Narrative Skills and Genre Based Literacy Pedagogy Teaching Material
The Case of Greek Upper Elementary School Pupils One Year After the Implementation of the Current Teaching Material

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Narrative Skills and Genre Based Literacy Pedagogy Teaching Material: The Case of Greek Upper Elementary School Pupils One Year after the Implementation of the Current Teaching Material

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Abstract: This article presents and discusses the findings of a research study on the issue of literacy competency, focusing on the narrative written text production. The study examines the narrative text writing skills of 11-12 year old students (attending the last grade of Greek elementary school), before and after the first year of implementing the language teaching material introduced in 2006-07, considered to be consistent with the logic of genre based literacy pedagogy. It also investigates whether parameters such as gender, socio-educational background, and teachers’ practices regarding students’ written discourse production influence such performances. The students’ narrative skills were examined using part of the written composition test of the IEA - International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (the part assessing the narrative text), revised and adapted to the Greek language and educational context. Analysis of the pre- and post-implementation data suggests that after the first year of implementing the current teaching material, the pupils’ narrative skills display a considerable increase. Additionally, their performances are related to their gender, social background, and practices regarding students’ written discourse production.

Keywords: Literacy, Narrative Genre, Narrative Skills, Genre-based Literacy Pedagogy, Textual Competence, Written Discourse Production, Writing Assessment, Language Arts Textbooks, Primary Education, Elementary School.

Introduction

Over the last three decades, language teaching worldwide has revolved around the concept of literacy, that is a social practice constantly redefined in terms of the socio-cultural environment in which it takes place and that deals with the individual’s ability to understand, interpret, critically manage and produce all genres and discourse types necessary for society and generally to control his/her life and environment through written discourse (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000). Over this period of time, the debate on the concept of literacy created the framework and principles of literacy pedagogy. According to genre based literacy pedagogy (see Sydney school, i.e. Johns 2002; Macken et al. 1989), the main unit of literacy is the genre, as shaped by the respective socio-cultural reality. As students become familiarised with authentic texts from the social sphere belonging to different genres (e.g. narrative, descriptive, argumentative), which are inter-related to the cultural dimension of language, and learn about their rules and conventions, they gain the opportunity to participate in social processes and function successfully in any situational context (Baynham 1995; Freedman and Medway 1994).

Consequently, school literacy (Macken et al. 1989) is mainly achieved through the elaboration and production of – mostly written – genres considered important for defining and transmitting knowledge in various sectors, aiming to develop critical language awareness (Goatly 2000; Fairclough 1992). It is recommended to conduct communicational and interactive activities (between students and their peers or their teachers), which include practices that help students realise the characteristics of each genre, and to allocate time for the production, reviewing and editing of written discourse by the students themselves. In this way, language is not viewed as a static product, constructed through specific grammar and syntax rules, but as a dynamic semiotic system.
Such educational programmes have already been successfully implemented worldwide over the last thirty years (Brown 2001; Cope and Kalantzis 1993; Hedge 2000; Richards and Renandya 2002).

In Greece, this debate led to the 2003 National Curriculum for the Greek language in the Elementary School (FEK 2003) and the 2006 school textbooks and teacher manuals for the language arts class (Ministry of Education 2006a, 2006b).

Prior to the implementation of the 2003 and 2006 material, several Greek studies and research projects (see Fterniati and Spinthourakis 2004; Koukourikou et al. 2006; Kostouli 1997, 1998; Papoulia-Tzelepi 2000; Papoulia-Tzelepi and Spinthourakis 2000) had been conducted on the previous teaching material and, more generally, on the quality of language teaching in primary education and on important points revealed by the pupils’ written text production. These studies focused both on the common problems faced by children of different social background when producing written texts and on socially determined differences in language use. The studies included textual analysis of a large number of texts of various genres, written by students of different social background and addressed the problems faced by children of different social groups when producing written discourse. The results were disappointing. They demonstrated that the majority of students displayed medium or low written discourse achievement, while their success depended on their social background. The above results were attributed to the nature of the teaching material, which was based on the structural approach in language teaching (Galisson 1980) and relevant teaching practices, as well as to a lack of adequate educator training.

