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"CRITICAL THINKING IN EDUCATION"

31 October – 1 November 2014

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'FROM FUNCTIONAL LITERACY TO CRITICAL LITERACY': A COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT OF THE GREEK LANGUAGE CURRICULA FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Since the educational reforms being established are normally reflected on an effort to reform the National curricula, the recent educational reform in Greek Language Curriculum, has included the overall philosophy and principles of "critical literacy". Critical literacy focuses on developing critically literate individuals to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In other words, it aims at developing readers and writers as active participants in the reading and writing process. As a result, the communicative-genre based approach is ineffective to fully meet that demand.

This paper examines the "transition" from the communicative approach and functional literacy to critical literacy in the curricula for primary education and its impact on language teaching in Primary Education. The starting point of this study is the so-called "reform Arseni" namely the three successive versions of the curricula of 1999, 2001 to 2003(the Cross-thematic Curriculum framework), which are compared with the reformed pilot curriculum of the New School (2011). Through a comparative analysis of basic aspects of these curricula, the study aims at investigating how the principles of functional and critical literacy are presented in the Cross-thematic Curriculum framework (2003) and the Curriculum of the New School (2011), in an attempt to identify the innovative characteristics of the latter curriculum. Furthermore, an attempt was made to map the aspects of convergence and divergence, and to pinpoint the rate of exploiting the theoretical principles in the language teaching practice. The comparative study indicated the innovative aspects of the Curriculum of New School, which focuses on developing relationships between language and social practices, and enhancing reflection, communication, and critical awareness, as well as promoting the use of multi-media and multi-modality literacy in the classroom.

Keywords: functional literacy, critical literacy, Language Curricula, communicative / genre based approach, primary education

Introduction

In new Greece Language Curricula (1999, 2001-2003 and especially the curriculum of the New School in 2011) it is suggested that education, nowadays, has to meet the new demands, such as globalization, interculturalism, multilingualism, technologies, as well as international commitments by renovating methods and goals, always in the light of the Greek educational strategies.

The Curricula of the last two decades have attempted, for the first time systematically in Greece, to incorporate strategies that promise the transition from *"sentence"* to *"discourse"* through social and textual circumstances by incorporating the methodological principles of *communicative-genre based approach* (Archakis 2005). The social nature of the communication function requires that the speaker is competent to choose from all good proposals those which

comply with the specific social rules that dictate appropriate language behaviours for specific communicative situations (Mitsis 2004).

Through a comparative analysis of the Curricula, a special effort was made to take into account the major changes that have taken place locally (in Greece) and globally for the last two decades. An attempt has been made to include all global sociopolitical changes, such as the explosion of information technology, advances in communication, multicultural and multilingual societies.

Thus, the latest educational reforms have been included in the overall philosophy and the goals setting the concept of *"critical literacy"*. This concept, which focuses on developing skills to meet the challenges of the 21st century, aims to create critically literate people. The need for the pedagogy of critical literacy emerges from the fact that communicative-genre based approach is unable to fully meet that demand. Critical literacy is based on the concept that language constitutes a socialsemiotic system (Halliday 1978), which refers directly to new textual practices in primary school, examining both the social and the structural aspects of language (Chatzilouka-Mavri & Iordanidou 2009).

The main purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to identify those elements that reveal the *"transfer"* from the communicative approach and functional grammar to critical literacy, through a comparative overview of the Primary School Language Curricula of 1999, 2001, 2003 and the curriculum of the New School (2011). Emphasis was placed on some points of convergence and divergence between the Curricula in relation to the general aims, the specific objectives and the teaching methodology in order to indicate the variation that occurred diachronically in the philosophy and principles of the curricula. These were examined with respect to the functional use of language, the development of critical language awareness and linguistic / metalinguistic skills and the principles of pedagogy of multiliteracies.

