

The International  
JOURNAL  
*of* LEARNING

Volume 14, Number 9

The New Greek Elementary Language Arts  
Textbooks: Teaching Written Discourse Production

Anna Fterniati

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING  
<http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

First published in 2007 in Melbourne, Australia by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd  
[www.CommonGroundPublishing.com](http://www.CommonGroundPublishing.com).

© 2007 (individual papers), the author(s)  
© 2007 (selection and editorial matter) Common Ground

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of citations, quotations, diagrams, tables and maps.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair use for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act (Australia), no part of this work may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher. For permissions and other inquiries, please contact [<cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com>](mailto:cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com).

ISSN: 1447-9494  
Publisher Site: <http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING is a peer refereed journal. Full papers submitted for publication are refereed by Associate Editors through anonymous referee processes.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system  
<http://www.CommonGroundSoftware.com>.

# The New Greek Elementary Language Arts Textbooks: Teaching Written Discourse Production

Anna Fterniati, University of Patras, Patras, Greece

*Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to present the framework used for developing the new Greek elementary language arts textbooks, as well as to outline the teaching methodologies implemented. These include the different philosophical and pedagogical theories used for the development of the new textbooks. The paper analyses the adopted didactic approaches and points out the perceptions and practices regarding the teaching of written discourse production. Emphasis is placed on the use of various strategies for the production of specific and appropriate text types. Fundamental to achieving the stated objectives of the new textbooks is that: · students come into contact with a large variety of texts. · students produce written discourse continuously. · students engage in self-assessment as well as in peer-assessment of their work. · written discourse production is perceived as a long and ongoing process which includes designing, producing, and revising of the student's text. · text production and processing is integrated into wider communicative activities using critical methods.*

**Keywords:** Language Arts, Primary Education, Textual Competence, Written Discourse Production, Genre Based Literacy Pedagogy, Teaching-Learning Processes Model, Self-Assessment, Critical Language Awareness

## Introduction

**F**OR THREE DECADES, language teaching research has focused increasingly on the systematic study of text structure. Genre-based literacy pedagogy promotes the concept of the text, as implemented in various situational contexts, while specific studies put forward the dynamics of textual communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Johnstone, 2002; Kalantzis & Cope, 2001; McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Stern, 2001). The latter attempt to negotiate criteria frameworks –both linguistic and extra linguistic– which could be used to investigate the efficiency and, consequently, the communicative adequacy of each genre. (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 2004). Genres include narrating, describing, arguing, explaining, instructing etc.

Language teaching research worldwide suggests that textual communication may be perceived only through the comparative study of authentic texts from the social environment. Such texts, characterised by linguistic diversity and various degrees of efficiency, may form the basis for the production and processing of written discourse. The use of communicative and interactive activities between students and their teacher or peers is recommended. This is achieved through practices that help students appreciate text's particular features in different socio-cultural communities. It is also recommended to allocate time for the processing of students' written discourse. This is critical for broadening students' textual knowledge and their ability to perceive and use discourse effectively, conforming to an extra linguistic context for

the production and processing of various genres (discourse, textual, generic competence).

Previous research in Greece (Fterniati, 2000; Fterniati & Spinthourakis, 2004; Kostouli, 1997; Papoulia-Tzelepi, 2000; Papoulia-Tzelepi and Spinthourakis, 2000) pointed out that students' difficulties to perceive and produce discourse were due to their ignorance of each genre's defining parameters. Until recently, teaching did not provide students with the criteria frameworks they needed so as to realise the rules of textual communication. Language's social function was not approached by teaching, owing to the lack of practices training students in contextualised discourse and the production of linguistic and socially acceptable discourse types.

Until the implementation of the new comprehensive Curriculum (FEK, 2003) and new teaching material (Ministry of Education, 2006a), language teaching in the elementary school was dominated by a perception of students' written discourse as the free expression of their ideas. Its quality depended neither on appropriate programmes and teaching materials nor on appropriate teaching and practices, but on a "talent" students may or may not have. Written discourse was not even a subject for teaching. Only occasionally were any guidelines provided, the same for every genre, regardless of each genre's different strategies and organising needs.

The production of written discourse was not viewed as a dynamic cognitive process. Nor did it include processing various text versions before final production using interactive practices and taking into consideration the text's communicative purpose and



targeted audience. According to the above research, written discourse practices were limited to a simple analysis of the meaning of the (usually narrative and often non authentic but constructed) text, followed by subject-guided production of written discourse, for a maximum of fifteen minutes, without previous planning or later processing. Assessment consisted almost exclusively of grammatical errors discussion, touching fleetingly on content and structure. There was therefore little to no fruitful feedback; instead of leading students to identify any weaknesses and attempt to find solutions, the teacher simply corrected formal errors.

