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EDUCATION IN EUROPE:  
SHAPING THE FUTURE"

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## **EUROPEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE 2009**

**“Current Issues in Preschool Education in  
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# ***Conference proceedings***

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**New Curriculum – New Roles for kindergarten teachers:  
An in-depth investigation of presupposition of  
knowledge forms regarding literacy in Greek Pre-  
Primary Curriculum**

*Abstract*

*In 2003 a new curriculum was introduced in Greece: The Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework (CTCF). In the unified system of knowledge adopted by CTCF for compulsory education the role of kindergarten was underlined and in many ways enhanced. In this paper we will attempt based in Bernstein's theory for knowledge form to investigate the kind/kinds of knowledge which is/are necessary to be utilized by kindergarten teachers when developing and implementing the new curriculum in respect of literacy practices. The CTCF for pre-primary education and its official commentary "Kindergarten Teacher's Guide" was searched and the results show that kindergarten teachers should have a solid knowledge of relevant theory in order to adopt the guidelines and implement literacy practices suggested by new curriculum. Finally, questions such as education and further education of kindergarten teachers, classroom facilities and parents' expectations are discussed.*

**1. Introduction**

The question of literacy development in the early years seems to be of great importance for both researchers and kindergarten teachers (Anning & Edwards, 2006; Hall et.al., 2003; James & Prout, 2001; Spodek & Saracho, 2006; Stahl & Yaden, 2004). Currently the main concern of researchers is focused on issues regarding the linguistic aspects of school knowledge adopted by the official curricula as well as the didactic strategies prescribed by these presuppositions (Bourne, 2000; Daniels et.al., 2000; Makin et.al., 2007; Marsh & Millard, 2000; Morrow & Asbury, 1999; Tsatsaroni et.al., 2004).

In Greece up to 2000 the reading readiness approach was dominated kindergarten literacy practices. That year a new curriculum was introduced to kindergartens. It is argued that this is based on emergent literacy approach (Tafa, 2008). The new approach was incorporated in the "Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework for Compulsory Education" (henceforth: CTCF) which was introduced in 2003 (Ministerial Decision 21072b/G2/Government Paper 304/13-3-2003). This new curriculum attempts the integration of knowledge from the age of 5 up to 15 and it is



based of the decisions of European Union for cultivation of new basic skills and key competencies for the construction of the knowledge society (Alahiotis & Karatzia, 2006; Council of Europe, 2003).

This paper ventures, based on Bernstein's theory about forms of discourse, to investigate the kind of scientific, theoretical and practical knowledge which are necessary to be developed by kindergarten teachers in their classes in order to cultivate children's awareness for oral and written language.

Specifically, the parts regarding language of both the "Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten" (CTCF, 2003) and the "Guide Book for Kindergarten Teacher: Educational design – Creative Environments for Learning" (Dafermou, Koulouri & Mpasagianni, 2006) were put under scrutiny. The later is a book published by the Pedagogical Institute of Ministry of Education and elaborates the Curriculum. The research questions are: a) Which forms of knowledge seems to be encouraged for utilization for literacy development in Greek kindergarten? b) Which is the construction of scientific knowledge which a kindergarten teacher has to apply during language activities in classroom? and c) Which seems to be the ideal type of scientific identity of a kindergarten teacher?

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The official pedagogic discourse, which is produced by the state and is channelled through educational institutions, is of vital importance for the construction of experience of both pupils and teachers. This knowledge is implemented through three systems of messages: the curriculum, which is the constitution of valid school knowledge, pedagogy, which is the valid way of transferring knowledge and simultaneously forms the relations between teacher and pupil(s) and evaluation, which refers to the valid realization of official knowledge by pupils (Bernstein, 1989, 63-64).

At the field of pedagogic discourse and at the procedures of formation and reproduction of knowledge three are the parameters which seem to be involved: scientific knowledge, school knowledge and commonsense knowledge that carry pupils in schools (Kouzelis, 1991; Koulaidis, 1994). The first one is the initial point for the production of school knowledge with the application of recontextualization rules (Bernstein, 1990; Lamnias, 2002; Singh, 2002). School knowledge is the version of scientific knowledge adopted by school. At elementary level of education pupils, commonsense knowledge should be considered important and it should be utilized in order to develop through instruction to school knowledge (Kouzelis, 1991; Koulaidis, 1994). Any kind of school knowledge reform, as the recent one in Greek Pre-Primary Education, could have as consequence the change of theory of instruction. According to Bernstein these changes, have "*consequences for the ordering of pedagogic discourse and for the ordering of pedagogic practice*" (1990, 189).

