



Early literacy in transition from preschool to primary school: A comparative view of the practices of preschool and Grad 1 teachers

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Introduction 1/8

Before I proceed to the presentation of my paper, please let me give you some explications concerning:

- (a) Early Childhood Education and Care in Greece and
- (b) the institutional relation between preschool and primary school.





Introduction 2/8

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The split ECEC system in Greece

The field of ECEC is split in two levels on the basis of the age of the children.

- Whereas children **under 4** years enroll in day care centers
- those **between 4 and 6** go to preschool until they enroll in primary school.
- Enrollment of 5-year-olds in preschool, i.e. the last year before entering primary school, is compulsory.



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The policy responsibility at the central level is divided:

- for ages 0 to 4 the responsibility belongs to the Ministry for Health and Social Solidarity,
- for children older than 4 it belongs to the Ministry of Education.
- ❑ The preschool has its own National Curriculum.
- ❑ At present, about half of the preschools are full day preschools.





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Length and level of education of preschool teachers and day care centers staff

- Preschool teachers study at the university 4 years,
- Staff members working with children **under** 4 years are educated at Technological Educational Institutes (TEI), also lasting 4 years.
- The TEI became university-level institutions some years ago.



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Institutional relation between preschool and primary school

From the beginning, both institutions were defined as educational institutions under the administrative authority and supervision of the Ministry of Education

Thus the preschool was integrated into the educational system at the outset.

The two institutions have a common history and



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Length and level of preschool and primary school teacher education

- Both preschool and primary school teachers have the same duration of academic education, 4 years,
- receive the same salary under the same employment status in the public sector and
- have approximately the same occupational and social prestige.



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Does there exist cooperation
between preschool and primary school?

The above similarities between preschool and primary school constitute a significant favorable condition for the realization of a sustainable and enduring cooperation on equal terms between the two institutions, aiming at children's smooth transition from the one institution to the other.



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- However, the two institutions do not yet cooperate properly today, as would be expected given the above favourable conditions.
- The few rather coincidental or random cases of cooperation, which usually begin with the initiative of the preschool and are mostly confined to a visit by the preschool children to the first grade, do not constitute an organized, systematic, and sustainable cooperation.



We now proceed to the presentation of the study.



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The aim of the study

- This study focuses on the early literacy transition practices which were implemented by 3 preschool teachers and 2 primary school teachers who collaborated
- with the aim of developing a common communicative early literacy approach in order to ensure continuity in children's transition from preschool to primary school.



The two school partnerships and their participants 1/2

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To reach the above objective the 5 teachers built two partnerships:

- in the first, one preschool teacher cooperated with one primary school teacher, and
- in the second, one primary school teacher cooperated with two preschool teachers (full day preschool).



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The two school partnerships and their participants 2/2

The project leader and a specialist in early literacy, supported by a research assistant, had the responsibility for the project and for coordination of the two partnerships.

The schools and preschools which agreed to collaborate were public schools, located in a predominantly working class residential district in Thessaloniki.



- The study was oriented towards the theory of **social constructivism**, and in particular towards a **socio-cultural approach to early literacy**.
- The broader theoretical background was that of **grounded theory**, according to which the researcher moves back and forth from initial findings to hypothetical general propositions, and then, keeping these in mind, back to the data.

- video recordings of the early literacy activities
- written reports of the meetings of the whole group
- teachers' diaries kept for this purpose
- interviews to clarify issues when the questions posed were not clearly answered in the diaries, and
- a questionnaire answered by the teachers after completing the previous phases of the project.

The project carried out in three phases





First Phase – Preparation 1/2

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During the first phase, the 5 teachers were

- introduced to the topic of transition as well as to the basic assumptions of the early literacy approach.
- The teachers were given the main Greek literature on ‘transition’ and ‘early literacy’ and in addition were translated into the Greek the early literacy indicators /context indicators and the two learning stories ‘Hotel’ and ‘Apes after’ developed by the EASE partners Broström, Skriver Jensen, and Henrik Hansen.



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- The teachers **were invited** to find or come up with similar stories themselves, and to reflect about how they could work with these in the same way in both preschool and primary school.



Second phase – Planning the new practices

- The teachers reached agreement concerning 10 early literacy stories which would be developed in their classes in the framework of the official curriculum.
- The two partnerships decided to follow a different approach in developing the stories.
- It was also decided that the research assistant would make video recordings of teachers' early literacy transition activities for about an hour each week.



In all discussions during the two above mentioned phases of the project concerning the new practices we insisted that **the child's perspective** was the focus.





Third Phase – Implementation and Evaluation

During the implementation phase some difficulties were discovered that revealed the factors impeding the development of a common preschool and primary school communicative-teaching approach in early literacy and language practice.

These were complex personal and environmental factors that interacted and influenced teachers' practices negatively.



- **The absence of a common conceptual and theoretical frame concerning**
 - what early literacy is and
 - how it could be incorporated into the official daily curriculum and also
 - different understandings concerning the play formed an obstacle in spite of the introduction and the discussions during the previous stages of the project.



Findings 2/5

- Another constraint connected with the above problem was the **shortage of time** on the part of the primary school teachers.

Despite the earlier decision that the innovation undertaken with the project should be incorporated into the official curriculum and take up two hours within the flexible zone once a week, in practical terms this didn't always work for several reasons.



