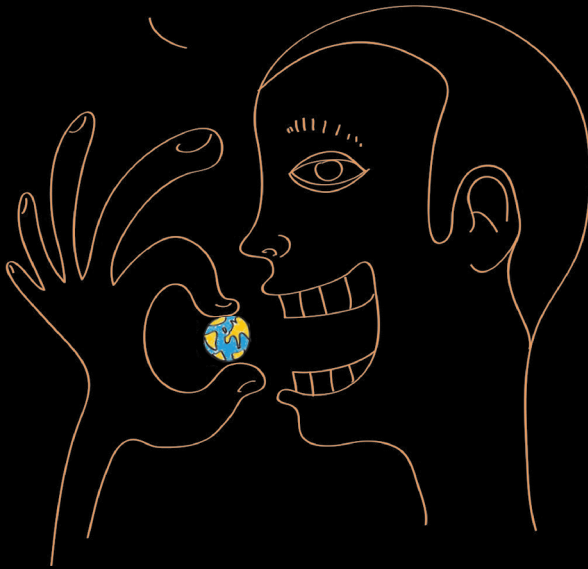


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Teaching the Writing of Argumentative Genre through *Imitatio*: A Solid Basis for the “Beginner” Writers

■ 301

Fotini Egglezou, Athens

Summary

This paper concerns the contribution of *imitatio* to the argumentative writing of twenty three 11-years old students of an elementary school (case-study) in the context of a socially constructed classroom. Through the lecture, listening, analysis and explicit teaching of the argumentative topics and stylistic figures found in a hybrid literary-argumentative text, students were conducted to the *mimesis* and *genesis* of multiple persuasive arguments. *Imitatio* seemed to influence positively the student's argumentative writing. The qualitative analysis of the final written argumentative texts showed a better awareness of the argumentative genre. Also, the quantification of data revealed an increased use of the argumentative topics of relations (*cause-effect*, *antithesis*) and of the figure of *rhetorical questions*.

Key words: imitation, argumentative writing, genre, elementary school

1. Introduction

Diachronically and interdisciplinarily the act of *mimēsthai* [μιμεῖσθαι /mimisthe], the notion of *imitation*, consists of a pivotal but, also, diversified, disputed or “elusive” term (Fanner and Arrington, 1993: 13) in many cognitive fields. Either as the representation of the real world in art and literature or as the deliberate imitation of various social behaviours and even more as pedagogical practice, *imitatio* or *mimesis* obtained fervent theoretical supporters as well as bitter enemies who tried either to reveal or to underestimate its value.

2. Historic Roots of *Imitatio* in Rhetorical Pedagogy

2.1. The Ancient Theoretical Pedigree

Sophistic rhetoric identifies *imitation* as a necessary factor of the development of successful orators. Besides, sophists are considered the first imitators of oral rhapsodies (Schiappa, 1999: 6).

As regards Plato and Aristotle, they both accept the contribution of *imitation* to learning even if they don't perceive it as an emulating practice (Corbett, 1971: 243). For Plato, the positive or negative evaluation of *imitation* depends on its role in the acquisition of the ideal truth. Finally, he approves its use as a medium capable of educating the *Republic's* future, ideal citizens (Plato, 1937; Tate, 1932: 161).

In *Phaedrus* Socrates presents an analogous bilateral attitude towards it. On the one hand, he applies the art of *imitation* by offering a more accurate version of Lysias' speech and he accepts, explicitly, the existence of ideal models of orators. On the other hand, he advises Phaedrus not to imitate entirely a speech which contains bad examples of what he considers as true rhetoric (Plato, 1993, 278b 4–5; 201, 264e 5–7).

As with Aristotle, he recognizes that through *imitation*, as an inherent impulse, "a kind" of learning is realized ($\mu\alpha\nu\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu\ \tau\iota\ \sigma\upsilon\mu\upsilon\alpha\iota\nu\epsilon\iota$ /manthanein ti symvainei), accompanied with a certain feeling of pleasure which derives from the syllogism that the object of *imitation* is identified with the prototype (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, x–xi, 1371b: 176). McKeon holds the opinion that Aristotle doesn't invoke the *imitation* of prior orators (1936: 27) despite Aristotle's lessons about arguments from example and about exemplar heroes – both as models praiseworthy to be imitated.

The history of the vigorous support of *imitation* as a method of acquiring rhetorical excellence has begun. It is accepted that Isocrates first highlighted its guaranteed role in the successful practice of philosophy. In his *Against the Sophists*, he attributes to the teacher – consequently to himself – the obligation to function as a model for his students in order to help them "appear more florid and graceful" (Cagarin, 2000: 65). Also, in the theoretical framework of Isocrates' *paideia*, *imitation* should be practiced, equally, at three levels; at the level of action, of thought and of speech (Haskins, 2000: 18, 22). It is due to imitative exercises of various kinds of discourse that Isocrates inserted *imitation* in the field of writing because of its close relation to *exercitatio* (practice) (Fleming, 2003: 109; Kinneavy, 1984: 74).

2.2. Greco-Roman Conceptions of *Imitatio*

In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, *imitatio* is viewed as an independent training method and as an important aid for achieving rhetorical proficiency combined with *ars* (theory) and *exercitatio* (practice) (II, ii, 3). In his turn, Cicero shares the above ideas and he reinforces Isocrates' previous concepts about the immeasurable value of carefully selected models of creative *imitation* (Muckelbauer, 2003: 69). As Antonius, he doesn't avoid proving his argument using the example of Sulpicius and the positive influence received by the *imitation* of his contemporary model, Crassus. All the same, Cicero highlights that the deliberate selection of a model – even an actor's model – must be strictly accompanied by the exclusive and exhaustive *imitation* of its "marvellous characteristics". Also, he emphasizes its pivotal role in the acquisition and transmission of a certain style (*elocutio*) (*De Oratore*, II, xxii, 92: 159; xxiii: 160).

