2010) distinguishes between two variant setups, wherein artistic research may either not ‘sit comfortably in a formal academic environment’ or ‘academic requirements can have an inhibiting effect on artists’ (p.6). In both cases, the investigative focus lies on ‘developments in the art world, to the art discourse and to other research in the arts’ (Hanze Research University of Applied Sciences, 2014). The research phenomenon is inspired by and questions are centered around professional practice of creation (ibid); where researchers tend to explore how they could ‘access and encourage skills and the culture of innovation’ (Devlin, 2010:16). This research study is closely aligned to the same. The study material currently available at the seminar library of the Institute of English Language & Literature, University of Sindh includes, for the most part, books detailing the contribution of renowned writers to English Literature (from Old English Period through 20<sup>th</sup> century).

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Overview of Creative Writing as a Discipline:* For a long time now higher education learners have been flocking to join the English Literature and Creative writing programmes in various parts of the world, intending to become writers. Trying to match up with their enthusiastic pace, a vast majority of institutes today have come to the forefront to offer Creative Writing Courses, most of them offering the workshop as a part of that course (James, 2009; Monteith & Miles, 1992). The academic teaching of creative writing is therefore no longer given an alienated status. With the pedagogical mechanism of developing creativity in students contextualized with immense response, numerous academics have grasped the importance of an underlying standard which informs their teaching of creative writing skills to learners (Bell & Magrs, 2001; Harper & Kroll, 2008). At the same time, as Donovan (2008) and Haven (1999) inform us, we are also surrounded today by a varied body of practitioners whose views on creative writing pedagogy are informed by their input on ‘creativity’ as an non-teachable art form, thereby providing the arena

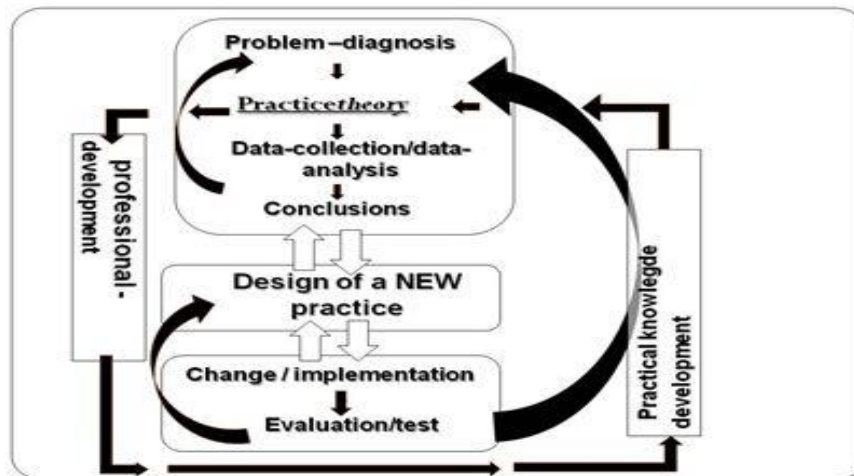
with its unique set of contradictory approaches to developing and enhancing students creative writing skills.

Mayers' (2009) outlook on the rationale behind creative writing pedagogy is to introduce changes in the perceived view of the function of creative writing as an academic enterprise, or to bring about transmuted notions of the intentions underlying the existence of creative writing programs and courses. He believes that the basic purpose of creative writing courses and programs, or creative writing studies on the whole, is not just to produce writers, but to promote the 'general intellectual framework concerning literacy itself.' By expanding the canvas of creative writing from practice based to practice led, from practice alone to practice, and theories incorporating diverse and 'practical knowledge of (and facility with) the composition of fiction, poetry, and other so-called creative genres,' and back to practice, creative writing programs strive to 'fashion themselves as producers of academic professionals, scholars or writers who are capable of teaching not only creative writing but also composition, literature, and theory, depending on their ancillary areas of expertise and interest' (2009). In her latest introduction of her forthcoming book titled 'Rethinking Creative Writing in Higher Education: Programs and Practices that Work,' Stephanie Vander slice notes how important it is for a creative writing pedagogy to not only improve the writing experience of students, but also to employ a more varied, 'outward-looking, outcomes-oriented training and to make a more direct contribution to the development of a literate society' (Vanderslice, 2011). Additionally, she believes in the instructive prowess of good practice as a means to achieving further good practice.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

