READING COMPETENCE AND TEACHER TRAINING

1.   THE CONCEPT OF LITERACY

Literacy is a person's ability to use his or her language and language skills flexibly and creatively, but always in a way that is specific to each communication situation, to achieve goals related to: (a) the verbal acts of oral speech and (b) the understanding, use, critique, but also the production of texts of various semiotic composition and different social function and, therefore, of different structure, typology and stylistics. (Matsaggouras, 2007).

"Γραμματισμός" is a relatively new term in the Greek vocabulary and, while it includes the meaning of literacy, it is broader than that. This is a translation of the English term literacy, which has also been translated into Greek as "εγγραματισμός" (see Ong 1997) [1] and which does not simply refer to the ability to read and write. The concept of "literacy" refers to the ability of the individual to function effectively in various environments and communication situations, using written and spoken texts, as well as non-linguistic texts (eg pictures, blueprints, maps, etc.).

The question of the abilities and skills that the members of a society must have developed in order to be considered documents - that is, those who have acquired a "basic", at least, a level of literacy according to the respective social requirements - is not simple.

It is a fact, however, that writing is a basic criterion for social prestige and that its lack - and especially illiteracy - is a criterion for social stigmatization. This is natural, since the ability to read and write has always been closely linked to social factors, such as social class and economic strength.

The development of some degree of literacy takes place in a natural way in the family and social environment, as we learn our native language and manage to communicate with different people in different social situations through different types of speech and types. At the same time, however, some type of systematic training is necessary. And the more complex the communication in a society, the more diverse the texts produced in the context of the operation of its institutions and the stronger the pressures and demands in the labor market, the greater the demands for literacy education. . This is the main purpose of the school, which is to help young people develop the level and types of writing that their society requires for the present and the future.

School literacy has traditionally been associated with the teaching of reading and writing, as well as with the development of cognitive skills such as the cultivation of logical thinking, the understanding of grammatical rules, the ability to manage abstract concepts and hypothetical questions, the development of communicative and other mental skills. (Bernstein 1971-1975; Wells 1986; Cook-Gumpertz 1986; Dickinson 1994).

School education often does not help children develop these knowledge and skills and so, as many scholars argue, the school system not only does not mitigate the social differences between children from disadvantaged families and families, but is their means of reproduction.

It should of course be emphasized that the very form of school literacy is changing as social needs change rapidly. For example, the introduction of new technologies into life now requires the development of writing skills in new technologies. As Aronowitz & DiFazio (1994) point out, the introduction of these new forms of writing has brought about significant changes in the very understanding of school writing, as it has been approached until recently, as well as in traditional views on its forms. Accordingly, the ever-increasing use of state-of-the-art technology requires specialized writing skills.

It has been observed, however, that the increasing use of technology, found mainly in disadvantaged schools - often in the more affluent areas - often leads to the development of skills traditionally associated with school literacy, to the point that many now speak out.

There is also social literacy. The types of social literacy required by members of modern societies to be productive in their private, social and professional lives are growing rapidly as the need for understanding and producing different types of texts continues to grow. The production and understanding of different types of speech and texts presupposes familiarity with the specific type of texts, with the ways of their writing and, in general, knowledge of the ways of production, distribution and approach of these texts. It implies that different types of texts require both different "reading" techniques and an understanding of their context in order to understand them;

Reading, understanding or writing a text is the result of social and historical practices related to a person's access to specific social environments in which he or she may encounter a particular type of text. Within the social institutions, on the basis of which people operate and communicate with each other, responding to their personal, social and professional interests and requirements, the members of a society are "trained" in social practices and come into contact with different types of texts. This knowledge is activated when reading a text and leads to a better understanding of it. Through school, young people come into first contact with social institutions and their forms of writing. Then, their access to specific social environments and their experiences in them shape their social identity that allows them to understand different types of speech and texts.

According to Freire (Freire & Macedo 1987), reading the world around us always precedes reading a text. The term reading is used by Freire in an important and original way to include "interpretation" on the part of the reader. In other words, the critical character of the reading is emphasized, the active role of the reader but also the previous knowledge of the world that the reader brings with him when "reading" a text.

