

BEYOND CRAFT: EMPOWERING EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS THROUGH SDG-INTEGRATED CREATIVE WRITING PEDAGOGY

(Melampaui Teknik: Memberdayakan Dosen dan Mahasiswa melalui Pedagogi Menulis Kreatif yang Terintegrasi SDGs)

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Abstract: *This paper moves beyond skill-based instruction to introduce a transformative framework for creative writing pedagogy: integrating the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It argues that this approach empowers educators by positioning them as literacy sponsors who intentionally use their authority to endorse work engaged with global themes. Simultaneously, it empowers students by guiding them into the initial stage of becoming future literacy sponsors, framing their creative work as a vital form of civic participation and critical engagement with global issues. The paper also provides practical models for SDG integration, demonstrating how this pedagogy fosters a cycle of agency and redefines creative writing as a practice of meaningful, world-building literacy.*

Keywords: *Creative Writing Pedagogy; SDGs; Literacy Sponsorship; Transformative Education; Empowerment*

A. INTRODUCTION

The foundation of university-level creative writing programmes is the "workshop model," an approach—often called the “craft paradigm”—that mainly concentrates on mastering craft (Dawson, 2005). This tradition highlights aspects such as narrative structure, point of view, imagery, and voice, usually through peer review and instructor guidance, which are considered essential for effective creative writing (Fitria, 2024). It means that students are provided with theoretical knowledge about various creative writing genres, including literary genres like fiction, poetry, drama, and creative nonfiction. Developing students' creative writing skills becomes the primary learning objective.

Although this method effectively develops technical skills, more scholars are now criticising its limitations. This model can unintentionally cultivate a culture of aesthetic uniformity, where writing is judged against a traditional standard of "good" literature that often reflects prevailing cultural views. Such a narrow focus risks treating creative writing as a solitary, apolitical art form, disconnected from the wider societal, ethical, and political contexts in which it is created and received (Harte & Hazley, 2021). Consequently, students may find it difficult to see how their work matters beyond the classroom, perceiving writing as merely a technical task rather than a compelling means of engaging with the world.

In response to these limitations, there is an urgent call within humanities education to develop pedagogies that are critically engaged, culturally responsive, and empowering for students. The contemporary university operates within a complex global landscape characterised by interconnected challenges, including the climate crisis, social inequality, political polarisation, and public health emergencies (Cantwell et al., 2018). In this context, an education that remains siloed and neutral neglects responsibility. Creative writing, with its unique ability to foster empathy, explore human experiences, and envision alternative futures, is particularly well-suited to address this need. This paper advocates for a pedagogical shift that moves beyond teaching writing as merely a craft and instead embraces its potential as a form of critical literacy. This change requires a new framework that connects the private act of creation with public discourse and global citizenship.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive and globally recognised framework for this educational change. Approved by all UN Member States in 2015, the 17 SDGs act as a shared plan for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, tackling urgent global issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and justice. Incorporating them into the creative writing curriculum provides a strong way to transcend the limitations of traditional workshops. The SDGs are not a strict syllabus but a thematic guide, providing a common language and meaningful, real-world themes that can quickly motivate student writing. They give a structured yet adaptable approach to connecting creative skill development with exploring essential human issues, ensuring that the work produced in the classroom stays relevant to the outside world.

This paper introduces and explains a new teaching method: the intentional integration of the SDG framework into university-level creative writing courses, and argues that this approach creates a powerful cycle of empowerment. First, it empowers educators by expanding their role from simply technical instructors—or masters of craft—to what literacy scholar Deborah Brandt (1998, 2014) describes as "literacy sponsors," conscious facilitators who use their authority to endorse work engaging with global themes. Second, it empowers students by guiding them to become future literacy sponsors themselves. Their writing becomes an act of agency, a form of civic participation that allows them to explore, critique, and contribute to urgent global issues. By moving "beyond craft," this model redefines the creative writing classroom as an essential space for cultivating empathetic, critically aware global citizens.

This paper discusses its concerns in the following sections: (1) Theoretical framework: from instructor to literacy sponsor; (2) SDGs as a framework for critical literacy; (3) Empowering the educator-sponsor: a model for SDG-integrated pedagogy; (4) Student outcomes: the beginning of the future sponsor. A conclusion will be drawn from the entire discussion.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM INSTRUCTOR TO LITERACY SPONSOR

The theoretical framework referred to here is the one that underpins the shift in the lecturer's role from instructor to literacy sponsor. It will begin with the concept of literacy sponsorship as gateways and gatekeepers. The discussion will then outline the existence of unconscious and conscious sponsors in creative writing pedagogy.

