

## **Cooperative Creative Writing in Greek and English; Writing Poetry in the Language Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, we present classroom Action Research during the last two school years 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 in a Senior High School (Greece) based on creative writing. The action was implemented in two target languages, Modern Greek as first (L1) and English as a foreign language (L2), during the corresponding language classes. On the occasion of an International Poetry Competition, students participated in groups and cooperated in writing poems in both languages. During the first year, the teamwork output was by a restricted number of students whereas in the second year among students of whole classes. Each year's project was from September to December. Both the outcomes of this teaching action and the students' responses in a questionnaire show that in L1 and L2 classes: a) creative poetry writing and b) teaching practices, such as co-teaching, student's collaboration, translation, and brainstorming are effective ways of teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** co-teaching methods, collaborative creative writing, poetry, translation, first language (L1), foreign language (L2), Action Research

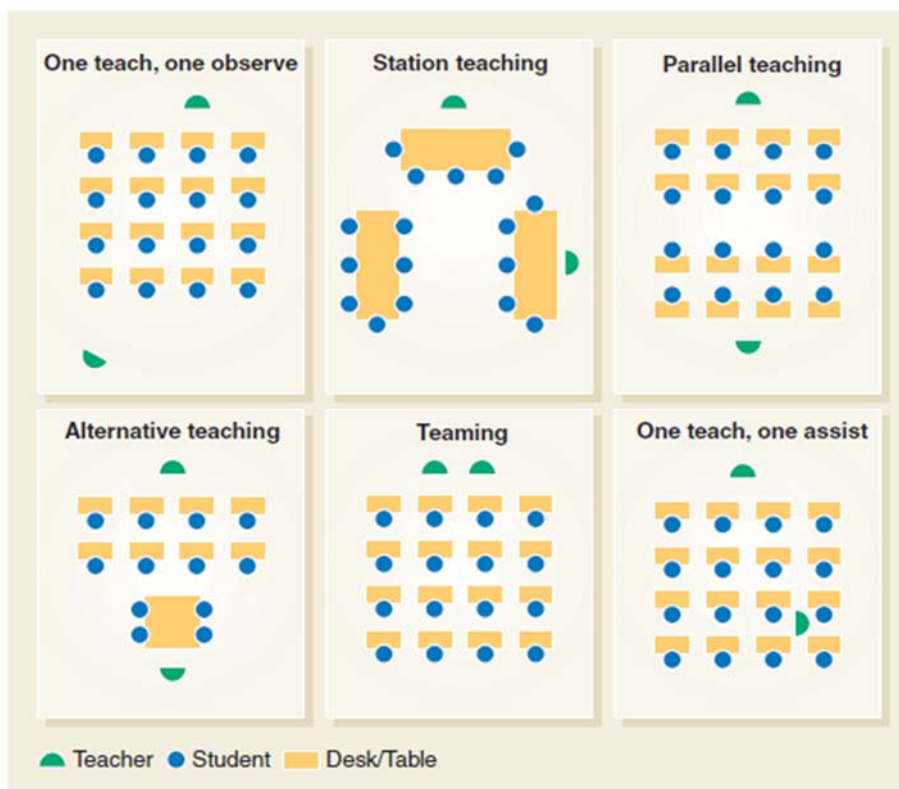
### **Introduction**

Creative writing poetry is an effective way of language teaching and learning. Many teaching practices have been suggested, i.e. in L2, namely, English as a Foreign Language, in Advanced Placement and Composition lessons, and in Greek as a first language (Hanauer 2012; Seale 2015; Souliotis 2012, among others). These strategies include brainstorming, practicing different writing types of poetry, creative writing, and collaborative writing. More specifically, Fithriani (2021) suggests strategies like (a) using popular poem templates as idea starters, (b) creating a vocabulary bank for writing rhyming poems, and (c) building emotions through personal story sharing and later channeling them through poetry writing.