*The Design for This Study:* Research within the Creative Arts, claim Webb & Brien (2008:2), generally tends to be practice-based at some level. That is to say that it serves as an original investigation that relies on, and incorporates, any art-oriented product as the basis of the contribution to new knowledge (Candy, 2006). The project aimed to design a course module that can be used to develop creative writing skills of students. In this correlation the study has therefore been practice-based, as it emphasizes the role of the researcher's practice as a writer-teacher along with the production of a creative

writing course module that will ‘form the basis of contribution to knowledge’ (Candy, 2006; Creativity and Cognition Studios, 2011). Structurally, this project has likewise followed the first stage of a practice-based plan by identifying a research problem in the initial stages, which was fully addressed in the course of the research. Later, it defined research objectives intending to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the problem that was addressed; specified the research context for the problem and emphasized the importance of addressing it; discussed other research that is being or has been conducted in this area; and finally rationalized an appropriate research method to address the problem, the conclusion following which will point out ‘the particular contribution this research has made to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in this area’ (Candy, 2006:2). Figure 1 depicts the stated research design.



**Figure 1 – The practice-based research design model presented by Hanze Research University of Applied Sciences (2014)**

As can be viewed above, following the initial ‘problem identification and analysis’ phase, the project moved on to the design phase. During this stage, a blueprint was made concrete, by developing a teaching method. However, the function of the course module has solely been to generate and enhance the researcher’s understandings about the creative teaching material. It has neither been ‘implemented (executed, applied), nor have the effects been evaluated’ during the subsequent phase (Hanze Research University of

Applied Sciences, 2014). Readjustments such as the designing of an alternative form of teaching practice, which focuses on some changes in the teaching material, can only be composed depending on the teaching conditions and learning context (*ibid*).

The project has been framed, and module developed, as per the design process embodied in the upcoming section; but it cannot be completely understood by referring to and observing the drafting process alone. It is in this correlation that the procedure deviates from the practice-based methodology and leans towards the practice-led study, wherein artistic practice becomes the very subject or vehicle for a theoretical investigation (Nimkulrat, 2012:1). The research has more comprehensively extended to practice-led inquiry in four specific ways. First, this study was initiated in Creative Writing practice, by focusing on a challenge as per the needs of that practice (Gray, 1996:3). Plainly speaking, within this methodological framework practitioner/researchers investigate their own creative practice or pedagogy, view either or both ‘as a basis for theoretical questions and as a place for undertaking artistic, cultural, and scholarly studies,’ and utilize a research process relying on “data creation” as opposed to the “data collection” (Sullivan, 2009:62; cited in Nimkulrat, 2012). Second, this project has sought to establish creative practice for an institute for the first time. As such, it is a starting point to see whatever emerges (Haseman, 2006:4-5). Third, the received insights have subsequently been ‘documented, and theorized’ (Smith & Dean, 2009:7), and strategies suggested, ‘which the current and next generations can apply and critically inhabit’ to promote their pedagogic practice (Gray, 1996:25). And finally, given that the focus of this study has been to advance knowledge within and about the Creative Writing practice, the results of this research have been described textually and non-quantitatively (Green, 2007:1). The theoretical documentation of the entire process has been research-led, which has developed the researcher’s understanding of teaching as a creative learner, and writer-teacher (Boyd, 2009). The pedagogic practice undertaken by the researcher as a part of this project has been accompanied by documentation of the research process as follows.

