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L1 COMMUNICATIVE-TEXTUAL COMPETENCE OF GREEK UPPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT. This article presents and discusses the findings of a research study on the issue of L1 communicative-textual competence (CTC). More specifically it examines the L1 CTC of 10–12-year-old Greek elementary school students, before and after the use of alternative communicative-text-oriented teaching material *versus* traditional language materials currently used in the schools. The CTC of the students was examined using a version of the test published by the French Ministry of Education revised and adapted to the Greek language and educational context. Analysis of the pre- and post-intervention data suggests that using appropriately designed communicative-text-oriented teaching materials can increase Greek school students' level of written L1 CTC.

KEY WORDS: assessment, communicative-textual competence, primary education, text-oriented approach, text types, writing as a process, writing production, written discourse

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective language teaching constitutes a basic cornerstone of the national curriculum. In recent years, written discourse has assumed a central position in the research. A recurrent theme in mother tongue (L1) teaching is how children can be helped to develop their communicative-textual competence (CTC).

1.1. *Communicative-Textual Competence*

Recent contributions of discourse analysis play an important role in identifying what we mean by communicative competence (CC) in general and specifically toward the function of CC in written language. Approaches based on text-oriented theories allow the exploitation of textual meaning for teaching purposes which emphasizes the writing process instead of the product.

Text, defined as a sum of contextualized sentences or utterances with a specific structure (van Dijk, 1980), is not considered simply the result of juxtaposing grammatically and semantically acceptable sentences. Text-oriented theories suggest that each text belongs in a specific speech



genre, which serves as a “super structure” that determines the writer’s options, dictating various conventions (Adam, 1990; Combettes, 1988).

In text-oriented analyses, promoting communicative competence in written discourse may refer to an individual’s textual competence (van Dijk, 1972a, b), that is the ability to effectively make use of language, using an extra-lingual system of reference for the production and processing of a variety of text types. Many factors determine this ability. Thus individuals who possess few textual schemas develop difficulties in their attempts to understand or produce discourse (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Clark and Ivanic (1997) propose three basic elements which transform a set of sentences into an effective text: (a) existence of cohesion and coherence, (b) introduction into a situational context and, (c) organization of and categorization to a specific text type (Adam, 1990; de Beaugard & Dressler, 1981; *Etudes de linguistique appliquée*, 1991; Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 1997; McCarthy & Carter, 1994).

1.2. *Factors Which Determine the Production of Written Language in School*

Various studies indicate that the problems faced by children during the production of a text are due to several different factors. These problems result not only from a lack of linguistic rule knowledge but also a lack of awareness of basic parameters which determine the production of each specific text type (Department of Education and Science, 1988; Gorman, Purves & Degenhart, 1988; Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, 1992, 1997; Papoulia-Tzelepi, 2000a, b; Purves, 1992; Reading today, 2000; U.S. Department of Education (NAEP), 2000; for Greece, see Kostouli, 1997, 1999).

Text types consist of various systems of rules. Therefore, students should not be able to produce text merely by adding small sentences (Kostouli, 2000; Papoulia-Tzelepi & Spinthourakis, 2000). Advocating and using such an approach may be due to a lack of information by the teacher on how to promote textual communication as well as on strategies in the development of CTC. In Greece, it may also be a consequence of inappropriate materials choice where there is a single state produced school text for each subject in the elementary school.

Several studies conducted in Greece (e.g. Kostouli, 1997, 1999), indicate that problems in written text production faced by children from various social groups are neither found on the sentence level nor linked to the creation of grammatical – non-grammatical sentences. Rather, they result from a different use of language for properly constructing an effective text.

For years, state based curricular policy has given priority to developing CTC in children. However, written discourse instruction in Greek schools,

while called communicative, has tended to focus more on grammatical and lexical development.

1.3. *Text-Oriented Teaching Approaches*

The development of the text-oriented approaches has received considerable international attention over the last several years. The expansion of literacy related to increasing communicative competence has been its basic goal. This has special importance in present circumstances of the social multi-literacy required in a multicultural society (Kress, 1998).