Longinus, following Cicero, recognizes that the elevation of the poetic style is due to the *imitation* of major, prior models. *Imitatio* is conceived as an emulative practice which honors the imitators even if their talent is not comparable to the models (Longinus, 1999, XIII: 71, 73). Analogous ideas about style and *imitation* are also found in other treatises like Demetrius' *On Style* and Dionysius' of Halicarnassus, *On Imitation*. The author of the latter, fragmentally saved treatment, encourages the *imitation* of older attic authors in order to elevate the style of the writers of his era. Examining the nature, the models and the process of *imitation*, Dionysius credits it, equally, with procedural and psychological features subtly interwoven (Demetrius, 1902: 22; McKeon, 1936: 28; Clark, 1951: 13).

2.3. Quintilian and the Pedagogical Use of *Imitatio*

Beyond any doubt, Quintilian inserts *imitation* as a crucial pedagogical practice in the educational history of Roman Provincial, Medieval and Renaissance schools. For Quintilian, the training of students in *declamatio* requires, first, the conscious imitation of excellent models, cautiously selected by the teacher of literature, the *grammaticus*. It is by imitating "a stock of words, a variety of figures and the art of composition" that students will be led on the desirable route of the personal *inventio* and the intended *facilitas* (*Institutes of Oratory*, X, ii, 1: 334–335, Murphy, 1996: 584). On the other hand, Quintilian admits the finite power of imitative practice (X, ii, 8: 335). Its educational energy becomes acceptable due to the possible generative and creative results which it

may incur to students. *Imitation* is not considered to be a passive process but, rather, an agonistic one. The “ideal” orator is challenged to reason and to emulate the offered models through the addition of personal elements and the substitution or deletion of existent features of the proposed discourse or style. In this sense, *imitation* acts as an incentive force which stimulates the cognitive, aesthetic, functional and linguistic choices of the imitator.

In the medieval period, Saint Augustine seems to draw upon Quintilian’s teachings. He couples *imitation*, as a rhetorical method of cultivating the expression of discourse (*modus preferendi*), with Christian ideas. He explicitly suggests that for future preachers the *imitation* of prior models like the holy scriptures are a safe way of acquiring eloquence and wisdom (Saint Augustin, 1958: 154–155).

Similar Greco-Roman ideas about *imitation* can be easily detected in the era of English Renaissance education. In the influential work of Wilson (1560), *The Arte of Rhetorique*, the author admits the necessity of “following the waies of wifemen”, by taking “some colour of them” (5). *Imitation* is recognized as an undeniable method of learning to speak and write eloquently, since the model of the literate man represented the person “who could speak spontaneously, *copiously* and persuasively on any subject” (Rhodes, 1992: 43).

2.4. The Period of the Crisis

The methodic and systematic commitment of Erasmus to *copiousness* is considered to be a representative example of Tudor’s educational trend. For Erasmus, the passionate practice of imitative exercises for the achievement of various educational purposes focuses, especially, on students’ moral training (Desiderius, 1978: 682–683). Unfortunately, his effort can’t be paralleled with Plutarch’s example. By presenting both the *Lives* of honest and bad men – as mimetic poles or as models to avoid – Plutarch aimed at the formation of virtuous characters (Duff, 2002). On the contrary, Erasmus intended to students’ ethical indoctrination according to current Christian demands influencing in a catalytic way the imitative pedagogy of his era. The semantic distortion of the term *imitatio* is a consequence of the alteration to classical principles of its practice by Erasmus. (Erdmann, 1993: 3, 10)

This seems to start the ongoing crisis of *imitatio* in pedagogy and, especially, in the field of writing. The passage of the 18th century may be characterized as a dark page in its history. Scholars ascribe the decline to two main reasons. First, imitation is interpreted as a sterile and pas-

sive act of copying stripped of all positive, assimilative characteristics. Especially, in the writing domain rhetorical pedagogy and, consequently, *imitation*, are considered to be responsible for a mechanistic, predetermined and skill-based mode of writing. Second, the Romantic movement, obsessed by the principle of personal genius, fights against the commonly shared characteristics of imitative elaboration and production (Starkey, 1974; Knoblauch and Brannon, 1984: 80; Welch, 1986: 167). In addition, Sullivan (1989) accuses *imitation* of lacking the desirable scientism that should characterize every educational practice. In contrast with the process theories of writing, *imitatio* insults the teacher's scholarship. Fanner and Arrington (1993) point out the importance of the new, negative theoretical orientation towards *imitation* insofar as it results in its long-lasting marginalization (24).

Despite the downfall of *imitatio* in England, pedagogical practices in America in the beginning of the 19th century still reflect its classical principles as a mean for developing students' knowledge and mental discipline. An interesting approach of the theoretical conversion towards *imitation* after the American Civil War is presented by Wilson (2003), who correlates it with racial politics. He supports the deliberate redefinition of the term in pedagogy to be a constraint on the threat of black *imitation* of the "dominant systems of white power" (89).

