

LANGUAGE TEACHING AND CRITICAL LITERACY CURRICULUM IN GREEK PRIMARY EDUCATION

Implementation and perspectives

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Abstract

The approach of the critical literacy principles in the L1 Language Curriculum (CL_L1C) in Greek primary education is strictly related to the study of social practices that focuses on the elimination of social inequalities and on the formation of critically thinking and socially active individuals. In the frame of this analysis, the development of new semiotic modes of communication is examined through the evaluation of the activities presented by the curriculum, in order to underline the significance of multiliteracies pedagogy in the critical understanding of forthcoming sociocultural changes. Through the presentation of basic teaching practices promoted in the context of critical literacy, the study of the contribution of the curriculum (CL_L1C) is pursued to change the way language is treated as a subject of teaching. For this reason, the documentary analysis is comparatively built by incorporating references into the older cross-thematic curriculum (CT_L1C) that focused more on the development of pupils' communication—and less critical—skills. The differentiation brought about by the newer curriculum, however, is mainly realized via the experience accumulated in schools, alongside the difficulties and perspectives it presents in the formation of a modern and innovative educational discourse.

Keywords:

Greek language curriculum, primary education, critical literacy, multiliteracies pedagogy, language teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on enquiring how the principles of critical literacy (Luke, 2012, p. 5; Vasquez et al., 2019) are defined in the L1 Greek Language Curriculum, which is defined as “New School Curriculum” (CL_L1C, 2011), through the access of selected thematic axes that govern the entire educational material (henceforth, for methodological reasons, the newest curriculum from 2011 that adopts the principles of critical literacy will be identified in the present work as Critical Literacy L1 Curriculum [CL_L1C] in contrast to the older one from 2003, i.e., Cross Thematic L1 Curriculum [CT_L1C]). It is clear, right from its introduction, that the New School Curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011), albeit incorporating elements from a variety of language teaching approaches (communicative, functional and genre-based approaches), is clearly focused on critical literacy, which, as the dominant theoretical prism, governs all its distinct chapters. This choice is, in fact, documented on the basis of social, cultural and technological developments that have taken place in Greece and the world, as well as the need for further democratization of education.

Therefore, having innovative elements of this program in relation to the older, cross-thematic one (CT_L1C, 2003) as a main point, concepts and practices are analyzed, focusing on the social dimension of discourse, the development of critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992) and the fight against social exclusion (Freire, 1970/1990). In particular, through critical presentation, it is intended to highlight the multidimensional meaning of the text as a sociocultural product (Duff, 2004; Halliday, 1994; Luke, 2012, p. 8), linguistic diversity (Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2019; Tsiplakou et al., 2018; Tzakosta, 2015) and emerging literacy practices, while emphasis is placed on detecting the principles of inquiry-based learning and differentiated teaching. From all the complementary concepts in the two curricula, the object of a more systematic elaboration is the identification of the methodological tools that are centered on the understanding and interpretation of literacy practices (Baynham, 1995) developed in digital environments (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 166; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 1996) through the examination of the activities proposed in the curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011).

At the same time, based on the conclusions drawn from the field of initial education and training of teachers (Frydaki & Mamoura, 2011; Oikonomakou, 2019), major difficulties are recorded regarding classroom application of critical literacy practices provided by the latest curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011), given the inconsistency it shows at the level of language-teaching approaches in relation to existing textbooks (Karagiannaki & Stamou, 2018; Kostouli, 2002). As the curriculum has had a complementary character for years now, one of the main problems identified is the lack of familiarity of teachers with its basic principles. The lack of motivation and similar systematic training has resulted in its remaining either unknown or marginalized. The teaching proposals and methods suggested in it are not binding; their adoption is at the discretion of the teacher.

