

**Effective teaching of literacy in Cyprus:
an investigation of the practice of Grade 1 teachers**

Elena Kyriakides

**Institute of Education
University of London**

Abstract

A key finding from the research into school effectiveness is that children's educational progress is highly dependent on effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; DEST, 2005; NCQT, 2011). But, the literature into teacher effectiveness offers less literacy-specific evidence. Nonetheless, successful literacy learning in Grade 1 is crucial as it has long lasting consequences on children's literacy development (Riley, 1996, 2007; Tymms et al., 2009), thus making the effective teaching of literacy an important focus of investigation. Researchers have also raised the issue of the inter-relationship of effective teaching and the context within which it takes place (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001; Campbell et al, 2003).

Within the specific context of Cyprus there is a paucity of evidence into teachers' literacy practices in correlation with the insights from the effectiveness research. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate this particular context and use the insights offered in order to illuminate thinking about effective literacy teaching practice. In order to do so, it draws upon relevant bodies of literature, to identify the features of effective literacy teaching in Grade 1 classrooms. By using these teachers as a lens into teaching practices, the study explores what these teachers do and also how the omissions in their practice compare with the literature in the field, as well as what they do differently and which has not, as yet, been widely recognised. In addition, the study examines what teachers report they rely on and how they claim to have learned their practice. The study is located within a qualitative - interpretive paradigm, using thematic coding to deductively and inductively analyse classroom observations and interview data from fifteen teachers who were deemed to be effective.

The findings offer an agenda to re-consider both the content and pedagogy of effective literacy teaching in Grade 1. Also, the implications that arise for programmes of Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development are addressed.

Declaration and Word Count

The candidate hereby declares that the work presented in this thesis is entirely her own and that appropriate credit has been given where explicit reference has been made to the work of others.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background and context to the study

There is an enduring international focus on improving literacy teaching and learning, manifested in various governmental initiatives and in numerous volumes written on the subject. Equally impressive is the relevant body of research findings focusing on the significance of effective teachers. A common thread in the broader field of effectiveness studies is that educational effectiveness is crucially dependent on the provision of quality teaching by competent teachers.

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2011) declares teachers to be the single most important school – based factor that determines pupil achievement. In Australia’s national inquiry into the teaching of literacy, teachers are described as the most valuable resource available to schools: “because teaching (*of literacy*) is a highly skilled professional activity, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of schooling depends, at the outset, on competent people choosing to work as teachers” (DEST, 2005, p. 25). Furthermore, the effect of poor quality teaching on pupil outcomes can be debilitating and cumulative, while the effects of quality teaching can be greater than those that arise from other factors, the best way to enhance pupil achievement is to enhance the quality of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

The area is, nonetheless, far from being fully explored and the need remains to further look into understandings of effective literacy practices. As noted by Hall and Harding (2003, p. 1): “we need to know more about how to recognise ‘effective’ teachers of literacy and to understand more fully the kinds of professional knowledge, beliefs and classroom actions that are associated with the successful teaching of literacy”.

Pythagoras’ maxim that “the beginning is half of everything” (and the English proverb “well begun is half done”) endures to this day and nowhere in education is

this better manifested and more applicable than in the teaching of literacy to young children. The importance of the early years of education, and of Grade 1 as the first year of formal literacy education in particular, and the persistence of these effects throughout primary school is stressed in a number of publications and official reports (Riley, 1996, 2007; NSW, 2009; Konstantopoulos and Chung, 2011). Riley (1996, p. 2) develops a compelling argument regarding the importance of Grade 1: "it is now becoming clear that it is in the first few months of school that effective learning patterns are established, and that they set the scene for educational success, with a special emphasis on an early and successful start with reading and writing". She discusses seminal studies in the field (Pedersen et al, 1978 and Tizard et al, 1998, cited in Riley 1996; Mortimore et al, 1988), which provided evidence to support the enduring benefits in the literacy education and overall academic progress of children who experienced an initial boost from an effective start.

Notwithstanding the impact of other factors, i.e. the children's cognitive abilities, their attitudes, different family background variables, etc., these longitudinal projects indicated that highly skilled teachers have great influence on children's learning. Riley (1996) encapsulates the difference an effective literacy teacher can make in the first year of school. As children bring with them their unique, highly idiosyncratic sets of knowledge and skills to acquiring literacy, inappropriate teaching that cuts across prior learning might cause confusion with long lasting implications. On the contrary, an effective teacher able to appreciate children's natural and competent learning abilities and able to capitalise on their previously acquired knowledge can lead to a successful start in literacy education.

Effective teaching is a multifaceted and dynamic process that has been persistently examined, and its complexity has been vividly portrayed. Within the teacher effectiveness literature, literacy-specific information has not been as widely provided as in other areas. Effective teaching in Grade 1 is however arguably more crucial and important to investigate, as it has substantial consequences for children's literacy development. Given the importance and complexity of literacy teaching and the particular demands for supporting learners in Grade 1, this study focuses on Grade 1 in Cyprus. In the milestone of their first year in primary school,

children progress from emergent literacy to conventional literacy as they undergo systematic teaching of reading and writing. More information is needed regarding this particular stage of literacy development, as often research has focused on older children.

This thesis draws on the effectiveness research as part of the theoretical framework, but does not use an effectiveness methodology itself. Rather, the wealth of existing research findings are used to frame what effective teachers have been shown to do and in order to identify, examine and compare the teaching practices observed in the Cypriot setting with these. The focus will be not on making evaluations on the degree of the effectiveness of the teachers, but on exploring what the features of their practice are and what has influenced these teachers in becoming what they are.

Researchers have raised the issue of the inter-relationship of effective teaching and the context where it takes place (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001; Campbell et al, 2003). This study adopts the position that recommendations that follow from studies elsewhere should be considered in the light of the fact that all education systems are contextually bound and what applies in one situation may not necessarily be appropriate in another. Research findings indicate the importance of context, in order to enrich relevant understandings, but also as a means of adding to relevant conceptualisations in the broader fields of quality teaching and effective practice regarding what teachers know and do, where this comes from, and what the implications are. It is thus particularly important to add to the understandings of effective teaching by exploring the way it manifests in different educational and cultural contexts, as this study aims to do.

As noted above, this study was conducted in Cyprus and examines effective literacy Grade 1 teachers' practices in the context of the Cypriot setting. Cyprus, a member of the European Union since 2004 is a relatively newly formed sovereign state, established in 1960. Although the constitution recognises two official languages, Greek and Turkish, the mother tongues of the two main communities of the island, the linguistic culture of the Cypriot society has never been bilingual and it encompasses two distinct and divergent entities. Language education has always

been a vehicle of the ethnic, cultural and religious identity of the Greek and Turkish community. Following a failed attempt to achieve a political union with Greece in the late '50s, the Greek Cypriot community pursued spiritual and educational union with Greece promoting Standard Modern Greek in schools and targeting a Greek identity (Persianis, 1981; Papapavlou and Pavlou, 2005). For political, emotional and financial reasons, the Greek national curriculum for language education and the respective textbooks were adopted and are to this day distributed to all children in Cypriot schools. Greek Cypriot children learn Standard Modern Greek in their schools, but also use the Cypriot dialect.

In Cyprus, all children over the age of five years and eight months by the 1st September of the year their tuition is due to begin must enrol in primary schools, while a year of pre-primary education is also compulsory. The vast majority attend public schools (where the study was conducted), which are free, and follow the curricula and policies of the Ministry of Education and Culture. In Grade 1, as well as in the higher five grades as children progress to secondary education, the weekly attendance is from Monday to Friday, with lessons starting each day at 7.45 a.m. (ending at 1.05 p.m.). Each day has seven teaching periods (six spanning forty minutes and the seventh thirty five) and three breaks. Greek, the language and literacy lesson is almost ubiquitously found in the first two periods of all timetables, with the sessions lasting eighty minutes.

Teachers in Cyprus are employed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and are graduates of four-year Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes, offered by the state and private accredited universities in Cyprus (and Greece). Upon graduation they apply to the Education Service Commission, which is the legal body appointing teachers in schools. It is the responsibility of the head teacher of each school to assign which teachers will teach Grade 1. A Grade 1 teacher organises the teaching and learning process in all subjects, although in large schools there are also subject teachers for some specialised subjects (i.e. music, art, gymnastics, etc.).

Beyond the above wider background to this study, there is also a personal one. As a teacher trainer for the past ten years, it has been possible to professionally engage and reflect upon issues of effective literacy teaching in Grade 1 both as an

instructor of the relevant undergraduate course offered, as well as an observer of the challenges student teachers face in preparing and delivering lessons in Grade 1 classrooms. Importantly, given the aforementioned importance of the first year of primary school, the Cypriot curriculum for Grade 1 is the least prescribed of all the primary grades. This is a fact that is recognised by participating teachers at Continuous Professional Development (CPD) seminars who frequently raise questions regarding the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1. The relevant discussions always reveal a plethora of often strongly held opinions on what and how to teach literacy to children. Decision-making processes of different stakeholders regarding the issue, from university and educational authorities to practitioners seem to have been informed by opinion.

Within the specific context of Cyprus, research has been undertaken in the areas of Grade 1 literacy acquisition and education, but predominantly from a cognitive, linguistic, and sociolinguistic perspective. A number of studies on effective teaching have also been published. However, they are mostly foregrounding general school and classroom characteristics, while some focusing on teachers have not looked into literacy practice in particular. Therefore there is a lack of investigation into teachers' literacy practices in correlation with the insight of the effectiveness research. Moreover, the findings of the discrete studies in the two fields have not been linked and used as an insight into ITE courses preparing student teachers to teach literacy in Grade 1. Therefore, this study aims to look at the intersection of three lines of inquiry, reviewed in the following chapters. Specifically, it examines evidence base from research into effective teaching, and on literacy skills acquisition in the early years, as well as their implementation. This synthesis is of particular importance. Research on effective teaching on its own has had the potential to capture important aspects about teachers' actions and behaviour in the classroom, but often tends to lack precision. While it draws out significant points about practice, these are fairly general and can be hard to know how to implement. On the other hand, research on literacy in the early years again on its own has provided useful detail, typically with a fairly strong evidence base, but by its nature is highly focussed and does not cover the breadth and complexity of the teachers' instructional practices in Grade 1. More importantly, research into either area is not valuable for educational practice unless the

implementation of notions and theoretical approaches is also considered. It is thus vital to also examine what teachers do, what it is that influences teachers' practice and how they adapt general notions of literacy effective practice to their own situation. This study adopts what Hall and Harding (2003) noted, that the most popular and useful way to find out about effective literacy teaching is to observe teachers nominated as effective teachers and to interview them about their teaching. And this is exactly what this study is designed to do.

1.2. Aims of the study and research questions

The main purpose of this study is twofold, aiming to look at practical and theoretical aspects of effective literacy teaching in Grade 1, examining each separately but most importantly their interrelationship and the way they influence each other. Thus, the study aims on a first level to meticulously describe the teaching practices of effective teachers in Grade 1 literacy classrooms in Cyprus. A holistic in-depth investigation is undertaken of the different aspects of literacy teaching taking place, and these are examined on their own as well as in concurrence. Drawing from relevant bodies of literature, namely research on literacy and effectiveness, and particularly on the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1, the study aims to identify how the observed practice matches the existing evidence and how it diverges and why, looking into not only what teachers do not do, but also at what they may do differently and has not been widely recognised in the field. In 1986 Shulman asked 'how does the novice teacher (or even the seasoned veteran) draw on expertise in the subject matter in the process of teaching?' (1986, p. 8). Although many studies have been undertaken ever since, the issue remains open and calls for further investigation. Thus, the study also explores what teachers report they draw upon in order to teach literacy effectively in Grade 1 and how they claim to have learned their practice.

Most importantly, the study aims to contribute to the wider field of effective literacy education, as the snapshots of effective teaching practice from the particular context can add and even challenge broader understandings of how literacy should be effectively taught to Grade 1 children and how this sets a framework for ITE and CPD programmes.

Therefore, the study aims to answer to three research questions, namely:

- a. How can a holistic, in-depth investigation of Grade 1 literacy teachers in Cyprus illuminate thinking about effective literacy practice?
- b. In what ways do the practices of Grade 1 teachers in Cyprus agree or differ from the international literature on literacy effectiveness?
- c. How do teachers' declared understandings influence their practices?

In order to examine the practices of the teachers, how they approach literacy teaching, as well as their management of the classroom are investigated. In line with researchers who have discussed the importance of studying instructional practices to understand the work entailed in teaching (i.e. Shavelson, 1983) or who have actually engaged in such work (i.e. Grossman, 1990; Riley, 1996; Pressley, 1998; Lampert, 2001), the word practice is used to refer to what it is that teachers actually do. Also, that these actions and decisions are not random, rather they are patterns of recurrent actions typically informed by the teachers' own knowledge and beliefs about the effective teaching of literacy. Furthermore, by using effective teachers as a lens into teaching practices, it aims to juxtapose what they do, what they do not do and why, but in addition to apply this insight into considering the implications for programmes of ITE and CPD.

Here lies the significance of this study, as it not only aims to combine theoretical understanding and research findings of both the acquisition and teaching of literacy in Grade 1 and its effectiveness in the particular context of Cyprus, but also to provide useful insight for student teachers, teachers, teacher educators, researchers and educational authorities. In Cyprus and elsewhere, often in literature and policy documents a lot of emphasis is placed on the detail of curriculum coverage, levels of attainment, and the effectiveness models, etc., that is the 'what', but not about the 'how'. The findings of this research project aim towards setting an agenda for discussing how the 'what' and 'how' of effective literacy teaching in Grade 1 can be disseminated and transmitted, how collaborations can be fostered among all interested parties and to question broader conceptualisations of ITE and CPD.

1.3. Outline of the thesis

The thesis is structured in seven chapters. The first introductory chapter describes the background and context of the study, as well as its aims and significance.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide the theoretical foundation. Chapter 2 addresses the notions of literacy, its acquisition and effective teaching, with a particular emphasis on the evidence on the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1. Chapter 3 offers more specific information regarding the particular educational context of Cyprus, the language taught, the curriculum and textbooks used, as well as an overview of approaches followed. In Chapter 4, having moved from broader issues regarding literacy teaching, effective pedagogy, to the teaching of literacy in Grade 1 in Cyprus, reference is made to what the relevant literature reports teachers draw upon in order to teach. The chapter concludes with the research questions and aims of this study.

Chapter 5 outlines the research design of this study, presenting the research procedures followed during fieldwork, as well as an explanation of the phases of data analysis.

The research findings of the study are presented in Chapter 6, divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the features of effective oracy and literacy practices and on issues relating to classroom management. The second section presents the teachers' explanations as to what guides and influences their daily teaching decisions. Beyond a straightforward presentation of the results, this section also includes some discussion of aspects of the findings.

Finally, Chapter 7 presents the relationship between the findings of this study to the research literature. The features of effective teaching practice observed are presented which are in line with the literature, as well as the discrepancies between proven effective practice internationally and the locally collected data of the study. The chapter discusses how the participating teachers claim to have learned their practice, it includes the limitations of the study, and finally conclusions and recommendations are offered.

Chapter

Theoretical framework

Introduction

It is essential to pose a number of questions in order to gain insight into the current state of thought about topics related to this study, as well as prior relevant research findings. What is literacy? How is effective teaching understood and described? What does the research evidence reveal about the effective teaching of literacy? How have these notions been interpreted in Cyprus? What do we know about the underpinning of the teachers' practices? The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of literacy and effective teaching drawing on the international and national literature. It attempts to summarise how the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1 has been conceptualised based on research evidence, so as to allow a comparison with the practices of teachers in Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus judged to be effective, in order to look at the extent to which their practices match theory and research and the extent to which they do not. Thus, after reviewing the literature, key consensual areas on effective practice are summarised at the end of the chapter.

2.1. Defining literacy

In order to investigate the effective teaching of literacy, literacy itself needs to be defined. The notion of literacy has had a permanent place in the agenda of academics, policy makers and practitioners worldwide. It is widely accepted that it is of vital importance in every aspect of life and that it has an important role in defining an individual's academic, social and economic outcome. Literacy provides children with the tools to understand and negotiate the world of which they are part of while at school and, later on, as members of a nation's workforce. Thus, high levels in literacy have always been a preoccupation, fuelling governmental concern to improve standards and to investigate teaching effectiveness in order to boost pupil achievement.

The numerous initiatives and programmes, reports and policies that have been introduced in recent years worldwide are an indication of the persisting interest in literacy and ways in which to improve its teaching and learning. In the U.K. examples of government initiatives to foreground literacy include the National Literacy Strategy (1998), which later became part of the Primary National Strategy (2003), as well as the Rose review (2006), which looked particularly into the effective teaching of early reading, and therefore is particularly relevant to this study. The Rose review, defines literacy as “reading and writing and the skills of speaking and listening, on which they depend” (Rose, 2006, p. 10). In the Australian context the notion of ‘literacy continuum’ has been put forward (NSW, 2009) featuring eight aspects of literacy that need to be addressed. Following a more overt approach, Clay provides a ‘simple view of a complex theory’ and pins down an explanation of literacy, which for her is deeply embedded in cognitive approaches, focusing on the networks “we create in the brain linking things we see (print on page) and things we hear (the language we speak)” (2005, p. 1). Literacy for the purposes of this study is understood in a similar way, as involving reading and writing in a close relationship with spoken language.

It is important to note that in spite of the major interest in literacy, a consensus about its definition does not seem to exist; beyond the above basic definition, there are multiple ways in which it is described, which often reflect the different content and functions attributed to it. As Knoblauch observes “literacy is one of those mischievous concepts, like virtuousness and craftsmanship, that appear to denote capacities but that actually convey value judgements” (1990, p. 74). Furthermore, the understandings of the term as well as the approaches to describing and analysing it have changed significantly over time and across traditions.

In an attempt to untangle the highly contested meaning of literacy, different theorists and researchers have provided a number of descriptions of different approaches to the notion. Perfetti and Sandak (2001) discuss narrow and broader definitions of literacy, from the focus on the teaching of how the writing system encodes the spoken language system to literacy as a broad range of skills embedded in cultural and technological contexts. Street (2006) outlines four major areas of enquiry into literacy, namely, literacy and learning; cognitive approaches to literacy; social practice approaches; and, literacy as text. Other categorisations

of the different interpretations of literacy have been also put forward (i.e. Baynham, 2002; Roberts, 2005) and in all of these what exactly the term refers to varies. In every definition given there is, of course, an interest in the acquisition and development of the reading and writing processes, however the term often alludes to additional goals, such as social, ideological and critical aspects.

In the Greek context, learning how to read and write was traditionally denoted by the term 'alphabetism' and the terms 'first reading' and 'first writing' signalled the initial period of formal teaching and learning to read and write in Grade 1. This literally refers to the ability to decode an alphabetic system of writing. Literacy as a term appeared in the 2001 version of the curriculum; the aim of language teaching and learning was said to be the best possible use of the language so as a child would be able to acquire 'social literacy'. The term interestingly was not included in the 2003 edition. Nevertheless, literacy has become part of the Greek educational vocabulary and has been extensively used in the educational reform of curricula in the past few years in Cyprus.

More recently, literacy has been seen as a broader skill, which includes 'alphabetism' but, further more, the ability to function effectively and communicate in different contexts, using oral and written texts, as well as multimodal ones (Mitsikopoulou, 2001, Charalambopoulos, 2006, Hatzisavvides, 2007). This perspective of literacy seems to be closer to a sociocultural view of language, foregrounded in the Australian curriculum, along with the work on multi-literacies and multimodality (building, among others, on the work of Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Freebody and Luke, 1990; Luke and Freebody, 1999; Gee, 2000; Christie and Derewianka, 2008; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). In fact, in that particular context, literacy is broadened to include viewing and representing, as a response to multimodal texts and multimedia.

In the Greek literature though, a certain degree of confusion seems to exist around the Greek translation of literacy. For example, in the introductory note of a translated book of David Barton entitled '*Literacy: an introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*' the editor notes that both herself and the translator were puzzled about the interpretation of the English notion of literacy. They propose the

term 'egrammatismos' («εγγραμματισμός») or 'egrammatosini' («εγγραμματοσύνη») rather than the terms 'grammatismos' («γραμματισμός»). The argument is that this allows the term to be used to refer both to an action and a situation, similarly to 'literacy' in English (Varnava- Skoura in Barton, 2009). Translations for other relevant terms are also offered (i.e. for "literacy teaching" ('egrammatistiki didaskalia'-«εγγραμματιστική διδασκαλία»), again though, these notions are not used universally in the Greek literature. Thus, it is often a common practice to include in brackets the English term next to the Greek translation, in order to ensure that the writer and the reader share the same understanding.

The trend, locally and internationally, to broaden the scope of literacy as a term, and to look at it as a means of personal and social empowerment is not only a recent phenomenon, as many researchers from different fields of enquiry have used the term literacy, opening it towards different directions. Anthropologists, such as Goody (1987) and psychologists such as Olson (1977; 1994) have linked literacy with broad historical and cultural issues in their exploration of the role of literacy on cognition and the way societies develop and function; social practice approaches (for example in the work of Heath, 1982; Street, 1993; Gee, 1999; Barton and Hamilton, 2000), shifted the focus to the ethnographic study of literacy as a social practice within specific social and cultural contexts and further elaborated these ideas in their work henceforth. As mentioned above, in another extensive body of literature, the focus is shifted to 'multi-literacies' and 'multimodality' (see for example Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001) and many researchers have adopted these ideas in their own work.

2.2. A theoretical framework for literacy teaching in the early years

In spite of the differing emphases of different perspectives mentioned above, literacy in essence refers to knowing how to read and write. What changes over time is the range and types of texts children need to be able to read and write for different purposes as members of contemporary societies. The first year of primary school, in particular, raises such specific challenges that not all uses of the term literacy can (or even aspire to) cater for. It is important to consider a

definition of literacy and adopt a theoretical framework for literacy teaching in the early years that gives due cognisance to this particular landmark of children's literacy development. This thesis adopts that, particularly with beginners, it is required to have an understanding of the processes that underpin the teaching and learning of literacy (see also Rose, 2006). This is a cognitive perspective arising from research on how reading and writing work (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1999). Moreover, this thesis does not perceive literacy as an exclusively cognitive skill, and social, linguistic, cultural and psychological aspects are also embraced.

Literacy development is a complex on-going process, starting from the very beginning and spanning throughout an individual's life. Even before any formal schooling, children begin to understand the purpose of and the conventions of print and, very gradually recognise that the alphabet is a code system (Riley, 2006). The development of literacy begins therefore in very early childhood and some basic understandings of books, concepts about text and print and the purpose of literacy are acquired from a very young age. Gradually, children are able to use symbols, combining their knowledge of oral language, interpretation of the pictures, de-coding of print, which all combine to access the meaning in a variety of ways (Neuman et al, 2000).

Literacy in the early years is a time when the foundation for future literacy learning is set, as well as a stage for children to use and apply their developing skills, knowledge and understandings in a range of contexts and across learning areas (NSW, 2009, p. 12). Children's literacy acquisition and development is influenced by cognitive skills and also by their literacy experiences and exposure and their overall level of engagement, shaped by their environment, within and outside their classrooms (see Adams, 1990). Riley (2007) describes the particular and long-lasting importance of the reception year, and Grade 1 in Cyprus is a parallel situation. In the milestone of their first year in primary school, children progress from emergent literacy to conventional literacy as they undergo systematic teaching of reading and writing. Before looking at the teaching of literacy though, a brief note on the concept of emergent literacy is needed.

The term emergent literacy, introduced in the mid 1960's by Clay, turned attention to the recognition that children acquire a body of reading and writing knowledge, behaviours and skills before actually arriving at school and formally being taught to read and write (Sulzby and Teale, 1991). A shift was therefore made from previous beliefs regarding children's "readiness" to a developmental perspective, which took into account the interconnectedness of oral language, reading and writing within this phase, and which is strongly related to children's reading and writing ability later on (Rhyner et al., 2009). Emergent literacy represents the beginning of a long journey into literacy, which lasts throughout life, and where the foundations are laid for the development of the interrelated oral language and written language skills.

A central goal during the preschool years is to enhance children's exposure to and concepts about print (Clay, 1975,1991). These early experiences have been found to be critical (Adams, 1990), including the first fundamental understanding that print is speech written down, and which are crucial for understanding that the alphabetic code is a system. Concepts about print include knowing which way to hold a book and turn its pages, what a front, and a back cover are, which is the text and which the picture and what each of these add to the meaning, and also which direction the text runs, etc. While these are less important precursors to reading than phonological awareness or alphabet knowledge, these foundational understandings and awareness gradually develop into an ability to distinguish more advanced notions of written language, texts and print (see NELP, 2008). Furthermore, the development of print and sound processing skills supports the development of phonological awareness and this is widely accepted as a crucial factor in learning how to read. Some of the studies investigating the role of phonological awareness are reviewed in a following section, highlighting the virtually unassailable connection between phonological awareness and the development of reading and spelling (Stainthorp, 2003), and the critical role of early awareness of the phonemic principle of alphabetic writing in order to become a skilled reader of English and other alphabetic systems (Shankweiler and Fowler, 2004).

When discussing children's early literacy skills, an important aspect is parental involvement. As parents are children's first teachers, they significantly influence children's language and literacy development through everyday conversations, literacy experiences, storybook readings and writing related activities. The close link between children's literacy development and the role of parents is well established in the literature (Snow, et al., 1998; Purcell Gates, 2004), while the effectiveness research, which is discussed in a following section, also names parental and community involvement as an important factor influencing children's literacy achievements. Although school is the institution primarily responsible for the teaching of reading and writing, the role of parents and carers is crucial to the successful development of children's literacy skills (DEST, 2005).

A theoretical framework for teaching in the early years needs to address not only the complexities of defining literacy itself, but also the actual teaching of literacy and this in an effective way. In order to do so the next sections of this chapter draw on literacy and effective teaching research, attempting to summarise some of their major issues. In what follows, it will be demonstrated that in some cases, typically concerning the cognitive skills required in acquiring literacy, research has yielded very precise information, whereas in much of the effectiveness research recommendations can be rather general and therefore of limited value in informing practice. This thesis maintains that rather than to take a singular theoretical standpoint it is crucial to try to combine insight from a wide range of bodies of knowledge in order to synthesise a conceptual underpinning of teachers' practice. These general points cannot be elevated to constitute a theoretical or conceptual framework, yet they can scarcely be ignored when considering teachers' practice. Thus, beyond defining literacy it is important to look at major trends in the way it has been taught, locally and internationally, and to the key consensual areas on effective practice.

2.3. Approaching literacy

The question of exactly how children should be taught literacy, though, has been as widely discussed as the efforts to delineate the notion of literacy itself, and in what follows some of the contested opinions put forward are briefly examined. First, although language and literacy are two notions often referred to interchangeably,

it is important to make a distinction between them (Rose, 2006, p. 10). Literacy is primarily taught in language classrooms (English or Greek, etc.). Beyond this explicit teaching of literacy though, all learning areas and experiences of children within or outside the classroom also contribute to strengthening and extending their literacy skills.

In the widespread debate on how children become literate, and particularly on how they learn to read, two major opposing camps have been at odds for many years; one advocating a code oriented, bottom – up approach, the other promoting a meaning based, top-down approach. The bottom-up models place emphasis on phonics, the smallest components of language and the correspondences between their sounds and the letters that represent them. Gough (1972) set the foundations of such a view of the reading process, describing a sequential flow of transformations from grapheme/ phoneme to words into sentences and then texts. The pedagogical implication is that children are taught the fundamental nature of the alphabetic principle in order to be able to read fluently. Within this approach there are different methods of instruction, i.e. analytic or synthetic phonics, with the latter being proposed by influential reports as the “form of systematic phonic work that offers the vast majority of beginners the best route to becoming skilled readers” (Rose, 2006, p. 19).

In languages such as English and Greek (see relevant section following for a brief review of evidence base) their alphabetic writing systems link spoken language to written, thus being aware of the principles of the alphabetic code and mastering grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPC) are understandably seen as “foundational and essential skills for the development of competence in reading, writing and spelling” (DEST, 2005) while high quality phonic work’ early explicit and systematic teaching of skills is considered vital (Rose, 2006). Ehri (2003) also stresses the need for systematic phonic work, concluding that systematic phonics instruction produces superior performance in reading compared to all types of unsystematic or no phonics instruction.

On the other hand, there are those who advocate more meaning oriented or whole language approaches, foregrounding meaningful engagement with texts and real

books, in a top – down approach. For many years this was the predominant approach used in early literacy teaching and learning throughout the English-speaking world (Pearson, 2000, and Westwood, 2004, cited in DEST, 2005). 'Whole language' instruction moves from the whole to the part, using prediction and guessing as a decoding strategy, without teaching decoding skills as such. Goodman (1967) and Smith (1971) proposed such models. Adams (1990) reviewed the then current research evidence and questioned the validity of exclusively following this take on reading development, as it failed to recognise the importance of teaching decoding, and the central nature of 'bottom up' skills in early reading development. Still, such approaches offered insight on the value of engaging children in communication and in a variety of shared book experiences, literature circles and writing centres, through which reading and writing will naturally and meaningfully occur. They also argued that in a language like English, with such an irregular spelling system, trying to teach very young children all the exceptions to every GPC rule could be alienating and de-motivating. However, as Hurry encapsulates "it is no longer viable to argue that letter/sound relationships are not important to reading. The debate has been transformed into an issue of how children learn such relationships" (Hurry, 2004, p. 559).

In between these two poles in the spectrum of literacy teaching, there have been different combinational approaches put forward. An important consideration is that despite the momentum different approaches gained at different points in time, they have often had quite narrow focus in their lines of research. As the acquisition of literacy is generally acknowledged to be a complex process, it is unlikely that one model or one method is going to develop all aspects of the process in every child or at different points in their learning. As the Simple View of Reading has illustrated (DfES, 2006), a bottom up process is necessary (for decoding) but not sufficient (for language comprehension). Therefore, it is highly implausible that a universally best method of teaching literacy can be defined, as different children need different techniques and all children need different models so to tackle different aspects of their learning prioritised at different times. While in this thesis a mostly developmental view of learning is adopted, where the internal processes of general development or literacy acquisition are prioritised, it is important to note that research on the cognitive skills associated with literacy acquisition does

not attend to all central issues regarding children's literacy learning process. Such an example is children's motivation, an elementary understanding to any teacher charged with managing the children's learning. This has been documented in research on effective teaching and on the effective teaching of literacy, discussed in the next section. Thus, it is important to move beyond ideological controversies and opposing orientations and shift the emphasis to an effort to address the complexity of actually teaching literacy effectively. This study suggests that there is a need to draw on a wide range of bodies of knowledge, not only literacy acquisition and development but teaching effectiveness as well, a brief account of which is provided in the following section.

2.4. Research on effective teaching

2.4.1. School and teacher effectiveness

The effective teaching of literacy is obviously interrelated with school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness more generally. These terms and the relevant body of research share a lot in common, but can be found in the literature being used inconsistently. In this study, school effectiveness is seen as referring to factors on the level of the school as a unit of analysis, focusing on its management and organisation (with educational effectiveness being an overarching term). Research into teacher effectiveness shifts the focus to factors such as teacher characteristics, organisation, processes and outcomes within the classroom. While effective teachers and effective literacy teachers share many common characteristics, beyond the universal generic teacher skills, there are particular features regarding the effective teaching of literacy, and these will be reviewed in the separate following section.

Teachers make a significant impact on learning and they are seen as the single most important school – based determinant of pupil achievement (NCTQ, 2011). The quest for understanding teacher effectiveness is not new, still, there seems to be a lack of consensus on the definition of effective teaching as well as on the methods of describing and evaluating it. The definition of the notion in this case shapes what is valued and foregrounded; if the more limited, but highly common and acclaimed position on teacher effectiveness is considered (i.e. the one that associates it with pupil achievement exclusively) then testing procedures and

measurements based on standardised test scores are also foregrounded. If a wider conceptualisation of teacher effectiveness is allowed, (i.e. one that focuses on factors such as classroom processes, learning outcomes, teacher and pupil behaviours, children's engagement and attitudes) then the focus shifts and broadens, along with the ways of documentation, analysis, as well as the actions taken as a result of the research findings.

In a definition of teacher effectiveness by Campbell et al. (2004) these other factors reported to be in play are taken into account, still the focus and the way effectiveness is measured remains the same: "teacher effectiveness is the impact that classroom factors, such as teaching methods, teacher expectations, classroom organisation, and use of classroom resources, have on students' performance" (2004, p. 3). This is a much narrower definition than the one of Brophy and Good (1986), who state that: "the research discussed is concerned with the effects of teachers on students, but it is a misnomer to refer to it as "teacher effectiveness" research, because this equates "effectiveness" with success in producing a measurable gain in achievement. What constitutes "teacher effectiveness" is a matter of definition, and most definitions include success in socialising students and promoting their affective and personal development in addition to success in fostering their mastery of formal curricula" (1986, p. 328). Therefore, a crucial parameter in any teacher effectiveness research is the choice of outcome measures. As these become the criteria for judging effectiveness (Sammons and Bakken, 2011), focusing on only a narrow range would only provide partial indicators of effectiveness.

A number of researchers have provided systematic reviews of the extensive literature on the field that has developed over the years (i.e. Reynolds et al., 2002; Mortimore et al., 1998; Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008, 2009; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; DfEE, 2000; Scheerens et al., 2003), each foregrounding their own nuanced perspective. Initially, studies on educational effectiveness did not look at school and teacher effectiveness simultaneously, however joint studies revealed that neither level can be adequately studied without considering the other (Reynolds et al, 2002) and, furthermore, that the classroom level has considerably more influence over educational outcomes and student achievement than the

school level (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000). It is important to note here that although much time has lapsed since some of the research findings mentioned were published, they could not have been more relevant to Cyprus, the context of this study, as often the situation at the time, far before the introduction of literacy strategies on a national level, bears resemblances to the current situation in Cypriot schools.

In the UK context, the first attempt to link explicitly primary school and teacher effectiveness with pupil outcomes in terms of assessment scores, was the Mortimore et al. study in 1988, shifting the focus of contemporary research from the study of teaching styles to the study of actual behaviours that can make a difference in everyday teaching and learning practices. In the 1970's other major studies exploring teacher effectiveness also took place, though without making the link to pupil attainment. Bennett (1976) presented a continuum of twelve teaching styles, ranging from the most 'progressive' to the most 'traditional' style, with most teachers falling into the middle group. Rutter et al. (1979) studied London secondary schools and advocated that effective schools were characterised by "the degree of academic emphasis, teacher actions in lessons, the availability of incentives and rewards, good conditions for pupils, and the extent to which children are able to take responsibility" (Rutter et al., 1979, p. 178). Another significant contribution was the ORACLE study, which began in the mid 1970s (Galton, 1987) and continued with a replication study two decades later (Galton and Hargreaves, 2002), which suggested that the kinds of practice the 1967 Plowden Report endorsed were only partially implemented. In both studies, the data provided a description of processes in primary classrooms, teaching styles used and responses made by children, linking the processes described to children's performance and following children from primary to secondary education.

The Mortimore et al. study (1998) collected a wide range of data from children in fifty primary schools, taking into account a range of curriculum subjects (including mathematics, reading, writing), and other parameters (attendance, behaviour and attitudes to school), having collected data not only relating to school processes but, for the first time in research into UK school effectiveness, relating to classroom processes. The findings of the study indicated school and teacher effectiveness

factors that were associated with effectiveness across outcome areas. On a more general level, the way the school was managed and organised and the role of the Head Teacher was highlighted, together with the degree of involvement of the Deputy Head, as well as the teachers, in decision-making processes. Consistency and continuity of staff as well as an overall positive climate were found to have positive effects. Furthermore, the value of keeping detailed records and monitoring progress, and the encouragement of parental involvement were noted as impacting on both school and teacher effectiveness.

As far as teacher effectiveness is concerned, the study reported that effectiveness was higher where sessions were structured and organised by stimulating and enthusiastic teachers who intellectually challenged children in a work-centred environment with high student engagement. Also, pupil progress was found to be higher when less than two subjects were running simultaneously in the classroom, providing the children with a limited focus within sessions impacted on their performance. This was also positively connected with purposeful communication with their teacher, either individually or in whole class sessions. A very interesting aspect of the study was that evidence on outcomes was not restricted to test scores, but included practical tasks, speaking and writing activities, self-concept measures, and measures of attendance and behaviour, thus providing a richer set of data.

The close relationship of school effectiveness to effective teaching was also highlighted in the research by Sammons et al., who advocated that quality teaching is clearly at 'the heart of effective schooling' (1995, p. 15). In identifying the factors that influence school effectiveness, they referred to effective and purposeful leadership and the need to have shared goals within the school and the classroom community. These would lead to the creation of a learning environment with a clear concentration on teaching and learning, where teaching is purposeful with clear learning objectives. The teachers' role was emphasised, since the need to have high expectations, provide positive reinforcement and ensuring progress is monitored were included in the list, as well as the need to support their professional and pedagogical needs in order to ensure effective schooling (Sammons et al, 1995, p. 8).

These universal factors of school effectiveness provided by Sammons et al. (1995) were primarily focused on schools as units of analysis and on the work taking place within their walls, both on the level of school management and of teachers and their teaching, but did not take into account contextual parameters, such as the broader socioeconomic context of the school and the children's background. Reynolds (1998) highlighted that factors such as the aforementioned must entail an awareness of the context specificity of individual schools, which include the socio-economic status of the pupils, the type of school, the location of the school, the school's view of itself as failing or succeeding and the history and culture of the school (Reynolds, 1998, p. 157). However, in the Hay/McBer study, commissioned by Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2000), data showed that the school context could not be used to predict children's progress, and an argument was made that effective teachers teach in all kinds of schools and school contexts. Furthermore, the study indicated that their gender, qualifications or experience affect children's progress less than the teachers' skills and professional characteristics. The aim of the study was to provide a framework to describe effective teaching at different stages in the teaching profession (DfEE, 2000) and data were collected from approximately 80 schools and 170 teachers, from a range of schools that had been selected to represent the national distribution on such factors as school age phase and the social background of children.

The evolution of the effectiveness research through time and place has led to the development of checklists of characteristics and principles of effective teaching. While there are some universal common features, effective teaching cannot be reducible to single or simple measures nor is it of any value for educational practice to produce or emulate checklists. Furthermore, as it is often the case in educational research, contextual factors are extremely important and need to be taken into account. A number of researchers have raised the issue of the inter-relation of effective teaching and the context within which it takes place (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001; Campbell et al, 2003). It is thus particularly important to add to the understandings of effective teaching by exploring the way it manifests in different educational and cultural contexts and by drawing together

several features of effective teaching outlined in different research evidence, so as to be able to better understand and support teachers' practice.

2.4.2. Effectiveness research and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

This combination of teachers' content knowledge with their teaching strategies and techniques reported in the Hay/McBer study (DfEE, 2000) has been a focal point in a related area of inquiry, namely in pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) research, a notion that since its inception by Shulman (1987) has deeply shaped the conceptualisation of effective teachers. Shulman negated the focus on generic teaching behaviours and argued that, for a long time, research on teaching and teacher education had undeservedly ignored questions dealing with the subject matter (i.e. the content of the lessons taught and teachers' knowledge and intellectual grasp of this content).

PCK advocated a fundamental shift in teachers' knowledge needs. In his explanation of the notion, Shulman identified it as "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (1987, p. 8).

PCK raised awareness to the necessary transformations of subject matter knowledge in the context of facilitating student understanding. Shulman proposed categories for teacher knowledge, including general pedagogical knowledge, which incorporates principles and strategies of classroom management and organisation that appear to transcend subject matter. Knowledge of learners and their characteristics as well as knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds were also included. Furthermore, subject matter knowledge was proposed as the average content knowledge a teacher should have combined with an ability to explain why particular propositions hold, why they are true, and how they relate to other propositions. Curriculum knowledge referred to teachers' knowledge of how the curriculum topics are arranged within and across grades as well as their knowledge of available curriculum materials supporting teaching and learning.

The last category was PCK itself, “that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding” (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). This kind of knowledge referred both to the teaching and the content being taught. The connections between teacher knowledge and teaching in different disciplinary fields entailed different forms of representations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations that teachers can use, as well as an understanding of which approaches either facilitate or hinder the teaching and learning processes of it.

From Shulman’s theories, PCK was the one that rose to prominence and influenced significantly researchers in a wide variety of subject areas who then structured their research upon this notion. In the more than two decades that have lapsed from the first presentation of Schulman’s ideas, a plethora of articles studying, mentioning, and integrating PCK into teacher education have been published, focusing on various disciplines, predominantly science education (Magnusson et al., 1999; Loughran et al., 2004), and mathematics (Marks, 1990, Stylianides and Ball, 2008; Hill et al., 2008), as well as social sciences (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987) and language and literacy education. (Grossman, 1990; Verloop and Beijaard, 1999; Phelps and Schilling, 2004; Phelps, 2009).

Although extensively used, PCK is differently perceived and the controversy surrounding its nature results in descriptions of PCK as the result of transformations of types of teacher knowledge, as a separate domain of teacher knowledge, which exists alongside other domains. Others see it as having a more dynamic nature and instead of representing a fixed or static body of knowledge, define it as an ability to combine knowledge of a specific discipline along with the teaching of that discipline’ (Mason, 1999, in Gess-Newsome and Lederman, 1999). In one of the attempts to clarify its nature Gess-Newsome (1999), reviewed the theory and research on PCK (with an emphasis on its implications on science education), and developed two models that can be also applied in different subject areas. In the *Integrative model* PCK is conceptualised as the overlap between three domains of teacher knowledge, namely subject matter, pedagogy, and context. On the contrary, in the *Transformative model*, PCK exists as a separate category of

knowledge, where subject matter, pedagogy, and context are transformed into PCK, which then constitutes “the only form of knowledge that impacts teaching practice” (1999, p. 10).