From the curricula of 1999, 2001-2003 to the "New School" Curriculum (2011)

Theoretical framework and objectives of language teaching

In February 1999 a new Modern Greek language Curriculum for Primary Education was published (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999), with the provision to be implemented during 1999-2000 school year in order *for "the child to learn to use as much as possible the Greek language: to develop listening speaking, reading and writing skills quite easily"* (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1528). The concept of language development is in accordance with the holistic approach; this is a complicated skill that includes the development of the receptive and productive skills. According to the aims, objectives and activities of the curriculum, students should use the language by adapting and adjusting their speech to the appropriate situation and audience.

In the 2001 curriculum, however, (Government Gazette 1372/8-10-2001) the functional dimension of speech seems to be placed in the *"foreground"* since linguistic purpose is being approached in detail and the context in which it occurs is achieved. More specifically, language teaching aims at enabling students *"to use as much as possible the Greek language: to listen, to speak, to read and to write with ease, so as to gradually develop the multiple forms of literacy which the society of knowledge, information and multiculturalism requires"* (Government Gazette 1372/18-10-2001: 18736). For this purpose, the need for developing critical language awareness and enhancing students' ability to produce effective texts suitable for any special situation is stressed. The concepts of "*genre"*, *communicative situation, critical language awareness* are highlighted, referring to the modern concept known as *'critical literacy'*.

Nevertheless, the Cross Curriculum Framework was released in 2003, after being revised for once more (see Dinas et al. 2003). This new curriculum extends further the idea of language. In particular, in view of the general teaching of the language curriculum 2003 it is stated: *"language teaching in primary education aims to develop students' ability to operate efficiently and confidently, consciously, responsibly, efficiently and creatively in written and spoken language, and to actively participate in school and society"*. Language is considered "[...] *as a vector for promoting intellect and highly creative and critical thinking"* referring to newer perceptions of critical literacy (Curriculum 2003: 14).

The importance of developing productive skills and abilities, which is the purpose of language teaching in the primary education, is stressed in order for the children *"to handle with competence and confidence, consciously, responsibly, efficiently and creatively written and spoken language"* and *"to actively participate in school and the wider community"*.

Although the basic principle of 2003 Curriculum is interdisciplinary, the Language Curriculum of the New School (2011) obviously adopts the principles of critical literacy pedagogy, which define the overall objectives, content, basic skills / strategies and language teaching methodology as well as adoption of alternative evaluation methods. The main purpose of the curriculum is *"[...] students to acquire the properties of a critical and vigilant person that is able to recognize the historicity of various cultural traditions [...] a social subject which will primarily be able to understand how the language functions in economics, political, socio-cultural and ideological contexts"* (Curriculum 2011: 5-6). This is evident from the detailed record of such objectives and indicative aims proposing student's critical skills development to a) evaluate the various ways of writing based on the specific social context and to b) exploit the existing or emerging knowledge of dialects, language varieties or other languages in their local communities and contrast them critically with the standard variety, in terms of the stylistic, communicative and social dimension (Curriculum 2011: 8-9).

The curricula present a significant difference regarding the emergence of the role of ideology and linguistic diversity. Thus, the awareness of Greek language diversity in terms of geographical and social dialects and idioms (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1528, Government Gazette1372/18-10-2001: 18736, Curriculum 2003: 3749) contributes to the understanding of the function of linguistic forms as indicators of social aspects and mechanisms of constructing identities, ideologies, attitudes and behaviors (Curriculum 2011: 8). Similarly, in the genres and types of speech, language course has changed dramatically, since it was restricted not only to the understanding and use (of the content instead of textual organization structure) of a very limited range of textual items (almost exclusively narrative), but to speech production (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1528, Government Gazette 1372/18-10-2001: 18736, Curriculum 2003: 3748). In the curriculum of the *"New School"* the types of texts and their linguistic form are treated as *"products of social factors and power relations"* taking into account the current economic, political and cultural changes (Curriculum 2011: 9).

