Literacy and Literature: Developing Narrative Creative Skills through Creative Writing

Evangelia Aravani
Hellenic Open University, 4 George Kanigos, GR- 10677 Athens, Greece

Stavroula Themeli
Primary School Teacher
M.A. Teaching Greek to Speakers of Other Languages, University of Cyprus

Abstract

In the narrative theory Freytag, summing up the Aristotelian theory of typical plot, speaks of a pyramid with these elements: *Exposition, Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, the Crisis, the Falling Action, the Resolution and the End.* According to this theoretical frame we present *"the Narrators"*. The purpose of this research was to embrace narrative skills applying the Freytag's pyramid in the narrative texts. Twenty-four children, aged 8-9 years old, were asked to read 6 texts from their school text book and 1 book and at first to identify these basic structural elements of the plot and secondly to write their own stories, emphasizing the climax of the action in the academic year 2018-2019 at a Greek primary public school in Athens. The significance of this research based on two facts: it is compatible with the philosophy that governs the New Curriculum for the lesson of Literature and secondly the need to describe the dual meaning of the Creative writing as it implies the ability to control and master creative thoughts, converting them into writing, but incorporates, in its broad meaning, and all the various educational practices and techniques aimed at in the acquisition of literary skills. The results from the observation showed that children, to varying degrees, learned to recognize the structure of the text and with critical and creative thinking improved their own writing, giving focus on interesting climaxes of their stories.

Keywords: literacy, creative writing, narrative skills, literature, teaching

1. Creativity: Creative thinking and Creative writing

When it comes to atoms, language can be used only as in poetry. The poet, too, is not nearly so concerned with describing facts as with creating images.
Niels Bohr

Creativity has three modes of existence or ways of being in the world: the Visceral (embodiments), the Ideational (mind and conceptual), and the Observational (appreciation, critical, and evaluative) (Creely, Henriksen & Henderson, 2020). It is one of the three basic aspects of Sternberg's theory of successful intelligence (Sternberg, 2002: 18-20). Daskolia, Dimos, and Kampylis (2012: 270) stated that "creativity, as this theoretical approach is called, is viewed as a multi-component process, involving not only cognitive aspects and abilities but also affective, motivational, and personal characteristics mediated through social and cultural interactions". Also, in an attempt to define creativity, Piirto (2004) found that the root of the words "create" and "creativity" comes from the Latin creâtus and creâre, meaning "to make or produce". With regard to creativity, researchers agree that it refers to the generation of ideas or products that are original, valuable or useful (Runco, 2007). However, creativity extends beyond the intellectual domain. Recent personality theories usually include a prominent creativity component. The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) recognized four characteristics of creative processes: imaginative behavior, purposeful activity, originality, and utility. They define creativity as (1999: 30) "imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value". In the same vein, Torrance (1966) believed that creativity has the following constituents: (1) creative fluency, the ability to produce a large number of ideas; (2) flexibility, the ability to produce a large variety of ideas; (3) originality, the ability to produce unusual, unique ideas or ideas which are statistically infrequent and (4) elaboration, the ability to develop or embellish ideas and to produce many details.

In the educational domain, creativity teaching includes the development of a combination of abilities, skills, attitudes, motivation, knowledge, and other attributes (Starko, 2010; Sternberg, 2003). Developing critical and creative skills and nurturing citizens with creativity and innovative capacity are becoming worldwide because of the knowledge-based economy today and increasing global concern with 21st-century thinking skills (Li, 2010). According to Hadzigeorgiou, Fokialis, and Kabouropoulou (2012), creative thinking skills are the foundation of science and are very important for students (Baker & Rudd, 2001). Several research results show that the development of creative skills has a positive correlation with cognitive learning results (Lin and Wu, 2016; Nami,

Marsooli, and Ashouri, 2014; Vasudevan, 2013; Yusnaeni, Susilo, Corebima & Zubaidah, 2016).

Creative thinking skills can be increased through the implementation of the inquiry learning strategy (Seyihoğlu and Kartal, 2010; Keleş, 2012; Weinstein, 2014), and can also be improved through training (Zubaidah, Fuad, Mahanal & Suarsini, 2017) and creative writing. Because as Morley says (2007: 3-4):

"writing can change people, for writing creates new worlds and possible universes, parallel to an actual. At best, creative writing offers examples of life, nothing less. To some, writing remains an artifice, a game even, and it is – as most things are, as all of us are – something made or played upon. However, when nurture builds carefully on nature, then life is not only made well, it can be shaped well and given form. Writing is so absorbing and involving that it can make you feel more alive –concentrated yet euphoric. The process focuses at the same time as it distracts; the routine of its absorptions is addictive. It can also recreate in you something you may have lost without noticing or glimpse when you are reading a rewarding book: your sense for wonder. Certainly, the process of writing is often more rewarding than the outcome, although, when you capture something luminous, that sense of discovery and wonder swims through the words and leaps in the page. There is a pleasure in precision; in solving and resolving the riddles of your syntax and voice; and in the choices of what to lose and what to allow."

According to Barnet, Borto & Cain (1997: 17) "writing is not just a way of expressing pleasure, but it is also a way of learning and teaching others". They added: "writing skill is one of the essential language skills required for both academic and professional performance". Creative writing is more than just a passion; it is a craft for practicing and individual writing awareness. So following effective writing processes, they all play decisive roles in producing written texts (Larkin, 2009). Teaching creative writing is to encourage the students to write by drawing upon their imaginations (Barbot, Tan, Randi, Donato & Grigorenko, 2012). The goal of creative writing is not just to assist and enable learning; it is also to provide alternative ways of expressing and demonstrating teaching (Everett, 2005). Vass (2007) also believes that writing as creative design builds on creativity. He studied the role of emotions in children's creative writing and indicated the centrality of emotions in creative writing and the role of emotion-driven thinking in phases of shared engagement. Also, Rojas-Drummond, Albarrán and Littleton (2008) studied how primary school children learn to collaborate and collaborate to learn on creative writing projects by using diverse cultural artifacts including orality, literacy and ICT. In addition, Naidoo (2011:11) explored the development of creative writing skills among Indigenous Australian youth and concluded that creative writing not only facilitated social and literacy skills, but also provided a vital medium to explore personal and community issues. In fact, creative writing became "a powerful tool to open up communication and allow change to be initiated". In another study, Chen & Zhou (2010) explored ways of improving the creative writing strategies of young Chinese writers by using the graphical representations to stimulate and help the development of writing skills. They found that when Chinese children faced those Chinese characters they were not able to write, they used creative writing skills to communicate. Also, Taylor, Kaufman and Barbo (2020) showed in their study that story length and time-on-task were moderately correlated with the external criterion measures of creativity.