On the other hand, writing a text requires learning some kind of "technology" using some materials (such as paper, pencil or word processor), but in no case is it a neutral process through which information is simply transmitted. On the contrary, like reading, writing a text is the result of a complex social process, as it is linked to various social practices, general social dynamics, various forms and structures of power, social

order, gender, identity, etc. . (Hasan & Williams 1996; Gee 1996; Street 1995). Such a view of writing is far removed from the traditional view that it is merely a cognitive ability to read and write. Also, contrary to the traditional view, it supports the existence of various forms of literacy related to different cultural environments and the formation of social identities. For example, academic literacy refers to the communication skills that young students need to develop in order to meet the demands of the university space and successfully complete their studies. In particular, it has been shown that students' familiarity with academic discourse is closely linked to their success in academia (Chafe 1985; Tannen 1985; Ivanič 1998). A program for educating young students in academic discourse, for example, may consist of an analysis of various textual forms found in academic written or oral texts and the teaching of language choices such as grammatical written academic discourse (Halliday & Martin 1993). Another example of literacy is related to the new text types that are being developed with the use of new technologies. Email writing, for example, requires a revision of the distinction between "complete" written speech and "excerpted" oral speech, as these texts also draw on oral speech (Graddol & Goodman 1996).

Functional and critical writing: Functional literacy refers to the skills that individuals need to develop in order to cope with the demands of today's job market. In this case, literacy is measurable and quantitative. The purpose of the training is to achieve social goals and provide access to specific types of writing. The second direction, that of critical writing, aims to raise public awareness of the functions of the dominant forms of writing, as well as to develop critical thinking towards them. The ideological aspect of the practices of literacy is pointed out and it is argued that, like all uses of language, the forms of literacy also shape and are shaped through ideological positions connected to forms of social power (see also 5.3). As in the case of functional literacy, emphasis is placed on achieving social goals, which, however, are not treated as facts but are subject to critical analysis as part of the educational process.

2. KEYS TO PROMOTE READING COMPETITION IN EDUCATIONAL CENTRES.

There are two types of early childhood professionals in Greece: (a) the pre-primary teachers (kindergarten teachers) who deal with children at the age of 4 and 5 years old, and (b) the infant-toddler pedagogues and care providers (vrefonipiokomoi) who deal with children under the age of 4. 44 The training of early childhood professionals follows two distinct paths according to the age of children they are going to deal with. The kindergarten teachers are educated in Universities following a 4 year Bachelor programme. They follow a concurrent model of initial teacher education which provides concurrently a general component and a professional component accompanied by a practicum. Kindergarten teachers with a Bachelor's can work in public and private kindergartens. However, in order to work in public kindergarten they should have succeeded in national written exams. The infant-toddler professionals are educated in Higher Technological Educational Institutes following a 4 year higher education programme and they can work in infant-toddler centres and child centres for children under the age of 4. They follow a consecutive model of training which provides a professional component of one semester practicum with the form of paid placement in a centre-based day care institution. There are also a number of early childhood practitioners who are trained as infant-toddler care assistants and they work in the centre-based day cares. These practitioners are trained for two years either in post-secondary vocational training centres supplemented by an accreditation from the Organization for Vocational Education and Training (OEEK), or in vocational high schools (EPAL) with the specialty in early childhood care (this second choice of training assistants ended in 2013). The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5). Length of training is 4 years (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101). Continuing Professional Development is not obligatory (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105).

The role of teachers is especially important in the development of Reading for Pleasure. A teacher who tries to promote Reading for Pleasure should be convinced of the benefits it offers (Papadatos, 2012).

The role of the teacher in developing a love of reading is different from the traditional role of a knowledge transmitter. Without didacticism, with creative activities in which he participates, the teacher is called to act as a mediator and co-reader (Givalou, 2008), as an assistant and collaborator, trying to create «reading motivation» in students (Malafantis, 2008), in a time when conditions are not particularly favorable with the prevalence of television and electronic games in children's lives (Papadatos, 2012).