The critical presentation of the curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011), which covers an important part of the present documentary analysis, aims, therefore, both to diffuse and highlight its innovative features and to systematize the conclusions drawn from educational practice. This reflection is taking place as the Greek Ministry of Education launched the writing and updating of curricula in the language course in 2020. It is worth noting that a new effort—on the basis of the research conclusions thus far—is made to highlight the teaching practices that could contribute to the cultivation of metacognitive, social, critical and digital skills of pupils, in order to meet the great challenges of the time that concern modern societies.

2. CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE GREEK EDUCATIONAL SETTING

Critical literacy is a broader theoretical framework that focuses on the study of the interactive relationship that is developed between linguistic and social phenomena (Fairclough, 1992; Halliday, 1994; Vasquez et al., 2019) with the aim to challenge dominant data and perceptions, the undertaking of collective actions and, finally, the formation of the individual into a critically thinking and active citizen (Freire, 1970/1990). At the level of educational policy, the transition of the curricula (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, pp. 34-35) from the traditional discourse (Koutsogiannis, 2017, p. 91), i.e., grammatical-centered forms of teaching, to communication and text genres/types approaches (Katsarou, 2009; Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2019) and the adoption of the set of critical literacy principles (Freire, 1970/1990; Luke et al., 2001) in the compulsory education of Greece since 2011 constitute a natural consequence of a long course of sociocultural changes and transformations (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 5).

These developments, which are related *inter alia*, to the development of technology, mobility at the level of refugee and migration flows as well as various social and cultural interactions, have made it clear that the exploration and interpretation of cultural products presupposes, as far as possible, the essential understanding of the power relations that govern social groups (Fairclough, 1992; Halliday, 1994). Likewise, it is imperative to understand the new communicational practices and media emerging in multicultural and technologically developing societies, in an effort to assign meaning to the pupils' extracurricular literacy experiences (Fterniati et al., 2016, p. 87; Koutsogiannis, 2012).

As the most important strategy for language acquisition, the critical investigation of the discourses that shape it is, thus, preferred through the reflective approach and negotiation of the oral, written or hybrid texts produced in the classroom (Duff, 2004; Gee 2008; Koutsogiannis, 2015; 2017). Such a perception of language teaching brings about significant differences in the way a classroom is organized and operated, favoring the adoption of teaching practices that are formed based on the particular sociocultural characteristics of its members.

The placement of language in its social context, through the cultivation of critical reading skills as well as deeper understanding and interpretation of texts, is also based on the use of the possibilities of information and communication technology

(ICT) and the internet, tools that are intermediate between in-school practices and extracurricular usage (Koutsogiannis, 2015; Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 308). Thus, the totality of digital environments allows pupils to develop, in collaboration with teachers (Kostouli, 2002, p. 21), the ability to critically approach a new textual and language reality that is inextricably linked to their future development. This way, the critical literacy program (CL_L1C, 2011) contributed to the renewal of teaching methods and tools as well as to the redefinition of the direction of educational discourse (Koutsogiannis, 2017), which now places language teaching in social and cultural contexts through processes of critical approach to the language phenomenon.

3. FRAMEWORK OF THE L1 CURRICULUM IN GREEK PRIMARY SCHOOLS

3.1 *Teaching texts: critical language awareness*

The notion that discourse and society are in a relationship of constant interaction runs through all the building blocks of the Critical Literacy L1 Curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 7-20), which identifies the content of language teaching in addition to its aims and objectives, while targeted methodological observations are proportionally recorded. Differentiation in relation to the older interdisciplinary program (CT_L1C, 2003) is presented in a way which the negotiated text genres are processed and are now understood as basic tools for the development of pupils' critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992; Fternati et al., 2016; Karagiannaki & Stamou, 2018).