On the other hand, co-teaching (the presence of more than one teacher in the classroom) has been suggested as a teaching strategy in the classroom, with 6 different structures; (a) One teach One observe, (b) One teach One drift, (c) Parallel Teaching, (d) Station teaching, (e) Alternative teaching, (f) Team teaching (see, Cook 2004, Cook & Friend 1995, Friend & Bursuck 2005), as it is presented in Table 1 and Figure 1. All the strategies present variations based on the subject taught, the age group, the maturity of the students and the creativity of the cooperating teachers. None of the strategies is considered better or worse compared to the others, since each of them holds a unique position in the "co teaching" classroom.

**Table 1: Co-teaching models (Cook 2004)**

Co-teaching model	Description
One teach, One observe	One teacher observes specific characteristics while the other teaches
One teach, One drift	One teacher presents material to the class while another circulates through the room and provides assistance to students
Parallel Teaching	Two teachers present material to the class simultaneously by dividing the class group
Station Teaching	Teachers divide the class group and content, and teach one group first, then the other.
Alternative Teaching	One teacher instructs the larger group while another works with a smaller group needing more specialized attention
Team Teaching	Both teachers work together to deliver content to the class simultaneously



**Figure 1: Co-teaching models (Friend & Bursuck 2012:77)**

Over the course of the last three decades, teachers have been particularly interested in the possibilities created by two teachers who share the same classroom. Since 1960 (Trump, 1960), co-teaching was proposed as a strategy for the reorganization of secondary schools in

the USA as well as in England (Warwick, 1971). Accordingly, the variation of co-teaching, team teaching, during which teachers share the responsibility of planning while they continue to teach separately, was adopted by many schools during the 1970's (Easterby-Smith & Olive, 1984). More recently, the interest in co-teaching was rekindled as part of the middle school reform as well as other efforts for school reform (Maclver, 1990). In the current project, the different subjects taught (Greek language as L1 and English language as L2) through creative writing poetry have been taken into consideration, with both "Team Teaching" and "One teach One drift" models being employed. Basically, this is suggested by the curriculum, for core and elective courses, as well (Pitsaki et al, 2015, Faridou & Drougka 2017, Athanasopoulou, & Georgoudas 2019, among others). More precisely, this is suggested now only for students with special needs, for kindergarten English, and for Modern Greek Language and Mathematics in Vocational Senior High Schools (Ministerial Decisions 80378/2021, 109083/2021).

On the other hand, it is worth saying that the Action Research approach is a cyclical-spiral procedure (O'Leary, 2004) and each cyclical process consists of four steps: a) planning, b) acting, c) observing and d) reflecting-evaluating (Messiou, 2019). In our project, the initial planning and acting took place in the first year of our action and students participated in activities after the core curriculum. Meanwhile, in the second school year, based on the 1<sup>st</sup> year's observation and reflecting, we focused on learning outcomes (participation in the International Poetry and Theater Competition Castello di Duino and being awarded special mention) and we decided to involve the whole class during the Modern Greek and English Language lessons.

### **Methodology**

In both school years, the preparation was based on students' participation in groups and writing cooperatively poems in two languages. The teaching objectives were basically: (a) the encouragement of students in creative writing (in Greek and English), (b) learning by students, through the collaborative method: to cooperate, to write collaborative poems, and to deepen the vocabulary of both the mother tongue and the foreign language, (c) familiarity with translation techniques from Greek to English and vice versa.

All the above mentioned are connected with the core curriculum, both in the Modern Greek Language and Literature lessons and in the English Language lesson. More analytically, in the Modern Greek Language and Literature lesson, the main objectives are that: (a) groups clusters of texts that talk to each other are presented to students, (b) the oldest texts are chosen with the newest ones and vice versa, so the students are presented as modern readers, and (c) Literature is approached in such a way that the classroom becomes a creativity laboratory (Ministerial Decision 110050/2021). Furthermore, in English lessons, one of the tasks is the practice of the first and foreign language simultaneous use through mediation techniques. It provides motivation to develop specialized interpreting and translation skills (Document by Ministry of Education 134183/2020).

In the first year (2020-2021), the cooperation was among students in a restricted number of groups. 17 students -from the 3 grades- participated in the International Poetry Competition Castello di Duino, working extra hours after the main school schedule (Table 2). They worked together with three (3) teachers (2 Greek Language teachers and 1 English Language teacher) from September to December 2020-2021.

