

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE WRITING TO THE DEVELOPMENT LOVE FOR READING IN CHILDREN'S LIBRARIES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the significance of creative writing in cultivating a deeper, more meaningful connection between children and literary reading within the library setting. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, it views creative writing as an educational tool that serves to ignite the imagination of young readers and harness the expressive potential of language within reading groups hosted in libraries. The study begins with a concise historical overview of the formation of creative writing and proceeds to examine various approaches to the cognitive processes stimulated by creative writing techniques. It then proceeds to present illustrative applications of creative activities grounded in foundational texts, tailored for implementation in Children's Library settings. These activities are categorized into three levels based on the participants' preparedness for creative engagement. Furthermore, to underscore the pivotal role of creative writing in fostering a love for reading, the paper incorporates feedback from 18 Library Science students who participated in a reading group during the spring semester of 2019 at a Greek University. The group's thematic focus was on analyzing the structure of short stories through creative writing exercises. The students' perspectives, gathered through a brief questionnaire, provide valuable insights into the symbiotic relationship between creative writing and the educational mission of libraries.

Keywords: Children's Libraries, Creative Writing, Qualitative method, Reading groups

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Children's Libraries are autonomous institutions dedicated to catering specifically to the needs and interests of young readers (Bundy et al., 2006: 126-130). Typically, these spaces are designed to encourage interaction with books in a welcoming environment, spanning a broad age range from infants to teenagers. The overarching goal of Children's Libraries is to serve as educational hubs tailored to the age groups they serve. It is imperative to implement initiatives and practices that bolster their societal impact and foster positive encounters with literature and culture, even among pre-reading children (Rankin, 2016).

Modern Children's Libraries are recognized as optimal venues for nurturing the creativity inherent in young readers. This acknowledgment is grounded in several factors: first, the expertise and literary acumen of their staff; second, their diverse collections encompassing various genres and styles of language, both literary and non-literary, suitable for their target age groups; third, their utilization of international best practices in spatial organization to facilitate interactive reading experiences; and fourth, their core mission, which revolves around

promoting reading as a voluntary, recreational, and imaginative pursuit that fosters positive connections between young readers and books. Given these characteristics, the promotion of literature and the cultivation of creative expression emerge as primary objectives of Children's Libraries.

Interdisciplinary approaches to literary engagement underscore the reader as an inherently creative entity, activating multifaceted creative tendencies and cognitive processes. This multifaceted engagement with texts through interpretive exploration ensures the appreciation of literary works as aesthetic treasures. Indeed, the diversity of literary discourse presupposes active participation, dialogue, and mental exploration of space and time—elements that creative writing, as an educational endeavor fostering direct engagement with literature, significantly enriches (Grosdos, 1999; 2011).

Such an approach to reading naturally extends to the creative expression of various forms, depending on individuals' inclinations and interests, ultimately leading to the production of creative discourse. Conversely, engaging in creative writing exercises is perceived as a method to stimulate attention and reading response, as its utilization serves to cultivate a more dialectical approach to reading, influenced by Bakhtin's theory (1980). Interacting with literary texts becomes a spiritual journey, inviting and compelling the creative subject to draw upon their experiences, perceptions, representations, inclinations, and aspirations. Thus, literature must be a central focus of Children's Libraries, and beyond, in order to indirectly achieve additional objectives such as the development of information literacy, cultivation of aesthetic literacy, and enhancement of language skills. This is because the reader's dialogue with the literary text serves as both a reconstruction of social experience and a means of transcending it; through reading, individuals and groups explore new avenues of understanding and experiencing reality. (Spink, 1990; Liu, 2020)

In this context, the article aims to underscore the efficacy of creative writing in fostering a more qualitative relationship between young library users and literary reading, nurturing their creative inclinations and leveraging the playful nature of reading and writing within the Children's Library environment. To this end, insights from participating Library Science students in a reading group focused on the study of short story forms through creative writing exercises, conducted during the spring semester of 2019 at a Greek University, will be instrumental. The 18 participants provided responses to open-ended questions, evaluating whether creative writing can effectively enhance the reading interests of library users, particularly children, thereby emphasizing the educational role of libraries more actively. (Liu, 2020)

2.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY: dialectical reading as an educational process and creative act

This paper offers an interdisciplinary exploration of theoretical frameworks and educational methodologies concerning the role of creative writing in fostering reading habits among young readers within Children's Libraries. The bibliography employed reflects this comprehensive approach to creative writing and the significance of Children's Libraries. Specifically, it integrates theoretical principles and empirical findings from various fields: a. Insights from literary studies, particularly reader-centric theories. b. Perspectives from interdisciplinary studies on creativity. c. Empirical research examining educational practices that enhance

participants' creative expression within reading groups. d. Literature on library studies, focusing on the operation of Children's Libraries and their role in cultivating a love for reading.