2.5. The Modern Look at *Imitation*

During the 20th century the value of *imitation* remains disputable. Perplexity may be the term that best describes the state of whoever seeks to research the issue. On the one hand, *imitation* finds theoretical refuge in structural and post-modern literary theories which seem to encourage the use of *imitatio* in the teaching of writing (Minock, 1995: 492). Bakhtinian notions such as *heteroglossia*, *polyphony* and *dialogism* presuppose the incessant interaction, the uninterrupted dialogue with another's utterances (Bakhtin, 1986). Structuralists like Kristeva and Barthes (1981) invoke, implicitly, the act of *imitation* through the notion of *intersexuality*, since every text is paralleled with a "mosaic" made by the "absorption and transformation" of others (Kristeva, 1986: 37). Genette (1997), also, admits its importance and talks, explicitly, about "mimotexts" (75, 81). For post-moderns, such as Derrida (1988), a linguistic sign, oral or written, acquires its identity as such due to its capacity for being iterated, replicated.

On the other hand, the process theories of writing consist of the main theoretical adversary of *imitation*. For Berlin (1988) the develop-

ment of cognitive rhetoric changed the whole picture of writing and, consequently, influenced the imitative practice. Apparently, the ascendant criticism of *imitation* in the 1980's is not incidental. It is, exactly, the date of birth of Flower and Hayes' (1981) three-fold cognitive model of writing, composed by such elements as the task environment, the writer's long-term memory and the writing processes. The three writing actions of the continuously expanded model, *planning*, *translating* and *re-viewing*, consist of an onslaught on product theories that emphasize the role of "assisted" *imitation* in learning and in writing development (Be-reiter and Scardamalia, 1981; Pincas, 1982: 24; Flower et al., 1986; Gee, 1997: 25).

Notwithstanding their expansion, process theories didn't remain impervious to criticism (Horowitz, 1986). Since 1990 the development of genre-based approaches seem to dissent from viewing writing, only, as an "unconscious process" between the writer and his unreachable inner world (Swales, 1990; Tribble, 1996; Badger and White, 2000: 155). Teaching writing via genre-approaches serves not only for learning particular "patterns of forms" but, mainly, as Miller (1984) points out, for participating "in the actions of a community" (165). In this theoretical framework, *imitation* is accepted, even partially, as a useful pedagogical means to the development of writing. Genre based models of writing propose strategies which include the modeling of the target-genre and the analysis of the organization of textual patterns for teaching literacy and writing (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Devitt et al., 2003; Beaufort, 2007: 178). Such actions recall the classic activities of *progymnasmata* as the reading aloud of the text, textual analysis and transliteration. Similar techniques are used in modern workshops of creative writing, while the practice of *imitation* in writing is already inserted in the curriculum of teachers in Denmark (Fleming, 2003; Geist, 2004: 170).

The long pedagogical tradition of *imitation* influenced the two-fold aim of this paper. First, the theoretical and diachronic review of its practice attempted to gain a deeper comprehension of the way that could, still, facilitate the modern rhetorical pedagogy. Second, it is examined whether its practice could still facilitate students' familiarity with argumentative writing. The research reveals an explicit commitment to classical rhetorical teachings as well as to modern instructive practices. Moreover, it challenges the repetition (or *imitation*!) of similar efforts in the future.

3. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was the examination of the influence of imitation on a random sample of beginner students in the field of argumentative writing in a Greek primary school. Emphasis was placed on its use in order to foster students' argumentative capacities in writing, and especially, in the inventio of arguments due to the development of topics.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Theory and Methodology

The following research describes a classroom intervention with 23 pupils, 11-years old, in the fifth (5th) grade of a public primary school in Alimos, an urban zone of Athens. The experimental group consisted of 14 boys and 9 girls who shared an homogeneous middle class social back-ground.

The experimental group had no previous training experience in argumentative writing. During the intervention the researcher acted as a participant observer trying to direct the instruction of the proposed text-model and to observe students' reactions.

The intervention was influenced by the socio-cultural theory of learning and by the principles of mediated and rhetorical pedagogy (Bazerman, 2009: 283). According to Vygotsky imitation consists of a necessary process of "stepping from something one knows to something new". Coupled with instruction, imitation activates latent qualities in order to advance students' learning in the zone of proximal development and to transfer them to the potential level of their cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1962: 103; Vygotsky, 1978: 87).

Also, according to the socio-cultural theory, learning may be achieved due to the scaffolding method and the mediation of cultural tools as a text (Wood et al., 1976). For the text oriented approach of literacy the use of texts may contribute positively to students' development of written competence (Fterniati and Spinthourakis, 2005/2006).

Based on Pike's (1959) metaphor of *particle*, *wave* and *field*, we tried to find out which were the scaffolding effects of the analysis and explicit instruction of some common topics and stylistic patterns, found in an extract of a literary text (particle) through imitation, first, to a student's argumentative letter of the same content in order to create the necessary prior knowledge in written argumentation (wave) and, second, to a free written argumentative letter (field).

The corpus of data was composed: a) by transcripts from audio-taped instruction in the classroom and b) by students' individual pre- (Text A) and post-tests (Text B and Text C) in the form of informal argumentative letters. The writing of the texts was carried out before (Text A) and after (Text A, Text B) the lecture and the analysis of the text-model. The effects of imitation in students' writing were analysed in qualitative and quantitative terms (triangulation of data) in order to provide validity and reliability to the research. The qualitative analysis was based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis which examines both features of grammar or vocabulary as well as features of the textual organization and the appearance of genres in the produced texts. (Fairclough, 1995: 188–189; Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000: 448). The quantitative analysis used two statistical tests: a) the Friedman and b) the Wilcoxon test. The category system was identified as reliable because of the calculation of Cohen's Kappa coefficient for two raters (Cohen 1960). Alpha values of 0,907, 0,832 and 0,881 were obtained for the observations regarding the existence of arguments of cause and effect in the student's written texts A, B and C correspondingly. A high statistical significance of Kappa for the Text A was noticed (overall $k = 0,907$ $p < 0,001$). Therefore, there was evidence that the observation system used by the researcher was valid.

