International Conference
Innovation in Language Learning, 15th Edition
Florence, Grand Hotel Mediterraneo
10-11 November 2022

Redefining the students' contact with Literature through Creative Writing and Reading

Afroditi Athanasopoulou
University of Cyprus

Marili Douzina
Arsakeio General Lyceum of Psychico, Greece

Friday, 11 November 2022
Room A, 11:30-11:35

Research question

This paper is based on an important question:

How can Creative Writing – and Creative Reading as a related activity – enhance the teaching of literature, reducing the students' resistance to it in a typical classroom where often boredom is the case?

Aim of the paper

We strongly believe, based on long-term Creative Writing applications in High School classrooms and in Creative Writing Workshops, as well as in teachers' training courses in Greece and in Cyprus, that Creative Writing

- ✓ reduces the students' fear towards mistakes
- ✓ empowers creativity in learning
- ✓ promotes literacy, as students "try their hands on" literature, and, finally,
- ✓ enhances creative attitude towards life in general.

Theoretical frame - Terminology

i. Creative Reading

The term is coined by Ralph Waldo Emerson (2001), who pointed out its correlation with the term "Creative Writing". According to him, "There is then creative reading as well as creative writing". In fact, the act of creative reading enhances the act of creative writing.

Creative Reading is described as a **"poetic", i.e. creative adventure** by Rosenblatt (1994). Rosenblatt also introduces the term **"aesthetic reading"** – as opposed to the "efferent reading"– in order to point out the reader's mental and emotional involvement (*pleasure*) while reading and be inspired by the literary text.

Theoretical frame - Terminology

ii. Creative Writing can be described as:

(a) a procedure of **creative reaction to the text**, which requires reading efficiency, critical thought, and the activation of imagination (Harper 2013; Gross 2010);

(b) as **a pedagogical method** of experiential approach of the literary text, and

(c) as **a new literature theory** established by the transaction between reader and text and based mostly on the reader/writer's creativity (Kotopoulos 2012; Kotopoulos & Nanou 2015).

The benefits of Creative Writing

Creative Writing permits a combination of reception/reading, analysis and practice, which are basic ingredients of literary education. More specifically, it combines four itineraries / benefits (Dawson 2005):

- ✓ Creative Writing becomes **a way of expression and of self-discovery**;
- ✓ Creative Writing aims at the acquisition of **writing efficiency** (literacy);
- ✓ Creative Writing presupposes the theory and praxis of writing as a *craft* (**knowledge of texts and techniques**);
- ✓ Creative Writing leads to the acquisition of **reading proficiency "from the inside"**.

Pedagogical and methodological grid

Teaching Creative Reading and Writing, literature teachers can employ a combination of pedagogical and methodological tools (Donnelly 2009 & 2012):

❑ **the Objective Theory** (focus on critical reading and writing)

❑ **the Mimetic Theory** (focus on writing via mimesis)

❑ **the Expressivist Theory** (focus on free expression through free jotting, automatic writing etc.), and

❑ **the Pragmatic Theory** (focus on reader-response and on polyphonic reading and writing).

Methodology

❑ **The Objective Theory**

employs tools from the New-Critic theory such as close-reading, the analysis of figures of speech and of narrative techniques *as a basic theoretical knowledge* provided in the classroom *through the texts* for students to understand and form an interpretation of each text, based on critical thinking, and subsequently to adapt this knowledge and skill in the creation of their own texts inspired by the original literary text.

Methodology

❑ **The Mimetic Theory**

permits activities upon the literature text where mimesis is activated. This "mirroring" technique (writing *à la manière de…*) enhances attention and observation of the original text and, ultimately, leads to the development of a personal (re)creative filter towards it.

Methodology

❑ **The Expressivist Theory**

encourages the students to freely express themselves through activities such as free jotting, automatic writing etc.

The Expressivist Theory appears in the "expressivist curriculum" inaugurated by Hughes Mearns, who first replaced the traditional literature class with Creative Writing courses (Myers 1996: 103), aiming at *teaching the students and not teaching literature*.

Methodology

❑ **The Pragmatic Theory**

based on reader-response, centers on the students' reception of the literary text *in its cultural and historical context* and makes their act of reading and writing more "suspicious" about their *own* experiences and beliefs as well, permitting a "polyphonic" and critical reading and writing practice.

Assessment

For the assessment of Creative Writing, it is up to the teacher to sustain an equilibrium: on the one hand, assessment is important as it leads to improvement, on the other hand, however, it must be moderated so as not to impose the teacher's "authority" on students' creativity.

Given that an "easy A" on Creative Writing course leads to its underestimation, while a strict assessment risks to enhance the writer's block, we suggest a variety of assessment strategies, such as descriptive assessment, encouraging assessment, and occasionally no feedback (Zeigler 1989) in evaluation-free zones (Elbow 1993).

i. Creative Reading Activities

During Creative Reading, questions/prompts that combine critical and creative thinking can be employed, such as:

- **Emotional-response questions** (What were your feelings during reading? Where you touched most by this text? Did this text revive any memories? Did you identify with persons or circumstances presented in the text?).