1. Literacy Sponsorship as Gateways and Gatekeepers

The primary theoretical concept underlying this teaching change is Deborah Brandt's notion of "literacy sponsors." In her work, Brandt (1998) describes sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166). Sponsors act as gatekeepers who control access to literacy resources, genres, and platforms, thereby shaping the economic, social, and political value of literacy practices. They can be institutions (such as schools and publishers), individuals (like teachers and parents), or even technologies. Importantly, sponsorship is never neutral; it is an exchange. While sponsors provide access to knowledge and power, they also inevitably promote their own interests, ideologies, and standards, often reinforcing existing social hierarchies. This theory redefines literacy not as an innate skill but as a valuable and contested resource, the acquisition of which is deeply linked with structures of power and opportunity.

2. Who Is the Unconscious Sponsor?

Under this framework, the traditional creative writing instructor has always been, and continues to be, a literacy sponsor—often without realising it (Brandt, 1998, 2014; Vandeslice, 2011). Their influence is shown through: (1) Curating the Canon: Selecting reading lists that favour certain voices, genres, and cultural perspectives while marginalising others; (2) Setting the Standards: Defining criteria for "good" writing that often mirror dominant, long-established aesthetic values; (3) Controlling Access: Approving student work via grades, workshop praise, or recommendations for publications and awards, thus regulating access to more literary opportunities.

The limitation of the traditional craft paradigm is not that sponsorship occurs, but that it often goes unchecked (Vandeslice, 2011). The instructor emphasises a literacy of technical skills and aesthetic norms, which can suppress the diverse linguistic and narrative resources students bring to the classroom.

3. Who Is The Conscious Sponsor?

This paper advocates shifting from unconscious to conscious and ethically responsible literacy sponsorship. The integration of the SDGs acts as a catalyst for this change. In this sense, Mayers (2011) argued for more self-aware pedagogy that understands its power and influence—essentially, calling for creative writing educators to recognise their roles as sponsors.

By adopting this framework, the educator intentionally promotes a different kind of literacy: one that is civic-minded, critically engaged, and globally relevant. Their role expands from simply teaching how to write to teaching why we write. For instance, they can sponsor the students in: (1) Critical Literacy: the ability to use writing to analyse power structures, question norms, and explore social justice issues; (2) Multimodal & Public Literacy: skills to translate creative work into public discourse, potentially via blogs, podcasts, community projects, or advocacy work linked to the SDGs; (3) Ethical Literacy: a nuanced understanding of the ethics of representation, especially when writing across cultural or social differences about global issues.

In this model, the instructor's "advantage gained," in Brandt's terms, is the development of a more relevant and impactful humanities education and fulfilling the university's mission to address global challenges. They utilise their institutional authority not to silence diverse voices but to empower them by connecting student work to a framework of significant global importance. This deliberate support is the key theoretical shift that transforms the pedagogy from a simple curriculum update into a meaningful act of educational empowerment.

In this case, Koiri adapted Peter Hannon's ORIM Theory (Hannon, 1995; Nutbrown, Hannon, Morgan, 2005). A conscious literacy sponsor may actualise the ORIM theory, which includes Opportunity, Recognition, Interaction, and Modelling. Simply put, Opportunity involves creating chances to learn literacy strands through environmental prints, books, early writing, and oral language—Koiri also added a new strand: digital sources. Recognition means acknowledging students when they demonstrate proficiency in using these literacy strands. Interaction involves engaging in activities related to the literacy tasks they undertake. Finally, Modelling refers to acting as a role model in literacy, allowing students to emulate the sponsors (Koiri, 2023).

4. Literacy Sponsors, Empowering the Students

Literacy sponsors have a social function to empower students. Now, what do we, as educators, need to do after becoming empowered as literacy sponsors in creative writing? We should believe that creative writing has a positive impact on L2 writers' self-confidence

(Maloney, 2022), including fostering student development (Hoey, 2020) and shaping self-identity (Harte & Hazley, 2021). Specifically, the role of literacy sponsors has a significant influence on students' writing practices (Loretto, 2015). Given the importance of this literacy sponsorship, educators must perform their mentoring tasks with full attention.

The main idea here is that when we empower our students through creative writing, we give them more than just writing skills. Instead, we offer three vital things: First, a voice—the confidence to share their truth about themselves and their environment. Second, a tool—a means to process complex emotions and experiences. Third, weapons—the ability to challenge stereotypes, rewrite familiar stories, and define themselves on their own terms.