Furthermore, the paper elucidates ways and techniques that can support learning processes centered on reading and the production of creative discourse, drawing from literary works suitable for the diverse audience of Children's Libraries, including infants, child readers, and students in primary and secondary schools. It also illustrates how educators, parents, and librarians can collaboratively foster a recreational approach to literature and language expression within library spaces, whether through listening activities for preschool-aged children or reading activities for school-aged children (Liu, 2020).

In line with reading theories, both reading groups and creative writing workshops, particularly those integrated into institutional settings like schools or libraries, are viewed as reading communities. Within this framework, as theorized by proponents of the Reader-response criticism (see S. Fish, L. Rosenblatt), drawing on Iser's aesthetic response theory, the reader's participation serves to organize the aesthetic coherence of the text. Moreover, participation in reading groups constitutes a culturally enriching community, fostering aesthetic criteria and aesthetics education among its members through reading stimuli, discussions about works, and creative activities aimed at interpreting texts. Consequently, following Fish (1980), the reading community evolves into an interpretive community, wherein the interpretation of texts occurs alongside the development of linguistic, aesthetic, and social skills among its members (Grusec, 1992).

The function of reading groups and creative writing workshops is determined by both the increased willingness of the participants to engage and the success of the educational techniques employed by moderators in mobilizing participants mentally and spiritually. According to Wolf (2007), these groups and workshops can be seen as educational communities. This is because becoming a creative writer necessitates the cultivation of crucial language skills, aesthetic literacy, and inner motivations, which involve both individual and social processes of reading (Karakitsios, 2011: 27-28). The text serves not merely as an occasion but as a starting point for various creative activities that demand different levels of creative readiness (Kotopoulos, 2013: 117).

Incorporating creative writing into the teaching of literature at all educational levels enriches group reading responses by introducing activities aimed at stimulating creativity. These activities imbue a laboratory-like atmosphere to the interpretation of literary texts, fostering interaction among members and ensuring a dynamic and immediate approach to the works. This approach, as argued by Kennedy (2021: 277-280, 286-288) and Gavriilidou (2013), shields reading groups from reducing the process to mere information dissemination, which fails to accentuate the aesthetic essence of the texts.

However, when designing educational programs that combine literature reading with creative writing in libraries, one must consider it as essentially interdisciplinary. Particularly in Children's Library environments, applying reading approaches extends the educational objectives of reading communities to accommodate the operational mode, available resources, spatial organization, and staff expertise (Zachos, 1999; Kopsida-Vretou, 2011). Thus, reading groups employing creative writing techniques in Children's Libraries integrate educational strategies not only to activate creativity but also to maximize the utilization of library resources.

Properly equipped libraries support collaborative learning and foster the joy of reading among young visitors.

In the context of the Greek educational system, the latest Study Programs for Literature, particularly at the Secondary level: (Junior High School: Government Gazette 5769/B'/10-02-2023; High School: Government Gazette B 2953/4-5-2023), aim to propose strategies for maximizing the creative utilization of role production techniques in student communities. The goal is to transform these communities into active reading communities, whether within a classroom or library setting.

Drawing on the insights of Germanos (2001) and Dressman (1997), this process hinges on addressing performance anxiety, which stifles creativity, and fostering a sense of trust among members of reading groups to encourage active participation. Moreover, creative exercises in Children's Libraries must fulfill several criteria: they should be an integral part of educational planning, offer clear instructions during implementation, consider the literature being studied by the group, the age group of the participants, their reading preferences and creative inclinations, as well as the resources and collections available in the Children's Library. Additionally, they should incorporate feedback techniques for each endeavor to foster participation and ignite creativity.

3.0 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF CREATIVE WRITING AS AN EDUCATIONAL METHOD

A brief overview of the historical development and characteristics of creative writing can provide a richer understanding of the combined approach being described, aimed at experiencing reading and writing as creative acts. According to Karakitsios (2012: 3-4), creative writing finds its roots in the ancient Greek course of rhetoric, where Aristotle provided guidance to his students on their written expression. Kotopoulos (2012) notes that the classical method of teaching writing, which involved imitating stylistic features in both literary and non-literary forms, prevailed until the mid-19th century, alongside practice in speaking and writing.

However, rhetoric gradually lost favor, particularly during the Romantic era, as literary expression was not yet clearly distinguished from other forms of discourse. The Renaissance, as noted by Williams (1965) and Kotopoulos (2012), witnessed a renewed appreciation for creative ability, leading to a redefinition of the concept. During the Enlightenment, creation became increasingly detached from its theological origins. According to Andrews (2009), a significant shift observed across different eras and artistic movements was the transition of inspiration from an external agent to an internal one.