4.2. Materials Development and Teaching Intervention

The intervention was carried out for a total of six didactic hours of 45 minutes in a period of 7 days. The steps followed were:

- a) First, the free writing of an informal, exhortative letter (Text A) to the mayor of the town. By using arguments, students asked him not to permit the cutting of a tree for the construction of a new apartment building in the neighbourhood (one didactic hour). The requested text form of a letter was considered the most appropriate, since *ars dictaminis* integrates elements of oral and written rhetoric, and also it can be an answer to an implicit, underlying controversy, well-hidden beneath its structure (East, 1968: 242). The text A served as a basic criterion of students' initial writing and as a point of reference in comparison with the two following texts.
- b) The next two days the reading and the analysis of an extract with analogous content¹ followed (three didactic hours). The extract,

1 A little boy, Doros, saves Fundu (the tree) who is in danger, from the constructor, the bulldozer, the mechanic and the chopper.

written in dialogic form, was taken from the novel *My friend, the filbert tree*² (1982: 72–73).

The selection of the text satisfied the basic criteria of an *exemplum* for linguistic, stylistic, literary and active (ethical) imitation as proposed by Lausberg (1998: 13; Papadopoulou, 1999: 49). The comprehensible language, the vivacity of expression, the content explaining ecological and citizenship issues and the use of common topics and sub-topics made it appropriate for the research. In short, the text provided the space for the connection of rhetorical and social features necessary for learning the argumentative genre.

At a first level, the lecture of the text-model offered an alternative approach to the examined issue and provoked in students an “inner dialogue”, relative to the post-hoc performance of their writing and to the genre’s learning (Spencer, 1982: 43; Myers, 1983: 15; Stables, 2003: 9–10). According to Winterowd “you learn to write by (usually) unconscious imitation of what you read” (1975: 117–118).

The text was read twice: a) A read-aloud lecture was carried out by the researcher. Then, a genre analysis of the segment was made by following the labovian model (Labov, 1972) of questions about: a) the *abstract* (what was the text about?), b) the *orientation* (who participated? where? for what?), c) the *complicating action* (what will happen after the interview?), d) the *evaluation* (why do you think this segment was interesting?), e) the *result* (what do you think that will be the result of the interview taken?). The segment, as a form of discursive interaction, was correlated with the social event that caused it, while the aims of the “strategic action” of the heroes (f.e. justification of an opinion, persuasion) were emphasized (Fairclough, 2003: 65, 70–71).

Then, in an independent reading level, students underlined the arguments presented in the text. The arguments provided, were characteristic examples of two main categories of common topics and sub-topics as presented in the taxonomy of Corbett and Connors (1999: 87):

- a) The common topic of *comparison* (similarity, difference of degree). For example:
 - “We are attached to trees!” she told me. “We look alike. They live and respire like us”. (similarity / metaphor) and
 - b) the common topic of *relationship* (cause and effect, antecedent and consequence, antithesis/contraries). For example:

2 The book of Angeliki Varela was chosen to represent Greece at the international competition of books for children, and it was awarded one of the three “Honourable Mentions” from the International Award, JANUSZ KORCAC in 1985.

- “Standing by trees, men should make the sign of cross, because trees inspire carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen”. (cause and effect)
- If someone wanted to cut down your filbert-tree what would you do? I asked George.
- I would try to prevent him. (antecedent and consequence)

Students focused their attention on the above organizational patterns and the analysis of their structure, based on the assumption that knowledge of common topics may facilitate the production of arguments on any future given subject (Zompetti, 2006: 22). Accepting the idea that topics may provide an argumentative classification, the above topics were modeled on the blackboard as petals of a flower. Each petal represented a different argumentative *locus*, a different kind of thought which could help students in generating more arguments to support their opinion.

Furthermore, during the text analysis students searched for the main stylistic features used by the author, such as metaphors and rhetorical questions. Scholars propose that such an effort improves students’ personal linguistic and stylistic expression as well as their syntactic competence (D’ Angelo, 1973). For example:

- “A tree is a breathe of life”. (metaphor)
- “Mister Mayor, I learnt that a Dutch airline offered to Athens forty thousands tulips. And you, can’t you offer not even a tree to neighbourhood’s children?” (antithesis expressed in a form of rhetorical question)

c) The writing of a second letter (Text B) to the mayor with the same theme followed (one didactic hour). The change of the dialogic extract in a letter-form was an attempt to give a more dynamic character to the imitative practice similar to the classical rhetorical exercise of *paraphrase* or, in intersexuality terms, to the strategy of *adaptation* of the original text (Sanders, 2006: 26; Clark, 1951: 20).

d) Three days later, students carried out a similar writing task (Text C) (one didactic hour). This time, the theme of the argumentative letter was: *You want desperately a pet. Write a letter to your mother trying to convince her with your arguments to buy it.* The activity highlighted the effects of the prior imitative practice, mainly, of the topical invention of arguments and examined whether the results obtained could be dynamically transferred to a new writing attempt relative to a different content and context, to a “new conceptual intention” (Kelly, 1987: 375).