Furthermore, these results were due to the teachers’ views and practices on teaching written discourse (Kostouli 2002; Papoulia-Tzelepi and Spinthourakis 2000). As they point out, before the 2003 curriculum and the 2006 teaching material were implemented, written discourse production as a dynamic cognitive process was ignored. This refers to a process that includes the elaboration of various versions of a text before the final product, under interactive circumstances, and taking into account both the communicational objective and the intended recipient/audience. According to the above research, written discourse practices were limited to 15-minute written production exercises, with neither previous planning nor later elaboration, and without any self- or peer-evaluation. Evaluation, conducted by the teacher, was limited to the discussion of grammatical errors, and paid little or no attention to generic structure. Therefore the pupils received no feedback from their teachers, in the sense of fruitful guidance that would help them realise any weaknesses and find relevant solutions, but solely consisted of unfruitful error correction.

As a result, new educational material (language arts textbooks, student workbooks, grammar guide, dictionaries, literature anthologies and software, as well as the teacher’s guide) was implemented in elementary school language arts, as mentioned above.

This teaching material introduces important changes in Greek elementary school practices, including the formal adoption of specifically defined communicative genre-oriented approaches, as well as collaborative teaching/learning. According to the teacher’s guide (Ministry of Education 2006b), the new teaching approach aims to help students realise each genre’s different structure, and choose the appropriate linguistic means to produce specific texts. This is attempted through the analysis and production of different discourse types and genres in specific situational contexts. Ultimately, students should develop efficient communicative skills, by perceiving and producing various socially acceptable discourse types and genres. Texts provided should be authentic, while discourse production should be placed in context and culminating in the assessment of the produced discourse by the students themselves (self- and peer-evaluation). The reforms outlined, while not new in contemporary language learning and teaching theory and practice, are however highly innovative from the vantage point of the Greek educational reality (see Glossa 2002; Fterniati and Spinthourakis 2006).

So far, the research conducted to evaluate the above, in terms of meeting the stated objectives, focus on the teaching material (see Kapsalis and Katsikis 2007; Fterniati 2007; Papoulia and Fterniati 2010; Pourkos and Katsarou 2011). They examine whether the textbooks implement the
main teaching practices adopted worldwide. Most of them take the view of aligning the textbooks’ theoretical and practical choices with contemporary principles of teaching modern languages.

However, so far no research has been conducted on evaluating the impact of introducing the current material and related teaching practices on the students’ literacy skills level.

For this reason, it was considered necessary to conduct research focusing not on the teaching material, but on its actual product, that is the students’ written production, and on relevant teaching practices. The results of such a study could demonstrate whether the pupils’ literacy skills display any improvement after the implementation of the current textbooks, which is whether the current Greek elementary school Language Arts practices are effective, in relation to the improvement of the pupils’ literacy skills.

**Methodology**

**Research Objective**

The aim of the above mentioned study is to examine and discuss the findings of a research study focusing on the writing skills of Greek elementary school pupils producing narrative, descriptive and argumentative text before the current material was introduced in 2006-07, one year after its implementation, and six years after its implementation.

The research lasted six years (2006-2012), so that the pupils who attended the first grade in 2006, when the current books were introduced, would complete their primary education with this teaching material.

This paper presents some initial results from the first year of data collection on the pupils’ narrative skills. In particular, the study examines the narrative text writing skills of 11-12 year old students (attending the last grade of Greek elementary school), before and after the first year of implementing the language teaching material introduced in 2006-07, which is considered to be consistent with the logic of genre based literacy pedagogy.

Specifically, the paper aims to reveal any differences on the level of the pupils’ narrative skills after the 1st year of implementing the current teaching material in schools that operate in areas of different social background.

An effort was also made to explore whether the pupils’ skills are influenced by parameters such as gender, social background, and teachers’ practices regarding written discourse production.

**Sample**

The research took place in two phases (pre and post-test), October 2006 and June 2007, in ten Greek state elementary schools. The grade that participated was the 6th (ages 11-12).

The schools were located in a large prefecture and operated in urban, suburban, semi-urban and mountain rural areas, and were chosen so that both higher and lower parental social background could be represented.

The population of the study consisted of 151 students (78 boys and 73 girls).

**Data Collection**

The students’ literacy skills were examined using part of the written composition test of the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement), revised and adapted to the Greek language and educational context (IEA 2010).