Ball et al. (2008) highlighted the differences in the breadth of what PCK includes, and stressed that broad claims about what teachers need to know are often more normative than empirical, with only a few studies having tested “whether there are, indeed, distinct bodies of identifiable content knowledge that matter for teaching” (2008, p. 389). Again, although their work focused on mathematics, their findings apply in other subject areas as well. Their research indicated that content knowledge is immensely important to teaching and its improvement and, more importantly, that PCK needs not to be taken as a given, but to be carefully mapped and measured, explicating how this knowledge is used in teaching effectively.

A common thread in the broader field of effectiveness studies is that educational effectiveness is crucially dependent on the provision of quality teaching by competent teachers. Teachers are described as the most valuable resource available to schools in Australia’s national inquiry into the teaching of literacy: “because teaching is a highly skilled professional activity, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of schooling depends, at the outset, on competent people choosing to work as teachers” (DEST, 2005, p. 25). Thus, since PCK encompasses different forms of teacher professional knowledge, it has been associated with teacher effectiveness and is considered a critical element in teaching performance (Rowan et al., 2001). It is, after all, no coincidence that teaching quality constitutes one of the major foci of the 2000 US No Child Left Behind policy (LaTrice-Hill, 2002), further emphasised in the NCTQ recommendations for its re-authorisation (NCTQ, 2011). Darling-Hammond characterises the effect of poor quality teaching on student outcomes as debilitating and cumulative, based on data available from national surveys and assessments in reading and mathematics administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. She perceives the effects of quality teaching on educational outcomes as greater than those that arise from students’ backgrounds and pronounces the reliance on curriculum standards and national assessment strategies without paying due attention to teacher quality to be insufficient to gain the improvements in student outcomes sought: “the quality of

teacher education and teaching appear to be more strongly related to student achievement than class sizes, overall spending levels or teacher salaries” (2000, p. 3).

2.4.3. Synthesising models of effective teaching

In addition to the description of effective teaching in relation to PCK, research has led in the development of a number of models of teacher effectiveness, others to serve as a guide for understanding the notion, and others moving beyond modelling effectiveness and aiming to contribute to the improvement of teaching practice (Scheerens et al. 2003). Some key dimensions of the effective teacher have been already mentioned above, and in this section further examples of various perspectives are presented and synthesised.

Based on the results of their study of all Year 5 pupils in 50 primary schools in Cyprus, Creemers and Kyriakides (2008) developed a dynamic model of educational effectiveness, which referred to multiple factors of effectiveness seen as operating at four levels from student to classroom, school and system level. More pertinent to this study are the eight (interrelated) classroom level factors they identified, based on data from high and low inference observations instruments, which were seen as influencing effective teaching and describing teachers’ instructional role. Specifically, they referred to orientation, structuring, questioning, teaching - modelling, applications, management of time, the teacher’s role in making the classroom a learning environment and also classroom assessment. Their model was designed to describe and contribute to educational effectiveness in general, underscoring the interrelation of pupil achievement, teaching and learning situation factors, school level factors as well as the influence of the educational system. Nevertheless, in spite of the meticulous approach in outlining all factors they take into account, the approach seems to underestimate the disciplinary demands that specific subject matters impose, especially on primary teachers, and the particular strategies and techniques needed for the effective teaching of each subject, nowhere better manifested than in the very particular demands of teaching literacy in Grade 1.

Anderson (2004) proposed a conceptual framework intended to serve as a heuristic for understanding and improving teacher effectiveness. The framework consisted of four primary concepts: the curriculum, the classroom, teaching and learning (2004, p. 31). Thus, although more comprehensive frameworks including more detailed parameters could be developed (as in the previous example), he believed that when teacher effectiveness is targeted, it is these four concepts that need to be taken into account. In defining effective teachers, Anderson focused on their ability to achieve goals, without any rigid adherence to any preconceptions, maintaining flexibility, reflection and eclecticism: “teachers who are consistently effective are those who are able to adapt their knowledge and skills to the demands inherent in various situations so as to best achieve their goals. Doing whatever is necessary in order to achieve these goals, rather than doing certain things in certain ways or using certain methods or techniques, is a hallmark of an effective teacher” (Anderson, 2004, p. 24). Anderson’s framework provided useful information on teacher effectiveness, as it was a result of his synthesis of recently available research results and his long professional expertise; still, the evidence base is not directly accessible. Nonetheless, the insight provided by this publication of the International Institute for Educational Planning has been widely used by the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) as well as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for developing world indicators. Its primary value therefore, seems to be more related to a more general understanding of the notion of teacher effectiveness for policy makers and of the ways in which it can be increased, rather than providing a framework for guiding teachers in their everyday work.

Aiming exactly at this audience Gipps et al. (2000) looked into the practices of twenty teachers in Grades 2 and 6, combining classroom observations with interviews and activities that probed these teachers' value commitments and philosophical positions. While more modest in scope than the two examples above, they specifically identified a number of effective teaching strategies for primary teachers, grouping them under the parameters of teacher communication, assessment and feedback practices. Teacher communication practices were seen to include informing children through explaining, instructing and modelling, reinforcing knowledge through repeating and reminding and supporting learning

through bringing different strands of knowledge together. Assessment was addressed through verbal and written interaction with children, i.e. questioning and testing, through observations and through considering the evidence to understand the progress and the learning of individual children. As far as feedback was concerned, they distinguished between evaluative and descriptive. They highlighted the conceptual progress that can be achieved, from a teacher giving evaluative feedback to students, to suggesting ways of improving their outcomes on different levels, and eventually students developing meta-cognitive and reflective skills.

There are numerous other examples of models and frameworks describing effective teachers, either more theory or more practice oriented. From the eight factors proposed by Creemers and Kyriakides (2008) which provide an overarching conceptual framework for generalist teaching, to Anderson's (2004) attempt to theoretically unpack the notions, though without much practical orientation, and to Gipps' et al. (2000) effort to do exactly this, having a clear assessment focus though, each perspective contributes to understanding what effective teaching entails.

Without adopting one of these models exclusively, this study draws upon the insights they can offer, especially when their points of convergence can be synthesised, as these may arise from research evidence or theory. Specifically, that first, teacher effectiveness has as a prerequisite teachers' strong knowledge base (regarding content as well as pedagogical strategies and techniques). Secondly, effective teaching entails applying these understandings and skills into carefully designed and enthusiastically delivered focused lessons, with explicitly outlined objectives, goals and learning opportunities. One of the great challenges is reconciling the tension between doing so while being able to reflect and demonstrate flexibility as needed. The latter has as a necessary condition the systematic monitoring and assessment of children's educational needs. Another parameter is the repertoire of skills needed to create and maintain a learning environment that is stimulating, highly engaging and work oriented. And clearly, an effective teacher is one who manages to communicate successfully with the

children, sets high expectations and challenges children, while providing positive reinforcement and supporting their efforts.

Beyond these general features however, for the purposes of this study, it is pertinent to look at some of the efforts made in outlining specifically the effective teaching of literacy.

2.5. The effective teaching of literacy

Within the literature on teacher effectiveness, literacy-specific information has not been as widely provided as in other areas. Traditionally, the focus has been on generic teaching rather than in literacy teaching specifically (Medwell et al., 1998). The relevant PCK studies in literacy have also been less extensive than in the areas of science and mathematics; in the latter areas content knowledge is seen as well-defined, whereas in the area of language and literacy, content knowledge is seen as relatively unclear (Phelps & Schilling, 2004) and is often considered to be more concerned with processes. The extent to which effective teaching is indeed generic and the extent to which it is subject specific, has also been explored in a number of studies cited in Schepige (2006). She extensively refers to the American National Science Teacher Association standards of teacher candidates' effectiveness claiming that they articulate the very specific knowledge and skills teachers of science should know and be able to do successfully and she notes the need to look at effectiveness within content areas, since "what a science teacher may deem effective in certain circumstances may not be effective for a history teacher"(2006, p.4).

Beyond the effectiveness literature, though, important insight into the effective teaching of literacy has been provided by a number of systematic reviews and reports, based on meta-analyses of previous research findings or on qualitative and quantitative data collected particularly to inform the recommendations they make. From pioneering studies in the field to more contemporary studies, reviews of the literature and meta-analyses of research findings, considerable progress has been made in identifying key teaching practices that underlie effective teaching of literacy. There is a growing recognition that the content knowledge necessary for

teaching language and literacy is not simply a matter of being able to read and write, but requires a detailed knowledge of texts, the structure of language, and reading process that goes beyond just decoding or applying grammar rules (Phelps, 2009).

In any attempt to define the nature of effective teaching in literacy, a central requirement is a definition of literacy (see relevant section above) as well as of the processes involved in being literate. Wray and Medwell (1999) report on a number of research attempts to analyse these processes towards the development of a model to guide instruction in literacy, highlighting the difficulties researchers and teachers have found in agreeing on what exactly should count as effective literate behaviour. Different definitions of literacy and different approaches to literacy result in different points of emphasis; in the first grade, following a whole language approach, for example, would yield different criteria against which to judge its success, compared to a phonics approach. What has emerged from research and practice is that previously contrasting positions are most effectively carried out in the context of other components and that effective literacy teaching is multi-faceted (e.g., Adams, 1990, 2001; Pressley, 2002, Wray et al., 2002).

A similar argument was made and supported in an overview of comparative studies of methods of reading instruction (Hurry, 2004), in which what to include in children's reading curriculum and how to teach it was addressed. One of the main conclusions was exactly that different elements of instruction need to be included in a curriculum and different teaching styles need to be employed, albeit that some elements and certain styles have a greater impact on learning. Still, Hurry called for the need for further studies into the area, focusing on teachers' practices: "if we are interested in the lessons of comparative studies being applied we may have to expand our repertoire of research methods to address more of the research questions which emerge from the experience of teaching 30 children at once" (Hurry, 2004, p. 572).

It is important to note that research has indicated that the nature of effective teaching of literacy changes according to the outcome measures used to evaluate it (Wray et al, 2002) and in the research examples that follow this is evident. Rather

than seeking to be exhaustive, the review of the findings of different research projects below, aims to exemplify some relevant perspectives in relation to the effective teaching of literacy. After all, it is descriptions, not prescriptions, of what effective teachers do that can be provided (Mazzoni and Gambrell, 2003) and the danger of oversimplifying a truly complex activity should not be underestimated.

In 1990, Grossmann investigated the notion of PCK in English, focusing on novice English secondary teachers and drawing upon semi - structured interviews and classroom observations. In her study, the aim was to investigate the relationship between professional knowledge and professional education and thus, she compared teachers who entered their teaching career without previously being professionally prepared with others who had attended a teacher education university programme with a specific focus on English education. Although Grossmann's study was located in secondary schools, it is pertinent to this study, as it associated teachers' practices with the underpinnings of these practices using similar data collection tools. More importantly, the whole class didactic approach described is reminiscent of the prominent one followed in Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus.

From past research on PCK, Grossman identified four interacting sources, which provide an opportunity for the development of knowledge about teaching English: apprenticeship of observation; subject matter knowledge; teacher education; and classroom experience (1990, p. 16). She claimed that student teachers bring past experiences and memories of the English classes they attended as primary and secondary school students or as undergraduates, as well as their knowledge of language, literacy and writing. While learning how to teach, they need to reconceptualise their subject matter knowledge, combining their background and understandings with the goals and purposes, the curricular requirements and the strategies and techniques they will need to employ to effectively teach English, integrating theory with practice, within a specific context.

Besides classroom observations and interviews of the six participating teachers, the study also included observations and interviews of the professor and supervisors of one of the university courses of the teacher education programme

that three of the teachers attended. The findings of the study indicated that all teachers 'were more similar than dissimilar' as far as their educational backgrounds and subject matter knowledge were concerned. The difference was located in their knowledge and beliefs about the purposes of teaching English, the curriculum and their pupils. Grossman characteristically noted that "studying literature in college seminars and teaching English in high school classrooms is clearly not an isomorphic activity" (Grossman, 1990, p. 143) and that since the necessary transition to pedagogical thinking is not automatic, the purposes and strategies of teaching particular subjects in school, as well as particular knowledge about how students learn specific content, need to be explicitly taught in teacher preparation programmes along with disciplinary knowledge.

While English teaching is clearly very different from teaching the early stages of literacy, many of the points made about the underpinnings of teachers' practices are pertinent to this study as well. The analysis of the data of Grossman's study revealed that subject knowledge, although important, does not suffice. Instead, her results corroborated that teachers need a type of knowledge unique to teaching, Shulman's notion of pedagogical content knowledge, which cannot be developed just by taking content courses in a certain domain or by simply building on one's teaching experience. Thus, according to Grossman (1990), for the effective teaching of English a pedagogical content knowledge basis needs to include the curricular knowledge of English and knowledge about instructional strategies and assessment, as well as students' understandings of English. These are influencing and simultaneously influenced by subject matter knowledge, which includes knowledge of the forms and functions of English as a language, pedagogical knowledge, which includes general knowledge of learning, learners, instructional principles and educational aims and of classroom management, as well as knowledge about contexts (the students, school, community and district environment).

Aiming at identifying the key factors in what effective primary school teachers knew, understood and did which enabled them teach literacy effectively, Medwell et al. (1998) compared the practices, beliefs and knowledge of two groups of teachers. One was identified as effective at teaching literacy and one not so, based on the recommendations of advisory staff, as well as evidence of above average

learning gains in reading for the children in the classes of these teachers. Although recognising that progress on standardised reading tests is not a perfect means of determining children's literacy progress (Wray et al., 2002) they considered it as adding an objective measure of teaching effectiveness.

The participating teachers were observed twice. In the first observation Medwell et al. (1998) focused on certain aspects of the lesson, specifically the nature of the task(s) set and their context; teacher's differentiation of literacy activities for children with differing needs; teacher's ability to generate motivation and enthusiasm in children and the children's level of engagement with the task set; teacher's monitoring/assessment of children's progress in literacy in the lesson; the environment for literacy provided in the classroom, including kinds of texts used or produced in the lesson; ways in which the teacher demonstrated literate behaviour; the kinds of responses the teacher made to children's reading/writing; the kinds of questions the teacher asked the children; the ways the teacher drew children's attention to the codes of literacy; the ways in which the teacher encouraged independence in the children's use of literacy, and the use of other adults working in the classroom to support literacy work as well as evidence of home-school links.

The second observation focused on language and literacy issues more specifically and data was collected on a number of issues, including the literacy content of the lesson and its differentiation, the representation of content and the use of linguistic terminology and children's response to the content of the lesson. Teachers were interviewed twice and during the second interview, a 'quiz' was administered to test their knowledge about aspects of literacy (for example, their ability to identify parts of speech, their comments on examples of children's reading and writing assessments, their knowledge of children's books authors, etc.). Even though a lack of explicit, abstract knowledge of linguistic concepts was documented, the researchers found that effective teachers use such knowledge implicitly in their teaching, and appear to know and understand this knowledge in the form in which they teach it to the children.

The findings further revealed that effective teachers of literacy know the curricular requirements, based on which they are able to describe what they do. They teach

language features, contextualising them and presenting them functionally and meaningfully to children. Effective teachers are able to generate explanations as to why children read or write as they do and have a firm command of subject knowledge relating to literacy processes. Therefore, they develop coherent and consistent belief systems about the teaching of literacy, translating their beliefs about purpose and meaning into practice, and allowing them to guide their selection of teaching materials and approaches. Teaching literacy is placed into a wider context so that children understand how specific aspects of reading and writing contribute to communication and aspects of reading and writing are taught in systematic and structured ways, making explicit connections between the text, sentence and word levels of language study. Thus, teaching literacy aims at its core to foster active learning.

The Medwell et al. (1998) research project was pioneering, since it focused not only on features of the teaching of literacy but on the characteristics of the teachers who perform this teaching well, making a significant contribution to understandings of effective teaching of literacy in the primary school. The current study aims to add to these understandings by focusing in particular on Grade 1 in Cyprus.

In a similar study in a different context, Pressley et al. (2001) observed Grade 1 classrooms in the USA. Again, local school personnel and administrators had identified the participating teachers as outstanding or as typical, that is being representative of the first-grade teachers generally in the particular area. The data were again collected through classroom observations and teacher interviews. Teachers were observed repeatedly in order to document their teaching and to observe the reading and writing abilities of their pupils. The observations' focal points were teaching processes, types of materials used, and student reading and writing performances and outcomes, paying special attention to what teachers and children said in the classroom. The interview questions were informed by what the researchers believed to be gaps in their understanding based on the observations. Therefore, interviews in each site used different prompts.

For the analysis of the data a grounded theory approach was used with categories emerging from the data and not a pre-defined list. The initial data summaries were used as a guide for following observations, and as the observations proceeded, fewer new conclusions emerged during their analyses. The cycle of analysed observations and interviews generated a set of conclusions about the teaching and literacy achievement in the classrooms studied, and when the participating teachers were asked to review them, Pressley et al. (2001) report only few disagreements noted and these over relatively minor issues. Then, from the initial sample, based on initial observations and children's literacy outcomes, researchers selected a most effective teacher and a least effective teacher for each site and focused on pupil performances, looking specifically at the children's engagement in literacy, what they were reading, and the quality of their writing.

In the process of describing the most effective teachers' instruction, the researchers examined the daily schedule of the class; the nature of reading and writing instruction and the types of reading and writing that occurred; how skills development was addressed; the extent and nature of opportunistic teaching; the extent and nature of cross-curricular connections; and the methods and effectiveness of classroom management. The analysis of these data "found massive instructional differences" (Pressley, 2002) between effective and less effective teachers and resulted in a list of characteristics that differentiate effective literacy classrooms. These were high academic engagement and competence; excellent classroom management; positive, reinforcing, co-operative environment; explicit teaching of skills; literature emphasis; much reading and writing; match of accelerating demands to student competence, with a great deal of scaffolding; encouragement of self-regulation and strong connections across the curriculum (Pressley et al., 2001, p. 11). These findings replicated those of the smaller Wharton-McDonald et al. (1998) study into reading instruction in nine New York classrooms, in terms of differences in very effective versus less effective Grade 1 teachers.

The Pressley et al. (2001) study documented and corroborated the multi-faceted and complex character of effective literacy teaching, that involves teaching strategies and skills, providing often and varied reading and writing opportunities,

motivating, challenging and scaffolding children's learning in a positive environment: "there is no single magic bullet that develops effective literacy, but rather that learning strategies and skills, meta-cognition, content knowledge, and motivation work in interaction" (Pressley et al., 2001, p. 19).

In addition, Cowen (2003) reviewed six influential studies conducted in the US with international impact in the field of reading instruction, while research in the teaching practices that underlie effective literacy studies has been conducted in the Australian context as well (Center, 2005; Louden et al., 2005). A common finding from this research is that children in the early years of schooling must master foundational and essential skills for the development of competence in reading, writing and spelling, through systematic, explicit, and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies.

However, findings from the same studies demonstrated that when an integrated approach is adopted in which teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to combine the essential elements of explicit phonics instruction and meaning-based approaches the outcomes for pupils are likely to be most positive. In a research study building on this premise, Camilli et al. (2003) retracted the methodological steps and performed a meta-analysis of the National Reading Panel (2000) data, aiming to verify whether an independent team of researchers would arrive at conclusions consistent with those in the NRP report. While acknowledging as a limitation the fact that they did not examine how the 38 original studies of the NRP were chosen, they devised alternative plans for extracting and analysing data from 40 studies (37 of the original plus another three). Based on these analyses, they drew conclusions regarding the efficacy of phonics instruction and challenged the over-emphasis on systematic phonics alone. They thus reported that effective literacy in the early years depends on a combination of phonics and strategy instruction as well as whole-language reading activities, which are print-rich and meaning-based so as to create a balanced reading programme.

Insight provided by different research projects, cited above, on different aspects of effective teaching of literacy have added to the existing research in the effort to

determine which methods, instructional strategies and approaches are most effective for the successful development of literacy. The scope and quality of the evidence provided can arguably vary, as distinct research projects employ different methodologies and have more restricted aims than to comprehensively provide both theoretically and practically useful answers regarding the effective teaching of literacy. Nonetheless, from broader understandings of effectiveness to more language and literacy specific information, a picture begins to emerge regarding current ideas regarding the effective teaching of literacy.

Still, it is important to look at further information from the literature, theoretical and evidence-based, that seem to have had a significant impact on shaping the teaching of literacy, by specifically focusing on spoken language, reading and writing. These three fundamental axes serve merely a procedural purpose, as learning in classrooms does not occur in distinctively separated strands. In fact, it is clearly stressed in the literature that reading and writing are “twin processes”, while the “skills of reading and writing can only develop from a secure foundation and competence in oracy” (Riley, 2006, p. 125). Other core components in language proficiency are not ignored, i.e. vocabulary development, which provides much of the basis for how learners speak, listen, read and write (NRP, 2000), however they are not separately addressed.

2.5.1. Teaching spoken language

In discussing the teaching of spoken language, a note on definitions is first needed, as different terms are used to account for oral communication in classrooms, including ‘oral speech’ or ‘oral language’, ‘spoken language’, ‘oracy’, ‘talk’, or the more commonly curriculum-occurring ‘speaking and listening’, etc. The terms ‘speaking and listening’ have been used in the various versions of the English National Curriculum (i.e. DfEE, 1998). Also, they have been traditionally used in Greek curricula followed in Cyprus and implemented at the time of data collection; with the current curriculum reform, however, the terms have been replaced, and the Cypriot curriculum features the notions of “understanding and producing oral texts” (MEC, 2010), although empirical or theoretical justifications for this choice are not given. The terms ‘speaking and listening’ are also used in the Rose review in the UK, it is stated, though, that some respondents preferred the term ‘oracy’ to

'speaking and listening skills', arguing that this better defines the engagement in dialogue intended to advance children's thinking across the curriculum. (Rose, 2006, p. 56).

'Oracy' is not a newly coined term; almost fifty years have lapsed since Wilkinson (1965) first suggested it when he was developing a model to describe the production and reception of 'verbalisation of experience', the three words he would choose to describe the essential process of teaching English. Noting the lack of a term to describe the central concepts of listening and speaking he offered oracy in order to be cognate with literacy. Alexander (2012) notes that although there are those who regard the term 'oracy' as an unappealing neologism, it is a term that, unlike the devalued by casual use 'speaking and listening' or 'communication skills', can safeguard attention of children's oral development.

Riley (2007) discusses the importance of spoken language development, noting that "early years practitioners and primary teachers need to be aware of the different dimensions of function and use of oral language so that they are able to assess the level of a child's growing control over it" (2007, p. 67). She refers to the renowned 'Bristol Study' (Wells, 1987, in Riley, 2007), which whilst dated, provides rich information regarding the factors that encourage the development of spoken language, focusing on the fact that children learn best through meaningful conversations. This was built upon with the introduction of the 'sustained shared thinking' notion (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), referring to instances where a child and adult contribute in a one-to-one conversation, in which the child leads the construction of new knowledge whilst also developing her spoken language (Riley, 2007).

The National Oracy Project of 1987-1992 was also one of the best-known initiatives to promote and enhance the role of speech in the learning process. The somewhat neglected and overlooked aspect of spoken language was elevated into a priority, urging teachers to actively create a variety of oral activities and encourage children to develop awareness of the language appropriate to different contexts.

A number of researchers have focused on 'talk' and the different types occurring in classrooms, following Barnes' observational studies of classrooms in the 1960's (i.e. Cazden, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Mercer and Littleton, 2007; Alexander, 2009; Resnick et al., 2010). Performing different analyses of prevailing patterns of classroom talk a number of alternative patterns appearing to be more effective have also been suggested, such as reciprocal talk, accountable talk, inter-thinking and dialogic teaching. Further to the research interest into oracy, in the past decade a series of documents have appeared in the UK context (i.e. DfES/QCA 2003, QCA 2003, 2004), re-vitalising interest in spoken language in classrooms and addressing issues of developing children's learning and thinking through talk as well as supporting language development.

In reviewing research on teacher effectiveness Reynolds (1998) interlinked oracy and effectiveness, suggesting that effective teachers of literacy are interactive and provide time and space for dialogue. This was corroborated in a number of other studies (Dombey, 2003; Mercer and Littleton, 2007) which highlighted the importance of providing children with the opportunity to talk, albeit the need to be supported in order to do so is vital: "young children of five and six are capable of participating in productive discussion in a whole class setting and that when they are helped to do this they may choose to operate at a high level of cognitive challenge" (Dombey, 2003, p. 56).

Still, the need for a greater emphasis on oracy in the classroom is identified often. The Rose Review (DfES, 2006), recognises speaking and listening as central to children's development at an intellectual, social and emotional level, underpinning reading and writing, but addresses the lack of attention schools reportedly pay to these two components of the Primary Literacy Strategy: "far more attention needs to be given, right from the start, to promoting speaking and listening skills, to make sure that children build a good stock of words, learn to listen attentively and speak clearly and confidently" (DfES, 2006, p. 3). Furthermore, other curriculum reviews (i.e. Alexander, 2009) have highlighted the need for a greater emphasis on oracy in the classroom. Regardless of the term chosen, there seems to be in the past years a particular re-awakened interest in oracy, with specific research projects and resources developed to support language skills, such as 'Story Talk' (Riley et al.,

2004) and 'Targeting Talk' (see Jones, 2007). These projects corroborate research findings which indicate the importance of providing children with the opportunity to learn through conversations (see above the REPEY and the EPPE research, cited in Riley, 2006), in meaningful contexts which enable them to pose questions and hypotheses, provide explanations and formulate ideas, and all this, in different classroom organisational types.

Medwell et al. (2012) also stress the importance of providing children with opportunities to listen attentively and become confident speakers in a wide range of different contexts as this will provide a "strong foundation for communication in the broadest sense" as well as for reading and writing development (2012, p. 25). They call for carefully organised and well planned oral work within literacy lessons, drawing on drama techniques (i.e. role playing) and cite traditional stories as an example of oral storytelling, all within the effort to provide enriching language experiences. They also argue for the need to develop strategies for responding to a wide range of texts, story making and talking about writing.

In order to lift some of the barriers to effective language use and development in classrooms, Riley (2007) suggests drawing from evidence from the Bristol and REPEY projects, which established that a more genuinely conversational approach on a one-to-one level and in small groups (with adult support) is far more beneficial, both for native speakers as well as children for whom English is an additional language. A strong foundation in spoken language supports the development of literacy. The close relation between oral language skills and literacy is also highlighted in the extensive research on the fundamental importance of phonological skills to learning to read, which is covered in the following section.

2.5.2. Teaching reading

As discussed above, the teaching of reading in the UK has been an issue highly contested itself, and as Riley notes it "has been subjected to the world of opinion and fashion" (1996, p. xi). The distinction between a focus on 'phonic' principles on the one hand and teaching decoding as a priority versus an emphasis on comprehension and on 'reading for meaning' on the other has led to what is

sometimes termed the 'reading wars'. Contrary to this polarity, researchers have argued for a 'balanced' approach that is less divisive and that recognises the strengths of each perspective (Marsh et al., 1981; Snow et al., 1988; Adams, 1990; Riley 1999; Beard and Oakhill, 2003). After all, "if any single approach to the teaching of reading had unequivocally demonstrated a superiority to other methods, the current controversy would long since be resolved" (Pumfrey and Elliot 1991, p.17, cited in Riley, 1999). As the path for the acquisition of literacy is not the same for each individual, adhering to a single approach or method would entail significant dangers for children not able to follow that particular route.

Furthermore, reading is a complex process and draws upon many skills that need to be developed at the same time. Adams (1990) compares reading to driving, in the sense that a reader, like a driver, needs to know where she is going, be motivated and strategic and must recognise letters, words and meanings quickly, effortlessly and automatically. Unlike drivers, though, readers also need to actually build the car, as they have to first develop the tools and means for identifying words, and also, pay attention to the car's maintenance, fuelling it constantly with print, fixing any emerging problems and so on. But even the comparison with driving your individually 'DIY' car is not enough to grasp the intricacy of reading acquisition. Adams writes that although cars are built by assembling the parts separately and fastening them together in contrast, the parts of the reading system are not discrete: "we cannot proceed by completing each individual sub-system and then fastening it to one another. Rather, the parts of the reading system must grow together. They must grow to one another and from one another" (Adams, 1990, p. 3-4). She thus proposed an interactive model of reading with four processors (the context, meaning, orthographic and phonological processor), which interactively impact upon the reading process.

The ultimate goal of reading is to access meaning from print and texts and therefore both lower – order processes and higher order processes need to be attended to constantly and simultaneously. This is particularly highlighted in the 2006 Rose review (DfES, 2006) where a 'simple view of reading', first put forward by Gough and Tunmer (1986) is proposed, in order to describe the reading process as comprising of both decoding and comprehending, with decoding referring to

applying phonic rules to quickly recognise words and comprehending referring to interpreting linguistic and discourse forms and structures. The complex activity of reading is thus represented in a relatively simple way, by highlighting its two essential components.

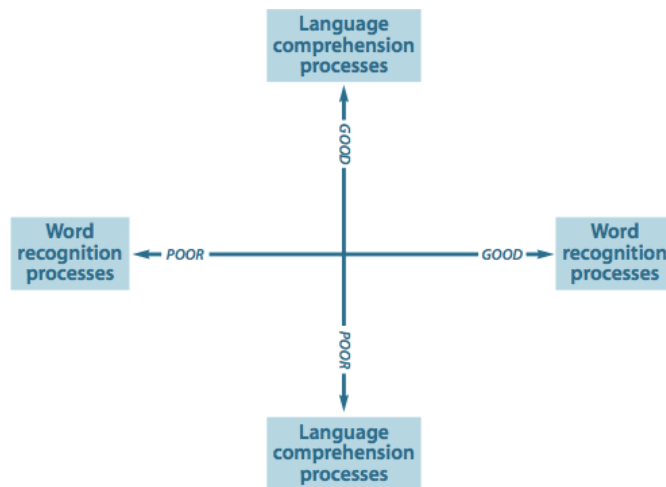


Figure 2.1: The simple view of reading (DfES, 2006, p.40)

While the simple view of reading model provides an explicit and comprehensive framework in order not only to understand reading as a process, but also to teach reading as a skill, there are significant related issues that also need to be considered, for example the need to teach explicit reading strategies. Parker and Hurry (2007) focused on teachers' understandings of such strategies and particularly on the various ways in which they approached the teaching of text comprehension. Their findings indicate that oral questioning seems to be the prevalent strategy for teaching reading comprehension and although teachers demonstrate all the strategies of highly skilled readers, they seem to have an implicit knowledge that does not translate into daily practice. Thus, they point out that additional to the discussions about phonics, comprehension and explicit interactive strategies for reading comprehension need to be attended to: "it is possible that the literacy agenda has been dominated by the important and plentiful evidence of the role of phonics. Other dimensions of literacy development, including comprehension, have received less attention both from researchers and from policy-makers" (Parker and Hurry, 2007, p. 313). Their work also exemplifies the close interrelationship of the teaching of reading particularly with spoken language, both of which are interconnected with the teaching of writing.

While for spoken language and writing such work is far more limited, Fisher et al. (2010) targeted exactly this gap in research, investigating the ways in which talk supports writing, which is briefly reviewed in the following section. Interesting insight has been offered though by a number of reports that have attempted to investigate different approaches and their effectiveness in teaching reading. While arguments can be made against looking into this kind of reports that can often serve or even push political agendas and policy reforms, they undoubtedly address areas that teachers do have to deal with in their daily practice. They thus overview evidence of many research projects and even if the choice they make could be questioned, they nonetheless describe different dimensions which is useful to consider when looking into effective teaching, especially when convergence is noted. In what follows some of the recommendations made in three reports are presented, namely in the National Reading Panel (NRP), 2000; the Rose review (2006); the Ofsted report on how the best schools succeed in teaching children to read by six (OFSTED, 2010), as well as the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (Gersten et al., 2007; Shanahan, 2010) practice guides. It is important to note that in the case of NRP recommendations were based exclusively on meta-analyses. Meta-analyses are useful in that they examine and combine research findings from different studies in order to shed light to controversial issues, still, the quality of the way they are designed can often determine the validity of their results. Borenstein et al. (2009) review and answer to a number of criticisms on meta-analysis reaching a similar conclusion. The IES practice guides are similar to meta-analyses, but also add practical advice based on their conclusions. The position taken in this study is that notwithstanding the possible dangers of adopting recommendations made by reports (based on meta-analyses or field data too), it impossible to ignore their insight (particularly when issued by respectable expert bodies), as it seems that (with the exception of PCK) there are gaps in the existing theory and knowledge seems less secure around the effective teaching of reading than in the more well theorised areas of reading (and writing) skills acquisition.

In 2000 the NRP was instructed by the US congress to review the scientific literature and provide recommendations, based on evidence, regarding the most effective ways to teach children to read. Approximately 100,000 studies, published since 1966 (along with some earlier work), were included in a pool from which

some were selected for meta – analysis. The NRP overviewed major research findings in five areas, namely alphabets (phonemic awareness instruction and phonics instruction), fluency, comprehension (including vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction, and teacher preparation and comprehension strategies instruction), teacher education and reading instruction, and finally, computer technology and reading instruction.

The NRP presented a comparison of systematic phonics instruction to unsystematic or no phonics instruction on learning to read, supporting that systematic phonics instruction proved to be universally effective and helped children to learn to read significantly better than all forms of control group instruction, including whole-language. It was suggested that systematic phonics instruction should be implemented as part of literacy programmes to teach beginning reading, as well as to prevent and remediate reading difficulties (NRP, 2000). For the development of fluency the NRP suggested repeated readings in combination with teacher feedback and encouragement, as well as work on grapheme-phoneme correspondences, vocabulary knowledge and punctuation. As far as text comprehension is concerned, the NRP stressed the interrelation of such higher order thinking skills with the explicit teaching of decoding skills and vocabulary. The NRP also linked quality teacher professional development to children's literacy achievements.

In the U.K. context, Jim Rose produced also an influential report, drawing from research and inspection findings, practitioners and policy makers consultations, as well as in situ visits. The Rose review (2006) commented upon the best practice that should be expected in the teaching of early reading and synthetic phonics, the impact of these practices on the development of national frameworks and the best provision needed to be made for children with literacy difficulties in intervention programmes. The report also referred to the role of leadership and school management, teachers' subject knowledge and skills and it also tackled cost effectiveness issues.

The findings of the review argued strongly for the inclusion of a rigorous, programme of phonic work to be securely embedded within a broad and language-

rich curriculum (Rose, 2006, p. 16). Although systematic phonics instruction, similarly to the NRP report, are seen as an essential part of literacy teaching, it is underlined that there are other important aspects to consider: “it is very important to understand what the rest of the picture looks like and requires. For example, nurturing positive attitudes to literacy and the skills associated with them, across the curriculum, is crucially important as is developing spoken language, building vocabulary, grammar, comprehension and facility with ICT” (Rose, 2006, p. 16). Further more, the review highlighted the need to apply any chosen programme consistently and regularly and through multi – sensory activities.

Much smaller in scale but highly insightful was the Ofsted-published report on the practices of twelve of the best primary schools in England (OFSTED, 2010). The report concluded that the success of these schools lies in their determination that every child will learn to read, and to this end, they all employ a rigorous and sequential approach to developing speaking and listening, and teaching reading, writing and spelling through systematic phonics. It is stressed that notwithstanding differences in the children’s social and economic status, school location, ethnic backgrounds, home literacy experiences or special educational needs or disabilities, these schools have developed strategies to “make every minute of every lesson count”. Again, phonics instruction in a systematic, structured and explicit way should be an essential part of the work done, along with ample opportunities to read for both decoding and comprehension. Children also need to be provided with rich opportunities to talk and listen in a wide range of contexts. The report also referred to the importance of highly trained teachers able not only to identify the learning needs of children, but also to recognise and overcome the barriers that impede learning. An important issue raised in the children’s assessment is the need for close monitoring of their progress. As noted in the report, “the quality of formative assessment and the interaction that stems from it make an important contribution to learning” (2010, p. 4).

The IES published practice guides with recommendations based on the major research studies in the relevant field are also an important source of information. In order to safeguard their quality, the IES guides use a classification system for the quality and quantity of the evidence they use, published for each study in a

specific appendix, relying on the *What Works Clearing House (WWC) Evidence Standards*. The guides include practical suggestions about aspects of instruction on which research ‘has cast the sharpest light’. In Gersten et al. (2007) recommendations are made for the effective teaching of children in Years 6-11, who enter school using a language other than English; however, these are presented as relevant regardless of the language of reading instruction, the number of languages children may use or their level of proficiency in each of these.

One of the major recommendations is that all language learners benefit from intensive and interactive language instruction. The need to screen for reading problems and monitor progress is stressed, so that children in need of additional instructional support may be identified and closely monitored in their reading progress over time. Intensive small-group reading interventions are recommended, especially for children at risk for reading problems. These interventions need to include the five cores of reading named, i.e. phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In addition, regular peer-assisted learning opportunities are seen as beneficial.

The importance of providing extensive and varied ‘high-quality’ vocabulary instruction is also highlighted, teaching essential content words in depth and addressing the meanings of common words, phrases, and expressions that children may not know (Gersten et al., 2007). This is seen as of particular importance for non-native speakers, as many of the simpler words or conversational words are acquired at home without explicit teaching, but are never the less crucial for understanding texts and other academic content. Special emphasis is placed upon the need for explicit, direct instruction as the primary means of instructional delivery and for time provisions made for children to practise and extend in a systematic and structured way what they have learned.

More relevant to this study are the recommendations made in Shanahan et al. (2010). Reading comprehension is defined as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (2010, p. 5), a definition found in Snow (2002, p. 11), which is seen as consistent with other common or more widely used definitions also cited.

They highlight that instructional practices used in each year differ, a fundamental premise of the present study as well, therefore the five recommendations made need to be adapted to children of different ages or at different reading stages.

Firstly, teachers are advised to teach children a variety of comprehension strategies in order to help them to become independent, resourceful readers. These are not broad comprehension skills to be taught or simple instructional activities, but explicit ways of thinking and understanding texts. Strategies are in other words “intentional mental actions during reading that improve reading comprehension” and “deliberate efforts by a reader to better understand or remember what is being read” (Shanahan, et al. 2010, p. 11). Examples include predicting, activating prior knowledge, question posing, text visualisation, monitoring reading and clarifying any misconceptions along the way, and retelling, orally or in writing, the text they read. These may be used in combination or in isolation, but what is important is the gradual release of responsibility, from explicit teaching to demonstration to independence in applying a strategy over time. This echoes evidence presented by Parker and Hurry (2007) showing that when Key Stage 2 teachers combine modelling thinking aloud strategies with direct instruction in identification and use of target strategies, reading comprehension is enhanced.

Elements of textual and generic structure and organisation are suggested to be identified and analysed, as being able to understand how a text is organised can help children understand what they are reading and improve their ability to recall it and, later, successfully write it. Equal emphasis on narrative, more common in the early years of literacy education, and informational texts is required. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to discuss texts with children as a means for improving reading comprehension, via the exploration of ideas in the text they are reading. Teachers should guide discussions after a read-aloud session, shared reading, or pictures paired with a text for less developed readers, and explicitly model ways to think about the text that can later help children when they are reading independently. An appropriate text choice is highlighted, as teachers need to choose texts that specifically support the goals of teaching and that contribute to improving reading comprehension.

The final recommendation refers to ways in which teachers can motivate children to improve their efforts to comprehend text. Keeping children interested, engaged and motivated has been found to be an effective practice in helping them to develop good reading comprehension skills. Positive stances for reading should also be aimed at, and children should be encouraged to see themselves as successful readers. Teachers are also advised to encourage peer collaboration. It is suggested that in order to be successful, these five recommendations need to be implemented together within a rich educational context, specifically a comprehensive literacy curriculum. Teachers are urged to offer many opportunities to children to read and write, using suitable resources under close monitoring, which may lead to additional instruction and practice for some children based on the results of formal and informal assessments.

Thus, in threading together some of the basic components of effective teaching of reading, it is important to note that a combination of explicit phonics instruction, and decoding skills need to be combined with the teaching of reading comprehension strategies, in a positive environment which is rich in texts, with systematic monitoring. The latter enables the identification of children or groups of children in need of additional instructional support, as early intervention is crucial so as they do not fall further behind from other children not just in reading, but in all subjects they go through in school (Muijs and Reynolds, 2011, p. 252). Clay's Reading Recovery is such an early intervention programme and provides a structural plan for designing a systemic response that will work flexibly within any education context (Clay, 1993, p. 60). It combines direct phonics instruction while attending to the key roles of meaning and comprehension in the reading process (Clay, 2005, p. 101). Finally, attending to vocabulary development and fluency are also important parameters to be considered.

2.5.3. Teaching writing

Research on writing and writing itself has been approached from different perspectives, however it is an area that has gathered less attention than reading. (Myhill and Fisher, 2010). As Beard et al. (2009) noted, "the field of research in writing is relatively young, unlike the well-developed parallel fields in language acquisition or reading" (2009, p. 17). Nonetheless, writing development is

interlinked with spoken language and reading, and the teaching of writing does not occur in a vacuum or in disassociation with any other aspect of language. Fisher et al. (2010) highlighted this in their *Talk to Text* project, in which they explored exactly how talk supports writing and how 5-7 year old children use talk before, during and after writing. Collecting children's texts, interviews with children, teacher reflections and video recordings data from six classrooms, they investigated "how creating explicit opportunities for talk may enhance children's early attempts at writing, and to develop practical and successful ways of implementing this in the classroom"(2010, p.168). The project illuminated how an idea generating process, the 'write aloud' idea and reflective talk on children's writing can support children's writing ability and teachers' efforts, providing not only theoretical and practical information on writing development, but on classroom management issues for using talk to support writing.

There is, however, a need to look at writing on its own, in order to delineate the complex and composite activity Grade 1 children are asked to master by the end of their first year of schooling. A milestone of the research into writing was the Hayes and Flower (1980) model, based on data from observing the processes writers employ in composing texts. Using recordings of think-alouds as they wrote, their findings suggested that writers use a combination of cognitive processes, namely planning, translating, and reviewing, which are hierarchically organised and called upon as needed. Planning refers to the generation of ideas and setting goals, translating to the actual turning of ideas into written text and revising to the recreation of the text in order to improve the way ideas were expressed. Berninger and Swanson (1994) proposed modifications, arguing that this model does not account for individual differences and that the processes involved in skilled writing may not fully account for beginning and developing writers. They claimed that child writers have two component processes in the translation process, namely composition or text generation (occurring at different levels of language) and transcription (handwriting and spelling). Alamargot and Fayol (2009) argued that the Berninger and Swanson model is the most superior for the description of the development of writing formulation and planning components, although still there is a lack of attention to linguistic and grammatical aspects (2009, p. 28).

