

MODEL-POEMS AS SHAPERS OF STUDENTS' POETIC EXPRESSION IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Poetry writing in elementary classroom is a very appealing, but complex process that includes many variables related to students' age, their perception of the world, the way they respond to the stimulus that is coming from the outer world, and the way they reflect on and experience the world around them. As with the other forms of creative writing, poetry writing presupposes creative uses of language under certain circumstances that support the unconscious process of creating and, at the same time, the conscious state of mind when the student-poet is revising a previously written text. Teachers in elementary classroom find the process of motivating creative poetic expression of students very challenging and difficult to be achieved with the majority of the students in the class. Therefore, they may use certain strategies, such as using model-poems that can ease this process of creation. The aim of this paper is to present the results of an experimental study of the influence of model-poems on production of poetic expression of students in elementary classroom. The sample of the experimental study with duration of 3 months consists of approximately 300 students from third to fifth grade in elementary classroom (8-11 year old students) and 15 teachers from the Republic of Macedonia. The results of the study show that the production of poetic sentences by elementary school students is positively influenced by exposing them to model-poems and this is the case especially with younger students.

Keywords: poetry writing, model poems, elementary classroom.

1 INTRODUCTION

Child's poetry writing is a creative act of a child directed towards creating verbal images which relate to the perceived reality and the feelings that emerge as a result of the interaction between the inner self of the child and the outer world. It is multifunctional in its essence, because it influences many aspects of the child's personality development: a) cognitive – due to its openness to cognitive processes such as abstraction, analysis, synthesis and evaluation that occur while the child is looking proper words in its mind inventory and then while it is making connections among the words, and thus, – producing metaphors, metonymies and other semantic figures of speech; b) affective – due to its openness to the emotions and feelings of the perceiver; and c) conative – due to its contribution to the child's willingness, self-confidence and eagerness to participate in the creation of the human's cultural world.

Motivating poetry writing in elementary classroom helps in developing students' creativity, because poetry writing is a process of creating new worlds, a new creation that has been made by practicing divergent thinking: poets are inspired to write and they are looking for words (practicing fluency and flexibility) that will reflect their thought and feelings. Therefore, they search for words in their own inventory and attempted to make original connections among them which will be perceived as semantic figures of speech (originality). In the case of creative processes, there is usually a convergent way of thinking, whereas in the case of poetry writing poets' intuition plays a major role [1]. Even though, students' poetry writing as a creative process differs from the one that is happening in an adult, because of their lack of self-criticism and the principle of selection that adults have [2], there is still a creative act that needs to be supported and motivated. Bek-Dvorzak [3] strives for the lost spontaneity and creativity in schools by pointing out several issues: directly stimulating spontaneity, freeing students' from the feeling of fear and depression in order to support spontaneity and altering their ego. According to her, there exists an ongoing practice of stifling students' creativity.

2 USING MODEL-POEMS IN ORDER TO INSPIRE POETRY WRITING

Poetry writing in elementary classroom is neither something that happens very often, nor an activity that is easy to organize. It comprises activities that provoke images from the unconscious mind of the

students and bring them back with the conscious mind in order to be interwoven in words, stanzas, poems. Students need a specific context in order to be motivated to write poetry. They can be challenged visually by presenting to them ordinary objects in different ways in order to be used as inspiration drivers. They can be challenged by exposing them to various pieces of poetry writings [4] from famous poets by creating an atmosphere of excitement and play, having good models of poems in front of them. It is expected that they will feel free to express themselves in a creative manner if they are not afraid of writing the “wrong” words, because there is no such thing when comes to poetry, according to Comstock [5]. “Teaching “great” poetry to students enhances their perceptions, improves their writing, challenges their minds, and enriches their lives” [6] as Certo points out. She goes on, and suggests that not only introducing poems from famous poets to the children, but also using poems from contemporary poets can serve as models and inspiration for poetry writing. Teachers should look for poetry models not only in the children’s books, but also in the anthologies for adults, because they are products of experiencing life and all of its manifestations through the poets’ perspectives without being forced to shut their eyes in front of the imperfections of the world, as with the children’s poetry. In addition, “the poem must be able to stand alone, without significant explication. If an explication is needed, the poem may not be developmentally appropriate for the age level” pg. 163 [7]. Certain statement, part of the poem, a verse, or something else from the original poem can be used as a poetry link, i.e. to motivate children to write poetry.