This specific test examines a variety of pupil literacy skills, including narrative, descriptive and argumentative text production skills, information management skills and metacognitive skills.

Overall, the study evaluates the effectiveness of pupil discourse and their awareness, in terms of the respect shown to restrictions imposed by linguistic and extralinguistic (purpose, recipient/audience) factors in different genres (narrative, descriptive and argumentative).
In this phase, as mentioned, the research initially utilised narrative text criteria. It examined the effectiveness (Clark and Ivanci 1997) of the pupils’ narrative discourse, regarding the main characteristics of the narrative genre, grouped into 5 categories:

1. the narrative pattern (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981; Labov and Waletzky 1967; van Dijk 1980), that is the basic generic structure including orientation, complicating action and coda,
2. the evaluation (commentary) (Labov and Waletzky 1967), 3. the cohesion (Halliday and Hasan 1976) 4. the coherence (Halliday and Hasan 1976) and 5. the grammaticality and semantic acceptability of the text.

The above was analysed in twenty criteria and each criterion was evaluated using a five-point scale. The total score of the five categories, in case of the highest performance, would be 100.

Apart from the analytic scoring it was considered useful to include the texts’ holistic scoring (evaluation of the text as a whole, overall impression). Both a six-point and a ten-point scale were used, so as to ensure greater objectivity (McCabe 1996).

The 5 categories are analysed below:

1. Regarding the narration of a complete episode (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981; Labov and Waletzky 1967; van Dijk 1980) based on narrative generic structure, the criteria examined the degree to which the pupils’ texts:
   a. Developed orientation successfully, that is whether they provide sufficient information on the characters/heroes, the place, the time frame, and the initial situation in general, so that the reader can be orientated and successfully introduced to the narration.
   b. Developed complicating action, that is first whether they: Include the event that upset the initial state, sufficient plot/action development (internal and external action), the climax and the end of the episode.
   c. Developed complicating action, that is second whether they: Develop the heroes’ characters according to the facts.
   d. Developed complicating action, that is third whether they: Follow a clear sequence of events.
   e. Display a successful coda/resolution, that is a conclusive statement that provides a sense of closure.

Five criteria were utilised in order to examine the above.

2. The study then examined whether the pupil provides an evaluation (commentary) of the narration, that is whether the text presents the pupil’s judgment as a narrator, on the meaning of the story, the point of the facts, and the narrator’s attitude and feelings (Labov and Waletzky 1967).

The texts were tested for:
   a. Commentary on actions or situations, e.g. with adverbs that define the heroes’ actions, with explanatory (because, since), final (so that, in order to), concessive clauses (although, however), or other phrases/utterances expressing an event’s cause or consequence.
   b. Commentary on the characters/heroes, e.g. clauses (mostly relative), adjectives, participles, or other phrases/utterances that state perception, judgment, will, feelings and constitute the narrator’s comments on the heroes’ behaviour and state of mind.

Two criteria were utilised in order to examine the above.

3. The study then examined whether the pupils’ texts displayed cohesion, that is how they structured meaning intratextually. The term refers to various linguistic means (grammar, vocabulary) that link sentences to form larger units and comprises the functional use of
grammar and syntax structures. Starting from the original work of Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion is considered to be the main quality that distinguishes a text from a random series of sentences. Cohesion is established by linking successive utterances with specific elements (connectors, pronouns, zero reference, etc.).

In a narrative, events are semantically linked with time and causal relationships, that is the ways in which a situation or an event affects the circumstances of another situation or event (de Baugrande and Dressler 1981). The verbs are in past tenses.

The texts were tested for:

a. The number and successful use of time indicators (conjunctions, adverbs, various determiners, participles, etc.).

b. The number and successful use of causal indicators (conjunctions, adverbs, various determiners, participles, etc.) and other connectors.

c. Textual cohesion, established through reference to people and places.

d. Textual cohesion, established through lack of reference to people and places.

e. The variety of past tenses.

f. The correct use of past tenses.

Six criteria were utilised in order to examine the above.