The theories are operationalized in teaching as strategies to broaden discourse competence by introducing and progressing through three basic steps: the study of various types of authentic texts as they appear in their communication context; the production of different text types by the students; and, the evaluating and improving of the aforementioned texts.

These perspectives supporting text-oriented programs for language teaching (e.g. McCarthy & Carter, 1994) include suggestions that can be adapted by teachers for the specific age and interests of their students. To this, we add the use of more effective alternative teaching methods *versus* the more traditional means Hillocks (1986) suggests. In the last decade, research indicates an explicit tendency (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993) for text production and processing to be integrated into wider communicative activities. Little if any argument exists that active student engagement in various communicative events not only increases communicative competence but also positively effects school and social interaction. Such student participation is activated when they play various roles and work through different types of texts using critical methods.

According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), the production of written text by the child is no longer seen as a spontaneous expression and automatic record of his/her views (*knowledge-telling model of writing*). Rather it results from a process (*knowledge-transforming model of writing*) characterized by three overlapping stages (Flower & Hayes, 1994; Hays, 2000):

- (a) prewriting
- (b) writing a first draft
- (c) editing to draft towards creation of a final product.

To have positive effects, these stages must rely on the child's active cooperation and interaction with both peers in groups and the teacher, since language production is perceived as an interactive social process.

MacArthur, Harris and Graham (1994) argue that textual competence is not developed based on rules or only grammar and vocabulary exercises (see Hillocks & Smith, 1991). Instead, it is enhanced through various strategies

students attempt to use depending on the subject, the purpose, the audience and the text type they need to produce.

A number of studies on discourse competence and genre approaches have been conducted by researchers in Australia (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Hyon, 1996) with a focus on investigating how to effectively teach language in a multicultural society. They linked identification, categorization and variety of text type to material use. The program parameters include specified time cycles, text-oriented instruction, and collaboration. The results of the above research showed a significant increase in the CTC of the children.

2. PURPOSE

This article presents the framework of a nine month research study on the CTC of a group of Greek upper primary school students. We aimed to look for an increase in the CTC of the students after being taught using text-oriented materials. It also examined the effectiveness of the current language arts instruction regarding students' communicative competence in written language. The issue of what constitutes CTC, how it can be developed and assessed is referenced. Examples of actual student performance on the test are presented and briefly discussed.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research took place in the fifth (ages 10–11) and the sixth (ages 11–12) grades in three Greek state elementary schools. In two of the schools, one of the two fifth grade classes was selected randomly as the experimental group. The second class served as the control group. Thus, in each of the two schools we had both a fifth grade experimental group and a control group. In the third school, the same design was followed, though we selected the sixth grade (one sixth grade experimental group and one control group). In Greece, the allocation of students to each grade is alphabetical which excludes systematic selection bias. The study included 127 (69 boys and 58 girls) students (six groups in total: three experimental and three control groups).

The schools were located in a large city and selected to represent high as well as lower parental socio-educational levels. The teachers of the study's experimental groups took part in an initial 45-hour training seminar on a 15 day recurring cycle.

At the outset of the study, we assessed the CTC of all the children (experimental and control groups) using an adapted pre-test instrument, the *Greek Communicative-Textual Competence Test (GCTCT)*. Thereafter, we

provided the experimental groups with communicative text-oriented instruction for nine months using experimental teaching material (four notebooks with an average of 100 pages each of texts and activities) designed by the principal investigator. The control groups were instructed to use existing state approved materials for language arts teaching and to use their traditional teaching methodology. Finally, we measured the effectiveness of the materials in a post-test through textual competence comparisons between the experimental groups' students and corresponding control groups. The post-test was a slightly altered version of the pre-test in terms of the details, but tasks remained essentially the same.

3.1. *Instrument*

The GCTCT (*Greek Communicative-Textual Competence Test*) instrument was based on a revised and adapted version of the French Ministry of Education (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, Direction de l'Évaluation et de la Prospective, 1991) modified to the Greek language and Greek educational reality.