This inadequacy of this practice is probably attributable to the definition of an effective text, as promoted by Greek schools. In the research referenced, teachers see “good” text as one with complete sentences, clarity of expression, and intricate linguistic form. Consequently, the identification of morpho-syntactic errors did not relate to their function and efficiency at text level, but treated it as a random word and phrase compilation. What’s more, students’ practice on syntactic forms was limited to exercises, isolated from their situational context.

Thus the underlying view was that text production was merely the result of compiling grammatically correct and semantically acceptable phrases. However, research has shown that assessing texts is more effective when knowing how specific communicative aims may be met through the appropriate use of linguistic elements (Knapp & Watkins, 1994). Nonetheless, the teacher was perceived solely as the judge of the students’ written product, not as their collaborator and guide; the teacher’s role was dominant, completely ignoring any processes of interaction between students and teachers, or among students.

The socio-cultural and communicative aspects of written discourse production were equally ignored. Teaching practices did not implement the widely accepted view that literacy is a process of producing text structures with socio-cultural influence (Collins & Blot, 2003; Kostouli, 2005; Kress, 1998). As such, it should be based on broadening students’ textual competence and achieved through various communicative activities, which introduce students to generic conventions.

The findings of Greek research such as mentioned above and the new proposals and studies on language teaching worldwide promoted the need for the adoption of a new way of teaching language in Greek elementary schools. As the need for a new curriculum and new teaching material became increasingly obvious, all curricula of compulsory education and

teaching material were subjected to reform<sup>1</sup>. The new language arts curriculum was predicated on the language teaching principles outlined (see, indicatively: Glossa, 2002; Fterniati & Spinthourakis, 2006). It was legislated in its final form in 2003, while full implementation started in the school year 2006-2007, when the new teaching material (language arts textbooks, student workbooks, grammar guide, dictionaries, literature anthologies and software, as well as the teacher’s guide) was gradually introduced to schools, as specified by the new curriculum.

The paper presents the framework used for developing the new Greek elementary language arts textbooks, as well as the teaching methodologies implemented<sup>2</sup>. The didactic approaches adopted are analysed below, along with the perceptions and practices regarding written discourse teaching.

### **Framework and Didactic Approaches Used for Developing the New Textbooks**

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 (both oral and written), by perceiving and producing various socially acceptable discourse types and genres, and thus become aware of the linguistic system. Texts provided should be authentic, while discourse production should be placed in context (who speaks/writes, to whom, why, what about, where and when) and culminating in the assessment of the produced discourse by the students themselves.

It has long been suggested (McCarthy and Carter, 1994) that textual competence is not enhanced only by performing speech acts and functions, but mostly by developing the necessary skills for choosing the right contextualisation strategies for such speech acts and functions. Consequently, teaching should utilise the concept of the text, as implemented in various situational contexts. In the new curriculum’s goal-setting context, the innovative aspect of the new language arts textbooks is that they organise and construct the syllabus around the genre, not discrete grammatical phenomenon, function, or communicative situation.

Based on a main genre, each teaching unit consists of related texts, associated communicative functions and their defining elements, as well as corresponding activities and exercises.

<sup>1</sup> As the Greek educational system is highly centralised, teaching material has traditionally been the exclusive responsibility of the state.

<sup>2</sup> The following presentation focuses mainly on language arts textbooks and student workbooks (and the corresponding teacher’s guide instructions); all the examples quoted here come from these two sources. However, the rest of the new teaching material was also developed based on the same principles and approaches.

## Teaching Methodologies Implemented

An advantage of the new textbooks is the existence of advance organisers at the beginning of each teaching unit (Finney, 2002). They present each unit's genres and linguistic elements, helping both

teacher and students realise the teaching objectives. The use of advance organisers is a metacognitive strategy. It is easier for teachers to engage students' interest and active participation when teaching aims are explicitly described. For example:

*We will work on:*

- *How to describe a building*
- *The role of adjectives in descriptive texts*
- *Which words or phrases denote location*

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 24)

*In this unit we learn:*

- *Different ways of giving instructions*
- *Which grammar moods to use when giving instructions*

(Language Arts Textbook, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 73)

Advance organisers are followed by the unit's central texts, and related exercises and activities.

Chosen texts display linguistic variety; students work on main genres such as narrating, describing, arguing, explaining, instructing etc., using different reading strategies. The provided discourse types consist of literary texts, and texts from the wider social environment (press articles, advertisements, brochures, instructions, maps, tables, letters, journals, etc.). They also include multimodal texts (Kress et al., 2001) and they are as close as possible to their authentic form.