4. The term coherence, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976), refers to the sequence of meanings, which makes a piece of discourse understood as a text. It refers to the suitability of the text content relative to the situational context. Coherence is established when the text is suitable, in part and in whole, for the reader and the purpose for which the text was written. The study examined the extent to which:

a. The pupils understand the text’s purpose and their texts are suitable for the specific situational context.

b. The texts are focused. All details are organised in a distinct pattern. The story is developed sufficiently, clearly, without digressions, with logical connections throughout the parts of the narration (including the paragraphs). It includes all necessary information, no more and no less.

Two criteria were utilised in order to examine the above.

5. Regarding grammaticality and acceptability, the study examined the texts’:

a. Grammar and syntax (compliance with rules, grammar and syntax errors, spelling and punctuation).

b. Conceptual and semantic correctness, and the accuracy and compatibility with its linguistic choices for written discourse.

c. Visual presentation and readability.

d. Errors, and the extent to which they influence its understandability.

e. The study also examined whether the vocabulary was rich and suitable for the occasion, also accounting for verbs and other utterances that indicate action, change, contact, distancing, request, provision and so on, describing the heroes’ actions.

Five criteria were utilised in order to examine the above.

As mentioned above, the texts were scored both analytically and holistically (evaluation of the text as a whole). To ensure greater objectivity, two scales were used, both a ten-point and a six-point. The study examined whether the plot is clear, complete, interesting, and sufficiently developed, and whether the narrative is vivid and reveals personal style.

Each text was evaluated by two examiners, who had been previously trained on evaluating the effectiveness of student narrative discourse in terms of the main characteristics of the narrative genre. The final score emerged from the mean average of the two scorings. On the rare occasion
that the two scorings displayed a difference larger than two points, a third examiner was called in to evaluate the text.

The data collected from the pupils’ texts were complemented by two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was administered to the parents of the participant pupils, and referred to the parents’ educational level, which was measured in a ten point scale, from not completing elementary school (1) to obtaining a doctorate degree (10). The questionnaire aimed at relating parental education to pupil performance.

The second questionnaire was administered to the participant pupils’ teachers, and referred to written production in class, in terms of allocated time, how it is conducted, and whether self/peer assessment is implemented. The questionnaire aimed at relating the above to pupil performance, to see whether the allocation of more time for text elaboration including interactive practices enhances pupil performance.

All data were statistically elaborated using the SPSS software, with both descriptive and inferential statistical elaboration. The data analysis below reflects the above.

**Presentation and Analysis of Findings**

As seen above (in the methodology section), pre and post-test evaluation comprised of 20 criteria (score of 100 for the highest performance) measuring five aspects of narrative competency, and two types of holistic scoring were used. Table 1 presents the performance mean average of all participant pupils and the difference between pre and post-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>POST-TEST</th>
<th>PRE-TEST</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Holistic score (1-10)</td>
<td>6.2050</td>
<td>5.5917</td>
<td>0.61333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Holistic score (1-6)</td>
<td>3.4603</td>
<td>3.1159</td>
<td>0.34437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Narration (orientation, complicating action, coda)</td>
<td>10.1329</td>
<td>9.4580</td>
<td>0.67483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Commentary – Evaluation</td>
<td>5.7604</td>
<td>5.1875</td>
<td>0.57292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Cohesion</td>
<td>16.4615</td>
<td>14.5105</td>
<td>1.95105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Coherence</td>
<td>2.2014</td>
<td>1.9410</td>
<td>0.26042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Grammaticality - Acceptability</td>
<td>16.9894</td>
<td>16.0709</td>
<td>0.91844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative competency:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total of mean average A, B, C, D, E.</strong></td>
<td><strong>51.5081</strong></td>
<td><strong>46.9879</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean average difference is statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

This section first examines the two holistic scorings (six-point and ten-point, for greater objectivity), and then the categories/factors that constitute a clear, interesting and coherent narration: Complete episode narration (orientation, complication action, coda), Evaluation--
Commentary, Cohesion, Coherence, Grammaticality–Acceptability. For each category, the tables present the mean average of the sum of the criteria involved, while at the end of the table (Narrative Competency), there is the mean average of the sums of all twenty criteria of the five categories (excluding the initial two holistic scorings). The total score of the five categories in the case of the highest performance would be 100.