The study of texts is, therefore, not limited to the investigation of the components of the various communicative circumstances given (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1974), but allows the detection and analysis of language choices formed under the influence of the given sociocultural conditions or needs (Luke et al., 2001, pp. 12-13). Therefore, as linguistic forms function "like indicators of social parameters and as mechanisms for building identities, ideologies, attitudes and behaviors," textual genres are not "typologically fixed and unchanging categories": they are transformed historically and simultaneously according to the communicational needs of each community and interpreted on the basis of economic, political and cultural developments (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 7-8 and 9, respectively). Through the selection and processing of a wide range of oral, written, hybrid, digital and multimodal texts, which serve as motivations for teaching (Duff, 2004; Kostouli, 2002; Oikononakou, 2012) and as objects of evaluation, the necessary skills are cultivated for shaping pupils into democratically and critically minded citizens. This critical elaboration, which also includes texts with reference to the language system itself (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 13), is achieved through the comparison of textual genres that belong to the same thematic conceptual field and is framed by activities that have a sociocentric character (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 16). At the same time, with the help of work plans, authentic current texts from different sources, such as mass culture texts (Fterniati et al., 2016), are approached exploratorily and analyzed

at both microstructure and macrostructure levels, thus favoring dialectical processes that are based on the social reality of children.

An important innovation of the program is the strengthening of the processes of collective rewriting of the texts during the production of oral or written speech, as the requirement is not the linear and temporal process (CT_L1C, 2003, p. 42) determined at each stage (i.e., the pre-writing stage, while-writing stage and post-writing stage) (Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2014, p. 80), but the collective assignment of meaning of the process itself (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 18). Therefore, the emphasis is not only on the final product because what is sought, with the help of both the teacher-coordinator and modern technology, is not only to improve the communicational skills of pupils, but also to cultivate a variety of skills with emphasis on the development of sociolinguistic competence (Gee, 2008). The texts under negotiation, therefore, function as means of broadening the field of educational aspirations and practices and are treated in the classroom in their full range “as products of communication, as linguistic and semantic structures, as carriers of ideological and sociocultural meanings, as means of development of metacognitive skills and critical thinking and as objects of evaluation” (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 15).

3.2 Language varieties and linguistic diversity

The concept of critical literacy is inextricably linked to that of linguistic variation as the critical reader or writer must be able to recognize different linguistic varieties and languages as well as hybrid intercultural discourses using effective dialects and registers, code-switching and interlanguages (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Tsiplakou et al., 2018). At the didactic level, linguistic diversity is usually associated with the inherent multilingualism of the classroom, alongside the teaching and learning of linguistic features and functions of textual genres as well as the application of critical literacy and multi-literacy practices (Fterniati et al., 2016; Kostouli, 2002, p. 7; Koutsogiannis, 2017, p. 299).

Analyzing the way to deal with linguistic varieties and, in general, of the diversity in the newer curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011) demonstrates the degree of utilization of these assumptions in didactic practice by identifying those practices that contribute to the reinforcement, through the comparative and critical approach of various linguistic forms and contents of the metacognitive and metalingual skills of pupils (Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2019; Tsiplakou et al., 2018; Tzakosta, 2015). It seems, therefore, that special emphasis is given at the level of goal setting (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 8-9) to the necessity for critical evaluation of the syntactic and morphological diversity, of the different lexical choices as indicators of social and cultural relations, and of the role of linguistic varieties—geographical, social or functional (Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2019, p. 44)—in identifying the discrepancies between oral and written discourse. Pupils, utilizing pre-existing or emerging knowledge of varieties or even other languages from their local communities as part

of their language capital, are called to use them creatively by contrasting them with the standard variety.

The study of structures from different geographical, social or functional varieties and from other languages, therefore, is sought to be linked to the awareness regarding the structure of the standard language. The presence in the classroom of pupils who use them gives impetus for the didactic utilization of a wide range of literacy practices (Baynham, 1995; Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 306) as well as for the handling of basic structural differences between the different linguistic forms of the community members (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 13, 16). It is indicative that even during the evaluation process, it is possible, through the language portfolio, to capture the communicational and linguistic knowledge and skills of bilingual pupils and to deposit knowledge and experiences through the possibility of transferring them from one language to another (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 20).