- **Cognitive questions** (Present/Describe the heroes and the era of the story. Who is narrating the story? Is he/she participating in it?).

- **Interpretative questions** (Explain the phrase/the verse... How would you explain the writer's choice to...? Indicate analogies and differences between...).

- **Evaluative questions** (Did you like the text or not? Why? Would you recommend this text to a friend?).

i. Creative Reading Activities

Different techniques can also be used to enhance the process of Creative Reading, such as:

- **Text scanning:** observation of morphological characteristics of the text at first sight (e.g. the structure of the poem or the narrative, external features of the text format etc.).

- **Segmental reading:** reading of the text with *breaks* scheduled by the teacher in order to stimulate imagination (Iser 1980), and the readers' expectations and interest.

- **Sustained Silent Reading** in the classroom, so as to imitate private deliberate reading for pleasure (Hunt 1970; McCracken & McCracken 1978; Spiegel 1981).

- **Improvised dramatization:** transformation of scenes of the text's plot, chosen by the students or the teacher, into short theatrical parts.

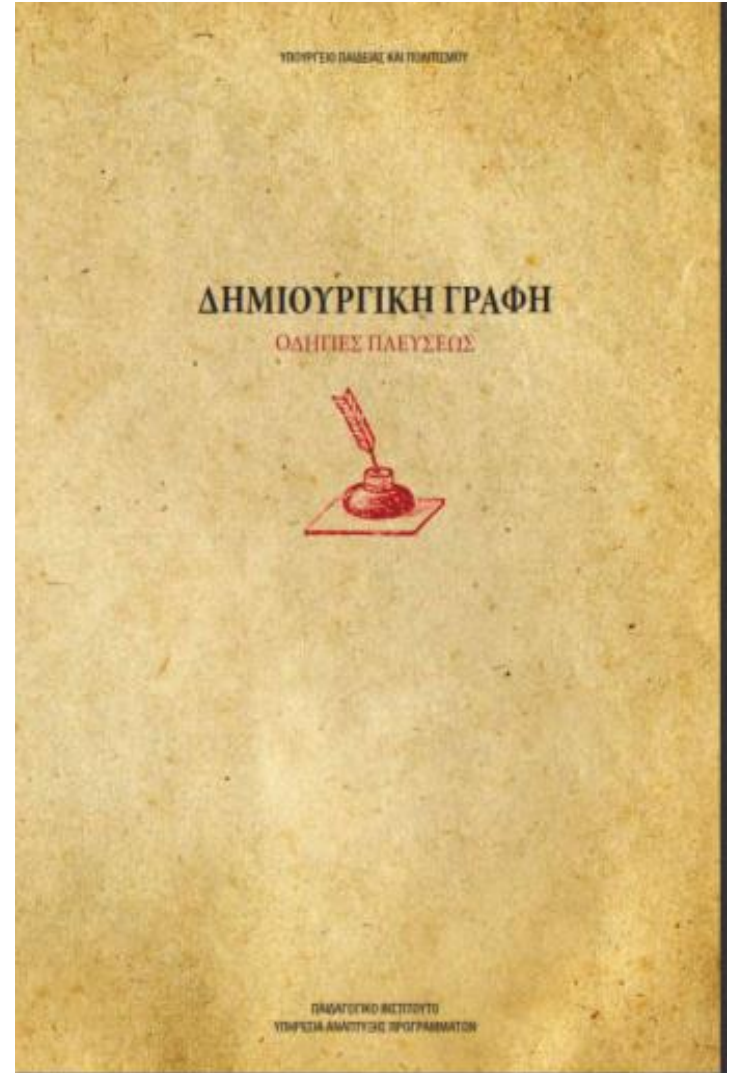## ii. Creative Writing Activities

In parallel with Creative Reading Activities, various Creative Writing Activities can be employed.

Some of them are anchored to the literary text, such as:

➢ rewriting a passage through a different narrative angle or point of view

➢ completing the narration's gaps

➢ proposing a different start or ending

➢ rewriting a poem with or without rhyme

➢ playing with the characters

➢ playing with the style of the text

and so on.

A textbook on Creative Writing

Several Creative Writing Activities, quite original and customized to the needs and the level of Primary and High School students, are provided in the book *Creative Writing: Navigation Instructions* by M. Souliotis and his team (2012), which is part of the teaching aids used in Cuprus's education since 2011 in the framework of the new Literature Curriculum (Athanasopoulou et al. 2010).

A textbook on Creative Writing

The aim of this book is to support the students' practice in Creative Writing in order to develop their reading and writing efficiency in the Literature course.

Some indicative examples of Creative Writing activities from this book are given below:

Some examples

- **Texting/SMS** (Souliotis et al. 2012: 94).

