



Elementary Teachers' Views on the Creative Writing Process: An Evaluation

Nevin AKKAYA^a

Dokuz Eylül University

Abstract

The goal of this study is to discover and evaluate both the areas of personal interest and the views of 4th and 5th grade classroom teachers regarding the creative writing process. In this study, one of the qualitative study methods, state study, and related to this, single state design which refers to the whole has been chosen. Research was carried out in 18 primary schools in Izmir, Turkey whose students belong to the middle class socio-economically. The study was carried out with the involvement of 69 teachers who were interviewed throughout the study. A total of five questions were asked and personal questionnaires were given to them soliciting their opinions about the creative writing process. At the end of the study, a content analysis was applied to the data, related codes were put together, and certain themes were obtained. After having obtained the themes, they were discussed leading to the finding that, in general, teachers cannot be considered to have no interest in creative writing process. While most teachers expressed that creative writing is "the completion of an unfinished story," they also stated that creative writing has many advantages and almost no drawbacks.

Keywords

Creative Writing, Creative Writing Process, Classroom Teacher, The Role of the Teacher, Teachers' Views.

Creative writing, because of its ability to develop students' creativity and personalities, is a practice that teachers should emphasize. The necessity for creativity is sometimes linked to the rapid changes occurring in the world: "In our rapidly changing world, only a few skills other than creativity can be listed for the advancement of humans" (Ataman, 1993, p. 108). "The idea that creative writing would enhance psychological relief (catharsis, in a way) was popular during the 1950's and reflected in practices. It was based on the perception that the tension, imbalance, and spiritual depression as a result of the World War II on human psychology can be externalized through creative writing" (Temizkan, 2010, p. 632). Works composed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are accepted as the examples of creative writing (Bishop, 1994;

Myers, 1993). Due to its having made a tremendous impression, creative writing is taught to students at both the high school and undergraduate level through special programs in the US (Healey, 2009). Having emerged in the late 1980's, the process-based approach fits the nature of creative writing due to its inherent characteristics as; similar to creative writing, what matters under this approach is not the product, but the effort made to create it. Consequently, the role of teachers in the writing process has gained another dimension in that teachers should not stick only to one writing practice in assessing students' compositions, but should consider multiple works in the process. They should believe that any student who is cognitively and affectively developed can successfully acquire the ability to express his/her feelings and opinions

^a Nevin AKKAYA, Ph.D., is currently an assistant professor of Turkish Education Teaching. Her research interests include writing skills, reading skills, teaching education, and folklore. *Correspondence:* Dokuz Eylül University, Buca Faculty of Education, Department of Turkish Education Teaching, Izmir, Turkey. Email: nevin_akkaya@yahoo.com.tr

openly and effectively. In doing this, teachers should also help students to come to this same realization; that is, that they can express themselves effectively. Otherwise, written expression skills might be perceived as an innate talent rather than a skill that can be learned by anyone. Accordingly, unsuccessful experiences might act to hinder students' willingness to continue writing (Karatay, 2012).

Since it is possible to reach children's inner worlds through creative writing activities, it would be easier for them express their feelings and opinions anytime, anywhere, and to anyone freely, without any pressure or fear of being judged and criticized. Consequently, when teachers show sympathy toward their students, they will be able to guide them more effectively" (Temizkan, 2010, p. 629). In fact, since teachers supportive of students' differences encourages children's creativity (Öztürk, 2007, p. 45), those wanting to develop their students' creativity may use various methods and techniques in their classes to address the different learning styles and characters of each of their students. For instance, through the use of creative drama in written expression activities, students would be provided the opportunity to write more effectively and more creatively due to the free and creative nature of drama (Tutuman, 2011, p. 17). Furthermore, some studies have revealed that by using their imaginative world in the creative writing process, students were observed to gain the target outcomes and write with pleasure during their creative writing practices (Ataman, 2008). However, teachers hindering creativity discourage students, do not trust them, criticize them, are not be consistent in their behaviors, cause their students to lose motivation, hold a dogmatic and strict understanding of education, have limited areas of interest, do not have the skills for discussing and talking out of the class, and cannot interact with their students effectively (Chambers, 1973 as cited in Demirci, 2000).