Riley (2006) drawing upon Hayes and Flower (1980) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) described a practical way to unpack the multi-dimensional skills of writing is, also, to distinguish between the transcriptional and compositional aspects. The transcriptional aspect of writing refers to the technical aspects, like the use of the alphabetic code which is spelling and the physical formation of the letters as in handwriting, while the compositional aspect of writing refers to the content and organisation of texts and the achievement of communicative goals set through the use of understanding grammar (understanding what a sentence is, etc.), language structures and generic conventions, etc. Punctuation straddles both the transcriptional and compositional, as it affects meaning. Although these aspects of writing are not, and should be not, approached discretely, it is important for teachers particularly in Grade 1 to grant them distinct and focused attention and, at times, teach them separately. And furthermore, as far as the compositional aspects of writing are concerned, teachers need to make the children aware of the importance of writing for different purposes, and ability to write in different genres, as well as providing opportunities for shared and guided writing to learn these differing and complex aspects.

Thus, writing research is informed by various cognitive models, leading to the development of process writing approaches, with the most eminent being the work of Donald Graves and colleagues, often labelled as the “writing workshop”, including modelling writing, independent writing, and sharing/publishing of writing. Furthermore, socio-cognitive perspectives, shift the emphasis to the emergent literacy perspective, as briefly addressed above, while socio-cultural perspectives attend to genre knowledge (Kamberelis, 1999). This views writing and literacy in general as a social practice that is embedded in power relations (Street, 1997) and associates writing with identity, viewing it, especially for young children, as an act of assuming a ‘social voice’ (Dyson, 2001). What is of vital importance, beyond the models proposed, is to look at research into the effective teaching of writing.

Parr and Limbrick (2010) identified practices of effective teachers of writing in a New Zealand study involving children in Years 4-8. Although the demands are very

different for first graders from older, more advanced writers, their findings still provide useful insight for the purposes of this study. A common characteristic of the six participating teachers was their definite ideas of what typifies the effective teaching of writing, focusing on the importance of feedback, formative assessment and a positive classroom environment. They had a clear sense of purpose and meaningfulness and attended to coherence of their lessons and the connectedness of learning activities and learning aims, being consistent and systematic. The researchers found ample evidence of whole class, group and individual sessions, something that indicates “that the teachers were cognisant that students learn differently” (2010, p. 588) and thus differentiation of teaching to meet children’s learning needs is a characteristic of effective teaching. What is of particular importance to this study is that they stressed the need for context specific studies of effective teaching practices, as these are not absolute and vary in different environments (Parr and Limbrick, 2010, p. 583).

In the IES practice guide for teaching primary school children to be effective writers (Graham et al., 2012) four recommendations are made. Evidence supported the need to use the writing process for a variety of purposes and to teach children to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing, while the need to provide daily writing time and the creation of an engaged community of writers were also identified as important parameters.

The daily provision of writing time, both for instruction and practice is seen as a critical aspect of literacy teaching and time should be dedicated to teaching a variety of writing strategies, techniques, and skills appropriate to the children’s needs. It is also suggested that writing tasks should be interlinked with reading and other content-area lessons. The recommendation supported by the strongest evidence is the need to teach the writing process and to demonstrate how writing is used for a variety of purposes. The components of the writing process outlined are planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revisiting, editing and publishing. Children should be explicitly taught related writing strategies and a gradual release of responsibility should be aimed at, so that children are able to apply a repertoire of strategies independently and flexibly. Teachers should, in addition,

teach the different purposes and functions of writing and how different genres are realized through specific features and meet different communicational needs.

Nevertheless, for Grade 1 children, it is the 'basic writing skills' that need to be addressed: "younger writers must typically devote considerable attention to acquiring and polishing these skills before they become proficient" (Graham et al., 2012, p.27). These are handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction skills. Thus, the third recommendation encourages teachers to begin with demonstrations of how to hold a pencil and form letters. As handwriting is a motor skill, much practice is recommended, though not only in isolation, but in sentences and authentic writing activities as well. In addition teachers should teach children to spell words correctly, leaving the linking of morphological spelling and writing for Grade 2 onwards. Sentences are seen as an important unit of analysis, and sentence construction, their meaning and syntax, as well as sentence mechanics, (i.e. punctuation and capitalisation) should be explicitly attended to. The report also includes fluent typing and word processing in its recommendations, suggesting, controversially, that children should be introduced to typing in 1st Grade.

Finally, a recommendation is made to establish a supportive environment in classrooms, in order to motivate children to write within a facilitative community of writers, one of which is the teacher herself. Choosing their own topics is a way to engage young writers, which should be provided with regular and structured opportunities to interact through giving and receiving feedback in smaller or larger groups. Also, children can be engaged through collaboration with their peers in jointly developing a single text.

In 2012 the Department for Education in the UK published a comprehensive paper (DfE, 2012), reporting on the statistics and local and international research evidence on writing, for children in primary and secondary schools. The report covered a broad spectrum of information regarding the gender gap in writing, attitudes and writing activities out of school, etc., which will be not considered as they fall outside the scope of this study. However, the report includes valuable information regarding writing in Key Stage 1 and effective teaching writing

practices. These echo many of the Graham et al. (2012) recommendations mentioned above, but furthermore synthesising them with evidence from other sources, and provides examples of how each of the recommended teaching practices can be applied.

Teaching of the writing process, writing for a variety of purposes, and setting specific goals are stressed, as well as the need for children to become fluent in handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing and word processing, which are more effectively tackled through multi-sensory approaches. The daily provision for time to write and creation of an engaged community of writers are also emphasised, while an added parameter is the focus on the contextualised teaching of grammar (although for more able writers). Special reference is also made to therapeutic teaching practices for struggling writers, through the use of explicit, interactive, scaffolded instruction in planning, composing and revising strategies. Interestingly, the need for structured conversations with parents is seen as an important aspect in raising pupils' achievement in English. The report draws from research to support the need for modifications and customising of all teaching practices in order to meet individual and whole class needs.

It is also important to note that the inter-relationship of writing with spoken language and reading is stressed. The report notes that effective teachers of writing make good use of oral work in order to improve writing and make links with the books children are reading. They also carefully monitor and use various assessments of the children's progress, providing feedback in order to meet their individual needs. Finally, a number of issues are noted where there is a lack of evidence, i.e. on specific interventions for supporting children's writing to help pupils as well as on effective strategies for teaching spelling.

2.5.4. Synthesising current understandings

In the table below follows a synopsis of the claims of the different studies and stances on the effective teaching of literacy mentioned above, which informs the theoretical framework of this study.

Table 2.1: Synthesis of current understandings

Framing factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong knowledge base (subject knowledge, content requirements and pedagogical strategies and techniques) • Clearly delineated and explained, coherent and consistent belief systems about the teaching of literacy • Critique of the materials and deliberate choice of how to use them
Lesson design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful planning • Clear objectives, goals and learning opportunities • Appropriate text choices to support the goals of teaching and contribute to improving reading comprehension based on criteria (multiplicity of genres, high quality, rich content, strong organisation, rich vocabulary and sentence structure, balance in word recognition and comprehension difficulty) • Variety of tasks within meaningful contexts
Lesson delivery and classroom environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulating, highly engaging and work oriented learning environment • Excellent classroom management • Enthusiasm, motivation, high expectations • Structure and flexibility • Reflective practice • Systematic monitoring, feedback, reinforcement and assessment • Communication, conversations and conferences with children • Whole class, group, individual and peer assisted learning opportunities • Differentiation for diversity of student population and changing literacy learning needs
Methods and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four corner stones of quality literacy teaching: explicit, systematic, balanced, integrated • Instructional balance with explicit teaching - combination of phonics and comprehension strategy instruction providing meaningful and contextualised learning opportunities • Multisensory learning with different forms of representations, examples, explanations, demonstrations • Whole class and intensive small-group reading or writing interventions, especially for children determined to be at risk • Combination of modelled, guided and independent teaching, whole class and intensive small-group reading or writing interventions, especially for children determined to be at risk • Instruction guided by a range of assessment procedures • Opportunities to develop spoken language and learn through conversations • Much reading and writing in a wide range of texts • Teach elements of grammatical, textual and generic structure and organisation placing emphasis on their function • Gradual encouragement of self regulation and independence in learning
Other Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of other adults working in the classroom to support literacy work • Home-school links and parental involvement • Consistency, continuity and cooperation of staff (teachers, head teachers, inspectors)

A common thread in research findings is that teachers are encouraged to draw upon different approaches to support different learning needs and abilities: “the effective teacher of literacy used an unashamedly eclectic collection of methods that represents a balance between direct teaching of skills and more holistic approaches” (Hall and Harding, 2003). This is highlighted in official policies as well “findings from research evidence suggests that all students learn best when teachers adopt an integrated, balanced approach to reading that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension in a context where children understand and embrace the value of reading and writing. Systematic phonics instruction is seen though as critical if children are to be taught to read successfully, whether or not they experience reading difficulties (DEST, 2005, p. 11).

What constitutes effective literacy practice has been expressed in different terms in numerous publications, which used different methodologies to collect and

analyse their data. The teaching of literacy may be at its core a cognitive, linguistic act interrelated with pedagogy, but it is important to acknowledge that the social and cultural context in which it is situated are very influential parameters. As the teaching of literacy has been influenced deeply by ideological perspectives, looking at evidence from effective teachers across the world can provide the antidote to unsubstantiated opinions or trends. While there are some universal common features, contextual factors, are extremely important and need to be taken into account, as it is often the case in educational research. A number of researchers have raised the issue of the inter-relationship of effective teaching and the context within it takes place (Hopkins and Reynolds, 2001; Campbell et al, 2003). It is thus particularly important to add to the understandings of effective teaching by exploring the way it manifests in different educational and cultural contexts. Thus, taking into account that effective practice is indeed not something absolute and that it varies with context, the following chapter provides an outline of the historical influences on the teaching of literacy in Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus.

Chapter 3

Teaching Greek in Cyprus

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the support for the development of children's spoken language, whilst attempting to document some of the differences between learning to read in English and Greek, which is relevant as most of the evidence from effectiveness research is based on learning to read in English. The curriculum and textbooks used are briefly presented, as well as an overview of approaches followed for the teaching of literacy in Grade 1 in Cyprus. Looking at the evolution of the way literacy has been taught in Cyprus, valuable information can be elicited about the teachers' practices as observed in the classrooms and as described in their interviews.

3.1. The Greek Language

As mentioned in the Introduction, Greek is the language taught in the Cypriot primary schools. Greek is a language with a long history of both an oral and written tradition. Browning (1983) provides a detailed description of the phonological, morphological, syntactical and vocabulary changes that have occurred throughout time, and it is important to briefly note here some of the most significant landmarks that have influenced Greek. It is also important to note that the Greek language in Cyprus, which dates back to the 13th century BC (Karageorghis, 1988), has been following the same processes in terms of the reforms taking place and the different decisions at a governmental level, albeit the Cypriot dialect has always co-existed with the standardised Greek variety.

From the golden era of Athens, which established Ancient Greek, in the years of Alexander the Great, Greek became the international language of its time, transitioning to the Alexandrian Common language. A significant change of this period was the introduction of diacritics. This polytonic system indicated the pronunciation of words, since the spoken language did not adhere to the distinctions made in Attic Greek. Gradually more changes occurred to the language

with Medieval or Byzantine Greek becoming the link between the ancient and modern forms of the language. Nevertheless, this development triggered a first wave of objections, with groups of purists reacting strongly against the way language was evolving and used. Christides (2004) noted that as early as the 1st century AD the movement of language purification, Atticism, initiated what was going to be dominating the history of the Greek language until the second half of the 20th century. This set the foundations of the Greek diglossic situation, with the contemporary spoken language being seen as a product of decay versus the pure, ancient clarity. Writing, in literature or in formal settings in government and education, remained influenced by this perception until the demotic Greek became the official language in education.

With the establishment of the Greek state, what was to be the official language became again a highly disputed issue, within broader ideological, social and political discussions. As scholars frowned upon the vernacular of the time, a compromising solution was adopted as the official language. 'Katharevousa', created as a midpoint between Ancient and Modern Greek, aimed at 'cleaning' the demotic language from any reference to foreign words, and adjusting the contemporary to ancient Greek forms. While the effort was to strengthen the national identity of Modern Greeks associating it with their glorious past, words that nobody had used before occurred and the endeavour was not embraced.

The new conflict among the supporters of the vernacular (demotic or demotiki) and the established official language (katharevousa) spanned a period of almost one and a half centuries with battles at ideological, political, educational and occasionally physical level (Diatsentos, 2008; Christides, 2004). Over time the publication of scientific and literary work in demotiki, educational movements and media attention by influential newspapers, resulted in its gradual empowerment and eventually domination. Although different governments opted for either katharevousa or demotiki to be the official language according to their ideological orientation, the final blow on katharevousa came from its affiliation with the Greek Junta. The fall of the Greek dictators and the constitutional inauguration of demotiki in 1976 as the official language of the Republic of Greece ended the language issue. In 1982 the polytonic system, used up to that point, was succeeded

by a monotonic; this has been the last major reform in the Greek language. Katharevousa and the polytonic system survive till this day only in the circles of the Greek Orthodox Church.

The above overview of the historical development of the Greek language has been provided in order to stress the fact that the language children are expected to learn how to read and write in Grade 1 reflects this long history and that its grammar and spelling are influenced by its evolution over time.

3.1.1. The dialects of Greek

Besides the changes occurring over the millennia of the language's existence, a vast differentiation exists across different varieties and dialects, defined both geographically and socially (Joseph, 2009). Standard Modern Greek (SMG) is the official language taught and it originates from the Athenian dialect that (in a historic recurrence) imposed itself upon other local dialects with the establishment of Athens as the capital of the Greek state. Particularly when it comes to the Cypriot dialect, Karyolemou (2000) provides a way of understanding the local sociolinguistic situation, referring to a bipolar axis, a dialect continuum, with SMG with some dialectical features at one end, and local varieties with marked local features at the other end; speakers move from one dimension to the other according to the occasion, the intention and their general linguistic ability.

There is a point on the middle of this continuum where most Greek speakers in Cyprus are located today, although Newton described it as common Cypriot, naming it General Cypriot (see Newton, 1972). The Greek Cypriot dialect has differences from SMG on the phonology, morphology and syntactic level as well as differences in the vocabulary. Although primarily used in informal domains, official reports do recognise that it is the dialect, not SMG, that children bring to school as their first language (MEC, 2004, p. 31). But although the dialect is used in everyday communication, research findings of attitudes to language studies indicate that SMG is more highly regarded than the dialect (see Papapavlou, 2001, 2004; Pavlou, 2004).

There are those who believe that the dialect should and will be eventually converged towards SMG, as it happened in other cases and then there are those who believe Cypriot Greek should become an official language for the Republic of Cyprus. Ideological and political arguments underlie these opinions. Whilst until recently, its place in education was rejected (Karyolemou, 2000), the recent curricular reform includes specific goals for comparing and contrasting the dialect to SMG and working with texts in both varieties. How this impacts on the teaching of reading and writing in Grade 1 is not specified and relevant research highlights the lack of formal guidelines for the teachers on how to tackle the issue of bidialectalism in the classroom (Pavlou and Papapavlou, 2004).

3.1.2. Characteristics, relevant research and implications

It is also useful to look at some of the characteristics of the language children are taught. The Greek alphabet has twenty-four letters. Like English, it is a morpho-phonetic script (Venezky, 1995). In the following table the letters in upper and lower case are presented, with their Greek name and the phoneme(s) to which they correspond.

Table 3.1: The Greek alphabet

Upper case	Lower case	Name	Name	Phoneme
A	Α	Άλφα	Alpha	Α
B	β	Βήτα	Veta	V
Γ	γ	Γάμμα	Gama	γ, j
Δ	δ	Δέλτα	thelta (as in this)	ð
E	ε	Έψιλον	Epsilon	e
Z	ζ	Ζήτα	Zeta	z
H	η	Ητα	Eta	i
Θ	θ	Θήτα	Theta (as in theatre)	θ
I	ι	Γιώτα	Yiota	i, j, ç
K	κ	Κάπα	Kappa	k, c
Λ	λ	Λάμδα	Lamtha	l, ...
M	μ	Μι	Mi	m
N	ν	Νι	Ni	n
Ξ	ξ	Ξι	Ksi	ks
O	ο	Όμικρον	Omicron	o
Π	π	Πι	Pi	p
P	ρ	Ρο	Ro	r
Σ	σ, ς	Σίγμα	Sigma	s
T	τ	Ταυ	Taf	t
Υ	υ	Υψιλον	Ipsilon	i
Φ	φ	Φι	Fi	f
X	χ	Χι	Chi	χ, ç
Ψ	ψ	Ψι	Psi	ps
Ω	ω	Ομέγα	Omega	o

As not all sounds of the language are or can be represented with a single letter of the alphabet, there are some vowels and vowel - consonant clusters. Despite this, Greek has a much more regular representation of phonology than English and words can be usually read using simple GPC rules (Nikolopoulos et al. 2006,

overviews differences in the pronunciation of vowels and consonants in the two languages). However, Greek is not entirely transparent and it is less regular in its sound – symbol mappings for spelling (Ellis et al., 2004). Spelling can thus not always be predicted, as Greek has a historical orthography, with words or morphemes remaining in SMG in their Ancient Greek form (see Porpodas, 1999, for a discussion of the ‘morphophonemic’ nature of SMG spelling). Aidinis and Nunes (2001) discuss the example of the phoneme /i/, which can be spelled in five different ways (as ι, η, υ, οι, ει). The many irregularities and variations in spelling reflect historical changes in the spoken language, conflicting views regarding the etymology or the prevailing educational practice.

Another characteristic of Greek that also differs from English is that it is a highly inflected language (Holton et al, 1997). Greek morphology is partly synthetic and partly fusional and it has different grammatical endings in verbs, nouns, adjectives, which mark person, singular and plural number, four cases (vocative, nominative, accusative and genitive) for nouns (which are either masculine, feminine or neuter) and adjectives, tense, mood, aspect endings for verbs, plus some categories are realized by other elements. Also the majority of Greek words are polysyllabic (most have an open CV or CCV structure), still there are fewer than half the syllable types of English (Ellis et al., 2004). Finally, the position of prosodic stress is marked for each written word, the only diacritic surviving, as mentioned above.

A number of research studies have attempted to investigate aspects of the structure of the Greek language and their educational implications. Aidinis and Nunes (2001), looked into the characteristics of Greek that may affect children’s performance in phonological tasks, and ultimately determine whether different types of phonological analysis (syllable and phoneme awareness) make significant and independent contributions to children’s learning of written Greek. Their research concluded that in Greek, as in other languages, syllable awareness precedes phoneme awareness, since the participating kindergarten children found syllable segmentation and manipulation much easier. Thus, they suggest that a successful reading programme in Greek schools should have as a starting point syllable tasks. Phoneme tasks should follow, using short words where the target segment is stressed, placed at the beginning of the word and is a consonant.

Gradually, children may more easily make a shift to tasks with an increased level of difficulty.

Nikolopoulos et al. (2006) investigated the role of phonological and grammatical skills in the development of reading and spelling abilities in Greek and found that, consistently with other relevant research, phoneme awareness is a robust predictor of variations in literacy skills in transparent orthographies, but it may play a bigger role in spelling than reading (2006, p.14). The researchers reported though that their findings surprisingly indicated that grammatical skills were not predictors of spelling.

Different levels of phonological segmentation may be of variable importance and value in different languages. Goswami et al. (1997) argued, for example, that focusing on onset/rime-level spelling sound parts does not give any advantage in the Greek reading process, while research has indicated that due to the structure of syllables in Greek, the combination of syllabic units is more important for the development of reading (Porpodas, 2001). As Aidinis and Nunes (2001) note “syllable awareness should explain more variance than phoneme awareness in reading and the latter should no longer remain significant when the first one has been controlled for; if both make significant and independent contributions, regression analyses should show that each contributes significantly to explaining variance in reading after the other has been controlled for” (2001, p. 147).

Porpodas (2006) summarised research into the relationship between phonological awareness and success in literacy acquisition in Greek, noting that learning to read is easier than learning to spell, syllabic awareness is initially easier than phonemic awareness and that children with satisfactory levels of phonological awareness achieve a better level of literacy development at the end of the first primary year (see also Papoulia-Tzelepi, 1997; Aidinis and Nunes 2001; Porpodas, 2001). Therefore, this type of research provides evidence on how different aspects of phonological awareness, inherent language structures and teaching methodologies and strategies need to be combined in order to provide children with the most effective literacy learning opportunities in order to become successful readers and writers.

3.2. Primary school curriculum and textbooks

Cyprus has followed similar, and in some periods identical, literacy curricula and textbooks to their equivalents in mainland Greece, from the end of the nineteenth century till this day. Most relevant Greek educational reforms have been followed in Cyprus as well, although currently Cyprus is implementing an educational reform and a new curriculum (MEC, 2010). It is important to note that the teachers participating in this study followed at the time of data collection the curriculum and textbooks provided by the Greek government.

3.2.1. The Greek curriculum

In 2003 the Greek Pedagogical Institute proclaimed a competition for the production of educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, grammars, dictionaries and software packages) based on the then newly introduced curriculum document, and these were distributed to all Greek and Cypriot Primary Schools in 2005. The *Cross – Thematic Curriculum Framework for Greek Language* (MERASC, 2003) set as a main aim of teaching the Greek language in primary school the development of children's abilities to communicate effectively in speech and writing, in order to participate confidently in school and public life. A set of content guiding principles provided the basis, while separate goals, thematic units and indicative activities were included for each pair of grades. Specifically, six content guiding principles are given for Greek; oral language (speaking and listening); written language (reading, handwriting and written production); literature; vocabulary; grammar, and information management.

For the first (and second) grade the main goal set for oral language is for children to be able to organise their oral language in a logical way, using correct, simple structures and basic vocabulary. Children are expected to correctly pronounce words and gradually practise taking turns, providing descriptions, expressing impressions and thoughts and perform language acts, while Storytelling is seen as a significant goal. Understanding written language in the first years of education focuses primarily on the acquisition of basic skills for decoding and comprehending texts. Thus, the relationship between oracy and literacy and the interrelationship of spoken language, reading and writing are seen as significant parts in the process towards understanding the function and the purposes of

literacy. Children are expected to read texts in order to locate information, distinguish generic and structural features as well as comment on the contents, spelling, syntax and vocabulary use. The curriculum provides a number of writing task examples, including copying, writing small texts or stories, and recounting events, and beyond grammar rules and vocabulary, the context and the audience the text refers to needs to be taken into account.

Literature is distinctively addressed, with the curriculum suggesting familiarisation with acclaimed texts of the Greek literary tradition and with books beyond the school textbooks. As far as vocabulary is concerned, the main goal is to consolidate previous vocabulary knowledge, enriching children's repertoire. Grammar at this stage aims at raising awareness of the basic elements of the structure and function of language and gradually understanding and using basic terminology. Finally, reference is made to information management as a skill to be developed across the curriculum, aiming at enabling children to locate, process and synthesise information.

3.2.2. The textbooks

3.2.2.1. Contents

At the time of data collection, Grade 1 used the official textbooks entitled 'Letters, Words, Stories' (Karantzola et al., 2006), comprised of a student's book, a workbook and a teacher's guide. The authors note that the main objective of these materials is the introduction of children to letters, as well as understanding and producing meanings from text and activities in oral or written language, which are seen as strongly inter-related. Children are to be given the opportunity from the earliest days to practise writing and, for the first time in the Greek context, the notions of genres and multimodality are introduced as parameters to be taken into account.

The students' book is organised in ten units, containing seventy texts. Contrary to the previous textbooks, there is one story throughout the book featuring the same group of characters. So the children follow the adventures of the main characters of the book, selected in order to fulfil specific goals, i.e. to negate, through their actions and attributes, stereotypical perceptions regarding gender, ethnicity,

different types of families, etc. The first unit differs from the following, as the aim is for children to get acquainted with the book's characters and attempt to analyse two and three-syllable words. For this unit the premises of the analytic-synthetic approach are to be followed, as conceived in the Greek context (see relevant section below on how this diverges from the use of the notion elsewhere). The following units of the book consist mostly of dialogues, texts that have been constructed in order to lend themselves for the introduction of a new letter or grammatical phenomenon. The fact that the texts are purposefully pre-constructed has been criticised in the local literature as highly problematic. The arguments made refer to the lack of authentic contexts of communication and the idealised way in which issues appear, but mostly to the inconsistencies in activities suggested and the proclaimed synthesis of elements from the different approaches (Aidinis and Grollios, 2007).

3.2.2.2. Approach put forward

The approach put forward in the books is explicitly described in the teacher's guide, which specifically suggests a combination of the "analytic – synthetic method", with elements of emergent literacy and of "whole language approach" (Karantzola et al., 2006, p. 12). Reading and writing are not seen as being restricted to decoding and encoding and emphasis is placed on text comprehension and production. In spite of the effort to incorporate research findings that were previously ignored in the Greek context, for example the notion of emergent literacy, objections have been raised as far as the applicability of some approaches. As the educational systems in both Greece and Cyprus have not an established official way of documenting children's knowledge at entry level nor from Grade to Grade, important information cannot easily be elicited by teachers. The adoption of a combination of approaches to teach reading and writing, is suggested, labelled as a 'constructivist approach'. This freedom allowed to teachers to combine different elements from theories that are in some points at odds with each other has often generated debates. It is seen a blessing for some and a curse for others, the latter being those who ask for a clear and definite framework, are less experienced or unsure of what exactly each of these approaches entails.

In the first unit of the book, a systematic effort is made to develop GPC and children are initially introduced to four vowels (α, ε, ι, ο) and five consonants (π, τ, μ, λ, ν). The selection is said to be based on their frequency in words, the fact that children may visually identify them and the possibilities they offer for word composition. A number of sight words are also included. As far as writing is concerned, only copying is suggested for this stage, while more letter formation, spelling and composition are later introduced.

A second phase follows, where each sub - unit introduces a new letter. Teachers are guided to discuss the book's pictures with the children, eliciting words that will be used for the teaching of the focal letter. Thereafter the text should be read in various playful ways, followed by activities for letter recognition and formation, as well as with using it within words. In a third and final stage of Grade 1 children are introduced to a number of genres (i.e. letters, lists, advertisements), aiming to develop an understanding of basic structural generic features and their purpose, and they also practise writing in different genres. Also, aspects of the structure of the language are to be attended to, looking at simple grammatical phenomena and their function.

3.2.2.3. Criticisms

As mentioned above, since the introduction of the books a number of objections have been raised regarding their content and the approaches they put forward. A recurrent theme has been the fact that having been centrally produced and distributed to a vast array of diverse learning communities, they can be irrelevant to the experiences of children in different educational areas, with different social and cultural schemata.

The textbooks have been criticised on a number of levels, which can be distinguished into procedural and substantive. For example, the process of their introduction in Greek and Cypriot schools was questioned, due to the absence of a pilot phase before their universal introduction and the lack of adequate training seminars to teachers. Objections were also raised about the lack of any empirical research findings supporting them. Aidinis and Grollios (2007) point out the lack of a systematic evaluation of the previous books, used since 1982, which left the

authors without specific evidence to build on in producing the new books. As mentioned above, a major criticism has been the distance between propositions made and the actual content and approaches put forward. Demetriadou and Konsouli (2009) discuss the series of inconsistencies that can be noticed among the curriculum, the methodological claims in the teacher's guide for a "modern language pedagogy" in the Grade 1 and the choice of texts and activities in the student's book and workbook. These discrepancies between proclamations and actions raise significant questions for the accountability of the formal state regarding the proposed methodological orientation for teaching reading and writing in Grade 1, a defining moment in children's literacy development (Riley, 1996).

3.3. Overview of approaches in Grade 1 in Cyprus

A number of different theories, methods and approaches of literacy instruction have had their momentum in different periods of time in Cypriot Grade 1 classrooms, evolving closely but not identically to the mainland Greece context. Both educational systems have been influenced by relevant international research, although often with considerable delay and with significant differences in the interpretation and application of concepts and methods. Most of these approaches have left their mark on their successors, even if they were condemned and officially abandoned. Traces of these can be found in teachers' practices till this day, even if considerable time and research has lapsed.

In Cyprus the dominant terms used to refer to teaching and learning literacy in Grade 1 have been *first reading* ("πρώτη ανάγνωση») and *first writing* ("πρώτη γραφή") as these have been used in the Greek literature: "the first reading stage during which the student learns the basic mechanism of reading, that is he/she learns, at least basically, to read" (Vougioukas, 1994, p. 75). Relative terms and underpinned by the same approach were the terms 'pre-reading stage' and 'pre-writing stage'. These stages were seen as contributing to the introduction of children to systematic literacy instruction, but not as reading and writing per se. They thus denoted a rather dismissive attitude to children's developing literacy knowledge at school entry. These terms pre-date the introduction of notions that the relevant international and local literature have proposed in order to describe

and analyse the complex process of literacy acquisition and development. Therefore, as the notion of literacy was introduced and established in the Greek context (as well as other relevant notions such as early literacy, home literacy, emergent and developing literacy), what was understood as 'first reading' and 'first writing' has been challenged. The terms have not been abandoned, but they have been re-negotiated in order to encompass the new understandings of literacy development from soon after birth onwards.

3.3.1. 'First reading and writing' during the 18th -19th century

Early information on the teaching of literacy in Cyprus documents that the 'alphabetic approach' was followed. Children were taught the letter names, which they recited in different orders and combinations; from beginning to end and backwards, and in pairs from the beginning and the end (α - ω , β - ψ , γ - χ , etc.). They then proceeded in blending and segmenting words. As teachers were primarily priests, the texts used were initially exclusively ecclesiastical or alphabet books containing prayers and psalms. These consisted of difficult to read and pronounce ancient Greek words, which did not really interest or motivate young learners: "thus first reading became a real torture both due to its unreasonable methodology as well as due to its inaccessible contents" (Vougioukas, 1994, p. 79). Writing did not occur until reading had been mastered, with the teacher writing a word on the board that the children needed to repeatedly copy (Filippou, 1930, p. 348).

The method was heavily criticised for focusing on letter names and not phonemes, which confused early readers, and was abandoned. Interestingly, however, research findings have indicated that there may be some value in teaching children letter names in those alphabetic languages where knowledge of a letter's name may help the processing of letter – phoneme relations in words (Cardoso – Martins et al., 2002). The argument made is that when children know the letter names, they may be able to detect them more easily in pronouncing some words, which in turn can facilitate the understanding of the sound-notation function that letters perform in the alphabetic code (Alves Martins and Silva, 2001).

3.3.2. 'First reading and writing' during the 19th – early 20th century

From memorising and reciting letter names, the focus shifted to the 'phonetic' or 'phono-mimic' approach. This was a phonics-oriented approach, and children were asked to locate and blend phonemes and graphemes in all possible combinations (acceptable and not) on syllable and then word level, leading to sentences. The two approaches differed in the emphasis the latter placed on associating the sounds of letters with emotional situations (i.e. /o!/, /a!/ to express admiration or surprise or /m/ as the sound of cows, etc.).

Syllables in this period were elevated as a major unit of analysis and 'syllabification' became a distinct stage within the process of learning how to read and write, which endures to this day. However, the overwhelming emphasis on syllables during reading instruction resulted in children being often unable to read fluently. Vougioukas (1994) noted that this was a consequence of the meticulous and rigid nature in which the approach was understood and implemented in the Greek and Cypriot education systems.

3.3.3. 'First reading and writing' in the 20th century

As a reaction to this, a turn towards the 'analytic – synthetic approach' was made, introduced to the Greek speaking world as an innovation (Patsis, 1937), combining blending skills (the 'synthetic' part) with insight from whole language approaches (namely the work of Decroly (1925, cited in Patsis, 1937), the 'analytic'). The starting point was a sentence, from which a focal word was picked, analysed in syllables, then in graphemes. The focal letter was located, and then blended into new syllables in sentences. The textbook 'The alphabet book with the sun' (Andreadis et al., 1919) was used, which was a landmark in the teaching of the Greek language, as it was the first written in SMG.

From this period onwards, early literacy instruction followed a different path in the Greek and the Cypriot educational systems. The most prevalent reason was the training Cypriot teachers received through commonwealth scholarships to U.K. universities (Myriantopoulos, 1946, p. 41). The knowledge and experiences gained were transplanted through reforms implemented on literacy teaching in Grade 1 in Cyprus. The first was the introduction of the 'sentence' approach

(Nikolaides, 1934). Pronouncing an existing confusion regarding the introduction of letters, and drawing from a number of international research findings of the time, the approach foregrounded the use of a sentence as a way into literacy. This would derive from a discussion or a picture description, analysed into words, one of which would be a sight word, also used as the basis for the analytic – synthetic method to be thereafter followed: "this combined approach is considered the most successful and most fruitful of all the methods that have been used until today or are currently in use for teaching first reading and first writing" (Nikolaides, 1934, p. 85).

The approach was, as well as many others through time, transferred from teaching English in its educational context into the teaching of Greek in Cyprus, and effectiveness claims were based on the educational authorities convictions rather locally collected data. The distinct processes of reading and writing instruction continued to be linked, so that children "are able to write what they read and read what they write" (Nikolaides, 1934, p. 175).

A second reform followed in 1950's, as the prevailing sentence approach manifestation was considered to be 'abstract, soul-less and mechanical' (Nikolaides, 1954, p. 9). Teachers were given the discretion to postpone phonics instruction and focus on comprehension and meaning aspects. Polyphony started to emerge, as different schools adopted different approaches, using materials produced within the school units in addition to reading books from mainland Greece and publications of various Cypriot teachers. In the following years the 'whole language approach' dominated early literacy teaching. The Cypriot take on 'whole language' was rooted in the U.K literature, although with discrepancies: "in Cyprus, where its education has traditional bonds with Great Britain, the whole language approach has prevailed, although not in its traditional form" (Vougioukas, 1994, p. 84). It shared the lack of explicit phonics instruction and the visual recognition instead of decoding of words; nonetheless, it essentially focused on sentences and not on meaning making of texts. Hadjilouca et al. (2003) report that this model of teaching reading was "particularly popular and it prevailed as a methodological strategy in Grade 1 for many years. (...). On a basis of a top – down model and a mistaken understanding of whole language, the teaching of reading

ended up in offering a group of unrelated to each other and de-contextualized sentences” (2003, p. 109).

3.3.4. 'First reading and writing' in more recent years

The multitude of approaches in co-existence was captured by Leontiou, who overviewed the main approaches that had been used in the Greek speaking world to that point and also proposed his own (1987, 1995). He argued that all methods and approaches have points that can be used or taken into account by the teachers in order to shape their own approach to teaching: “we believe in the principle that the young, educated teacher of today’s school leans on her own educational philosophy, chooses the best teaching approaches for each instance and organises them in order to fulfil the individual needs of her students” (Leontiou, 1987, p. 158). The following table presents the various prevailing approaches (Leontiou 1987, 1995).

Table 3.2: Prevailing approaches in the 1980's (Leontiou 1987, 1995, pp. 158-164)

Approach	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Alphabetic	Children are taught letter names. They then proceeded to blending and segmenting syllables and words	None mentioned	Children labour to learn the letter names which they cannot hear within the words
Phonetic – Phonomimic	Children are taught letter sounds (not names), presented not as a conventional set but as an expression of different actions or feelings or animal sounds; i.e. /a/ as the expression of joy, /z/ as the sound of the bees, etc.	Many and varied exercises that "contour the parts of the mouth cavity"	Children read letter sounds or small words without meaning and struggle with text comprehension
Analytic-Synthetic	Children are taught words from their environment or experiences. One is chosen as sight word, is put in a simple sentence and children collect gradually a number words that they use for to make sentences.	Pedagogically correct scheme (analysis of the whole/ isolation/ synthesis) that follows the official textbook approach (<i>'My language'</i>), acknowledges children's experiences and interests of the children, teaching writing simultaneously and sounds /letters are within words. Parents may be able to help.	No decoding as children actually read only the known word within a sentence, confusing similar words and needing a large repository of words to eventually read a paragraph with fluency and comprehension (the delay frustrates them)
Whole or analytic or Decroly method or ideo-visual (found in different terms)	Teachers are to start with the whole to move to the parts. Thus from a sentence to words, to syllables, to letters. Sentences (based on experiences) are written on the board as given on cards which are then cut in words, which are later cut in letters.	Children interests are foregrounded and the unit of analysis is meaningful, allowing children to read fluently. Spelling and writing are facilitated and individual differences can be catered for.	Children's memory gets overloaded with many words and/or sentences, which they are guessing, not decoding. Mostly it is the teachers who provide sentences and they get

	The new sentences and/or words are memorised. The words can then be put in new sentences.		overworked daily preparing cards to be cut.
Mixed	"Hundreds" of mixed approaches teachers draw upon, however the above are the most basic found exclusively used or in combination		

Although a number of advantages and disadvantages are presented for each approach, there were many ambiguities that were not addressed; i.e. how exactly would each teacher choose an approach, what exactly were the 'best teaching approaches' and based on which criteria, etc., more over, on which grounds were based the advantages and disadvantages of each approach, etc. The responsibility seems to be shifted to the practitioners, who are left without particular guidelines. Interestingly, the issue of parental involvement is raised for the first time, and they are assigned the responsibility to practise with their children at home.

A significant contribution was made to the study of Grade 1 literacy teaching from the research findings of a project aiming to delineate first reading in Cyprus (Leontiou, 1987). Noting that the educational system of Cyprus had been and still was in a crossroad of methodological trials, importing ideas from elsewhere he wrote "rich waves from Greece, the U.K and lately the U.S.A have left us sea-beaten. Occasionally they have dragged us very easily in superficial applications, leaving some negative remains on our education" (Leontiou, 1987, p. 164). This phenomenon is not only found in Cyprus, as there are often changes in the contents of curricula and the ways in which these are taught, however "language and literacy in the early years of education are no exception and are perhaps even more susceptible to these swings of the pendulum than other subjects" (Riley, 2006, p. 4).

The participating teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire and name the method they followed. From the twenty seven different answers provided, most prominent were the "per sentence", "whole" and "analytic - synthetic" methods, although the variety of the answers provided referencing non-existent terms, as well and the lack of more detailed definitions do raise significant questions as to what exactly each teacher meant and what exactly they did. Table 3.3 below

presents a summary of the varying definitions given to different approaches by the participating teachers.

Table 3.3: Methods followed in Cyprus in 1983 (based on Leontiou, 1987, p.165)

Per sentence	Whole language	Synthetic	Analytic-synthetic
Analytic synthetic per sentence	Mixed per sentence + phonic	Based on my experience	Whole, analytic-synthetic, phonic
Mixture of phonic synthetic and per sentence	Mixed	Whole analytic-synthetic	Combined (whole, per sentence, phonic)
Directed research - obstetrical	Sentence-word-letter	Per sentence, per word, analytic-synthetic	Whole, phonic
Method of word analysis and synthesis	Per sentence with phonic	Whole per sentence	Per sentence combined with per word and letter
Open method	Individualised	Mixture of whole and analytic-synthetic	Analytic-synthetic and interdisciplinary
See-observe-learn-read	Whole child centred	Whole in combination with others	

The findings indicated that teachers used a sentence that was supposed to be provided by the children, but more often was pre-decided by them. The sentence was separated into words. Words with common letters were collected and children were encouraged to locate them and colour them. Some teachers looked at the letter within the syllable as well and some not, others started with the vowels first, others with consonants. After approximately fourteen sentences the teachers proceeded with longer texts. Phonemic awareness tasks irrelevant to the sentence was seen as problematic and perceived as a differentiation method to motivate more advanced readers and intelligent students.

As the research documented, teachers seemed to know a variety of methods and approaches and felt free to compose them in any way and in any combination based on personal criteria. A recommendation was made to exchange this knowledge in relevant conferences. It was acknowledged that a specific direction was needed and clarification of several issues. The vagueness of the curriculum allowed total freedom to the teacher to base her teaching on a “well thought out and graduated plan according to the interests and needs of the children” (Leontiou, 1987, p. 167). Still objections were raised regarding the degree in which each teacher was indeed able to design and apply such a plan. Reference was also made to the lack of data on the effectiveness of the various methods of teaching first reading, since nothing has ever been evaluated. Interestingly, many of these issues

remain relevant almost thirty years later.

In responding to the above findings, Leontiou developed the 'child- centred' approach, which involved children choosing activities in different learning centres in the classroom, based on their interest. The teacher was to elicit from each child her personal sentence and write it in a notebook for the child to attempt to read and make a relevant drawing. A number of sentences were compiled and children would memorise them, thereafter following the same process described above. As Georgiou (2000) notes, "the 'child - centred' approach was an essentially whole language approach enriched with child-centred elements for the teaching of first reading. From that point onwards the whole language approach was established as the official policy of the Department of Primary Education, policy that stands until today" (2000, p. 16).

Although the approach took into account the children's personal interests, language experiences and varying learning rhythms, it was applied in classrooms, which at the time could have up to 34 children. Thus, one of the major criticisms against it was that a teacher was faced with a daunting workload and Theofilaktou criticised Leontiou's approach as "nothing more than a utopia" (2000). The most significant issue, however, was the lack of explicit phonics instruction. In fact, it was only to be allowed in 'extreme' circumstances: "for those children if the teacher is in doubt, it is not considered a sin to try and systematise getting them to know them (the letters)" (Leontiou, 1995, p. 194). Cypriot teachers at the time had therefore to reconcile conflicting official beliefs, having on the one side of the spectrum the aforementioned guideline and on the other the approach put forward in the then official textbook. Unlike the 'child- centred' approach, the version of 'analytic - synthetic' approach underpinning the 'My Language' books included explicit phonics instruction from the very beginning of the year. Thus, for the first two months teachers were asked to replace the book's material and produce their own reflecting the local policy. Interestingly, although many arguments were published for and against each of these approaches, none was based on evidence and no research was initiated in order to establish which method would be more effective in Cypriot schools.