The GCTCT offers detailed criteria for the examination of students' CTC. It contains a definition of specific areas of CTC evaluated in conjunction with text types and task presentation. It includes detailed instructions to the user as well as the exact goals, student instructions, and specialized evaluation criteria indicators, accompanied by pre-coding (see Appendix A for examples of the criteria per task).

3.2. *Structure, Content and Scoring of the Written Examination*

The test is made up of 10 tasks, each examining varied areas of CTC in students' written discourse. The cumulative communicative effectiveness of students' discourse is evaluated with respect to linguistic restrictions and extra-linguistic factors according to the specific text type (Table 1).

The first criterion in all the tasks refers to the extent the student respects the restrictions of the required text type. It also examines the extent of the conventions of each discourse type (i.e. letter, advertisement, instructions, etc.). The remaining criteria evaluate the specific abilities needed to make the text effective according to its original purpose.

Textual competence criteria assessed were adapted from the original French version of the instrument. The issue of quality indices was determined after careful review of the relevant research as well as discussion between the principal investigator and two language specialist academics. The quality indices ranged from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of either 1 or 2. The descriptors provided to the raters were predetermined after review and extensive discussion on what constitutes i.e. 'does not provide an

TABLE 1
GCTCT task description.

| Task | Text and discourse type |
|------|---|
| 1 | Informal argumentative letter |
| 2 | Short formal informative text – short advertisement |
| 3 | Formal informative text – announcement |
| 4 | Short informal text – invitation card |
| 5 | Short differentiated (informal to formal register) texts – greeting card text |
| 6 | Short informal informative text – note |
| 7 | Explicative text – task instructions (recognising a number of drawn out acts) |
| 8 | Explicative text – task instructions (set of directions that follow a given chronology) |
| 9 | Descriptive informative text – summary |
| 10 | Narrative text – fictitious |

argumentative text' (score of 0), with the difference between a score of 1 and 2 being the degree the text developed is in fact argumentative. Thus, a text may be argumentative (score of 2) but also incorporate elements of narrative and receive a score of 1. The cumulative scores (highest 65) were then used to evaluate students' performances.

An error analysis manual was developed and served as the foundation of the GCTCT rater training by the principal investigator and two specialists. We trained each prospective test rater on the use of the criteria and mechanics of grading the test. We practiced by grading an average of 10 papers. The consensus between raters' was higher than 90%. Copies of the English version of the GCTCT as well as the criteria and detailed descriptions of the quality indices for each of the 10 tasks are available on request.

We used Cronbach's alpha to check the internal consistency of the test both within as well as over tasks. With respect to the 'within task' internal consistency of both the pre- and the post-test, the Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.78 to 0.95, with the exception of one task in the pre-test that had an alpha of 0.64. The 'over tasks' analysis gave a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 for the pre-test and 0.93 for the post-test. Thus, it appears that the GCTCT has an acceptable range of internal consistency.

4. INTERVENTION OVERVIEW

The instructional intervention began at the beginning of the school year. Greek state primary schools have a minimum of 8 hours of language arts instruction scheduled per week in 2-hour blocks. The experimental groups in

the study were taught the 8 hours a week of language arts for the entire nine months of the study, using the materials and text-oriented approach.

We conducted a pilot study the semester prior to the initiation of the study to identify and remedy potential problems, with respect to missing elements and appropriateness of subject for the age of the targeted students.

The basic goal of the instructional intervention was to develop the students' ability to communicate effectively. Communicative text-oriented suggestions were the basis for developing the teaching materials. The intervention focused on understanding and producing various text types (narrative, descriptive, argumentative, etc.) as well as elements of communicative grammar.

During the nine months of the study, the teachers and students in the experimental groups worked with four notebooks with an average of 100 pages each of materials (texts and activities). These materials constituted the axis on which all language modalities (understanding and production of oral and written discourse) were taught. We used only authentic texts (i.e. narrations, articles, advertisements, etc.). It needs to be noted that the teacher throughout the intervention retained the right to use the teaching material as is, as a sample and even to modify it depending on the level, abilities, and interests of the class.