All cases demonstrate enhanced performance from pre to post-test. The most marked increase is demonstrated by cohesion, followed by grammaticality-acceptability. They are followed by episode narration and its evaluation. The least marked increase is demonstrated by coherence. Inferential statistical elaboration revealed that all the differences are statistically significant at \( \alpha = 0.01 \).

Table 2 presents the pupils’ performance mean average per school location, and the difference between pre- and post-test.

Table 2: Performance Mean Average per School Location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Location</th>
<th>MOUNTAIN RURAL</th>
<th>SEMI-URBAN</th>
<th>SUBURBAN</th>
<th>URBAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POST</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>DIFF.</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>PRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Holistic score (1-10)</td>
<td>5,39</td>
<td>4,69</td>
<td>0,70</td>
<td>5,82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Holistic score (1-6)</td>
<td>2,97</td>
<td>2,51</td>
<td>0,46</td>
<td>3,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Narration</td>
<td>9,15</td>
<td>8,69</td>
<td>0,45</td>
<td>9,71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Commentary – Evaluation</td>
<td>4,42</td>
<td>3,93</td>
<td>0,49</td>
<td>5,59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Cohesion</td>
<td>15,74</td>
<td>13,35</td>
<td>2,39</td>
<td>14,59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Coherence</td>
<td>1,99</td>
<td>1,62</td>
<td>0,36</td>
<td>1,88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Grammaticality – Acceptability</td>
<td>14,73</td>
<td>13,49</td>
<td>1,24</td>
<td>15,91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative competency: Total of mean average A, B, C, D, E.</td>
<td>46,31</td>
<td>41,26</td>
<td>5,05</td>
<td>48,13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean average difference is statistically significant at \( \alpha = 0.05 \)

We observe that all cases demonstrate enhanced performance from pre to post-test. Inferential statistical elaboration revealed that the differences are statistically significant at \( \alpha = 0.05 \).
Three area types show enhanced performance. The most marked increase is demonstrated in urban schools, followed by semi-urban and mountain rural locations. The least marked increase is demonstrated in suburban areas. These findings can be explained as follows:

Table 3 presents parental education (mean average) per school location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School location</th>
<th>Mean: Father’s educational level</th>
<th>Mean: Mother’s educational level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>URBAN</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>7.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMI-URBAN</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBURBAN</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOUNTAIN RURAL</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen above, parental education was measured in a ten-point scale, from not completing elementary school (1) to obtaining a doctorate degree (10). We can see that parental education levels are high in urban schools, because the corresponding area is populated by a higher social class (most of the parents belong to the teaching and administrative staff of the University of Patras). In terms of parental education level, the next area is the semi-urban location, which is actually an affluent small town. This is followed by parental education level in the suburban location, which is a degraded area, characterised mostly by working class population and more immigrants than the other areas under study. This location demonstrated the least marked increase in pupil performance. The lowest parental education level is displayed by mountain rural area. This area demonstrated both the lowest pupil performance and a marked performance increase from pre to post-test, almost equal to the urban and semi-urban locations. The area consists of poor mountain villages which are populated mostly by farmers, and have few immigrants.

Over the last decades, the correlation of the students’ linguistic performance to their social background has been established by numerous research worldwide (cited in Hannon 1995) and has been interpreted in various ways (i.e. Bernstein 1971; Labov 1972). A common point is that the process of mastering language as a communication tool can only be understood in relation to the social environment in which it takes place. As expected, the present study confirms this, as is indicated by the correlation between parental educational level and pupil performance (Tables 4 and 5). The correlations here are shown to be strong. The more privileged their background the higher the students’ performance in written expression.
Table 4: Correlation of Father’s Educational Level and Pupil Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s educational level</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Narrative competency (PRE-TEST)</th>
<th>Narrative competency (POST-TEST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.546**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.575**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Correlation of mother’s educational level and pupil performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s educational level</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Narrative competency (PRE-TEST)</th>
<th>Narrative competency (POST-TEST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.507**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.554**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows a difference between performance mean average for boys and girls, with girls displaying higher performance.