According to Kenneth Koch [8], parallelisms are powerful in creating those poetry links, i.e. they are very useful in the process of creating a model-poem. Therefore he suggests that several model-poems (Lie poem, Color poem, Wish poem (I wish...), Dreams poem (I dream...)) can be used in the classroom. In addition, they should be related to some specific occasion that happens in the school or a topic related to the school curriculum. Koch used List poems as a startup group activity where children are encouraged to list as many things as they want (I wish...) and end the poem by pointing out something, or saying something silly. He encouraged the students to create successful similes and metaphors, too, by using various model-poems in the classroom.

Citing the work of Rosenblatt, Fred Sedgwick [9] stresses the fact that a poem becomes alive only if it is in contact with the reader. In addition, each reader will attribute different and specific meaning to one and the same poem. Hence, every reading experience always implies a new and exciting relationship between the conscious and unconscious state of the reader’s mind. He argues that the teaching poetry should always be accompanied by poetry writing activities and vice versa, because students cannot understand and experience poetry if they are not in a position to write poetry themselves, and they cannot write poetry if they are not exposed to quality pieces of writing, i.e. if they do not have an opportunity to naturally absorb poetry elements and if they are not moved and touched by the rhythm of poetry. Therefore, students need appropriate models for writing poetry if they are to be engaged in poetry writing activities, and such models may be modified to meet their needs [10]. Students can also participate in the process of choosing model-poems for writing. “Offering diverse models suggests a greater number of possibilities to students, forces them to negotiate which forms and patterns will help them best convey their thoughts, and eliminates the notion that there is somehow a “right answer,” a model to be followed exactly.” [11].

Marsha Rodgers [12] proposes poetry writing activities by integrating technology to the school curriculum within her project called *30 Days of Poetry* where students are offered various model-poems and formula-poems each day (one per day) in e-form in order to practice different types of poems regarding their form and content. She explains the method of producing model-poems by offering the original one that has been analyzed and used as a model.

The model-poem below is an example of model-poem proposed by Rodgers [12]

“Title: Form of Nature chosen

Line #1: Title + (how it arrives or begins as the animal would arrive)

Line #2: Tell what it does

Line #3: And how it does it

Line #4: And where it is

Line #5: Tell how it leaves (as the animal would leave)”

This poem has been abstracted from the Carl Sandburg’s poem titled *Fog* [13].

“Fog

BY CARL SANDBURG

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.”

Brainstorming before poetry writing is a very useful strategy for instigating students to make clusters, which as Rico [14] puts it, it enables writing in a natural way. This method presupposes placing a word in the center of the paper, i.e. making a nucleus, which is intended to serve as a springboard for the other words to come. The word that will act as a nucleus can emerge as a result of previous observation a piece of art or a previously read piece of writing. Students organize their own words, phrases or sentences around the nucleus without too much thinking. Understandably, new ideas are welcomed, and they can be added around the previously produced ones, until students feel that there is enough material which can be organized in a poem. It is an awakening of the student's unconscious mind, i.e. the student's innocent eye, ear and hand. This is the moment of activating the right part of the brain which is responsible for perceiving the world in its entirety, as well as for imaginative thinking, transformation, openness to the new ideas, using images instead of words, which is a condition for creating metaphors. The next phase is activating the left part of the brain, i.e. paying attention to details, words, rules of writing, implementing logic etc. Revision is something that needs to follow and the whole process of writing should be guided by an expert.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Hypotheses

The aim of this experimental research was to answer the question whether poetry writing i.e. poetry expression can be prompted and motivated with using model-poems, similar to the ones that Kenneth Koch [8] was using in order to motivate poetry writing in the elementary classroom and to those proposed by Marsha Rodgers [12]. We have formulated several hypotheses, but the following two are the principle ones. H1: Model-poems can provoke students in elementary classroom to produce poetic expressions; H2: Student's poetry expression depends on the type of model-poems used to initiate the poetry writing process. Moreover, the following auxiliary hypotheses were derived from H1 and H2. H1.1. Model-poems can provoke third graders to produce poetic expressions; H1.2. Model-poems can provoke fourth graders to produce poetic expressions; H1.3. Model-poems can provoke fifth graders to produce poetic expressions; H2.1. Student's poetic expression depends on the type of model-poems used to initiate the poetry writing process of the third grade students; H2.2. Student's poetic expression depends on the type of model-poems used to initiate the poetry writing process of the fourth grade students; H2.3. Student's poetic expression depends on the type of model-poems used to initiate the poetry writing process of the fifth grade students.