The new Curricula for the Teaching of Modern Greek Language and Literature in the Primary School (Curriculum, 2011) encourage the development of practices and activities related to the book and especially literature. They highlight the potential, guiding, animating role of the teacher, ensuring the processes that contribute to the more complete communication of the child with the book. The second big step to enhance the reading environment has been made recently in Greece through various programs e.g. «Innovative actions to strengthen students' Reading for Pleasure» and ongoing initiatives of the National Book Center. In addition, the interest of publishing houses or bookstores in children's books helps to create a climate of Reading for Pleasure. The media, mainly the newspapers and some magazines with book presentations, book reviews, etc., but also the state television with shows dedicated to the book, actively participate in shaping such a climate. At the same time, there are many official texts of European and international organizations that, directly or indirectly, dictate strategies for education and inspire reading practices. But the family plays a primary role, regardless of its educational and financial level, which provides children with opportunities to read, even if they do not consciously cultivate a positive attitude towards reading. In any case, research has shown that children of the privileged social strata become acquainted with reading practices earlier than children of the popular or petty bourgeois strata, while the role of the mother is always catalytic.. Parents become carriers of anon-formal education that is more easily linked to school processes.

3. INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING

The Greek primary education teachers are educated in Universities, in various Departments of Pedagogy across Greece. Admission to the university departments is based on the final test score of candidates to the Panhellenic Exams (panelinies exetasis), held each year.

Teacher recruitment is mainly based on written exams held by the Higher Council of Staff Selection (Anotato Simvoulio Epilogis Prosopikou - ASEP). For primary education teachers, the tests examine knowledge of Modern Greek Language and Literature, Maths, Science and pedagogic competency. A table of successful candidates, based on their exams' score and other qualifications, sets those eligible for recruitment on public schools.

The primary teachers are educated in Universities following a 4 year Bachelor programme. They follow a model of initial teacher education which focuses both on scientific knowledge and pedagogic competency.

All primary teacher trainees are required to have a practicum in schools for a semester or more according to the programs of each university.

Important teacher competences are a) the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student they teach, b) selection of appropriate instructional methods and c) instruction in an effective and efficient manner.

According to the latest ASEP exams for recruiting teachers (Presidential Decree in the National Gazette 515/08-10-2008), the important competencies examined focused mainly on scientific and theoretic knowledge of candidates and their pedagogic competency. Specifically, for primary teachers, literacy expertise regarding:

- knowledge of the literacy curriculum,
- basic linguistic concepts,
- phonological, morphological and grammatical knowledge,
- composition of written texts and genres,
- and the role of literature in the curriculum.

All teachers, either primary or secondary, are also examined on their pedagogic competence, which regards:

1) General Pedagogic Methodology: current teaching approaches, issues of everyday school life, school as an institution within society

2) Specific Pedagogy of literacy lessons: ability to solve teaching and pedagogic problems within a given classroom setting, ability to make teaching plans by using modern pedagogic approaches

In April-June 2020, a survey was carried out in Greece within the framework of the REACOM project, directed to students of Primary Education and students of Early Childhood education. The survey was answered by participants from the following universities:

-Democritus University of Thrace

-University of Patras

-Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

-Metropolitan College

-University of Crete

Their answers were categorized according to the strengths (more than 70%) and weaknesses (less than 70%). What follows is a list of the strengths and weaknesses regarding Early Childhood Education degree competencies and Primary education degree competencies:

Early childhood education degree competencies

Strengths

- I understand that the daily dynamics in Early Childhood Education is changing according to each student, group and situation, as well as knowing how to be flexible in the exercise of the teaching function.
- I know the objectives, curricular contents and evaluation criteria of Early Childhood Education.
- I am able to design, plan and evaluate teaching and learning processes, both individually and in collaboration with other teachers and professionals of the centre.
- I master the language and literacy curriculum of this stage, as well as the theories about the acquisition and development of the corresponding learning.
- I know the learning process of reading and writing, as well as its teaching.
- I am able to critically analyse and incorporate social issues that affect family and school education (social impact of audio-visual and technological language, discrimination and social inclusion, sustainable development, etc.

