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PROCEEDINGS



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Trakya University - Edirne

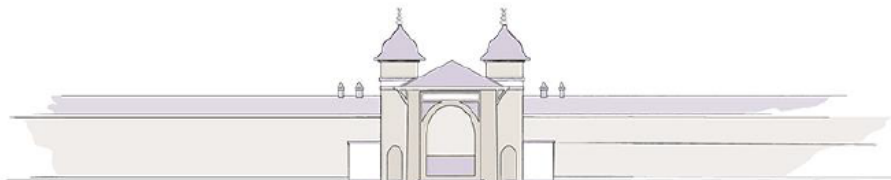
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USING MODEL POEMS IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM: BENEFITS AND OBSTACLES

Daniela ANDONOVSKA-TRAJKOVSKA¹

Abstract

Model poems are structure or skeleton of a poem that could be written. Model poems give the students direction and inspiration for creative writing, because they contain elements that determine the versification features and some of the stylistic features of the poem. They can be derived out of a famous poem that the students have read or structured by the teacher him/herself. Using model poems in elementary classroom is an instructional approach for motivating poetry writing at the early students' age. This paper aims to present the teachers' and the students' at the Faculty of education-Bitola perspective of using model-poems in the elementary classroom. Are model poems easy to use? Are they making the poetry writing process easier or more difficult? What is the best part of the lesson to use model poems: the beginning, the middle or the end? Can model poems be used for other school subjects besides the Language Arts class? These and more research questions are addressed after conducting experimental research where the model poems are experiment factor. 15 teachers and 44 students at the Faculty of education-Bitola participated in the research as subjects that implemented model poems as instructional strategy for motivating poetry writing with students in the elementary school (8-11 years old) for a period of 3 months and two times a week. They had enough time to feel the benefits and obstacles when using model poems in their classrooms and also to observe the students' reaction to the new instructional strategy. The teachers and the students at the Faculty of education-Bitola were interviewed consequently once a week during the process of research and finally at the end of the research in order to gather their particular experiences regarding the use of model poems in the elementary classroom.

Key words: model poems, elementary classroom, poetry writing

INTRODUCTION

Model poems are poems that can be used for motivating poetry writing in the classroom. When a poem is being read in the class, the students are invited to take part of the process of analysis of its content and form, after which poetry writing might come. The teacher can use the previously read and analyzed poem in order to engage the students in creative writing, therefore, the characteristic features of the poem in terms of the style (figures of speech and versification elements) and content are abstracted and put together in a piece of blank paper that will serve as a springboard for poetry writing. Young students especially, need a structure in their writing process. As Fred Sedgwick puts it: "Take structure. Ask anyone to write a poem, or a story, about his or her childhood, and he or she will, justifiably look blank. But give that person a structure – 'Look through this photograph album and write a couplet about each picture', for example, or 'write a haiku about each house you have lived in, or each school you have attended', and it becomes easier. Art does not require license to gush, to pour out; on the contrary, it requires containment." (2003, p. 65-66). One of the many approaches for motivating poetry writing in the classroom that Sedgwick recommend is as follows: reading a poem; content analysis of the poem; analysis of the form and structure of the poem; the students write several sentences in prose form and whereas they make longer pause when reading their text, they put short lines (indicating when the verse starts or ends); and at the end they edit their own written text in order to make it look as a poem (they organize the verses and strophes, they delete, write, rewrite).

Kenneth Koch considers parallelisms as a powerful means for giving structure of poem that is about to be written. He suggests model poems with the following titles: Lie poems (telling a lie in every line), Color poems (always start the line by referring to different color), Wish poems (I wish...), Dream poems (to write about unusual dreams and therefore give flow to the students' fantasy), Comparison poems (Saying something that happened in the past and comparing it with something that is happening in the present), Crazy or Silly poems (in order to boost humor in children's poems, they are advised to see normal and ordinary things in different contexts that are not usually related to the them, therefore, the funny element arises from that kind of construction), Contrasting poems (saying what the students like and dislike, for example, as two things that are in contrast)... (Koch, 1970: 9-28)

By following the recommendations on the motivating poetry writing process by model poem with students, one might think that the students are being taught to follow a model of a poem blindly and therefore - writing a text that is very similar to the original. On the contrary, "...poetry ideas of Kenneth Koch individuate the reading of a poem by putting it in the hands of each individual student into the student's hands in a directed, but personal and creative mode." (Cacciutto, 1979) "The writing of poetry closely based on models makes the model poem material,