3.2 Research population and Sample

Elementary teachers and students in the Republic of Macedonia were targeted as a research population. The sample was purposive and consisted of 15 elementary teachers and 300 students in elementary school from Bitola and the Bitola region. Second graders were under a special research design, because of their insufficient basic literacy skills. They were used as audience for the poetry readings organized by the teachers and students from the upper grades, and they also had poetry writing sessions with their own teachers that included working with the whole group of second graders at the same time by using the direct or frontal form of teaching or motivating poetry writing. They are not subject of this analysis and are not discussed in this paper. There were 4 classes in each of the upper grades (third, fourth and fifth grade) that acted as experimental groups (N=223) and the results coming from them is subject of analysis in this paper.

The teachers were selected upon whether they appreciate poetry writing in the elementary classroom and whether they feel motivated enough to practice different poetry writing strategies with their students by conducting face-to face interviews. There was intensive course on implementing specific techniques and methods regarding the use of model-poems with the students organized for all teachers that were included in the research and conducted by the first author of this paper.

3.3 Experimental factors

The students were given model-poems as tools for encouraging poetry writing as part of the Language Arts classes twice a week by the trained teachers with assistance provided by the students at the Faculty of Education-Bitola. In addition, in the three month period of practicing poetry writing with model-poems as experimental factors, there were 26 poetry writing lessons organized for each class, which also implies that eventually there were approximately 26 poems written per student.

The experimental factors included in this study were as follows: a) model-poems that create contexts for writing poetry about the outer world (A), b) model-poems that create contexts for writing poetry about the inner world (B), c) publishing/ sharing activities (poetry collections, poetry readings, poetry walls (C)¹, d) listening to the other students' poems written as a result of the shared model-poems (D)², e) brainstorming and day-dreaming time before the poetry writing process (E)³.

The poems that were used as experimental factors were mainly based on the Koch's [8] and Marsha Rodgers' [12] model-poems: they were inspired by his and her work, and some of them were modified for the specific purpose of writing as stipulated in the national curriculum and on the work of.

The poems were categorized in two groups:

- Experimental factor A: Poems about the weather, Color poems, Sense poems, Three word forms, List poems, Object poems, Poems about a specific character from a book, Animal poem, Person poem.
- Experimental factor B: Three word poems starting with the word *I*, Three different kinds of poems *I am...*, Feelings poems, Love letter poems, *I wish...* poem, *I dreamt about...* poems, *I am sorry for...* poems, *I wish I were invisible...*, *When I...*, Feelings, Sense poems, Thank you for..., *I can/ could/ would...* poems.

The experimental factors were introduced to the students as shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Experimental factors assigned to the experimental groups

3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th grade	Experimental factors
Group 1	A+E
Group 2	B+E
Group 3	A+B+E
Group 4	A+B+C+E

Teachers were advised to implement the following steps:

- Read a poem.
- Discuss about the poem.
- Present a model-poem.
- Explain the elements of the model-poem, especially if the model-poem aims to motivate students' creation of epithets, metonymy, metaphors, simile, or personification without any definitions of the implied figures of speech.
- Brainstorm activities (via frontal teaching or individually at the back of the paper sheet).

¹ This experimental factor is not paid much attention in this paper due to the fact that it is not related to the two of the main hypotheses stated above that are being tested and discussed here.

² First graders were exposed to the experimental factor D as part of the larger research conducted by the first author of this paper, and the gained results are not subject of analysis nor discussion in this paper.

³ The factor E was introduced after one month of practicing poetry writing with the elementary school students, because we realized that the students needed some preparatory time before the creative writing process started in order to be able to look in their own inventory of words and concepts that was made possible by the brainstorming sessions, and to be able to make connections among the produced words by visualizing poetry images which was enabled by leaving some time for day-dreaming. In the following sections group A+E will be referred to as group A, B+E – as B, A+B+E – as A+B, A+B+C+E – as A+B+C.

- Poetry writing by using model-poems.
- Sharing time (at least 5 poems need to be shared among the students).