The activities proposed connect to the structural and organizational particulars of each text type as well as the function of the linguistic elements, textual cohesion, and style. They also have a game-like format to kindle creativity and imagination. The majority of the activities model communication events from every day life. They aim to help student realize the need to adapt the style and language to the intended audience, subject, purpose and genre to be produced.

The teaching material was designed to allow for a methodology flexible enough to encourage questioning and experimentation and ensure creativity. Moreover, student initiative of the management of the learning procedure was encouraged. We encouraged various practices important to the educational process including highlighting different teachers-students roles such as group work, student centered learning, independent student learning in communication situations, and finally, self-evaluation using scales (Fterniati, 2001a, b: 95-103).

Each student had a personal portfolio with all writing activities as a record of progress. The teaching written language production began with work on the initial text and teaching the structure of a specific genre. A systematic guiding by the teacher for text corrections by the student followed. The guidance, of course, included not only textual structure but also, textual cohesion, grammar and/or any other textual issues.

Initial teacher training for teachers lasted 45 hours and included questions of theory and practice in L1 (mother-tongue) teaching. The principal investigator modeled several early lessons for teachers in the experimental classes. Moreover, regular meetings between the researcher and the teachers occurred bi-weekly during the study thus allowing for continuous training. In large part, the teachers exchange ideas and experiences so that the application and evaluation of the new material could be examined from various viewpoints. These sessions often led to new proposals for application and helped considerably in clarifying practises of the new approach.

The researcher attended classes on numerous occasions throughout the duration of the intervention to record observations of the application of the material and help teachers when required. Observation often became participatory as the researcher participated in the teaching procedure or worked with student groups. This contributed a great deal to the feedback on the program. Teachers also kept ethno-methodological diaries and participated in interviews with a random sample of the students, periodically set up by the researcher. This qualitative follow-up constituted the basis for discussions in the feedback–training meetings of the researcher and teachers.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. *Data Analysis*

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the pre-test, the post-test and the pre–post difference separately for the control and experimental groups and for each and both grades. In the control group, the means of the pre and posttest are very close in both grades and the total. The last row shows that the differences are indeed very small and not statistically significant. This indicates, among other things, that no sizeable maturation or history effects could be identified. It also suggests that the skills examined were not systematically developed by the traditional materials and teaching methodology used by the control group teachers.

In contrast, large differences emerged in the experimental group. The mean of the post-test for both grades is more than two times that of the pre-test. The differences are smaller in the sixth grade. But even here, the post-test mean was more than one and a half times that of the pre-test. The largest differences were observed in the 5th grade in the school with the lower socio-educational environment, where the mean almost tripled from the pre- to the post-test. Using paired samples *t*-tests, we found that all of the last three differences are statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$.

TABLE 2
Means and standard deviations by grade and group.

| Test | Fifth Grade | | Sixth Grade | | Total | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------------|------|--------|-------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| <i>Control group</i> | | | | | | |
| Pre-test | 31.40 | 14.36 | 33.55 | 8.76 | 32.12 | 13.41 |
| Post-test | 30.23 | 15.52 | 31.36 | 3.26 | 30.62 | 14.28 |
| Difference (Post–Pre-test) | –1.16 | 6.97 | –2.18 | 6.97 | –1.51 | 6.96 |
| <i>Experimental group</i> | | | | | | |
| Pre-test | 23.33 | 11.73 | 37.65 | 8.76 | 27.95 | 12.72 |
| Post-test | 57.62 | 5.71 | 62.22 | 3.26 | 59.13 | 5.46 |
| Difference (Post–Pre-test) | 32.43* | 8.78 | 24.22* | 6.98 | 29.75* | 9.05 |

*Statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$

A repeated measures analysis of variance to examine the pre- and post-test differences and the effects of Group and Grade was also run. The model included pre- and post-test scores as the within subject factor and group and grade as two between subject factors. Table 3 shows the most relevant results of the multivariate analysis. The analysis showed that there was a significant difference between pre- and post-tests for all students. This apparently is attributed to the pre–post differences in the experimental group, since no pre–post difference existed in the control group. Furthermore, it showed that both the group and grade had a statistically significant effect on the pre–post difference. In other words, pre- and post-test results differed significantly by group and by grade. The difference between the control and experimental groups indicates the beneficial results of the intervention, while the differences by grade may be attributed to the differential educational level or age of the students. Both results were expected given the statistics of Table 2. Finally, the analysis showed a statistically significant interaction effect of school and group on the pre–post difference. In practical terms, this suggests that the influence of the intervention differs by grade.