As seen above, textual competence is comprised of two skills: text producing on the one hand, and perception of written and oral discourse on the other hand. The logic of suggested activities is the systematic use of information, which clarifies the form and content of texts under study, and shapes the form and content of the texts to be produced by students. Each genre is taught according to its characteristics, which include both its formal structure/schema (su-

perstructure), and the appropriate linguistic means (in terms of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary). Combined with explicit teaching, the suggested activities put forward each genre's structure, the function of linguistic elements, and the way such elements construct each genre's cohesion and style. Identifying and distinguishing different genres is one of the teaching aims; another is to help students realise genre interaction. That's why textbooks include exercises where students detect genre co-existence and identify the inter-relationship of their functions. Through the above activities, students practice not only decoding but also interpreting a message, as well as understanding the writer's intentions. Activities are usually open, while some units also include closed questions (true/false or multiple choice type). In some activities, students are directed to discover the text's structure, while in others they have to determine its genre, based on its structure. In the following examples, students are directed to discover the text's structure:

⇒ An exercise aiming to help children realise the structure of a narrative text:

You want to tell a friend about the story you just read. You need to say:

- ◆ Who is the main character and who else is involved?
- ◆ Where and when did the story take place?
- ◆ How does the adventure begin?
- ◆ What happens next?
- ◆ What is the result?
- ◆ How do the characters feel or think about what happened?

Answer each question with one phrase, then join the phrases and build a text (by using conjunctions and other connecting words), to tell a summary of the story.

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 14)

⇒ An exercise aiming to help children realise the structure of a descriptive text:

Complete the dolphin's ID card, based on the information provided in your book's texts.

*ID card*

Common name: .....

Length: .....

Colour: .....

Body features: .....

Habits/behaviour: .....

Favourite food: .....

Main threats: .....

(Language Arts Student Workbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 39)

In contemporary education, teaching grammar aims at enhancing students' communicative/textual competence (Brown, 2001; Hedge, 2000; Knapp & Watkins, 1994). The new textbooks attempt to implement this, presenting not only the structure and rules of grammar, but also its function and use, as well as the alternative ways of performing a speech act. Grammar is therefore presented as structure, as the function and means of performing communicative acts, as a means of textual cohesion, and as a mechanism of style, register and text differentiation.

The teaching of grammar rules and structures in the earlier grades begins with examples taken from the unit's texts, which are contextualised (Richards, 2002), with limited metalanguage use. In older grades, most grammatical issues come from the taught syllabus, and are therefore already familiar to the students. Students deal with explicit linguistic rules, so as to deepen their awareness of grammar rules and the language system, and develop conscious control of linguistic elements. The mastering of grammatical phenomena and mechanisms is achieved through free communicative activities, rather than controlled exercises, in order to ensure the understanding and precise use of taught structures and

functions. Teaching aims do not include rote learning of rules, definitions, or conjugational examples. Students learn grammar to be able to produce discourse using linguistic means competently, and realising their communicative intentions effectively. For this purpose, textbooks provide exercises asking students to explain their grammatical choices, or detect, explain and correct grammatical errors.

Exercises on the function of grammar and syntax provide students with choices which may help them realise the relationship between a writer's intentions and the linguistic means necessary to achieve intended results. According to the principles implemented in the new textbooks, morphosyntactic mechanisms are studied in the context of their respective genre, while teaching aims involve not only knowledge but also speech acts on the level of the whole text such as explaining, suggesting, guiding, informing, narrating, etc. By analysing each genre, students learn the respective dominant linguistic means. Linking genres and linguistic means allows students to realise the latter's function, and use them effectively in the production of oral and written discourse. For example:

The author narrates a story that happened in the past. Imagine the author narrates the following part of the story as if it were happening in the present. Re-write the story, changing the tenses. Which tense do you use to show that the story's events are taking place at the time of speaking? Which is the best tense to use when you want to tell a story vividly, as if it were happening now?

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 15)

- a. Do you remember which tenses are used in narration? Are these tenses used in the text you just read?
- b. In which grammatical person is the narration written? Who narrates the story? Is it one of the story's characters?
- c. Now read the third paragraph: "Yannis... live together". Imagine the story is narrated by Yannis himself. In which grammatical person should the story be written? What else should change?

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume II, p. 56)

<p>a. The author prefers Simple Present when describing the building, but uses past tenses – mainly Past Continuous – when narrating about how people lived in it. Why do you think this is?</p>
<p>b. In the text, we can find many adjectives, which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide us with further information about what is being described, making the narration more <b>vivid, explicit, precise and graphic</b>.</li> <li>• Show us the author's comments on what is being described. That is, adjectives show us the author's <b>point of view / personal perspective</b> regarding what is being described.</li> </ul> <p>In the text you just read, can you find some adjectives that are simply descriptive and some that also provide comments?</p>
<p>c. An adjective provides a short description for a feature of the noun it relates to. See how we can describe, replacing an adjective with more words:</p> <p><i>In the room there is a little table made from <u>unprocessed</u> wood (wood that hasn't been processed, a <u>straw</u> chair (made of straw), and an <u>iron</u> tripod (made of iron).</i></p>
<p>d. Now do the opposite. In the following text, try to replace the texts' underlined phrases with adjectives which describe the corresponding nouns.</p> <p><i>I pushed the heavy door, <u>made of compact wood</u>, and saw...</i></p>
<p>e. In a text which describes a building in space, there are many words (single or groups) that denote <b>place</b>. Such words can be, for instance, adverbs (around, up, outside) or prepositional phrases (through the yard, in a corner).</p> <p>Split in four groups and look for such words in the text. The group who finds the most words wins.</p>