¹ PhD, Assistant professor at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski"-Bitola, Faculty of education-Bitola, R. Macedonia, email: dandonovskatrajkovska@yahoo.com

objective and at hand, for the writing of a new poem; the derivative composition is both valuable in itself and as a means of partially comprehending the model poem. The complementary principles here are: writers are readers; through writing, the reader gains insight into literature. Reading poetry offers more opportunities for the development of vitality in composition than does the strict study of grammar and rhetoric. Without that vitality, any study of literature is superficial, however analytically exhaustive it may be. Beyond objectives of concrete production and observable skill development, the relationship between the model poem and the derivative of created poems entails both a merging of imaginations and an affirmation of individual being through selection and transformation. While protecting the model poem from aggregations of interpretation by reading and rereading it closely, the teacher must greatly encourage the student to find his own voice as he makes the poetry idea his own; to the degree in which his imitations are slavish, they tend to be facile and boring." (Cacciutto, 1979)

Emil Kamenov and Pero Spasojevic (Каменов и Спасојевиќ, 2003: 188) also stress the importance of the model poems in motivating poetry writing, but in the elementary classroom especially, since the age of the students is very convenient to organizing creative writing process as a game in which the actors are active participants and contributors to the poem that is about to be written (either individually or as a result of a group work). They suggest the poems of Jovan Jovanovic-Zmaj (If I am..., As I am...), Grigor Vitez (If the trees could walk...), Miroslav Antik (When I was a big boy/girl...), Bozidar Timotijevik (If I were a bird...), Branislav Crncevik (If I am given...) to serve as a springboard to creating a model poem titled *If I...*

Meryl Goldberg, Michel Doyle and Lilian Vega-Kasteneda (Goldberg, Doyle, Vega-Kasteneda, 1995) point out the importance of the model poems, and they suggest the following model of teaching approach to motivate poetry writing with little children: brainstorm activity; presenting a model poem (the model could be either fully followed or modified); editing and reviewing (sometimes this phase could be time consuming, from several days to several weeks); publishing (on the school board, in the school journal, reading to another person, i.e. – friend, parent, teacher,...publishing in a book); organizing the written poems in a book (editing their own poetry book); constantly searching for a new modes for motivating child's creative thought; providing the students with deadlines for submitting their work (to the editors of the school journal, for instance); sharing and commenting.

In the Lorna Dils' teaching approach to poetry writing with model poems we could recognize several phases or steps: presenting a poem that will serve as model poem later on; discussion; providing examples for creative writing; presenting the author's biography; poetry writing process; sharing time.

METHODS

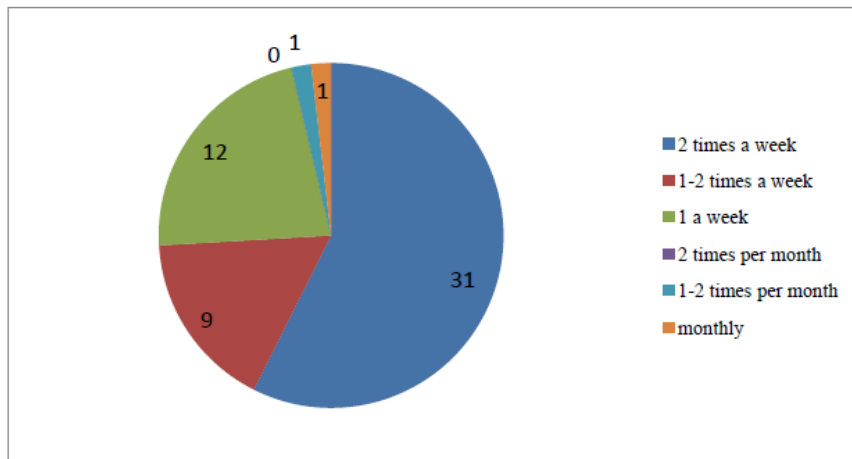
The focus of this research is the nature of using model poems in the elementary classroom in R. Macedonia, as a springboard for poetry writing with students at the age of 8 to 11 years old. At the beginning of this research, several research questions are identified, among which the following are related to the teaching approach with the model poems used by the teachers: Are model poems easy to use? Are they making the poetry writing process easier or more difficult? What is the best part of the lesson to use model poems: the beginning, the middle or the end? Can model poems be used for the other school subjects aside from the Language Arts class?