As Morley says (2007: 5) "all people have a book inside them, and anyone has dreams, ideas, hopes, and fears, as well as a certain amount of imagination". What most people lack, however, are skills and knowledge of how to turn ideas into a story that others want to read; writers are born to put words on paper and show the life of the language (Gaffield, 1998). "The power to be creative", as stated by Thomas (2014: 21), "is within each one, but the challenge is to open up ourselves to it". He adds that "there are many keys to keep in your mind to write creatively: curiosity, passion, determination, awareness, energy, sensitivity, a listening ear and an observant eye". An advantage of creative writing is that it has various healing powers and can reduce depression and rumination, improve self-image, and organize thoughts, emotions and behavior (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009). Creative writing "is best described as a process" that involves "not just a recording of ideas" but rather "a way of interacting with ideas" (Runco, 2009: 184, 188). For Cathy Day (2017: 166), creative writing in educational settings allows for "a thinking process involving student-centered questioning and inquiry," where ideas from research and students' own lived experience of the world can inform one another. Creative writing activities help students reveal their creativity to write and produce, and give students chances to explore and understand the value of writing (Tok & Kandemir, 2015; Freiman, 2007). They offer them opportunities to practice thinking, freedom of expression, design, creating a product, developing empathy, improving imagination, exploring different aspects of their lives and choosing writing topics and methods for themselves (Dai, 2010: 547-550). That's why, finally, creative writing is a form of expressing oneself in a unique way (Abraham, 2015).

2.   The Freytag's Pyramid as a creative narrative tool

One of the areas in which it seems creativity is a relevant topic is the narrative genre. As Johnstone (2008) states, the concept of narrative has become a significant part of the repertoire of social sciences since the mid-1950s and has been one of the major areas of research within linguistics. Various areas of narrative - from its formal structure to its use in the presentation of the self - have been explored by researchers (Ozyıldırım, 2009). A

narrative, by definition, refers to the recitation of a fictional or real account of an event or an experience sequentially (Justice, Bowles, Pence, & Gosse, 2010). Although the qualities of creative people might be advantageous in any language task, it seems that narrative tasks, which obviously rely on learners' imagination, might intensify the effect of creativity on language performance (Pishghadam & Mehr, 2011: 115). Therefore, although the imaginativeness or creativity of the stories cannot be measured directly, it is believed that narrative tasks and especially narrative structure would be best fitted for doing exploratory research on the relevance of creativity and output (Albert & Kormos, 2004), as applied to something that is fictional to determine the direction of the plot of a story, such as story books, novels, films, and animations (Kumaat & Zulkarnain, 2021).

In this framework Freytag's pyramid is a narrative structure that was initially identified in successful theatrical tragedies (Freytag, 1863). It has since been widely applied to all narrative forms, and found to characterize most successful fiction (Stern, 2000) as a tool to shape the narrative structures of their works. "It is the most common visualization currently used for teaching plot" (Dobson, Michura, Ruecker, Brown & Rodriguez, 2011: 170). Freytag argued that exposition, or the building of the story's scene, laid the groundwork for a narrative's structure. As a story moves forward, action between characters increases and, ultimately, peaks at the top of the narrative arc: the story's climax. Subsequently, a decline in conflict prompts characters to transition toward denouement or resolution. Freytag described these narrative elements as something akin to specific events within a story - relatively discrete destinations that appear at fixed points in a narrative (Freytag & MacEwan, 1960).

So, the premise of Freytag's analysis is that stories can be divided into five acts: *exposition,* in which the setting, protagonist and primary complication are introduced; *rising action*, in which the primary complication is confounded by secondary complications; *climax,* which marks a turning point in the story, and makes clear the path ahead; *falling action*, in which the primary complication is resolved; and *conclusion,* which restores a state of normality. The drama rises from the exposition to the climax and then falls again to the conclusion. Freytag's analysis also defines three important dramatic moments: *the inciting moment* occurs at the end of the exposition, and provides a motive force for the remainder of the story; the moment of reversal is the culmination of the *climax,* which marks a change in the dramatic momentum of the story; finally, *the falling action* concludes with the moment of final suspense, in which the outcome of the story is in doubt (see Figure 1). Freytag notes that while the inciting moment is necessary, the others are good but not indispensable accessories. We have to notice that Freytag was based on the Aristotelian theory of typical plot. "Aristotle tells his class what to seek and what to shun in the composition of poetic dramas; the outcome at which such dramas aim; how the achievement of that aim governs the form of the drama; by what means that aim is realized and by what defects a dramatist may fail to realize it. However, Aristotle's work goes further, for it has a moral aim, and creative writing teaching inherits this aim to some extent" (Morley, 2007: 16).
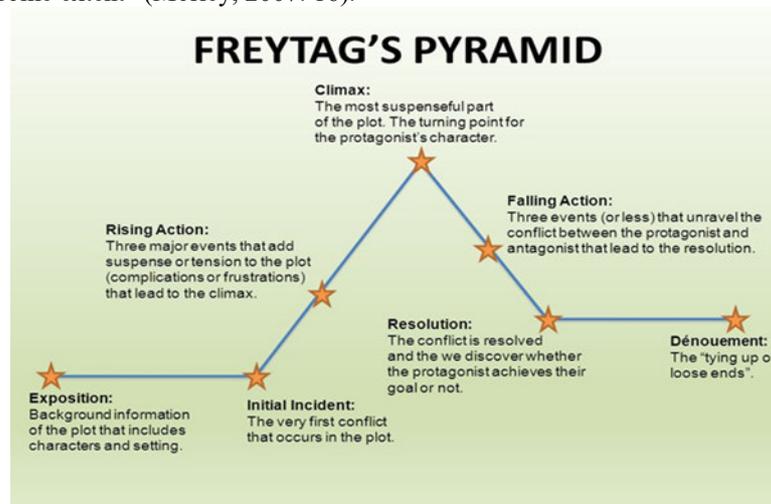