5. Results

5.1. Qualitative Analysis

The students' first, free written argumentative letter (Text A) revealed the necessity of accurate instruction of argumentative writing. First, the prevalence of a written narrative schemata became obvious. Five students ($N = 5$, 21,7 % in the total sample) didn't respond to the demand of writing a letter. On the contrary, they developed the subject in the only well-known method, the narration. For example:

It was Friday, the day of the assembly for examining if my beloved tree should be cut down. The majority supported the opinion that it should, definitely, be cut down. I had to react quickly. The only solution was to send a letter to the mayor. [...] (Yannis)

Emphasis was placed on the chronological organization of personal experiences with the beloved tree:

Well, I and my friends we have grown up with that tree. We were 7 years old when we played over there. When we were 8 years old we played on the swing and now that we have turned 10 years old we have made a tree-house and you want to cut it down. (Konstantinos)

Second, students' writing revealed their limited prior knowledge in developing arguments. The mean of the produced arguments was low. The initial letters were very short in length, while stylistic elements were scarcely present.

The majority of written arguments was presented either in the introduction or in the conclusion of the texts, while the rest of the letter was, mainly, dedicated to recalling personal memories. Even when arguments were given in an explicit form, they usually made part of the knowledge-telling model of writing (i). For example:

(i) I ask you not to cut down my neighbourhood's tree because I used to play over there, to climb and to sit on its branches. (Minas)

In the second text (Text B), students as sensible citizens developed a more accurate and extended argumentation in order to support their thesis based on a critical interaction with the problem emerged (Terrill, 2011: 301). For example:

Resolving this problem is crucial for all the children of our neighbourhood, because we are the habitants of the zone and you can't take decisions against our rights. (Thanos)

Two were the main persuasive strategies used: 1) First, the removal of personal experiences. Students approached the interests' of the receiv-

er of their arguments invoking either personal motives (i), or personal experiences (ii), fears and bias (iii) as shown by the following examples:

- (i) All the mayors until now showed an increased interest for the trees of our neighbourhood. This is the reason why you should stop cutting the hazel. Do you imagine the consequences of your action if it will be repeated and repeated in the future? That's why we would propose you not to be the first mayor who will start this destructive action. (John)
- (ii) To my opinion this tree shouldn't be cut down, because we used to play there since we were too young as, also, you did when you were a little boy. (Maria)
- (iii) Also, if you permit it, the citizens won't vote for you. (Theodoris)

2) Second, students allowed the appearance of passion in their speech, mainly, due to the use of the stylistic element of rhetorical questions (iv) invoking further socio-economic parameters.

- (ii) What is more important for you...oxygen or money? (Helen)

Also, in the third text (Text C) students used as evidence examples taken either from the mythology (i.e. the powerful relationship between Ulysses and his dog) or from the friendly "milieu", while their lexical, syntactic and functional choices were more accurate.

5.2. Quantitative Analysis

The basic criteria of students' pre- (Text A) and post-tests (Text B and C) quantitative analysis with the SPSS (statistical package for the social sciences) were:

- a) The number of all the written arguments of each text. The argumentative unit consisted of one or more sentences which guaranteed the basic structure of the argument (Caccamise, 1987; Kellogg, 1990).
- b) The number of arguments based on the topics of: (i) *cause and effect*, (ii) *antithesis*, (iii) *antecedent and consequent* (expressed by conditional conjunctions), (iv) *similarity* and v) *difference of degree*.
- c) The number of stylistic elements. More specifically, a rating scale from 0-2 was created. The existence of (i) *metaphors* (0-1) and of b) *rhetorical questions* (0-1) was marked.
- d) Text length: counting the words of a text provided a useful analytical device.

As an alternative test for the one-way repeated measures ANOVA, the Friedman analysis of variance by ranks was used because of the sample size of our research (23 students). The Friedman test consisted of a non-parametrical test which detected differences across multiple test at-

tempts at a significant level of 5 %. In our case the attempts were represented by the texts A, B and C. Furthermore, the Wilcoxon's test was used in order to detect which texts contained statistical significant differences. The significance level of $0.05/3 = 0.017$ was calculated with the Bonferroni adjustment.

The practice of *imitatio* was considered as the independent variable of the research (YES/NO) (Verma and Mallick, 1999). The total number of the written arguments, the number of arguments based on the above mentioned topics, the number of stylistic elements and the text length constituted the dependent variables.

The experimental group produced a higher total mean of written arguments as attested by the statistical analysis. The initial mean of arguments $M = 1.09$ ($SD = 0.900$) in the Text A increased after the intervention. In the Text B the mean raised ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.849$) as well as in the Text C ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.329$) (Figure 1). The analysis showed a significant difference among the mean of arguments of texts B and A ($p = 0.000 < 0.017$) and of texts C and A ($p = 0.000 < 0.017$), while the difference among the texts B and C wasn't significant.

	TEXT A	TEXT B	TEXT C
Mean \pm SD	1,09 \pm 0,900	3,65 \pm 1,849 [*]	3,70 \pm 1,329 [^]

^{*} Significant difference among the mean of arguments of texts B and A, $p = 0.000 < 0.017$

[^] Significant difference among the mean of arguments of texts C and A, $p = 0.000 < 0.017$

The produced arguments were mainly based on the topic of *relationship* as expressed by the sub-topics of *cause and effect* ($M = 0.52$, $SD = 0.593$: Text A, $M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.222$: Text B and $M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.022$: Text C) (Figure 3), of *antithesis* ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.344$: Text A, $M = 0.78$, $SD = 0.736$: Text B and $M = 0.78$, $SD = 0.671$: Text C) (Figure 2) and of *antecedent and consequent* ($M = 0.13$: Text A, $M = 0.52$: Text B and $M = 0.57$: Text C) (Fig. 4).