The new curriculum aims at a deeper clarification of the framework related to a variety of texts, which belong to different genres and include various types of textual and linguistic functions (Curriculum 2011: 12), thereby activating students' previous experiences with respect to everyday reality. Along with the study of the ideological dimension of speech, students understand that in addition to oral and written texts there are also hybrid text genres, which are used in some cases in daily communication, mainly through IT (Curriculum 2011: 9). The Curriculum of the New School (2011) is enriched with new data related to the multimodal, visual and general IT literacy means and the use of tools, such as web 2.0. In addition, it is worth

mentioning that the development of family literacy practices is strongly suggested (Curriculum 2011: 10-11). Finally, special emphasis is put on the enhancement of students' critical skills, to develop individuals who can easily comprehend and effectively use the language as well as to reflect on the *"meaning beyond the words"*, so as to become active citizens

Educational practices and Teaching methods

In the previous curricula (2001, 2003), the section concerning teaching methodology begins with stressing teachers' responsibility to implement the curriculum, by stating: *"The teaching approach dictates the resulting responsibilities and initiatives taken by the teacher in order to adjust his/her teaching to the circumstances and objectives of each course"* (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1550, Government Gazette 1372/18-10-2001: 18770, Curriculum 2003: 41). Nevertheless, in the curriculum of the New School (2011), teacher assumes a different role: he/she is the advisor, supervisor who coordinates the teaching/ learning process and the performance of the various activities students are involved into (Curriculum 2011: 16). Students themselves, with their own previous experiences, are at the core of the teaching process and participate actively in the learning process, get involved in communicative, problem solving tasks appropriate to their age.

Furthermore, this curriculum differs from the previous ones in terms of the proposed teaching approaches and texts types. It was first in the curriculum of 2001/2003, when texts are classified basically under narrative (narration, description, etc.) and directional ones (argumentative text, instructions, etc.) in relation to their use and their function in communication. The *«New School»* curriculum, gives emphasis not only on the ideological and sociocultural aspects of the texts but also focuses on providing students with the opportunities to develop metacognitive skills and critical thinking (Curriculum 2011: 15).

Moreover, in the latter case, other forms of texts emerge because, apart from oral and written texts, hybrid genres are used, since they are part of our daily communication mainly through IT (Curriculum 2011: 9). It should be noted that the common component of all curricula is the inclusion of texts performed/composed in real communicative conditions, since it is stated that *"certain communicative purposes, for example, are carried out through texts structured in paragraphs"* (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1550) and *"special circumstances for each course of the curriculum to contact those kinds of speech, types of texts [...] are offered"* (Government Gazette 1372/18-10-2001: 18771). Indeed, in the Curriculum issued in 2003 it is stated that *"the texts of the textbooks can be replaced by other articles, announcements, etc., relevant to students' interests and background knowledge and in any case, when texts contribute to teaching a specific linguistic item"* (Curriculum 2003: 3773).

Furthermore, a turning point is the change in the types of text processing: in the curriculum of 1999 it is stated that the main focus is on students' ability to comprehend and produce various text types covering a wide range of linguistic diversity and levels of speech (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1550). In 2001, a systematic reference is made to the types of text and key characteristics such as the structure, the axis of linguistic consistency and level of style (Government Gazette 1372/18-10-2001: 18771). In the revised curriculum issued in 2003, composing texts is introduced as three-step procedure. The first stage, *pre-writing phase*, is related to the production and organization of ideas. In the *writing stage*, the first draft of the text is composed and finally, in the *post-writing phase* improvement interventions are made to make the text efficient and effective for the situation of communication (Curriculum 2003: 3773). This process is highlighted even further in the New School Curriculum (2011), since this curriculum incorporates activities that focus on the processes of revising texts, based on the specific genre

and the appropriate style. This method is process oriented, since focuses on the process of writing rather than on the *"final product"* (Curriculum 2011: 18).