Concrete evidence was provided by the data collected for the International

Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) report, with the poor results initiating a renewed interest in the way children were taught (Papanastasiou, 1998). Aiming at establishing a common official policy for teaching literacy in Grade 1, the Ministry of Education initiated an action plan involving the Ministry officials, the University of Cyprus, the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus and the teachers' syndicate, as well as groups of practitioners. During this time a number of in - service training sessions and applications in classrooms were organised. The result was the publication of a book in which the official position of the Ministry is presented, and a new approach is put forward for teachers to follow.

3.3.5. From 'first reading' and 'first writing' to literacy

The book entitled "Reading and Writing in the First Grade: Theory and practice" (Hadjilouca et al., 2003) presents the approach which was named 'Interscientific'. The adjective 'first' was abandoned and the notion of literacy was introduced in the Cypriot vocabularies of Grade 1 teachers. The considerable number of teachers who participated in the preparation of the materials published in the book, tried out in their classrooms the ideas developed by the writers. Two of the three writers were teachers (now inspectors) with extensive experience in Grade 1 and the third, a cognitive psychologist at the Psychology Department of the University of Cyprus.

The most significant contribution of the book to the educational context of Cyprus has been the unification of the literacy development of children from birth to formal schooling and beyond and the abandonment of the notions 'pre-reading' and 'pre-writing', as well as of the narrow understandings of 'first' reading and writing. In the introduction of the book as well as the glossary at its end, definitions were given for central notions (i.e. for literacy, emergent literacy, alphabetic code, etc.). Moreover, for the first time since the dominance of the whole language approach in Cyprus, teachers were specifically instructed to explicitly attend to phonological awareness development and GPC. As the writers stressed: "as part of the developing knowledge about reading, phonological awareness is the most substantial skill, mostly in alphabetic systems, in which the Greek one belongs" (2003, p. 36). The approach suggested a combination of bottom - up and top - down approaches, delineating conventional time stages for

teachers to follow. The book co-existed as the official position of the Ministry of Education and Culture with the Greek book that has been in use since 2005, being one of the main sources of information for teachers in Grade 1.

The above overview of the evolvement and the changes in the methodology of teaching children how to read and write in Cyprus leads to rather astonishing conclusions. It seems that the different models and approaches adopted through time were a kind of personal choice of different individuals finding themselves in an influential position, able to disseminate the knowledge they acquired usually by attending a course or conference abroad mainly in the UK or Greece. Thus, a series of policies and significant educational reforms were based on an individual's interpretation of a theory or an approach, seen to be beneficial for Cyprus as well. Furthermore, and even more surprisingly, the various re-conceptualisations of the teaching of literacy in Grade 1, have been based on these idiosyncratic arguments and rarely if ever on research findings. Thus, no evidence has ever supported the change from one direction to another and there is no data regarding the most effective or even preferred approach. All reforms followed a top – down path, that is from the centralised educational authorities to the practitioners, whose role has primarily been restricted in executing the almost whim – like directives from inspectors and the Ministry of Education.

This study aims therefore to contribute to this gap in the research literature and even to a change of this culture of choosing teaching methods. It is argued that teacher practices, and particularly, the practices of effective teachers in Grade 1 need to be explored and analysed as this will provide significant insight into the successful teaching of literacy in Grade 1. The review of the literature above, from broader issues of literacy, to the notion of teacher effectiveness and particularly effective teaching of literacy, and most importantly, the teaching of literacy in Grade 1 in Cyprus frame the main research questions of this study. Furthermore, it is argued that it is crucial not only to observe, describe and analyse teachers' practices, but also to attempt to understand their underpinning. The following chapter provides an overview of existing evidence on the issue.

Chapter 4

The underpinning of teachers' practices

Introduction

In this chapter, having moved from broader questions regarding literacy, literacy pedagogy and literacy effectiveness, to the teaching of literacy in Grade 1 in Cyprus, now an overview is provided on what the relevant literature reports teachers draw upon in order to teach. The chapter concludes with the research questions and aims of this study.

4.1. The importance of considering underpinnings

In addition to the different theories and research findings regarding the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1, it is important to consider what underpins teachers' practice. Insight into such information may be valuable in order to comprehensively understand teachers' effective practices, and also for teacher training and professional development. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) stressed almost three decades ago "we do not understand practice by beginning with theory, but by studying practitioners and classrooms as they are. The heart of teaching is action, performance and the penumbra of belief, attitude, feeling tone, sense of values, personality, and background experience of the teacher that surrounds and contributes to each lived moment of practice" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, cited in Wien, 1995, p. 10). Shulman (1986) also pointed out that this perspective is often overlooked: "in reading the literature of research on teaching, it is clear that central questions are unasked. (...) Where do teacher explanations come from? How do teachers decide what to teach, how to represent it, how to question students about it and how to deal with problems of misunderstanding?" (Shulman, 1986, p. 8). This chapter therefore, aims at briefly reviewing some of the existing knowledge regarding the key factors that seem to influence teachers in their planning, selection of resources and instructional decisions.

Research suggests that teachers in their everyday practice draw upon teaching practice beliefs, assumptions, values, knowledge and experience which seem to

exert a strong influence upon their theoretical and practical knowledge construction and development (Vieira Abrahão, 2006). According to Schön's (1983) description of 'reflective practitioners', teachers understand and organise their teaching using a repertoire of values, knowledge, theory and practice, which they develop with experience, which he refers to as "appreciative systems". Different researchers have looked into these "appreciative systems", in addition different definitions and labels can be found in the literature; Handal and Lauvas (1987) describe them as 'practical theories' whereas Connelly and Clandinin (1988) adhere the adjective and refer to 'personal practical theories'; Elbaz (1983) proposes the term 'practical knowledge'; Woods (1996) refers to the triptych of BAK, that is beliefs, assumptions and knowledge; Shulman's (1986, 1987) influential work enumerates the sources of the knowledge base of teaching as consisting of (a) "scholarship in the content disciplines," (b) "the materials and settings of the institutionalised educational process," (c) research on social and human functioning that affect how teachers work, and (d) "the wisdom of practice itself" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). It is the wisdom of practice that deserves increased attention in order to look at effective literacy teaching in classrooms.

Shulman (1986) referred to two kinds of practical knowledge. He identified propositional knowledge as the way in which teachers accumulate knowledge from practice in the form of maxims or practical roles. One such instructional maxim growing out of concentrated work in teaching inquiry is "Inquiry means getting kids to ask questions." Shulman's second form of knowledge derived from practice was case knowledge. Theoretical principles and maxims are communicated by specially selected cases. But how do experienced literacy teachers teach effectively in their classrooms and utilise values, maxims, and illuminating cases? Shulman observed, "One of the frustrations of teaching as an occupation and profession is its extensive individual and collective amnesia, the consistency with which the best creations of its practitioners are lost to both the contemporary and future peers" (1987, p. 11).

4.2. Knowledge, beliefs and sources of inspiration

Grossmann et al. (2009) in discussing the complexities of teaching practices, report that the 1980's saw an effort to re-conceptualise the deceptively simple teaching

profession by focusing on the knowledge demands of teaching. The argument made was about the many kinds of teacher knowledge, content/ subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986), as discussed in the first chapter. Hiebert et al (2002) also argued that teachers base their practice on a body of knowledge, nevertheless, they claimed that translating traditional research knowledge into forms that teachers can use to improve their practice has been inherently difficult. They therefore suggested that teachers develop practitioner knowledge, a type of knowledge that grows in response to specific problems of practice (2002, p. 6) and it is organised according to the particular problem it is intended to address.

In parallel to the earlier studies on teachers' knowledge, a significant body of literature suggested that besides the more formal knowledge systems teachers may have, a subjective knowledge system, including their experiences, beliefs and attitudes also impacts on their practices. Thus, teachers "filter formal theories and ideas regarding practices through their own values, beliefs, feelings, and habits, sometimes expanding and changing their personal knowledge to accommodate new ideas and new experiences, sometimes re-structuring it to fit their current needs" (Bowmann, 1989, p. 444).

Research into teachers' beliefs is thus another way to frame the exploration of the underpinning of their practices. When teachers' beliefs are examined other relevant notions are often intertwined, i.e. attitudes, values, opinions, ideology, perspectives, conceptions, and personal theories (Pajares, 1992, p. 309), and as such leading to a confusion primarily on the distinction between beliefs and knowledge. Putnam and Borko (1997) referred to beliefs and knowledge as closely related; they noted that teachers "interpret experiences through the filters of their existing knowledge and beliefs. A teacher's knowledge and beliefs – about learning, teaching, and subject matter – thus, are critically important determinants of how that teacher teaches" (1997, p. 1228).

On the other hand, Pajares (1992) distinguished beliefs as based on evaluation and judgment, while knowledge as based on objective fact. He asserted "beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organise and define tasks and problems and are stronger predictors of behaviour" (Pajares, 1992, p. 311). He discriminated educational beliefs from general beliefs and

referred to teacher efficacy, epistemological beliefs, self-esteem, self-efficacy, etc. as some of their aspects. He proposed that clusters of beliefs around a particular situation form attitudes, and attitudes become action agendas that guide decisions and behaviour. Calderhead (1996) also discriminated knowledge and beliefs, defining the former as “factual propositions and understandings” and the latter as “suppositions, commitments and ideologies” (1996, p. 715).

Still, it is debatable whether beliefs and knowledge can be examined and understood in isolation, while a number of other factors that influence teachers’ practices are often added to the discussion. Lortie (2002) argued that teachers often teach as they were taught, stressing the importance of background and experience. Taylor (2012) reported that teachers draw from different resources and learning activities when planning a lesson, as well as formative assessment notes, past experience and their colleagues, although they may often change these joint plans to suit each class (2012, p. 144). She asserted that teachers have to reconcile broad statements (vision, principles, values and key competencies), and specific intentions (achievement, objectives, specific learning outcomes) that influence their planning decisions.

A number of studies have looked at teachers’ beliefs in different areas; Askew et al. (1997) examined the links between numeracy teachers’ practices, beliefs and knowledge in relation to children’s learning outcomes. From the analysis of their data they developed three orientations, i.e. models of sets of beliefs, important in understanding the approaches teachers took towards the teaching of numeracy. They suggested that a study of these orientations may shed light into the fact that practices with surface similarities may result in different learner outcomes: “while the interplay between beliefs and practices is complex, these orientations provide some insight into the mathematical and pedagogical purposes behind particular classroom practices and may be as important as the practices themselves in determining effectiveness” (Askew et al., 1997, p.50). In the English as second language area Breen et al. (2001) observed lessons and interviewed experienced Australian teachers, aiming to “discover the relationships between teachers’ thinking and actions” (p. 470), i.e. the meanings the teachers gave to their classroom work in terms of the particular relationships they identified between practice and principle. The study revealed both individual and group diversity in

the practices they adopted and in their underlying principles.

Blatchford et al (1994) examined teachers' beliefs in relation to their reading instructional practices, noting that although many studies have evaluated different approaches to the teaching of reading and their impact on reading standards, although teachers themselves have not been particularly involved: "there has been surprisingly little research attempting to describe teachers' approaches, without preconceptions, and which has attempted to obtain from teachers their views about their approaches" (1994, pp. 332-3). They found that there was a range of responses regarding the way teachers described features of successful reading instruction. This eclecticism in their approaches, besides a particular ideology, might be a consequence of teachers' lack of participation in the debate on the teaching of reading, a lack of confidence in the teaching of reading, and a reported dissatisfaction with the preparation provided by their initial training. They also suggested that similar to other research, teachers' decisions were often influenced more by "situational factors" such as characteristics of the curriculum (e.g. the reading scheme used), features of the classroom context (e.g. class size) and the demands of managing the primary classroom activities (see Hoffman, 1991, cited in Blatchford et al, 1994, p. 342). Wray et al. (2002) also pointed out that while teacher beliefs are seen as an important element of effective teaching, the literature is weak in terms of the ways in which beliefs link to practice, particularly in the area of literacy teaching.

The varying degree to which teachers' beliefs and practices are consistent, as well as contextual factors that shape beliefs (i.e. time, context and circumstance), was also acknowledged in Poulson et al. (2001), who examined the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice. Drawing from a number of studies, they argued that despite the differences in approaches and methodologies in studies of teachers' beliefs, the research literature agrees that teachers' educational and pedagogical beliefs and values influence their teaching practices. In order to do so, they drew on existing research literature on teachers' theoretical orientation and used a pre-designed instrument to collect information. Their analysis revealed differences in the theoretical beliefs about reading and writing according to the teachers' years of experience, type of training and qualifications, as well as consistency between theoretical beliefs and choice of teaching activities. They also

pointed out that these variances resulted not only to differences in practice, but also to differences in ways of interpreting, and making sense of policy requirements relating to literacy, an important issue to be taken into account when implementing nation or state-wide programmes or innovations.

Such an implementation was explored in Ainsworth et al. (2012), where the researchers inquired into the teachers' sources of information and inspiration regarding the implementation of the newly state-mandated curriculum in the United States. The teachers reported reliance on colleagues and on their own efforts to compensate for the reported lack of adequate in-service training and minimal support by educational authorities. In one school, teachers relied on discussions with colleagues to become familiar with the curriculum, which also reportedly relieved some of the anxiety felt in the initial phase of implementation. Other participants stated that their understanding was the result of self-study, rather than in-service training. In the same vein of confidence in their own experience and abilities, the teachers stated that they developed their own extensive files and materials, which they used to implement the skills addressed by the curriculum.

Particularly relevant to this study, Wray et al. (2002) reported on a number of issues that the teachers participating in their research project commented upon, as underpinning their effective teaching of literacy. Specifically, they supported that effective teachers of literacy had a coherent set of beliefs about the teaching and learning of literacy, which impacted upon their selection of teaching approaches. A strong subject background in English language and related subjects was found to be important, however experiences in ITE had been forgotten by experienced teachers, who found that long in-service literacy courses or projects had provided them the opportunity to develop and clarify their own personal philosophies about literacy teaching. The more effective a teacher was found to be, the more explicit the links she would make between her beliefs and practices. Also, the role of a teacher as an English co-ordinator was seen as very significant, as it generated demands and provided opportunities to actively think about materials and approaches in order to guide colleagues.

Stipek and Byler (1997) also explored the relationship of several factors to preschool, kindergarten and first grade teachers' practices. Specifically, they looked into their beliefs about how children learn, their views on the goals of early childhood education and their positions on official policies. Similarly to this study, the researchers were intrigued to explore the underpinning of the myriad of decisions teachers of young children make, and one of the aims of their investigation was to assess associations between teachers' beliefs about appropriate and effective education for young children and their classroom practices (1997, p. 307). They refer to previous research suggesting that other stakeholders also need to be considered, namely school administrators and colleagues in other grades, parents and school and district policies. Their findings suggested that teachers' beliefs were consistent with their practices (although less for first grade teachers).

Therefore, the relevant research indicates that there is a body of practical knowledge that is inherently implicit and constitutes "those beliefs, insights and habits that enable teachers to do their work in schools. (...) It is time bound and situation specific, personally compelling and oriented towards action" (Feinman-Nemser and Floden, 1986, p. 512). The underpinnings of teachers' practices include their understandings and beliefs and are inter-related with their experiences and interaction with colleagues, and the curriculum and policies they implement. Still, based on the literature, it appears that there is still much to understand as to where teachers look in order to practise effective teaching.

4.3. Personal epistemologies

Another way to look into what underpins teachers' practice is to draw from the territory of epistemology (i.e. the nature and justification of human knowledge); albeit a long interest of philosophers, the interest of educators and is relatively new. As a field, teachers' personal epistemology has received less theoretical and empirical attention in comparison with research on teachers' beliefs. Nevertheless, it can provide insight into the underpinnings of teachers' practices as it explores a particular type of teachers' belief about the nature of knowledge and knowing (Brownlee et al., 2011, p. 4). Although personal epistemology has had a long history in the educational research primarily in the context of the United States

and Canada (see Hofer & Pintrich, 1997 for an overview), more recently, the interest has shifted on the ways teachers' practices are related to teachers' personal epistemology (Schraw & Olafson, 2002; Feucht and Bendixen, 2010). In their edited book, Brownlee et al. (2011) propose theory and research into personal epistemology as a way of nuancing understandings of teaching practices, arguing that there is a gap between teachers' beliefs and practices, which can be closed by increasing awareness and by self-reflection.

One of the few studies exploring the influence of teachers' personal epistemology on their classroom practice as well as the children's personal epistemology was conducted by Johnston et al. (2001). An extensive number of classroom observations, semi - structured interviews with teachers early in the year and again later, based in part on the teacher's viewing of a videotaped segment of the day's lesson, as well as informal interviews with teachers and six children from each classroom provided the data that indicated that the different personal epistemologies of two primary school teachers influenced their English instruction as well as the children's personal epistemologies. They found that equally competent teachers could have very different epistemologies, which may consequently lead to very different emphases in their classrooms.

Although teacher beliefs do not automatically translate into actual instructional practice, Johnston et al (2001) pointed out that it is arguable whether it is better to have a particular epistemology or whether a mixture of epistemologies would be preferable so as to ensure that children are offered multiple possibilities. Finally, similarly to the research into the relation of teachers' beliefs and their practice, evidence suggests that personal epistemologies and practices can be inconsistent. Olafson and Schraw (2006) for example, reported that even though the lessons they observed were teacher - centred, the teachers participating in their research claimed to use pupil-centred teaching and assessment practices.

4.4. ITE and professional development

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to comprehensively overview the role of ITE and professional development in the way teachers design and deliver literacy lessons, there is no doubt that teachers acquire a significant bulk of propositional and procedural knowledge regarding how to teach during their ITE.

They are exposed to different theories and methodological approaches and offered opportunities to apply them in practice during their school practicum. As Elliot et al. (2011, p. 85) note interpersonal knowledge is also important and skilled interpersonal relations are crucial for effective teaching and learning (cited in Eade, 2012, p.21).

In one of the few relevant studies looking into the impact of professional development on early language and literacy instructional practices, Neuman and Cunningham (2009) reported that teachers who receive coursework plus coaching are the ones who gain the most as this combination seems to yield improvements in teacher knowledge and quality language and literacy practices. They highlight that albeit the consensus on the importance of a high – quality teacher during children’s formative years, there is much to be learned about how to prepare them to rise to the particular challenges and demands of early literacy teaching.

Looking into the notion of teachers’ expertise might add to such an endeavour. Arguing that a focus on features of effective teaching oversimplifies the multidimensionality of teaching, Eade (2012) called for a shift towards an exploration of teachers’ expertise: “to see teaching as reducible to a series of competences underplays the extent to which expertise consists of subtle and interlinked features” (2012, p. 2). He reviewed relevant research and concluded that teacher expertise is tacit, intuitive and situated, and while there may be some generic features many are context dependent. The different types of expertise teachers have, are seen as underpinning their practices. “Teacher expertise is learned, mostly through a cycle of action, reflection, abstraction and planning, informed by research and experience, one’s own and that of others” (Eade, 2012, p. 60)

These findings are in line with Eraut’s investigations on informal, work-based learning. His argument was that in addition to explicit and formal knowledge professionals develop tacit knowledge, responding to developing situations, which require intuitive decision – making (Eraut, 2000,2004). The teaching of literacy in Grade 1 classrooms is an apt example of such professional performance. Tacit knowledge develops from the implicit acquisition and processing of knowledge, which are influenced by socialisation processes and the local workplace culture. This intuitive practice leads to the development of a personal type of knowledge,

which may be used uncritically. As practitioners may believe a practice followed works well for them, they become more confident in their own proficiency or lack the time and/or disposition to search for anything better, it is crucial to attend to the need of deliberation and reflection, in order for quality not to fall: “Tacit knowledge of this kind is also likely to lose value over time because circumstances change, new practices develop and people start to take shortcuts without being aware that they are reducing their effectiveness.” (2004, p. 261).

Borko (2004), in discussing professional development, argues that a situative perspective needs to be adopted, i.e. a conceptualisation of teachers’ knowledge and its use as an aspect of their participation in practices within a particular social context. The argument is that teachers learn in their classrooms, school communities and in professional development programmes, from colleagues and through children interactions. Darling – Hammond (2006) also highlights that all teaching and all learning is shaped by the contexts in which they occur, influenced by the particularities of the subject matter, the goals of instruction, the individual experiences, as well as the interests and understandings of both learners and teachers. Therefore, it is important to look into multiple contexts, taking into account both individual teachers’ practices and the systems within which they teach.

This study aims to contribute towards this direction. It adopts the notion of understandings in order to refer to the body of theoretical, conceptual, pedagogical, methodological and affective, explicit or implicit sources of information and inspiration which teachers draw from in order to teach.

4.5. Research questions

The previous chapters have provided an overview of different but closely related bodies of knowledge, others more theoretically and others more practically oriented, in order to tackle the issue of effective literacy teaching. Thus, the sections on literacy, effective teaching and the underpinning of teachers’ practice have attempted to highlight the need to link what is known from research and how teachers can implement this knowledge in the contextualised and flexible ways described.

This study examines how a holistic in-depth investigation of the teaching of

literacy in Grade 1 in Cyprus can illuminate thinking about effective literacy practice. By exploring the ways in which the practices of Grade 1 teachers in Cyprus agree or differ from the international literature on literacy effectiveness and how the teachers' declared understandings influence their practice the study aims to consider its findings with relation to the research into both literacy effectiveness and literacy pedagogy.. The intent is not to assess or evaluate the teachers' practices. Instead, this investigation will link what the teachers practice with the findings of local and international research literature and with the claims the teachers make about why they choose to teach in a particular way and what underpins their teaching. Insight into these issues will be valuable to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effective teaching of literacy. It is hoped that the resulting insight may be transformed into a knowledge base for ITE and to inform continuing professional development of teachers.

The following questions guide this research study:

- a. How can a holistic, in-depth investigation of Grade 1 literacy teachers in Cyprus illuminate thinking about effective literacy practice?
- b. In what ways do the practices of Grade 1 teachers in Cyprus agree or differ from the international literature on literacy effectiveness?
- c. How do teachers' declared understandings influence their practices?

In Chapter 5 the research design of the study is outlined.

Chapter 5

Methodology

Introduction

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design of this study. It explains the research paradigm and the methodological reasoning adopted to guide the exploration of the practices of Grade 1 teachers in Cyprus in relation to the effective teaching of literacy. The research procedures followed during fieldwork are presented, with reference to ethical considerations, as well as an explanation of the phases of data analysis.

5.1. Research paradigm

Over the years numerous discussions and paradigmatic controversies have endured, from the traditional comparisons between the positivists and post-positivists adherents on the one side and the interpretivists on the other, to the discussion of postmodern stances, such as critical theory, constructivism and the participatory paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 2000). With non-conclusive outcomes, the epicentre of the epistemological debates has been shifting and has traditionally perceived different approaches as being rigidly defined and mutually exclusive.

However, as Miles and Huberman (1994) note, in the actual practice of empirical research such definite categorisations often become irrelevant, since within qualitative research the lines between epistemologies have become blurred and, even if they were to be considered separately, there are multiple overlaps amongst them. In the introductory chapter of their book in which they advise their readers to “look behind any apparent formalism and seek out what will be useful in your own work” (1994, p. 5) within the broader orientation of ‘transcendental realism’ they adopt, and which calls for a study of social phenomena and the exploration of regularities and sequences that link them.

As the research questions should dictate the methodological approach that is to be used to conduct the research (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), the present study is

located within a qualitative - interpretive research paradigm. Interpretivism as a research philosophy puts forward the ontological position that there are multiple realities and multiple constructions of meaning within specific contexts (Cohen et al., 2000; Robson, 2002, Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Understanding and explaining how people make sense of the subjective social worlds of their human experience means that their perspectives, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and attitudes are investigated. Such approach allows exactly “to get the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 12). As this study looks at the features of effective literacy teaching in Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus and the sources of information and inspiration that teachers reportedly draw upon, an interpretivist approach allows this exactly: looking into how people within this specific context make sense of their experience in order to teach literacy effectively.

The epistemological acknowledgement that knowledge is subjective and it is bounded by contextual and cultural factors as well as individual interpretations (those of Cypriot Grade 1 literacy teachers) affect in turn the methodology chosen. Therefore, qualitative methods are required in order to understand the participants’ worlds and the construction of meanings and understandings. The following section outlines the methodological decisions made.

5.2. Research Design

5.2.1 Flexible research design and thematic analysis

This study has a descriptive and exploratory character, as it seeks to outline and understand the features of Grade 1 teachers’ effective literacy practices. Therefore, a flexible research design (Robson, 2002) is adopted, which allows the development of the design of research to evolve during data collection, instead of having a pre-devised set of rigid categories or checklists to be strictly followed in the field. Nevertheless, the observations of lessons and the teachers’ interviews were not conducted with an ‘anything goes’ approach, a common point of criticism of qualitative research designs (Antaki et al., 2002, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data collection decisions were informed by an understanding of literacy, early literacy and the international perspectives on effective teaching in this

domain. In addition, the data were collected in two phases, so that issues emerging through the enquiry could be pursued more comprehensively in a second phase. Through the discussion below it is attempted to illuminate the approach to the data collection and the framework chosen, drawing from thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p. 6). It is a flexible and useful method of analysing and drawing out meanings from detailed and rich qualitative data, and contrary to the restrictions of some of the major traditions which may constrain the researcher, it allows a great deal of flexibility and an in-depth analysis of the data based on the research questions. The identification of themes (the prevalent patterns of information within the data relating to the research question) may occur inductively or deductively and may be identified at the semantic or at the latent level. A thematic analysis following an inductive approach shares significant similarities to grounded theory, since the themes are not related to a theory but emerge strictly from the data. In a deductive approach to thematic analysis, a theoretical framework underpins the analysis and thus an engagement with the literature in the field is to a great extent a prerequisite for data collection and analysis. Thematic analysis is distinguished at two levels, at a semantic or explicit level and at a latent or interpretative level (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the first case, themes are identified, described and organised and after their summarisation an effort is made to interpret and theorise their significance, their broader meanings and implications, in association with the international effectiveness literature. In the latent approach, however, the focus is on the underlying ideas and ideologies that are seen as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data.

The aim of this study is to carefully observe, describe and try to explain teachers' observed and reported literacy practices and where these are said to be founded. In order to do so, findings of research in the fields of effectiveness, effective literacy teaching and learning in Grade 1 were also taken into account. Thus, a flexible research design approach was adopted, which included fieldwork in order to describe and analyse data, combining both a deductive and an inductive approach. Specifically, some a priori codes were used, which were drawn from the

relevant literature as overviewed in the previous chapter, as well as some a posteriori codes arising from the data themselves. This was a particularly appropriate approach to answer the research questions of the study, as it allowed the findings of relevant research into the effective teaching on literacy in Grade 1 to guide the process of deductive thematic analysis and, simultaneously, it provided space for themes to emerge inductively from the data as the analysis progressed. A pre-determined framework would not be sufficient to capture the effective teaching of literacy in the particular context of this study, without such a framework though, important aspects as delineated in the relevant literature might have been overlooked.

Also, it is important to note that the research approach used in this study goes further than a semantic level, as it does not only describe what is observed and explicitly reported; the data are not taken at face value, thus the study also adopts elements of a latent approach, where the teachers' practices and what they say they draw upon in order to teach are interpreted and reflected upon. This underpins the selection of the data collection methods, which is described below.

In order to overcome some of the inherent weaknesses of qualitative flexible research designs such as transparency, subjectivity and rigour in the processes followed and particularly the coding process are explicitly outlined in a relevant section below, after the description of the procedures of the research.

5.2.2. Context

The research was conducted in the area of Larnaca, Cyprus. Larnaca was selected because it was relatively convenient to access. Unlike Nicosia or Limassol there are no tertiary education institutions undertaking research or teacher education programmes, thus the schools are generally more willing to participate in research projects. The table below presents the schools visited, both urban and rural state schools with a variety of pupil population, in terms of socioeconomic status and background. Each teacher was visited and interviewed once.

Table 5.1: Schools visited

	Location	School	Teachers observed	Student population
1	Urban	D	4	High SES
2		K	2	Middle to high SES

3		E	1	Middle to low SES
4		Ka	1	Middle to low SES
5		S	1	Low SES, L2
6		Kal	1	Low SES, L2
7	Rural	A	2	Middle to high SES
8		P	1	Middle to high SES
9		L	1	Middle SES
10		Da	1	Middle SES

5.2.3. Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was used for selecting the sample for this research. In qualitative research samples are more often purposive rather than random (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The principle of the selection in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgement as to the person, place or situation that has the largest potential for advancing the understandings that the research study sets out to examine (Given, 2008), thus sampling was driven by the research questions (Willig, 2001).

At the outset, two basic eligibility criteria were set for the selection of teachers. The first was experience in Grade 1. For the purposes of this study no newly qualified teachers were invited to participate. Therefore, all teachers had a minimum of five years experience in Grade 1 and at least ten years of overall teaching experience (see Appendix 4). Even more importantly for the purposes of this study, from the available experienced Grade 1 teachers in the area aforementioned the most effective were invited to participate. The educational system of Cyprus does not involve set national standards or any assessment methods to measure children's progress, their educational outcomes or teacher effectiveness. Teachers are centrally allocated in schools, are assigned to Grades 1-6 by head teachers, and are monitored by inspectors. An inspector in the Cypriot educational system is a former head teacher promoted to this position, which involves making judgements about the quality of schools and the effectiveness of teachers. Inspectors visit schools for classroom observations and collect information, which may lead eventually to an individual teacher's promotion. The number of visits and the actual way time is spent during these visits varies according to each inspector. While an official assessment only takes place on the 12th year of a teachers' employment, inspectors keep informal notes on teachers and confer with the head teachers of the schools they visit. Inspectors also outline

the educational policies that teachers need to implement, based on their interpretation of the Ministry's agenda, which also often leads to significant differences among inspectors and the educational direction given to teachers in different schools.

Therefore, following the recommended procedure, at a meeting arranged with the Larnaca District Head Inspector two inspectors were suggested, as being interested in Grade 1 language and literacy teaching and who would have a comprehensive picture of effective Grade 1 teachers in the broader Larnaca area. These inspectors nominated teachers they perceived effective, and a list of about twenty was compiled, aiming at having a balance and range of schools.

5.2.4. Participating Teachers

As discussed below, from the teachers initially approached, fifteen agreed to participate. The participating teachers provided information on their background in relation to the teaching training institution they attended, other professional qualifications and any in-service training opportunities they had had (see Appendix 3). This information was provided through a simple questionnaire the teachers completed (see Appendix 4).

Ten teachers had graduated from the University of Cyprus. Prior to its establishment in 1992, teachers were primarily trained at the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus, which offered a three year teacher qualification course. For the graduates of that institution, the University of Cyprus offered a complementary programme, leading to the award of a bachelor degree in education, to replace the diploma they held, thus levelling any incongruities in salaries or status issues among teachers. Two of the participating teachers were initially trained at the Pedagogical Academy and three gained their degree at Greek Universities.

Regarding the different forms of in-service training that teachers mentioned, it is important to clarify the notion of exemplary lessons. This is a way of disseminating practice that an inspector considers worthy. Specifically, often a teacher is asked to repeat a lesson the inspector observed for a number of other teachers who are invited to the classroom, while it is also common for the inspector and the teacher

to plan a new lesson together. After the observation a discussion follows, where the teacher reflects upon her teaching and her colleagues may pose questions. Eleven teachers stated that they either had attended or organised such lessons.

From the fifteen participating teachers, ten were possible to observe and interview during the first year of fieldwork and five during the second. This led to two phases of data collection, both including interviews and observations, but with slightly different emphases, as it is explained below.

5.3. Data Collection

5.3.1. Gaining access

Following the relevant regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus, a research proposal was submitted to the Centre of Educational Research and Evaluation, in order to gain permission to observe lessons and interview teachers in state primary schools in the educational area of Larnaca. The permission was a pre-requisite in order to be able to contact inspectors and schools. At the meeting with the inspectors mentioned above, the permission was reviewed, as well as the draft letter for the head teachers (see Appendix 1) and the consent forms prepared for the participating teachers, however the latter were rejected as unnecessary and formal documents that would, in their view, overly complicate the process.

Following the procedure indicated by the District Head Inspector, appointments were arranged with head teachers of different schools, where the permission from the Ministry was presented, as well as a letter explaining the aims and scope of the research (see Appendix 1). With one exception, the head teachers contacted replied positively, and meetings were arranged with seventeen Grade 1 teachers, when once again the research questions and the aims of the study were explained. It was orally stressed that the teachers' anonymity would be safeguarded and pseudonyms would be used for them, the school and the Grade 1 children mentioned in any reports and the thesis. It was also clarified that the findings of the study would be available for the teachers' use and the schools' records. Two of the teachers approached politely declined to participate, as the workload of Grade

1 was very demanding for them and they felt that a researcher would further complicate their work.

During the initial visit to each school, it was stressed that the aim of the study was to observe experienced, effective teachers of literacy in Grade 1, in order to enhance the researcher's personal understandings of what and how it is done. Questions about the background, studies and the relationship of this study to the researcher's professional affiliation with the University of Cyprus were also addressed, in an effort to diminish power issues and stress the exploratory and not evaluative nature of the study. In the extensive discussions that took place, a significant effort was made to clarify all issues that were raised, and to offer complete confidentiality in order to build a relationship of trust that made possible the data collection.

5.3.2. The observation schedule

The aim of classroom observations was to gain insight into the effective teachers' practices in Grade 1. Thus, a pre-designed and highly structured observation schedule would not be useful, since the aim was to collect as much information as possible about what goes on in the classroom. As the goal was to explore and describe the parameters and dynamics deployed in a first grade literacy classroom, a decision was made not to use a closed type of observation schedule with pre-determined events to be recorded. Nonetheless, the review of the literature had yielded some parameters of effective literacy teaching that were used to inform a list of prompts, as a means of being alert during the classroom observations to the variety of literacy and classroom management practices that could be recorded. The list of prompts was loosely taken into account while observing the lessons, as they were not used as a predefined list of things to look at, but as a checklist or reminder of aspects of the lesson that needed to be attended to (see Appendix 6).

The initial narratives were transcribed on an observation schedule (see Appendix 5) that included different columns for tracking time, capturing what both the teacher and the children say and do as well as what resources and materials are being used in the lesson. On the first line of the observation schedule, the time and place of each observation were noted, together with the lesson focus and the

teacher's aims and goals for the lesson, as they had orally stated them prior to the observation. Only two teachers provided a lesson plan including the above information; the rest explained that they do not routinely prepare detailed daily lesson plans, but they usually keep some notes in their books, a checklist of the issues or activities they want to cover within the eighty minute period they have available. Two of the participating teachers had prepared a lesson plan 'especially for the occasion', stressed however that it was not common practice for them.

Effort was made to capture the complexity of the taught session on the grids of the observation form; the time, teacher/child talk, teacher/child behaviours and resources/materials were noted. These grids allowed a recording of an approximate track of the time spent on activities as time sampling was not used. It also enabled the recording of what was said and what was done by both teachers and children and also of the resources and materials that were used in the lesson, while the teacher and children talked or worked on a specific task. The transfer of the observation as a narrative onto the observation schedule constituted the first level of data analysis, which is described in the following section.

5.3.3. Interviews

The fifteen observations were complemented by semi – structured interviews. It was important to have an additional source of information about what the teachers do and why they do so, as the observations on their own would not provide sufficient insight into teachers' practices beyond the actual lessons observed. Further more, their rationale and their sources of information and inspiration could only be guessed. While a questionnaire might be used as an additional method of data collection to quickly elicit such information, it would not have allowed any flexibility or probing. As the aim of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the features and underpinnings of teachers' practices, interviews were considered as a much more appropriate option.

The purpose of these fifteen interviews was to develop a first hand understanding of what guides the teachers in their decision making process for literacy teaching. Since the aim of the interviews was exploratory, a structured interview would not yield such rich information. Oppenheim (1992, p. 86) states that exploratory interviews are designed to be essentially heuristic and seek to develop hypotheses

rather than to collect facts. Lincoln and Guba (1985 cited in Cohen et al., 2007) suggest that structured interviews are useful when researchers are aware of what they do not know and therefore are in a position to frame the questions that will supply the knowledge required, whereas unstructured interviews are useful when researchers are not aware of what they do not know and rely on the respondents to enlighten them. In this case a fairly open framework was constructed allowing focused but conversational communication for giving and receiving information.

The semi-structured interview schedule used, consisted of three parts and aimed to elicit information about the practices of the participating teachers and their sources of inspiration and information. In the first part of the interview, the questions revolved around the teachers' general organisation, their use or not of the published literacy curriculum, textbooks and other materials, the language and literacy methodology they follow and the suggestions they had regarding the material they teach and its organisation. The second part of the interview revolved around questions about the lesson observed. The prompts included references to their planning of the specific lesson observed and its implementation, touching upon issues of goals set, monitoring of children's progress and learning, and overall outcomes. The third part of the interview included questions more closely related to what they see as underpinning their own practices. The semi-structured interview schedule is in Appendix 7.

5.4. Research Procedures

5.4.1. The fieldwork period

The main fieldwork for this study was conducted in a period of 13 months, from October 2010 to November 2011. The data collection was organised in two phases, Phase I including ten teachers and Phase II another five. Prior to the first phase, a pilot took place, where two classroom observations were conducted for exploratory purposes. The pilot was designed to explore the kinds of data that were to be collected to be used for the study and to get an initial sense of the field. In these observations the instrumentation selected was an open – ended narrative, handwritten recording of the lesson. This helped to shed light on important issues that needed to be recorded, and informed the development of the observation schedule described above.

The data collected in Phase I (October to February 2010/2011) and their preliminary analysis informed Phase II, as the instruments and processes were refined. Frankel and Devers (2000) describe flexible research designs as a rough sketch to be filled in by the researcher as the study proceeds. Accordingly in this study, the emphases and goals of the classroom observations and interviews were thus clarified after a preliminary analysis of the data collected in Phase I.

Given the importance of the first year of school (Riley, 1996, 2007; NSW, 2009; Tymms et al., 2009; Konstantopoulos and Chung, 2011) a research decision was made to have a sharper focus on the first three months of the academic year of Grade 1 and the very beginning of the formal teaching of literacy. As teachers had demonstrated and reported the greatest differences during the initial months of Grade 1, prior to following more closely the official textbook, a focus on September to November, would allow the exploration of different approaches and differences of opinions and practice on the precise way of starting children with the learning of reading and writing. It was decided to place more emphasis on pedagogy and classroom organisational issues, i.e. on the way a teacher differentiates her teaching according to the needs of different children in her classroom, as well as parental involvement, issues which had not been anticipated on the outset.

5.4.2. Observing the lessons

Seventeen eighty-minute sessions of Greek language and literacy lessons were observed in total. In each case the teachers introduced the researcher to the children as a friend or a colleague, providing different explanations for her presence. A chair was allocated usually at the back or at the side of the classroom. With the exception in some occasions, when the teacher briefly addressed the researcher, the observations were non – participant. While the same observation schedule was used, a more detailed record of time was kept in Phase II, as well as of the length of each activity within the 80-minute sessions. This more precise timing of activities allowed data to be analysed with a reference to the amount of time spent on each activity.

5.4.3. Conducting the interviews

The interviews took place mostly immediately after each lesson or within the same day, with the exception of one teacher, who suggested meeting the following day, so as to allow for more time to talk. The interviews were informal and often the teachers, while answering one question, referred to issues planned to be raised at a later point. Thus, the order of questions was not strictly followed. Although some teachers responded more elaborately and more extensively than others, in all cases the duration of the interviews did not exceed forty minutes, with the shortest interview lasting twenty minutes, since the teacher did not want to add anything further. As described above, the interviews covered three areas, namely general questions, questions about the lesson observed, and questions in relation to what underpins their practices. Since the interviews were semi – structured, the order of the questions often changed, while some were omitted, if the teacher had referred to the issue as part of answering another question.

5.4.4. Data recording and translation

The classroom observations were not tape-recorded, however an effort was made to note carefully and extensively what was said and done. Six of the Phase I interviews were also not recorded. In order to escape the risk of ‘co – authoring’ rather than ‘collecting’ data when an open-ended collection method is employed (Kvale, 1988, cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994), as well as way of enhancing the rigour of the research, interviews need to be audio-recorded. This also ensures full data capture and retention, as well as rapid access and retrieval. However, in Phase I this was not always possible; some teachers felt that the recorder was making them uneasy. While negotiating access, it was explained that the purpose of the interviews was not to evaluate or to assess them in any way, but to contribute to improve understanding of precisely how experienced, effective teachers work in Grade 1. These teachers asked for handwritten notes only to be taken instead, as they considered this method of data recording less formal.

All Phase II interviews were more extensive and in-depth, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim later. Participating teachers were informed about this from the outset, and were convinced of the necessity of doing so, as they were informed about the challenges of handwritten records. This allowed a shifting of focus from taking detailed notes, while they spoke, to listening to what

the teachers were actually saying. The interviews thus became more conversation – like and both parties were able to reflect, respond and handle the series of topics raised in a more comprehensive way.

An important research decision that was made in relation with the transcription of the data, from both classroom observations and interviews, was the issue of translation. All data collected was in Greek and the question arising was whether to translate all data into English and work from the translations for the analysis, or to perform the analysis on the Greek transcripts and write the findings in English. Data needed to be transcribed for thematic analysis, which raises significantly less challenges than linguistic analyses where the degree of detail and the conventions of transcription are more extensive and strict. However, the typing of the handwritten notes was a laborious process in which the question of translation was central.

Temple and Young (2004) discuss the issue of translation dilemmas in qualitative research and the need of setting boundaries between the role of translator and other roles the researcher has within her study. They outline epistemological and ontological consequences raising awareness on issues of representation of meanings. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of a delayed or partial translation, it was decided that all observations and interviews would be typed in English. This allowed a comprehensive picture of data to be shared with the supervisors of the study and enabled discussions on the body of the data collected.