#### **THE PROCESS OF DATA CREATION**

***Training as a Workshop Participant:*** The researcher initiated their work by participating in training workshops arranged for Level

One Creative Writing students belonging to the Research Institute for Media, Art and Performance at the University of Bedfordshire. These were designed to acquaint a newly practicing writer with the art of creating fiction through hands-on practice oriented activities and writing exercises. In addition to the same, the workshops also offered an opportunity to explore study aims, by enabling the researcher record and reflect upon the experience of composing narratives from a student's, researcher's and a writer's point of view. Studying with British students with a well-developed capacity as practicing narrative writers, their insightful and thoughtful comments and critical discussions with them contributed significantly to researcher's own fiction-based perspectives for this research. It was due as much to the experience as a workshop participant as to the researcher's practice as a creative writer that they were able to design a course module for undergraduate learners of IELL at the USJP as a part of this research.

***Training as a Workshop Coordinator:*** Having finished the training as a beginner level student-writer, to practice as a workshop instructor deemed the logical next step. As a researcher setting out to investigate and enhance students' creative writing skills, their initial task was not merely to put together a report, accumulate enough information on the writing craft in order to return to the project site, create a sample fiction artifact, complete preliminary research and design a creative writing training module to generate data for this study. Given that the module receptors selected for this project belonged to an environment where critical and theoretical writing alone was what they were aware of, this study unveiled several important aspects necessary for the investigation beyond collection of bookish information. It required an actual practice as a creative writer-teacher itself. Rather than collecting and supplying information or a list of does and don'ts pertaining to composing fiction, the researcher was about to embark on the process through which novel teaching material was to be located within an educational environment for the first time. This was a decidedly subjective act. The module produced as a consequence was to become physical manifestation of a writing practice unprecedented and inexperienced in a pronounced fashion before. On the one hand it was really important to make it work in a place without betraying the nativity of its context or its population to whom the researcher was connected. On the other, since the researcher was working with information that

belonged to contexts with established precedents in the arena of innovative fiction writing, the responsibility of doing justice to the native and the non-native by creating a harmony between the two came hand-in-hand. Some teaching experience was therefore required in an international study environment prior to formulating pedagogy. During the same, various issues were uncovered, and some factors disclosed. Notions such as a parallel verbal discourse, difficult to understand lectures, excessive or non-friendly critical feedback may function as a linguistic barrier that could impede clear communication necessary for creative writing training, etc., were learnt. The teaching experience garnered at the University of Bedfordshire suggested a few changes to the initial module, which has been presented below.

**Development of the Course Module:** The preliminary course structure for the present study (Table-1) was conceived during the ‘design phase’ of the module formation process, following the initial review of literature. This previous structure of the module was based on Johnson’s (1998) model of Writing Skills Development (Emotin-Bucjan, 2011), and the modular course format identified by Atkinson T S (2003) for their research on developing Creative Writing skills of undergraduate learners.

**TABLE-1**  
PREVIOUS INSTRUCTIONAL MODULE STRUCTURE OF CREATIVE WRITING-I

<i>Module Stages</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
<i>Design Overview</i>	The module structure must be designed to facilitate creative learning by containing the following: 1) Introduction/Brief description; 2) Aims or Objectives; 3) Content; 4) Study Material - Set Text/Relevant Reading; and 5) Learning Outcomes. No ‘Unit Description’ has to be included.
<i>Development Phase</i>	Preliminary hand-outs must be developed that include information on suggested readings about the topic. The Reading material should comprise of: 1) Quick guide sheets, book chapters and web-based articles; 2) Additional fiction & non-fiction e-text readings; and 3) Any other documents relevant to the topic.
<i>Field Try-out Procedure</i>	The module can be implemented in a single semester, but without using a step-by-step description of the module or detailed directions to take the learner through the writing process. Students can be informed about the course verbally, and about the requirements of the



	module in written.
<b><i>Evaluation or Assessment</i></b>	Evaluation can be done using a grading format in the form of a checklist or rubric, along with comments. This does not include a post-module feedback questionnaire, asking participants to reflect on what they have learnt about the writing process and how the modular instruction has shaped their learning.