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 26)

Regarding assessment, the teacher's guide (Ministry of Education, 2006b) points out that it is not the responsibility of the teacher alone, but relies on the cooperation between students and their teacher or peers, and involves each individual student. For this reason, the new textbooks adopt practices of self-assessment, peer-assessment and collective assessment practices. These forms of assessment are deemed much more important than assessing student performance, and aspire to assess discourse in order to enhance it. To achieve the above, teaching needs to develop specific and explicit criteria of discourse quality and define what constitutes effective and successful discourse production in each case. This requires students' active involvement. Moreover, teaching practice needs to address student errors in a different way than it used to. Errors should be managed in a manner that leads to fruitful discussions and comparison with the specific criteria. They are considered useful teaching feedback, indicating students' temporary skill level and tracing their progress towards deeper knowledge. Ultimately, any type of assessment should examine whether each discourse type fulfills the students' original intentions, and is acceptable as a whole. Acceptability consists of further assessment criteria, including appropriate content, expression, vocabulary, syntax and morphology, spelling, and the general impression of the text (for examples of check lists and revision tables see next chapter).

The teacher's guide (Ministry of Education, 2006b) also notes that, apart from being responsible for time management, which should be particularly flexible, teachers can view the teaching material as a suggestion, to be managed according to the students' level and competence. For instance, they can replace some texts with others, more contemporary or appropriate for their classroom, and omit, add, or modify activities, as long as they keep to the main ideas. In this way, textbooks provide the syllabus and implement teaching models and strategies, without being restrictive (Harmer, 2001). Students are encouraged to take initiative in terms of managing the learning process, while teachers should aim to render students responsible for the produced discourse, so that they can assess and improve it on their own, fulfilling their intentions more effectively. In general, we observe that the attitude towards knowledge has changed. Teachers are encouraged to design and coordinate students to view language not only as a subject but also as a tool of knowledge; through problem-solving students are called to construct their own knowledge.

Emphasis is also placed on the adoption of techniques that link school and non-school contexts of language use, demonstrating the interaction between school discourse and that of society in general, through the development of integrated units of work and projects. In this way, it is believed that students can enhance their skills and knowledge, gaining a holistic perception of knowledge, which allows them

to form their own opinions on inter-related issues of science and everyday life (Alahiotis & Karatzia, 2006). This approach is based on active and experiential learning methods, which may be implemented in every subject matter, and which involve cross-thematic activities for each teaching unit. These activities help children act autonomously out of the classroom, and use what they have learned efficiently, in authentic circumstances of communication, in order to interact with their environment (social aspect of language use). In line with the student-centred approach and group cooperative forms of learning, students can take initiative, be active, and participate consciously in the learning process. These teaching practices are deemed necessary for the new textbooks to achieve maximum efficiency. The classroom is not viewed as a group of individuals,

but as a community, the members of which define the way they use language and develop participation strategies through interaction. For example:

In the context of each unit it is recommended (Ministry of Education, 2006b) that the students, with the help of their teacher, should develop a project as set by the curriculum, on a subject relevant to the unit's theme. For instance, in the context of the unit *Travelling-Places-Transportation* it is suggested that the class should organise a day trip to a place of historical interest. The project includes organising students' work based on the study and production of various discourse types: information leaflets, classified ads, maps, transportation timetables, literary texts, newspaper articles, instructions, travel guide books, postcards, etc.

Would you like to organise a school trip to Delphi with your class?

- One group should find information about the mythology and history of Delphi, and present it in class.
- Another group will study the road map to choose the route you should follow. This group will find information on interesting places on the recommended route, so that you can visit the best places on the way.
- How much will the trip cost? How many children are coming? How much should the ticket cost? One group will be responsible for the financial aspects of the trip.
- When you arrive at Delphi, which monuments should you visit? What is there to see at the museum? The fourth group will find all necessary information to provide the rest of the class with excellent travel guides!

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 19)

### Perceptions and Practices Regarding the Written Discourse Teaching

As seen above, texts to be taught or produced cover a wide range of genres such as narrating, describing, arguing, explaining, instructing etc. and discourse types including articles, journals, instructions, informative and literary texts, advertisements, interviews, etc... In order to write successfully, students need to be sufficiently aware of the particular features of the text, according to the genre it belongs to. The teacher's guide (Ministry of Education, 2006b) underlines that the teaching of written discourse production should begin with the genre analysis of the original text. During this analysis, students approach the text actively, commenting on text data and assessing linguistic choices in terms of the writer's intentions. As seen above, genre teaching is not only about text structure, but also about text cohesion and other ob-

jectives. These elements form the basis for the development of discourse quality criteria (e.g. what makes a description successful) and a reference framework for the production of the respective genre by the students.