Summarizing, the results suggest a strong and consistent effect of the use of communicative-textual materials to teaching written discourse. This effect may vary depending on some other factors but it is always present, is rather large, and is statistically significant in every case.

TABLE 3
Tests of within-subjects contrasts.

| Contrast | <i>F</i> | <i>P</i> |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Pre–post difference | 325.743 | 0.000 |
| Difference by group | 412.619 | 0.000 |
| Difference by grade | 9.763 | 0.002 |
| Difference by group by grade | 5.927 | 0.016 |

5.2. Presentation of Actual GCTCT Student Discourse Examples

In this section, we present the actual pre- and post- GCTCT examination discourse samples of three children who took part in the study. The pre-test version of the GCTCT was administered to all students participating in the study in the first month of the new school year. The post-test version was administered at the end of the school year, and, after 9 months of being taught using the experimental teaching material. All three children (one boy and two girls) were in the fifth grade and in experimental groups. The family backgrounds are: the boy is the child of a farmer and a housewife, the first of the girls is the child of a civil servant and a laborer, and, the second girl is the child of an accountant and a housewife. The children fall into three categories in terms of overall school based achievement: the boy is a poor student, the first girl an average student and the second girl the lowest of the three.

In each instance, we present the translated version of the GCTCT pre-test task. The actual post-test tasks are not presented here; they remain essentially the same. In each case, the written discourse sample of the child is presented as given on the actual pre-test and post-test (in Greek and in their own handwriting), and, the translated text (in English). We present different tasks for each child, even though each child completed all 10 tasks prescribed by the GCTCT. The presentation of different tasks and, the examples of the students' written discourse is intended for the reader to see the different text types produced by the children and the progress they made between the pre- and post-test versions of the GCTCT. Space limitations prevented us from presenting discourse examples of the same task for each child.

Case 1: Student 1, the fifth grade boy, produced the written discourse presented in Figures 1 and 2 in response to the GCTCT's first task.

Task 1

Your parents, after having read the following announcement (an ad from the summer programs of certain child camping organizations), have decided to offer you a 15-day Educational French Language Camping trip. However, you want your best friend, who lives in a different city, to come with you no matter what. Carefully read the announcement about the Educational French Language Camp and write a letter to your friend convincing him or her to come with you.

Educational French Language Camp: Located in Palairos village in the Ionian province, at the hotel "Vounaki". Combines usefulness with pleasure. Studious students in the morning, fearless explorers in the afternoon, given to mountain climbing, aerial passages, salt water kayaking and other nature loving excursions. (Information: 210-3250317 for children ages 8–12.)

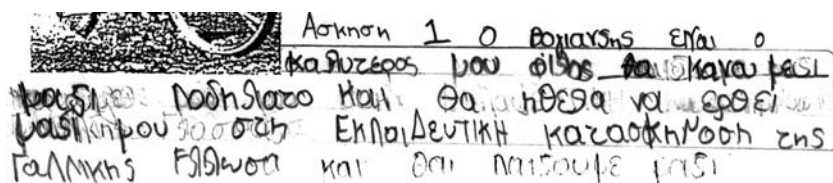


Figure 1. Case 1 pre-test written discourse sample.