At this juncture, aspiring creators are expected to be systematic readers, as the concept of creativity encompasses their apprenticeship in the works and texts of their contemporaries. A pivotal moment in the historical evolution of the term is the romantic cosmopolitan ideal of the 19th century, which delineated the divide between creativity in the arts, imbued with a mystical dimension, and creativity in utilitarian constructions of various forms and scales. Leahy (2005) highlights that from this juncture, the primary dilemma in the 20th century regarding the concept's meaning revolved around integrating creative thinking into other realms of life, such as the economy, beyond the arts (Karakitsios, 2012).

Myers (1996) asserts that the emergence of creative writing as a pedagogical trend in the modern Western world is intimately linked to social developments and the "progressive education" movement in American secondary education at the onset of the 20th century. This trend preceded expressions of skepticism toward the scholastic approach to literature in American universities. H. Mearns (1958; 1993) was the first to introduce the term "creative writing" as a novel teaching method aimed at enhancing creative expression.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the use of the adjective "creative" expanded into various contexts to identify qualities of individuals not solely related to art. In 1930, it was introduced as an independent academic subject at the University of Iowa, following the tenets of New Criticism. Creative writing courses burgeoned thereafter, maintaining Mearns' pedagogical principles. By the mid-1960s, these courses proliferated and began functioning as preparatory classes for aspiring writers, often inviting established writers as guest lecturers. Myers (2006) and Andrews (2009) note that creative writing gradually became detached from English literature programs in the Anglo-Saxon system. Instructors realized the need for redefining the academic discipline, shifting focus to cultivating creativity and critical thinking.

The 1970s witnessed a surge in interest in undergraduate creative writing programs, with renowned writers joining as faculty members and a notable rise in graduate programs. By the 1980s, creative writing had become a recognized academic subject within English and American studies. However, interest waned significantly in the 1990s, and even award-winning writers struggled to secure well-paid positions in the field. Radavich (1999) maintains that despite its status as a humanities discipline, it was widely believed that maintaining ties to English studies was crucial for ensuring students' academic and professional training. The increase in postgraduate programs in Britain, from 40 in 2000 to 90 in 2011, as cited by Kotopoulos (2014: 803), illustrates the sector's evolving dynamics (Kotopoulos, 2012: 6).

Regarding its inception in Greece, seminars primarily conducted by writers emerged in the late 1980s. According to Kotopoulos (2014), by 2013, there were 24 undergraduate and graduate courses embracing the principles of Creative Writing. The year 2008-2009 marked the establishment of Greece's first postgraduate program, initiated by writer and academic M. Souliotis, alongside the inception of International Creative Writing Conferences, showcasing the field's dynamics within the Greek academic sphere. In 2014-2015, the postgraduate program "Creative Writing and Editorial Production for Children: From School to Extracurricular Books" was approved at the Department of Preschool Education and Education of the University of Thessaloniki, later renamed "Creative Writing for Literature and Education" in 2016-2017. Finally, the academic year 2016-2017 saw the launch of the graduate program "Creative Writing" by the Hellenic Open University (EAP), implemented through distance learning in collaboration with the University of Western Macedonia's graduate program (Kotopoulos, 2014: 804-805).

Nevertheless, the question persists regarding the definition of "Creative Writing," as emphasized by Kotopoulos (2012), due to its ambiguous meanings, primarily stemming from its evaluative implications, given that all writing can be considered creative to some extent (Karakitsios, 2012: 1-2). According to Andrews (2009) and Kotopoulos (2014), these varied interpretations often lead to misunderstandings and objections regarding its academic legitimacy. Eisner (2002) notes that, for many, creative writing is synonymous with literary

production, while others view it as the ability to generate original written compositions, extending beyond literature to encompass various textual forms (Ramet, 2004).

A more satisfactory description of the concept is offered by those who perceive creative writing as an innovative educational process with clear pedagogical benefits, independent of direct reliance on literary theory and criticism. According to Dawson (2005) and Kotopoulos (2012), creative writing entails any written exercise deemed original, unconventional, self-reflective, and psychotherapeutic for the writer. Consequently, it has been recognized as a significant component of a new educational paradigm, leading to its definition as an autonomous field of study in higher education in many countries. Gradually, it has become integrated into the teaching methodology of language and literature or established as an independent subject within primary and secondary education curricula (Symeonaki, 2012). Recent developments in literary theory further bolster the argument of proponents, seamlessly linking creative writing with the appreciation of literary texts as aesthetic entities.