Despite the differences pointed out and highlighted in the Greek curricula of the last two decades, they all aimed at the enhancement of oral and written language both in terms of comprehending and composing. In relation to the teaching of the language system, the teaching of grammar to the level of word, sentence and text is provided. The level of the word corresponds to the area of morphophonology, while that of the sentence corresponds to the area of syntax. The third level concerns the effective teaching of morphosyntactic structures in relation to their function in the text (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1550, GG 1372/18-10-2001: 18771, Curriculum 2003: 3773). In the New School Curriculum (2011), the critical dimension is added, with emphasis on the identification of the mechanisms of style construction as the result of specific grammatical choices. In addition, emphasis is given on students' linguistic and cognitive background knowledge, as well as on digital literacy. Even more emphasis is laid on the principles of critical literacy, since oral and written language comprehension and production involves an active, dynamic and reflective process.

Students' evaluation and assessment

The final part of the 1999 curriculum refers to students' assessment, where a series of written and oral tests are proposed aiming at the efficient evaluation process. It is characteristic that the errors are treated as "*provisional level indicators of student communication skills"* and act as *"diagnostic tools that allow the teacher to devise remedial interventions"* (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1552-1553).

The Curricula of 2001/2003 introduce an expanded *"concept"* of student assessment. In particular, three different types of evaluation are identified to be applied by the teacher in the classroom, the *diagnostic*, the *formative* and τhe *summative* one. The regenerative nature of evaluation is emphasized, as well as the need for students' effective engagement in the evaluation process through self-assessment (Curriculum 2003: 3777) or evaluation of their peers is stressed in order to promote *"self-confidence, self-esteem"* and *"metacognitive skills"* that will enable *"control and management of their learning"* (Curriculum 2003: 3743- 4).

In the *New School* curriculum (2011), emphasis is placed on alternative assessment methods, such as systematic observation, think aloud process, student diaries, and projects with the ultimate purpose to record the students' progress and highlight both the strength aspects and those that inhibit the learning process (Curriculum 2011: 19-20). Moreover, the language portfolio is suggested, which is mainly a student self-evaluation instrument since it contributes to a systematic record from the part of the students and/or additionally by teachers (Curriculum 2011: 20).

Writing and reading skills in 3rd and 4thgrade of Primary School: a comparative account

The material extracts of the 3rd and 4th grade of Primary school which was selected to present, is representative of the whole Primary School. In these extracts, we have tried to identify and record some elements of convergence and divergence of the curriculum from 1999 until 2011. In the communicative-oriented research, the focus is on the context of communication and the social parameters that affect language use. The trend is for students to adapt the language depending on the variety of conversational contexts (Government Gazette 93/10-02-1999: 1537-8, Government Gazette 1372/18-10-2001: 18750-1, Curriculum 2003: 27-8, Curriculum 2011: 101-3, 111-2).

As a result, we see that the previous curricula (2001-2003) aimed at strengthening students' abilities to refer to reality, to influence, to change it or to create reality, thus

introducing a concept of priority of culture communication ability, since the language is understood as a system of communication based on articulated discourse and treated with its natural complexity. On tables 1 and 2, where some indicative aims of reading and writing skills are recorded, it is obvious that the language and context of communication are in a dynamic influential interrelation constantly defined and redefined during the production of oral and written texts. Also, the culture of language aims to develop students' ability to negotiate, through texts, a variety of meanings, as well as to develop critical reading and writing skills.

On the contrary, the new curriculum, taking into account economic, social, and mainly technological developments, focuses on the emergence of Multiliteracies which refer to *"a variety of forms of text produced in a multilingual and multicultural society"* (Chatzisavidis 2006: 115). There are similar references in the previous curricula and the term is extensively analysed in the section *"Information Management"*. The innovation aspect of the new curriculum is the shift from *"passive reception"* to *"active production"* and "interpretation" of the meaning of the text produced in the specific context.

In the *New School* curriculum (2011), it is suggested that students should be able to understand the various types of texts, reflect on and critically interpret the meaning produced under the specific circumstances of communication (Oikonomakou & Griva 2014). At the same time, the students themselves become creative and critical "producers" of discourse, depending on the different social environments. In other words, students are exposed to a wide range of texts, so that through the juxtaposition of different types of discourse differences, conflicts, contradictions, etc. will cultivate *"genre"* awareness and critical reading skills.