While the mentioned module design had worked quite well for developing composition and creative writing skills of undergraduate learners (Atkinson T.S., 2003; Emotin-Bucjan, 2011), an advance review of literature conducted for the present project identified several contextual restraints of Pakistani learners nevertheless. Research findings were exhibited by Behlol (2010), Chandio, *et.al.*, (2013), Karim & Shaikh (2012), Haider (2012a, 2012b), Khan (2011), Mansoor S. (2009), Mansoor A. (2010, 2011, 2012), Memon & Badger (2007), Nadeem (2007), Shah (2011) and Siddiqui, S. (2007), brought native students' inability to comprehend complex language patterns, and their varied learning capabilities, into focus. A more elaborated, detailed and clearer version of the module was sought to help provide students with better guidance from both the purpose of the training and learning outcomes end. The ICARE model was consequently adapted given to its 'flexible system of development,' which 'was needed to account for the many types of instruction' that could be offered within a creative, innovative or practice-oriented learning context (Byrum, 2013:4). The ICARE method of designing instructional material had also been discovered to be particularly helpful for those students who were novice learners 'working on their first project' (*ibid*). At the same time, since the models utilized by Behlol (2010) and Rashidi (2011), were similar to the module matrix theory propounded by Henne and Kelly (2009), produced effective results in the Pakistani Higher Education context, the sample Creative Writing module was sought to incorporate additional elements in its design.

Table-2 presents the revised design elements using the modified version of Hoffman & Ritchie's (1998) ICARE Model, along with T.S. Atkinson's (2003) model for developing creative writing skills, Johnson's (1998) model for developing writing skills, Henne and Kelly's Module Matrix (2009), and UNESCO Regional office for



education in Asia and Oceania model (1987); cited in Behlol (2010) and Rashidi (2011). The model comprises of stages that can be used successively, iteratively or different overlapping stages can be employed as the context requires (Mojab & Huyck, 2001).

**TABLE-2**  
**REVISED MODULE STRUCTURE USING THE ICARE MODEL**

<i>ICARE Model</i>	<i>ICARE Suggested Items</i>	<i>Module's Restructured / Borrowed Features</i> <i>*A - T S Atkinson's Model</i> <i>*B - Johnson's Model used by Emotin-Bucjan</i> <i>*BR - Behlol &amp; Rashidi's Model</i> <i>*HK - Henne &amp; Kelly's Model</i>
<b><i>I-Introduction</i></b>	<p>Introduction/Overview/Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background discussing how this module fits within the course</li> <li>• Brief description on what the module offers for the learner</li> </ul> <p>Aims &amp; Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant opportunity for participants for creative thinking and problem solving</li> <li>• Relevant opportunity for participants for writing creatively</li> </ul> <p>Learning outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide basis for selecting or designing useful learning activities</li> <li>• Assessing accomplishment</li> <li>• Focus on learners' creative and critical output</li> </ul> <p>Essential reading / other orientation materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested Reading Extracts</li> </ul>	<p>New features to be included:</p> <p>Learning and teaching strategy *HK</p> <p>Unit breakup *BR</p> <p>Detailed workshop overview, schedule and activity itinerary *A</p> <p>Pre-portfolio and post-project portfolio format hand-outs *A</p> <p>Portfolio assessment form *A</p> <p>Module evaluation questionnaire *A &amp; *B</p> <p>Pre-module assessment via creative portfolio must be incorporated to select participants for a prospective teaching session, and view their level of expertise prior to initiating the module and related activities *A *B</p>