Building upon these theoretical and educational frameworks, we propose the integration of creative writing into the educational framework designed for conducting reading activities in modern Children's Libraries. We argue that creative writing plays a pivotal role in cultivating a more positive attitude towards literature and books. Aligned with reader-centric theories of literature, any engagement with a textual genre, whether through reading or writing, is considered a creative endeavor when undertaken voluntarily and for pleasure. Therefore, incorporating exercises in creative expression during the reading process, which center on the literary text itself and encourage the written expression of creative experiences to enrich the interpretive skills of group members, justifies educational practices that initially encountered skepticism within the academic community of literary studies (Andrews, 2009: 243).

Creative writing can be positioned within the realm of Philology as both an art of writing and a literary theory of reading. However, its influence extends across various disciplines, with Cultural Studies, Graphic Arts, and Library Studies increasingly exploring its impact on the reader-book relationship. Simultaneously, researchers in this field are embracing a wide array of interdisciplinary approaches and advocating for the scientific validity and autonomy of their discipline (Kotopoulos, 2014). In essence, the term is employed in two distinct but interconnected contexts today: firstly, pertaining to the development of an individual's capacity to generate and articulate creative thoughts effectively, and secondly, encompassing a set of educational practices aimed at nurturing linguistic skills with an emphasis on literary writing, thus effectively stimulating students' creativity (Souliotis, 1995).

4.0 THE PRODUCTION OF CREATIVE SPEECH AS A COGNITIVE PROCESS: CREATIVITY OF LANGUAGE AND CREATIVITY OF SUBJECTS

The aim of this paper is to explore a methodological framework for organizing reading communities in libraries. Every choice made in this pursuit involves, to some extent, a semantic redefinition. Beginning with the concept of "interpretive dialogue," it is viewed as a foundational aspect of a holistic and creative mediation of literary discourse. Consequently, it remains pertinent as an indicator for evaluating the process. This concept underscores the conditions necessary for the functionality of the act of reading, in terms of the participants' self-awareness regarding freedom of expression and the value they attribute to the interaction among themselves (Frydakis & Papageorgakis, 2022).

The present study seeks to establish a functional integration of theory and practical applications for the development of reading literacy, with a focus on implementation in Children's Libraries. It introduces the concept of "creative" or "literary" reading, as proposed by Kalogirou & Vissaraki (2005) and Kiosses (2018). Both terms describe processes aimed at fostering a dynamic, revisionist interaction among community members based on literary works. For the purposes of this study, they are considered equivalent, as they align with the mission of libraries as vibrant social spaces for cultural promotion. These terms are preferable, as they inherently encompass a broad range of cultural practices, including: a. showcasing various textual genres while recognizing the significance of the literary collections they curate. b. Acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings within literary texts, thereby fostering social interaction within library spaces. c. Promoting the recreational aspect of reading literary works. d. Supporting procedures that facilitate a more comprehensive utilization of all available resources during the interpretive process (Aabø, 2005: 205-211).

While the paper primarily focuses on young readers, it's essential to recognize that the creativity inherent in the act of reading knows no age limits or boundaries (Leahy, 2005: 412-414). According to Moje (1996), exposure to literature isn't solely tied to academic performance but also correlates with a more engaged approach to life, culture, and the cultivation of internal motivations that lead to new interpretations. Drawing from Leahy (2005), creativity in reading and the creative discourse, seen as an aesthetic, mental, and philosophical process, have been integral to human consciousness across civilizations (Moulla, 2012: 1-2).

To elucidate the distinct characteristics of these concepts, it's important to emphasize the reception of creation as a process and act grounded in deep cultural influences and conscious projections that shape the artistic endeavor (Pope, 2005: 132-133; Iser, 1991: 25). Considering that human consciousness evolves through dynamic dialectical interactions between individuals and socio-cultural structures, the notion of "creativity" encompasses not just the final product but also the generative idea (inspiration), the production phase, and the refinement of artistic expression (Deleuze, 1995: 136-137; Pope, 2005: 7-9).

Building on reader-centric theories, reading can be understood as a dialogic process wherein individuals project initial impressions and responses to a text, actively engaging with and deriving pleasure from the literary work (Nell, 1988: 6-9). These engagements lead to the affirmation or reassessment of initial responses, encouraging readers to delve deeper into the impact of the text, reconstructing it or using it as a catalyst for expressing their innermost thoughts and emotions (Allington, 1977: 57-61; Rosenblatt, 1978).

Creative writers, in essence, emerge from communities of readers (Tziovas, 2014). Drawing from Pope (2005) and Deleuze (1995), the term "creative" encapsulates a multifaceted process influenced by both external stimuli and internal psychic-mental structures. Examining the creative process thus reveals the interplay between creative and critical thinking, which forms a vital axis within reading communities. Such an approach strengthens mental pathways and language skills that contribute to the development of reading proficiency (Bruner, 1966).