The cultivation of a different perception for various linguistic forms not only has purely didactic benefits, but can also function beneficially in children's personal and social lives. In formulating the relevant learning outcomes (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 11), not only the equal treatment of different languages, dialects and language choices is preferred, but also the respect of the personality of the people who use them—with reference point to the critical negotiation of the meanings they express—in a direction of democratization of education (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 168; Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2019).

3.3 Language learning in a dynamic literacy classroom

The critical literacy curriculum (2001), emphasizing the dynamics of the group, the collective action and the strengthening in a democratic climate of the dialectical processes, attempts to give new content to the learning and the relationship of the members of the classroom (Kostouli, 2002, p. 22). This is because rapid sociocultural developments presuppose the cultivation of a different perception of communication, based on the realization that the dominant way of learning in modern demanding conditions is an inquiry-based one that allows pupils to “work as researchers and gain access to out-of-school literacy practices” (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 11). Thus, the critical reading of both the learning outcomes and the teaching methodology proposed in the curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011) focuses on the exploitation of pre-existing or emerging knowledge of pupils and the exploitation of the framework of principles of inquiry-based learning, always focusing on harmonious cooperation, innovation and creativity (Kostouli, 2002, p. 21; Luke, 2012, p. 9). The production of discourse, oral or written, for example, is understood as a collaborative and creative process that provides the opportunity for equal and democratic exchange of views, with the aim to review and critically evaluate the produced discourse (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 10-11).

A similar approach is adopted during the presentation of the methodological principles of the curriculum, where the sociocentric character of the

proposed teaching actions is emphasized. Taking the interests and needs of the pupils as a reference point of language level (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 16), these actions are designed and implemented in relation to the changes that occur in the immediate or wider environment (Gee, 2008; Janks, 2010; Luke et al., 2001; Vasquez et al., 2019). Thus, with the help of the teacher who has the role of coordinator and equal interlocutor, exploratory, timely and contemporary issues from the everyday life of the community are approached (Fterniati et al., 2016, p. 87). Research, interviews and discussions are carried out at the level of classroom, while the cooperation of the group is sought both with other schools and educational organizations as well as with local bodies.

This extroverted attitude assigns meaning to the social dimension of learning and contributes to a more substantial approach of the texts produced, as it utilizes, in writing, the multi-intellectual potential of pupils and the temperamental way in which each of them processes and internalizes information from the external environment (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 17-18). In this context, the evaluation is carried out on the basis of individual differences and aims to investigate the degree of effective use of prior knowledge in various communicative situations (Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2014) by strengthening the processes of awareness of pupils' strengths and, thus, improving their overall self-esteem.

3.4 Digital technologies in language teaching

An important innovation of the curriculum is the utilization of the principles of the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, pp. 166, 184-186; New London Group, 1996), highlighting the necessity of developing skills and abilities necessary for the comprehension of texts that combine different semiotic means for the production of meaning and discourses produced in multifaceted and multicultural social environments (Kress, 2010). The practice with these texts, which are treated as multilevel, multimodal and polysemic semiotic products, contributes to the emergence of their social and cultural power and to a deeper understanding through the development of a critical metalanguage of similar social practices (Luke, 2012; Luke et al., 2001; Vasquez et al., 2019). The acquisition of such skills is intertwined with the way pupils perceive, based on their social experience, external reality and, therefore, their future development.

These assumptions govern both the formulation of the objectives of the curriculum, where special emphasis is placed on the role of technology, and the presentation of the aggregate tables by grade. In particular, the goal setting (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 9-10) recognizes the central position that the existence of other semiotic systems occupies in the perception of reality and in communication along with new hybrid textual genres used for everyday communication mainly in digital environments (Janks, 2010; Koutsogiannis, 2015; 2017). Pupils are, thus, asked to recognize, evaluate and use the discourse of texts that emerge through information and multimedia technologies by understanding its highly differentiating

characteristics (Oikononakou, 2012). In fact, as the pupils are already considered to be familiar with interactive media, the further development of these skills in learning spaces is a feasible realistic goal.