According to Küçük (2007), since it focuses more heavily on comprehension and expression skills, the Turkish class is the most suitable class for revealing, evaluating, developing, and encouraging creativity. Students should not think about what they should write in the introduction, body, and conclusion; instead, they should be able to express their opinions freely, without any cognitive obstacle. After becoming aware that they can actually write and express their feelings, then they should start writing based on a certain plan (Ünalın, 2006).

Creative writing requires, to a certain extent, creative thinking, imagination, and subjective statements. If the writing is lean, based on truths, it may not be creative writing (Donovan, 2007). Creative writing includes being extraordinary without attacking commonly accepted values, offering different ideas by using one's imagination, being unique, writing for pleasure, and thinking beyond clichés (Küçük, 2007, p. 11). Although creative writing is unique to every individual, it should be parochial. Since creative writing requires one to be a good reader, students should be guided to read a wider range of topics other than their current interests (Winterson, 2012). Horng, Hong, and Chanlin (2005) offer two suggestions to aid students in their attempts to improve their creative teaching skills: (1) Creative teaching should start with creative teacher training, with pre-service teachers being equipped with creative teaching strategies and (2) with schools not only organizing creative teaching activities, but inviting professional's experiences in creative teaching to share creative teaching strategies. According to Oral (2002), "it is important and necessary for teachers aiming to conduct creative writing activities to try writing creatively on their own, teachers should support students' ways of using language creatively such as narrating, describing, observing, brainstorming, hypothetical conversations and unique sayings, care about differences, should not expect uniform writings, and should not guide them into certain clichés" (Maltepe, 2007, p. 153).

Students may want to make additions and changes while revising their writings, a desire which keeps them engaged in the process of writing (Medd, Hills, & Houtz, 2003). In addition, they feel less pressure of having to be taught and of being compared to traditional standards. On the other hand, they might realize the mystery of success within creative writing (Healey, 2009). Students are encouraged to think differently, produce unique works, and conduct practices that help to develop their problem-solving skills for issues that they have not encountered before (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Stojanova, 2010). Instead of criticizing why a certain idea is expressed, the focus should be on how it is expressed. In the creative writing process, teachers are not supposed to criticize the idea or the writer, and should instead make suggestions on how s/he can better express such ideas in writing (Yıldız, Okur, Arı, & Yılmaz, 2006). Teachers' skills of observation, communication, awareness, flexibility and extemporaneous, acting by considering situations and conditions provide an atmosphere in

which students can develop their creative abilities (İpşiroğlu, 2012). Furthermore, teachers should be competent in their abilities to conduct and develop creative writing. The studies conducted within the literature have mostly focused on the quality of creative writing, the role of process-based program on written expression skills (Çakır, 2003), developing written expression skills (Temizkan, 2010), the effect of attitudes on success (Akkaya, 2011), evaluating creative writing works, and in what ways teachers of Turkish apply creative writing activities in their classroom activities (Akkaya & Kırmızı Susar, 2012; Kırmızı Susar, 2011; Temizkan & Yaçinkaya, 2013). However, since the literature on measuring teachers' competency in conducting creative writing practices is quite limited and since the main role in applying these practices and evaluating them is of teachers, examining teachers' creative writing competencies is important.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to identify 4th and 5th grade teachers' views on, knowledge of, and experiences with the creative writing process with answers to the following research questions sought:

1. What do teachers know about the creative writing process in general?
2. How often do teachers use creative writing practices in their classes?
3. What do teachers know about the advantages or disadvantages of creative writing?
4. What do teachers know about creative writing techniques?
5. Do teachers participate in in-service training courses related to creative writing?

Method

In the study, due to its qualitative nature, a case study design was used (Ekiz, 2009).