Interdisciplinary research findings reveal that both cognitive processes presuppose and incorporate similar parameters and brain functions related to reflection and exploration of a domain of experiences. In such a manner, one process cannot be completed without the involvement of the other. Mezirow (2007) and Morley (2009) assert that every critical stance

or creative act necessitates re-examination, creative alternative approaches, free reconstruction of a situation, and rational analysis based on specific criteria. They also emphasize the importance of enlisting and requiring a multifocal view of an issue.

Creative expression, whether in the context of a dialogic approach to a literary work or through exercises in the production of creative writing, is equivalent in advance to a deepening and transformation of the structures that constitute ourselves (Galda, 1998: 1-11). Both critical attitude and creative expression, particularly creative speech, have a cultural reference and are influenced by the dominant structures of social reality. Therefore, both critical and creative thinking abilities are rooted in the environment that shapes the context of reflective functioning and offer opportunities to delve into the structures of reality (St. Brookfield in Mezirow, 2007: 168-170).

In this light, the various sciences and research fields that seek to approach the concepts of creativity and critical thinking continuously provide new dimensions to each term conceptually, as well as to the relationships between them. Modern interdisciplinary approaches reveal the complexity of the mental process undertaken by the creative reader in the sense of the conscious subject who seeks dialogue with the text and with other members of the reading group (Pope, 2005; Runko, 2007: 184). Moreover, new dimensions are added to the understanding of the term, particularly with the positions of Csikszentmihalyi (1996), who approaches creativity as "flow," and Bohm (1998), as "dialogue" and "participation." Through their interdisciplinary approach, they emphasize the importance of a series of cognitive processes. Eagleton (1990) argues that creative practice is an active element of consciousness, providing a challenging path to critique many preconceived structures that constrain it.

Scholars such as Scruton and Pope pioneered the approach to creativity as a dialectical process, pointing out that any originality requires tradition, if it is to become an artistic sensation (Pope, 2005: 22-25). This particular shift is extremely important because it highlights the subterranean interactions of creativity and imagination with the rest of the mental functions. All these findings reveal valuable aspects of penetrating or valuing dialectical reading as creative (Katsiki-Givalou, 2011: 22).

The creative process, concerning the linguistic code, becomes a symbolic activity involving the dynamic vitality of language. It transforms experiences while the aesthetic struggle aims to clarify new compositions (Williams, 1983: 83-84). R. Barthes (1977), following anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, refers to this type of creativity as "bricolage," reconstructing existing cultural elements in a way that generates meaning for users (Hawkes, 1977: 51-52). This reinterpretation, considering brain biology, encompasses critical processes in creative thinking and reintroduces neglected terms like "imagination" (Williams, 1983: 84).

Chomsky (1972: 100) suggests verbal creativity as a facet of mental creativity that defines human differentiation. Bakhtin (1977) builds on this idea, stating that language's creative power turns writing into a dialectical juxtaposition of cultural elements, reshaping the position of the "I" in the social present (Bohm, 1998). Creative discourse represents personal fulfillment, revealing renewed aspects of consciousness within situational constraints (Eisner, 2002: 19-21). Scholars like Runko (2007) have investigated creative processes to understand techniques aiding in the activation of creative information use (Runko, 2007: 117).

While defining critical skills isn't straightforward, it generally refers to a cognitive activity involving the reexamination of beliefs (Kamii, 1991: 382-388). Literature and arts enhance perceptual limits, fostering critical focus on reality and enhancing everyday performances (Eisner, 2002: 10-11). Through aesthetic contact, individuals gain new dimensions in life's critical view, strengthening observation and producing recognizable aesthetic experiences (Eisner, 2002: 10-11). In creative speech, cognitive processes allow text development within literary genre boundaries, utilizing unconscious images and feelings, resulting in dialectical synthesis (Runko, 2009: 32; Csikszentmihalyi in Pope, 2005: 8).

Cognitive psychologists view creative expression as a multilevel brain activity with parallel and retrospective processing (Pope, 2005: 115-116). Exploiting this dynamic in library environments facilitates dynamic educational methods, cultivating reading skills, and emphasizing the modern role of libraries (Papadatos, 2009: 232; Angelopoulou, 1994: 12).

5.0 EXAMPLES OF APPLYING CREATIVE WRITING IN CHILDREN'S LIBRARIES BASED ON THE CREATIVITY READINESS OF YOUNG READERS

As previously discussed, integrating a methodology that intertwines textual discourse with the participants' creative voices during collective literary readings can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the process in imparting holistic knowledge. It also allows for a functional exploitation of a variety of teaching techniques available to educators: writing activities, dramatization, listening exercises, utilization of technology, and more (Michailidis, 2018). According to Paschalidis (1999), the selection of appropriate techniques is contingent upon factors such as the text itself, the specific teaching objectives, and the preferences, interests, and abilities of the educational community's members.