Figure 1

Research has shown that narrative is one type of discourse with the classification of oral and written language. Spoken discourse analysis, which is concerned with speech, is studied more extensively than written discourse analysis (Stubbs, 1997; van Dijk, 1997; Atkinson, 1991). Similarly, as indicated by Johnstone (2008), most studies on narratives concentrate on the investigation of narrative structures in oral language. In a study Ozyıldırım (2009) investigated the narrative structures in the oral language in comparison with the written version. He concluded that the structure of personal experience narratives is a specific genre. Narrative tasks are well-established and frequently researched task types (Foster& Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1999; Robinson, 1995). They usually involve the creation of a story in response to some kind of stimulus: a picture strip or a short

film. So, this task type seems ideal as far as the manifestation of creativity is concerned. Sharples (1999) illustrated that it is comparable to creative design rather than problem solving, which is without settled stages, specific results or a defined goal, because writing is an open-ended design process.

Freytag's pyramid can help writers organize their thoughts and ideas when describing the main problem of the drama, the rising action, the climax and the falling action. This narrative structure method can also be used to analyze scientific and nonfiction books, or design motion graphics (Kumaat & Zulkarnain, 2021). As Harun, Razak, Nasir & Ali noticed (2013: 2) "it offers a technique which allows researchers to visually analyze a narrative and to recognize the drama or tragedy that occurs in the plot". In their research, they construct a Freytag's pyramid diagram to establish an understanding of the narrative structure in Filem Negara Malaysia's first animated cartoon called *Hikayat Sang Kancil* (1978) (HSK). The outcome of this approach produces a symmetrical pyramid diagram. With this result, the researchers conclude that the dramatic elements and narrative structure of HSK not only accentuate the visual storytelling but also suggest that the animation is slow-paced and lengthy. So, they argue - in regards to the Freytag's structure - that these factors to some extent may affect the mood and interest of the audiences. In addition, Boyd, Blackburn & Pennebaker (2020), based on Freytag's pyramid, across ~40,000 traditional narratives, found that all of them had stage setting, plot progression, patterns of unfolding across genres, authorship attributes and story lengths. Moreover, each narrative dimension unfolded in theoretically consistent ways: staging tends to occur at its highest at the beginning of a story, followed by a rise in plot progression, paired with a rise and fall in cognitive tension around the middle-to-late parts of a story. So, Freytag's analysis of a structure can be applied (sometimes in a modified manner) to short stories and novels as well, making dramatic structure a literary element (Aravani & Blioumi, 2018). Good stories inspire us, transform us, take us to another world. A storyteller might answer that the dramatic structure of the narrative is what makes a good story (Rolfe, Jones, Wallace, 2010: 448).

The increasing studies in the field of creativity show its centrality to learning and the many different ways in which this key concept can be investigated. But, unfortunately, creative writing skills development is the exception rather than the rule in teacher education programs (Anae, 2014: 125), generally, despite the evidence that shows that supporting creativity in beginning teacher programs supports creativity in the school curriculum (MacLusky, 2011), and despite the evidence advocating creative writing's potential to liberate creativity and present a powerful stimulus for self-expression (Appleman, 2011) and understanding the 'self' (Thaxton, 2014). Accordingly, creative writing activities are more effective than traditional writing education without improving story writing skills (Babayigit, 2019: 215).

3. Method

3.1. General goal and particular teaching aims

Based on previous findings on the development of creative narrative skills, as well as the theoretical perspectives of the creative writing and the narrative structure of Freytag's pyramid, the researcher designed the program "the Narrators" and the class teacher implemented it in the academic year 2018-2019 at a Greek primary public school in Athens.

The general goal of this study was to embrace narrative creative skills by applying the Freytag's pyramid in the narrative texts.

The objectives of the study were for the children to:

- ✓ identify the seven basic structural elements of the plot according to Freytag's narrative pyramid (exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, the falling action, the resolution and the end) in some texts
- ✓ write their own stories based on Freytag's narrative pyramid, developing their creative thinking skills in the frame of creative writing

3.2. Participants

As this research is a case study, the findings are inevitably specific to the particular time and place (Yin, 2003) and are not generalizable to all classes. The sample consisted of twenty-four children (14 girls and 10 boys), aged 8 years old, attending the fourth grade of a public primary school in Athens. According to the teacher of the class, all children had a typical development and no learning difficulties generally, apart from two children. They were all Greek native speakers from middle- class families. Also, they had not been previously taught the elements of narrative stories at school, in a systematic manner.

3.3. Instruments

The data collection instruments included: (1) content analysis as a research tool, (2) observation checklist, (3) observation diary, (4) post-course interviews with the children and the teacher.

Content analysis
Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts (Berelson, 1971; Krippendorf, 1980). The researcher used this method in the second and third phase of the program in order to identify the basic elements of the pyramid's structure in texts written by their own children. Then, she quantified and analyzed the meanings and relationships of the words and concepts in the children's texts and made inferences about the messages within their texts, according to Freytag's pyramid. More specifically, we used the directed content analysis approach, as we started with the Narrative theory of Freytag as guidance for initial codes and results (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278).