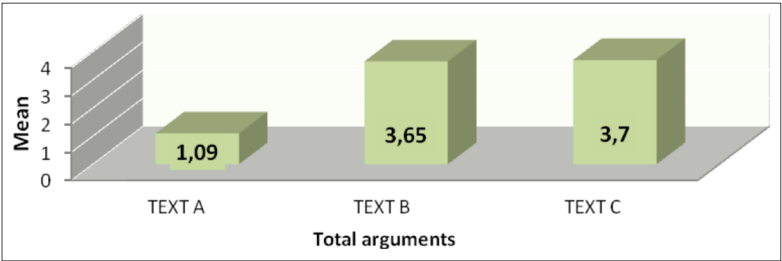


Figure 1: Total mean of written arguments in texts A, B and C

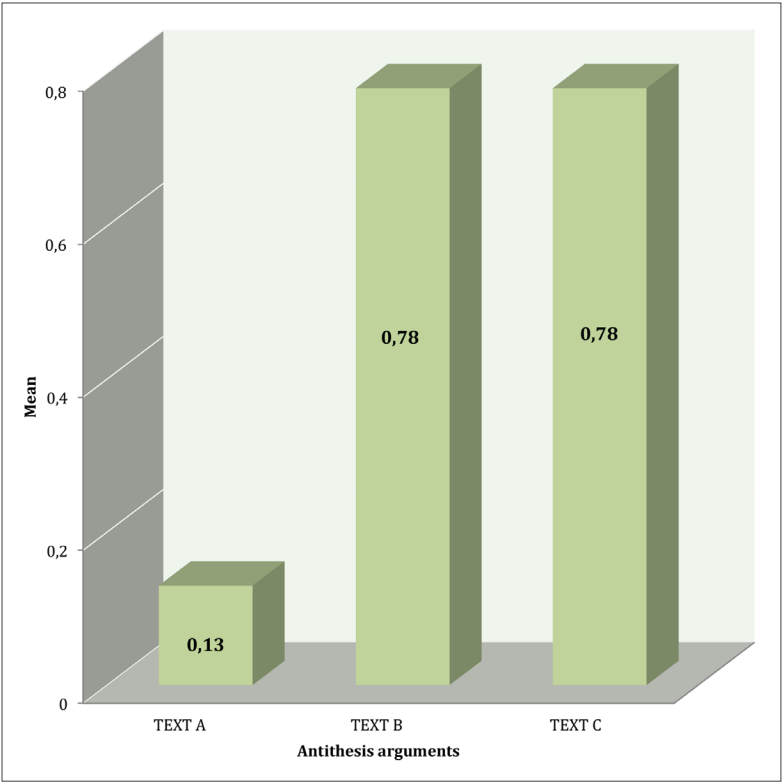


Figure 2: Mean of arguments based on the topic of antithesis in texts A, B and C.

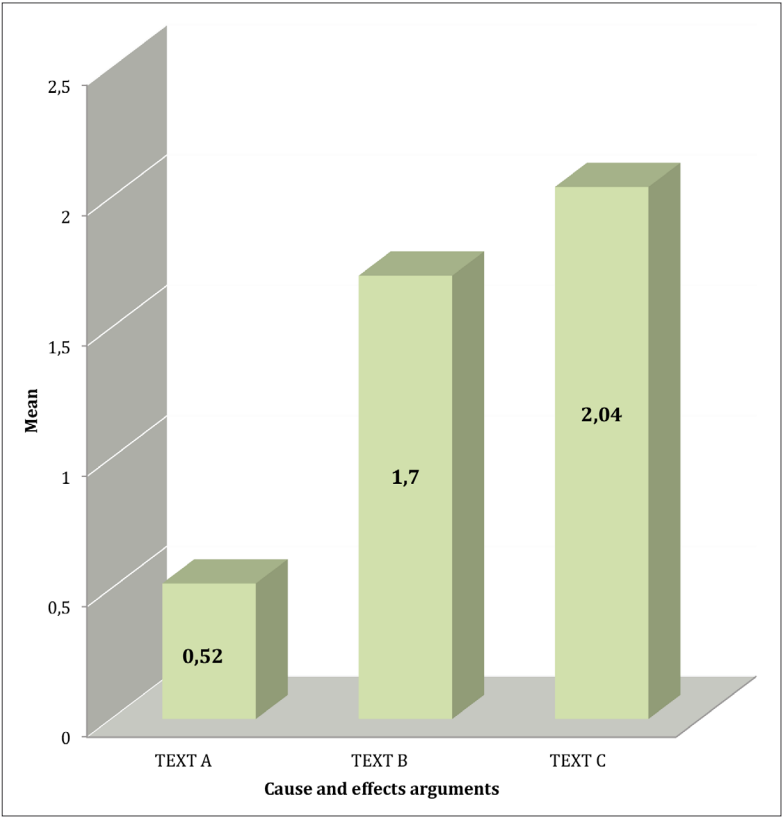


Figure 3: Mean of arguments based on the topic of cause and effect in texts A, B and C.

	TEXT A	TEXT B	TEXT C
Mean ± SD <i>Cause and effect arguments</i>	0,52 ± 0,593	1,70 ± 1,222 [*]	2,04 ± 1,022 [^]
Mean ± SD <i>Antithesis arguments</i>	0,13 ± 0,344	0,78 ± 0,736 [*]	0,78 ± 0,671 [†]

^{*} Significant difference among the mean of cause-effect arguments of texts B and A, $p = 0,001 < 0,017$

[^] Significant difference among the mean of cause-effect arguments of texts C and A, $p = 0,000 < 0,017$

* Significant difference among the mean of antithesis arguments of texts B and A, $p = 0,002 < 0,017$

† Significant difference among the mean of antithesis arguments of texts C and A, $p = 0,001 < 0,017$

The difference of *cause and effect* arguments was significant among texts B and A ($p = 0,001 < 0,017$) and among texts C and A ($p = 0,000 < 0,017$), while the difference among the texts B and C was not statistically significant ($p = 0,193 > 0,017$). Also, the increase of *antithesis* arguments was statistically significant among texts A and B ($p = 0,002 < 0,017$) and among texts A and C ($p = ,001 < 0,017$), but not among the texts B and C ($p = ,894 > 0,017$). When it comes to the arguments based on the sub-topic of *antecedent and consequent*, a significant difference was noticed only between the initial Text A ($M = 0,13$) and the final Text C ($M = 0,57$) ($p = 0,013 < 0,017$) in favour of the final text (Text C). On the contrary, no significant difference concerning the production of arguments based on the sub-topic of *similarity* and the subtopic of *difference* was noticed.