**Table 2: Participants' profile, 2020-2021**

<b>participants in the school year 2020 - 2021</b>	<b>number of students</b>
A Grade (15-16 y)	4
B Grade (16-17 y)	4

C Grade (17-18y)	9
Amount	17

The three teachers divided the students into small groups of 2-4 members. They organized appointments with them after the core curriculum hours. Usually, the first meetings were among the two (2) Greek Language teachers and each student group. In the first meeting, there was a presentation of the different kinds of poetic writing (haiku, free verse, rhymes, acrostic poems, 15-syllable rhyming couplets in Cretan dialect called *mantinades* etc) by the Greek Language teachers. The topic of the Poetry Competition was “**Là, dove nasce la musica**” (*There, where music is born*), so the next step was a brainstorming activity about what music meant to them (a sound, a color, a season etc). Based on the word list that students made in brainstorming techniques, and the various kinds of poetry writing, each group started creating a cooperative poem and uploaded it as a common word file on the drive. When the poems were ready in Greek, the next meetings were between the English teacher and each student group, in order to translate or recreate their poem into English. The students were motivated to use dictionaries during this activity (Bampiniotis 2008, Stafylidis 1998, Interactive Terminology of Europe, Merriam-Webster Thesaurus, WordReference English-Greek Dictionary). These poems were uploaded on the common word file on the drive, as well. Since our school got a Special Mention for its participation and our students were excited about the result, we decided to extend the project the following year.

In the second year (2021-2022) ninety-three (93) students of whole classes worked within groups, during the core curriculum. More analytically, five (5) classes and three (3) teachers participated in this year’s project, from September to December 2021-2022 (Table 3). The classes were from grades A and B. No class grade C students participated due to the time limitations that the Panhellenic exams demand and the heavy workload on specific subjects.

**Table 3: Participants’ profile, 2021-2022**

attending classes in the school year 2021 - 2022	number of students
A Grade (15-16 v) (1 class)	22
B Grade (16-17 y) (4 classes)	71
C Grade (17-18y)	0
Amount	93

During the lessons, brainstorming was applied as an initiating teaching technique for groups to write cooperative poems. Furthermore, translation (from Greek to English and vice versa) and co-teaching were used in two ways: Greek teacher -Greek teacher and Greek Teacher-English Teacher using the “Team Teaching”, and the “One teach, One drift” model. One class of students experimented on writing first in their L2, in our case English, and then translated or more accurately rendered the poems in their first language (L1). The steps of each intervention are presented more analytically below.

*Co-teaching: Greek teacher-Greek teacher*

What followed before the co-teaching lesson was a parallel preparation of the students by the two teachers, each in their respective classrooms. The students were divided into mixed groups of 4-5 people. They were given a specific theme around which the students would create their poems. The topic was ‘Nostalgia’, since it was the topic of the International Poetry Competition for the year 2021-2022. What followed next was the interpretation and analysis of similar poems (Greek poetry of 1920-1930 by Kostas Kariotakis and Kostas Ouranis). The students had time to ponder over the topic of nostalgia and share what it meant for them

through brainstorming. (What color is nostalgia? How does nostalgia smell? If it were a sound, what sound would it be? What kind of music is nostalgia?) The words that came out of the brainstorming session formed the basis of the group's poetic creations that followed. The students practised different types of poetic writing (Cretan rhyming couplets-mantinades, Acrostic Poems, Haiku, Limerick, and Freestyle poems).

The co-teaching lesson started with a revision of different kinds of poetic writing presented by the two teachers using PowerPoint. Afterwards, each group presented the cooperative Greek poem they wrote on the classroom projector and their classmates helped them with suggestions for changes or improvements, such as (a) suggested collocations for the most accurate rendering of the students' thoughts and feelings, (b) Reciting the poems in the appropriate style by students of different groups and (c) suggestions by students for correct punctuation, poems' titles and linguistic rendering of the content. The coordination of the teams was made by the two teachers following the "One teach, One drift" co-teaching model. At the end of the teaching hour, the students expressed their thoughts and worries about the translation of their poems into English.