According to contemporary didactics, writing should be as authentic as possible. In most written discourse production activities, the text under production should fulfill a specific communicative purpose, in line with its socio-cultural context, and be addressed to a specific audience. These elements define the text's structure, organisation, and language (Harmer, 2004; Hyland, 2002). It should be noted that all textbook exercises of written discourse production define the situational context (purpose, audience, etc.) and the genre to be produced, regardless of the text's desired length and form. See examples of exercises for the production of argumentative and narrative text below:



Your teacher has decided to ask all students about their opinion on their free time. What you want is to convince your teacher to give you less homework, so you can have more free time. Write your opinion, backing it with arguments. Remember:

- ⇒ Use the right verbs and phrases to express your opinion (I believe that, I hold that, my opinion is)
- ⇒ Support your opinion with arguments (as, because, due to)
- ⇒ Write your conclusion (so, therefore, consequently)

(Language Arts Student Workbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Volume II, p. 11)

Do you like video games? Would you like to write a story on the adventures of your favourite video game, so you can share it with your classmates? All you have to do is follow this plan:

1. Present the heroes, the place, and the time.
2. What is the heroes' mission?
3. What obstacles or dangers do they have to face?
4. What skills, resources and artefacts do they have?
5. How can they overcome the obstacles?
6. How can you see the feelings of the persons involved?
7. How does the game end?

You could even organise a contest. Read the stories you wrote and choose the best adventure. Good luck!

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume II, p. 57)

Contemporary didactics also view text production as a creative composite process. Teaching written discourse production should therefore follow the pre-writing, writing, and post-writing stages of this process. This includes designing the text composition (planning), writing a first version (drafting), modifying the draft's structure and content (revising), correcting spelling and grammar mistakes (editing), and producing the final text (Brown, 2001; Flower & Hayes, 1994; Hayes, 2000). The teacher's guide (Ministry of Education, 2006b) points out that students' written discourse production should be viewed as an ongoing and challenging process; ample time should be allocated to its three stages. Students are to process the text under production (revising-editing), in a form of guided self-assessment, aiming to produce the final text. Emphasis is placed on allowing students great autonomy throughout the process. Textbooks attempt to achieve this through various forms of systematic guidance: questions delineating

a specific genre's main structure, explicit description of elements to be included in the students' writing each time, incomplete texts to be completed, self-assessment tables, revision tables, check lists, etc.

More specifically, the new textbooks provide guided techniques for the stage of writing planning, which includes producing ideas, collecting data, and organising the produced ideas. The description of the writing activity is followed by a questionnaire or a list of the text's main structure, content, and style elements, to be included in the text the students have to write. Moreover, when working on textbook texts, students are called to identify the structure, style and cohesion characterising the genre under study (genre analysis), and use this knowledge to produce similar texts. Their planning is thus greatly enhanced. See below for an example of the elements students should plan to include in their text, in a written discourse production exercise.

A new classmate has invited you to spend part of your summer holidays in his / her summer house. In order to convince your parents, you have to describe your new friend, focusing on his / her virtues and personality. You can also mention events that show the special relationship that has developed between you.

Remember that we usually **describe people** in a specific way. This is how:

- we provide some **general characteristics** and talk about our **relationship with him / her**
- we describe **the way he / she looks**
- ⇒ first the general impression
- ⇒ then specific features
- we describe his / her **personality and behaviour**
- ⇒ talking about his / her virtues and weaknesses
- ⇒ mentioning specific events
- we conclude with a **general judgment** of the person described
- throughout the description, we can mention **our thoughts and feelings**

The following ideas will help you describe your friend:

**My friend**

Name and age .....

Where does he or she live? .....

How often do I see him or her? .....

How does he or she look? .....

General impression .....

Face (eyes, lips, nose, forehead, hair) .....

How do I feel about him or her? .....

How do we spend time together, what do we do? .....

Behaviour, personality (generally) .....

Virtues, weaknesses .....

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume II, p. 88)

What needs to be clear is that text production does not necessarily mean the production of a whole text. Based on a given story, students may be asked to continue it, or write its beginning or end. In order to do this, students need to analyse the given text, and then produce discourse under specific restrictions. In the case of a narration, for instance, students have to work on all its superstructural categories (orientation, complication action, coda), identifying: the narrator, the main characters, the time and place of action, the content of narration or what is happening at the time of interruption, the type of narration, the preceding structure elements, the tenses used by the narrator, etc. All these reflect the writer's choices, and at the same time pose restrictions for the students, who need to produce discourse preserving the text's cohesion and style. Of course, these restrictions do not negate creativity, since students need to use their imagination to begin, continue or finish a story in an interesting and original way, as they would when writing a whole text. Other suggested discourse production activities include transforming one discourse type to another, e.g. rewriting a narration as a theatre dialogue. Students are called to produce texts of different types and varied length; texts may

have to be quite long or as short as a title or a caption.