Translation of the Greek pre-test written discourse of student 1 in response to task 1:

Vogianzis is my best friend we will cycle together and I would like him to come with me to the French Language Education Camp

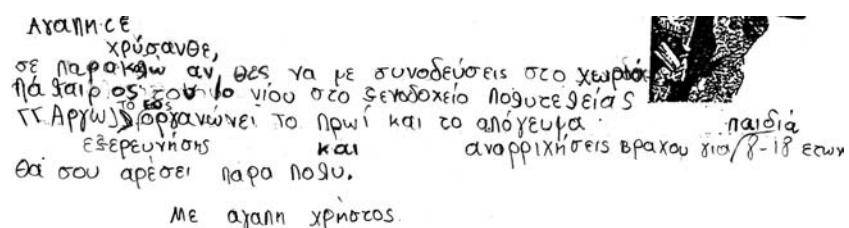


Figure 2. Case 1 post-test written discourse sample – 9 months later.

Translation of the Greek post-test written discourse of student 1 in response to task 1.

Dear Chrysanthe,

if you would like, please accompany me to Palairos village in the Ionian to the luxury hotel "Argo". The EOS is organizing in the morning and the afternoon explorations and rock climbing for children 8–18 years of age you will like it very much

With love Christos

Case 2: Student 2, the first of two fifth grade girls, produced the written discourse presented in Figures 3 and 4 in response to the GCTCT's second task.

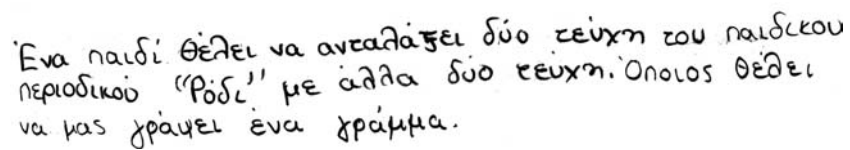
Task 2

Dear newspaper editor,

During the course of summer vacation, I lost two issues of my children's magazine "Rodi", which I have been subscribing to for the past year. I would like to complete my collection again with the missing issues.

Could you place an ad in your paper, allowing me to get in touch with other subscribers of the same magazine, in order to make possible the trading of various issues?

Carefully read the above letter, from the young subscriber of the magazine "Rodi". Suppose you are the newspaper editor, to whom the letter is directed. What would the ad you would compose be? Compose it.



Ένα παιδί θέλει να ανταλλάξει δύο τεύχη του παιδικού περιοδικού "Ρόδι" με άλλα δύο τεύχη. Οποιοσ θέλει να μας γράψει ένα γράμμα.

Figure 3. Case 2 pre-test written discourse sample.

Translation of the Greek pre-test written discourse of student 2 in response to task 2.

A child wants to exchange two issues of the childrens magazine "Rodi" with two other issues. Whoever wants can write us a letter.

ΑΓΓΕΛΙΑ

ΖΗΤΟΥΝΤΑΙ δύο
 τεύχη του περιο-
 δίκου «Αστερίξ»
 του Ιουνίου και του
 Ιουλίου. Πληροφορίες στο
 τηλ. 278903

Figure 4. Case 2 Post-test written discourse sample – 9 months later.

Translation of the Greek post-test written discourse of student 2 in response to task 2.

ADVERTISEMENT

WANTED two issues of the magazine “Asterix” for June and July. More information at tel. 278903

Case 3: Student 3, the second of two fifth grade girls, produced the written discourse presented in Figures 5 and 6 in response to the GCTCT’s eighth task.

Task 8

Arthur is a robot that you received recently. You want to program it to set the table for lunch, to let your mother rest. Write instructions-orders to give him.

Αυτή διαβία σου ΕΚΑΝΕ ένα δώρο που ήτανε
 φορητό και ότι του έλαβες το ΕΚΑΝΕ.
 Του είναι όταν έρθει κοντά μου να βάλει το
 φορητό και να βινει τραπέζι και η γαλά
 σου της αρέσει πάρα πολύ και
 σου είναι όταν έρχομε να με ΠΕΡΙΝΙΗΤΕ
 πάρα πολύ.

Figure 5. Case 3 Pre-test written discourse sample.

Translation of the Greek pre-test written discourse of student 3 in response to task 8.

Grandmother gave me a gift that was a robot and anything you told it it did. I told it when my mother came to put the food and become a table and my mother she liked it very much and she told me when I come to take care of me very much.