C. THE SDGs AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL LITERACY

Why is integrating the SDGs into creative writing pedagogy so important? It is vital to recognise that the SDGs are universal goals for all of humanity (Kanie & Biermann, 2017; Swain & Dobers, 2025). An essential part of this is to ensure that students understand the meaning of the SDGs, such as No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Life on Land, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, among others. Here is the explanation.

1. The SDGs as Common Goals for Humanity

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, act as a global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and promote peace and prosperity for all by 2030. Comprising 17 interconnected goals—ranging from climate action (SDG 13) and gender equality (SDG 5) to reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and quality education (SDG 4)—the framework provides a comprehensive and holistic plan for addressing the world's most urgent issues (Kanie & Biermann, 2017; Swain & Dobers, 2025). Unlike narrow or partisan agendas, the SDGs are recognised worldwide as multidisciplinary and action-oriented. They acknowledge the complex interactions among social, economic, and environmental systems, making them suitable for linking creative expression with real-world challenges. By adopting this framework, creative writing pedagogy becomes part of a broader movement towards sustainability and justice, offering students more than just themes, but a shared language of global citizenship.

2. From Abstract Craft to Critical Literacy

Traditional creative writing exercises often focus on technical skills—such as developing character, setting, or plot—in isolation, disconnected from broader societal issues. The SDGs, however, promote what can be called consequential literacy: literacy practices that are ethically conscious, socially relevant, and designed to resonate beyond the classroom. This

shifts the view of writing from a solitary act of artistry to a form of agency with real-world impact. For example: (1) Writing a short story about water scarcity (SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation) links narrative skills to ecological justice; (2) Creating poetry that examines migration or displacement (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities) connects lyrical expression to human rights; (3) Developing speculative fiction set in a post-carbon economy (SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy) combines imagination with pressing policy issues.

Through such engagements, the SDGs provide a framework for applied creativity, enabling students to use their writing to examine, critique, and engage in conversations of global importance. This shift does not lessen the importance of craft; instead, it enhances craft by giving it a purpose (Mayers, 2011; Swain & Dobers, 2015; Vandeslice, 2011).

3. Interdisciplinary and Critical Perspectives

The SDGs naturally oppose disciplinary silos (Kanie & Biermann, 2017; Swain & Dobers, 2015). A goal like SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) overlaps with economics, public policy, cultural studies, ethics, and environmental science. Incorporating these goals into creative writing encourages students to research beyond literary boundaries, promoting interdisciplinary thinking and intellectual humility. Students must navigate complexity, contradiction, and nuance—whether imagining the lived experiences of climate refugees or examining the tensions between economic development (SDG 8) and ecological conservation (SDG 15). This approach fosters critical perspectives essential for meaningful artistry: the ability to question sources, consider multiple viewpoints, and comprehend the systemic dimensions of individual experiences. The SDGs, therefore, do not just offer topics; they require a deeper, more informed, and ethically conscious creative process, transforming the writer into an active participant in global discourse (Heil & Vanderslice, 2020).

4. Empowering Students to Have a Voice

Ultimately, the SDGs act as a democratizing force in the classroom. While traditional literary canons can seem distant or exclusionary to some students, the SDGs address issues—such as inequality, mental health, community, and environment—that are immediate and universally relevant (Heil & Vanderslice, 2020; Reiss, 2025). This accessibility encourages students to write from their own lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and ethical concerns, validating their voices as authorities on issues that matter to them. By connecting personal creativity to global goals, the SDGs help students see their work as part of a larger human effort, affirming that their stories—whether fictional or autobiographical—can contribute to understanding and resolving shared challenges. In this way, the framework not only enhances creative expression but also fosters a sense of agency and belonging, which are essential components of transformative education.

The main point here is that when educators empower students through creative writing, they provide them with more than just writing skills (Heil & Vanderslice, 2020). Instead, they offer three vital elements: first, a voice—the confidence to share their truths about themselves and their environment. Second, a tool—a means to process complex emotions and experiences. Third, weapons—the ability to challenge stereotypes, rewrite familiar stories, and define themselves on their own terms.

D. EMPOWERING THE EDUCATOR-SPONSOR: A MODEL FOR SDG-INTEGRATED PEDAGOGY

Empowering educator-sponsors in creative writing naturally involves four steps: creating a classroom environment that fosters a collaborative space, assigning SDG-driven tasks to promote global engagement, mentoring the process to encourage ethical creativity, and expanding the criteria for success in assessment and validation. Each step will be discussed below.