Every group of students was at the same time a control and an experimental group, because comparisons were made between the initial and the final state of the poetry writing expressions of the students in one group only. In addition, comparisons were made between different groups of students in order to compare their poetry expressions as they were influenced by different experimental factors. The groups of one and the same grade were equalized by using these criteria: school success, students' grades in Language Arts (from the previous school year), and the score they achieved in the survey conducted by their teachers whose aim was to identify the students who write poetry, and whether these students are self-initiated and whether in the process of poetry writing they are supported by an adult or not.

3.4 Data collection

We have collected data during a period of three months by using these methods: interviewing the teachers on several occasions (the main interview sessions were organized face-to face at the beginning and at the end of the research, and less structured interviews were conducted either face-to face or by phone at the end of each week) and interviewing the students from Faculty of Education-Bitola (future elementary school teachers) that acted as observers and assistant researchers (44 in total) by means of an interview guide and lists of questions conducted by the first author of this paper.

4 RESULTS

We have formulated 6 null hypotheses in order to verify the auxiliary hypotheses: $H1.1_0$ =*There is no statistically significant difference between the initial and the final identified situation regarding poetry writing of third grade students* (when it comes to the extent to which students have initiatives for poetry writing, the occasions when they practice poetry writing, and the extent to which they feel confident to write all by themselves), $H1.2_0$ =*There is no statistically significant difference between the initial and the final identified situation regarding poetry writing of fourth grade students*; $H1.3_0$ =*There is no statistically significant difference between the initial and the final identified situation regarding poetry writing of fifth grade students*; and $H2.1_0$ =*There is no significant difference among different experimental groups in third grade*; $H2.2_0$ =*There is no significant difference among different experimental groups in the fourth grade*; $H2.3_0$ =*There is no significant difference among different experimental groups in the fifth grade*.

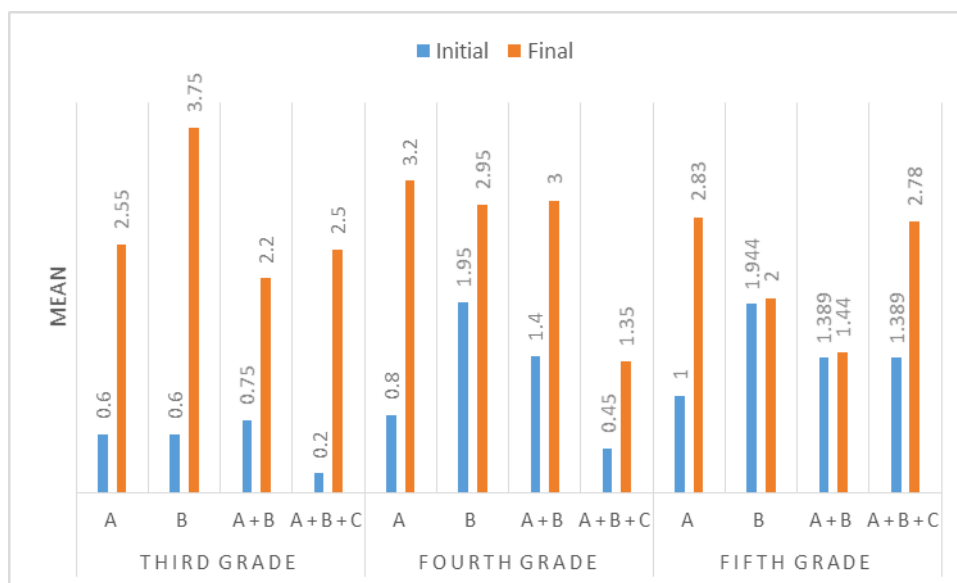
In verifying the first three null-hypothesis $H1.1_0$, $H1.2_0$ and $H1.3_0$ we have compared the data gathered from the initial and final interviewing of teachers that organized the poetry writing sessions with their students, i.e. we have made comparisons between the initial and the final results of the students based on their teachers' opinion, which means that we have been testing two paired samples with T-test. All of the statistical tests are run in Excel with Data Analysis Pack Tool.

The results obtained for the third graders assigned with the experimental factor A+E showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the paired samples, because $t(19)=-4.390765$, $p=0.000314248$, i.e. $p<0,05$ with T critical= 2.093024 . The group of third grade students assigned with the experimental factor B+E also showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the paired samples, i.e. $t(19)=-7,764057$, $p=2.61E-07$, i.e. $p<0,05$ with T critical= 2.093024 . The results showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the two paired samples in the cases of experimental group A+B+E ($t(19)=-3.681441433$, $p=0.001585406$, i.e. $p<0,05$ with T critical= 2.093024), and the experimental group A+B+C+E ($t(19)=-4.232755726$, $p=0.000450379$, i.e. $p<0,05$ with T critical= 2.093024). Therefore we can reject the null hypothesis $H1.1_0$ and accept the alternative hypothesis $H1.1$: Model-poems can provoke third graders to produce poetic expressions.

