ELINET Symposium

Enhancing literacy skills: Good practices for early years education

Chairpersons: Eufimia Tafa, University of Crete, Greece and Renate Valtin, Humboldt University, Germany

The European Literacy Declaration identifies high quality preschool and initial literacy education as important conditions for its realisation. It emphasises that all people in Europe should have opportunities to develop literacy skills and knowledge in order to effectively understand and use written communication in print and digital media. In addition, the declaration indicates, among other ideas, that young children should be engaged in a wide range of literacy activities in print-rich and media-rich classroom environments to help them develop reading and writing skills. In this symposium, good practice examples will be provided that help young children to develop and improve reading and writing skills. In particular, we will present, discuss, and analyse practices that enhance young children's narrative skills and their understanding of story structure by the use of technology, that enrich young children's vocabulary through arts integration, and that improve young children's writing by using self-regulated techniques which help them to develop metalinguistic skills.

Presentation 1: Supporting kindergarten children's storymaking with technology

Eufimia Tafa, University of Crete, Greece

Producing a fictional story is considered a challenging task for kindergarten children. In narrating a story young children should understand the "story grammar", namely that each story has a setting, a theme, an order (the plot episodes that take place in sequence), and a resolution. Today the advent of digital technologies has created new contexts that offer multimodal ways for young children to narrate stories. Taking into consideration the above information, the purpose of this study was to examine whether kindergarten children were able to create a well-structured story using digital technologies. Twenty-two children in pairs, aged five to six years old, were asked to create a story using the story-making

software tool called Storybird. This tool offers a large variety of images, which are organised by theme and selected by children in order to create a story. The results showed that the children's texts, to varying degrees, approximate a well-structured story. Children included the setting, the theme, a few episodes and a resolution. In addition, results showed that the teacher's role was found to be crucial in children's story making: it was the teacher's scaffolding that enabled the fulfilment of the task.

Presentation 2: Teaching vocabulary in kindergarten through analytic-context based instruction and arts integration: An innovative approach

Marina Sotiropoulou - Zormpala and Elissavet Chlapana University of Crete, Greece

The presentation aims to describe a study which investigates the effect of a two-phase instructional program for vocabulary teaching to preschool children. The sample of the intervention consisted of all the children of four pre-school classrooms located in Greece and Cyprus. In the first phase of the intervention, through analytic-context based instructional activities, children approach the literal, denotative and conventional meaning of selected words. In the second and subsequent phase of the intervention, children process the meanings of words through arts activities, at a metaphoric, connotative and creative level. At the completion of each phase, children were evaluated on: a) target word knowledge by the use of researcher-based criteria, such as multiple choice vocabulary measures; and b) on the extent to which they were able to interpret the meaning of words in a personal way, and relate it to their experiences, by the use of observation notes. The results are expected to show how this two-phase instructional program enriches the learning experience of children and helps them develop and transform the taught vocabulary.

Presentation 3: Early morphological awareness instruction and impact on reading and spelling skills

George Manolitsis and Alkistis Kyriakou, University of Crete, Greece

This is an intervention study examining the long-term effects of two types of morphological awareness instruction delivered in kindergarten (K) on reading and spelling skills in grade one (G1). One hundred and seventeen Greek children with typical development who were attending kindergarten (K) were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The two experimental groups were instructed to identify and manipulate morphemes through playful activities for three months (30 teaching sessions). The first group focused on oral language skills and the second combined morphological activities with an involvement in written representation of morphemes. The third group, the control, received mainstream classroom instruction. At the end of G1, all children were assessed on morphological awareness, reading speed, reading comprehension, and spelling. Data analyses showed that both experimental groups outperformed the control group on morphological awareness, reading comprehension, and spelling at the end of G1. The findings suggest that MA instruction can be beneficial even when implemented as early as in kindergarten with no appreciable differences between the two types of morphological instruction conditions.

Presentation 4: Long term effects of an intervention program on Greek students' writing process

Helen Vretudaki and Athina Doulia, Regional Directorate of Primary Education of Crete

It is generally accepted in the Greek educational system that students, especially in the first primary grades, face particular difficulties in composing written text. This results in "poor" ones with limited vocabulary, many repetitions, and frequent citing of unrelated thoughts and ideas. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to capture the long term effects on the students' behavior and writing process when using the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) techniques. This strategy was applied six months ago, when students attended second grade primary classes and was aimed at the development of students' capacity to manage the writing process. Four months after the first post assessment, we re-assessed 40 Greek-speaking students (19 girls and 21 boys) in the third grade who were aged from 7.6 to 8.0 (M= 7.8) and that made up our previous treatment group. The researchers met the students during the first period of the school year and before they received formal

instructions in composing narrative text. The results showed stability and further improvement in students' outcomes as they produced relevant or better narrative texts with regard to respecting the length of the text and the qualitative data mentioned above. Therefore, the SRSD is validated as an effective strategy with a long-term impact on student writing behavior and writing.

Presentation 5: Enacting the multiliteracies framework for literacy education in the early years. Learning from an action-research project

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We present preliminary results of an action-research project aiming to transform literacy pedagogy in preschool education by enacting the central tenets of the multiliteracies theoretical framework. The data, which was examined by using multimodal and content discourse analysis, shows how a group of children in the last year in Kindergarten/ pre-school in Portugal spontaneously chose to use different modes of representation and media to communicate their meanings, despite experiencing the same learning circumstances (e.g. participating in the construction of a common project work) and having access to the same set of modes and media of representation. It also reveals a different use of the written mode of verbal language according to the semiotic profiles children were constructing for themselves. The analysis points into the relevance of reconceptualising emergent literacy as embracing the development of semiotic repertoires, rather than written language alone. Besides, the data illustrates the role of professional development in unveiling the possibilities offered by the multiliteracies theoretical framework for literacy education in the early years.

Presentation 6: Developing narrative skills through creative writing: The Freytag pyramid

Evangelia Aravan, University of Athens, Greece

Creative writing is used today with a dual meaning, as it implies the ability to control and master creative thoughts, converting them into writing, but incorporates, in its broad meaning, and all the various educational

practices and techniques aimed at in the acquisition of literary skills. In the narrative theory Freytag, summing up the Aristotelian theory of typical plot, speaks of a pyramid with the elements: *Exposition, Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, the Crisis, the Falling Action, the Resolution and the End.* According to this theoretical frame we present *"the Narrativers"*. The purpose of this study was to embrace narrative skills applying the Freytag pyramid in the narrative texts. Twenty-four children, aged 8-9 years old, were asked to read 48 texts from their school text book and at first to identify these basic structural elements of the plot and secondly to write their own stories, emphasizing the climax of the action. The results showed that children, to varying degrees, learned to recognize the structure of the text and with critical and creative thinking improved their own writing, giving focus on interesting climaxes of their stories.