Observation checklist
Observation checklist was a Likert scale based on the Observation Guide for Reading and Readers (Serafini, 2010) and was completed by the researcher while observing the two-hour teaching sessions three times a week during the program. It consisted of the following five levels: completely satisfied, very satisfied, fairly well satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied and very dissatisfied, and was divided into seven categories: a) exposition, b) inciting incident, c) rising action, d) climax, e) falling action, f) resolution, g) end. These were based on the objectives of the research and the perspectives of the Narrative theory of Freytag.

Observation diary
Along with the observation checklist, the researcher used a diary to keep track of additional information on children's behavior and reactions as well as the teacher's course of action. Throughout the program (Oct 2018-May 2019) the researcher discussed the course of action with the teacher at the end of each session and wrote the conclusions in the diary. Using the narrative form of observation, the researcher recorded the way children communicated, both verbally and non-verbally, with each other and with the teacher, their actions, their difficulties and generally their behavior while they read the texts trying to identify the elements of the plot or while they wrote their stories, filling the plot, creating a new plot, discussing these efforts in the group and correcting them.

Post-course interviews with the children
On the last day of the program the researcher conducted informal interviews with the children, which were then audio-taped and transcribed. Our objective was to investigate the children's viewpoint on the narrative lessons and discuss with them in a more relaxed way. Therefore, the interviews confirmed what was already known and provided not just answers but also the reasons for the answers (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The interview guide used was semi-structured and included the following questions on the children's difficulties about story structure, attitudes towards literature and their preferences about reading short stories:
1. Did you enjoy this story-structure program and why?
2. Would you like to have the same program next year? Why?
3. Which short stories did you like the most? Why?
4. What did you learn from the Freytag's pyramid?
5. What were the difficulties in a narrative story?

Post-course interviews with the class teacher
Finally, the researcher conducted informal interviews with the class teacher, which were then audio-taped and transcribed. The interview guide used was semi-structured and the questions focused on the teacher's perceptions towards narrative theories, the difficulties of teaching the plot and the narrative structure of a story, and her thoughts on the children's progress:
1. What was your relationship with the narrative stories before participating in this program? Has this changed and how?
2. Did you find it difficult to teach narrative texts? If yes, in what way and why?
3. Did you notice any change in children's behavior and skills during the program? How so?
4. Did you find it difficult to teach Freytag's pyramid? What was your opinion about this tool? Did you find it useful in developing narrative skills?

4.The "Narrators"
4.1. Intervention: The description of the Narrative Program
The program ran from October 2018 to May 2019. The researcher selected the stories in cooperation with the teacher in order to teach the basic elements of the pyramid and story structure based on the following criteria:
1. the stories have structure with all the elements of the Freytag's pyramid
2. the stories are included in the school text books of Language and Literature
The narrative stories selected were: E. Trivizas "The Machine", Aisopos "The lion and the mosquito", a fairytale

"The sweetest bread", R. Kipling "How the whale got his throat", Ch. Boulotis "The statue that was cold" and E. Trivizas "The last black cat". The last one was a book.
The program included three phases:

Phase A: Recognizing the 7 stages (Oct 2018-Dec 2018)
While teaching this pyramid to kids, we first aim to make them recognize these stages. In the beginning of the lesson, the teacher presented the pyramid to the kids and discussed with them about it. The form of the pyramid was adapted to the children age as follows (see Figure 2):
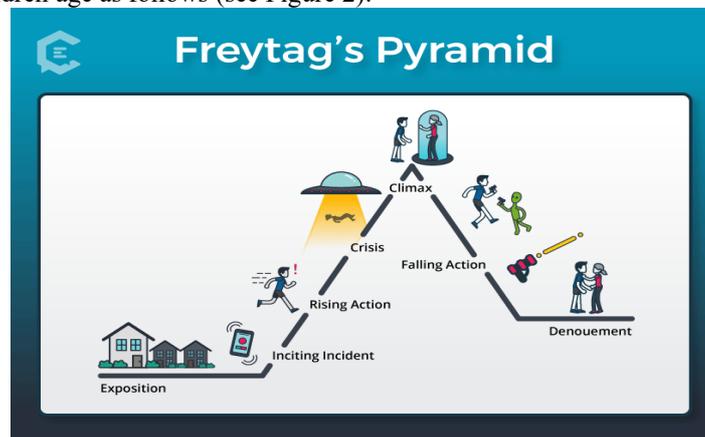
Figure 2

Based on their thoughts, preferences and previous knowledge, she encouraged them to think of a story they have read in some book, or a movie they saw and try to isolate some parts of the story that they think fit with these stages (e.g. "which part do you think was the climax?"). After that, they thought of a story they had all read some weeks ago, in order to have some common ground to work on. She asked children to think which stage of the pyramid corresponded to the different parts of that story. So they started to get familiar with the subject. The second step was the kids to practice recognizing the stages in specific different stories. For this, we used different texts. Firstly, they read all together the story "The Machine" by E. Trivizas, a famous Greek story teller, and filled out a table with the structure of the story on a paper sheet. The table had 7 different questions and each one of them referred to a different stage of the pyramid. We figured out that this way made it easier for the students to track what they were looking for, instead of using the exact Freytag's terminology.
The questions were:
➢ What is the setting of the story (where, when, who)? **(exposition)**
➢ What incident starts the action? **(inciting incident)**
➢ How does the action evolve (what happens next)? **(rising action)**
➢ Which part is the climax of the action? **(climax)**
➢ How does the action continue after the climax? **(falling action)**
➢ How was it resolved? **(resolution)**
➢ How does the story end? **(end)**
The third step called upon the students to try and figure out the stages on their own. So, we gave them a story titled "The lion and the mosquito" (Aisopos) and a fairytale titled "The sweetest bread". We chose these stories because they have a clear structure, a simple language and an interesting plot based on the student's interests. We let them read it and fill out the same table with the same questions. When everybody was done, they checked the answers and discussed the different opinions or the difficulties the students had. The teacher noticed that there was a little confusion between the rising action and the climax, while the most difficult part for them was to separate the falling action, the resolution and the end. So, they worked on these stages with other stories. One of them was another fairytale named "The sweetest bread", on which students had to work alone. This time, the teacher checked the answers herself and gave them feedback the next day in class. She was pleased to see that most of them had found the stages of the structure correctly. There were still some different opinions though and some of the students couldn't find all the stages very clearly.