1. The Classroom Milieu as a Collaborative Space

The first step for the educator-sponsor is to intentionally transform the classroom environment from a traditional workshop—often narrowly focused on technical critique—into a collaborative and critical space (Vanderslice & Maness, 2016). This involves establishing a community agreement that values not only craft but also ethical inquiry, respectful dialogue across differences, and bravery in engaging with complex topics. The instructor must model this change by guiding discussions that emphasise deep questioning (e.g., “Whose perspective is centred in this story?” “How does this narrative engage with power structures?”) alongside line-level edits. This new classroom contract explicitly welcomes diverse forms of storytelling and cultural expressions, framing the SDGs not as a restrictive checklist but as a starting point for critical creativity. In doing so, the educator fosters a literacy of inclusion and critical thinking, creating the foundation for meaningful writing.

2. SDG-Driven Tasks for Global Engagement

The core of this teaching model is designing assignments that smoothly combine creative work with SDG themes. The teacher acts as a curator of prompts that guide student creativity toward investigative and empathetic exploration (Vanderslice & Maness, 2016; Swain & Dobers, 2025). Examples include: (1) Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi) Narrative: Write a short story set in a future affected by climate change (SDG 13), focusing on human aspects of adaptation or resilience; (2) Monologue from the Margins: Write a first-person story from the view of someone facing inequality (SDG 10) or dealing with a public health crisis (SDG 3); (3)

Speculative Solutions Story: Imagine a community successfully adopting a solution related to sustainable cities (SDG 11) or clean energy (SDG 7), exploring social and technical challenges; (4) Poetry of Witness & Advocacy: Write poems that witness issues of gender inequality (SDG 5) or ecological loss (SDG 15), using imagery and structure to evoke emotional and ethical responses.

These prompts require students to conduct research—reading news articles, scholarly analyses, or personal stories—thereby encouraging research-based creativity. The teacher’s role is to provide resources, context, and frameworks that help students approach these topics with depth and sensitivity.

3. The Process to Promote Ethical Creativity

SDG-integrated mentoring processes to foster ethical creativity often involve navigating ethically complex terrain (Reiss, 2025; Scherer et al., 2017). The educator-sponsor must therefore guide students through questions of representation, privilege, and voice—especially when writing across cultural or social boundaries (Brandt, 1998). This includes: (1) Helping students avoid stereotypes and simplistic narratives; (2) Encouraging critical self-reflection on their own positionality and assumptions; (3) Introducing foundational concepts from ethics, postcolonial theory, or environmental justice, as appropriate.

This mentoring changes the instructor into a co-investigator, learning alongside students instead of just teaching technical skills. It promotes a literacy that is both creative and ethically responsible.

4. Criteria for Success in Assessment and Validation

Finally, the educator-sponsor must redesign assessment methods to align with the aims of consequential literacy. Grading criteria should be clearly expanded to include: (1) Critical Engagement with SDG Themes: How thoughtfully does the work explore the complexity of the selected issue? (2) Research and Authenticity: How well-informed is the creative piece? Does it accurately reflect real-world contexts? (3) Ethical Considerations: How does the work address the representation of vulnerable communities or contested issues? (4) Craft and Technique: How effectively do literary elements support the work’s thematic aims?

By evaluating these aspects, the instructor endorses and affirms a broader understanding of literary excellence—one that values relevance, empathy, critical thinking, and technical skill (Heil & Vanderslice, 2020; Vanderslice & Maness, 2016). Feedback might also include advice on how to share the work beyond the classroom, such as submitting it to relevant publications, sharing it at community readings, or using it in advocacy efforts, thereby emphasising the public and impactful nature of the literacy being promoted. In summary, this

approach places the educator as an active literacy supporter who shapes the entire learning environment—from classroom culture to assignment design to assessment—in order to empower students as creatively capable and globally conscious citizens.

E. STUDENT OUTCOMES: THE BEGINNING OF THE FUTURE SPONSOR

When educator-sponsors effectively implement their programs, they achieve student outcomes. What exactly are these desired outcomes? This is the beginning of the birth of future sponsors. What competencies do they possess? They include: from skill acquisition to agency and voice, developing critical and creative skills, students as emerging literacy sponsors, and promoting global citizenship and lifelong engagement. They can be elaborated as follows.