In this "warming up" activity students are asked to write messages as if they were texting on their smartphones and then to transform them into a form of slam/oral poetry.

The use of adolescent "slang" renders this activity attractive; at the same time, unconsciously, students are introduced in the *symbolic and elliptic* poetic language. (These features are common to their texting as well.)

Some examples

- **Literal vs Metaphorical meaning** (Souliotis et al. 2012: 127).

Students are asked to write a poem using only literal meanings and to rewrite it through metaphors. This replacement exercise helps students realize the power of metaphorical meaning and the difference between common and poetic language. E.g.

By the roads of the city	By the roads of my mind
I wait alone	I sit on the rock of solitude
My heart beats fast	My heart dances on the beat of agony
I am afraid	Like a frightened deer

Some examples

- **Poetic recipe** (Souliotis et al. 2012: 141).

Students are asked to write the "recipe" of a feeling, of a situation etc. Through this playful activity they realize the particularity of poetic language which lies in the unexpected combinations of words. Here follows a "love recipe":

Ingredients
2 hearts
1 spoon of trust
3 promises that won't be kept
1 cup of tears
....
Performance
We open the heart like a book. We add the trust, the tears and the promises, we stir them lightly and we boil the mixture, not too much, for the eternity…

Some examples

- **Weather forecast** (Souliotis et al. 2012: 112).

Using stereotype phrases from weather forecasts, we encourage students to express a feeling. Through this activity "lower" textual genres, such as the weather forecast, are elevated in literary texts, while students cultivate their imagination and language creativity. E.g.

Heavy rains will fall during your absence
Violent winds will be raging in the coast of memory…

- **Textual Montage** (Souliotis et al. 2012: 127).

Sergei Eisenstein stated that the art of *montage* was applied in literature before its application in cinema. The literature montage activity, i.e. the application of cinematographic techniques, such as "frames", "shots" etc., to the writing of literary texts helps students understand *in a direct and not a theoretical way* the narrative techniques in literature.

Conclusions

Creative Writing, in connection to Creative Reading,

➢ transform Literature Teaching into a constructive art, based not only on literary records but mostly on literary action.

➢ Creative Reading and Writing lead not only to reading and critical efficiency but also to imaginative exploration and accomplishment.

➢ Indifferent or resistant students who don't enjoy literature or question its utility seem to discover, via Creative Reading and Writing, the textual power that derives from the literary text as well as from their own creative imagination.

References

- Athanasopoulou et al. 2010. *New Curricula for Public Schools of the Republic of Cyprus. Integrated Programme of Study for Literature for Primary and High School Education*. Designed by A. Athanasopoulou. Supervised by P. Voutouris and M. Souliotis. Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus.

- Dawson, P. (2005). *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

- Donnelly, D. J. (2009). *Establishing Creative Writing Studies as an Academic Discipline*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of South Florida.

- Donnelly, D. J. (2012). *Establishing Creative Writing Studies as an Academic Discipline*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

- Elbow, P. (1993). Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment. *College English, 55*(2), 187-206. doi:10.2307/378503riting Studies, 2(1), 3.

- Emerson, R. W. (2001). The American Scholar. In J. Porte & S. Morris (eds), *Emerson's Prose and Poetry* (pp. 56-69). New York: Norton.

References

- Gross, P. (2010). Small Worlds: What Works in Workshops If and When They Do? In D. Donnelly (Ed.), *Does the Writing Workshop Still Work?* (pp. 52-62). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

- Harper, G. (2013). *A Companion to Creative Writing*. New York: Blackwell.

- Hunt, L. C. Jr. (1970). The effect of self-selection, interest, and motivation upon independent, instructional, and frustrational levels. *The Reading Teacher*, 24, 146-151.

- Iser, W. (1980). *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Kotopoulos, T. (2012). The "legalisation" of Creative Writing, *Keimena Magazine*, 15.

- Kotopoulos, T. & Nanou, V. (2015). The Restitution of Creative Writing into Greek Educational Reality. In Harper, G. (ed.), *Exploring Creative Writing. Voices from the Great Writing International Creative Writing Conference* (pp. 147-160). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

References

- McCracken, R. A., & McCracken, M. J. (1978). Modeling is the key to sustained silent reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 31, 406-408.

- Myers, D. G. (1996). *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing since 1880.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978/1994). *The Reader, the Text, the Poem. The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work.* Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale and Edwardsville.

- Souliotis, M. ed al. (2012). *Creative Writing: Navigation Instructions. Teacher's Book*. Ministry of Education and Culture, Pedagogical Institute, Nicosia, Cyprus.

- Spiegel, D. L. (1981). *Reading for pleasure: Guidelines*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- Zeigler, A. (1989). Midwifing the Craft- Teaching Revision and Editing. In J. M. Moxley (ed.), *Creative Writing in America: Theory and Pedagogy* (pp. 209-212). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.