*Co-teaching: Greek teacher-English teacher*

During the Literature lesson, the Greek teacher read and presented poems with the theme of "Nostalgia" (Greek poetry of 1920-1930 by Kostas Kariotakis and Kostas Ouranis). Students discussed their thoughts and feelings about nostalgia, and were then divided into groups of 4-5 members in preparation for the next co-teaching lesson. In the first co-teaching hour, both teachers were present and the students worked in groups, brainstorming answers to questions related to nostalgia (e.g. colour, smell, type of weather, sound, person, music). A "One teach, One drift" co-teaching model was implemented. Then, both teachers presented different types of poetic writing to familiarize the students with different poetic expressions (e.g. haiku, acrostic poems, Cretan rhyming couplets-mantinades and free verse). The students then created different forms of poetic expression in Greek and wrote them down on a shared document. At the end of the teaching hour, the groups presented their poems in class using the overhead projector. During the second teaching hour, the students translated or rendered their poems into English with guidance from the English language teacher, while both teachers were overseeing and assisting the groups.

*Co-teaching: English teacher-Greek teacher*

During the 1st teaching hour, in the English lesson, the students had already been divided into groups by the English language teacher based on their linguistic competence and sex to form balanced groups with male and female students and stronger and weaker ones in terms of language skills. They were given a worksheet in English with questions to facilitate their brainstorming session. This time the students started writing their poems in English. Meanwhile, they were guided by the Greek language teacher into the different types of poetic expressions (**Cretan rhyming couplets-mantinades**, Acrostic Poems, Haiku, Limerick, freestyle poems) ("Team teaching"). In the second teaching hour, the students in groups wrote their poems in Greek with the assistance of both teachers ("One teach, One drift").

**Table 4: Guided Questions Worksheet**

**How do I write my own stuff in POETRY?**

I suggest two steps.

#1 -- respond to the questions below...you can choose whichever ones you want and skip those you don't like, but try to do at least half.

#2 -- put everything else down on the page and then fill in the gaps

**How should I turn it in?**

- Give it a title
- Type it
- Use a readable font
- Hand it in by ...

**Questions to start writing a poem:**

What color is nostalgia?

What does nostalgia smell like?

If you met nostalgia, what would it do?

If you could touch it, what would it feel like on your fingertips?

If nostalgia were a kind of weather, what would it be? (ex: a bright sunny day)

How would nostalgia move...slowly? Jerkily?

If nostalgia made a sound, what would it be?

If nostalgia turned into a physical object, what would it be?

*Questionnaire and results*

At the end of the second school year 2021-2022, 92 out of 93 students filled in a questionnaire. 21 students attend Grade A and 71 are in Grade B. No students from Grade C participated in the project. The data was collected with a questionnaire which consisted of 4 close-ended questions and a 1-5 scale Likert evaluation (1=not at all, 5= a lot) (Table 5). The students were asked to complete an open-ended question and express their impressions and thoughts about their participation in the International Poetry Competition as well as the preparatory creative process. It should be mentioned that the school project won the 3rd Special Jury Prize in the International Poetry Competition.

**Table 5: the questionnaire given to the students at the end of the second year's project**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear student, the following questionnaire is anonymous and aims to explore the impressions from your participation in the International Poetry Competition during the 2021-2022 school year.

1. What grade were you during the 2021-2022 school year?

1st grade of Senior High School

2nd grade of Senior High School

3rd grade of Senior High School

2. How satisfied are you from the process of your participation in the International Poetry Competition?

Not at all      A little      Quite      A lot      Very much

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. Did you enjoy the process of preparation for participation in the International Poetry Competition Castello di Duino?

Not at all      A little      Quite      A lot      Very much

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. Are you satisfied with your involvement in the group for the creation of poems using creative writing in order to participate in the International Poetry Competition?