The new textbooks also help students revise and edit their drafts. Self-assessment usually takes place at the end of each unit, through check lists and revision tables. Check lists provide students with questions on the quantity and quality of their texts' ideas and arguments, on the way they were developed and substantiated, on the need to add, rephrase or revise certain ideas, on their clarity and precision, on the organisation and cohesion of the text and paragraphs, and on the degree to which the writing objectives were fulfilled. Revision tables outline the main text characteristics, that is, the appropriate structure elements and linguistic means for the production of the genre in question. See below for the self-assessment tables the students can use after producing a first version of their text, in order to ameliorate (revise and edit) it, producing the final version of the text. The following table's first question refers to the instructions of the written discourse exercise and to the next revision table which defines the main elements of a narrative text, that is the main structure and the linguistic elements necessary for the production of the specific genre.

*Correcting my work*

Each time I write a text, I proofread it. I pay attention to the questions below, and correct as necessary. (I may have to re-write parts of my text).

1. What was my aim? Did I succeed? (*Each time, consult the instructions of the written discourse production exercise for the points recommended for development, as well as the revision tables at the end of each unit.*)
2. Did I structure my work in paragraphs?
3. How about spelling? Did I use my dictionary?
4. Did I use full stops and commas properly?
5. Did I use many different words or did I repeat the same words often?
6. What did I like best about what I wrote?
7. What could I have written better? How can I write it now?
8. What could I add? What could I omit?
9. Will my classmates understand my text?
10. Which parts will they like the most and which the least?
11. How does my text look? Is it neat and tidy? Is it easy to read?

(Language Arts Textbook, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 22; Volume II p. 22; Volume III, p. 26)

*Unit revision tables for correcting my work*

(first look at the table: *Correcting my work*)

*I use the right column to mark a plus sign (+) for what I think I have written and a minus sign (-) for what I haven't written. I then complete what is missing to make my text complete.*

<b>How to narrate a story</b>	
<p><i>Write:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Where and when do the story's events take place?</li> <li>◆ Who is the story's main character?</li> <li>◆ Who else is involved?</li> <li>◆ With which event does the story begin?</li> <li>◆ What happens next?</li> <li>◆ How does the story end?</li> <li>◆ How do the characters (especially the main character) feel or think about what happened?</li> </ul> <p><i>Use:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Past tenses (mostly Simple Past, Past Continuous, but also Simple Present, to create a vivid and direct text)</li> <li>◆ Time and reason subordinate clauses</li> <li>◆ Conjunctions, adverbs and phrases denoting time</li> <li>◆ Action verbs</li> <li>◆ Nouns and adjectives for descriptions</li> </ul>	

(Language Arts Textbook, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Volume I, p. 21)

It should be noted that the discourse quality criteria given to the students concern more than each genre's conventions (structure, text cohesion, etc.). They also include grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and other elements, which relate to the student-writers' satisfaction with their production, the degree to which they consider it comprehensible, pleasant and interesting for its audience, and the text's appearance. Moreover, each exercise is followed by lists of genre structure elements, which may be used as self-correction criteria. Further, instructions suggest that an effective means of revising is the constant dialogue (conferencing) between students and their teacher or peers, on the text's content and structure, and on issues of text cohesion, grammar objectives and other aims (Hedge, 2000). After the above process, students may exchange their writings and en-

gage in classroom discussion, in order to realise any errors or deficiencies displayed by the produced texts, through this form of peer-assessment or collective assessment in groups or by the whole class. In older grades, at least two academic hours are allocated to the process of written discourse production and assessment.

The above assessment forms aim to help students realise both their progress towards mastering knowledge and their own weaknesses, and help them develop metacognitive skills and strategies in order to control their learning and gain more autonomy. These assessment forms also help students develop critical reading skills (Milian-Gubern, 1996; Goatly, 2000), urging them to be critical towards any textual structure (*critical language awareness*). This is a fundamental pedagogical objective: as tomorrow's citizens,

students learn how to send and receive messages, how to evaluate messages critically, and how to make informed choices. From the first grade, simple strategies provide children with self-correction and self-improvement habits, helping them write and spell correctly: they return to their writings, re-read them, and consult other sources (language textbooks initially and dictionaries later), in order to correct them.

## Conclusion

Up until the implementation of the new curriculum and teaching material, Greek elementary education viewed the production of written discourse as the mechanistic compilation of words and phrases in larger units, not as the subject of systematic teaching. Students' written discourse was perceived as an autonomous product, independent of the socio-cultural context in which it was produced, addressed only to the teacher. However, in the past three decades, contemporary research has challenged these views.

This paper attempted to investigate the compatibility of the new Greek elementary language arts textbooks with contemporary language teaching models, as they are implemented worldwide. The presentation of the new textbooks' features and the analysis of the main methodological practices used reveal that the books conform to the principles, perceptions and practices of contemporary language arts didactics. In terms of written discourse, the new textbooks seem to keep pace with contemporary views on the concept of the text and its production. According to international perceptions, the implemented practice seems to have incorporated the principles and practices of a communicative text oriented approach to language, drawing from genre based literacy pedagogy, and combined with elements from the teaching-learning processes model.