Table 1: Comparative presentation of some objectives related to reading skills in the curricula (2003/2011)

Curricula 2001/2003	**Curriculum 2011**
Reading	**Reading**
Compares texts on the same topic, but belonging to a different *type of speech*. Identifies the level of a text style and decides on being *appropriate to the theme of the text*. Develops the ability to select and read *unfamiliar texts*. Shows a positive but *critical attitude* towards the book and gradually becomes an independent and adequate reader who enjoys reading. Familiarizes himself/herself with vernacular speech and highlights *the structural differences* in relation to standard language.	- Evaluates the *effectiveness* of the texts being processed. - Identifies "polyphonic" texts and identifies author's perspective. - Shows a *critical attitude* towards the text and gradually becomes an independent and critical reader.

Table 2: Comparative presentation of some objectives related to writing skills in the curricula (2003/2011)

Curricula 2001/2003	**Curriculum 2011**
Writing	**Writing**
Reflects on his/her needs to *rewrite readable texts*. Uses various *types of discourse*, and writes *different types of texts for different purposes and for different audiences***.** Invokes *the language of feeling.*	Plans texts after negotiation, depending on *the communication / socio-cultural conditions and context.* Learns to reflect on and assess, or *challenge the stands and opinions*. Understands that writing is a dynamic process resulting *from the active students' involvement using procedures* of collecting, comparing, recording and evaluating the content and its linguistic expression.

Discussion-concluding remarks

Through the comparative presentation of the Modern Greek language Curricula for Primary Education in 1999, 2001/2003 and the New School curriculum (2011), their complementary character was revealed, along with the influence of social and cultural developments in the development of a new approach to language and educational reality in Greece. The curriculum of 1999 adopts a communicative approach to language teaching (Charalampopoulos 2000). In the same line, as the subsequent ones issued (2001/2003) followed the communicative approach and furthermore encompassed a new term of *"interdisciplinary approach"*.

Although the horizontal interface of courses has existed since the curriculum of 1999 (Dinas et al. 2003), the curriculum of 2011 goes beyond the terms of *"interdisciplinary"* and *"holistic"*, as it follows the new trend of language teaching *"the language teaching integrated with other subjects of the curriculum"* (Chatzisavidis 2007).

Since the principles of communicative approach are at the core of the 1999, 2011/2003 Curricula, focusing on the importance of the functional use of language, students are trained to understand and produce oral and written discourse adapted to the appropriate circumstances of communication. At the same time, they are asked to realize the mechanics of the language and learn to take advantage of the options to achieve effective communication (Charalampopoulos & Chatzisavidis 1997: 59). The New School Curriculum (2011) follows the principles of critical literacy according to which *"any cultural product is conceived as a multi-level learning outcome of ideological, social and technological processes"* (Curriculum 2011: 5). So, language teaching in Primary education in Greece follows a continuum of the communicative approach to post-communicative approaches to come under critical literacy (Chatzisavidis 2010).

Considering the Greek Language Curricula implemented from 1999 to 2011, we believe that the New School Curriculum (2011) incorporates a number of innovative elements while adopting and including the principles of critical literacy and multiliteracies (Chatzisavidis 2005, Oikonomakou & Griva 2014). Moreover, it provides students with opportunities to develop

creative abilities and critical skills with the ultimate purpose to become critical thinkers and active citizens (Curriculum 2011: 5-6).

Concluding, we assume that Critical literacy contributes to training students how to analyze social issues and helping them identify, reflect on and analyze underlying power relationships. In addition, critical literacy strategies learned across the curriculum, support students' higher order thinking skills and formulate inclusive behaviours both in school and society. However, the innovation of language policy and language curriculum towards the adoption of *"critical literacy"* is a multi dimensional, long-term and an ideologically charged process, while the question remains unanswered, whether teachers will be *"the agents of change"* or those who maintain the educational status quo.

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