Weaknesses (less than 70%)

- I am able to deal effectively with language learning situations in multicultural and multilingual contexts.
- I know how to identify possible dysfunctions and intervene for their correct evolution.
- I understand the transition from oral to writing, and I know the different registers and uses of the language.
- I am able to acquire literary training to learn about children's literature and its teaching.
- I know how to encourage reading in students, and encourage them to express themselves through written language.
- I am able to collaborate with the different sectors of the educational community and the social environment.
- I know and am able to apply information and communication technologies (ICT) in the classroom to develop reading skills.

Primary education degree competencies

Strengths

- I am aware of the importance of the school library as a resource centre for reading, information and lifelong learning.
- I know and I am able to apply information and communication technologies in the classroom.
- I am able to encourage reading and encourage students to express themselves through written language.
- I am able to design, plan and evaluate teaching and learning processes, both individually and in collaboration with other teachers and professionals of the centre.
- I understand the basic principles of language and communication sciences.
- I know the school curriculum of languages and literature.
- I know the current proposals and developments based on learning skills.

Weaknesses (less than 70%)

- I am able to deal effectively with language learning situations in multicultural and multilingual contexts.
- I am able to have my students express themselves orally and in writing in a foreign language.
- I know and am able to exercise the functions of tutor and counsellor in relation to family education in the period 6-12.
- I know the organization of primary and primary schools and the diversity of actions that comprise their operation.

- I am able to critically analyse and incorporate social issues that affect family and school education (social impact of audio-visual and technological language, discrimination and social inclusion, sustainable development ...).
- I know the difficulties in learning the official languages of students of other languages.
- I am able to relate education to the environment, as well as cooperate with families and the community.
- I know the curricular areas of primary education.

Students were also asked about the activities carried out during the internship period. The answers were categorized in strengths and weaknesses. Strengths include the activities carried out by more than 70% of the students. What follows is a list of the activities:

Activities carried out during the internship period with the early childhood education students

Strengths
- Relationships between written language and oral language are established.
- In class, various ICT resources are used to carry out interactive reading activities (internet, digital whiteboard, book material or created ...).
- There is a stipulated time in class for learning to read (assembly, corners ...).
- The trainee has had greater autonomy in carrying out reading activities in large group and small group and in carrying out reading animation activities.
- There is a quiet place in the classroom dedicated to individual reading (classroom library).
- Coordinates with other teachers to schedule and / or carry out activities with our students about reading.
- Classroom planning is modified according to the needs of students throughout the school year.

Weaknesses (less than 70%)
- An initial evaluation is carried out at the beginning of the school year.
- Information is provided to families to encourage reading learning at home (workshops, quarterly meetings, tutoring, parent school ...).
- Families do with their child at home suggested literacy activities in the classroom.
- In my classroom other agents of the educational centre or other professionals participate in actions that favour the reading learning of my students.
- Concrete moments are used during the course to evaluate my students with a reading test.

- Groups are organized taking into account that they have students with different reading levels.
- The tutor performs together with the internship student.
- Students do not have initiative in the practice period.

Activities carried out during the internship period with primary school students

Strengths

- The participation of families in the organization of reading activities (cultural week, representation of works, etc.) is encouraged.
- Students are asked before, during and / or after reading a text.
- Reading activities are carried out in large groups and small groups.
- Trainees participate autonomously preferably by asking questions during reading texts to ensure understanding, to summarize knowledge after reading
- Most of the performances are performed by the tutor

Weaknesses (less than 70%

- Students are asked questions while reading texts to ensure their understanding.
- Use of ICTs to promote linguistic competence
- It is carried out in the sponsoring centre where my students tell stories or stories to students from lower grades.
- Concrete moments are used during the course to evaluate my students with a reading test.
- The tutor performs without the internship student.
- Students do not have initiative in the practice period.
- Use a textbook in the language area.

4. CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

Continuing professional development is optional in Greece. The aims of the in-service education and training of teachers (INSET), in Greece, are:

- teacher training focused on the new curricula in Compulsory Education;

- teacher training on ways to organise and implement Experimental Actions and Projects, based on the principles of experimental and inquiry-based learning;

- teacher training specialised in ICT, drama, music, arts and intercultural education, who are employed today in all-day primary schools using a unified and revised curriculum

- induction INSET for newly-appointed and substitute teachers
- INSET for teachers on the use and application of ICT in the teaching practice.

There are not many initiatives regarding the improvement of the quality of literacy instruction but there is an increasing attention paid to initiatives for tackling reading difficulties, such as:

- the programme "Screening pupils with learning difficulties – Creation and standardisation of Twelve Assessment Tools" (University of Patras)
- and the project "Primary and secondary prevention of learning difficulties and speech problems in preschool and school age for all children" (Pedogogical Institute).

Those programmes are mostly on a local level, in collaboration with specific schools, rather than on a national level.

Another important inititative for Continuous Professional Development of Teachers was the programme Philanagnosia (love for reading). This programme ran for three school years (2011-2014) as part of the literacy curriculum on primary schools, implementing "Philanagnosia" for an hour per week in every grade. It included teacher training and seminars, support of reading groups in schools under the motto "a reading group in every school.

The results of the READCOM survey addressed to primary and early childhood teachers are the following:
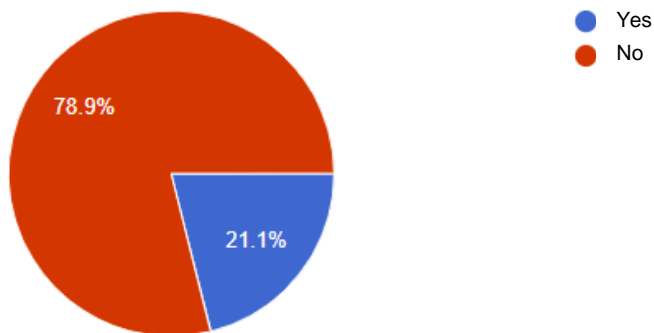
Number of training actions in which I participated in the last 5 years on linguistic competence:
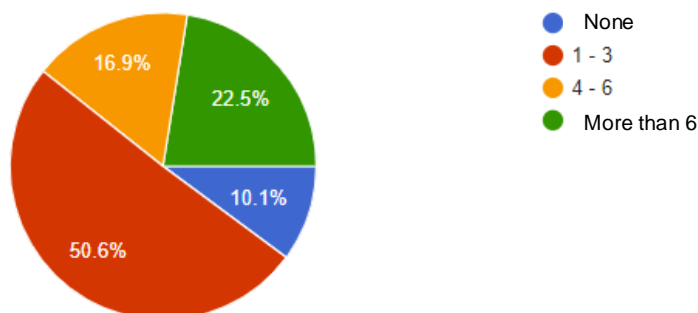
I have been in centres with innovative practices.

65.2%

34.8%

Yes
No
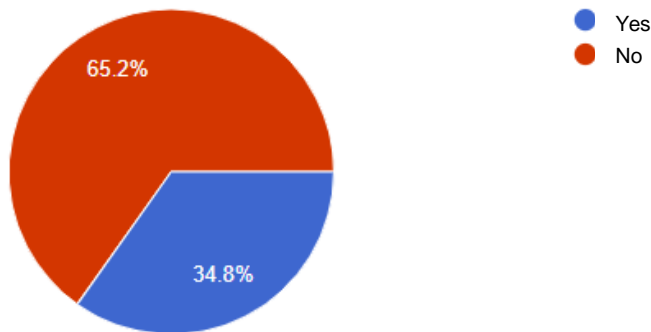
I have participated in institutional or administration projects related to the teaching of reading.

78.9%

21.1%

Yes
No

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