

Manuel scolaire: recherche et évaluation * School textbooks: research and evaluation

Editors: M. Kondyli, Y. Papamichael

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The UNESCO Chair (UNITWIN) of Patras University
in Learning, Teaching and Evaluation
265 00 Rion - Patras, Greece, tel. (0030-61) 997645

Chaire UNESCO (UNITWIN)
de l'Université de Patras
en Apprentissage,
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School Textbooks:
Research and Evaluation

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Introductory Comments

This editorial review integrates the oral presentations of the Workshop *School Textbooks in First School Age*, coordinated by UNESCO'S Chair of Patras University (Greece). It can be paralleled, in my opinion, with a task similar to countering the effects of the Tower of Babel. The point of this edition is not only if we have manage to see the world before the Tower, but also be fair and objective with all different aspects of the education and the multi-cultural experience, as well as within the framework of the complex domains of the social sciences. A small example of the problem of dealing with cultural differences was our efforts to convey the different linguistic and cultural approaches despite the confines of translation. In addition, in transcribing oral presentations into written form there is, unfortunately, a certain loss of what is conveyed by the nature of the spoken word which can be neither saved nor presented here.

Another structural element by which the written edition differs from the oral presentations is the exclusion of the discussion following each presentation. In addition to these we have also not included the extensive discussion during the last day of the meeting addressing the issues of future collaboration between Balkan, Mediterranean and Western European Nations, as well as the establishment of a network at institutional level, concerning educational research and evaluation of didactic material. It has been, of course, a remarkable experience for all of us, as an effort to formulate and define problems, to exchange ideas and, above all, to surpass somehow all those obstacles of linguistic barriers and reach an understanding of cooperation and coexistence.

The sections of this volume are generally presented in the order they were in the Workshop's programme. Under the heading of «School Textbooks», which represent the core subject of the Workshop, the school textbooks and school curricula are, however, two sides of the same coin, that is, educational material and instructional media. Furthermore, it is for the benefit of the reader that the following sections are presented in the way they are not only according to theme but also so that we can compare the different national approaches, the educational level, the subject-matter, the methodological assumptions, the instructional techniques, the different assessment and evaluation procedures.

The papers presented by Koulaidis and Tsatsaroni, Zogza, Skouras, Kondyli, Eleyou, are grouped together under the title «Didactic and Epistemological Aspects» in school textbooks of subjects such as physics, biology and language. The emphasis on the above subjects does not mean that similar intellectual prerequisites, which relate knowledge to the *functional use of materials*, do not exist in other areas of the curriculum.

The analysis of the contents of textbooks it is examined in the section under the title «Pedagogical and Ideological Aspects» by Avdela, Pandiska and Ravanis, Chabchoub, Birzea and Braga, Wehbe. The first three papers analyse school textbooks in different subjects (i.e. history, physics and language) by focusing on the dominant ideologies that pervade the texts. Consequently, they indicate the attitudes and

beliefs on ethnocentrism and sexism, as well as conservative, traditional and perhaps religiously fundamental messages. In all cases, the authors are dealing theoretically and empirically with the existing educational politics and the political practices. The two other articles which follows in this section, recommend future directions towards a global curriculum and the *rationalisation* of educational politics.

The ethnic peculiarities which are elaborated within the «National Dimensions of Textbooks' Elaboration» are shown in the work of Chabou, Fall, Mostafa, Bishkov, Rosenbaum, Napuce. In reality, this ethnic boundaries are the primary source from which all kinds of problems will flow and develop. These are familiar and perhaps similar to those of other nations such as Algeria, Senegal, Morocco, Bulgaria, the Ukraine and Albania. Regardless of the varied social conditions and policies of the different countries, or the characterization of children and youth (whether it is appropriate or inappropriate) there exist a common need for the *modernization* of all educational materials.

The issues involving «Evaluation of School Textbooks» are presented by Rogiers, Genthon, Miled, Chronaki, Agha. They examine all kinds of assessment and evaluation both generally and specifically, providing information on ethnographic views of self-regulatory and self-evaluating approaches within the context of school classrooms, as well as the grilles of curriculum evaluation.