Phase B: Filling in the story (Jan 2019- March 2019)
After the students had gotten used to the pyramid, it was time for them to be the narrators and create some parts of a story. For this purpose they read the story "How the whale got his throat" from R. Kipling and filled out the same table with the structure of the text. Then, the students had to change the plot after the Initial Incident, trying to keep the structure they had learned. The kids wrote different ideas that, in various degrees, followed this main structure. They read the stories in class and the kids made comments on each other's work. The teacher was

surprised to see that some students, who weren't so good at writing, gave very good answers.

Phase C: Creating a story (April 2019- May 2019)
In the third phase of the program, they worked on a story called "The statue that was cold" by Ch. Boulotis, another famous Greek storyteller. This time, the students had to continue the plot from the point that the text on their book ended, starting with the word "Suddenly". This way, we aimed to make them create also an initial incident that would start the action of their own story. The results were good, as the plot of their stories started to get more interesting. We noticed that the students started thinking about the rising action and climax as different stages and, therefore, the length of their texts had now increased. Additionally, a lot of students thought of putting a separated end. At the same time, we realized that some stories, while following the structure, didn't have a very intense climax or a proper ending. We figured out that while the students tried to write an interesting plot, they sometimes lost connection with the main characters of the story and, therefore, their end wasn't very accurate. So, in order to work on giving emphasis to the main characters and to the last part - the end -, we used a book called "The last black cat" by E. Trivizas. This was a book that they had all been reading in class for some months and the students were very familiar with the main characters. They had to work on creating one of the last chapters of the book, where the cat and his best friend attempt to rescue all their captured friends. We asked them to follow all the stages of the story structure and try to think of a proper end to their story, which could also be the end of their book. This time, the results were surprising. The students made a great connection with the past chapters of the book and created a scene that could really fit with the rest of the plot and followed all of the stages of Freytag's pyramid. Moreover, they thought on an end, since they have been making assumptions for the end of the book for a long time.

5.   Results and Discussion
5.1. Developing narrative creative skills: identification of the seven basic structural elements of the plot based on Freytag's pyramid
For data analysis purposes, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was applied (Hammersley, 1992). Quantitative data from the categories of the observation checklist indicates a sharp difference in the ability of the children to identify basic structural elements of a narrative plot. In the first phase of the program 15.3 per cent of the children could understand the narrative structure and identify the basic elements in a very satisfied way; after the implementation of the program, this rate increased to 90,2 per cent It seemed that in the first phase children faced many difficulties in order to understand the plot and to distinguish the narrative elements - specifically the differences between the rising action and the climax - while the most difficult part for them was to separate the falling action, the resolution and the end. While 25,3 per cent of the students found it difficult to construct and confirm the meaning of a story based on Freytag's pyramid, this decreased to 12,9 per cent after the intervention. This finding is confirmed by the score of the item "identify the basic narrative stages' in the observation checklist, which indicated that it was easier for them to identify the inciting incident, the rising action, and the climax and to separate the resolution from the end. The overall picture gradually changed as the program advanced and the students had a more systematic contact with a narrative story. In the end of the second phase, it was observed that the students became conscious of the structure of any written text that needs to have beginning, middle and ending (Harun, Nasir, Razak, & Ali, 2013: 2) and these seven narrative elements in their plots. This finding is also confirmed by the children's interviews. The responses of three children are illuminating in this regard:

Child one: *This narrative program helped me understand how a storyteller writes a story. Each story should have three basic parts, the beginning, the middle and the ending, but this is more complicated than what I thought. So many other things were there to show us the emotions, the purposes and the ideas of a narrator. As the program advanced I learned how to give attention to these elements and how to understand better and better the theme of the story. So, I liked it a lot.*

Child two: *It was really fascinating to analyze the stories and find out what each story wanted to say. The most exciting part for me was the climax, as I was very anxious to see the next fact, the next step of the main character. My heart was beating more and more. And then I understood that this was a very important element of a story, which I should have in my own creative stories- essays too.*

Child Three: *The most difficult thing for me was to continue the story. I didn't have any ideas and I was so confused to understand how to do that based on a specific point of the plot. After the first phase of the program I understood very well all these specific parts of a story, and as the second phase advanced I became better and better in this attempt.*

When the teacher was asked if she noticed any changes in the children's behavior, she replied:

It was difficult for me to make them understand the structure of a story. Freytag's pyramid was a powerful, interesting and creative methodological tool in order to achieve this target. Also, I believe that such interventions and programs helped a lot teachers and children too. In the first phase of the program I noticed

that there was a little confusion between the rising action and the climax, while the most difficult part for them was to separate the falling action, the resolution and the end. So I worked on them with other stories. As the program advanced, I was pleased to see that most of them had found the stages of the structure correctly and I was, also, surprised to see that some students who weren't so good at writing wrote very good answers. The most important thing for me was that children enjoyed looking for the various elements of stories, understood them better, and their reading motivation and creativity was increased.

5.2. Developing literacy: creative writing and creative thinking skills

Through the second and third phases of the program children learned to write their own stories according to Freytag's structure. In particular, this happened in the third phase where they managed to write another chapter – the last one - of the book that they had read and analyzed. In the course of the program, both the researcher and the teacher observed that children, following this specific narrative structure, had been helped not only to put their ideas in order, but also to enrich their texts. It seemed that according to these 7 questions, they had been motivated to think more complex details of their story and make their plot more interesting (Zak, 2015). The rate of using all the narrative stages in the observation checklist increased from 15 per cent to 65 per cent after the intervention. To quote the teacher:

It was impressive to watch the plot of their stories start to get more and more interesting. The kids had started thinking about the rising action and climax as different stages and, therefore, the length of their texts had now increased. They, additionally, made a great connection with the past chapters of the book and created a scene that could really fit with the rest of the plot. Moreover, they thought on an end, since they have been making assumptions for the end of the book for a long time.