Not at all	A little	Quite	A lot	Very much
1	2	3	4	5

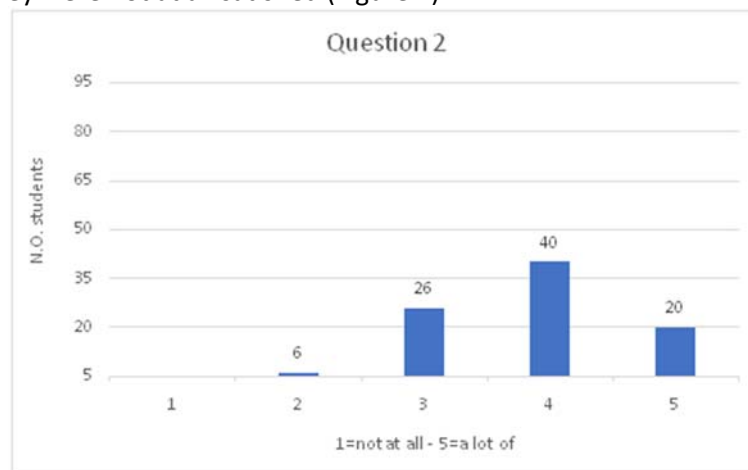
5. Did you like the presence and cooperation of 2 teachers in the classroom for the creation of poems in Greek and English language?

Not at all	A little	Quite	A lot	Very much
1	2	3	4	5

6. Write your feelings about your participation and the distinction of your class in the International Poetry Competition.

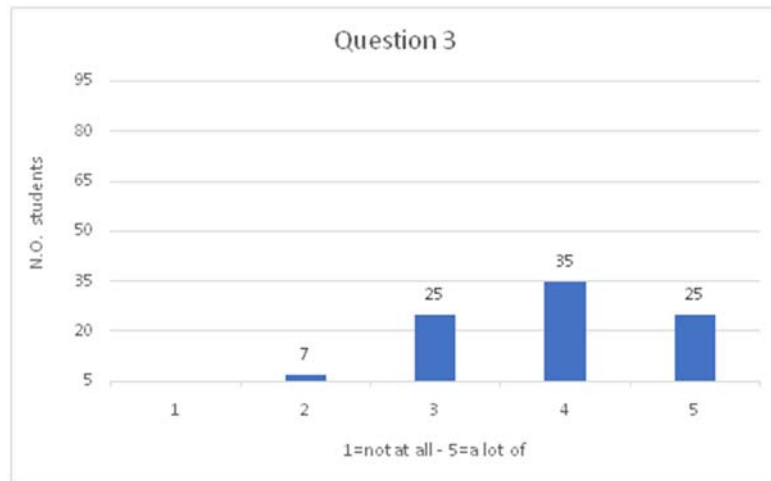
**Thank you for your time and your cooperation**

Based on students' responses to the question of satisfaction with their participation in the International Poetry Competition, 60 out of 92 reported that they were satisfied. No students reported that they were not at all satisfied (Figure 2):



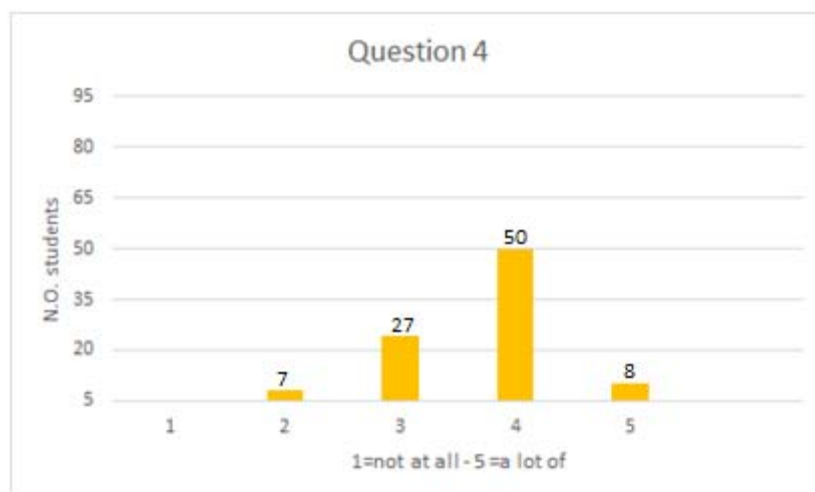
**Figure 2: Students' responses to the question "How satisfied are you by the process of your participation in the International Poetry Competition?" (Question 2)**