5.4.5. Ethical issues and the researcher's role

The first phase of the study had been considered and approved by the Cyprus Educational Research and Evaluation Centre, which grants access to researchers into schools in Cyprus, and informed consent had also been sought from the Institute of Education's Doctoral School Ethics Committee. The teachers and head teachers of the participating schools had been informed about all aspects of the research and were assured that all possible precautions would be taken not to influence adversely the normal function of the school. Although a consent form was dismissed (see above), assurances were orally made so that the participating teachers understood what the research entailed and that they would be able to

withdraw at any point. It was made clear that the research would be conducted in a considerate manner to cause minimal disruption to teachers' work, the school environment and the children and their families. It was emphasised that the results would remain anonymous and all information collected would be held strictly confidential and exclusively for the purposes of this research. The results of the research will be given to the schools.

Although not utilising it to guide all methodological decisions made, this study draws on interpretative phenomenological analysis (Willig, 2001), which calls for a psychological state of mind in which the researcher attempts to remove personal judgments and attitudes and to be driven solely by the data. This guides the findings and the whole report of the research to be subscribed to the third person model of reporting. It was also attempted to approach the analysis with transparency, and thus have the data analysis process explicitly documented, secondly with consistency, subjecting all the data to the same systematic process, and thirdly with objectivity by allowing the data to speak for themselves. In order to avoid looking into the data with a list of predefined themes, what Braun and Clarke (2006) clearly dismiss "as some of the worst examples of 'thematic' analysis (...) in such instances no analysis has really be done at all!" (2006, p. 86), restricted use of the theoretical frameworks was made in the initial data collection and analysis period.

As a teacher educator who has worked with undergraduate student teachers, classrooms were entered and teachers were interviewed hoping to get insights of an age-old problem, that of effective literacy teaching in the first grade and what influences it, as well as how initial education of teachers may help them to be better prepared. The use of the theory was more relied on in the later analysis stages of the data as explanatory framework when combining the data and addressing the research questions. Still, there are subjectivity issues that need to be acknowledged; although every possible effort was made to objectify the researcher's position, it remained a fact that the teachers and head teachers were aware of a professional affiliation with the University of Cyprus. The issue was explicitly addressed in initial and subsequent meetings and clear distinctions were made between the researcher's role as a teacher educator and as a researcher for

this particular study. Thus, any power relations issues were overtly tackled prior and during data collection.

On another level, and as “the more familiar a setting may seem, the greater the danger of bringing your own unexamined interpretive frameworks in making sense of what you see” (Brown and Dowling, 1988, p. 44), the researcher consciously and continuously reflected on her role in the data collection and analysis and remained aware about the subjectivity of the interpretations.

As far as issues of reliability are concerned, the practice of an audit trail as Robson (2002) describes it was followed. This entails keeping a full record of activities, data collected and processes followed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a form for keeping the details of the coding and data analysis process and a version of it was used. Also a colleague at the University of Cyprus with a doctorate in language education and experience in qualitative research was consulted at a later point of the analytical process and provided feedback on the codes generated for the analysis of the data. This is described in the following section. Reliability is of greater concern with thematic analysis than with other analyses because more interpretation goes into defining codes and themes as well as their application to the corpus of data. To maintain rigour, strategies for monitoring, should be implemented in the analytic process. The step- by – step analysis of the data reported below serves this purpose.

5.5. The Analysis of the data

5.5.1. Guiding principles

In their extensive writing on qualitative data analysis, Miles and Huberman (1994) define data analysis, “as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 10). Upon first obtaining data during a “data collection period,” Miles and Huberman explain these three stages of qualitative data analysis by stressing that data reduction should not be considered to be separate from analysis, but as a part of it. It is a process that aims to organise, sharpen and focus the data in order to discuss the findings. The data display process aims to have the reduced data and displayed in a manner that allows conclusions to be more easily drawn. Again, the creation and

use of displays is not seen as separate from analysis, but as a part of it. The final process is conclusion drawing and verification where regularities, patterns of differences and similarities are noted and explanations start to be generated.

In the data analysis process, the inductive codes described above were combined with a list of what effective teachers of literacy need to know and do, as it was compiled from relevant literature in the field (see Chapter 2). The list generated was used as a framework for the development of an understanding of what the features of effective literacy teaching are. The list was in the process revised and enriched with inductive codes, which emerged from the actual data from both phases. In order to answer the research questions the analyses were designed to explore the themes and patterns that emerged and to trace their manifestations in the participating teachers' practices, identifying similarities and differences and gathering the relevant information to understand the different aspects of their literacy teaching. It is important to note that a decision was made not to use a data analysis software package.

5.5.2. Stages of analysis

First stage: familiarisation

As a first stage of the analysis, the aim was to gain familiarity by reading and re-reading the data, rewriting parts where the handwriting was unclear and adding notes in the margins as soon as each observation or interview was over, so as to recall as much as possible. A sense was thus gained about the issues raised and the ground covered.

Second stage: typing and translation

Simultaneously with the on-going process of data collection and the familiarisation with the collected data, the classroom observations notes and the interviews were translated and typed. As some small talk preceded the observations and the recordings, handwritten notes were taken about any pertinent points raised and these were included in the transcripts as introductory notes. Transcripts and recordings were stored in Dropbox folders, along with the scanned original handwritten notes.

Third stage: into the grids

What Miles and Huberman (1994) note about the three processes of data analysis as 'concurrent flows of activity' was indeed evident in this stage, when data reduction and data display levels were interconnected, while some initial and tentative inferences began to emerge. As the observation notes taken were recorded in narratives, they were transferred onto the observation grid described above (Appendix 5). Time was noted in the first column and under 'teacher/child talk' what the teacher (T) and the children (S for students) said was noted in the second. When the children provided an answer together (shouting it out) this was indicated as SS. Teachers asked different children to contribute each time and their names were substituted with an 'S'; when different children provided answers for the same question this was indicated with the use of numbering (Si, Sii, Siii, etc). The third column included what was actually done (under teacher/child behaviours). A fourth column allowed comments to be included. As far as the interviews are concerned, questions and answers were cut from the transcriptions and pasted in different columns, with a third column being added for comments.

Fourth stage: codes and categories

At this stage, a preliminary set of codes was developed in three different categories. Specifically, the first set of codes referred to the underpinnings of teachers' practices (sources of inspiration, theoretical understandings, curricular knowledge and their knowledge of the Greek language and the textbooks, references to their ITE and their own experience). Although these issues may differ from each other, they were clustered together, as they all refer to the body of knowledge at a more conceptual level and previous experiences that guide teachers in their work. The second set of codes documented the specific approaches and methodologies they claimed they followed. These were distinguished from the theoretical understandings of the teachers, because they are specific to the content of teaching reading and writing in Grade 1, and therefore needed to be addressed separately. The third set coded their actual practices, focusing on what they said they do in their everyday teaching. The coding for the practices was performed in two levels, focusing separately on issues relating to oracy and literacy teaching and on classroom management.

Fifth stage: colour coding

As working on the screen was challenging, the transcripts were printed out. Using a green (for theoretical understandings and beliefs), orange (for approaches) and blue (for practices, darker blue for oracy and literacy practices and lighter for classroom management) and coloured pens were used to go through each observation and interview. Although initially it was intended to go through the data for each category separately, after following this process for some time, confidence was gained and within the same reading of an observation or an interview different parts were coded in different colours. If a comment made was falling in two different categories, two colours were used to underline it.

Sixth stage: subsidiary codes

Based on the literature review and the data, subsidiary codes were developed in order to encompass different aspects within the three broad categories. For example, it was ensured that the coding system used allowed differentiation between different levels (i.e. letter/syllable/word level). While going through the coding, the codes were reconsidered. Another column was added on the observation and interview grids, and having the list of codes on the side, a first coding of the data using the initial codes was performed. Over all, eventually multiple readings of the observations and the interviews were done, focusing each time on each set of codes or going back in order to see if an issue that emerged and seemed to be important and re-appearing in a lesson or an interview, was included in previous interviews as well.

Often issues that had not been anticipated emerged; some were found on more than one occasion, but in some cases these were raised by individuals and did not re-occur. In Phase I, for example only one teacher referred to the role of parents and on the particular nature and need of collaboration of teachers and parents in Grade 1. This was picked up in Phase II, where all teachers were explicitly asked to comment on this particularly important issue. At this point the analysis was then transferred on screen, a process that provided the opportunity to re-read and re-visit coding decisions made, adding more details.

Seventh stage: codes and themes

During this phase of data analysis, the initial observation grid was revisited and some changes were made, so as information recorded within the same column allowed a comprehensive account of the actions, behaviours, materials used and the flow and change of activities taking place in the lesson. In a separate column, routines were marked along with comments relating what teachers were teaching to theory and research findings, as these derive from the literature, as well as the published literacy curriculum. During this stage of analysis, interesting features of the data were noted systematically across the observations and interviews, collating data relevant to each code. Gradually, families of codes were developed and through the grouping of codes themes were identified. The final list of themes and codes is included in the Appendix 9, but it is important to note that in the process of data analysis decisions made earlier were often revisited making changes (whether a new code was needed or whether it could be clustered under an existing one, see example in Appendix 8). The initial list of themes was extensively discussed in supervision tutorials, so as to check the reliability of the process of code generation and the development of the themes.

Ninth stage: from themes to findings' reporting

Following the phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) these initial themes were reviewed, and data were gathered in relation to each theme. In order to ensure the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts as well as the data set, a thematic 'map' of the analysis was created, before proceeding to define and name the themes. The definitions and the names of the emergent themes with a selection of extract examples became the basis of the report of the findings.

This chapter has provided an illumination of the approach followed for the collection and analysis of the data, including the stages involved in the process of thematic coding that involved a balance of deductive coding (derived from the literature) and inductive coding (themes emerging from the complementarity of classroom observations and interviews data).

Chapter 6

Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings regarding the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus. For the presentation of the results, a decision was made not to distinguish the data based on their source of collection (observation or interview), or whether collected in either Phase 1 or 2, but in relation to the research questions and analysed through the families of codes that have been generated. The aim is thus not primarily to compare and contrast what was shown and what was claimed in an effort to find incongruities, but to gather layers of information regarding the features of teachers' practices. The results are divided in two sections. The first section focuses on the features of effective oracy and literacy practices and on issues relating to classroom management, as well as the description of the macro level decisions that teachers make which impact on their daily practices, i.e. their ways of teaching Grade 1 and the units of teaching they develop. The second section presents the theoretical underpinning of their varying practices, drawing upon the teachers' explanations as to what guides and influences their daily teaching decisions.

Section I: Teachers' practices

6.1. Oracy and Literacy teaching practices

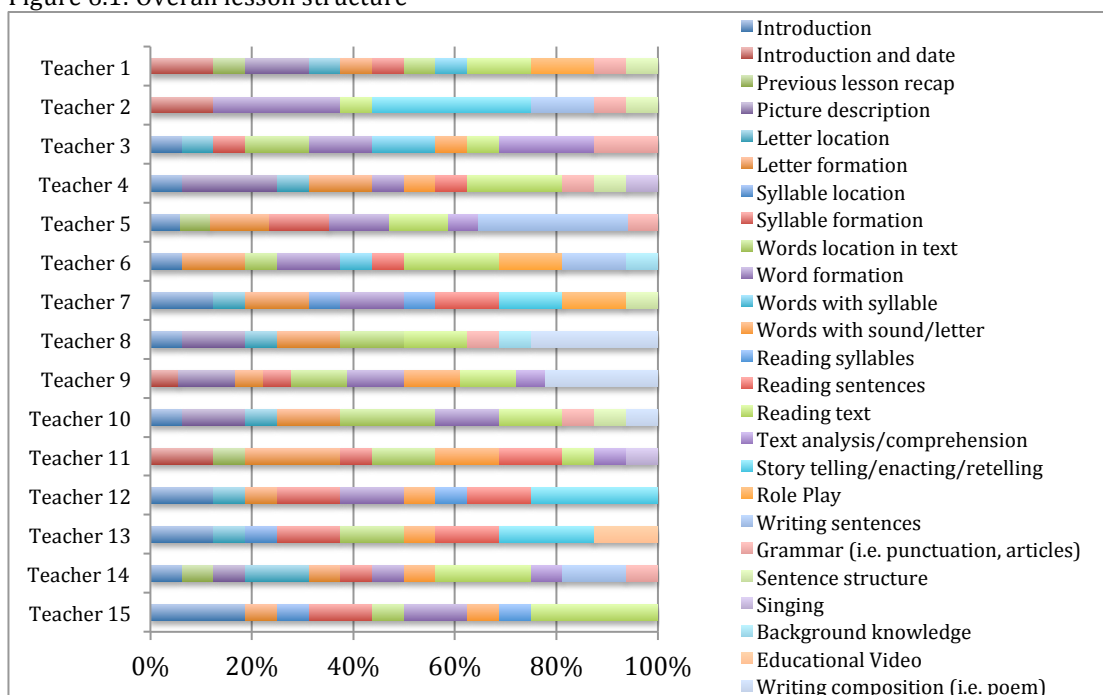
It is important to note at the outset of this section that the categorisations made both for the analysis of the data and for the presentation of the findings serve merely a procedural purpose, as learning in classrooms does not occur in distinctively separated strands; indeed, in a number of observations, several critical incidents were recorded, i.e. examples of teaching and learning episodes where it was practically impossible to distinguish the point where the teaching and learning of reading, writing or work on spoken language begin and end. The findings regarding the teachers' oracy and literacy practices are organised around three fundamental axes: spoken language, reading and writing. As this decision restricted the overview of the teachers' ways into literacy, an introductory section

was added, where the lessons are seen as complete units, trying to tease out the differences among teachers regarding allocation of the time spent and in the order of different activities and the learning foci in their lessons.

6.1.1. Overall lesson structure

The overall lesson structure presented differing patterns, as teachers followed various activities in a different order, even when the main focus of the lesson was the same, i.e. the introduction of a new letter. As the figure below presents, all the teachers introduced a number of learning activities in each lesson, usually changing every five to ten minutes and focusing upon letter/sound, syllable, word, sentence and text level activities, also placing different emphasis on different aspects of their language teaching.

Figure 6.1: Overall lesson structure



As the figure indicates (with the percentage of the lesson time on the horizontal axis), teachers seem to draw from a repertoire of activities with an emphasis on decoding – encoding, but with a balance of oral and written tasks within each lesson, and whether they have just introduced a new letter or are doing further work on it. However, this does not seem to influence the number of activities on different aspects of language that they include in their lessons. There are interesting issues arising from the teachers’ descriptions of how they organise their teaching (see relevant section) and the consistency between their beliefs and

classroom choices echoes relevant research mentioned above (Poulson et al., 2001). They were aware of the demands they place on the children and themselves, in terms of the volume of the work to be completed, while the overall structure of their lessons seems to be entirely up to their personal preferences and their own judgment:

T: This is everyday. I mean there are tons of things to do. Today was the first day of teaching a new letter and we looked at the letter and the book. It usually takes me two days for each letter. You saw the first with the textbook and then tomorrow I will bring a hand out with a text I will produce with their known words and some activities.

Q: Each letter gets two 80' lessons?

T: Not always. I take a third day if a letter is difficult or if I think they could use it. (Interview, Teacher 4)

Thus, besides the overall organisation in the micro level of daily lessons, teachers organise their lessons on a macro level of two to three day units, which are referred to later on. Secondly, teachers talked about the way they organise their lessons with confidence and clarity, and in consistency with what was observed:

"... this is what you saw today, we do the introduction of the letter, we read the text and we don't really write anything, just a bit, if we have time (...) But at the same time I work on punctuation, on the correct spacing of the words, on using the capital letter; there are always multiple goals in the first year!" (Interview, Teacher 1)

Although the introduction of a new letter and the reinforcement of its learning seems the common denominator for the overall structure of the lessons across the whole group, there is wide disparity among the teachers regarding the ways in which they introduce each letter; as some use the textbook and some children's books or other texts, some place emphasis on the formation of the letter from the first day of its introduction while others leave that to the second day, some focus on decoding and encoding, while others add comprehension aspects too. What seems to be a common feature though, is that through this combination of different types of activities, even if these seem not to be adapted to different groups of children, teachers place value on providing children with many learning opportunities, in order to be able to learn to read and write as well as stay engaged:

"So essentially I take one day to do the story and the introduction of the letter and then the next day we also have a 'dictionary' notepad where we practise the formation of the letter and we draw pictures of words starting with it or we do assignments in the 'language creations' notepad, where we write the title of the story, children draw a picture and write a sentence below it. I also give them hand outs like you saw today, but it depends on the day (...) And also when we work with any text, we work the text and the structure and letters and syllables and basically all together in a variety of combinations". (Interview, Teacher 2)

This effort to be creative and find ways to keep children engaged, is also a solution to overcoming the challenges of the length of the lesson per se, as children need to stay engaged for 80 minute – sessions.

6.1.2. Spoken Language

The description of the findings on spoken language as a separate section has a specific caveat; the effort is to focus on those teaching practices that aim to develop spoken language as a goal itself and that can be distinguished from instructional practices targeting more specifically reading or writing. Although this distinction is made in order to concentrate on the ways in which teachers try to approach speaking and listening in their classrooms, by no means is it suggested that oral language skills and reading and writing are to be seen as anything other than directly interrelated and mutually supportive.

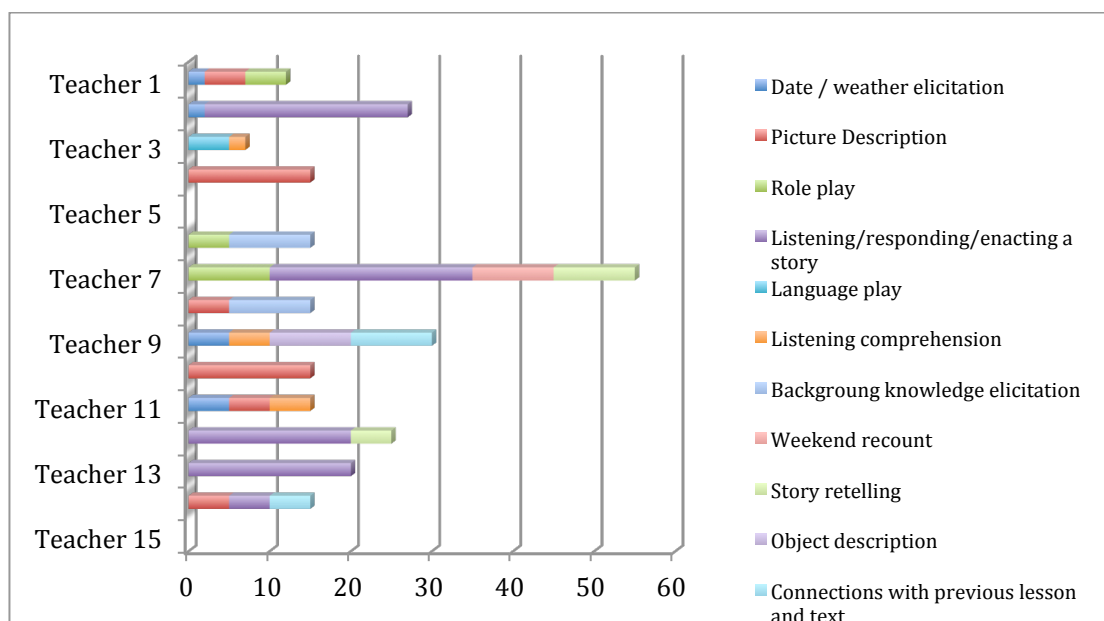
A methodological note is also needed prior to the presentation of these findings; similarly to distinctions made elsewhere (i.e. the classification into transcriptional and compositional writing practices), it was attempted to organise these findings under an analogous schema. One of the obvious choices was the distinction of spoken language into speaking and listening practices; however, this seemed inadequate to account for the variety of types of practices observed. Other distinctions, i.e. into speaking; listening and responding; group discussion and interaction; and drama (DfES, 2006), would also not be productive in this particular case. One of the most prominent reasons is that in no lesson observed, did any of the teachers organise group discussion of any kind. All lessons were held from start to finish at whole class level, without any opportunities for smaller group collaboration, between the teacher and a number of children or among children themselves. The only exception was a type of activity where pairs of children were asked to ‘perform’ a dialogue but in front of the rest of the classroom; thus the classroom organisation remained quite monolithic, without allowing authentic smaller group interaction.

Therefore, after going through the data and drawing from research into effective classroom talk functions and strategies, a basic framework was devised for organising the spoken language practice observed. Specifically, in what follows

question and answer sequences and compositional opportunities are presented, while under a separate section learning opportunities are discussed, where listening and speaking were blended together with some drama techniques, all intended to cultivate children’s spoken language.

Firstly, the following table presents all the different types and the time allocated (horizontal axis) to spoken language activities. As mentioned above, oral work aimed at supporting reading or writing is not included here and it is referred to in the relevant sections. This accounts for the lack of any reference to spoken language for Teachers 5 and 15 in the table below. In Teacher 5's lesson, for example, children practised reading and writing, while the only part of the lesson where they engaged in classroom talk was directly linked to reading. There were also examples where such distinctions were practically impossible to make; in these instances oracy and literacy are truly interwoven and the theoretical argument of their inter-relation is illuminated through these classroom practices.

Figure 6.2: Spoken language practices



Beyond the above features of spoken language practices, nine of the teachers attended to aspects of grammar teaching as well.

6.1.2.1. Question & Answering Sequences

In the lessons observed, teachers used Q & A sequences for a number of purposes, namely for checking comprehension of oral texts; for information elicitation; for

background or previous knowledge retrieval; for picture description; on one occasion, for the recount of events; and, for grammar teaching.

6.1.2.1.1. Q&A for oral comprehension

Four teachers provided children with opportunities to develop their listening comprehension skills in the context of oral language teaching; children were thus expected to concentrate and listen to information delivered not through a text they had read, but aurally.

Teacher 9, for example, played an audio file where children listened to sounds relevant to a storm, providing children with the opportunity to concentrate on listening and describe the sounds, and as an introduction to the content of the text about to be read:

T: Put your head on your desks and listen to what the Snowman is experiencing

(....)

T: What did you hear? I'll play it once again

(...)

Si: The snowman is surrounded by a storm

Sii: There is a strong wind

Siii: It rains heavily

Siv: There is thunder and lightning

Sv: It's too noisy

Svi: I wouldn't want to be out there

T: So we heard different noises related to the weather. This is what we heard. Let's read together...

(Observation, Teacher 9)

An interesting Q&A sequence that promoted aural comprehension, was organised by Teacher 3. In an effort to contextualise her phonics work, the teacher organised a game – like activity, forming riddles, the answer to which was a word starting with the focus sound:

T: We will now play my favourite... On my hand I wear it and I can tell the time. What is it? Is it perhaps...

S: Watch!

T: Whole sentence please

S: Perhaps watch?

T: Article please

S: Is it perhaps a watch?

T: Yes. Come out Lefteris. Give us a riddle.

S: It is big and green and it lives in a lake. What is it?

S: Is it perhaps a frog?

T: Yes. Who's next? Come out my friend

S: Out of it comes music and with it I dance a lot. What is it?

T: I love that you made your riddle in rhyme! (Observation, Teacher 3)

In the above exchange the teacher provided an example for children to respond to and then allowed them to pose their own questions to their classmates. It is an example of a more complex form of an Initiation - Response -Feedback (IRF) exchange, where grammar teaching is also present and sentence structure is tackled, while simultaneously knowledge is tested on a phonic and semantic level and children's problem-solving and understanding skills are also supported, all in language play.

The same teacher at a later point in her lesson, organised an activity as a variation to the reading comprehension of the text they worked on, which demanded of the children to listen to what she was telling them, to mentally compare it with the content of the text they had read, and identify whether it was right or wrong:

T: Right or Wrong! Who wants to play? I am sure I can trick you. Let's see... Marina didn't have her birthday.

S: Wrong

T: What is correct?

S: Marina had a birthday party

T: Marina did not invite her friends

Sii: Wrong – Marina invited her friends

T: The children did not buy gifts

Siii: The children bought her gifts

T: What's the problem in these sentences: It's Aris' birthday. Aris took a radio.

S: Orfeas took a radio

T: Ok. (Observation, Teacher 3)

The teacher therefore organised a game – like activity again, this time enabling her to evaluate the children's understanding, both of the text read and of the text heard. This was also explicitly raised during her interview:

"I find it particularly important to make them speak, cultivate their oral speech and through games this happens a lot". (Interview, Teacher 3)

6.1.2.1.2. Q&A for information elicitation

Question and answer sequences were widely used to elicit information. Examples of general knowledge information elicitation Q&A sequences were the four instances, in which teachers asked children at the very beginning of their lessons to correct the date on the board of the classroom. In the example below, the teacher wrote on the board the respective information the children provided, the day, month and the date, drawing a cloud partly obscuring a sun:

T: So, what day is it today?

SS: Wednesday!

T: Now, now, where are our good manners. Raise your hand as we agreed. And the month?

Si: October

T: And our season?

Sii: Our season is autumn

T: This is a very good answer. And the date is the 13th. And would you say the weather is the same as yesterday? How was it yesterday?

Siii: It was the same. Some clouds and some sun. (Observation , Teacher 1)

Simultaneously though, through this basic Q&A sequence, the teacher utilised this opportunity to do more than meets the eye, as she modelled not only turn taking, but also transformed spoken language into written language. Teacher 1 explicitly addressed the need for children to speak throughout her lesson and in her interview:

“what we did was first oral speech production based on the book’s picture about the text and then we extracted sentences. I use the notion of a train with wagons for the sentence and its words. And as you saw I work on the size and the quality of the sentence, I need them to give me completed and enriched sentences. It is very important for them to know what a sentence is. We also use drama and role play so as they produce oral speech”. (Interview, Teacher 1)

Similarly, Teachers 9 and 11 used basic patterns of interaction and daily classroom routines for serving more than one purpose, both on a decoding – encoding level and on a compositional level. Specifically, Teacher 11 approached spoken language as a way of enriching a skills-based lesson. Associating it with creativity, she called for a need to provide children with the opportunity to express themselves orally:

“On the first day you will therefore introduce the letter and do some simple activities with the new letter and the basic syllables, but I try to incorporate some more creative things beyond this, I think it is needed, because they need to learn to talk, express themselves, to participate in what we do. I think these are important too. Being able to manipulate syllables will come sooner or later but the lesson must not be dry, simply to teach them to read – they should learn to express themselves too and to be creative.” (Interview, Teacher 11)

6.1.2.1.3. Q&A for previous/background knowledge retrieval

In what can be seen as a more advanced level of information elicitation, three teachers attempted to build their lessons on children’s knowledge from previous lessons or other sources of information. Having read the story’s title, Teacher 6 explored children’s prior knowledge of the matter in hand:

T: Remember this book? We had read it a few days ago... We will read it today and look at it more carefully. Now the title is “Ο καλόκαρδος καρχαρίας” (The goodhearted shark) and as I read I need you to listen carefully. First though, what do you know about sharks?

Si: They are dangerous

Sii: They live in the ocean

Siii: There are different kinds and colours

T: Really? Such as?

Siii: Like the hammer-head shark which is grey and there is also a white shark I know of

T: Round of applause for all this information that we were told! (Observation, Teacher 6)

In her interview, Teacher 6 noted that in her choice of methodology, she explicitly and intentionally attends to spoken language, an area in which she thinks children need development:

"I approach language in a text-centred way and with emphasis on spoken language because I think children are lacking in that domain and I believe in starting with the whole, it is more appropriate, then from the text to the word to the syllable to the letter". (Interview, Teacher 6)

Teacher 14, after providing the opportunity to recall the previous lesson, used the picture from the new lesson as a way to introduce the new text:

T: Who can remember and remind us what happened to the characters of the story in the last lesson?

Si: They entered a house to see what was inside

Sii: It was Orfeas, Aris and Marina

Siii: They wanted to see what was inside the bag, but night fell and they got scared of the dark.

T: Good. Now today we will discover what happened next. Look here...Who can tell where our heroes are?

Si: It's Aris and Marina

Sii: They are outside a house

Siii: outside a house fence

T: And what do you think they look at with such great interest?

Si: What Ioanna does

Sii: Where does the carrot came from?

T: And what do you think they say?

Si: I think Ioanna talks to the parrot and asks if he is hungry

T: Ok! (Observation, Teacher 14)

The picture provided the basis for children to use relevant vocabulary to produce sentences in order to describe what it depicted and to hypothesise about the content of the corresponding text.

Oral speech production based on pictures was a practice observed in four other classrooms, while a fifth teacher used them as prompts in order to help children narrate a story. Theoretically, there are a number of opposing ways to account for the use of illustrations in the language classroom. If a multimodal approach was to be adopted, these pictures would be seen as visual texts; when children were asked to describe or compare them, they would be asked to analyse and comprehend a particular text type, having "read" a semiotic mode that is not language, but images. But taking a multimodal perspective in this stage of Grade 1 would mean broadening the definition of what a text is and how a text is to be 'read' and analysed. The emphasis here is placed on the fundamental ability to learn how to read written texts and to write them. Thus, for the purposes of this study, pictures are seen as prompts for children to develop their spoken language by describing what they see, as a path to understanding what they are about to read.

6.1.2.1.4. Q&A for picture description

Examples of Q&A for a picture description were seen in classrooms where the teachers inductively lead children towards the letter or the text of the day; Teacher

4 allocated a large part of her lesson for the description of the picture of the previous and of the new lesson.

T: Ok. Look at the picture and remind me what we said yesterday. What do you see? Hands up!

Si: I see a carrot

T: You Despo?

Sii: I see Ioanna holding a carrot. I also see a lamp.

Siii: I see a parrot. You can't really see the parrot, but I can tell from its nose.

T: Antrea?

Siv: I see Aris and Marina

T: What are they doing?

Siv: He is feeding a carrot

Sv: I see a cat.

T: What does the cat do?

Sv: The cat is hiding.

T: Why is the cat hiding?

Sv: Because there are some children the cat does not know. (...) (Observation, Teacher 4)

The teacher proceeded by asking the children to focus upon and describe the clothes or feelings (based on the facial expressions) of the specific characters depicted. Through such repeated processes of providing sentences to describe pictures, the teacher elicited words containing the letter under study, which she used later on.

In another interesting example, Teacher 10 organised an activity moving from the oral production of children's sentences to the 'extraction' of the text's sentences, presenting them not as the pre – prepared and published sentences of their book, but as a natural extension of their classroom discussion:

T: Ok, let's focus on the new picture then. Why do you think Ioanna is happy?

Si: I think because she is having fun with the parrot

T: Who else is in the picture?

Sii: Ioanna, a parrot and Orfeas and Aris.

(...)

T: Correct. So Orfeas says to his friend "Ari, a girl in the window", but Aris knows her from school. We know her too!

SS: It's Ioanna!

T: Aris says to Orfeas that Ioanna likes music a lot. What does it mean? Do you like music?

SS: Yes

T: So what does one do when he likes music?

Si: He listens to the radio

Sii: He plays guitar

Siv: He listens to cd's and i-pod

Sv: He sings

T: Excellent. Ioanna sung too all day long. So here we already have a text. I will read it for you once (...) (Observation, Teacher 10)

Beside the use of the pictures accompanying the texts in the children's books, Teacher 8 used a picture from a different source, too. As she wanted to teach /s/, she began her lesson showing a picture of a snail, before proceeding to the book's

picture. This was a way of drawing on the general knowledge the children had and linking it to their knowledge of the everyday world, while also providing the opportunity to children to talk more freely with less closed questions to answer.

6.1.2.1.5. Q&A for recount

In one occasion, a teacher provided children with the opportunity to recount events, however this was done within a limited amount of time and without allowing much elaboration; Teacher 7 asked the children to recount how they had spent their weekend:

T: So who will share how you spent the really long weekend? We didn't have school on Friday and I think you grew since the last time I saw you!

Si: We went to my grandmother in Limassol

Sii: We went to my cousin's birthday

T: How old did was she?

Sii: ...

T: How many candles did she blow?

Sii: Three

T: So she turned three years old.

Siii: We stayed at home and I played outside and fell and had blood on both my feet

T: I am so sorry you fell and hurt your feet. But I think your feet are better now yes?

S: My feet are ok

T: Excellent. (Observation, Teacher 7)

6.1.2.1.6. Q&A for grammar teaching

The teaching of grammar in the lessons observed occurred in two contexts and in relation to activities aiming at developing spoken language or reading, thus not as an aspect of language teaching as a goal in itself. Regarding the teaching of grammar, which featured in the spoken language activities, it is important to note that it varied from a passing observation or reaffirmation of information previously repeated in a more extensive activity. Teachers 3, 8 and 12 for example, while during activities focusing on the alphabetic code and GPC awareness, reminded the children about using a capital letter when writing names:

Si: Antreas

T: Yes, Antreas, but why? What is Antreas?

Si: A name

T: And what did we say about names?

Sii: They need a capital at the beginning (Observation, Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 referred to this in her interview, but associating more with writing activities rather with oral, which was observed in her lesson:

I try to stress the basics in writing a sentence every time we write; always start with a capital, space the words with our little fingers, stress each word as we write it and not leave it for the end and put a full stop. (Interview, Teacher 3)

Spelling rules was another aspect of grammar teaching being inserted into an activity aiming mainly at a different goal. Teacher 12 for example, in the same activity as above, continued by asking a child to refer to the spelling of a verb. The answer provided was quite linguistically oriented:

Sv: Περικλής

T: And because it's a name...

Sv: If we write it, we use a capital

Sii: παίζω (I play)

T: I play. I. Which /o/ do we write?

Sii: omega – it's a verb ending

T: Brilliant (Observation, Teacher 12)

Teacher 12 was the most interesting case in relation to grammar teaching, as in her interview she referred to it throughout extensively:

I believe in starting them early with grammatical rules and doing it in parallel (...) and also word endings, which I didn't do today with no time left, (you only saw some verbs) but they already know that we have masculine, feminine and neuter and neuter nouns have the article 'to' in front and are spelled with 'o' these things we have already established and they know the exact terminology – I insist. (Interview, Teacher 12)

The use of meta-language was seen in a number of lessons, with an explicit example in Teacher 5's classroom. In providing feedback on some written work, she interrupted the children's work in progress:

T: In the word horn remember that this is not a verb, it is a noun, it's neuter and it takes...?

SS: Omikron!

T: Whereas if we had a verb we would use?

SS: Omega (Observation, Teacher 5)

Thus, the teacher instead of correcting a spelling mistake she located, she provided the grammatical rule, providing a justification and modelling a meta-cognitive strategy, so that the children would remember the correct spelling in the future.

Two teachers in their introduction to functions of words (i.e. adjectives) used explicit meta-language. Teachers 1 and 3 chose to include as an oral activity in their lesson sentence structure and the function of adjectives as that part of speech which can expand a sentence and provide additional information about the noun. Six teachers saw the structure of sentences as one of the most important aspects of their teaching in Grade 1 (although almost all of them discussed the importance of the distinction between sentences and words - starting with a capital letter, ending with a full stop). Teachers 1, 11 and 15 discussed in detail in their interviews the importance they place on teaching sentence structure:

"But at the same time I will work on punctuation, on the correct spacing of the words, on using the capital letter; there are always multiple goals in the first year! (...) I use the notion of a train with

wagons for the sentence and its words. And as you saw I work on the size and the quality of the sentence, I need them to give me completed and enriched sentences. It is very important for them to know what a sentence is.(...) Their names are important and also the structure of a sentence. (Interview, Teacher 1)

On the particular day of the observation, Teacher 1 applied in action her belief on the importance of the sentence. Specifically, children were asked to describe a picture:

T: Because I know you are excellent spies I want you to look at the picture and tell me beautiful little sentences for the grandfather, Ioanna and the parrot. Start them nicely, "Ioanna...", "Grandfather..." and use nice words from the picture"

S: The parrot is near the bicycle

T: Oh! The parrot flies over a bicycle, said Ioanna. Wow! Look how many wagons this little sentence has!

S: Joanna eats ice cream

T: This is a small sentence. Ok, let's make it bigger. How can we show that the ice cream is nice? Ioanna eats a...

S: delicious

T: Very nice! A delicious ice cream. What do you have to say about the grandfather?

S: The grandfather holds a melon.

T: Let's make this one also bigger!

S: The grandfather holds a big lemon

T: And one sentence for that man there. What does he do?

S: He sells fruit

T: The fruit seller sells melons and watermelons. (Observation, Teacher 1)

Besides describing, the children were thus given the opportunity to learn how to use a grammatical category to serve a particular purpose within a given context.

Similarly, Teacher 3 introduced children to the function of adjectives in sentences, using a prompt:

T: I remove all our friends and now comes the bow. Who will make the sentences more beautiful for me? Sentence 5! Orfeas took a watch

Si: pretty

Sii: ornated

Siii: clean

T: It could be dirty, yes, but whole sentences please

Si: Orfeas took a red watch.

Sii: Orfeas took a black watch.

Siii: Orfeas took a big watch.

Siv: Orfeas took a small watch. (Observation, Teacher 3)

Although adjectives were here introduced only as a means of 'sentence beautification', with children providing also descriptive examples, it is important to note that the children grasped the function this phenomenon serves in sentence structure and language in general.

It is important to note that all the examples above lean more towards the grammar of words and sentences and not at text level. Only one occasion was observed

where a grammatical category was explicitly associated with the production of a text within a specific genre. When asking children to retell a story, Teacher 7 guided them towards the conventions of the story telling genre (opening-ending, main episodes, and the use of connective words as cohesive devices:

T: Now I think I want you to tell me the story again, but this time I want you to use these words that will help us bring the story together. This is "also", "later", "then", "afterwards". Start like we start a story...Who will try?

Si: Once upon a time

T: Yes! (Observation, Teacher 7)

It is possible that the teachers purposefully choose basic grammatical phenomena to look at during the initial months of Grade 1. This is indicated in Teacher's 8 interview:

"I work in the order the book suggests, setting for each and every lesson a set of communicational goals and a set of lexicogrammar goals, which change after Christmas and become more genre or grammar oriented" (Interview, teacher 8)

In all the above Q&A sequences it is obvious that aside from the opportunity teachers provided for children to listen and respond to questions, they were also aiming at a number of other goals, fulfilling other purposes in an implicit and parallel way. Teachers also had the chance to see whether children could understand and respond to meanings, simultaneously though they could use these sequences as tools for monitoring and assessing the overall progress of children of their classroom. However, there does not seem to be any evidence on whether teachers systematically and consciously did so or whether they tried to differentiate the questions posed to different children. What seemed to be a priority was to involve as many children as possible in the whole process so as to keep them engaged and motivated, as a class control mechanism.

6.1.2.2. Compositional opportunities

Children were provided with two types of compositional opportunities, i.e. opportunities to develop their spoken language skills outside a structured schema of Q & A sequences. Interestingly though, and indicatively of the way teachers staged their lessons, even in those occasions a lot of probing was observed, at a point where an argument could be made that instead of compositional these instances were Q&A sequences as well.

6.1.2.2.1. Role - playing

Teachers 1, 6 and 7 asked children to do some role – play. Unlike in the UK context, where drama is distinctively addressed with specific goals to be met, the situation in Cyprus is quite different, leaving drama- related activities to the discretion of teachers. Teacher 1 allowed less than 5 minutes for an activity where the children would assume the roles of the characters mentioned in the text in order to improvise a dialogue, and so extending the text:

T: Now, I have great idea. This picture has inspired me for a play. Who wants to sell fruit? Who will be the grandfather? The parrot? And Ioanna will want ice cream

You will be Ioanna, you will be the grandfather, this is the parrot and the seller.

S: I sell melons, fruit!

S: Can I have an ice cream?

T: And then what happens?

T: Let's do it again. Which children want to try this time?

SS: Me! me! (Observation, Teacher 1)

The children participated in the above activity with excitement and had a second try at it gladly. The situation was different in Teacher's 6 classroom, where she tried to have the children improvise on two occasions, with children however being obviously not able to respond:

T: Ok. Now I want you to leave everything on your desk and look here. Let's do some role-playing. Sotiris and Marios out and I want you to pretend that you are the shark and you are a fish the shark meets

Si: (...) I will eat you (...)

Sii: (...) Please don't eat me (...)

T: Ok we tried. We will try again at some later point. (Observation Teacher 6)

While a similar activity worked for one teacher and not the other (possibly because children may have had less frequent opportunities to engage in such practices) it is important to note that both perceived it important to include in their lessons.

Also, Teacher 7 guided the children in assuming the roles of different characters of one of the main episodes of the story, providing cues and prompts:

T: You did very well. Now I want a Snow White, a queen, a huntsman, and seven dwarfs

SS: And a prince!

T: How could I forget! Ok, we will do Scene 1 when the Queen asks the huntsman to kill Snow White. Come on Queen. Be evil! What will you say?

Si: Kill her

T: I want...

Si: I want you to kill Snow White

T: Good. And what will you say. Don't be shy. I will help you. She sends you to kill Snow White- what will you say

Sii: Ok

T: At your orders my Queen!

S: Ok, at your orders my Queen!

T: Applause for the Queen and the huntsman and you can go back to your seats (Observation, Teacher 7)

6.1.2.2.2. Narrative re-telling

The second example of compositional opportunities provided was the retelling of a narrative. After having experienced a story once, and this is explained in detail in the following section, two teachers asked the children to retell the story.

As mentioned previously, Teacher 7 guided them through the retelling insisting on the use of the appropriate connective words and generic conventions of stories, such as the opening and the ending and the sequential reference to events:

T: So Snow White wandered in the woods until she found the dwarfs' house. Then?

Svi: Then she went inside and cleaned it.

Svii: Afterwards she slept because she got tired and a dwarf found her

T: The evil Queen found her and poisoned her with a poisonous apple. And then?

Si: Then a prince kissed her and woke her

T: And how do fairy tales end?

SS: And they all lived happily ever after! (Observation Teacher 7)

Also, Teacher 12 asked the children to retell the story and briefly connected it with the children's personal experiences:

T: Now in your own words. Once upon a time...

Si: There was an ugly duckling who turned into a beautiful swan

T: That's it? What happened in between?