It is important to note that the score of the item "make connections with the main characters and the main theme" increased to 40 per cent from 14 per cent. This finding showed that while the students tried to write an interesting plot, they sometimes lost connection with the main characters of the story and, therefore, their end wasn't very accurate. So, as the program advanced, they got familiar with the idea that there is a strong connection and a logical order between the actions and the results, and the length of their texts increased without forcing it, by teaching the narrative structure of this narrative tool. Also, the score of the item "create stories to express personal feelings, creativity and imagination" in the observation checklist increased from 30 per cent to 54 per cent. They gradually started to use their imagination, embellishing their creations with literature language, pictures and schemes according to the basic line of the book in the third phase.

Finally, it is worth to point out specific cases of students who had difficulty in language and made great progress during this intervention. One such case was a dyslexic student with difficulty in both reading and writing. This child mostly struggled to create a text with an organized order of the ideas, usually skipping parts or combining them together in a confusing way for the reader. Following the 7 stages of the Freytag's pyramid helped it write neat stories that were comprehensible for the reader and with a clear meaning. It didn't skip parts of the story and even used punctuation more often. This outcome is encouraging, confirming Dobson, Michura, Ruecker, Brown & Rodriguez (2011: 170) who stated that Freytag's narrative tool "is the most common visualization currently used for teaching plot."

Then was another child with general linguistic difficulty, who was in a very immature stage of writing. This child liked this subject a lot, since was a kid with great imagination and loved making stories. The pyramid of story structure helped it evolve its writing skills, by giving it motivation to use its creativity. It managed to place its ideas into words and write them in a specific order, which was not chaotic for the reader (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). We were surprised to see that it made complete texts and was one of the first students who put a separate end to its stories. The most interesting fact was that during the lessons it presented us a book had started writing, which was a story about its life and its family. This outcome confirms the argument that narrative tasks and, especially, narrative structure would fit best with doing exploratory research on the relevance of creativity and output (Albert & Kormos, 2004) to determine the direction of the plot of a story, such as a story book (Kumaat & Zulkarnain, 2021).

Also, there were the cases of some students who didn't have a specific difficulty in linguistics, but needed improvement in their narrative skills. There were both students with good understanding, but struggled to enrich their texts and usually complained that "they don't know what to write". Both of them started writing a lot easier by following the story structure and made their stories more complete and detailed than before. They put an accurate end to their stories. They wrote a two-page chapter for a book, with dialogues and very intense action. So, in this narrative program their narrative skills have been improved.

6. Concluding Remarks

The present study has numerous limitations. It is a case study involving a small number of children and in this respect the results are non-generalizable. Our goal, though, was to systematically teach the narrative theory based on a specific narrative tool, Freytag's pyramid, and to develop narrative creative skills through creative

writing. Research has shown that one of the most important goals of creative writing activities is enabling students to produce fluent, interesting and authentic written texts, rather than boring and repetitive ones, and to allow them to demonstrate their creative skills while writing (Michalopoulou, 2014). Other purposes of creative writing activities are to encourage learners to think, to improve their imagination while provoking their creativity, and to uncover their own creative skills (Göçen, 2019: 1034). Besides, creative writing activities aim to improve students' skills of self-knowledge, emotional self-regulation and thought regulation, decision and plan making skills, and skills to implement these plans, to enable them to discover and to use information in a unique way (Anae, 2014:124-125). Our case study showed that the present narrative program helped students to enforce narrative skills and increase their reading motivation, encouraged them to think and imagine, and offered them a systematic way of self- expression, self-knowledge and creativity. For these reasons, teachers should attach more importance to creative writing activities (Barbot, Besançon & Lubart, 2011). It is necessary for the rapidly developing world to increase creative writing skills effectively. So that the students can adapt, think more practically and creatively (Robinson, 2006), be able to express themselves better and have different qualities from other individuals (Kaya, 2013: 90). The responses of two children are characteristic and illuminating in this regard:

Child one: *I loved the fact that this year in the language lesson we read texts and tried to see how the writer had made the plot. The problem I always had was WHAT to write in a story and HOW to write it. Now I understand that a story has a narrative structure and some stages that I have to follow. How nice!!*

Child two: *The implementation of the pyramid looked like a toy, and that made me want to write more and more and see how I would follow it. This was very convenient for my thoughts and the story I made. I am looking forward to continue the program next year too.*

In conclusion, this research could well offer insights for further investigation of Creative writing and Narrative theory in the teaching process. As Xerri said (2017: 95) "nurturing young people's creativity seems to have become one of the foremost goals of education over the past few years. However, a minimal amount of attention is paid to the challenges that teachers face in achieving this goal in the classroom". Our findings allow us to conclude that there is potential for further development in this area as a future research agenda could include teacher's training in Creative writing and the implementation of Freytag's pyramid- as a narrative tool- in narrative poems too in order to enforce narrative skills.

References

Abraham, A. (2015). Gender and creativity: An overview of psychological and neuroscientific literature. *Brain Imaging and Behavior, 10*(2), 609-618. doi:10.1007/s11682-015-9410-8.

Albert, A., & Kormos, J. (2004). Creativity and narrative task performance: An exploratory study. *Language learning, 54,* 277-31. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2004.00256.x

Anae, N. (2014). "Creative writing as freedom, education as exploration": creative writing as literary and visual arts pedagogy in the first teacher education experience. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39(8),* 123-142.

Appleman, D. (2013). Teaching in the dark: the promise and pedagogy of creative writing in prison. *English Journal*, *102*(4), 24–30. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EJ/1024- mar2013/EJ1024Teaching.pdf.

Aravani, E. & Blioumi, A. (2018). Creating… in the New Creative School! Creative Writing Ideas and Techniques for the Literature Course. *Proceedings of the 3rd Panhellenic Conference "Education in the 21st Century: In Search of Innovation, Art, Creativity".* School Life and Education Museum, Hellenic Educational Society, Hellenic Department of IBBY. (Athens, April 20-22, 2018), vol. A´, 196-207.