	<p>(Creative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested Reading Extracts (Critical)</li> </ul>	*BR *HK
<b>C – Connect</b>	<p>Connect prior literature/fiction elements knowledge with new practice-based knowledge</p> <p>Contextualize activities / exercises with real-world examples (fiction samples based within learners’ native context)</p>	<p>The workshop hand-out should be provided as part of the module package *A</p> <p>A step-by-step schedule of the workshop must ideally comprise of detailed directions to guide learners through the writing skills development process *BR *HK *A</p>
<b>A – Apply</b>	<p>Practice further by using the new information/ideas/skills acquired</p> <p>Workshop context</p> <p>Write</p> <p>Create</p> <p>Discuss</p> <p>Formatively assess</p>	<p>Hand-out generation of the activity list / writing assignments / learning tasks *HK *BR *A</p> <p>This stage could be implicit within the module itemiser, but utilized explicitly via the workshop method *A</p>
<b>R – Reflect</b>	<p>Articulate new understanding</p> <p>Mentally re-process</p> <p>Organize thinking</p> <p>Build schema</p> <p>Reflective activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-reading samples presenting questions to think about</li> </ul> <p>Post activity discussion</p> <p>Fiction samples’ analysis</p> <p>Reflection items</p> <p>Summarize experience</p> <p>Analyze</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss possible uses and/or problems, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>This stage could be implicit within the module itemiser, but utilized explicitly via the workshop method *A</p> <p>The workshop hand-out containing areas deemed suitable for discussion or reflection should ideally be provided as part of the module package *A</p>
<b>E – Extend</b>	<p>Enrichment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources for those who want more</li> </ul>	<p>Following can be additionally utilized for the</p>

	<p>Remediation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recourse for those who are struggling</li> </ul> <p>Student evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did they achieve the outcomes?</li> </ul> <p>Program evaluation</p> <p>Did the module work?</p> <p>BY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing Extra Resources for extended learning.</li> <li>• Arranging Troubleshooting or help resources</li> <li>• Summatively assessing the post-module creative piece and contextual study drafted by the participants, designed for their current or proposed study setting.</li> </ul>	<p>stated purpose of assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-project portfolio format hand-out *A</li> <li>• Portfolio assessment form *A</li> <li>• Module evaluation questionnaire *A &amp; *B</li> </ul>
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**CONCLUSION**

Franz (2000) and Haslem (2011) consider both practice-based and practice-led inquiry as subjective, interpretative and situation-specific research methods. Given that each deals with individual human experiences, wherein researchers either investigate their own practice or reflect on other individuals’ situation. Analysis, synthesis and communication of all research data is provided by their subjective understandings or insights (Haslem, 2011). Consequently, ‘unlike traditional scientific research method, the research cannot aim to produce objective, independently verifiable research results’ (Archer 1995:12; cited in Haslem, 2011). Additionally, the concerns of this study do not lie with the composition of a practice oriented product, but with the practice of producing a creative work. The module structure produced during this research, as has been presented as Table-2, is not final. Rather it is a process, with the final piece being an instantiation of that ongoing process. Thus, though the resulting product created by the researcher towards the end of this study did aid

and support the investigation, it 'should not be seen as the outcome of the research; it is the means rather than the ends' (Haslem, 2011).

On a broader scale, until recently there has been little attempt in Pakistani universities to develop and explore a unique Creative Writing theory and praxis. Contrary to the longstanding and deep-rooted establishment of literature and linguistic courses within the English departments, various research inquiries have been unable to detect a presence of Creative Writing pedagogy in higher education institutes and universities in Pakistan (Ahmad, 2011; Bilal, 2013; Chandio *et.al.*, 2013; Haider, 2008a; Imtiaz, 2010a; Rustam, 2010; Siddiqui Z.S., 2007). Rustam sadly concludes that learners' work within the university is entirely concerned with 'writing which is necessary for exams,' and 'no creative writing activity is part of the students writing, neither they are encouraged to do that' (2010:458). The present study is one attempt to begin this process.

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