Table 6: Performance Mean Average per Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Narrative competency</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRE-TEST</td>
<td>POST-TEST</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>50,4365</td>
<td>53,5076</td>
<td>3,07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>44,4133</td>
<td>49,3986</td>
<td>4,98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>6,02*</td>
<td>4,10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean average difference is statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

However, the boys show a more marked increase compared to the girls (mean difference from pre to post test: 4.98 for boys versus 3.07 for girls). Moreover, the mean difference between boys and girls in the pre-test is higher (6.02) than in the post-test (4.10).
Inferential statistical elaboration revealed that the difference of performance mean average between boys and girls in the pre-test is statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$, while at the post-test this difference is not statistically significant.

This can probably be explained by the fact that all recommended activities to utilise the teaching material serve as a motive for action and sociability. Compared to girls, boys are more active and with a narrower attention span, so it is easier for them to be distracted when performing repetitive mechanical exercises to reproduce discourse (previous teaching material) than when involved in various communication roles (current teaching material) (Millard 1997).

Summarising, the results suggest a strong and consistent effect of the use of genre based literacy pedagogy teaching material and of the respective practices adopted in some cases to the narrative competency of the students. This effect may vary depending on some other factors but it is always present.

However, given that the total score of the five categories for the highest performance would be 100, as can be seen (Table 1) from the performance mean average for all students (46,9879 in pre- and 51,5081 in post-test), pupil performance is mediocre even after the implementation of the new material and despite their improvement.

When we examine the results for each location (seen above in Table 2), we observe that even in the higher socio-educational level area, mean scores are barely 61,33/100, followed by 48,25 in the semi-urban area, 46,63 in the suburban area and 46,30 in the mountain rural area. In the last three areas, student performance remains below average scoring (50/100).

Finally, Tables 7-9 examine the relationship between pupil performance and the way in which written discourse is produced, since in the teacher’s guide (Ministry of Education 2006b) it is recommended to allocate time for the production, reviewing and editing of written discourse by the students themselves and their peers at school.

**Table 7: Performance Mean Average per Location of Written Discourse Production**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where do students produce written discourse?</th>
<th>Narrative competency (POST-TEST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both at home and at school</td>
<td>47,6194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school</td>
<td>55,1397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8: Performance Mean Average per Way of Producing Written Discourse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How are the students’ texts edited?</th>
<th>Narrative competency (POST-TEST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only the teacher edits texts</td>
<td>44,4800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts are edited by both teacher and students</td>
<td>47,6194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts are mostly corrected with self/peer editing</td>
<td>61,3372</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 9. Performance Mean Average per Time Allocated to Written Discourse Production**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time allocated to the production and editing of written discourse</th>
<th>Narrative competency (POST-TEST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twenty (20) minutes</td>
<td>43,5250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One (1) hour</td>
<td>48,8056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two (2) hours</td>
<td>49,3704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three (3) hours</td>
<td>57,2981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We observe that performance is higher when written discourse is produced exclusively at school and lower when written discourse is sometimes produced at home (Table 7). It also seems that performance is higher when the pupils’ texts are reviewed and edited using communicational and interactive practices and when the pupils themselves are involved in the process (Table 8). We also observe that pupil performance is higher when more time is allocated to producing and editing written discourse (Table 9).

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The findings of the study indicate that after the first year of implementing the current teaching material and the respective teaching practices, the pupils’ narrative skills display a considerable improvement, since both the scoring in all separate criteria and the two holistic scorings display a significant difference from pre to post-test. It also suggests that their skills, at both time points, relate to their gender, social background, and teachers’ practices, with higher performance attributed to girls, high social background and more time allocated to the production and (self) reviewing of written discourse in the classroom.

Particularly regarding the relationship between performance and gender, although the boys’ performance before the implementation is often remarkably lower than the girls’, after the implementation the boys demonstrate a more marked increase in their performance than the girls. As mentioned above (see analysis of Table 6), this fact could possibly be attributed to the fact that all recommended activities to utilise the teaching material serve as a motive for action and sociability (Millard 1997).

Furthermore, pupils display an improved performance, to a greater or lesser degree, regardless of whether they come from a privileged or less privileged social background (see Table 2). Sociolinguistics have established that children from non privileged backgrounds have less access to formal language, particularly to written discourse, which represents its most challenging form (see analysis of Tables 4 and 5). It is most important that these children are introduced to this challenging process through original texts from the social sphere, which are more familiar, and through their participation in different interactive activities, where they assume various roles. It seems that this practice offers non privileged children a motivation to critically elaborate different genres and expand their discourse competency. However, despite a general enhancement, we observed that the pupils of the sample overall display a mediocre performance in terms of narrative competency. For most pupils, the scores are mediocre and their performance greatly depends on their social background.