In conclusion, it can be argued that, thanks to the recently adopted practices:

- students come into contact with a large number of texts from our social environment through collaborative and cooperative approaches.

- students continuously produce written discourse.
- students engage in self-assessment as well as in peer-assessment of their work.
- written discourse production is considered as a long and ongoing process which includes designing, producing, and editing of the student's text.
- an explicit trend is identified for text production and processing to be integrated into wider communicative activities using critical methods.

On the contrary, due to the practices that had been followed before the implementation of the new curriculum and teaching material:

- written discourse practices were limited to a simple analysis of the meaning of the (usually narrative and often non authentic but constructed) text, followed by subject-guided production of written discourse, for a maximum of fifteen minutes, without previous planning or later processing.
- the production of written discourse was not viewed as a dynamic cognitive process. Nor did it include processing various text versions before final production using interactive practices and taking into consideration the text's communicative purpose and targeted audience.
- assessment consisted almost exclusively of grammatical errors discussion, touching fleetingly on content and structure.
- the socio-cultural and communicative aspects of written discourse production were equally ignored. Teaching practices did not implement the widely accepted view that literacy is a process of producing text structures with socio-cultural influence

If the new textbooks are to achieve maximum efficiency and the aims of the new language teaching practice in Greece are to be met, educators should realise the need to adopt new teaching methods, striving to develop strategies to enhance students' textual competence.

## References

- Alahiotis, S. & Karatzia-Stavlioti, E. (2006). Effective curriculum policy and cross-curricularity: Analysis of the new curriculum design of the Hellenic Pedagogical Institute. *Pedagogy Culture & Society* 2, 119-147.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles. An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. London: Longman.
- Clark, R. & Ivancic, R. (1997). *The Politics of Writing*. London: Longman.
- Collins, J. & R.K. Blot (2003). *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, power, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (1993). *The Powers of Literacy: A Genre Approach to Teaching Writing*. London: The Falmer Press.
- FEK. Vol. B, 303/13-03-03 303/13-03-03, tome A'. *National Curriculum for the Greek language in the Elementary School*. [in Greek]

- Finney, D. (2002). The ELT Curriculum: A Flexible Model for a Changing World. In J. Richards & W. Renandya (ed.), *Methodology in Language Teaching. An Anthology of Current Practice*, 167-174. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flower, L. & Hayes, J. (1994). A cognitive process theory of writing. In Rudell, R.; Rudell, M.; Singer, H. (eds.). *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (pp. 928-950). Newark, D.E. International Reading Association.
- Fterniati, A. (2000). The communicative competence in written discourse of elementary school students in language arts. In Georgiou, Kyriakidis and Chrisou (eds.), *Current research in the sciences of education*, (pp. 329-335). Lefkosia: University of Cyprus. [in Greek]
- Fterniati, A. & Spinthourakis, J.A. (2004). L1 Communicative-Textual Competence of Greek upper elementary school students. *L1-Educational studies in Language and Literature*, 4, 1-20.
- Fterniati, A. & Spinthourakis, J.A. (2006). National curriculum reform and new elementary school language arts textbooks in Greece: The Characteristics, Innovations and Methodological Directions of the National Curriculum for Language Arts and the Specifications for New Textbooks. *The International Journal of Learning*, 13, 37-44.
- Glossa (2002). Special Issue dedicated to the new National Language Arts Curriculum. [in Greek] *Glossa*, 54.
- Goatly, A. (2000). *Critical Reading and Writing: An Introductory Coursebook*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex: Longman.
- Harmer, J. (2004). *How to Teach Writing*. Essex: Longman.
- Hayes, J. (2000). A new framework for understanding cognition and affect in writing. In Indrisano, R. and Squire, J. (eds.). *Perspectives on writing*. Newark, D.E.: International Reading Association.
- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Writing*. London: Longman.
- Ivanic, R. (2004). Discourses of writing and learning to write. *Language and Education*, Vol. 18, issue 3:220-245.
- Johnstone, B. (2002). *Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kalantzis, M. & Cope, B. (eds.) (2001). *Transformations in Language and Learning*. Australia: Common Ground.
- Knapp, P. & M. Watkins (1994). *Context - Text - Grammar: Teaching the Genres and Grammar of School Writing in Infants and Primary Classrooms*. Australia: Text Productions.
- Kostouli, T. (1997). Social environment, textual skills and school achievement. *Glossa*, 41, 43-57. [in Greek]
- Kostouli, T. (ed.) (2005). *Writing in Context(s). Textual Practices and Learning Processes in Sociocultural Settings*. New York: Springer-Studies in writing, v. 15.
- Kress, G. (ed.). (1998). *Communication and culture*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Kress, G.-Jewitt, C.-Ongborn, J. -Tsatsarelis, Ch. (2001). *Multimodal teaching and learning*. London and New York: Continuum.
- McCarthy, M. & Carter, R. (1994). *Language as Discourse: Perspectives for Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Milian-Gubern, M. (1996). «Contexted Factors Enhancing Cognitive and Metacognitive Activity During the Process of Collaborative Writing». In: G. Rijlaarsdam et al (eds.). *Effective Teaching and Learning of Writing*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Ministry of Education. Pedagogical Institute (2006a). *Glossa*. (Language textbooks, 17 volumes). OEDB. [in Greek]
- Ministry of Education. Pedagogical Institute (2006b). *Book for the teacher*. (First to sixth grade, six volumes). OEDB. [in Greek]
- Papoulia-Tzelepi, P. (2000). Written expression in the elementary school: first estimates. In Papoulia-Tzelepi (ed.), *Literacy in the Balkans* (pp. 43-60). Athens: Greek Language and Literacy Association. [in Greek]
- Papoulia-Tzelepi, P. & Spinthourakis, J. (2000). Greek teacher's personal theory on writing at the elementary level. *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, 5(1), 55-75.
- Richards, J. (2002). Addressing the Grammar Gap in Task Work. In J. Richards & W. Renandya (ed.), *Methodology in Language Teaching. An Anthology of Current Practice*, 167-174. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. & Renandya, W. (ed.) (2002). *Methodology in Language Teaching. An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stern, H. H. (2001). *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## About the Author