Augmenting the reading of literary texts in the Children's Library setting with creative writing endeavors tends to enrich experiential learning (Rosenblatt, 1994: 45; Kotopoulos, 2013). This underscores how language serves as a conduit for expressing human thought through the lens of individual creativity. The dialectical relationship that underpins linguistic coherence can be harnessed didactically, contributing to the educational process as a vital tool for bridging the reading experience with social life (Frydaki, 2009: 346). Critical engagement with literary works encompasses a myriad of experiences, memories, and prior knowledge, guiding readers towards understanding the significance and value of the written word as both a cultural asset and a form of creative expression (Rosenblatt, 1978: 55-57).

Participation in creative exercises fosters the development of the necessary skills for each member of the reading community to derive aesthetic pleasure from the work. This recreational aspect can be linked to their involvement in unraveling the plot or their endeavor to interrogate the text regarding their own dilemmas and anxieties (Barthes, 1987). In this vein, libraries, as hubs for reading and social interaction, can contribute to the broader educational endeavor of cultivating a community of engaged readers. Engaging in collective reading activities can nurture positive reading attitudes among young readers (Sloan, 1991: 3-5).

Whether in formal education or lifelong learning contexts, creative writing techniques provide avenues for nurturing the creative faculties of young readers, allowing them to experiment with different textual elements in practice. Consequently, the use of creative writing fosters linguistic and cognitive flexibility among readers, safeguarding the learning process against

any remnants of past normative practices (Rosenblatt, 1978: 43-46; Kalogirou, 1999: 148). Generally, creativity, whether manifested in reading or writing, entails a process of invoking and actualizing internal and external interactions between the reader and literature that endure over time (Jauss, 1995: 55-56). Building upon Rosenblatt's (1978) perspective, the act of reading is a dynamic process wherein the reader reconstructs the meaning of the literary work, characterized by being active, self-ordering, and self-corrective.

Creative expression isn't confined to traditional problem-solving approaches; it stimulates various perspectives on problem-solving schemas. Consequently, contemporary educational research is increasingly focused on identifying methods to foster creative thinking, recognizing that creativity flourishes when individuals can explore diverse ways of perceiving situations. These expanded dimensions of creative thinking, closely intertwined with critical thinking, offer valuable insights into the role of literary engagement within reading communities fostered by libraries.

Scholars like Vygotsky (1978) advocated techniques to promote experimentation, social awareness, and personal responsibility for aesthetic outcomes. These methods involve critically evaluating genre traditions and norms while providing a framework for creativity to flourish. Within the library environment, reading groups adopt a laboratory-like dimension, nurturing a learning atmosphere conducive to both self-expression and disciplined exploration beyond literary conventions.

Cooperative learning and the cultivation of creative thinking complement personal expression, especially within an environment of mutual trust, shared interests, and open dialogue. Grammatical rules, playful linguistic experimentation, and interaction with verbal objects activate inherent creativity within language, enhancing critical skills. Engaging in creative activities within this environment allows individuals to reconstruct experiences and systematize information into coherent narratives, facilitating comprehension and retention.

The involvement of creative writing depends on the selected works, the creative readiness of the readership, and the resources provided by the library infrastructure. Creative activities can be integrated into various phases of literary mediation within educational processes, aligning with new educational programs to enhance collaboration between children's libraries, student communities, educators, and librarians.

The strategies for incorporating creative exercises can be tailored to different reader groups, promoting interaction and enhancing the overall educational experience. These efforts are in line with the objectives outlined in the Greek Study Programs, emphasizing the integration of libraries into educational settings to enrich learning outcomes (Government Gazette/5769/B'/2023).

The examples of activities listed by category are primarily based on creative writing exercises, suitable for a Children's Library environment, based on two projects: a. The poem by G. Ritsos "Peace" from the Agripnia collection (1941-1953) for the target population of readers-children, in the last grades of Primary and second. the teenage novel Paper Towns by J. Green [2008; 2015 (in Greek translation by H. Kapsalis)], for pre-adolescent and adolescent readers (High School). However, they are listed, where it is deemed necessary to provide a greater variety in

terms of activities, and exercises referring to other literary texts, suitable for the age audience to which Children's Libraries are addressed.

1st class. The initial category of creative activities pertains to those that concentrate on preparing the reading community. These activities entail creative interventions of limited scale, primarily revolving around verbal games such as homogenous words and hyperrealistic experiments (Michailidis & Oikonomopoulou, 2023 & Kalogirou, 2019: 203-206). They are suitable for employment during the initial phase (A phase) of embarking on an independent project or communal reading endeavor. However, they can also be integrated into various phases contingent upon the target audience.