Population and Sample

Being one of the various purposive sampling methods, the critical case sampling method was adopted for this study due to its use in qualitative research projects. Considering that "cases related to creative writing ... encountered at schools with medium socio-economic level can also exist in other schools," eighteen schools with medium socio-economic level in different parts of Izmir, Turkey

were selected for the sample group. Since the goal of this study was to identify whether 4th and 5th grade teachers within different schools have similar characteristics, supportive information (economic features of the neighborhood, parents' level of income, etc.) was obtained from the Provincial Directorate of National Education (İl Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı). A total of 69 teachers (female=42, male=27) participated in the study (Cemaloğlu, 2011; Çepni, 2001; Kuş, 2009).

Data Gathering Tool

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used to identify the sample teachers' knowledge about, experiences with, and views on the creative writing process. A total of 7 easy to understand, open-ended questions focusing on the creative writing process were developed. Accompanying this form was a demographic information form designed to obtain data on teachers' characteristics. Before implementing the above-mentioned forms, the questions were presented for expert analysis to a team composed of four university faculty members, three Turkish teachers, and three elementary school teachers. The forms were finalized based on the suggestions offered by the group of experts and were then used in the interviews conducted with the teachers. For the purposes of this study, only 5 questions were analyzed. The data were coded by the two researchers after which the reliability of the questions was calculated using the formula "Reliability=Agreement/Disagreement + Agreement x 100." The rate of agreement for the first question was 78.21%, the second question 68.32%, the third question 81.65%, the fourth question 75.52%, and the fifth question 62.66%.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The data of this study were obtained through a survey including open-ended questions asked in order to gather data related to the research questions. Furthermore, the survey also included closed-end questions used to gauge participants' characteristics. The survey was first distributed to the teachers and then gathered on a later date. The teachers expressed their suggestions and views in written form using the semi-structured interview form with the researcher encouraging the teachers to provide as much information as possible while responded to the form's questions. Furthermore, in an attempt to enhance the internal reliability and

validity of the findings, direct quotations from the teachers' statements were used with researchers attempting to uncover distinct meanings in the data. These meanings were then coded, which were brought together to form a list. The related codes were combined under certain themes (categories). To support the interpretation regarding the themes and codes, abbreviations related to the quotations and individuals' characteristics were included. These abbreviations are as follows: Male teachers (M), female teachers (F), 4th grade teachers (4. Grade T.), 5th grade teachers (5. Grade T.), order of the teachers (1, 2, 3, ...). For example: (F, 5. Grade T., 1); F: Female, 5. Grade T.: 5. Grade teacher, 1: The first teacher.

Findings and Interpretation

In this part, the data gathered by researchers were analyzed and interpreted while also aiming to answer the research questions. The first research question of the study was: "What do teachers know about the creative writing process in general?" With regard to this research question, researchers attempted to identify teachers' general knowledge related to the creative writing process by asking them what they knew about the creative writing process. Two different themes were identified after analyzing the code, "having knowledge;" these themes being: "teachers having knowledge of the techniques used in the creative writing process," and "taking in-service training related to creative writing." The theme "having knowledge of the techniques used in the creative writing process" contained the codes including Having Knowledge of the Creative Writing Process, the Frequency of Using Creative Writing Techniques, Comparing Creative Writing Techniques with Other Writing Methods, Teachers Knowing about Creative Writing Techniques. As for the theme "taking in-service training related to creative writing," it included the codes such as teachers taking in-service training related to creative writing and teachers not taking in-service training related to creative writing.

The findings revealed that teachers had general knowledge of creative writing. Based on these findings, it can be said that teachers have the necessary knowledge related to creative writing and that they attach importance to this process. With this being said however, fourteen teachers described the creative writing process as "completing stories which are not finished." Considering the number of such teachers, it shows that reasonable amount of teachers perceive creative writing as merely completing stories.

Regarding the second research question of the study, although there seems to be quite a high number of teachers stating that they include creative writing techniques in their classes, these teachers avoided stating clear descriptions as to which techniques they used.

As for the third research question, it was revealed that the teachers listed almost all the advantages of the creative writing process. In particular, they emphasized that creative writing "develops the imagination, helps uncover abilities, increases self-confidence, develops writing ability, encourages one to think and move beyond clichés etc."