### Dr. Anna Fterniati

Dr. Anna Fterniati (Bachelor in Letters, D.E.A. in Linguistics, D.E.A. in Educational Psychology, PhD in Language Teaching) has been employed as a teacher in secondary education since 1987, as a researcher at the Hellenic Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs between 1997-2005. She has recently been elected to the position of Lecturer in the Department of Elementary Education, Division of Pedagogy, of the University of Patras. She has participated in various research projects and has published papers and books in the field of Language Education and specifically in the field of instruction of written discourse production and assessment. She also has experience and publications in curriculum design and development. She has served as a member of the board of designers of the new National Curriculum for Language Arts in the Greek Primary School (2003) and was a member of the board of editors of the new teacher manuals for Language

Arts for elementary education (2004). She has also participated, since 1993, in initial and continuing in-service teacher training.

## THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING

### EDITORS

**Mary Kalantzis**, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

**Bill Cope**, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

### EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

**Michael Apple**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

**David Barton**, Lancaster University, UK.

**Mario Bello**, University of Science, Technology and Environment, Cuba.

**Robert Devillar**, Kennesaw State University, USA.

**Manuela du Bois-Reymond**, Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands.

**Ruth Finnegan**, Open University, UK.

**James Paul Gee**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

**Kris Gutierrez**, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.

**Roz Ivanic**, Lancaster University, UK.

**Paul James**, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.

**Carey Jewitt**, Institute of Education, University of London, UK.

**Andreas Kazamias**, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

**Peter Kell**, University of Wollongong, Australia.

**Michele Knobel**, Montclair State University, New Jersey, USA.

**Gunther Kress**, Institute of Education, University of London.

**Colin Lankshear**, James Cook University, Australia.

**Daniel Madrid Fernandez**, University of Granada, Spain.

**Sarah Michaels**, Clark University, Massachusetts, USA.

**Denise Newfield**, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa.

**Ernest O'Neil**, Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

**José-Luis Ortega**, University of Granada, Spain.

**Francisco Fernandez Palomares**, University of Granada, Spain.

**Ambigapathy Pandian**, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

**Miguel A. Pereyra**, University of Granada, Spain.

**Scott Poynting**, University of Western Sydney, Australia.

**Angela Samuels**, Montego Bay Community College, Montego Bay, Jamaica.

**Juana M. Sancho Gil**, University of Barcelona, Spain.

**Michel Singh**, University of Western Sydney, Australia.

**Richard Sohmer**, Clark University, Massachusetts, USA.

**Pippa Stein**, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa.

**Brian Street**, King's College, University of London, UK.

**Giorgos Tsiakalos**, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

**Gella Varnava-Skoura**, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.

**Cecile Walden**, Sam Sharpe Teachers College, Montego Bay, Jamaica.

**Nicola Yelland**, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.

**Wang Yingjie**, School of Education, Beijing Normal University, China.

**Zhou Zuoyu**, School of Education, Beijing Normal University, China.

Please visit the Journal website at <http://www.Learning-Journal.com> for further information:

- ABOUT the Journal including Scope and Concerns, Editors, Advisory Board, Associate Editors and Journal Profile
- FOR AUTHORS including Publishing Policy, Submission Guidelines, Peer Review Process and Publishing Agreement

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Journal offers individual and institutional subscriptions. For further information please visit

<http://ijl.cgpublisher.com/subscriptions.html>. Inquiries can be directed to

[subscriptions@commongroundpublishing.com](mailto:subscriptions@commongroundpublishing.com)

### INQUIRIES

Email: [cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com](mailto:cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com)