These activities serve as a foundational level for activating creativity and are centered on exploring the creative potentials inherent in language itself. Common choices include word games involving altering or completing words or phrases, as well as changing verb tenses. Through such exercises, the reading community can delve into the effects that individual linguistic choices wield over the generation of meaning (Souliotis, 2012: 20-21, 101-103; Kiosses, 2018: 396-398).

Indicative:

Individual or group activities, suitable for all participants in a plenary session, intended for Phase A of reading.

- a. Task your group with substituting the underlined verbs in G. Ritsos's poem "Peace" with alternative choices, then share your revised version with the group. Reflect on the alterations made and discuss the shifts in emotions and ideas conveyed by the text.
- b. Collaborate with your group to fill in the blanks in the first three paragraphs of J. Green's novel "Paper Cities." Craft your personalized rendition of the text.

Creative activity more actively engaging the library (Phase B and C):

- c. Embark on a guided tour of the library premises with your group, accompanied by a librarian. Locate a collection of works by G. Ritsos and select your favorite titles. Compose an original poem by incorporating elements from the chosen texts. Embrace the diversity of meanings that may emerge, prioritizing self-expression.

2nd class. The second type encompasses activities centered on the creative reconstruction of individual narrative events. These activities are tailored to stimulate individual reading responses and serve as a springboard for creative expression. Such reenactments cultivate empathy and promote a problem-solving approach to reading by encouraging readers to devise original solutions to plot situations (Kiosses, 2018: 427-434; Vassiliou & Theodosakis, 2022). Concurrently, they illuminate the repercussions of any form of creative intervention on the storyline (Kalogirou, 2019: 67-68). Readers are tasked with partially transforming various scenes from literary texts, engaging in activities such as altering the narrator's perspective, sketching new scenes, or appending a stanza to a poem (Michailidis & Oikonomopoulou, 2023; Souliotis, 2012: 29-30, 134-135). The ensuing examples epitomize the second category, drawing inspiration from the selected poems.

Individual or group activities, shared among all participants:

- a. Collaborate with your group to craft a very short story (about 1-2 paragraphs) based on a stanza from the poem that aligns with its theme. Conclude the story with Richos's line, "Nothing else is peace." (Phase B of reading)
- b. Narrate, along with your group, a personalized rendition of Quentin's visit to one of the mock-towns or paper towns in Central Florida, as experienced through the perspective of one of his friends. (Phase B)

Consider Quentin's quest to locate Margo, but set it within the streets of your neighborhood or a specific area of your city. Adapt the narrative as necessary and explore with the group the alterations in the storyline prompted by this change in setting.

Creative activity involving the library more actively (Phase B):

- c. With the assistance of our esteemed librarian, locate Alexander Green's book *The Purple Sails* (2013) and peruse the passage bookmarked for you. Subsequently, narrate an adventure experienced by the protagonist during her imaginary journey.

Alternatively, compose a letter addressed to a close friend of the protagonist, to be sent from the ship she is aboard. Deposit your letters in the bottles displayed on the table. Then designate a team member to select a letter to share with the group.

3rd class. The third category comprises activities that aim for more extensive reconstructions within a flexible framework. These activities are typically employed during the B and C phases of the reading response model, particularly when endeavoring to expand the reading experience through creative writing. Readers are encouraged to explore writing new texts either based on or inspired by the original text under discussion (Goulis & Grosdos, 2011: 154-155, 225). Such tasks often entail composing narratives or theatrical adaptations involving creative alterations to the plot, characters, or timeline of the story (Bakhtin, 1995: 27). These activities are best suited for reading groups exhibiting high levels of creative readiness and heightened reading interests (Michailidis & Oikonomopoulou, 2023; Kalogirou, 2019). The following examples present diverse formulations and versions of activities falling within this category:

a. Group activity of the 3rd type, distinct by groups:

- Drawing inspiration from G. Ritsos's poem "Peace," envision a scenario where a child from Ukraine, having witnessed and endured the ravages of war, sends a postcard to relatives in another country. Tasked with conveying their feelings about the sufferings of war through verses, each group crafts a poignant message reflecting the child's experiences.
- Continuing with the theme of G. Ritsos's poem "Peace," imagine Irene assuming the persona of a contemporary girl. Each group formulates five questions they would ask her. Optionally, participants may enrich Irene's narrative by detailing her background, age, and purpose for being in the neighborhood.

b. Individual or group activity, common to all:

- Assuming the role of Margo or another character from the play, participants document their experiences, thoughts, and emotions upon returning home from school in a diary entry. Alternatively, envision yourself as Margo and compose a letter to your family, elucidating the motives behind your departure.