With respect to the fourth research question of the study, the teachers had the most amount of knowledge about the following two techniques that may be used during creative writing: "completing a story that is not finished" and "composition, story, game, novel writing."

According to the fifth research question of the study, it was found that the number of teachers participating in creative writing practices is quite low.

Based on the findings, although most of teachers had not previously attended creative writing practices, they stated that they would like to. In general, it can be argued that the teachers possess a preliminary knowledge of creative writing techniques.

Result, Discussion, and Suggestions

Regarding the code "Having Knowledge of the Creative Writing Process," the teachers stated that for themselves, "it is a process that develops children's creativity, confidence, feelings, and opinions." The findings reveal that creative writing "develops students' imagination, creativity, thinking skills, their ability to express themselves freely, and their written expression skills while also helping them to realize a certain level of self-confidence." On the other hand, a number of teachers stated that the writing process "takes a lot of time and that it is perceived as difficult by those students lacking writing skills." According to İpşiroğlu (2012), since creative writing directly stimulates sensory perceptions, it leads to free thinking. When the teachers' views regarding the code "Teachers Knowing about Creative Writing Techniques" are examined, it is seen that teachers mostly conducted activities such as composition, story, novel writing, and completing stories. Of the 69 teachers participating the study, twenty

(20) stated that they knew nothing about these techniques. Therefore, since they do not have any knowledge of creative writing, they cannot allot time to such practices. These findings are consistent with Colantone, Cunnigham, and Dreznes, (1998 as cited in Öztürk, 2007). Examining the codes: “teachers taking in-service training related to creative writing” and “teachers not taking in-service training related to creative writing,” sixty (60) out of the total 69 teachers participating in the study stated that they had not previously taken part in such a course. Some of these teachers asserted that although they had not, they would like to attend in-service training seminars regarding this matter. This shows that creative writing should be attached more importance in schools. These findings are consistent with Newton and Newton (2009), and Diakidoy and Kanari (1999).

The following suggestions can be offered based on the findings of the study:

1. Teachers should be exposed to a qualified in-service training process with regard to creative writing techniques.
2. Teachers should be informed about the contributions of creative writing to students' development.
3. Teachers should be encouraged to write creatively.
4. Teachers' misconceptions regarding the creative writing process should be taken into consideration.
5. Teachers' willingness to use creative writing practices in their courses should be turned into acts of developing students' writing skills in in-service trainings.
6. Teachers should be made aware that creative writing practices are not only used in Turkish classes, but also in other classes.
7. Teachers should be made aware of the fact that although creative writing takes a lot of time, it is worth it considering the learning outcomes.
8. Creative writing can be perceived as a game or enjoyment by the students. However, it is very effective in making them love writing practices and having successful written works at the end. Teachers should be made aware of the importance and necessity of creative writing.