In order to test $H1.2_0$ hypothesis, we have compared the paired samples gathered by the initial and final testing of the fourth graders. The results showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the compared samples in all of the experimental groups (Group A+E: $t(19)=-8.717797887$, $p=4.57144E-08$, i.e. $p<0.05$ with T critical= 2.093024 ; Group B+E: $t(19)=-2.32992949$, $p=0.030987824$, i.e. $p<0.05$ with T critical= 2.093024 ; Group A+B+E: $t(19)=-4.213291447$, $p=0.000470823$, i.e. $p<0.05$ with T critical= 2.093024 ; Group A+B+C+E: $t(19)=-3.757561184$, $p=0.00133279$, i.e. $p<0.05$ with T critical= 2.093024). Therefore we can reject the $H1.2_0$ hypothesis and

accept the alternative one which is formulated as follows: H1.2. Model-poems can provoke fourth graders to produce poetic expressions.

The samples of the initial and the final data gathered from the fifth graders were compared in order to test H1.3₀ hypothesis. The results point to the fact that there is a statistically significant difference with the level of significance of $\alpha=0.05$ only with the participants in the group A+E ($t(17)=-4.344140839$, $p=0.000441047$, i.e. $p<0.05$ with T critical=2.109815578). As to the rest of the experimental groups, the results led to a conclusion that there is no statistically significant difference between the initial and the final situation regarding the poetry writing of the fifth grade students (Group B+E: $t(17)=-0.174701592$, $p=0.863061299$, i.e. $p>0.05$ with T critical=2.109815578; Group A+B+E: $t(17)=-0.120591641$, $p=0.90542831$, i.e. $p>0.05$ with T critical=2.109815578; Group A+B+C+E: $t(17)=-1.397612738$, $p=0.180202822$, i.e. $p>0.05$ with T critical=2.109815578). Therefore we accept the null hypothesis and we reject the alternative hypothesis H1.3. Model-poems can provoke fifth graders to produce poetic expressions. In each case, the mean of the data in the final measurement is bigger than the mean of the data in the initial measurement, as shown in Graph 1, however, a statistically significant difference occurs only in the case of the third and fourth graders.



Graph. 1. Comparison of the means of the samples in the initial and the final measurement in the case of the second grade students

We can, now, partially accept the hypothesis H1: Model-poems can provoke students in elementary classroom to produce poetic expressions.

In the following paragraphs, we also present some of the teachers' observations (excerpts from the interview conducted at the end of the research) revealing their opinions about whether model-poems can provoke poetic expression of the students as a support for the accepted H1.

GU (female, third grade teacher): "Model-poems are very helpful. I've been trying to organize poetry sessions with my students before, but I must say, it was without much visible success, because the students were struggling with the form or the words that they needed for their poems. They were quite often - blocked, because there wasn't enough time for them to write a poem in class, so they would approach it later at home, with the help of their parents. I find model-poems very interesting, functional, but also provocative, because they do provoke students' thoughts and they also help in organizing them in stanza or in poetry images. Thank you for giving me such a helpful and powerful tool for organizing poetry sessions even with small children such as my students."

SI (female, a fourth grade teacher): "Model-poems made my students think more profoundly and in a divergent way. And I didn't care much whether a student has written a good or perfect poem, what I really cared about was whether a model-poem has succeeded in provoking creative thoughts on the part of the students and whether they have broaden their horizons. I was really surprised by the majority of my students, because I wasn't thinking about them as "poets" before introducing the model-poems. I would especially like to point the case with NT (a timid girl). She wasn't very communicative

with the rest of the students during the lessons, but now she is the first one to raise a hand in order to share her poem with the rest of the students in the class. PP (a boy with signs of depression) also made a visible progress in expressing his feelings thanks to the model-poems that made him connect with his inner self and reflect on the past and current events relevant to him. He also started writing poems even without being prompted and motivated by a model-poem. And this is not an isolated case.”

