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## **ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS FOR MOTIVATION OF CREATIVE WRITING WITH CHILDREN IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Creative writing is a process of self-investigation, self-commitment, inner motivation, inspiration and self-dedication. It is a process that may not have transparent start, because the creative thought exists in the conscious of the individual prior to the process of communicating it to the outer world. Knowing this, we pose the question - is it possible to influence creative writing in the elementary school where the pupils have obscure life experience and knowledge about the process itself? This paper explores the environmental factors that influence creative writing in the elementary school. It also presents the contemporary educational perspective on the creative writing process on the whole.

*Key words: creative writing, motivation, environmental factors*

### **Child's creative writing: what is it?**

Creative writing can be understood as a process and as a product. Creative writing as a process indicates a process of creating a text where the author envisages in an unusual way in order to produce original ideas connected in a logic syntax manner in an attempt to explore specific theme, or a feeling, or someone's ideas and feelings. Nevertheless, this is not sufficient for making a distinction between creative writing and non-creative writing. For instance, we can explore a theme by making analysis of the previously gathered data and think of the usage of the elements in an unusual way. It is critical and creative thinking, but it cannot be recognized as creative writing. Creative writing should imply figurative expressions, vivid descriptions of a place, character or feeling, possibility of recognizing elements or characteristics of fiction or creative non-fiction, the narrator's voice, point of view etc. in order to be recognized as a text considered almost literary. We say "almost literary", because we may assign our pupils to write a story, meaning that we are trying to integrate creative writing into the curriculum, but the question "Will those stories written by children have all the necessary elements that stories have?" or "Will those creative products be recognized as good stories?" remains without a satisfying answer. This is so because in the elementary classroom we work with children that have very obscure experience in reading books with stories, poetry, or drama. In addition, they have very poor knowledge of literary theory and the structure of literary texts. Moreover, even if we are positive about the fact that our children have had enough contacts with literary texts and have specific knowledge of literary theory we cannot claim that our pupils will be able to produce literary texts.

In addition, producing literary texts requires existence of fantasy, ability to practice divergent way of thinking, ability to produce ideas that are original, ability to imagine things and to become someone else and think from someone else's perspective, ability to make connections to the reader, the text, the time, and many other things. Fluency, flexibility, and

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<sup>2</sup> Revisional scientific paper



originality are varieties of divergent type of thinking (Šefer, 2000). Divergent manner of thinking takes place when our thought moves from its starting point onto other points previously or seemingly not connected to the topic or to the object of speaking or thinking. Fluency means ability to produce as many ideas as possible when thinking of a subject; and flexibility is measured according to the number of categories that previously produced ideas can be enlisted in. Originality is ability to produce ideas that are not similar to the ideas of the rest of the pupils, ideas not expected and sometimes even shocking.

There are two types of creativity: primary and secondary (Sorokin, 1987). Primary creativity is something that all children have. Children naturally think in divergent way, mostly because they have lack of information to make conclusions and because they enjoy imagining things and try to make unusual combinations with words that later might be considered as figurative speech, such as the use of the metaphor. For example, a three-year-old might say that the moon looks like rounded cheese (comparison), or the moon is rounded cheese (simile). This is recognized as figurative speech, but it does not come out of the child's inner motivation for creative writing, but out of his/her curiosity and lack of knowledge about the moon. After all, the child feels so amused and has so much fun when making unexpected combinations of words such as those that the moon is cheese, that s/he continues to search for more words, which will amuse him/her and make him/her laugh. The child is not aware that his/her creation contains figurative expressions. Thus, the child does not use figurative language on purpose when creating a poem, for example. What happens next? When children enter the educational system, which imposes on them classifications and the use of logics, and when they are taught that the moon is not cheese, their way of thinking changes and becomes convergent as well. Convergent thinking is when the course of our thinking narrows from many possible solutions to the problem to one solution only i.e. to the solution that feels the right one. At this stage, not all pupils will be able to think in creative manner, meaning that creativity will not be a personality feature of all of the pupils. However, few of them will still be able to perceive the world from the child's perspective in spite of knowing enough facts such as the one that the moon is not cheese. At this stage of creative writing development, the pupil will use figurative speech by following specific purpose related to the inner need to express him/her self in a nonconventional way. This is, so called secondary creativity.