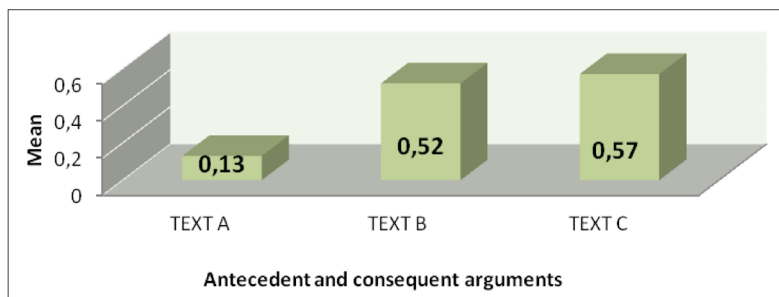


Figure 4: Total mean of antecedent and consequent arguments in texts A, B and C

Furthermore, the statistical analysis showed a significant increase of the mean of stylistic elements ($M = 0,4783$, $SD = 0,51075$: Text A, $M = 1,6087$, $SD = 1,49967$: Text B and $M = 1,2609$, $SD = 1,05388$: Text C). A statistically important difference was noticed among texts A and B ($p = 0,003 < 0,017$) and among texts A and C ($p = 0,004 < 0,017$), while there was no important difference among texts B and C.

The mean of *rhetorical questions*, to complete the one-way repeated-measures ANOVA, varied from $M = 0,13$ ($SD = 0,344$: Text A), to $M = 1,17$ ($SD = 1,154$: Text B) and to $M = 1,04$ ($SD = 0,976$: Text C) (Figure

5). It was confirmed that the mean of *rhetorical questions* statistically increased for B and C Texts versus Text A ($p = 0,000 < 0,017$ among Texts A and B, $p = 0,001 < 0,017$ among Texts A and C), while it was statistically equal between the texts B and C. On the contrary, no significant difference concerning the production of *metaphors* as stylistic elements of texts A, B and C was noticed ($M = 0,35$, $SD = 0,49$: Text A, $M = 0,43$, $SD = 0,59$: Text B and $M = 0,22$, $SD = 0,42$: Text C, Sig: $0,273 > 0,05$).

	TEXT A	TEXT B	TEXT C
Mean \pm SD	0,13 \pm 0,344	1,17 \pm 1,154	1,04 \pm 0,976

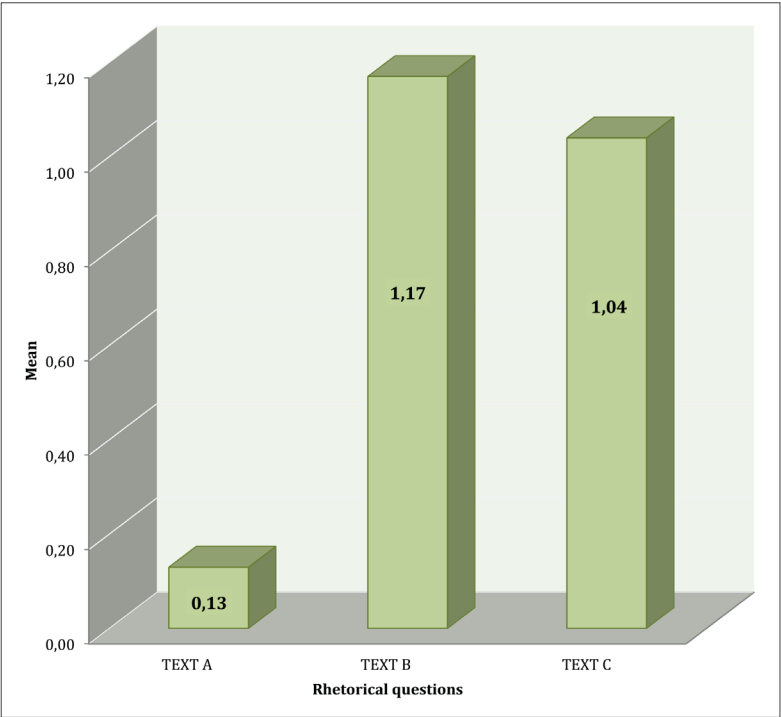


Figure 5: Mean of rhetorical questions in the texts A, B, C

Finally, a significant increase in the *text length* relative to the invention of more arguments suitable to the situational context and to the communicative result of persuasion was noticed (Figure 6). The mean

M = 85, 87 words of the text A (SD = 42,939), increased to the mean M = 140, 17 words for the text B (SD = 55,998) and to the mean M = 136 words for the Text C (SD = 47,944). It was confirmed that the *text length* statistically increased for B and C Texts against Text A ($p = 0,000 < 0,017$ among Texts A and B, $p = 0,000 < 0,017$ among Texts A and C) and that it was statistically equal between cases B and C.