The term pedagogic discourse "*describes the relay of pedagogy. It consists of an instructional discourse embedded in a regulative discourse, or where a discourse of competence (the instructional, including specific skills) is embedded in a regulatory discourse (regulatory of character, conduct and manner, and of theories of pedagogy)*" (Hoadley, 2008, 65). Therefore, during teaching teachers transmit contents of knowledge (instructional discourse) and social and moral values (regulative discourse). The regulative discourse is the dominant teaching and learning discourse, because of producing the social order of pedagogic act and containing theories of learning, the ideal pedagogic relation and the ideal teacher model (Bernstein, 1990). The pedagogic act and the theories supporting it are not



ideologically neutral. Contrary, both school knowledge and pedagogic practices are socially constructed and convey the dominant power and control operating in a given society in a certain historical period (Apple, 2000; Bernstein, 1990, 1996; Young, 1998).

Power relations refer to the structural level and are closely connected with the concept of classification. The principles of social control refer to the interactional level and are connected with the concept of frame (Daniels, 2001). Classification in micro level of a kindergarten class pertains with organizational aspects of pedagogic practices. It refers to the *"relations between"* and in the level of boundaries maintenance between categories (discourses, disciplines, agents and spaces) (Bernstein, 1989, 1990, 1996). In the case of previous curriculum for kindergarten in Greece is concerned the administration of school knowledge was connected to an integrated code. Kindergarten teacher had to administrate knowledge based on daily life experiences, current issues or even more specific topics (weak classification) (Bernstein, 1977, 1989). But in the case of current curriculum the situation is different. This curriculum suggests the demarcation of school knowledge in broad cognitive areas (linguistics, science, arts etc.), which are gradually become separate to different levels of compulsory education. So in late grades of primary school or secondary education there are distinct subjects of school science, such as geography, history, sciences etc. (strong classification) (CTCF, 2003).

Framing refers to *"relations within"*, which in the micro level of a kindergarten class demonstrate the way in which pedagogic practices are form the relationships between teacher and learner. Among others Bernstein (1977) suggests, especially for kindergarten, a child-centred and invisible form of pedagogy, through which kindergarten teacher takes part in educational activities as facilitator or mediator. From this perspective kindergarten teachers should take care to provide a framework in which through inter-personal forms of control as well as play-like activities children are motivated to discover knowledge. Moreover, kindergarten teachers need to know a solid theory for literacy acquisition in order to interpret and evaluate children's attempts to read and write as well as to decide what kind of activities are appropriate to be adopted in the class (Bernstein, 1989). This is of crucial importance since teachers' definition of literacy impacts their instructional decision making (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Thus, teachers certainly seem to draw resources from specific forms of knowledge, which are called by Bernstein (1999) horizontal and vertical discourse.

The horizontal discourse is akin to everyday or mundane knowledge (Muller & Taylor, 1995). The horizontal discourse is *"a form of knowledge usually typified as everyday or "common sense" knowledge. Common because all potentially or actually have access to it, ...it has a common history in the sense of arising out of common problems of living and dying...it is likely to be oral, local, context dependent and specific, tacit, multi-layered and contradictory across but not within contexts"* (Bernstein, 1999, 159). The horizontal discourse and the exploitation of everyday knowledge is necessarily an important source for any kind of activities in kindergarten. Segments of horizontal discourse (e.g. issues of health, work, parenting, domestic skills, etc.) are recontextualised and inserted in the school subjects to make specialized knowledges more accessible to the young, and to improving the student's ability to deal with issues arising in their everyday world (Bernstein, 1999, 169). In conclusion, in any subject of curriculum, that consists the school version of a scientific field (school science) (Kouzelis, 1991; Koulaidis, 1994), horizontal discourse is recontextualized in order to facilitate access to vertical discourse.



The vertical discourse contains the school or official knowledge, the scientific knowledge (according to Vitale, 2001: the soft sciences as social sciences and humanities and the hard sciences as natural sciences) and the knowledge that is more unfamiliar and abstract to the student (Bourne, 2003, 509). Bernstein (1999) distinguishes between two forms of vertical discourse: a) hierarchical knowledge structures that take the form of a coherent, explicit and systematically organized structure as in the physics, chemistry and biology. *"Hierarchical knowledge structures appear...to be motivated towards greater and greater integrating propositions, operating at more and more abstract levels"* (Bernstein, 1999, 162). And b) horizontal knowledge structures that take *"the form of specialized languages with specialized modes of interrogation and specialized criteria for the production and circulation of texts as in the social sciences and humanities"* (Bernstein, 1999, 159). The specialized languages of horizontal knowledge structures are discrete and not translatable into other language because they have their own criteria for what constitutes a legitimate text. In this framework it is set apart horizontal knowledge structures with strong grammars and horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammars. In first category belong sciences such as economics, linguistics, parts of psychology and mathematics, which *"consists of a set of discrete languages, for particular problems... The strong grammars of horizontal knowledge structures (excluding mathematics and logic) often achieve their power by rigorous restrictions on the empirical phenomena they address"* (Bernstein, 1999, 164). In the second belong sciences such as sociology, social anthropology and cultural studies which are characterized by weak structuring principles and by rules with low levels of formalization and explicit procedures (Vitale, 2001).