The results of the survey show that the majority of students (35 out of 92) liked the preparation process for the International Poetry Competition a lot, with another 25 liking it very much. No students reported not liking the preparation process at all (Figure 3):



**Figure 3: Students' responses to the question "Did you like the preparation process concerning your participation in the International Poetry Competition?" (Question 3)**

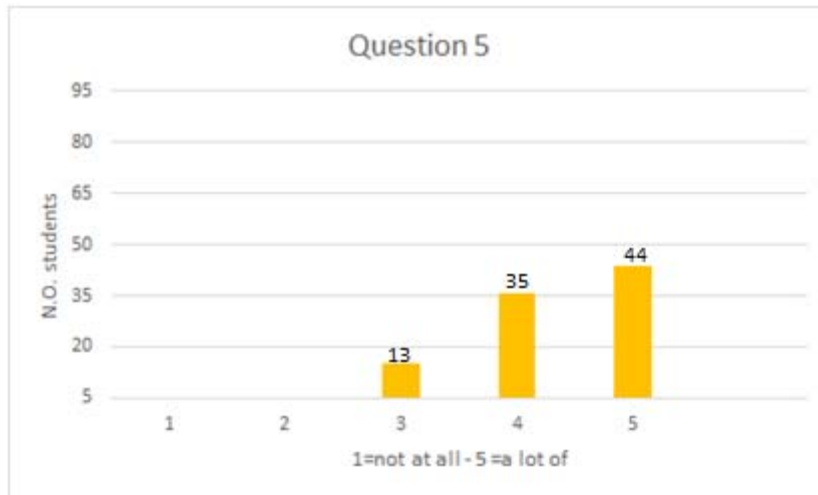
In the question, how satisfied are the students with their involvement in the group for the creation of poems using creative writing, 50 out of 92 students were satisfied. No student answered that they weren't at all satisfied by their involvement in the group (Figure 4):



**Figure 4: Students' responses to the question "Are you satisfied with your involvement in the group for the creation of poems using creative writing in order to participate in the International Poetry Competition?" (Question 4)**

The majority of students (44 out of 92) reported that they liked the presence and cooperation of two teachers in the classroom while creating group poems in Greek and English. No students reported that they disliked this arrangement. (Figure 5):





**Figure 5: Students' responses to the question "Did you like the presence and cooperation of 2 teachers in the classroom for the creation of poems in Greek and English language?" (Question 5)**

The open-ended question (Question 6) asked students to describe their feelings about their participation and distinction in the International Poetry Competition. Their reactions were overwhelmingly positive, as evidenced by the following responses: Student #1 said they "enjoyed the process, [felt] happy, and [enjoyed] working with [their] classmates"; Student #5 noted that they "enjoyed the cooperation and team spirit, [felt] good, [liked] that [they] did something different, and [were] awarded"; Student #16 remarked that they "felt very good and happy throughout the preparation" and appreciated the fact that "two female teachers taught together; it was original and interesting. And the distinction was a nice award"; Student #17 stated that the process was "very good, [they] felt good and creative" and liked "that [they] expressed [themselves] and [that they] did something different from the usual lesson"; and Student #38 concluded that it was "good, different from usual" and they would "do it again". In conclusion, the students clearly enjoyed the process, preparation, and felt proud of their distinction.

#### Conclusion

The reflection on student work and the evaluation of lessons via questionnaire demonstrate that a whole-class approach to creative writing activities allows students to effectively express themselves and create poems in two languages. The students were pleased with their engagement and preparation for the Poetry Competition, even though co-teaching is not a standard teaching approach in Greek mainstream classes and is not included in the core curriculum. Preparing the class to write poetry in groups was an innovative step towards creative writing and language excellence.

The evaluation and external assessment of the quality of student work indicate that co-teaching practices foster cooperation and inclusivity among students and teachers. Similarly, techniques such as brainstorming, translation, mediation, group work and experimental writing in various poetic styles (e.g. haiku, rhyme, acrostic poems) enable students to express themselves in both languages, while also improving their language skills.

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