Αποδωρε εα παρεις το εφουδωρε με το ανοππινωτικω
 και εα εανουκωρεεις τα Αλασα μεσα εα
 τα ζεφεινεις τα Αλασα και εα τα βαρεεις
 να στενωδου.

Figure 6. Case 3 Post-test written discourse sample – 9 months later.

Translation of the Greek post-test written discourse of student 3 in response to task 8.

Arthur take the sponge with the cleaning material and soap up the dishes later you will rinse the plates and you will put them to dry.

5.3. Pre- and Post-test Writing Samples – Reflection and Teaching Intervention

The written discourse examples presented above allow us to observe the differences in achievement of the students between their pre-test (Figures 1, 3 and 5) and post-test efforts (Figures 2, 4 and 6). The GCTCT appears to be able to differentiate between the degree of CTC each child has at the time of initial testing and after a period of instruction.

All three students in their pre-test text failed to respect the restrictions present and conventions in the genre requested. That is, in certain cases the student forgot to include pertinent information (Figure 3), and in other cases they produced text types totally different from those requested (Figures 1 and 5).

In Figure 1: The first criterion evaluated in task 1 refers to the conventions and restrictions present in an informal argumentative letter. This task also evaluates other specific abilities such as: ability to direct the reader to convey the communication situation; to invite; use the text as source material and the information correctly; use appropriate information from the original text (in this case, the ad referring to the camping site); and convince a friend using this information in an effective manner by organizing it into arguments. The boy produced a narrative instead of the argumentative text requested, albeit a poorly and incompletely developed one. It has only the beginning of the narrative and does not meet the

required conventions or criteria of either the requested text type or the one he tried to use.

In Figure 3: The second task evaluates to what extent the text type used matches the task requirements: formal register informative text; a short advertisement. The task evaluates the student's ability to precisely describe the situation in question, understand the number of people involved and clearly define their identities. Finally, the task evaluates the existence or lack of the necessary data required for communication such as a phone number or address. The student must not only write a text in the form of an ad as a newspaper editor, but also manage to incorporate all the information found in the first reader's letter, which clearly states a request for communication with other readers. Emphasis, therefore, is on understanding the role of the three parties involved. We note that the first female student fails to respect the restrictions present in the text type requested as well as the conventions of the particular discourse type and forgets to include pertinent information.

In Figure 5: The first criterion of the eighth task evaluates the student's response to the required text type: that is, explicative text; orders regarding carrying out tasks. The rest of the criteria evaluate the accuracy of the description of the actions, objects and places, appropriate grammatical forms, and the chronological order. We note that the second female student fails to produce an explicative text and like the male student of Figure 1 produces a narrative text with the same results. In this last case, the child has more general problems with writing, language, and presentation that extend beyond issues of genre.

The post-test results reveal that all three students (Figures 2, 4 and 6) exhibit distinctly improved understanding and production of the required genres. Also, the students in these three written discourse examples apply the appropriate conventions needed in the genre they produced.

In Figure 2, the boy manages not only to write a letter to persuade his friend to accompany him to the camping site, but he also uses a part of information taken from the original test correctly for this purpose.

In Figure 4, the first female student not only includes most of the information needed in the short ad but also applied all the necessary conventions of the particular discourse type.

In Figure 6, the second female student manages to give the robot orders to carry out the task needed, maintaining chronological continuity and using appropriate grammatical form (imperative).

The overall language achievement of the three students improved. The differences between the post-tests and the pre-tests emerge clearly in terms of the content as well as the discourse in general (see Figures 5 and 6).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The National Course Curriculum for Language Arts in the Greek Primary School calls for an approach to language teaching centered on communication and CTC. The results of the present study appear to indicate that the type of instruction currently provided has not produced the expected results. Therefore, we argue that one possible reason children lack fully developed CTC may result from a mismatch between stated expectations (curriculum policy) and the manner it is produced in materials and teaching practices (Koutsosimou-Tsinoglou, 1985).