Findings 3/5

- One reason was the primary school teachers' sense that they were being forced to neglect other subjects which were also to be developed within the 'flexible zone'.
- They also feared that colleagues and parents were whispering behind their back that the new early literacy practices were time consuming and not as efficient as traditional language teaching.



- However, from our discussions with the teachers it appeared that the real cause of their hesitations was not so much what they said about the reservations of the parents and their colleagues, but
- the conflict within the teachers' own conflicting beliefs and **tacit theories**, that is, the conflict between the constructivist-based versus the skills-based approach.

Findings 5/5

Good practices

Nevertheless it is noteworthy that 4 to 5 weeks after the beginning of the implementation stage of the project, one of the two primary school teachers had managed a particularly innovative way to incorporate into the first grade curriculum many play-oriented early literacy practices, which were focused on the child's perspective.



Analysis of video observation materials

- The research assistant recorded the weekly early literacy transition activities which each teacher developed and produced observation materials lasting altogether more than 50 hours.
- The analysis of the video recordings was carried out by the project leader and the research assistant working independently and using an video observation sheet.





The video observation sheet

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was constructed by the researchers and was based on the 19 context indicators developed by the EASE partners, Broström, Skriver Jensen, Henrik Hansen.

The researchers have treated the 19 context indicators not as absolutely fixed categories **but as a conceptual basis assisting the analysis**, and helping to produce some inductive insights that were used for slight modifications of the initial categories.



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Video observation sheet



Teacher A

Interaction		Adult awareness in the interaction				Character of the interaction			Activity				Facility						
Younger child-older child interaction	Child-adult interaction (one-to-one)	Shows positive emotions for the child	Sees the child's initiative- understands the message	Invites to conversation- listens and answers	Provides recognition	Captures the child's attention	Maintains the child's attention	Mediates the child's experiences, elaborates/clarifies	Role play	Frame play	Read aloud	Interactive read aloud	Drawing	Literacy -props	Reading-corner	Writing-and-drawing-corner	Sound-and-listening-corner	Computer-corner	
																			1
																			2
																			3
																			4
																			5
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Comparison of the additive assessment for each teacher and for each indicator

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Context indicators			Assessment				
			Primary teacher A	Primary teacher B	Preschool teacher A	Preschool teacher B	Preschool teacher C
Interaction	1	Younger child-older child interaction					
	2	Child-adult interaction (one-to one)					
Adult awareness in the interaction	3	Shows positive emotions for the child					
	4	Sees the child's initiative- understands the message					
	5	Invites to conversation-listens and answers					
	6	Provides recognition					
Character of the interaction	7	Captures the child's attention					
	8	Maintains the child's attention					
	9	Mediates the child's experiences, elaborates/clarifies					
Activity	10	Role play					
	11	Frame play					
	12	Read aloud					
	13	Interactive read aloud					
	14	Drawing					
Facility	15	Literacy -props					
	16	Reading-corner					
	17	Writing-and drawing-corner					
	18	Sound-and listening-corner					
	19	Computer-corner					



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Conclusion 1/6



In accordance with the data and the analysis undertaken, we reached a number of conclusions. We will conclude with the presentation of some of these.



Conclusion 2/6



- Both groups, preschool and primary school teachers, were from the beginning to the end of the project motivated and cooperative in working towards the common goal.
- The two groups compared the Preschool National Curriculum with the First Grade Curriculum and found that in contrast to what was previously believed, the two Curricula did offer possibilities to be used in the spirit of a socio-cultural approach to

- All five teachers adopted, as individuals and as teachers belonging to different educational levels, early literacy practices and have exchanged their views concerning the strong as well as the weak points of these practices.
- However, in many cases this reciprocity in the adoption of practices by the other side had a rather formalistic and restrictive character, in the sense that there was some hurry to arrive under any circumstances at the final result.



For example, the adoption of role-playing by a primary school teacher did not always mean that she took the time to see the child's initiative and understand its message. This means that often the chance was not given to the child or that the teacher did not properly use the chance to adopt the child's perspective and to try to imagine, as an adult, how children think.



Conclusion 5/6



- Thus, we observed several times that opportunities were not used to invite children to conversation and to listen to their answers.
- It would seem that teachers at both levels did not dedicate sufficient time to understanding the child's perspective, either because they were not yet sufficiently sensitive to this or because the pressure to teach the syllabus did not leave enough time to do this.



Conclusion 6/6

However it should be noted that all five teachers improved their practices – although not to the same extent– concerning their performance on the indicators “Adult awareness in the interaction” and “character of the interaction”, in which they had the most difficulties.

To conclude 1/3

As was shown above, the early literacy practices which aimed at the development of a communicative early literacy approach common to preschool and primary school teachers were influenced by complex personal and environmental factors.



To conclude 2/3

- It seems, however, that it is possible to cope with the environmental factors if the teachers are first made aware of the influences, which their personal beliefs and tacit theories in fact have. They can arrive at this self critical awareness by confronting their tacit theories with the scientific theory of the field.





To conclude 3/3

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Response to our project....

A first initiative to cope with difficulties mentioned above is the conference which is planned now for November 2010 according to our proposal by four teacher training institutions under the auspices of the University of Athens and the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus.



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Thank you for your attention



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talents and mental and physical abilities
to their fullest potential.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

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