Atkinson, D. (1991). Discourse analysis and written discourse conventions. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics 11*, 57–76. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500001951

Babayigit, O. (2019). Examining the effect of creative writing activities on reading, writing and language lesson attitudes of elementary school fourth grade students. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *8*(1), 213-220. doi: 10.12973/eu- jer.8.1.213.

Baker, M., & Rudd, R. (2001). Relationships between critical and creative thinking. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research, 51*(1), 173-188.

Barbot, B., Tan. M., Randi, J., Danto, G. S., & Grigorenko, E. (2012). Essential skills for creative writing: Integrating multiple domain-specific perspectives. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 7*, 209–223.

Barbot, B., Besançon, M., & Lubart, T. I. (2011). Assessing creativity in the classroom. *The Open Education Journal*, *4,* 58 – 66. Retrieved fromhttp://benthamscience.com/open/toeduj/articles/V004/SI0034TOEDUJ/58TOEDUJ.pdf http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/1874920801104010058

Barnet, S., Borto, E. W, & Cain, E. W. (1997). *An introduction to literature* (11th Edition.). New York: Longman.

Berelson, B. (1971). *Content analysis in communication research*. New York: Hafner Publishing Company.

Boyd, R., Blackburn, K. & Pennebaker, J. (2020). The narrative arc: Revealing core narrative structures through text analysis. *Science Advances 6*(32). Published online 2020 Aug 7. doi: 10.1126/sciadv.aba2196.

Chen, S., & Zhou, J. (2010). Creative writing strategies of young children: evidence from a study of Chinese emergent writing. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 5*. 138–149. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2010.09.002.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education.* (5th Edition), London: Routledge Falmer.
     http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203224342.

Dai, F. (2010). English language creative writing in mainland China. *World Englishes, 29*(4), 546-556.

Daskolia, M., Dimos, A., & Kampylis, P. G. (2012). Secondary teachers' conceptions of creative thinking within the context of environmental education. *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education, 7*(2), 269-290.

Day, C. (2017). Our town: teaching creative writing students to love research and collaboration. M. D. Clark, T. Hergenrader & J. Rein (Eds.). *Creative Writing Innovations: Breaking Boundaries in the Classroom*. Bloomsbury Publishing. (pp. 163–76).

Dobson, T.; Michura, P.; Ruecker, S.; Brown, M.; Rodriguez, O. (2011). Interactive visualizations of plot in fiction. *Visible Language, 45* (3), 169-191.

Creely, E., Henriksen, D. & Henderson, M. (2020). Three Modes of Creativity. *Journal of Creative Behavior, 55*(2), 306-318

Everett, N. (2005). Creative writing and English. *The Cambridge Quarterly, 34(3),* 231–242. doi: 10.1093/ camqtly/bfi026.

Foster, P., & Skehan, P. **(**1996). The influence of planning and task type on second language performance. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition 9*, 12-20.

Freiman, M. (2007). What do students learn when they do creative writing? *AAWP 2007*. *Conference of The Australian Association of Writing Programs* (12th: 2007) (21–23 November 2007: Canberra). Retrieved fromhttp://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/theaawp/pages/81/attachments/original/13850 78869/freiman.pdf 1385078869.

Freytag, G., & MacEwan, E. J. (1960). *Technique of the drama: an exposition of dramatic composition and art; an authorized translation from the 6th German Edition.* Scholarly Press.

Freytag, G. (1863). *Freytag's technique of the drama: an exposition of dramatic composition and art*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Company.

Gaffield. N. (1998). Creative writing in the ELT classroom. *Modern English Teacher*, *7*(3), 31– 37.

Göçen, G. (2019). The effect of creative writing activities on elementary school students' creative writing achievement, writing attitude and motivation. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 15(3),* 1032-1044.

Hadzigeorgiou, Y., Fokialis, P., & Kabouropoulou, M. (2012). Thinking about creativity in science education. *Creative Education, 3(5),* 603-611. doi:10.4236/ce.2012.35089.

Hammersley, M. (1992). Deconstructing the qualitative-quantitative divide. In J. Brannen (Ed.) *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research,* (pp. 39-55). Brookfield: Avebury.

Harum, A., Nasir, M., Razak, M. & Ali, A. (2013). *Freytag's pyramid: an approach for analyzing the dramatic elements and narrative structure in Filem Negara Malaysia's First Animated Cartoon*, (1-5). Retrieved https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301293373_Freytag's_Pyramid_An_Approach_for_Analyzing_Th e_Dramatic_Elements_and_Narrative_Structure_in_Filem_Negara_Malaysia's_First_Animated_Cartoon/lin k/571030c208ae19b186938a8d/download.

Hsieh, H & Shannon, S. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15(9),* 1277-1288.

Johnstone, B. (2008). *Discourse Analysis*. (2nd Edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

Justice, L. M., Bowles, R., Pence, K., & Gosse, C. (2010).A scalable tool for assessing children's language abilities within a narrative context The NAP (Narrative Assessment Protocol). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25,* 218-234.

Kaufman, S. B., & Kaufman, J. C. (2009). *The psychology of creative writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kaya, B. (2013). A compilation of studies conducted for development of the creative writing skills. *Research in Reading & Writing Instruction, 1*(2), 89-101.

Keles, Ö. (2012). Elementary teacher's" views on mind mapping. *International Journal of Education, 4*(1), 93-100. doi:10.5296/ije.v4i1.1327

Krippendorf, K. (1980). *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Kumaat, A. & Zulkarnain, A. (2021). *The use of Freytag's pyramid structure to adapt "positive body image"*

book   into   a   motion   graphic   structure. doi:10.37312/imoviccon.v2i1.95. Retrieved https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353031185_The_use_of_Freytag's_Pyramid_Structure_to_Adapt_ Positive_Body_Image_Book_into_a_Motion_Graphic_Structure.