Towards reinforcing these practices, the curriculum proposes specific applications that enable the use of language in different communicative settings (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1974). Thus, electronic libraries (wikis), websites/weblogs/blogs, social networking and digital platforms that host software and a variety of alternative activities can be used creatively in teaching (Kostouli, 2002, p. 21). The contribution of technology is also important in supporting the processes of reformulating continuous oral discourse, as the improvement of its communicational efficiency is ensured by locating, for example, the points where communicational difficulties occur (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 18). At the same time, taking advantage of the capabilities of second-generation web tools (Web 2.0), which act as important support tools, can greatly facilitate the production and comprehension processes of spoken and written discourse.

Useful information is extracted during the study of the aggregate tables per grade (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 51-113), where, in addition to the expected learning outcomes and the identification of the textual genres under teaching, indicative activities are described with emphasis on the existing educational material. A substantial innovation is the integration, in the basic perceptual and productive skills of the new curriculum, of the section that concerned the cross-thematic curriculum of information management (CT_L1C, 2003, pp. 39-40). It was limited to the detection, processing and decoding of information by pupils from various linguistic or non-linguistic sources of information. This differentiation in the newer curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011), in combination with the separate per grade elaboration of the procedures of comprehension and production of both written and oral discourse, has resulted in the widening of the field of planning teaching interventions that focus more on the use of ICT and the Internet (Koutsogiannis, 2015; 2017). Therefore, a more regular use of electronic environments and digital resources in the classroom is strongly promoted. The comparative study of all the oral discourse activities proposed for the first grade of primary school is indicative. The aggregated tables of the interdisciplinary curriculum (CT_L1C, 2003, p. 18), albeit focusing on pupils' familiarity with different types of multimodal texts (Oikononakou, 2012), do not indicate specific ways of processing these data. A similar picture is presented in the summary table presented for the two smaller grades in the section of Information Management (CT_L1C, 2003, p. 38). While the emphasis on the importance of acquiring information retrieval and evaluation skills as well as decoding visual and audible signals is present, a range of supporting activities are not suggested. As a result, apart from listing the different sources from which information can be retrieved, sufficient instructions are not provided for the procedures of searching, locating and, above all, evaluating the data ultimately selected by the community.

In contrast, in the newer curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011), the understanding and production of oral discourse is largely based on the creative exploitation of digital media and environments (Koutsogiannis, 2015; Kress, 2010). In particular, specific programs and tools are identified for use, while the proposed teaching activities are designed and implemented with the help of the internet as well as audiovisual material or video recordings created by the pupils themselves. At the same time, through a more detailed description of the activities, the framework is clarified for the application of the principles of inquiry-based learning and multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, pp. 166, 184-186) as it focuses on characters and experiences from the daily life of children (Karagiannaki & Stamou, 2018).

Pupils are, thus, given the opportunity to narrate, direct and proceed together in innovative actions with the ultimate goal of critical text editing. Indicatively, at the level of activities, the creation of more than one electronic comic is proposed (e.g., with the tools Go! Animate, Pixton or Toondo) where each time the heroes have different characteristics and adopt a different view of reality (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 51-54). Similarly, the creation of electronic cartoon characters is promoted, so that pupils, as directors, can produce short stories with these characters and use their own original narratives during this creation (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 57-59).

4. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CRITICAL LITERACY CURRICULUM

The Critical Literacy L1 Curriculum (2011) for Greek compulsory education attempts, through the interpretation of modern reality, to highlight the dynamic character of language learning in the deconstruction of social stereotypes or established power relations (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 168; Freire, 1970/1990). It, thus, aims to combat social exclusion through the cultivation of critical skills and the promotion of literacy practices in the communities that constitute a classroom (Kostouli, 2002, p. 22; Luke, 2012, p. 9). Although it works complementarily to the older interdisciplinary program (CT_L1C, 2003), it expands the field of study and reflection with a starting point for recording and evaluating the sociocultural changes that have taken place both in education and on the world stage (CL_L1C, 2011, pp. 2-6).

These changes, which have led to the treatment of language as a social practice and as a naturalized means of enforcing and negotiating power (Baynham, 1995), redefine the aims and objectives of language teaching that now focus on the social and cultural context of literacy practices (Fairclough, 1992; Halliday, 1994; New London Group, 1996). Thus, in the context of critical literacy (Janks, 2010), through the described procedures, the need is emphasized for educators and learners to be able to function as cultural workers (Luke, 2012, pp. 4-11), recognizing and combating social injustices as well as ensuring conditions of social justice.

At the level of educational reality, the critical reading of the L1 Curriculum (2011), in its main and sub-points, helps to clarify the practices that favor the co-formation of pupils into critical thinking emancipated citizens in realistic conditions (Freire,

1970/1990), as distinct thematic axes are intertwined creatively and cover the whole range of the proposed teaching methodology. The integration of the set of principles of critical literacy (Vasquez et al., 2019) and the use of elements and empirical data from the application of the principles of the communicative approach (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1974) thus contributes to enrich or reformulate the purpose and objectives of the older interdisciplinary program (CT_L1C, 2003) and to identify alternative approaches regarding the elaboration of the educational material and the evaluation procedures.

A common component is the importance given to the dynamics of the classroom through the depiction of the roles that its members are called to perform. The teacher, as an equal interlocutor, coordinates the conduct of the proposed activities, a choice of which is determined by the interest and participation of pupils in community terms (Kostouli, 2002; Koutsogiannis, 2015; Luke et al., 2001). Therefore, the practices adopted are pupil-centered and collaborative, are governed by the principles of differentiated pedagogy in teaching and are formed based on particular cultural and social characteristics of those involved.

Learning by utilizing the assumptions of the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Koutsogiannis, 2017, p. 299) is, therefore, understood as a multifaceted and multimodal process (Oikonomakou, 2012), an act of continuous creation and transformation of points and texts, according to existing data in the learning and social environment. The very meaning of the text is redefined (Martin, 1993), embracing various forms of pictorial representation (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) that can combine different semiotic ways with the dominant image that has gradually emerged as a dominant medium of discourse (Kress, 2010, p. 54).

In addition to the basic categories of textual genres, the existence of hybrid texts that have highly differentiating characteristics and are transmitted daily by traditional or non-traditional media (Duff, 2004; Kress, 2010) is recognized in the curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 2). These texts, which are found in different sources of print, electronic and oral discourse, are now creatively utilized in the classroom, and the social and cultural conditions of their production are critically approached, with emphasis on the dominant or stereotypical perceptions projected on them (Fterniati et al., 2016; Karagiannaki & Stamou, 2018). Additionally, the discourse that the pupils themselves produce, as a result of this friction and the processes of gaining critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992), is authentic and experiential, because it relies on their pre-existing experiences and knowledge of both the standard language as well as from other languages or varieties (Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2019; Tsiplakou et al., 2018).

Critical literacy, therefore, contributes to the cultivation of a wide range of teaching and learning practices, in the development of which the evolution of technology, and especially the linguistic one, plays a decisive role (Koutsogiannis, 2015). In the curriculum, during the presentation of the goal setting and the individual methodological markings, the creative use of digital media and

environments is systematically advocated, while different possibilities of interactive interaction and search or retrieval of information are presented.