Creative activity more actively involving the library (Phase C):

- View the trailer of the movie *Paper Towns* (2015) based on J. Green's novel and directed by J. Schreier. Craft a narrative wherein you embark on a quest to locate a mysteriously vanished friend. Alternatively, compose a short poem inspired by the emotions evoked while reading the book.
- Explore the library with your group and select a book whose title and cover pertain to travel. Peruse its contents, drawing inspiration from the images and descriptions, then craft a short poem or story introducing a specific place, whether real or imagined. Other teams must discern the location from your depiction and are allowed up to three clarification questions.

Engaging in creative activities that integrate other arts, such as music and theater, is crucial as it can cultivate and reinforce intrinsic motivations for library visits and literary engagement (Malafantis, 2018: 19).

6.0 DISCUSSION

Indeed, it is evident that active reading and the production of creative speech, both oral and written, converge as cognitive processes and interact within educational methodologies (Kotopoulos, 2012: 4). These practices serve as valuable tools for achieving the fundamental objectives of the reading community by fostering the development of various intellectual faculties such as intellect, emotion, intuition, and memory. They not only facilitate a deeper understanding of literary works but also offer an opportunity to explore the space and collections of libraries.

Furthermore, they play a significant role in promoting cooperative learning, enriching discussions about literary works through diverse interpretations. With the expertise provided by modern library and information scientists, texts created by team members can be curated into anthologies and published digitally.

Interdisciplinary research on the interplay between creativity, language, and human consciousness, as it relates to cultural history, highlights the importance of utilizing creative writing within reading groups to enhance members' interest in reading (Leahy, 2005: 32). Creativity is now seen as a multifaceted dialogue between the individual and the social and cultural structures, a domain of inquiry for librarians, scholars, and literature teachers at all levels.

Engaging with artistic and scientific practices, which stem from creative thinking, facilitates reflective processes and symbolic reconstructions of the self's boundaries. Active participation in learning communities within libraries or with scholarly guidance fosters a creatively informed understanding of the rules, conventions, and histories of the arts and sciences (Bundy et al., 2006: 126-130).

These findings appear to be supported by the responses gathered from questionnaires with open-ended questions, completed by 18 Library Science students who participated in a reading group. The aim was to explore the role of creative writing in fostering a love of reading and in emphasizing the educational function of libraries. The reading group comprised undergraduate students and convened during the spring semester of 2019 on a voluntary basis, with 12 out of the 18 students concurrently enrolled in a course on New and Contemporary Literature.

Among the participants, 14 out of 18 acknowledged that creative writing effectively engaged them as readers. As one student expressed, "Creative writing trains you as a reader without learning being rote [...] but participation [...] play." Furthermore, 16 out of 19 respondents emphasized the crucial role of creative writing in underlining literature's significance in education and within library settings. A student articulated, "I believe [...] creative writing can really motivate students to love books [...] it insists on collaboration and changes how children view literature and reading."

Regarding the correlation between creative writing and libraries, 15 out of 18 students highlighted that techniques fostering language and critical thinking among participants underscored its importance in the endeavors of modern libraries, particularly those with an enhanced educational focus such as school and children's libraries. They noted that these techniques strengthened the connection between libraries and young audiences, further promoting their societal role within user communities. A typical student remarked, "Creative exercises can make a difference [...] in the efforts of young librarians to bring younger readers closer to the book and the library [...] we need training, so that we can also use these techniques [...]."

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

In summary, creative writing serves as an engaging and effective method to encourage children and teenagers to visit Children's Libraries. By creatively utilizing library collections, educational processes can transcend cultural, gender, and societal constraints in an enjoyable learning environment that fosters equal dialogue among participants (Kerslake & Kinnel, 1998: 159-167). According to Pope (2005), nurturing creativity reshapes individuals' relationship with themselves and instills positive attitudes toward culture, thereby increasing awareness of the value of libraries, literature, and cultural endeavors in general.

This contemporary understanding of creativity signifies a transformative approach to reality, bridging critical and creative thinking in literature. It underscores that effective critical thinking demands boldness and imagination, qualities traditionally associated with creative discourse (Howe, 1999). Consequently, the incorporation of creative writing in Children's Library environments:

- Highlights the aesthetic nature of literature and the joy of reading.
- Equips young readers with critical and creative information management skills.
- Introduces them to various literary formats, enhancing digital literacy.
- Provides opportunities for discussions on copyright issues and accessing diverse literary and non-literary content within society's information landscape.
- Raises awareness of academic ethics, including discussions on plagiarism and censorship that may emerge during the interpretation of literary works.
- Redefines users' perception of the library as a social space (Athukorala, 2020: 242-255; Brindezi, 2013: 396-402).

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