Larkin, S. (2009). Socially mediated metacognition and learning to write. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*. doi:10.1016/j.tec.2009.09.003.

Li, L. (2010). Introduction to the special issue: 'thinking skills and creativity: SE Asian perspectives'. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *5*, 1-2. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.11.002.

Lin, C.-S., & Wu, R. Y.-W. (2016). Effects of web-based creative thinking teaching on students' creativity and learning outcome. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education, 12*(6), 1675-1684. doi:10.12973/eurasia.2016.1558a.

MacLusky, J. (2011). *Teaching creative writing in the primary school: delight, entice, inspire!* Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.

Michalopoulou, A. (2014). Inquiry-based learning through the creative thinking and expression in early years education. *Creative Education, 5*, 377-385. doi:10.4236/ce.2014.56047.

Morley, D. (2007). *The Cambridge introduction to creative writing*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Naidoo, L. (2011). Beyond institutional walls: literacy support for indigenous students at a remote high school in the Northern Territory, *Literacy Learning: the Middle Years, 19*(3), 9-18.

Nami, Y., Marsooli, H., & Ashouri, M. (2014). The relationship between creativity and academic achievement. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 114*, 36-39. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.12.652

National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE). (1999).. *All our futures: creativity, culture and education.* London: Department for Education and Employment.

Ozyıldırım, I. (2009). Narrative analysis: an analysis of oral and written strategies in personal experience narratives. *Journal of Pragmatics, 4,* 1209–1222.

Piirto, J. (2004). *Understanding creativity*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

Pishghadam, R. & Mehr, F. (2011). Learner creativity and performance in written narrative tasks. *World Journal of Education, 1*(2), 115-125.

Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667305.021

Robinson, K. (2006). Do schools kill creativity? *In presentation at TED 2006 conference.* Monterey, C.A.

Robinson, P. (1995). Task complexity and second language narrative discourse. *Language Learning, 45*, 99-140. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1995.tb00964.x

Rolfe, B., Jones, C.M., Wallace, H. (2010). Designing dramatic play: story and game structure. *Proceedings of HCI 2010 (HCI) Human Computer Interaction.* 6 - 10 September 2010. (pp. 448-452).

Rojas-Drummond, S.M., Albarrán, C.D., & Littleton, K.S. (2008). Collaboration, creativity and the co-construction of oral and written texts, *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 3,* 177-191. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2008.09.008

Runco, M. A. (2007). *Creativity: theories and themes: research, development and practice.* Amsterdam: Elsevier Academic Press.

Runco, M. A. (2009). Writing as an interaction with Ideas. In S. B. Kaufman and J. C. Kaufman (Eds.) *The Psychology of creative writing.* Cambridge UP. (pp. 180–95).

Serafini, F. (2010). *Classroom reading assessments*. Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH.

Seyihoğlu, A., & Kartal, A. (2010). The views of the teachers about the mind mapping technique in the elementary life science and social studies lessons based on the constructivist method. *Theory & Practice, 10*(3), 1637-1656.

Sharples, M. (1999). *How we write—Writing as creative design*. London: Routledge.

Skehan, P., & Foster, P. (1999).The influence of task structure and processing conditions on narrative retellings. *Language Learning, 49*, 93-120. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.00071

Starko, A, J. (2010). *Creativity in the classroom: schools of curious delight* (4th Edition). New York: Routledge.

Sternberg, R.J. (2002). The theory of successful intelligence and its implications for language- aptitude testing. In P. Robinson (Ed.) *Individual differences and instructed language learning*. (pp. 13-43). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Sternberg, R.J. (2003). Creative thinking in classroom. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 47(3),* 325-338.

Stern, J. (2000). *Making shapely fiction*. WW Norton & Company.

Stubbs, M. (1997). An educational theory of (written) language. In T. Bloor & J. Norrish (Eds.) *Written Language*. Warwick.

Taylor, Ch., Kaufman, J. & Barbot, B. (2020). Measuring Creative Writing with the Storyboard Task: The Role

of Effort and Story Length. *Journal of Creative Behavior, 55*(2), 476-488.

Thaxton, T. A. (2014). *Creative writing on the community: a guide*. Bloomsbury: New York.

Thomas, B. W. (2014). *The everything creative writing book*. Everything (2nd Edition.). Publisher Karen Cooper. Avon, Massachusetts, USA.

Tok, Ş., & Kandemir, A. (2015). Effects of creative writing activities on students' achievement in writing, writing dispositions and attitude to English. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 174,* 1635-1642.

Torrance, E. P. (1966). *Torrance tests of creative thinking*. Princeton, New Jersey: Personnel Press.

van Dijk, T. A. (1997). The study of discourse.   In van Dijk, Teun A. (Ed.), *Discourse as Structure and Process*. Sage Publications, London.

Vass, E. (2007). Exploring processes of collaborative creativity—The role of emotions in children's joint creative writing. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 2,* 107-117. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2007.06.001

Vasudevan, H. (2013). The influence of teachers' creativity, attitude and commitment on students' proficiency of the English language. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME), 1*(2), 12-19.

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: an introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching.* Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203946268

Weinstein, D. (2014). Teaching idea. mind maps: a lesson in creativity. *The Utah Journal of Literacy, 17*(1), 44-51.

Zak, P. (2015). Why inspiring stories make us react: the neuroscience of narrative. *Cerebrun, 2,* Published online 2015 Feb 2. Retrieved https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4445577/.

Zubaidah, S., Fuad, N. M., Mahanal, S., & Suarsini, E. (2017). Improving creative thinking skills of students through differentiated science inquiry integrated with mind map. *Journal of Turkish Science Education, 14*(4), 77-91. doi:10.12973/tused.10214a.

Xerri, D. (2017). Help Them Understand the Complexity, the Difficulties and the Pleasures of Creative Writing": Children's Author Libby Gleeson on Creativity in Education. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship, 23*(2), 95-105. doi: 10.1080/13614541.2017.1367571.

Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research design and methods* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage.