



UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN MACEDONIA
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
AND HUMANITIES

PROCEEDINGS

4th International Conference
Education Across Borders

Education in the 21st Century:
Challenges and Perspectives

Aikaterini Dimitriadou
Eleni Griva
Angeliki Lithoxoidou
Alexandros Amprazis
(Editors)

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Education Across Borders

Education in the 21st Century: Challenges and Perspectives
Florina, 19-20 October 2018

Aikaterini Dimitriadou
Eleni Griva
Angeliki Lithoxoidou
Alexandros Amprazis
(Editors)



UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN MACEDONIA
Faculty of Social Sciences and
Humanities, Florina



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The authors were asked to produce updated versions of their papers and take into account the discussion that took place after the presentation and the suggestions received from other participants at the Conference. On the whole, the e-Proceedings present a comprehensive overview of ongoing studies in Education Research in Europe and beyond.

The editors carried out a review of the updated versions of the papers that were submitted after the Conference. The editors do not necessarily endorse or share the ideas and views presented in or implied by the papers included in this book.

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It is our pleasure to present this volume consisting of selected papers based on oral and poster presentations from the 4th International Conference *Education Across Borders*, held on 19th -20th October 2018, at the University of Western Macedonia, Florina, Greece.

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We would like to extend our gratitude to the international and national scientific committee for their valuable contribution to organizing the 4th International Conference Education Across Borders. The members of the Scientific Committees have offered their scientific expertise and provided support on the process of reviewing papers.

We would also like to give special thanks to conference presenters and participants/audience members, as well as we wish to thank our undergraduate and postgraduate students who greatly contributed to the organization and success of the Conference.

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OPENING CEREMONY SPEECH

Dear representatives of the national and international authorities,

Dear colleagues and students from the co-organising Universities of the three neighbouring countries, the UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN MACEDONIA, the «ST KLIMENT OHRIDSKI” UNIVERSITY – BITOLA & UNIVERSITY OF «FAN S. NOLI” – KORÇË,

Dear participants from Cyprus, Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra, Corfu and other Greek universities,

You are very welcome to the Faculty of Education in Florina!

We consider ourselves privileged to represent the host institution of this International Conference for a second time. Please, give me the opportunity to remind you that the idea of “Education across Borders” was born in the Faculty of Education in Florina, with professor Lemonidis being the godfather of it. I can see him here, among the audience.

Thanks to this Conference, and while being located in the most distant North West corner of Greece, our Institution has the opportunity to share interests in academic study and fieldwork with the aforementioned universities, thus creating a common ground for academic research, scientific knowledge, communication, as well as exchange of ideas and culture.

Such an initiative

- connotes multilateral cooperation between higher education institutions in the Balkans,
- increases the degree of transparency and compatibility among higher education in the area,
- facilitates the development of innovative practices in education and training,
- supports the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practices for lifelong learning
- develops multi/interdisciplinary approaches and
- contributes to the creation of sustainable learning communities.

Above all, such an effort is made to promote interaction among participants with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds on both personal and institutional level.

Apparently this initiative contributes to academic and personal benefits for the participants. It introduces the idea that borderlands cannot be inferred or deduced only from the defined political and economic structures of the neighbouring countries.

Considering the human factor, we can realize that the lives of people living and working at the borders are part of the border cultures; these people coexist on the same or the other side of the legal state demarcation, the borderline; and they share forms of particular conceptualisation with other borderlanders.

These characteristics underpin the core concept of this Conference. Above all, they constitute fundamental strands of both cooperation and interaction among the three neighbouring countries and even the whole Balkan area.

So, I am happy to announce the beginning of the 4th International Conference. We would like you to

share your thoughts and ideas being derived from the Conference and we wish you a pleasant stay in Florina!

Florina, 19th October 2018

Prof. Aikaterini Dimitriadou
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MULTIMODAL TEXTS AND LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: COMICS' IMPACT ON ORAL LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract

The use of multimodal texts has been introduced in education, especially in language teaching, during the last decades in response to the social, cultural and technological changes in the world. Comics due to their multimodal character are considered as a powerful teaching tool. Greek Early Childhood Education Curriculum (Greek ECE Curriculum) suggests the use of multimodal texts in preschool classes. However, in opposition to other education levels, comics are not sufficiently used in preschool teaching and learning procedures. Considering this gap, we conducted an exploratory case study at a preschool class in Florina investigating the comics' impact on preschool children's oral text production. We examined if using comics in storytelling activities could a) improve children's ability to sequence events of a story, b) help children to increase the number of linking words that they use, c) make children give more complete and complex structure in their story production. According to the findings, most of the thirteen children, involved in this study, showed considerable improvement. We claimed that comics' use contributed positively to this improvement.

Keywords: multimodal texts, comics, Early Childhood Education (ECE), language

1. Introduction

1.1. Multimodal texts and Education

The term of multimodality appeared in a period of social, cultural and technological changes in the world over the last decades (Kress, 2000). Multimodality refers to the progressive language's displacement as the main communication mode and highlights the emergence of other modes, such as images, graphics, colors, music and sounds, also in their digital form, that nowadays contribute in meaning making. These elements supplement the usual form and content of text and create new multimodal texts, such as posters, video-clips, films and sites (Hodolidou, 1999). Consequently, a competent reader had to deal with more complex media. Due to the emergence of multimodality, there was a need for the education to follow the new trends. Schools, in order to prepare students for the future requirements, had to introduce in the classroom multiple modes of meaning and not to promote exclusively written texts (Hadjisavidis, 2005). Ever since, the literacy is multimodal and it refers to the study of language that combines two or more modes of meaning. Reading and writing are rarely practiced as discrete skills, but are intimately connected to the use of multimodal texts, often in digital contexts of use (Mills & Unsworth, 2017, p. 3). These changes have led to new language curricula design and pedagogical theories' review (Kress, 2000).

For instance, the new approach of multiliteracies has supplemented the existing curricula and pedagogical approaches to the teaching of language and literacy by connecting the changing social environments and the “what” and the “how” of literacy pedagogy (The New London Group, 1996, p. 89).

In the new educational settings students learn to read, understand and produce different kinds of verbal, visual and digital texts through meaningful practices based on the particular social and cultural context (Hadjisavidis, 2003; Unsworth, 2001). Researchers argued that children have no difficulty dealing with multimodal texts. Children combine the different kinds of languages that they have in their disposition in order to express personal experiences, knowledge and interests and are considered as experienced makers of multimodal messages (Hope, 2008; Kress, 1997 in Androussou, Kortesi-Dafermou & Tsafos, 2016, p. 192). The 2011's Greek Early Childhood Education Curriculum (Greek ECE Curriculum) takes in consideration the new educational settings, created by the multiplicity of communication reality. It suggests systematically the use of multimodal texts in the teaching and learning procedure. Especially, in Language Curriculum, the use of multimodal texts such as picture books, advertisements, digital storytelling and various audiovisual materials is firmly recommended in order to make children achieve social and linguistic skills. Especially, with regards to comics, researchers have noticed an increasing interest in the multimodality of comics, and they claimed that comics should be considered a mentor text for multimodal literacy (Cook & Kirchoff, 2017).

1.2. Comics in education

Even though comics were not created for the young people, it did not take long to attract the younger age groups (Mallia, 2007). Comics were received enthusiastically by young people and it was compared to a cultural phenomenon. Since 1940's, studies in the USA highlighted the educational value of comics. However, about a decade later comics were disapproved as a paraliterary genre and a barrier to education. In addition, comics were considered an increasing factor of juvenile delinquency (Yang, 2018a). Since 1970's comics attract again the researchers' interest and comics are introduced timidly in education. However, comics are counted as a worthy education tool when «Maus», a graphic novel about the Holocaust, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 (Yang, 2008, p. 186). Nowadays, the use of comics is strongly supported in various teaching aims in different disciplines (Rouvière, 2012) and in various school settings, such as schools hosting immigrant students (Derder, 2013). The popularity of comics makes teachers use them as a successful way to attract unmotivated students. By introducing popular culture, like comics, in classroom, teachers build bridges between home and school, make the classes more student-centered and increase the students' involvement in the educational process (Moula & Koseyan, 2010; Yang, 2018b). Which are the comics' features that attract students and engage them in the educational procedure?

Comics are an art form based on the combination of image and text. Comics' authors can create audio and visual codes for giving the comics an illusion of sound and of movement and can compose psychological and ideological codes for giving the comics an emotional density and an ideological meaning (Martinidis, 1990). Four categories of image-text relations were identified: a) both words and pictures send essentially the same message, b) words amplify or elaborate on an image and vice versa, c) words and pictures follow different courses without interacting, and d) the pictures and words go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone (Bateman in Mills & Unsworth, 2017, p. 15). According to Paivio's dual coding theory, people store and decode information on two memory systems, which are language and

images (Oiconomou, 2018). As comics' readers can rely on language and image to understand the story meaning, comics could be a kind of facilitator between students and different disciplines (Yang, 2018b). Comics can be used as a stimulus of students' motivation but can also increase students' comprehension, having a powerful role both to the affective and cognitive domain (Mallia, 2007).

Moreover, comics differ from other visual media. For instance, while in animation the medium dictates how quickly the time progresses, in comics the time progression depends on the reader and on how quickly reader's eyes move across the page. That makes comics a *visual permanent medium*. In contrast to the digital visual media, the comics' readers can determine the *information-transfer's* pace (Yang, 2008, p. 188; Yang, 2018b). Consequently, comics could be a useful teaching tool, as they provide students a more active role in managing the time required to process the information given.

In addition, comics concretize the abstractions and give a form to a concept (Martinidis, 1990). For instance, comics, thanks to the fragmented scenes in juxtaposed panels, articulate a narrative chain and offer the possibility of time visualization and events' progression (Moula & Koseyan, 2010). This comics' feature enhances comics' educational character. Comics could be a successful mean to approach abstract concepts, particularly in ECE and primary education. For instance, preschool teachers could see comics as a medium, through which, they can teach sequence of events (Kakana, 1994, p. 72).

1.3.Rationale

The 2011's Greek ECE Curriculum mentioned comics, in a word, as a medium in written text comprehension without underpinning more this idea. It suggests the illustrated books in storytelling activities as a prompt for improving children's oral speech and specifically children's sequencing ability. At least to our knowledge, comics' potential as a teaching tool in ECE is not sufficiently exploited as the other multimodal texts, such as picture books, posters, and animation. However, comic strips, i.e., short comics of a few panels, and also silent picture books are suggested as an appropriate medium for creating and telling stories (Lindofors & IBBY, 2016; "Oral language and story", 2019).

Story is one of the principal contexts through which oral language can be approached. Narrative is a part of oral speech. The development of narrative skills in preschool children enables literacy, gives a helping hand to other language skills, helps children to reach reading proficiency and contributes to school success (Kanellou et al., 2016). Researches have shown that narrative skills both of typically developing children and children with learning disabilities improved through Story Grammar Approach (Murza, Montemurro, Schwartz & Nye, 2009; Shelton, 1999). Story Grammar determines the components that usually are included in adults' narratives and are considered necessary in making a story complete and understandable. For instance, the goal-directed protagonist's action, the sequence of events, the temporal and causal relationships connecting these events and the protagonist's accomplishment are considered as story components (Stein & Policastro in Kanellou et al., 2016). The relation existing between these components make story structure more or less complete and complex. Usually, story structure responds to the following schema containing: the *setting information* that introduces the protagonist, the *initiating event* that evokes a desire in the protagonist to achieve a goal, the *internal response* that includes the emotional reaction and plans of protagonist, the *attempt* that presents the protagonist's action, the *consequence* that indicates whether the protagonist attains his goal or not and the *reaction* that includes a moral (Stein & Trabasso, 1982; Stein, 2001).

The study of children's narrative skills focuses on cohesion and coherence (Kanellou et al., 2016:38). According to Beugrande and Dressler (as cited in Dinas & Goti, 2016), cohesion refers to the relationships that exist among the various elements of surface text in order to provide text as a unified lexical and structural organization. The cohesive devices as the reference, lexical cohesion, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis join information logically. Coherence refers to configurations of concepts and of temporal, causal and spatial relationships that make the text meaningful and understandable as a totality. Coherence uses the readers' and listeners' prior knowledge to construct meaning (Dinas & Goti, 2016, p. 63-65). According to the 2011's Greek ECE Curriculum, children's oral text production, for instance storytelling, could obtain a) more cohesion if children learn to use linking words to join the different parts of text and b) more coherence if children are trained in sequencing events. In our case, we considered comics as an educational tool that could help preschoolers to be more fluent in storytelling and could promote preschool children's oral text production. So, we made the hypothesis that by using comic strips in storytelling activities, we could encourage children to: a) improve their ability to sequence events, b) increase the linking words that they use, and c) give more complete and complex structure in their story production.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Participants

The research took place at an ECE establishment in the center of Florina. It lasted a month. The intervention activities were implemented twice a week. The children involved were thirteen. Nine of these were aged from five to six years old while the other four were from four to five. The elder group consisted of five boys and four girls while the younger group consisted of three boys and a girl. The boys were eight and the girls were five.

2.2. Procedure

The research procedures were divided in three phases. First, we evaluated, with the assistance of a visual medium, children's prior ability in storytelling. We showed to every child separately a picture story, composed by six pictures, and then we asked him or her to tell the indicated story. Children's stories were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using the content analysis method (Bryman, 2017). Children's answers were categorized according to children's ability in sequencing events, in using linking words and in including story components to their stories.

During the second phase, we implemented six activities that we had designed, based on the Greek ECE Curriculum. Every activity session lasted approximately forty-five minutes. We used famous comic strips like Garfield, Mafalda, Mickey Mouse and comics from schoolbooks and children graphic novels. The comic strips, that were selected, corresponded to a simple story structure including the most critical components of a story as the *initiating event*, the *attempt* and the *consequence*. Every comic strip contained from three to seven panels and narrated a short story. In each panel the story's events were depicted successively. The activities had an increasing degree of difficulty, which were: a) the number of comics' panels that increased from activity to activity and b) the transition from one panel to another that became more demanding for the readers. For instance, in the first activities we selected comic strips with action-to action transition that showed a simple progression of actions and demanded little effort to read

comics' panels as a whole. For the next activities we selected comic strips with scene-to-scene transition, in which space and time were more spanned, and that demanded more readers' efforts (Transitions and Gutters, 2019)

All the activities emphasized in the image and text combination. In each activity, we cut-off comics' panels of the comic strip and we gave them to the children in a random order. Children were required to deal with them in two steps. In the first three activities children were intended to put the comics' panels in order and to tell a story based exclusively on the graphics. After that, we read to the children the speech balloons that were incorporated into the panels. Then, we prompted children to retell the story and to reorder the sequence of comics' events, if they found it necessary. In the three next activities the procedure partially changed. We gave the comics' panels to the children and we asked them to put the panels in sequence by focusing exclusively on the graphics. Later on, we gave to children the speech balloons, in separate pieces and in random order, we read the text and we asked them to incorporate the speech balloons into the graphics.

In the third phase, we evaluated children's learning. We used the same picture story as in the initial assessment and asked every child separately to tell the indicated story. Children's stories were, one more time, recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using the content analysis method. Children's answers were categorized according to the content and the structure of their stories. Then, we evaluated possible shifts in children's narration.

2.3. Research questions

The research question of this study was the following: Does using comics in storytelling activities improve children's ability in oral text production? To answer this research question we investigated if children after the activities: a) improved their ability to sequence events of a story, b) increased the number of linking words that they used, and c) could give more complete and complex structure in their story production.

2.4. Coding

As coding criteria, we defined a) the number of pictures/events that every child was referring to and the logical order of narrated events, b) the frequency of linking words, such as after, since, when, used by children, and c) the emergence of relationships existing between the story events narrated by children and the existence of critical parts of story schema (initiating event, attempt, consequence). Subsequently, children's narrations were classified, ensuring that there is no overlapping and that the resulting categories are mutually excluded. We were based on a previous study's classification (Kanellou et al., 2016) and children's stories were classified into the three following categories: sufficient, partially sufficient and insufficient.

In the *sufficient* group belonged the children's stories when a) referred successfully to all story events, depicted in the pictures, and corresponded to the initial story's sequence, b) included two or more linking words, and c) evoked the relationships connecting the events, highlighted the goal-directed action of story's characters and reflected the initial story schema.

In the *partially sufficient* group belonged the children's stories when a) corresponded to the initial story's sequence, even if a picture/event was omitted, under the condition that this omission did not interrupt

the story flow, b) included one or two linking words, and c) evoked the relationships connecting the events, and reflected the initial story schema.

In the *insufficient* group belonged the children's stories when a) referred partially to the story's events, which were put in an out-of-order sequence, b) included one or less linking words, and c) were interrupted and did not reflect the initial story schema.

3. Results

According to the initial assessment's findings, children's stories were divided into three categories almost in a proportional balanced way. Stories of the elder children, aged from five to six years old, are placed mostly in the sufficient and partially sufficient categories. Stories of the younger children, aged from four to five years old, constitute the main insufficient population (Table 1). Only one child's story of the younger group (25%) was placed to the sufficient category and no one ranked in the partially sufficient category. In total they are divided as following: a) four stories were included (30.8%) in the sufficient category, b) four stories (30.8%) in the partially sufficient and c) five stories (38.4%) in the insufficient. In the sufficient category belonged three girls' and one boy's stories. They referred successfully to all story events and corresponded to the initial story's sequence. They included more than four linking words, up to eleven times. One story evoked the temporal relationships of the events. The other three stories evoked the temporal and causal relationships of the events and also the goal-directed action of the story's characters. Every story in this category followed faithfully the initial story schema. Especially, some of these enriched it by adding an introduction about the protagonist and the environment in which happened the story (the *setting information*).

In the partially sufficient category belonged two girls' and two boys' stories. They nearly referred to all story events and they corresponded approximately to the initial story's sequence. They included two linking words, up to eight times and evoked the temporal and causal relationships of the events. Every story in this category reflected the initial story schema.

In the insufficient category belonged five boys' stories. They referred partially to the story's events in an out-of-order sequence. In two stories no linking words were included while in the other three one linking word was included inappropriately. These narrations were interrupted, sometimes incomprehensible, and they did not reflect the initial story schema.

According to the final assessment's findings, children's stories were divided only into two categories. Stories of the elder children are placed exclusively in the sufficient and partially sufficient categories while all younger children's stories have moved into partially sufficient category. In total they are divided as following: a) five stories were included in the sufficient, b) eight stories in the partially sufficient. In the sufficient category belonged four girls' and one boy's stories. They referred successfully to all story events and they corresponded to the initial story's sequence. They included up to four linking words, up to five times. They all evoked the temporal and causal relationships of the events and they highlighted the goal-directed action of story's characters. Every story in this category followed faithfully the initial story schema.

Table 5. Initial and final assessment results

Category	PRE		PRE total	POST		POST total
	4-5 years old	5-6 years old		4-5 years old	5-6 years old	
Sufficient	1	3	4	0	5	5
Partially sufficient	0	4	4	4	4	8
Insufficient	3	2	5	0	0	0
Total	4	9	13	4	9	13

In the partially sufficient category belonged seven boys' and one girl's stories. They nearly referred to all story events and corresponded approximately to the initial story's sequence, even if some omissions occurred. In total, they included up to five linking words, up to ten times. Despite the high percentages of linking words observed in this category, most stories included only one. One story included five and two stories included three linking words. These three stories, narrated by children aged from five to six years old, included a large number of linking words so many times that they could be placed into the sufficient category. However, their use was not accurate and they did not express clearly the sequence of story events. So, they were placed in the partially sufficient category, even if they form a subcategory within the main category. In the partially sufficient category two stories evoked the temporal relationships of the events. The other six stories evoked the temporal and causal relationships of the events and especially in one of them the goal-directed action of story's characters was underlined. Every story in this category reflected the initial story schema.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The children who participated in this exploratory research had a considerable improvement. After the implementation activities no children belonged to the insufficient category any more. The sufficient category increased by one child and the partially sufficient category has doubled in size. Precisely, seven children moved up to a superior level, four children retained their placement in the sufficient and partially sufficient categories and two children have been downgraded from the sufficient to the partially sufficient category. This movement to an inferior level could be assessed as a minor impact finding since it concerns two children belonging to transcending stages. For example, one of these children belonged to the younger group and this fact indicates that her placement in sufficient category was not stable. Also, our findings showed the existing tendency for girls to perform better than boys, mentioned in previous studies (Kanellou et al., 2016).

Moreover, within each category, quantitative changes have been observed. Children, except one, referred to all the story's pictures in the final assessment. Also, during the implementation activities, children did not find any difficulty narrating all the events, depicted in the comics' panels. The comics' panels and the handling procedure that children followed with comics helped them to understand clearly the successive events and, consequently, they helped them not omitting any of them. The handling procedure along with the comics' feature to visualize time allowed children to increase the comprehension of the story events' progression (Martinidis, 1990; Moula & Kosseyan, 2010). This finding confirms Mallia's claims about comics' contribution in cognitive domain (2007).

Furthermore, the variety and the frequency of linking words used by children have increased. This growth was more reflected in the partially sufficient category. However, this increase was more remarkable during the intervention activities, in which the number of linking words was progressively increased. Particularly, when children had access only to the graphics, they used fewer linking words and fewer times. When they had access also to the speech balloons, they used more linking words and even more frequently. These extra linking words, used by children, did not exist in the comics' text. The better the children understood the story, the more linking words they used. For instance, at the beginning children linked the story events mainly by using the conjunction «and», as it has already been demonstrated in a previous study (Dinas, 2000). Gradually, they used a bigger variety of linking words, such as after, first, when. In any case, they were likely to use linking words that connect sequence events in a linear narrative. On the contrary, linking words, such as just, before, after were less used. However, an increasing tendency to use these linking words was also demonstrated. While at the beginning of the intervention none of them were mentioned by children, in the end, the children were more familiarized in using them.

In addition, children, even these that initially had poor oral expression skills, narrated more complete and complex stories. All of them managed to put the story events, depicted in the pictures, in sequence and concluded efficiently their stories. Also, most of them pointed out the temporal, causal relationships and the goal-directed action of the story's characters. Also, children's ability in sequencing story events gradually improved during the implementation activities. Both graphics and text made it easier for children to understand in which order the comics' events should be placed. For instance, when children had access only to the graphics, they did not place all the panels in a logical order. Children could not always get information from the visualization of story elements in the graphics, especially in comics strips that time and space were spanned. When children understood that the layout of the panels they had proposed, created meaningful gaps in the story, they preferred to bypass the lack of coherence by strengthening the sequence story events, adding imaginary information. On the contrary, when they had access both to the graphics and to the text children proposed an alternative layout, identical to the original sequence of events. This finding demonstrates the power of image and text combination in comics (Martinidis, 1990; Yang, 2008). Also, it highlights the need to promote multimodal literacy in preschool classes.

Summing up, the image and text combination of comics and their strength to visualize abstractions helped these thirteen children in storytelling activities and contributed to improve their oral text production. The children improvement was imprinted apparently: a) in the understanding of sequence events, b) in the

use of linking words, and c) in the completeness and complexity of children's story structure. Comics based on image and text helped the preschool children of this study to improve their oral text production. However, the sample size of our study does not allow general assertions and further investigations on a larger scale are necessary to corroborate our findings. Even so, considering the above advantages, we should think about using comics, more systematically, as a teaching tool in ECE.

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