The purposive sample of 15 teachers was drawn out of a population of teachers in Bitola (town in the southwest of Macedonia, near the Greek border) and the surroundings. There was training for the use of model poems in the classroom organized for the sampled teachers, by the author of this paper, prior to conducting experimental research. The teachers were advised to practice poetry writing by using model poems two times a week for a period of three months (the first semester of the school year) and to write their experiences regarding the experimental factor and their reflections on this kind of teaching practice in a reflective journal for the research's purposes. The teachers were free to organize poetry activities in terms of the time, place, in relation to specific school subject, the teaching lesson to which poetry writing by using model poem was attached, and in terms of the time needed for poetry writing (part of the teaching lesson of 40 minutes, or 40 minutes). The reflective journals served as a source for gathering data about the process of realization of the model poems, and that process differed from one case to another, as well as for the reflective thoughts of the teachers on the teaching strategy and the students' response to it. The other kinds of data, such as the data that reveal the viewpoints of the teachers and the students regarding the frequency of the experimental factor, the possibilities of their usage across the whole curriculum, the students' response to certain model poems and the advantages or disadvantages of using model poems in elementary classroom, were gathered by conducting personal interviews with the teachers and the university students from Faculty of education-Bitola, i.e. future teachers, that were positioned in each classroom as observers (approximately - 3 students per class, i.e. – 44 students in the whole).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

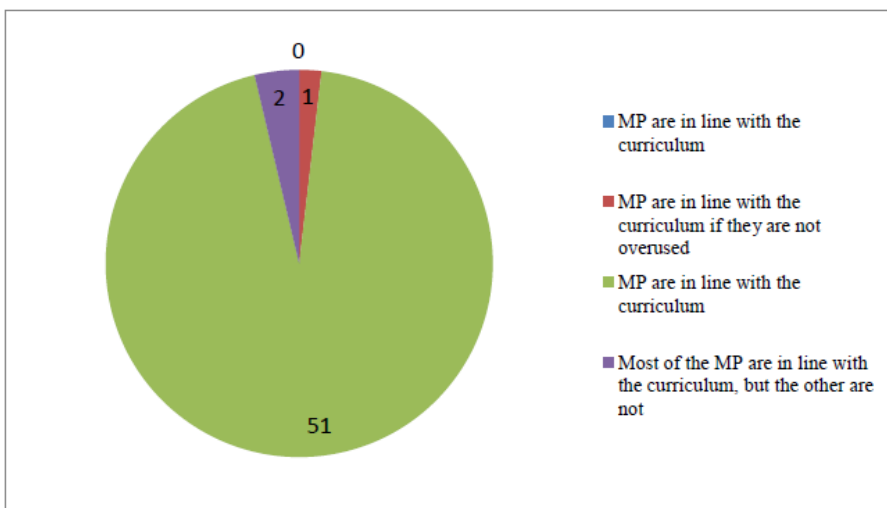
With the personal semi-structured interviews, the respondents were asked several close-ended and two open-ended questions. As we can see in Graph 1., that presents the answers of the respondents (15 teachers and 44 students at the Faculty of education-Bitola) on the question - how often should model poems be used in elementary classroom, most of the respondents answered that model poems should be used twice a week, or at least once a week. This is the point where we could say that the teachers found model poems useful, if it were the opposite they would give us much more different replies such as, model poems should be used on a monthly basis.

Graph 1. How often should model poems be used in elementary classroom?



Almost all of the respondents think that the use of model poems in the elementary classroom is in line with the national curriculum (see Graph 2.) and therefore, they find model poems to be a useful strategy to enlarge the students' reception of the poetry and the creative writing itself (result - from the reflective journals of the teachers that implemented the model poems as an experimental factor in the study).