There are three phases of creative writing development: *The Innocent Eye, Ear and Hand*; *Conventional Eye, Ear and Hand*; and *Cultivated Eye, Ear and Hand* (Rico, 1983). The first phase is when the child is 2-7 years old. At this stage, the child perceives the world in an innocent way because of lack of experience and insufficient vocabulary, and thus produces combination of words with connotative meaning. When between 8 and 16 years of age, children usually use words with denotative meaning because of the enormous influence of the school over their perception of the world. At the age of 16 and over, the child, approaching the age of an adult person might appear to have his ability to perceive the world through the eyes of the inner child awakened. In addition, not many people have this ability. That is why not many people are able to write in a creative manner. Therefore, we can assume that many of our pupils will not produce a good piece of writing, but this is not very important at this stage of creative writing development. The most important thing is that we, as teachers, must organize many situations in which our children will be able to express themselves in a creative manner. One of these situations would certainly be the creative writing process in elementary classroom.

### **Motivating creative writing in the classroom**

Creative writing in the elementary classroom plays an essential role in the process of child's personality development. Storytelling is an activity in the classroom, which amuses

children and provokes creative thinking. Moreover, *storytelling helps in releasing creativity in the classroom, encourages sharing experiences, helps in the learning and in the teaching process, improves language and comprehension skills, develops high-order thinking skills, improves recall and serves as a bridge and bring closeness between all subjects included in the process of learning.* (Herendeen, 1995).

In order to motivate creative writing in the classroom, Burke (2007) stresses the importance of making special rooms or classrooms intended for pupils' creative writing. In such an environment children feel safe and they are encouraged to write in a creative manner. They are also responsible for the design of the classroom in which they work. Therefore, they have certain power of creation: they participate actively in the arrangement of the classroom and in the process of the creative writing that takes place in the classroom. The teacher also creates positive atmosphere in which pupils are encouraged to contemplate and ponder in a situation of relaxation in order to evoke their creative powers of their unconscious mind. If there is a possibility to decorate a classroom to be used when engaging pupils in creative writing, then the children will feel secure and relaxed as if they are at home. It would be a good start for creative writing engagement to stimulate the unconscious mind of the children i.e. to turn them to their inner self.

In the process of visualization pupils in elementary classroom are encouraged to write short stories by using those pictures and relying upon the unconscious within them before they start their creative writing or storytelling activity. In addition, they may be asked to produce several drawings as part of the story construction without giving verbal support. After creating a story book of drawings, pupils are engaged in story writing activities, starting with only few sentences and continuing with a paragraph related to the said drawings (Welch, 2003 and Goularte, 2002).

Because visualization is very important at this children's age and for the creative writing itself, the teacher should provide visual rich environment full of pictures and photos that are appealing and are capable of provoking creative thought/s. Those pictures/photos should have at least one of these characteristics in order to be provocative:

- to have aesthetic values,
- to include metonymy,
- to create metaphor,
- to be dynamic,
- to be mystic,
- to explore new perspectives of familiar things,
- to present the unexpected and unknown (or less known),
- to initiate divergent thinking,
- to open possibility for asking questions,
- to cause problem situation while watching or discussing about it,
- to expand horizons,
- to say what has never been said,
- to be appealing to emotions...

Metonymy, similarly to metaphor, presupposes substitution of one word (or in this context – thing) and the characteristics of the term that is being substituted are taken into consideration, too, together with the used term. The absence of the first term doesn't really happen, because the reader feels its presence anyway. The words (or – things) are substituted by respecting the logical principle. In the case of the metaphor, the words are being substituted by using the principal of similarity. Therefore, the metonymy is a figure of speech that enables substitution of words that determine things or concepts that are close to each other, or the first thing is part of the second thing (synecdoche), and the metaphor enables



substitution by similarity. Because, similarity does not exclude closeness, we can conclude that *there are no absolute criteria for identification a metaphor over metonymy* (Вангелов, 1986: 171). Previously presented determination of the metonymy reflects the common thought of the theoreticians over the past years. However, there are new views of this term that dislocate metonymy from the general linguistics to cognitive linguistics. According to the new theories, the metonymy is

- i) a conceptual phenomenon,
- ii) metonymy is cognitive process,
- iii) metonymy operates within an idealized cognitive model (Radden, G. and Kovecses, Z., 1999: 17)

*We assume that metonymy is not, as has often been taken for granted, merely a matter of substitution of linguistic expressions but a cognitive process that evokes a conceptual frame. The notion of 'conceptual frame' is meant here as a cover term for what is variously called 'domain', 'idealized cognitive model' (ICM), 'schema', 'scenario', 'script' in the cognitive linguistic literature.* (Panther, K-U. and Raden, G. 1999: 9)

Therefore, a photo or a picture in which there is substitution of one element to another in order to create specific meaning and to leave the audience to construct concepts that refer to previously gained knowledge and experience is metonymic. A photo that is taken out of its real context can also be considered as a photo that includes metonymy. Picture 1 is an example for metonymic picture, because the recipient cannot presuppose the context in which the little monkey is nor the reason for the monkey's specific behavior (thumb sucking). It also raises many questions that provoke divergent thinking.