Topics referring to «Structure, Content and Didactic Approaches» of textbooks and generally of the curricula are presented by Glaubman, Panayotova, Koliopoulos/Bagakis/Papami chael, Valanides, Psillos and Barbas. The papers assume that decontextualized knowledge of theories and principles will have applications in actual situations. This view incorporates the two main elements: analysing situations and drawing upon technical knowledge. But also there is a new element: teachers must choose goals for a given situation and act on these choices. This action is guided by a sense of purpose, goals, and ethnical considerations, as well as by technical knowledge and by one's analysis of the immediate situation. Altogether, all these reflect the complexity of teaching in practice.

Given the need for publication of this bilingual volume in two major languages as French and English, it is very difficult to convey the precise meaning in every instance, due to the fact that problems in translation are going to arise since most of the contributors are not native speakers of either of the two languages of the publication.

Finally, it should be noticed that any stylistic difference of papers is due to the fact that they are a written transcription of their oral presentations and this was each author's responsibility. An exception to this is three papers, which, with a few small changes, appear in a transcription of their recorded oral presentation. One of the three is the presentation of the late Professor Chabou, and this volume is dedicated to his memory. The authors of the other two papers (Prof. Genthon and Prof. Eleyou) were unable to rewrite their oral presentations.

Considering all the above, we hope that we will have your understanding for any errors and mistakes that you will come across in this text. However, we hope that the final version demonstrates that our efforts to attempt to coordinate a pluralistic text, which is diverse in both languages and subject matter, are rewarded, despite any shortcomings that remain.

Marianna Kondyli
Lecturer in Sociolinguistics
University of Patras

Problems in planning language education in Greek kindergartens

MARIANNA KONDYLI
University of Patras
Greece

Base of our assumption is that any teaching process is characterised by materiality, in the sense that both the preparation of a teaching curriculum and the means necessary for its actual implementation in school practice constitute per se didactic material per se. The following remarks refer to specific problems of the «material» for language teaching in kindergarten.

The matters discussed below arise from methodological problems concerning language as a theoretical and as a teaching subject. In this approach, prior to any attempt at establishing teaching material, the school curriculum must, in each case, answer the question of what is considered as *children's language* at pre-school age and, consequently, what are the *teaching objectives for language* in kindergarten.

In regard to the first part of the question (what is children's language at pre-school age), it is relatively easy to find general research data. Therefore, we can agree that the results of various research works regarding the linguistic needs of children at pre-school age are more than sufficient to identify the characteristics of children's language (Andersen 1990, Vosniadou 1990, Kati 1992). Regardless of their general theoretical differences, linguistic and psychological studies tend to agree that even at the age of 3, if not earlier, children possess the system of their native language and use it fluently. Thus they have «acquired» what N. Chomsky calls *linguistic knowledge* or *linguistic competence*, that is, they are able to control the construction of sentences of the language.

What, of course, has not been acquired (or learned) by children at this age is the so-called *communicative competence*, a term used by socially oriented approaches to language to denote all those aspects which characterise the use of language under different communication circumstances. In fact, this is a process of social, pragmatic and cultural learning of rules which govern the use of language and, in this sense all efforts which go beyond the traditional concept of language teaching as a learning process of the

metalinguistic rules of the system are focused.

Our argument is based on those features of linguistic and communicative competence, and, accordingly, the teaching curriculum, as an official tool for the implementation of learning prerequisites, does not present a solid theory on the needs for language teaching to young pupils. Paradoxically, the current teaching curriculum for Greek kindergartens seems to overlook scientific data concerning the development of language. One can assume that the teaching curriculum, which has been modernised in most aspects, seems to be bound to a narrow interpretation of «Piagetian» inspiration with regard to the subject and the learning objectives of children's language. Thus, language is viewed as the means to achieve objectives on knowledge and logic development. We would like to mention some of the definitions for language from the curriculum (it should be underlined that these come from units which deal with the psychokinetic, intellectual and socio-emotional development) i.e.: «a tool for thinking», «a means for construction of schemes», «means for descriptions and knowledge», «code of expression», «means for organising social behaviour», «means for communication between pre-schoolers» (but why the definition «language as a means of communication between pre-schoolers and teachers» is left out?). What is expected is that pre-schoolers, with the help of their kindergarten teacher, will use language as a means to carry out multiple tasks, without having, however, a systematic didactic approach of the use of language in its multiple forms. As it has been supported elsewhere (Kondyli 1994), the absence of a cohesive theory on the subject of «language» in this specific curriculum, leads to negligence in teaching opportunities for the development of linguistic-communicative competence of young pupils.