Important factors for instruction are: a) school knowledge as it is described in the curriculum for every lesson, and b) instruction theories which are prescribed as relevant for any lesson. Investigation of these two factors, especially during of an educational reform, as in this case of Greek kindergarten helps to reveal pedagogical identities, which both teachers and pupils are called to form (Bernstein, 1996). Moreover, it reveals the demands for theoretical and practical further education which is necessary for teachers to adopt under new circumstances.

In the current Cross Thematic kindergarten curriculum is explicitly stated *"for the support of didactic practice of teacher there will published a guide book for the design and the realization of language activities... In this guide should be included indicative creative activities"* (CFCT, 2003, 4312). As Makrinioti & Solomon argued *"teacher' Guide intends to provide instructions not only on teaching but also on teaching methodology and the main principles of a so-called child-centered pedagogy... Teachers are encouraged to introduce alternatives to conventional teaching methods. However, the guides lean heavily on the content of the textbooks to such an extent that they tend rather to impose the conventional teaching practices than to liberate teachers"* (1999, 293-294). Thus, the target of "Kindergarten teachers' Guide" is to support teaching instruction and to provide information for formulation of activities. A great variety of illustrative activities are incorporated in Guide. The question which arises is this Guide encourages the introduction of alternatives or it is used as a guide, in other words, constrain kindergarten teachers to certain teaching methods.

### **3. Horizontal discourse regarding literacy in Greek Pre-Primary Curriculum**



Greek curriculum for kindergarten recognizes the importance of everyday knowledge and especially for language it is recognized that there are particular aspects which are closely connected with children's cultural and social environments (CTCF, 2003, 4308). These are basic elements of horizontal discourse and it is suggested that in kindergarten children should be offered "*opportunities for using their knowledge, for practicing their abilities and continue to learn all the time*" (CTCF, 2003, 4307).

Characteristic element of pupils entering kindergarten is their ability to use oral language with competence, whatever their social background. Oral language, which belongs to horizontal discourse, has a crucial role in kindergarten:

*"Most of the children entering kindergarten have already acquired oral speech in a natural way, through communication in their environment, and they are able to communicate effectively using language in their family, in their play and in the broader social environment"* (Dafermou et al., 2006, 98-99).

Utilization of horizontal discourse elements, transferring to school by children, including oral speech, linguistic and social experiences will be the ground floor for the development of literacy. More specifically, the authors of official curriculum, who are part of Official Recontextualising Field as they put in practice the state policy for school knowledge (Bernstein, 1990, 1996), suggest that:

*"At the beginning of week, when children have richer experiences from weekend, they should be invited to narrate their experiences, inform for family plans, narrate a tale they have been told or read at house"* (Dafermou et. al., 2006, 101). This means, that conversations in class start from current issues or topics of great interest for children and their families or their community. Thus, they are specific and context dependent.

Moreover, the texts under consideration seem to recognize the differences of pupils' social background, which certainly connote in different enactments about the use and utilization of written language (Dafermou et. al., 2006, 107). These enactments, which are strongly connected with experiences in family, should be taken into account in kindergarten and they should be included in educational process for literacy development.

The reality of multicultural society, which is formed in Greece the last two decades, is connected with a weak classification between agents. Kindergarten teacher is suggested to elevate cultural aspects of children's backgrounds (festivities, customs) and encourage the use of mother tongue. It is worthy to mention that the use of mother tongue is openly connected with the promotion of "*composition of dominant model oral language*" (Dafermou et. al., 2006, 100).

Finally, we note that according CTCF (2003) and Teacher's Guide (Dafermou et. al., 2006) kindergarten teacher must: a) take into account the cultural wealth that create the multicultural composition of his/her classroom pupils, and b) turn to advantage the cultural wealth in the educational process to guide his/her pupils to the "scientific use" of language (vertical discourse). In order to be realized the last objective the students must: a) comprehend the use of language rules (acquisition of recognition rules: Bernstein, 1996), και b) can apply these rules in the various communication circumstances (Kouzelis, 1995) for shaping with suitable way their speech (acquisition of realization rules: Bernstein, 1996).