Picture 1. *Monkey*<sup>3</sup>



Picture 2. *Freedom*<sup>4</sup>

The picture or the photo to be used in the creative writing classroom is advised to be dynamic, i.e. to present movement (picture 2) or to create dynamism by ordering some objects in specific order, usually - diagonally (picture 3).

Picture 4 represents mystic picture, because there is something that is untold or hidden (the human or the shadow among the doors – opened and closed). It is symbolic, metaphoric and metonymic as well, because it may represent emptiness, sorrow, grief, loneliness, memory, non-presence, cry, deep pain... It can also be used for motivating divergent thinking, because this photo says something that lies somewhere beneath the surface of conscious mind. Therefore, the pupils may be surprised to find out that there might be several meanings constructed by the recipient him/herself.

<sup>3</sup>Internet source, retrieved from <http://www.furrytalk.com/2010/01/the-21-most-adorable-and-cute-baby-monkeys-in-the-world/>

<sup>4</sup>Photo taken by Daniela Andonovska-Trajkovska



Picture 3. *Deconstruction*<sup>5</sup>



Picture 4. *Shadow*<sup>6</sup>



Picture 5. *Santorini*<sup>7</sup>



Picture 6. *Sunset*<sup>8</sup>

Picture 5 and 6 are emotionally appealing photos with highly aesthetic function enabled by the combination of colors, contrast, light and freshness. They can also be understood as metonymic (as something that stands for something else by using the logical principle), symbolic or as metaphoric (as something that stands for something else by using the similarity as principle).

Collaborative writing in the classroom might also gain in significance when children are put in specific context in order to discuss their compositions as well as the writing process (Hodges, 2002). This way they also share their life experiences, and while getting familiar with the language, with the characters and with the story writing, they can also explore their own identities (Wiseman, 2003). Collaborative writing creates an atmosphere which makes pupils feel the creative writing as an activity equally important for all of them. Another method of inspiring creative writing is organizing the parents, pupils, and teachers to meet and share their own family stories, motivated by their own personal experiences related to their closest family occasions and events (Buchoff, 1995).

Parents, pupils, and teachers can work together towards developing creative writing even when they tell and write stories about other people or fictional characters (Goethel, 1995). Parents are the first natural teachers to their children, even though they aren't always aware of the particular situations in which the learning happens. Creative writing can also be a context that can be practiced at home, i.e. in a pleasant and friendly setting. Therefore, parents should be aware of the developmental stages of the child's writing, be familiar with the literary elements that constitute literary texts, practice reading and writing in their

<sup>5</sup>Photo taken by Daniela Andonovska-Trajkovska, abandoned house in Brnik (village in Mariovo)

<sup>6</sup>Photo taken by Daniela Andonovska-Trajkovska, abandoned house in Brnik (village in Mariovo)

<sup>7</sup>Photo taken by Toni Andonovski

<sup>8</sup>Photo taken by Toni Andonovski



everyday contexts in order to serve as a role model for their children and be open to the children's need to reconstruct verywell-known story.

### Conclusion

At the end, we can conclude that creative writing as a process that needs to be developed in elementary school can be motivated by several environmental factors. Practitioners and theoreticians stress the importance of making specialized rooms or classrooms to be used exclusively for creative writing. It is also important that the children are included in the decoration of that private 'space'. Drawing pictures or taking photos by the pupils are very appealing to the young writers. Sometimes or frequently the teacher can search for an appropriate photo that could be analyzed and discussed in the classroom. In addition, the teacher should be very particular about the right photo to meet most of the criteria listed above (the photos must have aesthetic values, can be metonymic or metaphoric, mystical, dynamic, new, to be emotionally appealing, to give fresh perspectives on familiar objects, have ability to provoke questions and therefore to create problem situations in the classroom,...)

Collaborative writing is a method that can be used for bringing pupils together in the creative writing process in terms of creating links and connections among them, but also between teacher – pupils, parents – pupils, teachers – parents, pupils – family, and so on.

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