VA (female, a fifth grade teacher): “Model-poems helped in developing students’ written expression, and as a proof I will point to the fact that I achieved much better results regarding students’ literary competencies and awareness of the poem’s structure when I started using model poems with my students. My students became much better at divergent thinking and they were more confident in finding proper words to create their own poems.”

In order to verify hypothesis H2, we approach hypotheses H2.1, H2.2 and H2.3 by testing the null hypotheses $H_{2.1_0}$, $H_{2.2_0}$ and $H_{2.3_0}$. To this end, comparisons were made between the final scores of the students in different experimental groups within the same grade by using ANOVA: single factor test.

The test showed that there is no statistically significant difference among the 4 samples drawn upon the 4 experimental groups in third grade, $F(3,76)= 1.950854115$, $p= 0.128548508$. Therefore, we accept the null hypotheses $H_{2.1_0}$ and reject the alternative one - $H_{2.1}$. Student’s poetry expression depends on the model-poems used to initiate the poetry writing process of the third grade students.

While analyzing the data from the fourth graders, we have come to interesting results. ANOVA: single factor test showed that there is a statistically significant difference among the 4 samples ($F(3,76)= 5.149669282$, $p= 0.002702528$) or there is a statistically significant difference between at least two pairs of samples. Therefore, we took Tukey HSD test created in Excel by its built-up formula options, in order to determine which of the samples are significantly different. The results showed that there is no statistically significant difference between these pairs of samples: A+E vs B+E ($Q(3,76)= 0.6621$, $p= 0.8999947$), A+E vs A+B+E ($Q(3,76)= 0.5297$, $p= 0.8999947$), and B+E vs A+B+E ($Q(3,76)= 0.1324$, $p= 0.8999947$); and there is statistically significant difference between these samples: A+E vs A+B+C+E ($Q(3,76)= 4.8996$, $p= 0.0047636$), B+E vs A+B+C+E ($Q(3,76)= 4.2375$, $p= 0.0189316$), and A+B+E vs A+B+C+E ($Q(3,76)= 4.3699$, $p= 0.0145497$). Hence, we can conclude that the main difference found here is related to the experimental factor C and also needs to be undertaken further analysis in order to answer the question: How can the experimental factor C be responsible for the less production of the students’ poetic expressions? Is it due to some parasite factor or due to the stress that the students might have felt during the publishing activities related to the poetry writing sessions?

The results retrieved from the data gathered from the students in the fifth grade show that there is no statistically significant difference among the four samples ($F(3,68)= 1.147813441$, $p= 0.336183972$). Therefore we can accept the null hypothesis $H_{2.3_0}$ and reject the alternative one ($H_{2.3}$. Student’s poetry expression depends on the type of model-poems used to initiate the poetry writing process of the fifth grade students).

We can now, reject hypothesis H2: Student’s poetry expression depends on the type of model-poems used to initiate the poetry writing process.

5 CONCLUSION

Having in mind the results of the quantitative analysis of the gathered data and the qualitative analysis of the teachers’ reflections regarding poetry writing by means of using model-poems, we can conclude that model-poems provoke poetic expressions on the part of elementary school students, especially in the case of students from the lower grades (third and fourth grade). Model-poems may be used as poetry writing starters in the elementary classroom, because they can provoke creative thinking on the part of the students and they can shape their poetic expression. They can also contribute to the growth of the students’ self-confidence and inner motivation for creative writing, because they can shorten the time that students will use in order to start with poetry writing by providing certain context for writing and some poetic structure to the written text. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that, according to the evidence gained from this research, model-poems did not succeed in provoking poetry expressions on the part of the students in the fifth grade more than any other method. The fact that the students weren’t exposed to poetry writing by using model-poems earlier in their education might be the reason for this finding. It can also be that the students at this age may be in a position to

give some kind of resistance to any kind of framing of their poetry expression. Nevertheless, this finding can serve as a starting point for further research in this area.

This research has made us conclude that the type of the model-poems does not influence students' poetry expression in elementary classroom. In addition, students feel motivated and sufficiently prompted to write poetry texts regardless of whether the model-poem creates contexts about the outer worlds or about the inner worlds. Therefore, we can suggest that model-poems can be used in the poetry writing sessions, and the greater variety of the model-poems is used, the better results in awakening the inner motivation for writing and the urge to write in a creative manner are achieved. If the students feel encouraged to write poems in the classroom, and if they are given some structure at the beginning, later on they will certainly start to express their own feelings in a creative literary manner without using model-poems as starters.

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