In conclusion, the new curriculum encourages the use of horizontal discourse in order to guide children to vertical discourse, which is the use of more decontextualized language. What seems to be crucial is the development of the understanding of the communicative purposes of language (Bernstein, 1996).



#### **4. Vertical discourse regarding literacy in Greek Pre-Primary Curriculum**

For cultivation of oral and written language in kindergarten it is demanded the further education of kindergarten teachers and the acquisition of theoretical apparatus in current literacy research theory and practice. Otherwise, they will be not able to use pupils' everyday knowledge (horizontal discourse) as feedstock of learning activities and will not be able to transform it to "elaborated code" (Bernstein, 1989). It is referred in CTCF that *"language program in kindergarten is built upon the perspective that knowledge and language are developed gradually, through communicative relations, which are supportive"* (CTCF, 2003, 4307). But there are not clear and articulated principles for the theoretical background, which seem to be behind this perspective. The question which arises at this point is how could kindergarten teachers decide and choose the relevant activities without such information.

As we have already argued teachers' definition of literacy impacts their instruction in class and we have mentioned that for some scholars the new curriculum adopts an emergent literacy approach (Tafa, 2008). We have looked carefully the new curriculum and the kindergarten's guide book, but we could not find a definition of literacy in both of them. Moreover, only in Guide book we found once the word "literacy" in the phrase *"reading and writing should occur in a learning environment which facilitates functional literacy experiences (children read and write for a communicative purpose)"* (Dafermou et. al., 2006, 110). Moreover, in CTCF (2003, 4308) it is stressed that *"failure in school is closely related to children's lack of familiarity with elements of language related with written discourse. And this concerns much more the children who come from unprivileged pedagogic and social environments. This program could contribute to a better preparation for children's incorporation to a society of written communication, as the modern one"*.

This statement is of great importance but since the "elements of language related with written discourse" are not specified it is not possible to find out the definition of literacy which is officially adopted. Do the authors mean a certain spectrum of technical skills (sounds, letters) or enculturation to secondary discourses (Gee, 2006)? The answer to these questions could show which model of literacy is adopted. The answer is directly connected to the corpus of literacy practices which could be considered as appropriate as well as those which could be considered less important or even irrelevant for preschool education. For example, if the authors mean the technical skills then it could be assumed that they adopt an autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1995). Otherwise it could be assumed that they adopt a broader sociocultural approach.

Looking for a clarification at the Guide we come across the term "constructivist approach" in the phrase *"In this chapter we will refer to activities of oral and written language, which developed in a constructivist approach framework, according to which knowledge and language are constructed developmentally in a supportive learning environment"* (Dafermou et. al., 2006, 98). The choice and utilization of constructivism paradigm for the cultivation of language necessarily constitute application of scientific knowledge, in other words constitutes application of horizontal knowledge structures with strong grammar (Bernstein, 1999). Constructivism which is supposed to be the base for teaching language is formed by cognitive developmental theory of Piaget and sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Kaufman, 2004; Dafermou et. al., 2006).





Studying carefully both CTCF and "Kindergarten Teacher's Guide" we argue that it is not clear what model of literacy is adopted in Greek kindergarten. Since there are strong suggestions for a print-rich classroom environment and the encouragement for active participation of children in meaningful activities of reading and writing for communicative purposes, the statement for the interrelation between oral and written language acquisition among others it is plausible to assume that the dominant approach is that of emergent literacy. The questions which arise at that point are many. For example "Has the term emergent literacy a certain definition?", "If the official Greek curriculum adopts emergent literacy perspective why this is not clearly defined?", "What kind of further education is necessary for kindergarten teachers in order to follow the new directions?"

At this point we would like to focus indicatively on three examples, which could not be understood by teachers without clarification and theoretical support. We would like to highlight the demand of new curriculum for a versatile teacher, able to utilize a variety of methods and practices in order to facilitate literacy learning. In order to encourage team work, individual or group play, artistic activities, drama etc. teacher should be able to activate a reservoir of knowledge (horizontal knowledge structures).

Firstly, in the part of CTCF (2003, 4313-4314) for the development of oral communication pupils are called, with the mediation of teacher to create different kind of texts, namely: narratives, descriptions, explanatory and argumentative texts. How a kindergarten teacher should apply this kind of activities when (s)he lacks the knowledge about genre-base approach (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 1999; Matsagouras, 2007), which is the case for the vast majority of kindergarten teachers in Greece?