1. From Skill Acquisition to Agency and Voice

The most immediate outcome for students within this pedagogy is a transformation in their identity: from passive learners acquiring skills to active agents with a sense of voice and purpose. By engaging with the SDGs, students realise that their writing can challenge power structures, highlight injustice, and envision alternatives (Kanie & Biermann, 2017; Reiss, 2025). A student writing a story about food scarcity (SDG 2) isn't just practising descriptive language; they are advocating for awareness. A poem exploring mental health (SDG 3) becomes a tool for destigmatisation. This agency is empowering—it affirms students' perspectives and experiences as deserving of literary and public attention. Their creativity becomes a way to participate in civic discourse, fostering confidence and emphasising the importance of their unique voice.

2. Critical and Creative Skills

This model promotes both critical and creative literacies. Students refine their skills while also developing higher-order abilities (Vanderslice, 2011) such as: (1) Critical Thinking: Analysing complex global issues, evaluating sources, and understanding systemic causes; (2) Research Literacy: Conducting interdisciplinary research to ensure their work is well-informed and authentic; (3) Ethical Reasoning: Addressing questions of representation, privilege, and perspective, especially when writing about experiences beyond their own; (4) Empathic Imagination: Developing deep empathy by exploring diverse viewpoints and human experiences related to SDG challenges; (5) These skills extend beyond the creative writing classroom, preparing students for roles in advocacy, education, media, and more—where the ability to think critically and communicate creatively is vital.

3. Emerging Literacy Sponsors

Perhaps the most significant outcome is students' initiation into the cycle of sponsorship. As they create work that tackles important themes, they start to act as literacy sponsors for their peers and future audiences (Brandt, 2014; Swain & Dobers, 2025). This occurs in several ways: (1) *Within the Classroom*: During workshops, students offer feedback that either supports or questions how global issues are portrayed, thereby sponsoring certain ethical and creative standards among their peers; (2) *Beyond the Classroom*: By sharing their work publicly (e.g., in readings, publications, or online platforms), they introduce new viewpoints for their readers, raising awareness and potentially shaping how others interpret and engage with SDGs; (3) *In Future Roles*: Students carry this model of meaningful creativity into their future careers—as teachers, writers, community leaders—where they may sponsor similar literacy efforts for others.

This initiation marks a notable expansion of Brandt's theory: sponsorship is not confined to powerful institutions or individuals, but can also be undertaken by students themselves (Brandt, 1998, 2014). The educator-sponsor's role is to establish the conditions for this cycle to begin, empowering students to become not only writers but also sponsors and influencers through their work.

4. Global Citizenship

Ultimately, these outcomes foster the development of global citizenship. Students emerge not only as skilled writers but also as engaged individuals who recognise their influence within interconnected global systems (Heil & Vanderslice, 2020; Reiss, 2025). They understand that creativity is linked to responsibility—and that storytelling can be a powerful tool for awareness, empathy, and change. This mindset fosters a lifelong commitment to addressing societal issues, viewing creativity as an ongoing exercise in critical thinking and civic engagement. By guiding students into the role of sponsor, this teaching approach ensures that the impact of their work extends well beyond the semester, helping to build a more thoughtful, empathetic, and actively involved society.

F. CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that this paper advocates for a fundamental reimagining of creative writing pedagogy, shifting away from the traditional craft paradigm towards a model of meaningful literacy that incorporates the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper has demonstrated how this approach transforms the educator's role from a technical instructor into a conscious supporter of literacy, fostering learning experiences that blend artistic skill with ethical and global engagement. By

anchoring creative writing in the SDG framework, the pedagogy enables students to see their work as relevant, critical, and capable of contributing to wider societal discussions.

At the core of this transformation lies a robust, self-sustaining cycle of empowerment. Educators, by assuming the responsibility of sponsorship, foster classrooms where creativity is linked to purpose. Students, in turn, are empowered not only as writers but also as emerging sponsors themselves—agents who can use their voices to influence peers and public discourse. This cycle guarantees that the impact of the pedagogy extends beyond individual skill development, cultivating a community of practice dedicated to empathy, critical inquiry, and civic engagement.

This paper implies that adopting an SDG-integrated model positions creative writing as a vital and responsive discipline within the modern university. It affirms that the arts are not secondary to global challenges but essential to addressing them—offering human insight, fostering empathy, and imagining more just and sustainable futures. By expanding from craft to cultivating literacies with international significance, creative writing pedagogy can reach its full potential: enabling individuals to write competently and purposefully, and to see their creativity as a force for transforming both themselves and the world.

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