The targeted educational material is moving in this direction as well, since it appears that both in the production and understanding of oral discourse it is proposed to utilize specific electronic tools and programs with the aim to edit and create multimodal texts (Oikonomakou, 2012). In addition, the selection and analysis of videotaped material, produced either by the children themselves or in direct connection with their experiences, is framed by the commentary and the expression of critical remarks on the subject, the purposes, the function of the linguistic and pictorial options as well as the different viewing angles of decoding the meaning (Halliday, 1994; Kress, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Luke, 2012). Thus, even in the smallest classes, the interpretation of the various ideological, social and technological processes that characterize modern cultural products is favored through the application of the principles of collaborative inquiry-based learning.

5. PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

The presentation of the main axes of the L1 Language Curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011) for compulsory education in Greece, which is in harmony with the goals-pillars of the Digital School notion, highlighted as many aspects of its anthropocentric and sociocentric dimension as possible. From all the data, it became clear that the main pursuit of language teaching is not only the acquisition of specialized knowledge, but also the formation of a critically thinking active citizen (Freire, 1970/1990; New London Group, 1996) who will be able to “fight for democracy and equality between citizens, for respect for the rights of the socially disadvantaged persons” as well as “for peace, understanding and solidarity between peoples and persons” (CL_L1C, 2011, p. 6).

However, although the newest curriculum has been officially included in the educational process by the Greek Ministry of Education since 2011, its complementary character and the incompatibility between language textbooks and the suggested teaching practices (Karagiannaki & Stamou, 2018, p. 223; Kostouli, 2002, p. 21; Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2014; 2019) has resulted in the new curriculum not being regularly adopted in practice by the educational community, and even its context and philosophy are not to be widely known (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, pp. 34-50). As textbooks for teaching language in primary school were developed years earlier, teachers seem more familiar with teaching practices that contribute to the development of pupils’ communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1974). At the same time, elements seem to be utilized in the teaching practice from text/type genre approaches as well (Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2014, p. 80) as an effort is made to familiarize pupils with various textual environments and, to some extent, with various modes of text organization (Tsiplakou & Floros, 2013).

Teaching the comprehension of the linguistic and structural characteristics of descriptive, narrative, argumentative and procedural texts as provided in textbooks

and teaching instructions in the teacher's manuals for elementary school, however, is sometimes carried out in a procedural manner without highlighting the children's literacy experiences (Koutsogiannis, 2017, p. 216). Thus, static approaches are chosen, which treat the text genres as sets of linguistic and textual characteristics that are in unambiguous correspondence with specific contexts and environments of use. The approach to texts, thus, remains regulatory and the teaching of text genres is limited to the pedagogy of transmission and reproduction of linguistic and cultural norms (New London Group, 1996).

The utilization of the complementary curriculum is ultimately left to the discretion of the teacher, who is called to reframe his or her teaching methodology by enriching the already existing activities of the textbook in a more sociolinguistic direction. To the difficulties arising from the inconsistency between the newer curriculum and the textbooks (Kostouli, 2002; Oikonomakou & Sofos, 2019), the pressure of covering the increased material is added alongside the deficiencies in the material and technical infrastructure of the schools, which deprives some teachers the possibility of utilizing digital environments in language teaching on a regular basis.

The reasons that make it difficult to adopt and apply critical literacy practices have been documented by similar studies in Greece and Cyprus (Ioannidou, 2012; Neophytou & Valiandes, 2013; Oikonomakou, 2019) while some of them are also derived from the initial teachers' training (Frydaki & Mamoura, 2011). During the practicum conducted in the Pedagogical Departments, the cooperation of trainee students with teachers in the schools shows a large part of the teachers not being trained in language literacy issues and do not have a clear picture of the principles of multiliteracy pedagogy (Oikonomakou, 2019). Similar conclusions emerge during the implementation of training activities organized by the local Directorates of Primary Education or the Institute of Educational Policy, which is supervised in Greece by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the country's universities.