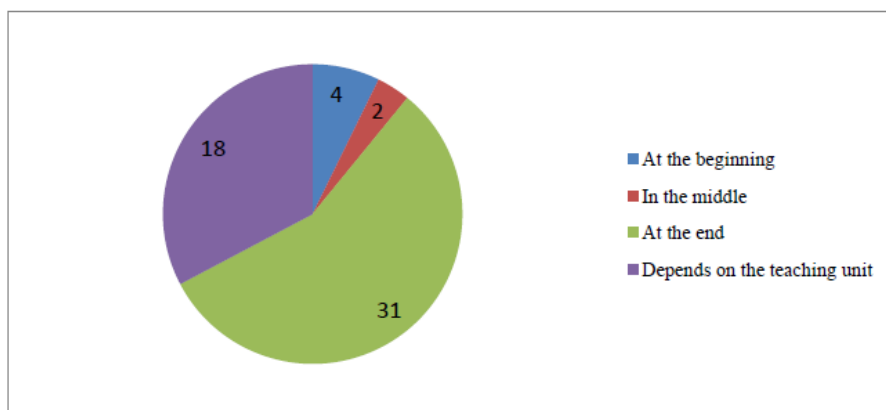
Graph 2. Are model poems in line with the curriculum?



Because the teachers were free to use the model poems in whatever part of the teaching lesson they thought it would be appropriate, they had specific insights on the issue what is the best part of the lesson for the model poems to be used as a method for motivating poetry writing in the classroom. The results have shown that the last part of the lesson is the best time to implement model poems in order to motivate poetry writing process and to bring

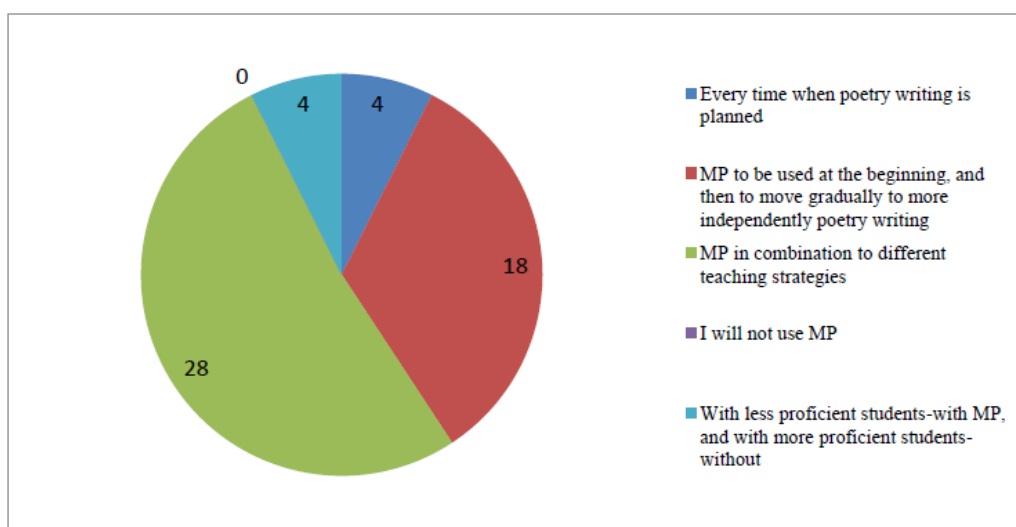
the new lesson even closer to the students. There are also respondents (18) who think that the implementation of the model poems in the elementary classroom depends on the teaching unit.

Graph 3. What part of the lesson is the most appropriate for poetry writing with MP?



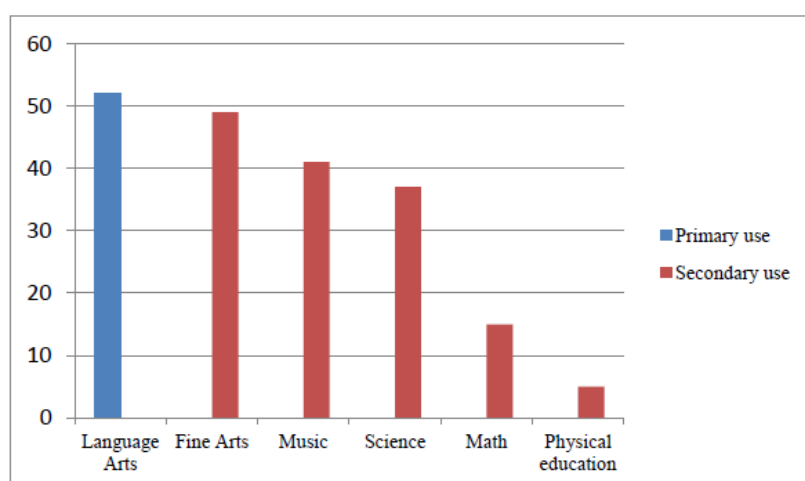
Most of the respondents claimed that they will use model poems in combination with other teaching strategies for motivating poetry writing (28), but there is also a group of respondents (18), which is not small, that said they would use model poems at the beginning of the teaching and practicing poetry writing, and as time goes by, they will try to focus on the poetry writing that will not depend too much on the external factors, such as on the structure that model poems provide for this kind of activity.