Sii: So this ugly duckling had a really bad time and everybody was mean to him, because he was grey

T: So they laughed at him for being different

Sii: But he then became a beautiful swan

T: Again he was different. And he was different in swimming too

Siii: He was better at it

T: Naturally, he was stronger

Siv: Because he would grow to be a swan instead of just a duck

T: Yes. Are you any good in swimming?

SS: Yes!!!

T: I believe you. (...) (Observation, Teacher 12)

It is evident that teachers focused more Q & A sequences and provided children with fewer opportunities to develop and sustain conversations or use spoken language for different purposes and various audiences. Still, it could be argued that the stage of Grade 1 in which they were, demanded this type of emphasis in spoken language, and relevant references are made in the discussion section.

6.1.2.3. Opportunities combining learning foci

In four lessons a phenomenon was observed where the teachers skilfully combined and cultivated different skills simultaneously, blending together listening and responding opportunities to drama-related activities, having children enact stories using some dramatic techniques and exploring characters and ideas through

improvisations. Teachers 2, 7, 12, 13 used children's books to teach the new letter, three of them, incidentally, 'Snow White' and one 'The Ugly Duckling'. In these lessons, a significant part was allocated into this kind of 'super' story presenting activity; teachers embedded a number of different activities while 'presenting', not exactly reading or narrating, but engaging children in a multi-sensory, multi-dimensional exploration of the text.

In two classrooms, teachers had the children seated in a circle in front of them, as they narrated the stories (showing pictures), interrupting to ask information (i.e. names, phrases) providing opportunities for role play and story retelling as the plot developed, while supporting the children to apply genre conventions to the story, cultivate their vocabulary and reinforce emotional response. The new letter was presented as an interlude, but in close association with the story (i.e. as the initial letter in the dwarfs' invented names). For example, Teacher 12 combined story-telling with vocabulary development and the modelling of reading comprehension strategies:

T: It says here that the Ugly Duckling won their admiration. What does admire mean?

SS:...

T: Is it like wow or ughhhhh?

S: It's definitely wow.

T: Yes, it is when we look up to someone. And why did the siblings look up to the ugly duckling?

S: He could swim better

T: How can you tell?

S: It says it could dive and get to point really quickly so it means he did better than the others

T: See? He may not have been the prettiest but it was the most able. What does being able mean? I am able, I have abilities... For example I am able in reading, Niki in drawing...

S: It means you are good at it. (Observation, Teacher 12)

Teacher 7 incorporated grammar teaching in her story-telling activity, while Teacher 13 asked the children to tell her the story based on the pictures she presented, asking questions about the characters' actions, motivations and feelings.

It is important to note that in all interviews, there seemed to be a pattern of reluctance among the teachers to view spoken language as an important goal of their language teaching, and the view commonly taken was that it is a vehicle, a way into a reading or writing teaching activity. Although all teachers went into detail regarding their practices for teaching reading and writing, four of them did not even allude to spoken language, even if it did play a significant role in their lessons. When teachers, for example, described how they organise their two or

three day units to teach a new letter, they referred to spoken language as a pre-reading or pre-writing tool:

“After this we always have an activity where they orally produce a text and then we write it. For example a list of foods the hero may have eaten or a list of games, a letter they wrote, etc. Then on the second day I extract sentences relevant to the story that are also the main points or a critical episode, something that is interesting and important. I write these sentences on the board after a discussion I have with the children and then I distribute them on a handout. Obviously, although the children think they have come up with them, I prepare them in advance. The sentences, usually two to four, include the letter I want to teach, The second day also includes an activity for oral speech production that we turn into a written speech production. For example I may ask them what a hero from our story might say on a specific point and then we would write a couple of sentences to enrich the story or extend it”. (Interview, Teacher 7)

Teacher 15, in summarising the overall organisation of her daily lessons, placed the text and language structure at the centre of her lesson, operating as the vehicles to teach a new letter; while spoken language is not separately attended to, it's importance is evident, but in relation to the main goal, the letter:

“It depends on the text, but it can be the picture of the textbook, or a discussion or something, you read the text and pose some comprehension questions, we look at grammatical or syntactical phenomena, adding or subtracting adjectives and seeing what happens, playing right or wrong games, I work a bit on opposites. You can then, if you are using PowerPoint for example, and use a little animal and say to the children that the animal visiting us today got hungry and ate some letters, so you ask the children to locate what the animal ate. So because orally you have already worked a lot with the text and the children are familiar with it, they can easily locate which letter is gone and so they discover that the missing letter will be in focus on that particular day” (Interview, Teacher 15)

6.1.3. Reading

As discussed in the literature review chapter, the extensive and prolonged study of reading has generated a variety of models that aim to describe the process of learning how to read, with one of the most helpful conceptualisations being provided by the Simple View of Reading model. Based on this model, this section presents the way in which effective Cypriot teachers of literacy address the teaching of reading first, as decoding and secondly, as comprehension.

6.1.3.1. Decoding

At the heart of reading an alphabetic language lies the ability to decode, i.e. the skill to quickly identify the letters (graphemes) and link these to the sounds (phonemes) that they represent. Reading the larger units of language, such as syllables or whole words, and the ability to blend the phonemes together is the next step; segmenting and blending sounds into words are the two skills that are directly associated with the development of fluent reading. Decoding is thus seen as a key and critical skill for early reading instruction. (Rose , 2006; NRP, 2000).

From the analysis of the classroom observations and the relevant comments made in teacher interviews, it is clear that during the initial stages of Grade 1, teachers are addressing decoding as a priority. When teachers referred to the teaching of reading in their interviews, again more emphasis was placed on reading as decoding rather than comprehension. They also, more frequently than not, associated it with the teaching of writing. These two facts are indicative of the emphasis placed on the decoding – encoding process, which, understandably, seems to dominate teaching practices during the first three months of Grade 1, leaving comprehension as something that comes later, as decoding becomes automatic and effortless. Teacher 13 explicitly revealed this:

“You know I would love to have you back later towards the end of the year when we do text comprehension and more extensive activities...” (Interview, Teacher 13)

In what follows the way that teachers introduce children to the foundational understandings of literacy is presented, as well as how they teach the identification of letters – graphemes and the knowledge of sounds – phonemes, before looking at examples of GPC teaching.

6.1.3.1.1. Foundational understandings of literacy

The explicit teaching of foundational understandings of literacy (i.e. understanding both the concepts and conventions of print, developing phonological, orthographic and then alphabetic awareness) are one of the core parameters of effective literacy teaching in the literature of early literacy acquisition. In the lessons observed, there were some examples of teachers touching upon some foundational understandings; overall, however, this aspect of effective teaching was not particularly observed. One of the most plausible reasons may be the fact that all children attend a compulsory pre-primary class and possibly one or two years of kindergarten, where issues like the concepts about print (i.e. print - pictures distinction and the orientation of books and print) will have been addressed. Teachers, therefore, may exclude systematic work on the foundational understandings of literacy, perceiving it as ground covered elsewhere, not least in many homes.

Four of the teachers did however provide an opportunity for children to associate decoding (and simultaneously encoding) with a day – to – day use of literacy,

specifically reading and writing the day and date. As part of their daily routines, the teachers explicitly and purposefully took time to change the date written on the whiteboard, modelling spoken language transformed into writing, as noted before.

Another example of work on the foundational understandings of literacy was also seen in the following occasion, where children were asked to point their attention to the fact that printed texts consist not only of letters but punctuation marks too. The teacher used the activity to introduce meta-language as well, asking the children not only to locate and name different punctuation marks, but to consider their function and how they impact on the reading of a text:

T: Children what are these signs here?

Si: Little lines

Sii: They show that different people speak

T: Yes it is a dialogue and these are dashes and they are a punctuation mark. Which other punctuation marks can you see? Who will come out and circle one?

Si: This and this are full stops.

T: And where do we put them?

Si: At the end of a sentence

T: Yes, but there are other marks that go at the end of a sentence...

Sii: This here.

T: Who remembers what this is? Excla...

SS: Exclamation mark

T: It shows exclamation, a surprise, excitement... If I wrote this... Here we read "Ioanna!" but if I put this?

Si: Ioanna

T: No that would be if I had a full stop

Sii: Ioanna?

T: Good. (Observation, Teacher 10)

Teacher 10 thus interrelated the teaching of reading with the teaching of grammar. In another observation, when the teacher used a children's book in her lesson, she started by showing it to the children making the following question:

T: So this is our book today. Who can read the title on the front cover?

Si: Το ασχημόπαπο (The Ugly Duckling) (Observation, Teacher 12)

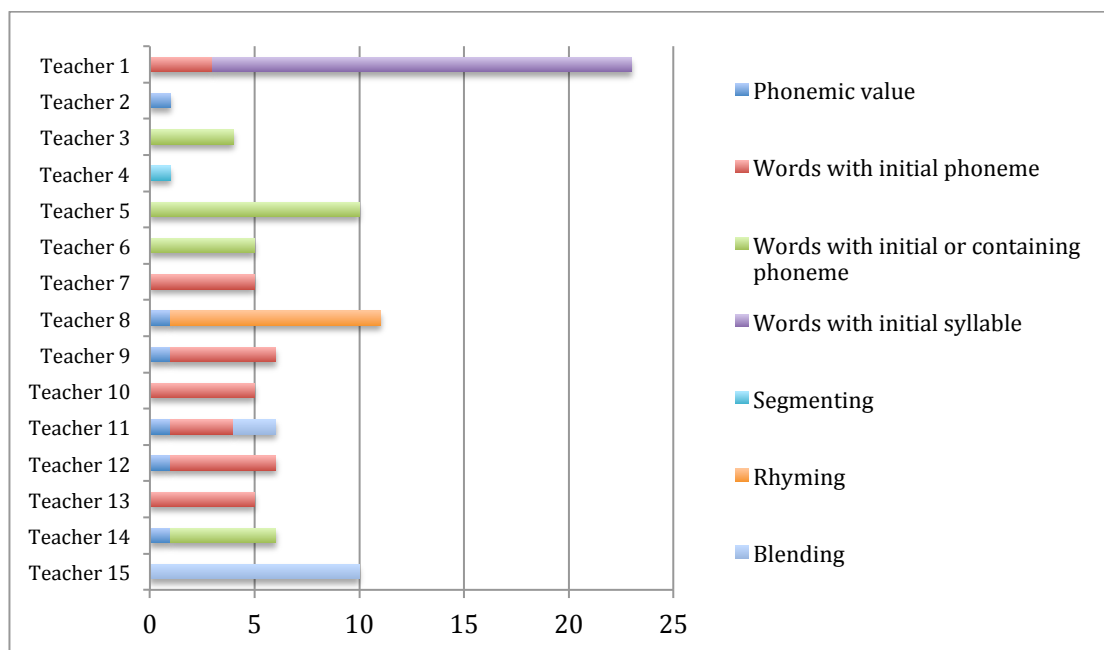
As she held the book in front the children she directed their attention to the title and once located, she wrote it on the board, modelling again turning spoken language to written, but mostly teaching the children about a book cover and the book title. Further activities on concepts about print were not observed.

6.1.3.1.2. Alphabetic code: Knowledge of sounds – phonemes

Phonological and phonemic awareness, teaching children how to focus on and to manipulate phonemes and larger units such as syllables, are important skills that

are highlighted in the relevant research as the main predictors at school entry level for the children’s achievement in reading. The research literature indicates that children need to be provided with opportunities to manipulate phonemes, focusing on one or two types of phoneme manipulations rather than multiple types, and that this type of teaching usually occurs in small groups. However, in all lessons observed, group work (in pairs) occurred when children practised reading or writing, but never when acquiring new knowledge or skills. Still, all lessons included phonological and phonemic awareness activities and the following figure presents the types of these activities and their duration (minutes in horizontal axis), in order to provide an indication of the time and importance allocated by the teachers within their 80-minute lessons.

Figure 6.3: Phonological and phonemic awareness activities



Teachers allocated as little as a minute of time to fifteen minutes of the overall lesson to the above activities. Six teachers asked the children to sound out the new letter of that session; typically, the teacher would show the new letter and ask the children to repeat it after her, as in the following example:

T: It's /n/. Look! Like /n/ in /nanos/ (dwarf). Sound it out for me...

SS:Nnnnnnnnnnnnnnn

T: Yes, you did try to shout it out loud, but I think /n/ needs a little help. Let's put it close to other letters to help it sound louder. (Observation, Teacher 2)

On one occasion the children were corrected for their pronunciation of a consonant; as explained in the relevant section, children in Cyprus are taught Standard Modern Greek but speak the local dialect, which is characterised, inter alia, by turning unvoiced plosive consonants into aspirated:

Sii: I know which letter we will learn!

T: Really? Which one?

Sii: ppp

T: 'παπάκι' (duckling). It's 'p' not 'ppp'! (Observation, Teacher 12)

In the above example, the teacher provided an example of the consonant used in a word which is pronounced in the exact same way in both varieties, leaving no margin for misconceptions. This is a practice echoing analytic phonics approaches, where children are encouraged to analyse letter-sound relationships in previously learned words to avoid pronouncing sounds in isolation.

Eleven teachers included in their lesson activities where children were asked to think of words with the letter in focus as either an initial phoneme or as being contained in the word. The framing of these activities differed though, from presenting it as a straightforward activity asking random words to asking for words with specific restrictions (i.e. names or objects from the classroom environment) or as a request by a character, as in the following example:

T: Our parrot is very greedy and wants to eat more things starting with /p/. Think about foods that start with /p/; what else could the parrot eat? (Observation, Teacher 1)

In the following example the teacher associated the content of the story they had read with a similar activity and after leading the children to the letter in focus, she further extended it:

T: He took her to the Land of 'Ks', where all the 'ks' things are. Let's see what they might have found there...

Si: ξύλο (wood)

Sii: ξιφίας (swordfish)

(...)

T: Do you notice anything?

S: They all start with a 'ks'

T: Since we are in the land of 'ks'. Now read for me what I circle...So who is our king for today?

SS: KS!

T: Look around and tell me if we have something in our classroom that starts or includes 'ks'

Si: τάξη (classroom)

(...)

Sv: Τσάντες (bags)

T: No! Careful! 'τσ' (ts) is different from 'ξ' (ks) say it...

Sv:...

T: All say it...

SS:... (...) (Observation, Teacher 9)

On this occasion, the teacher approached the new letter with a list of words with the letter as the initial sound, as well as through words from their immediate environment starting or containing it, pausing at a child's mistake to ensure that the children could pronounce the letter sound correctly and precisely and not confuse it with other double sounds of the Greek language.

An interesting example of linking phonemic awareness and decoding to vocabulary, spelling and grammar is the following extract from the lesson of Teacher 12; similar to her colleagues she asked the children to think of words starting with the focus sound, but simultaneously she took advantage of arising opportunities to work on semantics, pragmatics, spellings and grammar rules as well as children with Greek as L2 vocabulary:

T: Now pencils down, close your eyes and think of a word starting with p...Open!

(..)

Siii: πάπυρος (papyrus)

T: Wow. This was a kind of paper ancient Egyptians used children, it wasn't like our paper but a slightly different material

(...)

Sii: παίζω (I play)

T: I play. I. Which /o/ do we write?

Sii: omega – it's a verb ending

T: Brilliant

(...)

Siv: πούπουλα (feathers)

Sv: Περικλής

T: And because it's a name...

Sv: If we write it, we use capital

Svi: παγωτό (ice cream)

Svii: πεταλούδα (butterfly)

Siii: What is this?

T: You haven't seen one? You don't know the word? It's this! Definitely you have seen one, yes?

Πεταλούδα (shows a picture) (Observation, Teacher 12)

Teacher 12 relied to some extent on incidental learning, combining phonics instruction within the discussion of notions and vocabulary.

Although segmenting and blending sounds are very important skills for beginning readers to master, teachers provided opportunities to do so primarily as part of other activities. In the encoding activity below, the teacher asked for words with the letter in focus as an initial sound. Phonemic awareness was attached to the modelling of how spoken language becomes written and to how to spell words phonetically:

T: Yes Ioanni. Give me your word.

S: Ινδιάνος (Indian).

T: Ok. Tell me what to write...

S: /ι/, /δ/, (I, d)

T: Listen carefully! I-NNN-διάνος. Before /δ/ comes a...

S: /n/ (Observation, Teacher 4)

Children had thus a brief window of opportunity to understand how segmenting and blending can help them at a phonemic level, and segmenting and blending occurred while decoding or encoding written speech on other occasions too.

Teacher 1 moved from graphemes to sound /phonemes to blending them to form syllables, then to words, while simultaneously teaching grammar – spelling rules. Particularly interesting is the fact that she asked the child who provided a wrong answer to sound it out in order to locate the difference in the phonemic values of /b/ and /p/:

T: Ok. Now, all eyes here...Now, look here at the parrot. /p/ has teamed up with /a/ and together they shout /pa/. Here /p/ has teamed up with /e/ and together they shout...

SS: pe

T: Here /p/ meets /o/ and they shout...

SS: po

T: and here /p/ meets our little ghost and together they shout

SS: /poo/

T: Right. Do you know any other words that start or contain this little syllable?

S: παπαγάλος (parrot)

S: μπάλα (ball)

T: No, say it out loud; it's /b/ not /p/

S: παπί (duck)

S: πεπόνι (melon)

T: There isn't a /pa/ here, but there is a /pe/. Let's continue with /pa/

S: πάμε (we go)

S: παραλία (beach)

S: Παναγία (Holy Mary)

T: I need to ask a question. Should I write this also with a small or with a capital letter?

S: A big one because this is a name

T: It is a name, yes, and also out of respect

S: παπούτσια (shoes)

T: Ok, give me now /pe/

S: πεταλούδα (butterfly)

S: πένα (pen)

S: παιδί (child)

T: Ok, I will write this one here, because it sounds like /pe/, but, look, we write it with the two sounds that are /a/ and /i/ but that shout together like /e/. Ok, /po/ now

S: πόδι (foot)

(...)

T: Remember we also have pi (πη) pi (πυ) and this po (πω). Can anyone read these words?

SS: πηγάδι (rigadi), πύραυλος (piravlos), πώμα (roma) (Observation, Teacher 1)

It is important to note the distinction she made between the more widely used and easier three first syllables to the latter three (πη, πυ, πω), to which she simply referred.

Syllables, as also stated in interviews, are seen as an important unit in Greek, the manipulation of which grants access to the ability to read, as words are often multi-syllable:

"(...) /ela/, /elate/ are quite do-able for them, these are words that they can get them visually as well, as a picture. And I proceed with syllables. For example today we had /p/ since they know the vowels, first they practise /pa/, /pe/, /pi/, /po/, you saw them, and we follow the same process with all the new consonants. This is the secret of Grade 1. If you can grasp the syllabification process then you know how to read. (...) Basically Grade 1 is syllabification for me. And you saw that the children got it. If you can read syllables, you read" (Interview, Teacher 12)

Only one teacher provided an opportunity to rhyme words. The teacher asked the children to compose a text in a specific genre (write a poem), following the conventions of their textbook's example, and so cultivating phonological awareness.

6.1.3.1.3. Alphabetic Code: teaching the letters – graphemes

In the process of decoding, learning the alphabet and learning the alphabetic code are two different things; in alphabetic languages the alphabet is a list of the letters, with symbols for upper and lower case letters, whereas the alphabetic code entails knowledge of GPC, since it includes the letters and groups of letters which encode the phonemes of a language. Thus, teaching the alphabetic code includes the alphabet, but also the fact that more than one of its letters can be used to represent one sound, in different spellings and, more in English than in Greek, with both the same and different ways to pronounce them.

In all the classrooms visited, the alphabet was prominently displayed on the walls, so as the children would have them available throughout the day as a visual aid to use both on their own or after a teacher's instruction. The displayed alphabet was thus used as a reference resource for the shapes of the letters, their directionality and the association of the upper and lower case of each letter, being a valuable tool for the development of visual and mnemonic strategies when it comes to Greek spelling too; in order to distinguish the different /i/ for example, the picture accompanying each becomes the clue that children use to spell correctly. Thus, for /I ι/ there is commonly an Indian or a hippo pictured (ινδιάνος, ιπποπόταμος) and both the teacher and the children will refer to it as the «'i' of the Indian», for /Hη/ a sun (ήλιος, thus this becomes the 'i' of the sun) or the /Υυ/ of the cloth (ύφασμα), and similarly, the two representations of the sound 'o' are called the 'o' of the umbrella or of the hour (ομπρέλα, ώρα). Thus, when Teacher 11 paused as she

wrote the name of the day, stopping at the ending, the children replied in the following manner:

T: So what day do we have?

SS: Παρασκευή! (Friday!)

T: I don't know which /i/ which is. Who will come and show me? (...). And which /i/ must I write?

SS: 'i' like the sun! (Observation, Teacher 11)

Although this is a widespread practice with beginning readers in Greek, two of the teachers strongly objected to the use of such practices, as they thought it adds an extra level of difficulty in the decoding process and obscures the explicitness within which they deal with the content of language learning:

"Not 'boy' - 'girl' but masculine, feminine and neuter and the vowels as well. Other teachers don't do this (they say the /i/ of the Indian) but I wouldn't allow this past the very first days. We won't go to year 2 and still be saying these, the letters have their own names within the alphabet and those should be used. It happened you know the year I had Year 2, they did not know the letters with their name of the alphabet. And just like us - we all have a name. We are not called something different at first and then change". (Interview, Teacher 12)

Similarly, when Teacher 5 wanted the children to focus on the correct spelling of words, they replied using the actual name of the letter. In this case the children were still offered a kind of mnemonic cue, but it had more to do with associating the spelling of words with their grammatical categories:

"T: In the word horn remember that it is not a verb, it is a noun, it's neuter and it takes...

SS: Omikron!

R: Whereas if we had a verb we would use...?

SS: Omega." (Observation, Teacher 5)

The alphabet was explicitly targeted in five of the observed lessons; it is important to stress that in all the observed lessons extensive work was done on individual letter knowledge. In five lessons, however, the teachers allocated specific time and activities to the alphabet in its entirety. Specifically, within the first fifteen minutes of their lessons, four of the teachers addressed the alphabet in the most simple or more elaborate ways. The more straight forward was in Teacher 2's classroom, with her holding a long ruler pointing above the board at the letters, as the children chanted, a practice followed daily:

T: That's it? Nothing else? Ok, then. 1,2,3! Let's go!

SS: Αα αεροπλάνο (airplane), Ββ βιβλίο (book), Γγ γάτα (cat), Δδ δέντρο (tree) (Observation, Teacher 2)

In another classroom the teacher used a puppet that the children were familiar with, as she used it often, and it was the puppet, Mr. Elephant, who asked the children to help him wake up by reading loudly the alphabet, again above the whiteboards; the children continued with a rhyming song about the vowels with the teacher writing the letters on the board as they sung, reinforcing GPC:

T: Do you want to start with Mr. Elephant?

SS: Yes!

T: Good morning children! I heard that you have a visitor today that's why I woke up. But I am not quite up yet. Can you read really loudly your alphabet to me?

SS: /A/ Αεροπλάνο (airplane), /B/Βιβλίο (book)... Τα φωνήεντα είναι εφτά και φωνάζουν δυνατά Αα Εε Ηη Ιι Οο Υυ Ωω. (the vowels are seven and they shout out loud /a/, /e/, /i/, /i/, /o/, /i/, /o/)

T: Well done. (Observation, Teacher 1)

Teacher 11 covered letter recapitulation/consolidation and upper/lower case correspondence by asking children to move around the classroom, to pair up according to the letters they had been given in envelopes and which provided again a word with the letters as initial sound:

T: Ok. Let's remember a bit our little letters...Here comes the postman...go to sleep please. The postman will not deliver if you are not asleep.

T: Wake up! Who has a letter today from the postman? Quickly! We don't have all the time in the world! I need the children who have lower case letters to come out. Lower case not capitals!

T: Now very quickly I want all the capitals to go to the other side

T: To the count of 5, I will need you to find your pair. If you have any difficulty, look at our alphabet train. 1...2...3...4...5!

T: Let's see if our pairs are correct! Ok. Maria what do Eleni and Andrea call out?

S: A!

T: Find me a word...(Observation, Teacher 11)

Teacher 14 had no activity on the letters of the alphabet at the beginning of the lesson, but an activity where children were asked to place the mixed letters of a name in the correct order. After that, the children had to rewrite the name into upper case letters so as to write a label, to be seen from afar. Thus the children were provided with a context and a purpose to turn the lower case to capital letters:

T: So here is the envelope and inside I have ε, Ρ, ζ, ο, ν. Where should we start? Think!

S: Take /r/ first because it's a capital so it must be first

T: Excellent. Now? Do we have any clue about the last? Is there a letter that always goes in the end of the word?

S: s... Renos!

T: Brilliant. In your books, write it carefully, remember to stress the /e/ and the capital /r/ sits on the line.

T: Ioanna has something more to tell... (instructions for the label with uppercase letters)

T: There is a trick here you must remember

S: No accent on capitals!

T: Perfect. (Observation, Teacher 14)

Teachers indicated in their interviews of the somewhat repetitive nature of the activities to teach the alphabetic code:

"You watched the teaching of a letter; we always touch upon the same points: what it looks like, what it sounds like, what it's name is, how we write it, syllables, and then connecting the new with the known letters and syllables we already looked at, creating words, and so on" (Interview, Teacher 15).

This effort to approach the new letter from many different perspectives on a number of levels is also echoed by Teacher 1:

For the new letter, we look at how it looks as a picture, a symbol, how it sounds, then how it constitutes a syllable and how we find it in words. (Interview, Teacher 1).

6.1.3.1.4. Grapheme – Phoneme Correspondence

The teachers provided children with some opportunities to develop their ability to match a phoneme to a grapheme and vice versa. While in English there is a crucial need and an explicit emphasis on teaching a comprehensive set of letter-sound correspondences step-by-step and often alphabetic code charts are used, where sounds are associated with their many spelling alternatives, the Greek language presents less complexities and has a more transparent orthography, as discussed in the literature review. However, learning how the alphabet works through both decoding and encoding is the major emphasis at this stage of Grade 1, albeit GPC correspondences not being at the top of the teachers' priorities, with only seven out of the fifteen teachers including relevant activities in their lessons.

Teachers emphasised blending, less on an oral level, and explicitly and systematically provided opportunities to children to look at and hear graphemes /phonemes and to merge them into syllables and words (as in a previous example of Teacher 1 above). In such occasions, examples occurred containing items taught later on, i.e. one of the few Greek digraphs and teachers simply referred to the phenomenon:

*T: Now in this sentence there is this word, *καίρός* (time) and in it a+i sound out e – we haven't learned this yet, so let's read it together...*

SS:... (Observation, Teacher 12)

This was also commented in their interviews:

"On the second day I will insist more on reading and practising reading and reading more fluently, syllables, not only from this text but unknown text and sentences I give them with the known letters and the new one, and if there is one we have not learned yet I will show it to them, write it on the board – I did it today with the /ai/ as well. So if it is something we do not know I will tell them what it is. But I have to tell you that I insist on the unknown, I intrigue them, you know what I mean?" (Interview, Teacher 12)

Teacher 4 targeted segmenting in her lesson, asking children to hear a word, split it in phonemes and she then modelled how GPC knowledge is applied to write the corresponding graphemes in the correct order:

T: Well done. Those who finish start thinking a word that starts with /i/ and I will touch your head with my magic wand

S: *Ιπποπόταμος (Hippo)*

T: *Good. Let's write it.*

SS: *I-p-p-o-p-o-t-a-m-o-s*

S: *Ioannis*

T: *Ok I need help. I- then it's /o/ like hour, /a/, we need 2 /n/ then /i/ like sun and then /s/ the warm, the ending. Here comes the wand*

S: *Iakovos*

T: *ok. i-a-k-o like hour-v-o-s (...)* (Observation, Teacher 4)

Similar to all other aspects of language teaching in the lessons observed, GPC was only targeted at a whole classroom level.

6.1.3.2. Comprehension

In the observed lessons, teaching reading as decoding was seen as a priority, with more time allocated to activities related to learning the decoding skills and with teachers offering more information regarding their practices on this aspect of reading in their interviews. This is understandable, given the time of the year and the stage the children were at, i.e. the first trimester of Grade 1, with Teacher 15 commenting about this openly:

"So we start with the sentence, we break it down into words, and locate then the first letter of each word. And I work with more sentences, which we break down into words and we mix their order or make new sentences comprising of new words. These sentence transformations are an important part of the way I work. (...) I believe it is important that children get to know each letter on its own, see how you sound it, write it, combine it with vowels in syllables and find it in words, even if looking at it in isolation is difficult for some children, this is a stage they should go through before looking at texts in bulk and with more text-level activities (comprehension, discussions) that sort of things". (Interview, Teacher 15)

While some teachers prioritised decoding and comprehending texts on a time axis, others managed the decoding vs text comprehension conundrum by the parallel use of children's books and the set textbook; Teacher 6, for example, covered what she saw as different aims, educational needs and learning styles through this combination:

So when I do a children's story we focus on textual issues, when we work with the textbook on syllables and code issues and through this mixture everybody benefits and it is more appropriate help (Interview, Teacher 6)

The teaching of reading, as decoding or as comprehension, more often occurred in correlation with language structure and writing, than independently:

And usually on the first day I want them to speak and talk about the textbook's picture so they have the feeling that they have a sense of ownership of the text, they sort of thought of it, we then practise reading and I insist on punctuation and reading with a certain...flair, and then it's the letter and different activities about it (how it sounds, how we write it, and then words with it). (Interview, Teacher 10)

6.1.3.2.1. Comprehension and connections with other aspects of language learning

Teachers 8 and 9 connected reading with the teaching of spoken language, writing and grammar, making similar observations in their interviews:

“So, for example today, I wanted us to focus on dialogue and listening and comprehending texts, making hypotheses and arguments and comments, and to focus on the connection between spoken language and written language, knowing that an object has an image, a name and a way to write this name (the snail was today our focus). And I want them to pay attention to the basic mechanism of reading, associating sounds with letters and knowing that punctuation also plays a crucial role. That kind of things.” (Interview, Teacher 8)

However, in her lesson Teacher 8 placed more emphasis on the alphabetic code, decoding and a poem composition. Quite interestingly, though, she did attend to the importance of punctuation as an aspect of comprehending (and decoding) a text. In an activity prior to the actual reading of the text, she directed their attention to punctuation and implicitly modelled a reading strategy, i.e. a kind of text - scanning in order to collect information about it:

T: So do you notice anything strange about this text? Something that stands out?

Si: They will feed the snail

T: Yes, but I want something about the sentences. How do they end?

Si: Full stop.

T: All of them?

Sii: Some have a question mark.

T: Good. We have here a question And here? Does anyone remember what we call this mark? ‘A snail in the bag!’ ‘A!’ Excla...

SS: Exclamation mark!

T: Notice how all sentences start?

SS: Capital letter

T: And these lines here?

S: It’s a dialogue, they show who speaks

T: Great. Now I want you to read it for me (Observation, Teacher 8)

The generic conventions Teacher 9 alluded to in her interview, were indeed part of the activities around the text; after reading it as a whole and sentence by sentence, children matched pictures with words they located, and continued with the following text comprehension activity:

T: Now who is the narrator, who tells us the story?

Si: The friend telling us the story is Sarber

T: And which other characters appear? I will circle them as you tell me

Si: King Fire

Sii: Cloudy

Siii: Their daughter Snowy

T: And where did they live?

Siv: Mr? Wind too

T: Yes, I forgot him. So?

Si: They lived in a palace

T: So we have this family living in a palace, but there was a problem. What problem did this family face?

Si: The father did not allow the mother and daughter to go anywhere

Sii: He was mean

T: And?

Si: The wind came one day he forgot to lock the door and took his daughter away

T: Where do you think he took her?

Si: To the dessert

Sii: To another palace

Siii: He wanted to take her for a trip, but she cried and wanted her mum. (Observation, Teacher 9)

Teacher 12 also emphasised generic conventions through a story retelling activity, while she provided children with opportunities to provide explanations of words that they encountered while she first read the story, thus modelling a reading strategy of using the context to understand vocabulary. Teacher 5 used another kind of retelling, by asking children to rephrase the instructions they read in their handouts. Finally, Teachers 6, 8 and 11 associated through questions, the content of the text with the children's previous knowledge and experiences.

Comprehension was supported and checked indirectly as well; while aiming to connect the lesson with the previous one and recapitulate, Teacher 1 also monitored comprehension, along with spoken language and language structure:

T: Well done. Mr. Elephant was asleep as he told you and he needs you to remind him how Aris and Marina spent their vacation.

S: At the beach

T: Say it all

S: Aris and Marina spent their vacation at the beech

T: Now I seem to have forgotten. Where did Orfeas spent his vacation? Who else?

S: At a farm

T: Together with whom?

S: Titina the chicken

T: And our other friends? Ioanna? What do you think?

S: I think...

T: What do you think?

S: At her grandmother's

T: Another opinion?

S: I think she went to the grocery

T: She spent all her vacation there?

S: Yes, I agree with him

S: And I agree with him

T: Hmm... Let's open our books to see what really goes on. (Observation, Teacher 1)

6.1.3.2.2. Comprehension and reading strategies

On two occasions, there was a systematic effort to model the use of reading strategies in order to comprehend a text. Teacher 4, for example, used predicting and hypothesising about the text, and discussed the text's title prior to reading the text in order to validate or dismiss what was guessed. Teacher 3 discussed a text, its generic conventions, its form and function and the different cues children can locate and use in order to comprehend it. The following extract is an example of one of the critical incidents observed, i.e. a multi-level composite activity through

which a number of different goals (phonological, textual, etc.) are intersecting and jointly served:

T: Yes. Now look here. I-n-v-i-t-a-t-i-o-n. Where does it ask me to go?

S: At a party

T: Where is the party?

S: At a house

T: Where does it say it? Come here and show it

T: Well done. And what day?

S: Saturday.

T: Where does it write Saturday? Come and show us

T: Yes. And can I go whatever time I want? I can go whenever I want? What time should I go?

S: Is says at 5.00pm Miss.

T: Come and show us where it says so

T: And does anyone have a clue why I am invited? What is Marina celebrating? Hands up please! It's not fair to the others when some of you shout out the answers

S: It's her birthday party.

T: Why? How can you tell?

S: There is a picture of a cake. It's a birthday cake

T: And there should be six candles on the whole cake. So which birthday is it?

S: It's her sixth birthday

T: What can we get an invitation for children? For what events might one give us an invitation?

S: For a christening

S: For a wedding

S: For a name day

T: You could ask someone to come and play at your name day, but would you give a formal invitation? Maybe not. But if we have a party let's say to celebrate the opening of a new store, then we need an invitation

T: And tell me, since I am invited to a birthday party, what should I take with me? Hands up

S: A gift

T: Ok, tell me some gift ideas. I need you though to use my favourite sound, this one on the board, look! (Observation, Teacher 3)

There are two important issues to be raised regarding the teaching of reading. First, that among the participating teachers none mentioned or demonstrated any indication of any knowledge of the notion of running records or Reading Recovery. The way teachers overcome children's difficulties and differentiate their teaching is discussed later, but in general, there seems to be a lack of awareness, time and resources to do so. Teacher 13 pointed out that sometimes children might struggle with a text, but the solution given raises significant questions:

And today the lesson you say with Snow White, the text was quite easy, very well known, so we did not have to go through it many times. If it was a difficult text from the book, we might have needed to read the text 10-15 times from the board and the book, as we sometimes need to. And this is why working with a variety of texts and activities is important so that they do not get bored. Reading is very important and they always have it as homework as well, because they need as much practice as possible. (Interview, Teacher 13)

Secondly, that there is a polyphony regarding the role and the emphasis placed on decoding and comprehending sentences instead of texts. Initially, there seems to be an emphasis on reading sentences as a whole unit:

"I start with their names and some sentences that we read as whole units. These are things that help me later on. And as you saw I work on the size and the quality of the sentence, I need them to give me

completed and enriched sentences. It is very important for them to know what a sentence is". (Interview, Teacher 1).

These sentences may emerge from classroom discussions or the textbook, but for teachers working with children's books they are usually the books' titles. In fact, they argue against the use of de-contextualized sentences, a practice that was followed in the past, and stress issues of interest, motivation and engagement as gains from the use of sentences associated with children's books.

"First I want them to look at the shapes of letters, words, sentences. I am very interested in them learning to observe; observe the shape of their names, compare it with others. Cultivating observation will help them learn the letters. I start with the titles of the children's books I will be using. Not sentences as we used to do earlier. I remember in the first couple of years it was sentences, sentences. Now I want them through the books and their titles, within this specific context and frame, to see the structure of the sentence; not simply learn words and sentences by heart. I want observation not reproduction." (Interview, Teacher 2)

In the extract that follows, Teacher 11 eloquently describes the above-mentioned varied practices of the process of teaching reading:

"We start with them understanding what a sentence is. A sentence consists of words. We count the words. They need to understand that a sentence is something that has a beginning and an ending, so we start with a capital letter and we finish with a full stop. The sentence breaks into wagons, the words, we count them. This is our work in the beginning, in the first few days (...) So through this path, let's say, we arrive to the point that we count the letters within the words and the syllables within the words. We clap hands and count the syllables, which also helps them when we stress the words. I think that everything comes very naturally (...) I start with a whole language approach, remember the sentences I told you about? 'Here is Elmer. My name is Elmer'. The children had no idea about anything at that point, but they learned the sentences. We also took pictures of words that I have on the walls till today – these are visual words that they have learned them clearly visually, we looked for these words in lists of many words, we tried to find ways to remember the beginning of each words (i.e. this is Aris this shouts /a/) so we did the whole language approach and then we continued with phono... – syllable... approaches. The whole language approach is needed exactly for this thing. For them to understand what a sentence is, what a word is, get in touch with what will follow. But simultaneously you do phonics activities. For example, when I showed the sentence 'here is Aris' I said this is Aris and this (A) is the little house Aris puts his voice inside (because the capital /a/ looks like a house doesn't it?) so the children could make the connection. Or in the sentence 'Here is the boy' (Na to agori) I then erased the /o/ in the article and I made it 'Here are the boys' (Na ta agoria) so you see we did simultaneously a bit of syllables /syllabification. (Interview, Teacher 11)

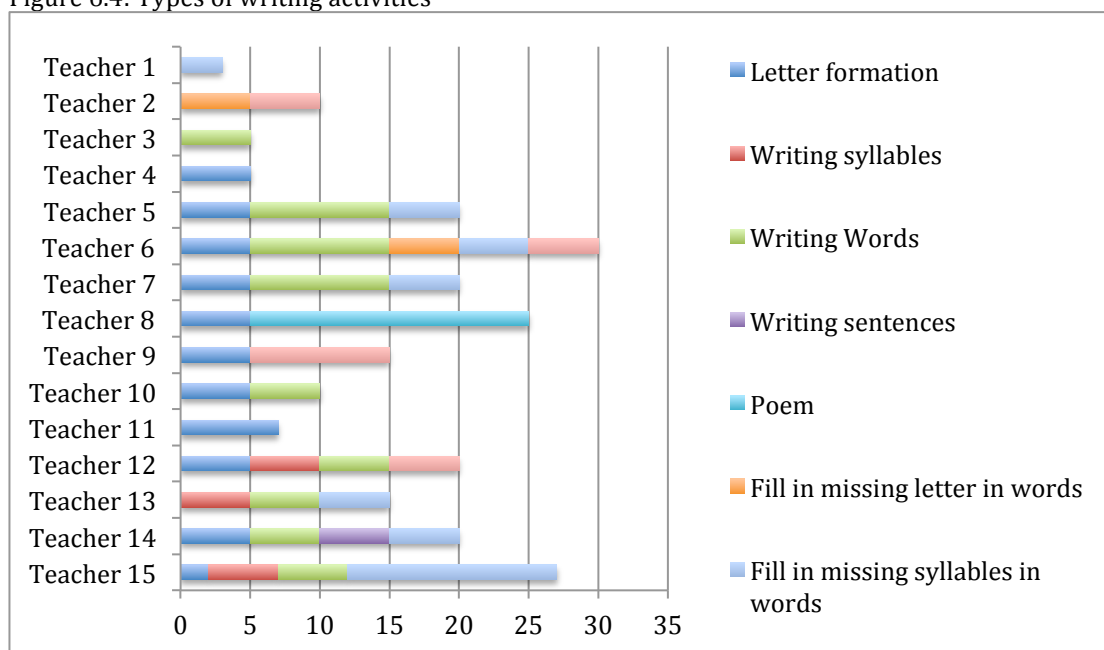
Thus, there seems to be a consensus about the sentence being a significant unit initially, followed by a gradual top – down approach to words, syllables and letters through the use of elements of different approaches, leading to a heterogeneous pedagogy.

6.1.4. Writing

At the outset of this section, it is important to stress again the fact that writing development and teaching of writing does not occur in a vacuum or in disassociation with the teaching and learning of reading, spoken language,

grammar, etc. In fact, it is clearly stressed in the literature that reading and writing are seen as “twin processes”, while the “skills of reading and writing can only develop from a secure foundation and competence in oracy” (Riley, 2006:125). There is however a need to look at writing separately, in order to explore the complex and challenging tasks that Grade 1 children are asked to master by the end of their first year of schooling. This can be more easily tackled by adopting a model of describing writing, i.e. by distinguishing between its transcriptional and compositional aspects (Riley, 2006). The following figure presents the observed types of writing being taught and their duration in minutes:

Figure 6.4: Types of writing activities



It is important to note that in the majority of the lessons observed, teachers indeed tried to associate writing with other aspects of language and literacy learning; in the interviews writing was often, correspondingly, mostly referred to in association with the introduction of the letters and the teaching of reading. This was made clear in the definition provided by Teacher 14 regarding the teaching of vowels:

“When I say I teach a vowel, it means we look at it from every possible angle: finding it, listening to it, locating it at the beginning of a word and within a word, writing it: I give them a lot of these type of activities (picture and word with a missing letter, first at the beginning, then at the end, then both the first and the last). Only then you can tell. If you ask them to simply write the letter you teach, its mechanical. This way you revise at the same time older letters (because as you move along you ask different letters to be filled in) and you make the child think”. (Interview, Teacher 14)

Also, understandably due to the very early stage the children were at, transcriptional writing was far more evident than compositional writing; Teachers 1,3, 8, 12 and 14 were consistent with this observed approach to writing. In the

extracts that follow the teachers talk about the limited time allocated to writing during the first day of their teaching units, the focus on letter formation and on transcriptional writing on the second, and the introduction of what they call a 'creative' or 'extensive' writing activity thereafter:

Q: You mentioned that you do some extended writing as well. What do you ask them to write?