The curriculum certainly contains didactic activities on language. It is worth while noting, however, that the curriculum is limited to the so-called «pre-reading» and «pre-writing» activities. These type of activities essentially constitute the only areas of pure language teaching. At this point, it is necessary to make two remarks. Preposition «pre» denotes respect of conventional limits of the curriculum, according to which learning of writing/reading is the task of the next school level, that is, the elementary school. And, of course, this same distinction of the reading/writing process in a «pre» and «per se» stage, denotes positivist and behaviouristic attitudes towards the phenomenon of literacy. Thus, the whole line of thinking which is recorded in research data on early literacy of children (i.e. Goodman 1990, Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982, Teale and Sulzby 1986) seems to be overlooked.

The second remark concerns the assumption in the curriculum that writing/reading is the par excellence field of language teaching. In this way, a kind of «paradox» is being developed according to which, written language is not taught in kindergarten but, on the other hand, the subject of language teaching is considered to belong to this written language.

Let's remain in the so-called language activities which, despite their wide range of objectives, are exhausted in structural type exercises for pre-schoolers, in order to train

them with elements of the language *system*. The most important didactic formulations are based on the necessity for the pre-schoolers to «realise» the «morpho-syntactic, phonological and semantic aspects» of language and to «realise that the transition from spoken to written language is a process of codification and decodification». A fact which, apart from other things, means that exercise in language use is based on the other, «non linguistic», activities which abound in the curriculum.

Contrary to didactic approaches of language introduced into other school levels (i.e. Paparizos 1993, Haralampopoulos and Hatzissavides 1991), we assume that language teaching in kindergarten, falls in line with a popularised Piagetism from its scientific point of view but, from the didactical point of view, it ends up with individual empirical solutions.

The crucial element in our case is that we lack both ethnographic and sociological data from kindergarten classes in regard didactic strategies. We also lack data on the attitude of teachers vis-à-vis language skills or the use of any didactic material (for one of the exceptions, see Papoulia-Tzelepi 1993 a, b).

In this way, the following work hypotheses results from a selections of opinions expressed by kindergarten teachers who represent daily practice in pre-school education. We can easily detect an effort to impose an ideal linguistic norm which aims mainly to «correct expression», syntax and «correct spelling». And if general characteristics of «correct spelling» seem to be more or less self-evident, the matter of «correct expression» is less self-evident. It is clearly a non analytical category which is based on the general intuitive perception of the individual speakers/teachers with regard to the notion of «correct». The most important element, however, is that the selected didactic strategies for learning of the correct language do not escape from the traditional method of «continuous repetition till consolidation» of skills. Thus, behaviourism indirectly dominates since what teachers assume is that provision of adequate stimulus will in the future stabilise the correct use of language.

Another element that should be stressed is the teacher's habit of resorting to teacher's aid books, products of free trade in order to fill the gap of a ready «prescription book» for various activities. There is no need to further comment on the plethora of arbitrary representations of language which come out from these aids.

The atypical language teaching takes place through empirical solutions. At this point it should be stressed that these solutions are not necessarily bad. Furthermore, a «scientific» didactic approach is not always preferable over an empirical one, since what children learn in the long run, does not relate directly to the aims set by the school. The question, however, which is asked is related to the previous remarks, that is, to the absence of research data and to the conception of language which is reproduced and acquired in kindergarten. Nothing prevents us from considering that behaviourist didactic solution, and the arbitrary «normative» models brought forward by teachers tend to constitute a lingual hidden curriculum, in contrast to the «severity» reserved for other cognitive fields covered by curriculum. We presume that this hidden curriculum goes

beyond Chomsky's theory which is present in the formal curriculum.

It has been insinuated that the teaching of language use, mainly aiming at the development of the communicative competence of children is one of the approaches that should constitute the spine of language teaching in kindergarten school. Given the limitations that have been pinpointed, this legitimate argument seems «bolder» since it not only demands a different approach to the didactic subject, but, a much different educative practice which will try to overcome the sterile teaching and the prescriptivism which was oppressed in language teaching in the past.

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