Secondly, in the same part of CTCF (2003) set the target of "phonological awareness". The term, although very common in the field of early literacy, is obscure for the majority of kindergarten teachers. Teachers ignore the terms "phonological awareness" and "phonemic awareness" and the relation between them as well as they seem to be entangled by the relation of these abilities to grapho-phonemic correspondences.

Lastly, the part of CTCF (2003, 4314-4316) about reading seems to be problematic because part of it sets the general targets (such as the encouragement of children to come across picture books) and part of it elaborate on certain didactic practices with less importance (such as that the teacher should follow the reading of a text with their finger, how exactly an alphabetic board is constructed, how the library is organized). Moreover, it is stated that "children should be encouraged to interrupt reading with predictions of plot, make comments about the main characters, etc." (CTCF, 2003, 4314). But this suggestion could not be fully understood without knowledge about the cognitively challenging talk and the kind of questions which could be characterized as demanding ones (Dickinson & Smith, 1994).

In conclusion, we argue that in order to facilitate early literacy learning kindergarten teacher should utilize scientific knowledge, which are characterized as horizontal knowledge structures (constructivism, teaching theories). But this kind of information as well as the central dimensions of an early literacy program is not defined in a straightforward manner in the official curriculum text. Our impression is that this text is an unclassified attempt of summarizing the current huge bibliography of early literacy. Even the terms "literacy", "emergent literacy" or "early literacy" seem to be intentionally omitted from the text. It is true that many of these deficiencies are cured in "Kindergarten Teachers' Guide Book" especially through examples of literacy practices. But many suggestions of CTCF are not clarified in this book or are totally



absent (such as descriptive and argumentative texts). In any case these examples lack the theoretical rationale, which is supposed to be necessary for this kind of book. The general assumption that "Kindergarten Teachers' Guide Book" is supplementary to official curriculum seems not to be true. If it was the case we would expect that the targets set by curriculum would be analyzed theoretically and secondly with elaborate suggestions in "Kindergarten Teachers' Guide Book". But, according to our view, this kind of correspondence does not exist.

### 5. Concluding Remarks

Following our argumentation we can conclude with some conclusions, which need to be further researched:

- The pedagogy for literacy learning in kindergarten is based upon personal experiences and utilizes everyday communicative circumstances (horizontal discourse). This everyday knowledge is the feedstock which is going to be transformed in kindergarten to school knowledge.
- Kindergarten teacher has a new role, that of facilitator or "literacy mediator" (Baynham, 1995). In order to fulfill this new role has to know current scientific knowledge on early literacy, or, at least, a clear definition of its presuppositions in the curriculum.
- Kindergarten teacher is suggested to work according to constructivist theory based on cognitive developmental theory of Piaget and the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky. We wonder if a kindergarten teacher can fulfil this without sociological knowledge, especially if (s)he is not accustomed to Bernstein's *codes* theory. Without this kind of knowledge kindergarten teacher is unable to understand the state of curriculum that a main target of kindergarten is "*children's acquaintance with forms of written language, which are connected with failure in school especially from those children who come from unprivileged environments*" (CTCF, 2003, 4308). But we argue that kindergarten teachers lack this knowledge and both official texts under consideration do not cure this deficiency. This is why kindergarten teachers seem not to fully understand the importance of suggestions and examples of activities which (s)he has been given. Unfortunately, the result is the adaptation of traditional practices in Greek kindergarten (Kondyli & Stellakis, 2005).
- Administration of school knowledge presupposes a new flexible identity for kindergarten teachers as well as requires awareness about the variety of teaching methods they can apply in class (horizontal knowledge structures within vertical discourse). The intention of new approach, that of emergent literacy, is to facilitate children's literacy knowledge with the mediation of kindergarten teacher.

The authors are among those scholars who greeted the change of curriculum at least for language teaching in kindergarten. But according to our view the theoretical fuzziness, which characterizes the official papers has as a main result misunderstanding of kindergarten teachers about the kind of literacy practices they have to employ in their classes. In order to overcome possible misunderstandings of kindergarten teachers' about the literacy practices which are relevant with emergent literacy approach we argue that there should be organized educational programs for kindergarten teachers, as well as, much more research for contemporary reality in both family context and preprimary education context. Since literacy is the most important provision of public education and the role of preprimary education seems to



be of crucial importance it is plausible to assume that preschool educators should have all the necessary theoretical qualification in order to supply substantial literacy education to their pupils.

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