	TEXT A	TEXT B	TEXT C
Mean ± SD	85,87 ± 42,939	140,17 ± 55,998 [*]	136 ± 47,944 [^]

^{*} Significant difference of the text length among the texts B and A,
 $p = 0,000 < 0,017$
[^] Significant difference of the text length among the texts C and A,
 $p = 0,001 < 0,017$

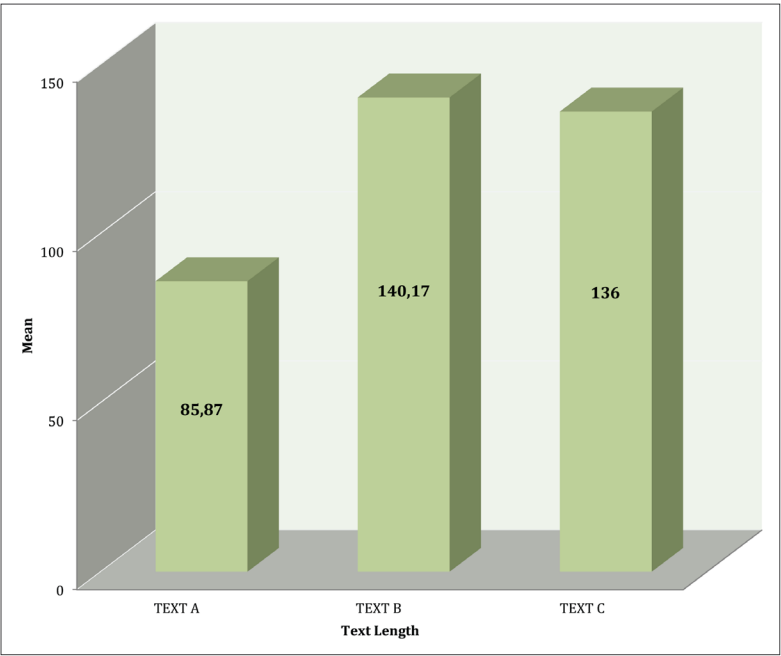


Figure 6: Text length of texts A, B, C

6. Discussion

The statistical results affirmed that the practice of imitation stimulated, significantly the students' cognitive, aesthetic, functional and linguistic choices. More precisely, its use contributed to the students' better awareness of the argumentative genre as a bridge between familiar and unfamiliar textual genres (Prince, 1989: 730).

The two texts-letters (Texts B and C) accomplished the necessary rhetorical interaction among reality, reader and writer according to the demands of the new genre. First, there was notice of critical restraint of the knowledge-telling model of writing and of its substitution by the model of knowledge-transforming, since students created more logical and organized argumentative patterns instead of narrative schemes (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 125). Second, the re-appearance of analogous statistical results in the third text (Text C) revealed a successful transfer of the acquired knowledge in a new context reinforcing the view that learning through imitation is not a passive and static process.

Indeed, by imitating the presented argumentative topics and sub-topics, students constructed in a more organized way their thought and produced more, accurate and valid arguments, in contrast to the first text, independently of the subject matter (Nelson, 1970: 121, 124; Infante, 1971: 128; Freedman, 1993: 238). At the same time, they developed their critical thought by discovering supporting reasons for their claims. Instead of a "stultifying and inhibiting" practice, imitation became a liberating and empowering tool for argumentative, persuasive writing (Grubber, 1977: 491; Eschholz, 1980: 24). The increased use of the sub-topics of *cause and effect* consisted of a device for the improvement of students' inductive thinking. Multiple possible adequate causes related to potential effects were produced. Moreover, the increased use of arguments based on the topic of *antecedent and consequent* revealed a better performance of students' use of the hypothetical syllogism, while the increased use of *antithesis* arguments led them to a dialectical game with opposite terms and ideas in order to empower the validity of the proposed claims.

Furthermore, the increased use of rhetorical questions, as a stylistic element, may be related to the interpersonal relations that emerged among the authors and the message's receiver either as a mean of the author's imposition or as a tool facilitating the social contact of the participants. Finally, imitation activated features of the students' vocabulary

which remained inert in the beginning of their writing efforts, since a significant increase to the text-length was noticed (Texts B and C).

But, according to the classical teachings of Quintilian, imitation isn't a panacea. Despite the more persuasive character of the produced texts, its practice didn't influence either the production of arguments based on the topic of comparison or the use of metaphors. More precisely, students showed weakness, especially in the final text (Text C), in the invention of arguments based on the sub-topic of difference. Their limited use may be ascribed to the subtle differentiation among the topics of difference and of antithesis as well as to the acknowledgement of the difficulty of their settling (Corbett and Connors, 1999: 97, 105). Finally, as regards the limited use of metaphors and the relative underdeveloped sub-topic of similarity, it may be related to the need for more interactive activities and students' joint participation in classroom (Cameron, 1996).

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the statistical results of the research showed that imitation should still serve as a useful method of teaching and learning in the field of writing and the acquisition of literacy (Murphy, 1990; Mendelson, 2001: 289). Its practice in a Greek primary school seemed to help the students who lack skills in argumentative writing. More specifically, the students improved the form, the style and the content of their texts by releasing latent abilities even from the beginning of their efforts (Gorell, 1987: 53; Butler, 2002: 26). The successful imitation of the argumentative topics concerning cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, antithesis, and rhetorical questions led to a variety of results. In particular, students were helped towards the production of more elaborated texts, the development of argumentative genre awareness and the construction of a solid basis upon which they placed the social artefact of argumentation. However, imitation doesn't exclude the practice of more interactive argumentative activities in the classroom. On the contrary, such activities in combination with imitation, may extend the acquired argumentative "textual basis" facilitating students "to understand what they are doing more deeply, more purposefully and more rhetorically" (Devitt, 2004: 202).

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