Indicatively, based on observations and evaluations of qualitative nature by the teachers, during or after the end of training activities, it appears that the metalanguage used in the critical literacy program (CL_L1C, 2011) makes its understanding difficult (Neophytou & Valiandes, 2013, p. 421). In some cases, there is confusion with the terminology, as critical literacy is identified with critical thinking, without becoming clear to teachers the methodology of critical negotiation of the textual environments proposed in the curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011). At the same time, the resistance—or even the objections—to the philosophy of the curriculum, whenever they appear, acquire an ideological character regarding the direction of the educational policy as a whole (Ioannidou, 2012, p. 226) along with the necessity, the degree and the way of integrating the texts of mass culture (Fterniati et al., 2016) in the educational process.

It is worth noting that the application of critical literacy practices in smaller classes appears more difficult, as it is often said that children at these ages have not developed sociolinguistic awareness or that the development of other skills in oral

or written discourse is paramount, with emphasis on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary according to the traditional perception (Koutsogiannis, 2017, p. 91). However, although preschool and elementary school pupils tend to align with the preferred reading (Hall, 1980) of the producers of mass culture texts, accepting the dominant meanings projected by them (Stamou et al., 2015), these pupils are aware of the property of language to vary and are able to easily distinguish between different linguistic varieties that are spoken by different fictional characters.

Despite the difficulties recorded in the teaching field, the response of teachers participating in trainings on the utilization of literacy theories and the pedagogy of multiliteracies in the classroom (Fterniati et al., 2016; Stamou et al., 2015) is positive and demonstrates the importance of further informing the educational community about modern language teaching approaches. The response of the pupils is also positive, considering the evaluative remarks of the trainee students (Frydaki & Mamoura, 2011; Oikonoumakou, 2019) of the university pedagogical departments that carry out their teaching in a coordinated manner at schools and in collaboration with the teachers.

It is emphasized, in particular, by both the trainees and the more experienced active teachers that the promotion of teaching practices that bridge the extracurricular literacy experiences with the school environment activates all pupils, especially those from disadvantaged social classes (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999). Pupils bringing texts from their daily lives to the classroom (Stamou et al., 2015) develop criticism and digital skills that are necessary in modern conditions. Similarly, the focus on the linguistic and cultural capital of all pupils contributes to the democratization of education (Oikonoumakou & Sofos, 2019) by enhancing voice pluralism in classroom and assigning meaning to teaching strategies that aim to combat racist and stereotypical perceptions towards underprivileged social groups.

6. CONCLUSION

The L1 Language Curriculum (CL_L1C, 2011) for teaching language in primary school contributed to methodological renewal by providing new tools and methods to teachers, so as to critically process, in collaboration with their pupils, a variety of written, oral, visual and multimodal texts (Oikonoumakou, 2012). The description in CL_L1C (2011) of the new innovative practices in the context of critical literacy (Luke, 2012; Vasquez et al., 2019) contributed to the development of a more substantial dialogue on the direction of language teaching that, in Greece, traditionally moved to more grammatical-centered and unframed forms of teaching. Its establishment, at the same time, highlighted the need for the overall reforming of the Greek school context, in a way that favors the combined cultivation of multilevel skills based on modern social, cultural and technological challenges.

The creation of a stable supportive framework that will allow these innovations to be effectively disseminated by implementation training or other targeted actions within the educational community and to be creatively adopted in the classroom

remains the desired goal. This could be achieved through both national-scale interventions and through the creation of individual literacy communities with the collaboration of educational institutions and local communities (Oikononakou, 2019). The organizing of workshops that focus on didactic design and implementation of educational scenarios within the school is crucial for assigning meaning to the different dimensions or traditions of critical literacy (Koutsogiannis, 2017) and the emergence of the sociocultural peculiarities of the local context, which is always in a dialectical relationship with the international experience. Otherwise, the gap between educational reforms at the curricula level and educational practice will remain largely unbridged and away from the needs and daily concerns of the educational community.

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