Graph 4. How will you use MP in the future?



The teachers were also free to use model poems in terms of the school subject. Therefore, they could try integrating poetry writing process enabled by model poems into as many school subjects as possible. They all agreed that model poems are best used in Language Arts, but they also admitted that model poems could, indeed, be used in Math, for example, or any other school subject, but with caution and special consideration related to the nature of the subject on mind (see Graph 5). Model poems can be used in the Language Arts primarily, and then in the Fine Arts almost as successfully as in Language Arts, then – in Music Education, Science, Math and Physical Education.

Graph 5. The possibility of using model poems in other school subjects, aside from Language Arts (as its obvious)



The respondents were asked two open-ended questions - What are the advantages of using model poems in the elementary classroom in order to motivate poetry writing?, and What are the disadvantages of using model poems in the elementary classroom in order to motivate poetry writing?

They identified several advantages of using model poems in the classroom, as following:

- MP provide the students with structure;
- MP motivate poetry writing;
- MP may act as projective techniques (students are more likely to project their personality, their everyday life contexts, their wishes and dreams, their thoughts and worries,... in a poem that they are creating in a spontaneous manner, then when they are put in a formal situation whereas they are asked interrogative questions by an adult)
- Children love them;
- Children are adopting model poems with great enthusiasm;
- MP help in written expression development with the students;
- MP are in line with the school curriculum;
- When using MP, students come to the product in a less time, then when not using them;
- MP are poetry starters;
- MP are trace markers;
- MP are providing frame in which the student can move or a frame that the student can brake (either way is good enough to be listed as an advantage);
- They motivate even the less proficient learners, because they can display footprints to follow (if needed);
- MP can boost student's self-confidence.

And, the disadvantages that the teachers and the university students have listed are following:

- MP could be too directive and therefore – too limiting;
- MP are time consuming (at least 10-15 minutes out of the 40 minutes lesson);
- The blank spaces left for writing the student's verse or part of a verse sometimes can be problematic (while some students find them short and therefore insufficient for writing the whole poetic expression, some students might feel frightened when looking at the long blank lines without any inspiration coming to the surface);
- Sometimes, the words that are put into brackets in order to give further explanations and directions for the young writers that can be found in the structure of a model-poem might cause certain difficulty (some students, without recognizing them as directions only, were reading them as part of their poems);
- The creative students might find them too narrow and too framed.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the analysis, we can conclude that model poems can be very useful in motivating poetry writing in the elementary classroom, as seen through the teachers' and future teachers' eyes. Although, we have presented only part of the analysis and part of the discussion regarding the model poems as a teaching strategy (the rest of the analysis is part of the bigger research project conducted by the author of this text), here, we can say that model poems can be regarded as poetry writing starters, poetry skeletons, creative game starters, structures that help students in modifying, reorganizing their own thoughts in a poem, initiating poetry writing and building their self-confidence when comes to their ability to express themselves in a creative manner. They can be used in line with the school curriculum, providing support for the educational objectives. They are applicable in almost every school subject, aside from the Language Arts. They can be used at the last part of the lesson, or depending on the teaching unit, they can also be used during the whole lesson.

Model poems may act as projective techniques, and therefore they may uncover some specific issues related to the student's personality. This could be of exceptional importance, if a student faces a specific problem or has family issues that provoke anxiety and problematic and unusual behavior of the student himself or herself. Yet, it is a field that needs to be addressed by the researchers in the future.

Model poems are fun and very well accepted by the students. They also make the poetry writing process less conventional and more appealing to students. It is very important for the teachers and practitioners to take into account the obstacles that one might face when working with model poems. We should always have in mind that model poems are supposed to motivate poetry writing, and not the opposite, therefore, if the teacher notices that a student oppose a certain model poem, then s/he should provide the student with a choice: to write with or without such structure. However, it is still an area that needs to be investigated further on.

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