The findings support other studies noting the absence of language instruction methods focused on a textual competence (Kostouli, 1997, 1999, 2000; Papoulia-Tzelepi, 2000a, b; Papoulia & Spinthourakis, 2000). These studies argue that contemporary language teaching practice in Greek schools still promotes a sentence based view of language. Furthermore, current practices appear to retain the knowledge-telling model with a focus on the product and corrections based only on linguistic elements. Such teaching lacks interactive opportunities and is virtually devoid of socio-cultural and communicative discourse dimensions. Teachers, while satisfying the surface requirements of language arts, tend not to spend time on the actual teaching of writing. When they do include teaching of writing, total time is very limited and the teaching tends to consist of giving directions that do not differentiate between the genres. Thus, it would appear that specific language teaching methods focused on a textually communicative mode are either not well known or continue to maintain a theoretical and non-practical status, despite the many discussions on the subject in Greece.

In contrast, our study attempted to present a case for replacing these traditional teaching behaviors by designing and implementing a text-oriented teaching approach predicated on the philosophy of communicative materials and instruction. Thus, we found that the comparative study of various authentic texts from the social environment we live in, seemed to help students understand the true value of textual communication. Exposure to and use of these materials provided models and focal points that enhanced the quality of students' written discourse. This exposure contributed to the improvement of written discourse, not only of those less privileged students facing the greatest difficulties, but also for those considered more privileged. More specifically, an emphasis on enhancing various strategies to produce specific and appropriate text types, using the knowledge-transforming model of writing and a writing process *versus* a product focused orientation, appears to be fundamental to the students' development of CTC. Systematic and continuing in-service training of the teachers taking part in the study

proved critical. This is a key element in the implementation of any innovation.

Introducing appropriate communicative and interactive activities and allowing time for the processing of students' written language are important for the broadening of their textual knowledge. Hillocks (1986: 122) points out in his classic study that

materials and problems selected to engage students with each other in specifiable processes important to some particular aspect of writing and activities such as small group, problem centered discussions, is conducive to high levels of peer interaction concerning specific tasks [environmental mode of teaching] and are over four times more effective than the traditional mode

in students writing production (also see Sadoski, Willson & Norton, 1997). Using an extra-lingual context for referencing while producing and processing various forms of text, in turn, appears to also bolster students' ability to use discourse effectively.

Written discourse instruction is more effective when it focuses on tasks dealing with creating various text types and in this context the use of morpho-syntactic structures. The goal should not simply be gaining new vocabulary or syntax strategies appropriate for use in written language as this proves ineffective (Hillocks & Smith, 1991). Instead, students ought to take a different view of how various linguistic elements can be combined to construct an effective text. Student acquisition of CTC should be measured for diagnostic purposes. Thereafter, appropriate teaching material can be provided to develop written discourse.

Studies on the development, use, and efficacy of different materials developed on the same principles to those of our study lead to similar findings (see Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Fitzgerald & Teasley, 1986). These studies indicate that the innovative materials were particularly effective in improving the quality of written discourse seen in the assessment of the students' written production. The fact that our study produced similar findings is of interest and speaks to the need for more studies in different socio-cultural environments.

Consequently, the statistically significant increase in achievement appears to indicate that students, when exposed to a text-oriented process in written discourse production, are made aware of the elements and do, in fact, develop CTC. This was especially marked in those groups exhibiting greater difficulty at the onset of the study. The above, especially in reference to those students from less favorable social environments, appears to result from using experimental material and instructional practices adopted. Therefore, text-oriented instructional material could be an especially effective factor in the improvement of the quality of written discourse.

The findings of the present study will hopefully contribute to the continuing discussion on instructional changes in the teaching of writing in the Greek primary schools. To that end, we suggest several interdependent factors critical to helping actualize the goals of CTC within the full implementation of the new Course Syllabus for Greek Primary Education. These include, appropriately designed piloted materials, continuing in-service instruction of educators as well as informed and supportive school subject advisors to serve as methodology facilitators. Together they create a frame of authentic and more effective praxis. It would be of great interest for further research to focus on the ways these factors interact in the development of communicative linguistic performance.

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