To a great extent, the findings of the present research confirm previous research mentioned above (Fterniati and Spinthourakis 2004; Koukourikou et al. 2006; Kostouli 1997, 1998; Papoulia-Tzelepi 2000; Papoulia-Tzelepi and Bleka 2000) on pupil written discourse performance in the Greek elementary school (see *Introduction*). They are also related to the findings of research conducted in the USA and other countries (Kress 1994; Reading today 2000; U.S. Dept of Education 2000; U.S. Dept of Education NAEP 2011). In the above studies, textual analysis of a large number of texts of various genres, written by students of various socio-cultural backgrounds, demonstrated that the text performance scores of most students are low or medium, and their success is directly related to their social background; the more privileged their background the higher the students’ performance in written expression.

According to previous research on the quality of written discourse teaching in Greece (Kostouli 2002; Papoulia-Tzelepi and Spinthourakis 2000), these results are partly due to certain older views and practices on teaching written discourse. This refers to a process that ignores the written discourse production as a dynamic cognitive process (elaboration of various versions of a text, allocating time for interactive activities, that is self- or peer-evaluation) (see also *Introduction*).
To a certain extent, these older views still survive in primary education, as can be seen from the teachers’ questionnaire answers. For instance, in some cases written discourse production is assigned as homework. When conducted in school, in some cases it is neither allocated sufficient time nor characterised by interactive practices and self- and peer-assessment techniques.

These causes probably explain the pupils’ mediocre performance in terms of their narrative competency, both before and after the implementation of the current teaching material, despite a significant increase in the first year of the material.

This happens because it does not suffice to simply design and implement teaching material based on contemporary teaching principles. It is also necessary to properly and sufficiently train all educators involved, so that the teaching material can be implemented properly and yield maximum benefits.

In the context of training educators in the new (at the time) educational materials, the Greek Pedagogical Institute organised and implemented a large scale training programme from 2005 to 2007 (Pedagogical Institute Report for 2005-2007). However, this training programme received heavy criticism and was considered insubstantial, as it failed to help educators to meet the demands of the new teaching material. According to research conducted by the Institute of Pedagogical Research of the Greek Teachers Association (IPR-GTA 2009) throughout the country on the new textbooks, educators were not satisfied by the instructions provided by competent authorities for the implementation of the new books. Apparently, the training focused mostly on presenting the books and not on illustrating the underlying teaching approach.

Of course, for any educational reform to succeed, educators must familiarise themselves with the new fields of information and knowledge, so that they can obtain the appropriate qualifications to master teaching practices that are different than the previous teaching practices. Despite the intention to change educational practice, the change can be pointless when the educators have not been properly trained or not as productive when educator training is limited to short informational presentations which are not followed up.

The findings of this study indicate that, after the implementation of the current teaching material and the respective teaching practices adopted in some cases, the pupils enhanced their awareness of textual communication, particularly their understanding of a text’s communicational effectiveness, for a specific genre in this phase of the research. At the same time, the findings stress the need to enhance written discourse teaching practices. Overall, after the findings of the six year research on the pupils’ literacy skills in narrative, descriptive and argumentative text have been completed and published, the conclusions of this study could contribute to the debate on promoting changes in language arts teaching in Greece. This is particularly valid for the need to change the teaching of written discourse in Greek elementary schools, after the current teaching material has been enhanced and the educators have been properly trained on genre based literacy pedagogy teaching practices.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by the “K. Karatheodoris” research grant (contract D157) awarded to the author by the Research Committee of the University of Patras.

1 More recent findings of the six year research are going to be announced in Ninth Bi-annual Conference of IAIMTE (International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education), to be held in Paris, 11-13 June 2013, focusing on Literacies and Effective Learning and Teaching for all. Moreover, more findings will be announced at the International Conference on Greek Linguistics, to be held in Rhodes, 26-29 September 2013, with a special focus on Language and Education.
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The International Journal of Literacies is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal.

ISSN: 2325-0136