T: I pose a question they need to answer. I might ask for example, how do the other animals behave towards the ugly duckling? And we will have a discussion and they will tell me different ideas, and I will write them down or ask them to come out and write a word letter by letter helping them, and then they will copy the sentences or some children may be ready to write on their own. And another thing you didn't see today is that each child has her own small board, that is a plastic card and markers, and I insist that we write sentences, not words, I am always for sentences making meaning, small but meaningful (Interview, Teacher 12).

It is therefore evident that writing is sometimes used as a means to teach reading, as Teacher 1 initially describes, whereas on other occasions it is taught as a goal in itself. Even though Teacher 12 insists on 'meaningful' written production, the emphasis on the activity as it is described above is clearly more on encoding than composing. Teacher 14 admitted this constraint, although highlighting that this also serves important goals:

"I ask them to write sometimes sentences with words they have on cards. You may argue that this is more copying than writing, but it has its value, because children compose their own sentences choosing different words, and you have here a sort of de facto differentiation, because the weaker will do one or two sentences, but your advanced may go further than five. For writing, we look at the picture and we discuss what they think it is said, but at the beginning the sentences we end up writing are a bit predefined; they say different things, and I say something like 'I happened to be there and I will tell you what was said exactly, so I say a sentence and I ask them to write it. We go slowly (I don't write it for them) and we discuss spelling and punctuation issues as we go along". (Interview, Teacher 14)

Concurrently with writing, teachers insist on cultivating language structure, spelling and punctuation and often associate it with children's experiences:

" We write about experiences, things we cover. I try to stress the basics in writing a sentence every time we write; always start with a capital, space the words with our little fingers, stress each word as we write it and not leave it for the end and put a full stop. And I have them practise at writing simple sentences though the activities we do. I will ask them, for example, to write a sentence about you and your visit when we go back". (Interview, Teacher 3)

Furthermore, Teacher 8 described the gradual introduction of children into generic conventions and their functions, a goal not shared by many of her colleagues, at least not in the earliest stages of teaching writing. Thus, in her classroom children often compile lists or simple recipes. Still, all teachers included some writing in their lessons, whether it was the first day of introducing a new letter or whether they were doing further work on a letter they had taught the previous day, incorporating writing with reading and spoken language, as

mentioned in a section above. In what follows, the teachers' practices are presented, adopting the distinction of writing as transcriptional and compositional.

6.1.4.1. *Transcriptional Writing*

All of the teachers observed allowed time in their lessons for writing at a transcriptional level, although this ranged from a three – minute activity to 25 – minute sections of the lesson. Specifically, teachers provided opportunities for children to learn and practise how to write letters, fill in gaps in given words and sentences, as well as to write whole words and sentences within or without a context.

6.1.4.1.1. Letter formation teaching and practice

Nine of the teachers in lessons where they either introduced or consolidated learning of a letter, spent some time teaching the children letter formation. The most basic instruction included the teacher on two occasions demonstrating on the board the movements required, after which children were asked to practise in their books or on a handout:

“Now, R is a really easy letter to write, but you need to remember that the lower case drops below our line. So capital in a line and an inverted moon, one, two and the lower case an ‘o’ and a line dropping below our line without lifting your pencils. Open page 32 in your workbooks and start. Those who finish take their dictionary notepads and draw pictures of the words you can write with ‘r’» (Observation, Teacher 10)

In this example, the teacher provided two consecutive tasks to handle children working at a different pace, but on both occasions immediately after a short demonstration children started practising on their own. On all occasions, while children were working, teachers moved amongst them, monitoring their progress or raising points that seem to be common difficulties or mistakes, like in the following occasion, where the teacher observed that some children seemed to confuse the new with a previously taught letter:

T: Now continue writing the letter in beautiful handwriting...

T: Your letters are too big – erase them (...)

T: Careful not to confuse it with /t/ (τ) we have two legs in /p/(π) (writes both on the board) Continue with putting the words in the correct order. Try alone and I will come and see if you have got it (Observation, Teacher 12)

Also in the aforementioned lessons, the demonstration and the practice of letter formation took place towards the end of the session. As mentioned above, there does not seem to be a particular pattern in the order in which the formation of a

letter is taught in relation to other activities within the lessons. In their interviews, some teachers explicitly referred to the way they organise the teaching of new letters, as comprising of two or three day units, with teaching of letter formation and practice occurring in some instances on the first day and in others on the second.

Instead of a brief demonstration from the teacher and the individual handwriting practice following immediately thereafter, as seen in the previous examples, seven other teachers chose a more multi-sensory approach, asking children to shape the letter using different media and materials on different surfaces, reinforcing kinaesthetic learning and demonstrating the use of mnemonic, visual and audio clues:

T: I want to show you something we forgot to do before. This is the correct movement in order to write /i/. Look here! This is capital /i/ a line from up towards down and the lower case is half a tall from up down and flick sitting on your lines. I want you to be careful, because there are children who do it like this..., or this... No no no. Now fingers, and write in the air, capital, lower case... and now on your desk again capital, lower case... Ok. Open your handwriting notepads. Put down today's date and make the little sticks as we just showed. (...)

T: Now open your books page 34, exercises 3 and 4. We write /i/ again (Observation, Teacher 4)

In the above example, the teacher demonstrated the 'correct movement', the expected way to form the letter providing also examples of bad practice that leads to unacceptable results and asked the children to first shape the letter with their fingers in the air and on their desk before practising on two further materials, their handwriting notepads and in their books. In the same way, other teachers added a more humorous - entertaining aspect, having children use their noses too:

T: So...two movements to write our letter. I show this on the board, although we did this yesterday too. All eyes here-I won't start unless everybody is concentrating here...The capital stands on the line and we do one movement...and another. Fingers in the air... One, we stop, and another. Now with your noses...one...two. Now the lower case r is a bit funny...it's like writing 'o' but we don't stop, we continue below the line. Let's do it again, fingers in the air. Round, round, round and drop. Noses and carefully not to get dizzy! Ok. If we finish on time I will have you write your whole names with your noses!

SS: Yes! (Observation, Teacher 5)

One teacher chose to do multiple demonstrations, using a video clip from an educational website with an animated demonstration of the formation of the letter before her own and the children's efforts, thus making the many repetitions more visually interesting and motivating:

T: Now let's watch this to learn how to write our king (clip from the Greek Pedagogical Institute). See here, I will write it too: for the capital we need a rain drop sitting on this line and then inverted little moon like this, but for the lower case you will do /o/, normal moon closing to grandma's cookie and continue diving below this line. Now you write it in the air with your finger (...), on your desk (...), on

the back of your classmate (...). Take your white boards and write it and I am coming. (Observation, Teacher 14)

Teachers used mnemonic, kinaesthetic, visual and audio clues to reinforce letter shape, associating the letters with shapes, or clothing items, or stressing the sound they made:

T: Sh! I hear something. T... t... What is this tik tik tik noise? I think it's a little bird. Tik tik. Come Mina and write /t/ for us. Line asleep and line dropping

T: Tik tik tik. Words starting with /t/? (Observation, Teacher 11)

Especially when letter formation presented a greater level of difficulty, the teacher explicitly demonstrated a strategy to help children to cope, to which another «trick» was added by a child:

T: Now look here, I will show you how we write Ε ξ. The capital is super easy, three lines like this, one up, one attached on the line here, one in the middle... Write it with your finger on your desks...

SS:...

T: Now for the lower case, all eyes here. One line up, then little moon, the s we use at the endings that looks like a little worm. The letter may look difficult but with this magic trick I told you is super easy too. Line, moon, worm! On your desks!

S: Miss you can say line, e and tail too!

T: Brilliant Margarita. You can use whichever trick you want (Observation, Teacher 9)

On this particular occasion, the teacher commented in her interview that although she did not anticipate the children struggling to form the letter, she could not avoid addressing this difficulty, at least at some extent:

"I didn't plan to spend the time we ended up spending today on forming the letter /ξ/. But you saw them, they got stuck and I couldn't move unless we gave a fair chance to most of them to take a shot at overcoming the difficulty. Then we could spend more time on discussing the announcement and how to describe a person. I did make a reference, but you can't spend time for everything, divert and open new sections on the lesson. It gets too much, too distracting, so it's all about prioritising." (Interview, Teacher 9)

6.1.4.1.2. Filling in the gap in words and sentences/texts.

Another type of transcriptional writing activity observed was the filling in of missing letters or syllables in words, and of missing words in sentences or texts. These types of activities have beyond their transcriptional nature an added function of teaching the structural features of words and sentences. Sentence construction and the sentence as a unit of analysis and composition was one of the main considerations of many of the teachers observed, and indeed an important notion for the children to grasp. The activities here, however, refer to a more transcriptional aim the teachers planned to develop. Ten of the fifteen teachers included similar activities in their lessons, however, some chose to do so within and some without framing them by providing a particular contexts. Specifically, in

activities where children were asked to fill in a missing syllable this might occur as a straightforward activity:

T: Just before we go out, I want you to do this little exercise and fill in these gaps in these words you know. (Observation, Teacher 1)

For the activities the teachers distributed handouts and cards where pictures of different items were above the respective words lacking a syllable that children were asked to fill in. Having a picture of an object and part of the corresponding word was observed on other occasions, however in those particular cases, the teachers presented the children with lists, providing both a context and a motive to children:

T: You know who else needs help? The salesman of the supermarket can't write and he needs help in writing products' labels. You can write so let's help him. Turn over your handout and tell me what to write. Be careful! You already have some letters from each word. (Observation, Teacher 2)

Similarly, another teacher chose to frame the activity in relation to the story they had read and to have the children work at whole class level and then individually, going through the words written on big cards, which she placed, one by one, on the board as children came out and wrote the missing syllable, before repeating the exercise on handouts:

T: Now I have in this chest, which I found in the depth of the sea and the problem we have to solve is that our shark was naughty and had bitten off some parts of some words. So let's see if we can make any sense of the shark's leftovers... (Observation, Teacher 6)

Likewise, Teacher 2 connected the story they had read and the notion of an introduction they had discussed in a handout, she distributed, where there were pictures of the dwarfs and their names with some letters missing:

T: Ok, children. You know Snow White's name and the dwarfs' names, but they don't know yours. Let's introduce ourselves in the same way: 'My name is...', I will give you a handout. First write your name on the bottom of the page (Observation, Teacher 2)

Thus the teacher combined letter/word recognition, comprehension and production at grapheme and word level, along with having children operate within the context of introductions as a genre. The same principle was also observed in another lesson based on the same children's book; in the handout Teacher 7 provided, children needed to copy the dwarfs' names from the board and write the missing syllable in words, which were contextualised in a very motivating way and also accompanied by an illustration:

T: So you know how Snow White stayed with the dwarfs and she cleaned and cooked for them? Each dwarf had a favourite drink or food that they wanted Snow White to know. We will help them prepare this list that she can have in order to remember. So you will take the handout and write the title on the top- what's our title that I have written on the board?

SS: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs!

T: You will write your name and date at the bottom of the page and then here I have seven lines. What will you write here?

S: The names of the dwarfs

T: Indeed – one name on each line – you will copy carefully from the board. Remember the accents. And then here you will write the drink or food they like and here you see the pictures of those things ok? I will walk around and help you. Pencils ready... (Observation, Teacher 7)

6.1.4.1.3. Writing whole words and sentences

Four of the teachers incorporated in their lessons the dictation of syllables and words, as well as opportunities for the children to write words and whole sentences. In the dictation activities, the teachers simply asked children to write what they heard, either de-contextualized syllables or words; children wrote on small white boards with markers or in notepads and handouts and, on some occasions, using their letter cases, containing cards of printed letters. While they worked, the teachers moved around them, checking their progress, and simultaneously assessing the work of individuals:

T: Take your whiteboards and write whatever I say and then turn it me to see. Write 'na'

SS:...

T: No

S: Any /o/ we want?

T: Yes and then /ni/ with the /i/ of your choice

SS:... (Observation Teacher 13)

The dictation was accompanied by drawings in another classroom:

*T: Ok. Ready for "I listen and I write". Open your notepads... You will write below my line and start at the very beginning of each line. Write *vová* (godmother)... write *vováς* (godfather). When you finish you will draw a picture of your godmother or godfather according to which you have (Observation, Teacher 6)*

Teacher 14 combined a listening activity to the writing of words. She played a relevant song and the children were asked to listen to the required answer and write it in a sentence:

T: We will write the last sentence on your books and remember to put a full stop at the end of the sentence. I will put the parrot's song for you to listen- he will tell you what we wants to eat.

(...)

T: So?

*Si: *ρόδια* (pomegranates)*

*Sii: *καρύδια* (walnuts)*

*Siii: *σπόρια* (seeds).*

T: Ok. Choose on of these and write in the speech bubble what the parrot is saying. (Observation, Teacher 14)

Thus, although the writing activity is essentially the same as above, children are provided with the added motive to listen to a song and gather the relevant information from its lyrics, but, most importantly, to listen for the words they needed to write which were put into a sentence, which in turn was within a speech

bubble, as the words spoken by a character. Thus developing auditory memory and phonological awareness.

In another sentence producing activity, Teacher 6 moved slightly further from transcriptional writing, asking children to produce a sentence addressed to a specific audience for a specific purpose:

T: Now the shark is swimming back in the sea and has decided to bring you some presents! I will give you one piece of paper and I want you to write on it what gifts you want from him. You have two minutes to write 'I want a...' (Observation, Teacher 6)

It is important to note that teachers differ not only in the way that they frame transcriptional writing activities, i.e. whether they contextualize them in some way or not, but also to the degree in which they aid the children whilst they work. Thus, some provide clues or strategies or refer them to the classroom environment to remind them of a letter or a word, but others deliberately let the children make an effort to transcribe without any additional help, as this is evident in the following comment:

"This is the model I work with. On the second day we get to practise more and I can really see who is at which point. Like at that point where they had to write words below pictures? It would have been less difficult for them if I had written the words on the board, but that would have taken away my chance to see what they can do. I can take my time to see where each child stands and offer them individual support". (Interview, Teacher 5)

6.1.4.2. Compositional aspects of writing

Interestingly, only two of the observed writing opportunities provided to the children could be described as compositional.

The first, was the production of a poem. After reading the textbook's text, the teacher asked the children to collaborate with her in composing a text in that specific genre, mirroring the conventions of the textbook's poem, and specifically its structure and its rhyming (phonological awareness), simultaneously developing GPC skills. The teacher guided the children through the production of the poem, comparing and contradicting the textbook's poem with their own and placing emphasis on the appropriations that needed to be made and the choice of words.

In the second example of compositional writing, transcription also featured, and perhaps, one could argue that it is primarily transcriptional writing. It is however,

a very significant critical instance, in which the complexity of the work done in Grade 1 and in writing in general is lucidly manifested:

T: So remember the King who lost his wife? He wasn't a bad person and he regretted all his bad behaviour, and looked for his wife everywhere! He was really sad and thought of ways to try and locate her. What do you think he should do?

S: When we lost our dog we put an announcement in the newspaper

T: Excellent idea! I was thinking of something like that. What do you think goes in such announcements?

Si: Whoever finds her call me

T: So what element do we need to put down?

Sii: Name

T: Our name and surname and the missing person's too, yes?

Sii: Telephone number

Siii: A picture

T: And so they know where we live?

Siv: Address

T: Good. So here is an announcement with the things we discussed, but the problem is that some of the elements are missing and we will need to fill them in. Who will try to read the title?

Si: Announcement

T: Good. The first sentence: my wife...What's her name?

S: Cloudy

T: Let's see how you will do, write Cloudy. (...) What will you need to write?

Si: phone number

Sii: Miss ours?

Siii: the King's

Sii: We don't know that

T: You can think of an imaginary number.

Si: It has to start with 24 if it is in Larnaca

T: Excellent! If it is Nicosia? Do you know the area code there?

Si: 22 – I call my godmother's house in Nicosia

T: and Limassol has 25, Pafos 26 and in the Famagusta area 23. (Observation, Teacher 9).

In the above extract the teacher chose to extend the story they had read and posed a problem-solving question to the children, asking them to draw on their prior knowledge and experiences and introducing them to a genre as fulfilling a communicational need. She also taught the conventions of the genre foregrounding its function. This teacher guided the children through a series of questions into gathering the parameters needed for the contents of such texts. Instead of asking the children to produce the announcement from scratch, she provided them with a pre-prepared text with some of its words missing.

Although writing an announcement about a lost person might seem less appropriate than one about a lost pet, it echoes the textbook's example the children had read and discussed, thus they were transforming information from a given genre to another, comparing and contrasting the different functions they fulfil. While the writing as such could be seen as a 'filling-in the gaps' activity, the teacher actually achieved several important things. One, not to overwhelm her first

graders with the production of a text that needed to adhere to several structural conventions and include much information, two, have them focus on more specific aspects of the text, three, boost their writing confidence by having them write a 'whole' announcement, and four, turn the filling of these gaps into an opportunity to teach children how to retrieve information from texts and pictures, which reason might be more logical or appropriate than others, as well as cover more general everyday knowledge.

It is evident from the data that there are less opportunities provided to children to cultivate their own compositional writing. Reasons that could explain this finding are elaborated upon in the discussion chapter, but it is logical that children need to master encoding first prior to utilising this newfound skill to compose texts.

6.2. Classroom Management Practices

This section presents features of teachers' practices at a classroom management level, focusing on three main areas that were central in the observations and the teachers' interviews. The relevant literature and research refer to a number of parameters, such as the management of misbehaviour, the establishment of rules and routines, the different ways of organising children and their activities, etc. These, however, were not mentioned in the interviews, and were not extensively observed. In what follows, issues relating to children's motivation and engagement, the monitoring and differentiation of children are presented.

6.2.1. Motivation and Engagement

One of the most prominent emerging themes from these data collected was the teachers' emphasis on the need to keep children interested, to provide motivation and to maintain high levels of engagement. Eleven out of the fifteen teachers referred explicitly to this issue and offered their perceptions how they achieve it. One of the strategies they employ is the organisation of a variety of activities and the maintenance of a rapid activity change rhythm in their lessons:

"It is better to have a variety of activities in each lesson. You choose according to the children's level, the ease in which they recognise letters, have conquered the letters taught before or have started to develop the reading mechanism, as well as their behaviour. If you see they make too much noise you will not have them stand up and go looking for letters and words or play games...There is a list of things, of activities you could possibly do in order to have them locate a letter. You will not do the same everyday. You try to choose for each letter something different. One day you will have them move in the lesson, one day you will give them children's books and ask them to look and find in the text and you try to have a variety and mix things up so they don't get bored. (Interview, Teacher 15)

Teacher 15 highlighted the challenges teachers face in order to be able to find alternative ways to do the same thing, i.e. the location of a letter through different activities and through the use of different texts and materials. Others also echoed this:

"The activities are something standard, but you need to change them a bit though so that children don't get bored doing the same things all the time". (Interview, Teacher 11)

In the same vein, teachers in their lessons used other means to keep the children engaged, i.e. oversized stuffed toys (i.e. hammers) that children used to locate words/letters or choose a numbered sentence/word. Stuffed animals and puppets were also used in setting the tone for reading (i.e. happily for Ms. Happy) or to give children instructions and to ask their help. On other occasions it was a character from the story they read that needed "assistance":

T: So (Snow White) she wanted to give the list to the dwarfs, but they could not read like you. So Snow White wants you to help them read the list by drawing a picture next to each word so they know what to buy. Here is the list. Let's hear the first! (Observation, Teacher 2)

In five lessons, teachers asked the children to sing a favourite song pointing out that they were feeling tired and this would help them. Amongst many of the teachers, a favourite way to keep children motivated and to re-engage them throughout the lessons proved to be the presentation of activities as games and the cultivation of a 'healthy competition' between teacher and children:

T: Right or Wrong! Who wants to play? I am sure I can trick you (...) (Observation Teacher 3)

As it will be discussed later, teachers did not often feel adequately prepared to engage children, and they considered this an acquired ability gained through personal experience or from an experienced colleague:

"As I said, in my first year I was really at a panic mode and I was unlucky as well because I worked with a much older colleague, who did everything really traditionally and plain: no games, no motivation and engagement. Just the book we used back then. Then slowly I got in touch with some other teachers and then the second year was mind opening(...) This teacher made everything fun, but in a substantive way." (Interview, Teacher 3)

The same teacher clearly insisted on the enjoyment of learning that children need to feel, associating the variety of activities with different approaches, which may cater for different learning styles as well and which will contribute to the children's overall positive attitudes:

But in the activities I do daily I have different levels of difficulty and some are really phonics oriented because that help some children more and some are whole language because that helps others. Most of

all I want my kids happy and happy to learn and get answers correct and that's why I need such variety. (Interview, Teacher 3)

Finally, teachers who used children's books, often referred to the children's positive reaction as a factor whilst increasing motivation and engagement that validates their choice:

"So I had worked before with those boring sentences, cutting them etc, and I could see the children moaning. Contrary to now, with the children's books the interest is much, much higher, then we may add to the story with another related story they may bring from home, or watch the DVD of the same story, or something similar (...). And you see them interested and engaged throughout the lesson, no moaning, and so I ditched the stupid sentences and the nonsense that sometimes the book includes." (Interview, Teacher 12)

6.2.2. Monitoring of the individual children's progress

The issue of the assessment and evaluation of children, the overall monitoring of their progress and the need for frequent revision was another significant aspect regarding classroom management practices. But although teachers seemed to be aware of the need to do so particularly in Grade 1, it appears that institutionally there is a lack of an explicit and systematic way to achieve this, and teachers collect information on the children's progress from different sources on the one hand, but on the other, without much, if any documentation.

The need to revise the content taught as often as possible was clearly described by Teachers 1, 6 and 14:

"You need to understand something about Grade 1; an older colleague who had worked for two decades in Grade 1, told me this a long time ago; in Grade 1 you are always one step behind and one step ahead at the same time. You prepare them for what will follow and you keep revising what you have taught them" (Interview, Teacher 1)

Teacher 14, touched upon issues of differentiation, along with the need to monitor and support all the children of the classroom. But, she downgraded the importance of tests and addressed the need of examining not only the mechanism of reading and writing, but comprehension, as well:

"By the way, I don't really need to wait for the test to make such observations, I do this more for typical reasons. The results of the test never come as a surprise to me, because I help and observe them daily. (...) This here is a revision handout, some activities are a bit typified, but you also need them. So here I give them words to fill in the missing letter, gradually the missing syllable as well at the beginning and the end or both, pictures to write words below them, sentences to associate with pictures, or giving sentences/words and providing them space to draw the corresponding picture (this way I can check comprehension, a point at which our students in Cyprus need more work). i.e. 'I bought three red flowers' and I expect them to draw three flowers all red". (Interview, Teacher 14).

Teacher 11 referred to 'quizzes and competitions' as a way of testing children's progress and identified monitoring of the children as one of the most demanding aspects of her work:

"In this lesson in particular I didn't face any difficulties, but in general it's to see what they do know and what they don't to check them and test them because they are a little bit sneaky you know. When we write something they may trick me or I might not see them copying from another child, so I would not know if they could do it alone. So I must find the time at some point to take them one by one individually to test them, that each and everyone has learned how to read and write syllables, you need to be above them and monitor them all the time. (...)We do quizzes and competitions, like the 'I listen and I write' which I find very important, I might bring out in front of the boards those I want to come as if to play a game, which really is my chance to check those I have picked out, I might bring them out in a pair or small group to do the same, I also use the PowerPoint slide you saw earlier, which is also a way to check. These are all games-like activities but I know exactly which children I will ask to participate and I know who face difficulties and where I should pay more attention, which children need it that is". (Interview, Teacher 11)

It is important to note the issue of time touched upon by Teacher 11; as the educational system in Cyprus does not provide teacher assistants, and with classrooms containing up to 25 children, that led time restrictions to account for a number of issues that do not allow the standards the teachers themselves would like to maintain.

Teachers 5 and 15 described how they monitor children through the organisation of activities in a way to provide space for difference in learning pace and abilities to be noted and also for differentiation:

"The difficulty starts early, as there are children that find it difficult to write, to recognise vowels, the rhythm they work may be an issue... That's not as defining though as a bit later, once we do the first two consonants. I can tell which children find syllabification difficult, which cannot recognise letters and syllables, so at the point we are currently at I know I have three - four children in my classroom that will need more work and I will need to talk to their parents as well. There is no time in our schedule for one-to-one support. Basically when the whole class is working on something you will go to these children first and provide some guidance, and you will not have the same expectations from these children. So one could write ten words, three sentences, with these children you are happy to get four-five words and one sentence. Also while I teach I will make sure I have some easier things they will be able to do confidently" (Interview, Teacher 15)

Overall, it is unclear when teachers choose to provide additional time and further instruction:

"If I see that in any of these we need more time and space then I will do more writing practice again in a second day, as well as reading" (Interview, Teacher 10)

More importantly, even when children are identified as struggling readers and writers, there does not seem to be any support mechanism for them to move forward. In fact, statements made by three teachers revealed a significant reluctance to acknowledge and address such challenges, whether these stem from unawareness or from Greek not being their native language. Teacher 15 had a vague idea of how children were progressing, whereas she claimed not to have had any experience with children unable to follow the materials she uses:

T: And I do have three Arab speaking children, which is a rarity for this particular school. They have been here for some time though and seem to have got the hang of it and they really try, so I think they are doing well and don't seem to face any particular problems.

Q: Let's go back a bit to what happens if a child who comes in your class in September and is not ready, cannot follow the book...

T: I haven't had such a radical situation so far. They come from preschool, yes at different levels, but I don't think that anyone was really unable to follow what we do. I am not sure what happens in such cases. If by the end of the year a child has not learned to read and write she would repeat the year. But if you see from the start that she cannot follow...I supposed she would have to return to the preschool class? I don't know, I never had such a case. You need to allow time for them to adjust; some need a week, some a month, so you need to allow space to see how they evolve as you cover the book units. (Interview, Teacher 15)

Teacher 12 admitted the difficulty of supporting children at different levels, too, but the solution offered is highly controversial, revealing practices, attitudes and policies towards less interested or less capable children or with Greek as a foreign language:

"And after a lot of cautions made and lots of efforts, a teacher is not left with much option and you need to move on with the rest. I have an obligation towards the whole of the class and I cannot deal only with the two children that struggle. They will have tomorrow as well. They get another chance. (...). And we also have many children in this area for whom Greek is not L1. We are supposed to have time for supporting them but Year 1 is not entitled to this extra time. The rationale is that if they are in a Year 1 they will learn Greek. No way. But I have to admit this to you. I cannot neglect and delay the good students, all the Greek speaking Cypriot children and the advanced, so I can sit and dwell on the learning of each Palestinian kid. I know this is racist of me and I acknowledge this and I also know that the Ministry does not agree, but they should come inside a classroom and see how unjust this would be. I want to push the good to become better(...)To be honest my Karolina (if you noticed she is foreign) is very conscientious. She does much better than many Cypriots and I am very proud of her, because she tries. What I mean to say is that it is not because she is or she isn't Cypriot (this is not the way I am racist) she tries, she makes an effort. Whereas those two in the back they do not bother. So why should I give them my soul if they are not even the slightest interested?" (Interview, Teacher 12)

Teacher 13 also cited the lack of support time as a contributing factor to the monitoring and support of children at different levels:

"We have no additional support time for the children but you can find some time to help a bit more, have the good ones work on a handout (I have a box in the back with different handouts where they can go and choose the one they would like to do) and at that time I can spend some more time with the one who needs my support more. Nothing much other than that, but it is something very difficult". (Interview, Teacher 13)

In the observed lessons, teachers tirelessly moved around looking at how children progressed as they were working on different written assignments. Teachers would sometimes interrupt to make comments about commonly observed mistakes:

I want to tell you something I have noticed in the work of many children. Look here...this is the lower case r, on the line the 'o' part, below the line its line. Some shape the lower r as standing on the line like this... Check all of your 'r's and correct them accordingly (Observation, Teacher 5)

They also monitored them while completing oral activities on a whole classroom level. After an encoding activity on the board, where children had to look at a picture and write the corresponding word, Teacher 3 commented:

T: I think this was a bit difficult for you. We will do now something you will really like (Observation, Teacher 3)

However, teachers were not observed to keep any records of the children's progress, although they meticulously tried to involve all of them in the lessons' activities.

6.2.3. Differentiation

The differences observed in the children's progress were addressed in some instances by differentiation. Not all teachers considered this to be possible. Teacher 13 for example seemed to consider differentiation as source of organisational problems and thought it would be more convenient to be left for use at home:

"You cannot do different things. What can I do, give three different texts? When we read together from the board what will we be reading? At home though it is different (...) So homework is differentiated and in the classroom I may not have the same expectations from all the children, but they will all try to read the text with me, they will try to do the activities, and of course, some will not have enough time and some may not manage..." (Interview, Teacher 13)

Teacher 11 had also a similar approach, giving a clearer account of what the issues are, what the different levels are, and described a differentiated assignment of tasks to children as a way to manage overall classroom time it seems, rather than children learning needs:

Look, there are those who acquire the mechanism of syllabification. Some do not manage to do so in the same timeframe. Now for example most of the children are there, but some still face difficulties, they get confused, they do not understand for example the notion. When we start to do more reading, some will have no problems and some will struggle, those who didn't manage to understand the syllables (...) You give an assignment to the good ones, something to keep them busy and you try to monitor the weak ones who you give something simpler. (Interview, Teacher 11)

Teacher 8 approaches differentiation by allocating different time or different tasks to children, and having different expectations of them:

Q: To take you back at the lesson I observed, I noticed that at the end, when they worked on their own, there were different rhythms...

T: Yes, that happens in Year 1, as well as in other grades too. I have children that arrive knowing or on the verge of knowing how to read and write and then some arrive not knowing how to hold a pencil. But I start everyone with the book and go on, but I always give some more time to those needing it or extra activities to those that finish. Everyone does the basic, but some may have extra work completed in their notebooks, for example today you might have noticed those who did a list already, while some others still tried to form the letter.

Teacher 5 chose to organise her lesson in a way that would allow children to proceed through a number of activities at their own pace; after going through all the instructions of different activities on a hand out, she asked them to work independently:

T: I wish you all every success, take your pencils and start working. I will come to you at some point, but raise your hand if you need me urgently. (Observation, Teacher 5)

In her interview, she described how she differentiates assignments and organises her lesson in a way that allows different paces:

"This year I have a situation I did not have previous times in Year 1 classrooms; it is a highly heterogeneous group, with children too mature and others...almost baby like! Where as there are children that can give you in seconds ten words with a given initial sound or letter others barely can think of three and this year I will have to differentiate their assignments and have two or three different groups. That's why we worked today the way you saw: I take them through all the activities of the hand out first and have them work on it later; the good ones will proceed to the end, the weaker I can have some time to assist and whoever finishes gets to do some reading or some additional work. And I have children that have no support at home. Sarah and Ahmed are from Palestine, so there is no way I can expect them to get help from their homes". (Interview, Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 was particularly interesting, as she was one of the few who demonstrated high conviction in the importance of differentiation both in practice and in her interview. She, in fact, identified the issue as of particular importance for ITE:

But essentially what ITE needs, and we did not get any, is training on locating and addressing learning difficulties. I felt completely clueless and I still feel unable to really do things, although in time I have learned a thing or two. All teachers must be able to diagnose early on reading difficulties and be able to help in the correct way" (Interview, Teacher 5)

Parental involvement, mentioned above, will be discussed later on, however it was a recurrent theme in relation with differentiation, revealing perhaps the local culture influences upon attitudes towards differentiation. Teacher 14 described how her efforts to differentiate her teaching were criticised and dismissed by parents:

"When you give an assignment you run to the weaker and leave the more advanced to work on their own. I give the same assignments and provide differentiated support. I did work with different assignments in the past, but it created problems with the parents who compared and complained. And I could not be in constant conflict with parents. The society where the school was located was very small and people gossiped and did not like to have their children "segregated", No matter how hard I tried to explain that every decision I made was for the benefit of their children they pushed me and eventually I decided to give the same assignment and differentiate the support I provide". (Interview, Teacher 14)

Teacher 14 also raised the issue of children for whom Greek is an additional language. While Teacher 2 differentiated her material adding "each day many many pictures to build on them", Teachers 6 and 11 admitted essentially to not

differentiate materials or approaches for non-native speakers of Greek. Teacher 14 also explained how she uses the 'mainstream' material, noting that the differentiation strategies employed (i.e. visual cues and mnemonic strategies, as well as, the use of the classroom environment) benefit native and non-native speakers simultaneously:

"And while we are on differentiation I will answer you the question about children with Greek as L2. I use similar materials, but I simplify some things, I assign some of the activities and not all, because the activities have a gradual level of difficulty, with them they will go up to a point. And with the children that did not speak any Greek they did learn how to read anyway. We work more on their vocabulary, but they do well". (Interview, Teacher 14)

Two of the few differentiation strategies observed were the allocation of different amounts of time to different children while the teacher moved amongst them as they completed a written assignment. Also, on three occasions, the teachers asked the children to either write more sentences or words or do a related activity as they waited for the rest to complete a task:

T: Open page 32 in your workbooks and start. Those who finish take their dictionary notepads and draw pictures of the words you will write with /r/ (Observation, Teacher 10)

6.2.4. Other issues emerged

During the interviews, a number of issues were identified by the teachers as directly impacting on their literacy and classroom management practices. In what follows the importance teachers gave to parental involvement is presented, the role of ICT in Grade 1 and the issue of the transition of children from preschool to Grade 1.

6.2.4.1. Parents' role

The majority of the teachers considered parents to be a vital component for learning in Grade 1, stressing the need for close cooperation. Teachers 11 and 15 highlighted their importance:

"Parents in Year 1 are extremely important. They help a lot. We invited them in the other day and I gave them directions. If parents do not help you in Grade 1 it is very difficult, because no matter what you do in the classroom you need to practise. Syllabification is purely exercise and practice. The children simply have to learn what each letter sounds like and be able to combine the sounds in the syllables. If you can't do that, there is a problem. I explained at the meeting what we do in the classroom and what I want them to do at home... the parents need to extend and practise at home. So they need to sit with their children and read the sentences asking questions about the story we read in class, so they can recall the content" (Interview, Teacher 11)

Similarly, Teacher 15 explained that she expects parents to assist their children not only with the content of the lesson, but also to establish those habits and develop positive attitudes towards homework:

"It is a hugely important role, because we expect of the parents to do the extra work at home to help children learn how to read, because in Grade 1, the work done exclusively in the classroom is not enough and children will later on face enormous difficulties. Parents are essential to help children at home in the afternoon: practise the letter they learned, practise reading, fill in some activities that help learning the letter. Their help is vital not only in relation to the content of the lesson, but also because Grade 1 is when you teach children how to get organised, tidy up their school bag, sharpen pencils, acquire those good habits that will help them throughout their school careers. Without parents or another carer to help children and guide them in these early stages, things will be so much more difficult. I send daily directions at home, I write on a piece of paper their homework and I provide detailed directions to the parent on how to help..." (Interview, Teacher 15)

It could be argued that perhaps an over-reliance can be observed and questions arise whether all parents have the time and/or the ability to follow the instructions and fulfil the obligations their children's teachers seem to impose upon them. More often than not, working parents may not be able to assist their children, even if the teacher communicates explicitly what needs to be done at home. This was echoed in the interviews of Teachers 5 and 14 for example, both of which believe that the role of teacher and parent are and must remain discrete:

"I expect nothing from anyone. The minute they are outside my classroom the work is finished. How can I rely on anyone to do what's my job to do? There are parents who don't speak Greek, parents who cannot, don't know or don't want to help, so I believe that it is my sole responsibility. (Interview, Teacher 5)

"I am glad you ask. I send at home daily an announcement, informing parents what happened in the classroom. I describe what I did and what they may do at home. I am very against homework. It is the duty of the teacher to teach and at home parents have chores, plus work of their own". (Interview, Teacher 14)

Both teachers raised the issue of the quantity and quality of the nature of homework as a means of keeping parents informed about their children's progress, through game-like activities, that even if not done, children will not particularly lack in comparison with class mates who might have more support at home.

But teacher – parent relations are quite often difficult to manage. And when jurisdictions seem to collide, good communication and explicit information and documentation may prevent complication:

I have had years in schools with intrusive parents, over-involved parents, indifferent parents, and you need to know that although they are not in your class you need to educate both them and their children. I hold a meeting with parents each year. I invite them on the first night schools open, when they are still anxious and curious, so more likely not to miss the meeting. And I explain to them my basics: one, that each child brings different things, experiences, knowledge, attitudes from home and will have different levels and rhythms so they should not compare one to another and trust that I will work so that each can progress in comparison not with another child but with where each started. Two, that beyond reading and writing, Grade 1 is about the beginning of their school career and this needs to be a happy, creative and motivational start. Three, I give them the books (I don't give them in the morning) and we go through them. I don't read them from page 1 to the end, but I stop here and

there to make some points. And I ask them to buy for their children big portfolios, folders and box files, certain types of notepads (i.e. for the dictionary we do) explaining why we need them and I will be documenting their child's work and progress throughout the year. I also encourage them to do things with their children and include them in writing party invitations, supermarket lists, read them stories, have them phone relatives, etc. And I also explain that I send minimal homework, so that I don't get complaints that their children are not working hard enough. (Interview, Teacher 10)

The issues of teacher-parent communication and the complexities of their relationships were clearly illustrated by Teacher 13:

Parents are a huge story. Honestly Elena you need to possess a certain kind of talent to be able to handle them, otherwise they create for us many problems. This year, you cannot imagine what we went through. It was my colleague's first year in Year 1. First, parents make comparisons, a lot. Secondly, they interfere with everything and have something to tell you about everything and the children carry in the classroom with them all the problems from their house, and that you have to deal with too". (Interview, Teacher 13)

Teacher 2 provided a solution regarding to the issues arising from parental involvement. She strongly believes in cooperation between teachers and parents:

"You help them, they help you and together you help their child". (Interview, Teacher 2)

However, she suggested that in order for this to be effective, teachers should be trained on how to manage parental involvement and cultivate cooperation. In addition, related practices that teachers have experienced as effective could be disseminated. Teacher 12, for example, addressed parents in short memos, in which the individual needs of their child are highlighted:

"So every day I write to each mother in the child's notepad: I address specifically each mother, i.e. to Christina's mum I write "Dear Evi, our Christina does this and that"; she went through a phase where she wrote 'ap', 'op' instead of 'pa', 'po'. She reversed the letters, so I sent the mother a message and she worked with her. So specific comments for each child, and this is very helpful, both for the child and me. So my experience told me that I much prefer these comments in each child's notebooks (sometimes in English too or Greek for an older sibling if the parents do not speak Greek). So instead of general discussions when someone comes to ask about a child's progress and then they may forget what I say, these comments, personally addressed to the parent by her or his name, work better. And they do work better, but don't think that this happens equally and always". (Interview, Teacher 12)

6.2.4.2. The role of ICT in Grade 1

Five of the teachers referred to the role of ICT in their work in Grade 1, describing some of its affordances and their conviction that it has an added value in their lessons. Teachers 11 and 14 described how they have followed technological advances throughout their careers:

"I have been using technology in my lessons since I remember. In the beginning to show pictures and this remains till today, only now I don't use transparencies, just the computer. And today as you saw we did many different things. Now that we have the interactive boards it is so easy to use ICT; we can use it to drag syllables for example. I had an interactive board in my class last year but unfortunately not in this school. So I think that the better technological support you have the more interesting the lesson in Grade 1". (Interview, Teacher 11)

Teacher 4 pointed out that these changes in technology should be part of the initial training and on going professional development of teachers; she argued that ICT may provide further tools to keep children engaged, but in order to do so effectively specific training is needed:

And also ICT. How to use ICT in Grade 1. All I knew was handwritten slides for the overhead and for making paper labels. And you can't work without computers in Grade 1 and interactive boards. Technology changes I know and always new gadgets come along, but it's the culture they need to cultivate at the university, the culture of ICT in Grade 1. And they also need to keep us up to date. (Interview, Teacher 4)

On the other hand, Teacher 15 foregrounded the teacher's own role in searching and locating sources that may be readily available online, but which still needs adaptation to personalise the material. She also raised the issue of ICT as not being a goal in itself, but a tool that should be used when and if appropriate:

I believe very much in the role of technology in Year 1. I use a lot of PowerPoint presentations and I use Word, and I prepare the slides on my own; you can find online all the materials you might need but I am not the type of teacher that would take materials produced by others and use them in my teaching (...)It's not that each lesson needs to be really technology-oriented, but it helps. (Interview, Teacher 15)

6.2.4.3. Transition from Pre School

While seven teachers referred to the importance of preschool and the relevance of the work done there to the children's literacy development and overall successful adjustment to Grade 1, five of them admitted that they are unclear as to what the preschool curriculum covers:

"Personally I have never read the preschool curriculum, I am not sure it even exists. I have an idea of what they do in preschool. They go through some units in order to gain some experiences, some vocabulary..." (Interview, Teacher 12).

While Teacher 13 also admitted to having a vague idea of what children learn in preschool, she argued that her choice regarding the use of children's books instead of the textbook was guided by an effort to facilitate easier adjustment:

"But I prefer children's books because this way I feel the transition from the preschool is easier". (Interview, Teacher 13)

Only in the case of Teacher 15 was a systematic, structured co-operation outlined, as she described a coordination meeting with the school's preschool teachers where information is provided on attainment and general behaviour:

"Each year we have a meeting with the public preschool and we talk about the children, their degree of readiness and their maturity as well as other background information that the preschool teachers may think essential to share, behaviour issues, any special skills or challenges, that sort of things, but the discussion is on a rather general level. The children don't come with a portfolio or a folder with basic documentation that would be indicative of who they are and how they do, which I think might

help a lot. I am not sure how easy it would be to prepare such a folder though and when...within the existing workload I mean". (Interview, Teacher 15)

The suggestion of a portfolio from preschool as a way of sharing information or documenting children's progress in their first obligatory year would provide Grade 1 teachers invaluable information on children who attended either private or other public schools.