References/Kaynakça

- Akkaya, N. (2011). İlköğretim 6. sınıf Türkçe dersinde yaratıcı yazma yaklaşımının Türkçe dersine yönelik tutuma etkisi. *Buca Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 30, 311-319.
- Akkaya, N. ve Kırmızı Susar, F. (2012). Sınıf öğretmenlerinin yaratıcı yazma ürünlerini değerlendirme çalışmalarına ilişkin görüşleri. *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 14(2), 171-187.
- Ataman, A. (1993). *Eğitim sürecinde yaratıcılık. yaratıcılık ve eğitim*. Ankara: TED Yayınları.
- Ataman, M. (2008). *Yaratıcı drama ve yaratıcı yazma*. <http://www.yaraticidrama.org/convent/view> adresinden 08.03.2012 tarihinde edinilmiştir.
- Bishop, W. (1994). *Crossing the lines: On creative composition and composing creative writing. Colors of a different horse: Rethinking creative writing theory and pedagogy*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Cemaloğlu, N. (2011). Veri toplama teknikleri: Nitel-nicel. A. Tanrıoğen (Ed.), *Bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri içinde* (s.133-164). Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.
- Çakır, Ö. (2003). Yazma öğretiminde süreç yaklaşımına dayalı programın yazılı anlatım becerisini geliştirmedeki rolü: Mersin Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi örneği. *TÖMER Dil Dergisi*, 122, 31-51.
- Çepni, S. (2001). *Araştırma ve proje çalışmalarına giriş*. Trabzon: Erol Ofset.
- Demirci, C. (2000). Yaratıcı düşünce. *Dil Dergisi*, 88, 4-9.
- Diakidoy, I. A. N., & Kanari, E. (1999). Student teachers' beliefs about creativity. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(2), 225-243.
- Donovan, M. (2007). *What is creative writing?* Retrieved from <http://www.writingforward.com/creative-writing/what-is-creative-writing-2>.
- Ekiz, D. (2009). *Bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.
- Healey, S. P. (2009). *The rise of creative writing and the new value of creativity* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Minnesota). Retrieved from http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/54437/1/Healey_umn_0130E_10355.pdf
- Hornig, J. S., Hong, J. C., & Chanlin, L. J. (2005). Creative teachers and creative teaching strategies. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 29(4), 352-358.
- İpşiroğlu, Z. (2012). *Yaratıcı yazmanın önemi ve yaratıcı yazma dizisi üzerine*. <http://zehraipiroglu.com/tuerkce/eneme-ve-elestiri-itapları/yaratici-yazma-2> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Karatay, H. (2012). *Yaratıcı yazı ve uygulamaları*. <http://www.yaratici-yazma-ve-uygulamaları.com> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Kırmızı Susar, F. (2011). Yaratıcı yazma ürünlerinin bazı ölçütler açısından değerlendirilmesine ilişkin nitel bir çalışma. *Dil Dergisi*, 151, 21-35.
- Kuş, E. (2009). *Nitel-nitel araştırma teknikleri*. Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.
- Küçük, S. (2007). *Yazılı anlatım ve yaratıcılık*. Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- Maltepe, S. (2007). Yaratıcı yazma yaklaşımı açısından Türkçe derslerinde oluşturulan yazılı anlatım ürünlerinin değerlendirilmesi. *EJER*, 26, 143-154.
- Medd, E., Hills, B., & Houtz, J. C. (2003). The effect of facilitated incubation on fourth graders' creative writing. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 26(2), 13-16.
- Myers, D. G. (1993). The rise of creative writing. *Journal of Ideas*, 54(2), 277-297.
- Newton, D. P., & Newton, L. D. (2009). Some student teachers' conceptions of creativity in school science. *Research in Science Technological Education*, 27(1), 45-60.
- Oral, G. (2002). *Yine yazı yazıyoruz*. Ankara: Pegem Yayıncılık.
- Öztürk, E. (2007). İlköğretim beşinci sınıf öğrencilerinin yaratıcı yazma becerilerinin değerlendirilmesi (Doktora tezi, Gazi Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Ankara). <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Stojanova, B. (2010). Development of creativity as a basic task of the modern educational system. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 3395-3400.
- Temizkan, M. (2010). Türkçe öğretiminde yaratıcı yazma becerilerinin geliştirilmesi. *TÜBAR*, 27, 621-643.
- Temizkan, M. ve Yalçınkaya, M. (2013). İlköğretim 6. 7. 8. sınıf Türkçe öğretmenlerinin yaratıcı yazma etkilerini uygulama durumları. *Dicle Üniversitesi Ziya Gökalp Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 20, 70-91
- Tutuman, O. Y. (2011). *Türkçe öğretmenlerinin uygulama yeterlilikleri* (Yüksek lisans tezi, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü, İzmir). <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Ünalın, Ş. (2006). *Türkçe öğretimi*. İstanbul: Nobel Yayınları.
- Winterson, J. (2012). *Teaching creative writing*. Retrieved from www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/may/18/jeanette-winterson-teaching-creative-writing.
- Yıldız, C., Okur, A., Arı, G. ve Yılmaz, Y. (2006). *Yeni Öğretim programına göre kuramdan uygulamaya Türkçe öğretimi*. Ankara: Pegem A yayıncılık.