6.2.5. The macro level of planning

The varying paths teachers follow for the overall structure of their lessons were also referred to on a macro level in their interviews, as teachers discussed their ways into Grade 1 during the initial days of the school year, and the units they work with in the following months of Grade 1. As mentioned above, teachers organise units based on a focal letter; the two or three day units are thus not thematic, genre – centred or revolving around content of any particular set of knowledge, skills or grammar. Interestingly, teachers seem to have their own order in which they choose to introduce letters; although there seems to be a consensus about the need to look first at vowels, the order and the way in which one does so is still open for different views, which may also change each year based on a number of reasons (i.e. personal preference or cooperation with colleagues):

"Each year I change my method, my approach and I do something different. I believe in this change, which renews my teaching and myself, and I think it makes me better, allowing me to revisit and rethink the daily issues of teaching children how to read and write. This and last year I try the model of one/two days textbook, one day children's book, next year though I will think of something else". (Interview, Teacher 6)

Teachers admitted that their choices might sometimes be less appropriate than expected:

"I thought it would be easier for them if I tried this year to start with /n/. They didn't find it that easy though. Regardless of which one I picked though (I did try /p/ another year and /k/) I think you can start with any letter you want, as long as it is not very difficult to express and in other ways too" (Interview, Teacher 11)

6.2.5.1. Ways into Grade 1

Although not prompted by a particular question about the very first days of the school year, six teachers during the first phase of the data collection referred to this initial period distinctly. Two of the teachers used materials they produce on their own, with the difference that Teacher 3 tried to touch upon previous

experience and first-hand knowledge within a framework delineated by the textbooks she uses later on, whereas Teacher 2 used children's books:

"I start with pictures and sentences or texts. First I want them to look at the shapes of letters, words, sentences. I am very interested in them learning to observe; observe the shape of their names, compare it with others. Cultivating observation will help them learn the letters. (...) So I start with the vowels from children's books; we did a story called Olivia for /o/, Elmer the elephant for /e/, etc. I believe in this openness, this explicitness in my teaching; one letter, one story". (Interview, Teacher 2)

"Now I do my own material in the beginning before entering the book. I use words, syllables and letters we are going to find in the first unit. In those first days I try to use syllables that we are meeting later in the book as well: /pa/, /pi/ and some children can easily put them together and say 'papi' others can say the syllables but are slower in recognising the word. I think that we need to start with things that are familiar like names, family names, words from food labels, toys and children's books' covers, I take them outside to find signs and read them and after some vowels and consonants become known I insist on a syllable approach and not on a visual recollection of words". (Interview, Teacher 3)

Teachers 1, 4 and 8 used the set textbooks from the first days, some having strongly opposing opinions regarding any other possible option:

"I definitely don't do the children's books some colleagues have to do because of their inspector. I start with the first unit and I linger with the heroes. Children like to get to know each of the book's characters so we spent a while in learning their names, and thinking about what they are like, and who they prefer. Children like the characters and they like to follow them in different adventures through the book" (Interview, Teacher 4)

"I start from the first day the children arrive to my class with the book. We play a few games to get to know each other, I distribute the book and we go through it: looking at pictures basically. Then I work in the order the book suggests, setting for each and every lesson a set of communicational goals and a set of lexicogrammar goals, which change after Christmas and become more genre or grammar oriented (because we have covered by then all the alphabet)". (Interview, Teacher 8)

From the above extracts it is evident however, that although the teachers used the same textbook and claimed to simply implement a given book, different approaches can be observed in emphasis placed on the characters' names and the plot of the stories presented or in the explicit attention to theoretical aspects of language teaching.

As the above teachers distinguished the first weeks of the school year from the rest, teachers participating in the second phase were specifically asked to describe their practices during this period. Teachers 12 and 15, similarly to Teacher 2, produced their own materials based on children's books:

"we start with a sentence. Basically, supposedly we read a children's book. In latest years we have been a bit careful to choose something about accepting difference, make children understand it's ok to be different and that we are all the same and at the same time all different. This is to ease them into a new environment with many new children, make them feel more comfortable and understand that we are alike and we also have our differences, all of which are accepted. So you make the children feel good about themselves and start respecting others too. We try to get to know each other and so we use the sentence "Με λένε..." (My name is...) and 'Elmer the Elephant' as a story that helps the goal I

described and can be combined with the necessary introductions. So we start with the sentence, we break it down in words, and locate then the first letter of each word. And I work with more sentences, which we break down in words and we mix their order or make new sentences comprising of new words. These sentence transformations are an important part in the way I work. We start with whole language, then we look at the letter then we work with the letter heading back to the whole. This is the methodology I follow all the way till Christmas. (Interview, Teacher 15)

Teacher's 15 description of her use of stories raises interesting issues about the criteria based on which the children's books are selected as well as the different points of emphasis a teacher may place when using children's books, and in this case sentence transformations.

Teacher 11 also used a children's book (in fact the very same, *'Elmer the Elephant'*), but similarly to Teacher 7, she combined it with other materials and the textbook, extending the discussion about introductions to the children and the textbook's heroes:

"I took pictures of them in the morning when we all met in the yard, I showed them using the computer and the projector and Elmer (it was the story I read them on the first day) – I have him as a stuffed toy- he said 'My name is Elmer. What is your name?' and these were sentences I had written on the board and each child had to answer to Elmer and I wrote all the names. We also did the introductions with the heroes of the textbook so we had many names to start with. Although I don't use the textbook much, especially in the beginning, I did do the introductions because of the important names, ie. Orfeas gives you /o/, Aris /a/, Marina /m/ and so on. So there we were sitting in a circle on that first day, repeating 'my name is...' and doing a whole lot of 'ice breaking games' like the English call them". (Interview, Teacher 11)

Teacher 13 also combined children's books with the textbook, following a somewhat different approach; in the following extract she described how she uses the textbook as a framework to dictate the order of the letters to be taught, her hesitations about the material and its reception by the children and her improvised solution, inspired by a kindergarten teacher friend:

"I start in the beginning of the year with the vowels. I place a lot of emphasis on them and spend some time so that when I add consonants the process will be easier and they will be able to make the combinations. So I start with vowels using children's books. Each story I use is for one vowel "(Interview, Teacher 13).

Finally, Teacher 14 described a different way into Grade 1. Stressing the fact that she always tries to put her "personal signature" to the proposed materials she has to work with, she described the preparatory work she does before entering the textbook, which includes the material she produces along with a set of strategies and mnemonic devices:

"So, we use the textbook, but for me it is impossible to work with the texts from this first unit. (...) I go through vowels first and my materials (...) When I finish all vowels, I start the book. (...) In the very first days we get acquainted with the heroes of the book through different game-like activities(...) The

picture is clear: vowels and names and reading games to locate them in pictures and words.
(Interview, Teacher 14)

Teacher 15, therefore, focuses in this particular period at a word level instead of the sentences other colleagues stressed as important, as a way to focus children's attention and to keep them engaged, without over-working them.

6.2.5.2. Units of teaching

When teachers were asked to describe the way they organise their lessons they all referred to two or three – day units in which they teach each letter. It is interesting to note that although all teachers described how they follow such a structure (with the exception of Teacher 9 who did not refer to one), not all claimed to carefully plan it explicitly ahead; thus for some teachers the notion of lesson plans seemed to be irrelevant, with Teacher 1 claiming that her planning although explicit is somewhat intuitive:

"This is my fifth year in Year 1. It's a bit automatic by now and I feel I follow a very clear path".
(Interview, Teacher 1)

On the other hand, Teacher 15 stressed the importance of thorough daily preparation:

"I prepare a lesson plan daily. I know that people with experience often tend to skip this part, but although this is my fifth year in Year 1, each day I need to make a programme, because I think this is necessary for me" (Interview, Teacher 15)

Teacher 9 claimed even though she does not write a lesson plan, she still prepares ahead, but in a less formal way:

"I don't really have a lesson plan when I go to teach, not anymore, but the evening before I do take a few notes, like bullets of the main points I want to cover, and I have to say that unless something extraordinary happens we usually get to where I want us to". (Interview, Teacher 9)

Teacher 12 suggested that the coordination with colleagues in other Year 1 classrooms is more useful than the submission of lesson plans on a weekly or monthly basis, a process that can end up being rather tokenistic:

"And although I am very against submitting a weekly-monthly planning to the head teacher (you copy-paste from others anyway) having each other to see who proceeds and who delays and having the textbook in the back of our minds to know at which point we should approximately be (all letters before Christmas, even if we do children's books, where to be by Easter, etc) that's very useful, without which we would be direction-less." (Interview, Teacher 12)

The following table presents the way teachers described the way they structure their units around the teaching of a new letter:

Table 6.1: Structure of teaching units

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
1	Introduction of letter Text reading	Writing Letter practice	“Creative” writing and language structure
2	Story Introduction of letter	Letter practice Writing	
3	Introduction of letter	Writing Language structure	
4	Textbook text Introduction of letter	Hand out with writing activities and new text	If needed
5	Textbook text and activities	Hand out for practice	
6	Textbook text and activities	Textbook text and activities	New text and activities
7	Children’s book story comprehension Oral text into written	Hand out (sentences with letter) Oral text into written	Letter practice Oral speech activity
8	Textbook and workbook	Related activities	Rarely
9	No reference		
10	Textbook picture description and text reading Letter introduction and formation	Writing practice Reading	Role playing Extensive writing
11	Letter introduction Sentence reading Letter location, syllables	Activities around letter	Sometimes
12	Children’s book Letter Introduction, syllables	Text reading Writing	Sometimes (more sentences)
13	Textbook’s text and activities Letter Introduction	Children’s book and hand out (syllables/ words to read and write)	If needed
14	Textbook’s text on consonant Letter introduction	Extra activities (hand out) Reading -writing practice	Further practice Textbook’s text containing vowel
15	Text reading - comprehension Letter introduction (location, formation), syllables	New text with similar words Activities	Rarely

It is evident from the above, that teachers have a great degree of autonomy in relation to the content, the methodology and the materials they use in their lessons. This was also pointed out in interviews, when teachers were asked to name any changes they would make in the way Grade 1 literacy material and content is offered and organised:

“The way the situation is now, in my case at least, suits me. I mean that I don’t have an opinionated inspector demanding the whatever approach in vogue, we are a small school and the parents are cooperative and really nice and I have a head teacher who trusts me and has me back, so I have a good, solid basis (the textbook) and I add things I have tried over the years and I like doing. If the teacher likes what she does, the children will like too you know and I actually love teaching Year 1, so everybody is happy!(Interview, Teacher 10)

Teacher 10 encapsulated in her answer a number of factors that influence and inspire her and that guide her choices regarding her teaching practice. The following section thus presents the underpinnings of the teachers’ practices.

Section II: The underpinning of teachers' practice

6.3. Overview

During the interviews, the teachers were asked to comment on a number of issues related to their background knowledge of different theories and methodological approaches. They revealed their understanding about Greek and its didactics, the curriculum base on which they taught, and the basic resources they used in their lessons, as well as other beliefs relevant to the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1. They also explained how they draw from their own experience and their collaboration with colleagues, head teachers and inspectors, as well as how they utilise knowledge and experiences gained in their ITE.

6.3.1. *The role of language content and pedagogy*

Teachers were prompted to describe what didactic approaches they use for teaching Greek, and while doing so they drew upon their background theoretical knowledge and understandings of the content and the pedagogy of Greek language and literacy teaching. Not all teachers expressed views on the Greek language as a subject matter. Teacher 3 for example, referred to the need to look at the language as a whole, while Teacher 6 referred to syllabification, as an example of linguistic knowledge that needs to guide practice:

"My basic principle is that language is unified and that all linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) must be simultaneously and equally cultivated." (Interview, Teacher 3)

"In Greek phonics I understand syllables are essential and then I do texts and syllables so I can attend to the needs of different learners". (Interview, Teacher 6)

Nevertheless, similarly to theoretical debates, there seems to be a disagreement among teachers regarding the validity of using syllables as a unit of analysis, at least as the introduction to the decoding process. In discussing the textbooks Teacher 5, for example, commented:

"For me the first unit should be abolished. It is very confusing for the children, because it starts off with syllables. Why? Why introduce the children to syllable as the smaller unit, then bring up the phoneme and then again the syllable? It makes no sense, and I have discussed it with other colleagues that agree with me. Children are made to think that a syllable and a phoneme is basically the same, and they then find it difficult to differentiate the sounds in the syllable, because they see it as one." (Interview, Teacher 5)

Similarly, in her description of her way of working, Teacher 3 did not seem to consider syllables as an important unit of analysis:

"I follow mostly (because I put different things here and there) a « top – down » model, from the text to the letter. I start a text that has sentences with meaning and of interest to the children, then I isolate words and then I end up focusing on a letter" (Interview, Teacher 3)

As far as the approaches the teachers draw upon it is important to note a disparity among some of the claims made and the descriptions provided within the interview. For example, while Teacher 2 claimed not to have a method and claimed to be guided by the children instead, she provided a detailed explanation of how she uses different children's books to teach each letter.

Beyond the initial days of schooling as described above, there are three major schools of thought among the participating teachers regarding the main vehicle they use for the teaching of language and literacy, namely the use of the textbook or of children's books or both; but each of these are differently perceived by teachers, who add to them their own produced materials and activities. The materials used though are not equivalent to methodological approaches, as their realisation can occur in a variety of ways; Teacher 1 highlighted that she does not use one method and that even though the textbook is provided to all, disparities are observed in its implementation: *"You see we all have the same book, but every teacher uses this book very differently"*. The need to synthesise different approaches was a position shared by the majority of the teachers:

"You can't just use one. Any one. You and the children gain different things from different ideas. So the recipe for Year 1 must include whole language, syllabification, stories and the textbooks in combination. And so I work with the textbook, adding to it". (Interview, Teacher 9)

Teacher 6 talked proudly and with a distinct feeling of ownership about her approach, which she changes annually in order to keep it 'fresh':

"I would like to explain to you how I work. Each year I change my method, my approach and I do something different. I believe in this change, which renews my teaching and myself, and I think it makes me better, allowing me to revisit and rethink the daily issues of teaching children how to read and write. I have a mixed, a very mixed method". (Interview, Teacher 6).

Teacher 5 emphasised the self – reflective process she follows and explained how she juxtaposes her method drawing from both older and current practices:

*"I have taught eight times in Year 1 and each year I learn from my mistakes. We used to do whole language, you know, with the sentences on family, school, autumn they had to learn, but memorising those sentences, cutting words and syllables and then dealing with the letter took too much time and effort. I was taught the opposite way: from the letter to the syllable, the word and then the sentence, but what I do is a combination of these two. If I only did letter by letter, syllables and words they wouldn't be able to produce texts by Christmas. Whereas now some words are learned as pictures, we have a visual vocabulary including words like *είναι, και, έχει* which contain diphthongs we learn later on, but are needed for sentence production early on. So I take from whole language the photographic part, some memorizing and combine this with the decoding mechanisms needed, thus I fulfil the needs of different children"*. (Interview, Teacher 5)

During the discussion of the methodology and approaches they employ, teachers often referred to the pros and cons of using the textbooks versus children's books,

more on which will follow in a relevant section. The interesting point is exactly this: that for most teachers the curriculum, materials, planning, activities organisation and methodological approaches seem to merge into an amalgamation that underpins their practices, which often undergoes changes according to their own instincts of what seems to work better.

The teachers using children's books often create and follow their own curriculum sequence of children's books in order to teach letters and diphthongs, but simultaneously introduce children explicitly to a range of genres and texts (from traditional to more contemporary). For the teachers working with the textbook, this rarely constitutes their sole means:

"we do not stay attached the book; the book simply provides us with stimuli to proceed and do other things too" (Interview, Teacher 15)

Thus, Teacher 15 described her approach as comprising of textbook, children's books, work on sentence level, then word and GPC and then back to sentences. She justified her choice based on her experience of teaching older children:

I initially taught second and third grade and at some point I thought it was time to go and see what happens in Year 1. In my opinion this is the correct way to do it; teach 2nd and 3rd Year first and then Year 1, because then you can look at things from a different perspective, knowing what demands they will have to face as they go along, you are in a better position to guide the children appropriately. It's not only about teaching them to read and write; there are other important things too. For example you pay attention early on to basic grammatical and syntactical rules, you work on handwriting, the way they read so that they read with comprehension, so they look at a word and recognise it but simultaneously can break it down... But you can never work exclusively with one approach(...). I ended up on a personal theory on how to teach in Year 1, but I believe that every teacher has the right to experiment and end up with her own theory (Interview, Teacher 15)

The approaches teachers follow seem therefore to be the result of their personal professional journeys, their accumulated knowledge and experiences, their successes and failures, blended with the various influences they voluntarily or obligatory experience. Teacher 14 also provided a detailed account of her own personal journey, her collaborations and her trials that lead her to the point she has reached after fourteen years of teaching Grade 1. Although sources of inspiration, such as ITE and her own experiences are addressed in a following section, in what follows Teacher 14 portrays the way in which the three aforementioned parameters have shaped the approaches she has employed over time. Having worked with all different methodologies employed in recent times in Cypriot Year 1 classrooms, she developed the idea of introducing children to literacy, using children's books when she had her first child. Her inspector at the time adopted her method of using children's literature exclusively to teach all

letters of the alphabet and her work was distributed to different schools and teachers who came to know it as the inspector's innovation and followed it (and many still do). Teacher 14 objected to the changes the inspector had introduced, namely the reduction of the story to a couple of teacher – made sentences to be learned by the children, as well as the lack of any credit to her. She thus turned to the textbooks in 2009 and uses them from the beginning of the school year, having prepared added activities to enrich them:

"I have worked with so many different ways in these past 14 years and I synthesise everything. When we started with Mrs. M (the inspector) initially I believed in that approach, but I had stressed that I didn't agree with telling the story in fewer words. She insisted on that, but I think that if you do so you abolish the conventions of children's books as genres – you kill the story. So in my mind and from different things I had read I came up with ideas (...)"(Interview, Teacher 14)

6.3.2. The influence of curricular knowledge

When teachers were asked about their views on the curriculum, its role on their teaching and the changes they might make given the opportunity, interestingly, some had strong opinions about its overall usefulness. Specifically, Teacher 3 rejected it, criticising its ambiguity:

Q: Do you often consult the curriculum?

T: No, the curriculum is very general for me (Interview, Teacher 3)

The same opinion was echoed by Teacher 11, who reconsidered her initial response and deemed support from experienced colleagues as more important than curricular knowledge:

"Our curriculum is very theoretical. An inexperienced teacher should better find an experienced teacher to help her I think. This would be much more helpful and that's why I think it is crucial in schools to have Year 1 assigned to one inexperienced and one experienced teacher. When you have an experienced teacher close to you, in the next classroom to help and guide you, and it doesn't need to be much, just a small talk and an observation of a lesson or two, especially the first one in which she will teach a new letter, if you take some good notes and then sit down on your own with some creativity you can build your own lessons."(Interview, Teacher 11)

Teacher 2 also downgraded the value of the primary school curriculum, but showed some interest about the preschool curriculum:

Q: What role does the curriculum play?

T: It's not particularly helpful. I don't really consult it.

Q: And the preschool curriculum? Do you think it is relevant?

T: Yes, I would like to know what it covers, it would be helpful, but I haven't had the chance to read it. (Interview, Teacher 2)

Teachers 13 and 15 agreed in the need to study the curriculum only at an initial stage, as a way to frame your individual understanding of the aims and goals of Grade 1:

"Before you teach year 1 you do need to look at the curriculum and the books, even if they change by the time you teach". (Interview, Teacher 13)

“ You read it (the curriculum) in the beginning – when you start teaching in Grade 1 for the first time, then, you don’t have to go back to it all the time because you have formed your aims and goals.” (Interview, Teacher 15)

Teacher 15 highlights an important conclusion about the emphasis teachers seem to place on the Grade 1 curriculum; although aware of its existence they consider it of limited value, and most importantly, of limited relevance on their actual content of teaching. Thus, they seem to look at the textbooks as a substitute curriculum:

I blend together the curriculum the Ministry expects (the textbooks they send) with children’s books that I use to further practise and learn the letter we see in the textbook. It also helps to break any routine patterns you might fall into when following the book. (Interview, Teacher 6)

And although I don’t need to consult the curriculum I know the books are based on it, so I think the discussions I have been hearing about an educational reform in Cyprus are out of place. My method in Year 1 is following the book, which I am extremely happy with, adding a few extra activities. (Interview, Teacher 8)

This is also evident in Teacher 4’s comparisons of previous approaches to the use of the textbook as a guide:

We gave them sentences, which they had to cut and then you needed to make out what each inspector you had each year preferred so you would follow that path. Like for the number of sentences we should do. Basically we all did very different things not all very effective up until November when we all, more or less, worked with the old books. Now this is better because most start with these books from the very beginning and everything goes more smoothly and it’s clearer to teachers and students, the sequence I mean of things to be done (Interview, Teacher 4)

Both teachers raised interesting issues regarding their understandings of how an official textbook is seen in relation to a less prescriptive curriculum, the tensions arising from curriculum reforms and the introduction of relatively new theoretical approaches (such as critical literacy as the proposed framework), but a significant parameter highlighted is the need for ‘smoothness’, ‘clarity’ and ‘uniformity’ in the order in which teachers are to introduce children to new knowledge and skills. As indicated above, teachers have their own opinions regarding the order in which they teach the letters of the alphabet; still they would welcome an official change that would establish a common path and would validate their choices:

Q: So, if you could do changes on the curriculum and the materials what would you do?

T: I would definitely change the order in which the letters are introduced. They are difficult the first ones. Of course I would have all the vowels first; But you can’t work without vowels. /t/ and /p/ are the first consonants introduced but are extremely difficult for the children, both as sounds and to write. If you use the heroes names (the children like them so much), i.e. Marina, Saber, you can start with /s/, /m/, /l/ and /n/. That’s my order. (Interview, Teacher 1)

The suggestion made by Teacher 1, is also indicating that it is the specific textbooks that guide her and not the curriculum. As currently the policy of the Ministry of Education turns teachers away from the use of textbooks towards the

production of thematic units based on their children's educational needs and interests, teachers will need more than ever a stronger knowledge of a curriculum based on research evidence and theory.

6.3.3. The resources debate: Textbooks vs. Children's books

At the time of data collection, teachers were expected to use the textbook, with the exception of the schools where the inspector favoured children's stories. However, teachers may use their own materials still, the textbook, children's books and other texts in any combination and in any realisation. Teachers have strong opinions on which option is most appropriate and effective and offer explicit argument for and against. As far as the use of the textbooks is concerned, Teachers 3 and 8 for example preferred them, condemning teacher – produced materials:

"I use the textbooks exclusively. I mean that I do not use any handouts I know other colleagues produce. Not that I don't know how – when I started in Year 1 we made all the materials on our own, but I strongly believe that these are professionally made materials, checked by academics and official educational authorities, and they have so many things to work with and expand upon that a teacher should not experiment with hand outs of questionable use, I mean making them for the sake of making them". (Interview, Teacher 8)

Although minor changes might be welcome, particularly regarding the first unit of the book and the order in which the letters are introduced, Teachers 1 and 3 spoke highly about them:

"But I find the books we now work with very worthwhile and so much better than the old ones. Sure, some written assignments are needed to enrich the ones offered, or help with syllables, but not many added assignments need to be given. You know how much the children get involved in the heroes' adventures? They wait for what will happen next, they anticipate it and they choose a favourite hero they empathise with." (Interview, Teacher 1)

On the contrary, Teacher 6 did not consider the textbook enough:

"Working exclusively with the books would take the creativity and the freedom of thought away, they are way too structured. So I add the children's books..."(Interview, Teacher 6)

Her use of children's books was different than in other observed occasions, as indeed they enriched and extended the textbook. Teacher 2 was however an example of the use of children's books as a preferred option:

"But what you saw today is how I prefer to work; children's books are really helpful. Children seem to like working this way, plus I can teach vowels first and consonants in a better order.(...) So I start with the vowels from children's books; we did a story called Olivia for /o/, Elmer the elephant for /e/, etc. I believe in this openness, this explicitness in my teaching; one letter, one story." (Interview, Teacher 6)

6.3.4. Underpinning notions

A number of underpinning notions that influence teachers' practices, beyond language or curricular knowledge, were also referred to. Teacher 5 for example

alluded to notions of respect, justice, equality and individuality, as well as the need to build meaningful relationships, and make adjustments to meet children's needs:

"You must never say or do things you don't believe in, things you don't like when you teach and you didn't like when you were a student. As a mom I think that I would never do anything as a teacher to other mothers' children that I would have a problem with if another teacher did to my kids. You must treat children as human beings, equal to you and individuals to be respected." (Interview, Teacher 5)

Teacher 7 cited patience and love for the job as the starting points, Teacher 10 dedication, persistence, creativity and building upon what children say. Teacher 14 added fantasy, vision and love for the children, while Teacher 14 emphasised the need for good communication and hard work. Teacher 12 elaborated in detail about what she believes to be important:

"The most important thing for a Year 1 teacher is intuition. This is really important; knowing what goes on with your children and I am not referring so much to the academic part, as to all the rest. Excellent communication with the parents; you need to get to different kinds of people in different levels and situations and make sure you understand each other. This is a skill. (...)" (Interview, Teacher 12)

The belief that not all teachers are fit for teaching Grade 1 was also echoed by Teacher 3:

"I now believe that not all teachers can teach in Grade 1. I empathise with those who cry in the beginning and don't want to do it. Eventually though if you have it and if it comes out from you, then you can have a shot at doing it well. If not, you simply destroy children, as I am afraid often happens". (Interview, Teacher 3)

Teacher 6 extended this notion of an innate ability for teaching in Grade 1 and associated it with effectiveness and experience:

"Effectiveness cannot be expected from inexperienced teachers or student teachers I think. This comes much later. It is a gift you know, but it can be learned and taught. But I insist that when someone has the gift it makes all the difference in the world". (Interview, Teacher 6)

6.3.5. Own experience

All participating teachers placed a lot of emphasis on their own personal experiences and reflection on them as being the secret to becoming a successful Grade 1 teacher:

"Teaching it, going through it, it makes you a teacher". (Interview, Teacher 1)

"And with experience and lots of success and failure you gradually become better at teaching Grade 1". (Interview, Teacher 8)

"Experience teaches you the zillion things you need to simultaneously pay attention to. Each year you get better at being a Year 1 teacher". (Interview, Teacher 12)

Teacher 11 described her involvement over years and agreed with opinions expressed by others above regarding the specific traits a Year 1 teacher must have:

"The first time I was given a year 1 class it was like I fell in an ocean and I had to figure out on my own what to do. And I really think that not all people can do it, not all people have this ability. Personally I am a very creative person, not to brag, but is very important to be able to create and not everybody can do it to sit and think of games, with flash cards, missing letters and have a spider come and eat a letter (...) No, this comes from me, not a particular training I went through at the university or while in-service. And you need to understand that in my first year I was completely different. I had no idea" (Interview, Teacher 11)

The first year of working in Year 1 seems to be a landmark in the personal and professional lives of many teachers, who clearly recall intense feelings:

"I was really alone in my first year. I did what ever I came up with-from my head. (Interview, Teacher 2) *"In my first year I was really at a panic mode"* (Interview, Teacher 3)

Teachers described the ways in which they add to the notes they keep each year, but emphasised the need not to remain static:

"You built the knowledge of being a Year 1 teacher year by year, a little by little, but you do need to keep an open mind and not fall into habits". (Interview, Teacher 9)

On many occasions, teachers linked their own personal experience with the common experiences of colleagues:

"I learned from my mistakes and omissions and from colleagues I had the luck to work with". (Interview, Teacher 10)

"Nobody taught me. Nobody showed me. When you are given a first grade you ask here and there you try to find others with experience. I didn't have any close friends who taught Grade 1. So I asked some teachers at my first school, but then again I was able to find a lot of material on the internet." (Interview, Teacher 4)

In the above remarks, the teachers also allude to a number of other sources of inspiration, besides their own experiences that have contributed to the formation of their teaching practice, which are presented in the following section.

6.3.6. Collaborations

The collaboration with other colleagues, the head teachers and the inspectors seems to be one of the most commonly agreed factors that underpin teachers' practices.

6.3.6.1. With other Grade 1 Teachers

Teachers have other teachers as a source of information and inspiration and this seems to be the universally agreed most influential underpinning factor that shapes their practices. The collaboration with other Grade 1 teachers can be official and unofficial, within and beyond the school unit.

Official cooperation occurs within the framework of exemplary lessons teachers are expected to attend. An exemplary lesson is one 'performed' by a teacher chosen by the inspector. It is jointly prepared and observed by a number of other teachers who visit the lesson, and it is followed by a discussion. Exemplary lessons seem to be a controversial subject among teachers, as some find them useful and others reject the mere idea of them:

From experience I think, I look around here and there what others do, I read other lesson plans I can get hold of, I observed many exemplary lessons which I think they really help because you see many ideas here and there and I think this is very important. (Interview, Teacher 11)

And then we were sent to attend lessons, you know two or three exemplary ones done by teachers chosen by inspectors. You know you can't teach those in normal circumstances, but you get a lot of good ideas. What I mean is that exemplary lessons are showcase lessons with a lot of things even the same teacher wouldn't do every day. (Interview, Teacher 4)

I don't go to the exemplary teaching sessions. They are set up, pre-directed and sometimes even pre-executed. I was asked a few times to teach and have others in my classroom, but I wouldn't comply to the norm, to what is expected and I would put myself into unnecessary trouble, so I abstain. (Interview, Teacher 9)

Teachers also cited other sources of inspiration, i.e. Teacher 3's description of developing ideas for activities through variations of games she plays at home with her daughter or TV shows that they have watched over the years. Lesson plans acquired over the Internet or through colleagues also seem to be important:

In my first year of employment in Grade 1, I had collected a huge pile of daily lesson plans I sourced out from different friends and colleagues. What I noticed was that some things were always featured, i.e. activities about phonological awareness, so I think that's the most important thing: to find teachers with experiences and materials willing to share them with you. (Interview, Teacher 15)

There are some examples in the Ministry's site and then there are some materials and ideas in the sites of teachers syndicates(...) You know you can find lesson plans, and ready-made handouts. I use a lot of them, but I do sometimes make some changes. (Interview, Teacher 4)

Still, as some teachers point out, it is not the lesson plans or the materials that make the difference, but the close and substantial collaboration:

"I got lucky the second year when I was assigned a Grade 1 class again, a brilliant colleague was appointed in the same school. (...). She stood by me in every step. And I don't mean the material. You can have tons of box files with hand-outs, but that alone does nothing. The activities are one thing the whole approach is something completely different. You have to have someone plan with you, do it at the same time and in parallel, and discuss the same things afterwards" (Interview, Teacher 3)

Teacher 2 also stressed the need for a more formal support mechanism. Teachers 1 and 13 were revealing in their interviews about their difficulties in adjusting to Grade 1 without any support, while others talked highly of positive collaboration experiences:

"...have excellent colleagues, nice people to work with, which was a real blessing for me and a motive to be productive. Cooperation is the best. I had people close to me eager to learn, and we exchanged opinions all the time". (Interview, Teacher 14)

It is important to note, however, that beyond the inspiration and support they may gain from colleagues, teachers also underlined the importance of reflection and self – improvement, after acknowledging the challenges that need to be faced:

"Talking to other teachers and discussing the lessons with them, but also trying out different things and seeing that you need to add something else too. So you think what to do. I honestly must confess that the first time I was give a Grade 1 classroom I was far from prepared and I was not ready. I did not know what it was and it was really difficult". (Interview, Teacher 13)

6.3.6.2. With Head Teachers

The Head Teachers of schools were seen as less important factors. Often, they may not be in a position to provide guidance, as they may not have direct experience or knowledge of Grade 1 requirements:

"The head teacher didn't teach Grade 1 so he tells us do what we want as long as we are not far from each other". (Interview, Teacher 4)

Teachers seem to expect from them organisational support, in terms of making successful choices on which teachers seem better fit to be assigned to a Year 1 class (as mention above, Interview, Teacher 12) and as indicated below:

"I think it is crucial in schools to have Year 1 assigned to one inexperienced and one experienced teacher". (Interview, Teacher 11)

The head teacher's role as coordinator and facilitator of teacher co-operation within the school unit is also suggested to be important, although as the extracts above and below indicate, it is the actual interaction among colleagues which seems to be more important:

"This, being at the same point, is helpful. The dynamic of a team of Grade 1 teachers may vary of course (and it was very different in my previous school). It has to do with the teachers' characters and their experience. And although I am very against submitting a weekly-monthly planning to the head teacher (you copy-paste from others anyway) having each other to see who proceeds and who delays and having the textbook in the back of our minds to know at which point we should approximately be (all letters before Christmas, even if we do children's books, where to be by Easter, etc) that's very useful, without which we would be direction-less. (Interview, Teacher 12)

6.3.6.3. With Inspectors

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, an inspector in the Cypriot educational system is a former head teacher promoted to this position, which involves making judgements about the quality of schools and the effectiveness of teachers. They also outline the educational policies teachers need to implement, based on their interpretation of the Ministry's agenda, which often leads to significant differences

among inspectors and the directions given to teachers in different schools. As teachers have a great degree of autonomy, particularly in Grade 1, these directions are often given as general guidelines, not as obligatory rules, resulting to teachers ignoring them:

This is the method I use; I mean I choose to do what I want and I am ready to “pay the price” of not following the inspectors’ wishes or of the colleagues I may have each year. Because this is the problem: they change almost each year and I am not willing to play this absolutely silly game of having different inspectors with different ideas and changing what I do to please these constantly changing situation. (Interview, Teacher 5)

The inspectors aren’t much help (...), there is no time and then often the inspectors have contradicting opinions. (Interview, Teacher 2)

Still, other inspectors insist on the teachers in their jurisdiction following the guidelines they issue:

“The inspector I had a few years ago, insisted that all the teachers in her jurisdiction should use the children’s books approach she put forward.” (Interview, Teacher 7)

Teacher 7 described how she transforms the inspector’s given approach into her own, based on her experience:

“At the beginning I thought it was strange, but I have found that now I cannot work in any other way. We read children’s books that children like, now I choose my own books, and then we focus on a letter that is predominant in the story and we do different activities that I have developed, following the ones the inspector provided us in a CD, as well as mine ideas that I have found work”. (Interview, Teacher 7)

Teacher 5 offered a suggestion regarding the role of inspectors and provided an idea regarding the creation on an official data bank with approved and appropriate material with resources to add and extend the book’s material:

“First I would change the way the inspectors function. They need to coordinate and have one common policy that will remain relatively stable for some time and I would like to have an official data bank for materials.” (Interview, Teacher 5)

6.3.7. ITE

Teachers were asked to comment on how their ITE informs their practice. Four teachers showed no hesitation in utterly dismissing their ITE, alluding to other factors that they place more value upon:

“I have to tell you that nothing from all those things I heard as student, I have found nothing useful”. (Interview, Teacher 11)

Q: From the courses you took which one helped you?

T: None, really. I have no recollection of what we did, if anything; I tried alone with some help from colleagues, but basically it is in Grade 1 that you learn how to become a teacher. (Interview, Teacher 1)

Three other teachers also had negative judgements, but were less dismissive and focused on the fact that the training they received was more theoretically than practically oriented:

"At the university, when we did the didactics of each lesson, not just Greek, all we learned was theories. The university should have prepared us better by having us watching and doing more lessons. We could have used more friction with the school, more contact with teachers already working. Even during school practicum the lesson plans we submitted and went through were not realistic and doable. They were staged lessons. Choreographed. And even if we did them after hours and hours of effort, these lesson plans were unreal. So we should do what you did today; go in classrooms, watch teachers teach, not just good ones, any teachers, and then sit down with them and ask them why they teach what they teach, how they decide, what do they change, that sort of things". (Interview, Teacher 3)

"At the university I was taught basic things in terms on how to write a lesson plan and basic theories of learning (Vygotsky, Bruner) but it takes at least 5-6 years before you get the hang of it and understand what the theory you read is really all about. So at the University they need not only to teach you a lot of theory, but also how to put it in action". (Interview, Teacher 6)

"I cannot begin to describe to you how angry I am for not having the opportunity to look at solid examples and we just read theoretical research and theories, which at the point didn't make any sense. I feel I have learned and I am still learning from the children. And I am also grateful to my MA supervisor, who taught me to think creatively. (Interview, Teacher 10)

There seemed to be a dichotomy regarding the quality and quantity of practical and theoretical aspects in ITE. While some insisted on applied knowledge, others argued that theoretical understandings are also essential:

"No, theories, no. It's the practical stuff. You need to show them to use 'Snow White and the seven dwarfs' to teach /n/ or the 'Wolf and the seven goats' to teach /k/. Take students by the hand and show them ideas, how to approach texts to extract words to teach letters, and also even more practical things like what homework to assign, what kind of work to send home (for me it's the drilling things and those only, everything else must be done in the classroom." (Interview, Teacher 3)

"We did have a course on early literacy but the way it was done - it was useless; we did classroom calendars and other 'visual' materials that ended in the garbage in the end. What really helped were Dr K's classes. She taught Psychology of Reading and that is extremely helpful for Grade 1. At some point I need to find my notes and read them again, I would love to find the time to do that, because it will be from a different point of view now. I will see how it all connects with the practice, but still I know it helps so much so as to understand developmentally what the process is, how the mind works in order to be able to read. (...) It's really helpful to have a theoretical framework to guide you, to explain what you do and how everything you do has a point and a solid basis. That's what the university did not do, teach us how to bring theory and practice together; the biggest challenge is to have the ability to do this connection and this is what we are lacking (...) Connect theory with practice: what can a child do at this age and what can't a child do at each age" (Interview, Teacher 2).

However, it is important to note that teachers who argued for practical aspects in ITE to be foregrounded, indicate that it is seeing teachers in action that is important and not producing whatever materials seem to be 'in vogue' in the particular time of their training:

"For Grade 1 the University gave me nothing. No help whatsoever. The University is ok for theory, for scientific sort of things for higher academic goals. Grade 1 is practice, action and simpler things. And the take of the course's coordinator on practice with all those boards and materials he wanted us to do, that was utterly unnecessary. We should have gone to visit many Grade 1 classrooms"

Interestingly, teachers also did not suggest that they would prefer 'recipes', i.e. readily made activities or lessons, but they put forward the need to have multiple opportunities to look at different approaches:

You must have had the same lecturer at the University of Cyprus as well, so you know. It was just whole language approach and nothing else back in the beginning. That's the training I got; whole language and no syllabification. But you know we all did syllabification, we taught them syllables otherwise they would never learn how to read and write following whole language. It's too difficult. And now I follow the book's method, texts and words from the texts to get out the letter. (Interview, Teacher 4)

Teacher 15 also referred to the same ITE educator, her view however was opposite than that of her colleagues:

"I used some of the things I heard at the University, he was for me very helpful and he oriented us in a practical and useful way. Other than that course I don't think that anything was helpful". (Interview, Teacher 15).

Thus, similar ITE experiences were deemed helpful or useless, while some teachers argued that any prior training cannot suffice in adequately preparing a Grade 1 teacher:

"I honestly don't think anyone can be prepared a 100% for Grade 1." (Interview, Teacher 7)

It is interesting to note that Teacher 8 pointed out not only the need of a solid theoretical background to underpin practices, but the priority she gives to on-going professional development.

I had a brilliant professor in Athens and she was a big inspiration for me. Not that she trained us explicitly on how to do this (which I would love) but she encouraged us to develop our own philosophy about language teaching, read linguistics, be aware. It's complicated: as a student you cannot understand what linguistics have to do with primary school. But you need to have a good theoretical background, to know where you stand. (...)It's not ITE that for me is more important though. It's the teachers professional development thereafter. Because once you have taught a year or two you can seek seminars where you can actually benefit from, workshops with colleagues that share similar challenges. (Interview, Teacher 8)

In the following extract, Teacher 13 echoed this belief, explaining the differences of actual school settings and the remoteness that often exists from ITE experiences, which need to be associated with the ability to respond to schools with different levels:

"I don't think the university really helped me. When you enter a classroom, and this refers not only to Grade 1, the situation is very different than at the university and even the teaching we did while there. It used to seem and be presented as too idealistic. (Interview, Teacher 13)

When asked to make recommendations for ITE, different aspects were addressed, including the need to study different theories, methodological approaches and teaching materials, but most importantly to observe teachers teaching. As always,

disagreements did occur, regarding to the importance they place on each of the above aspects:

Student teachers need activities and ways to work with the book's texts and other texts. I don't remember the theory and I don't find it useful at all, but the practice and what other teachers do, that's what helps. (Interview, Teacher 1)

I think most importantly they must know the little games we do in a classroom, the practicalities of teaching, creative activities to be able to handle it. (Interview, Teacher 11)

Associating theory with practice, valuing equally both, but in combination – only practical staff are not enough – only experience is not enough (Interview, Teacher 2)

A common thread was the need for enriching the student teachers experiences with more practical experience, and teachers provided additional information about aspects of it that could be foregrounded, i.e. the issue of variation in children's backgrounds and different educational needs (Teachers 5, 12 and 14), while Teacher 5 echoed the literature on the importance on Grade 1 and the adjustment on methodology and approach to reflect the children's evolving learning needs:

Definitely I would like to look at practical examples. Lesson plans, activities, specific things to make me understand what goes on. Theories and unstructured discussions do not help you to wrap your head around what you need to do. A teacher needs to learn to be flexible. Especially nowadays with the many children from different backgrounds in many schools you need to have flexibility. The system we have is not ideal. When a child comes with no knowledge of Greek you cannot simply throw him in a classroom and expect to pick it up! I am for introductory/foundation classes, where they could do intensive Greek and then be included in the classrooms. (Interview, Teacher 14)

"Students need to attend Grade 1 classrooms and observe. Grade 1 is completely different from the other grades. They need to come in at the beginning then before and after Christmas, around Easter and at the end of the school year too. See the evolvment and the way the methodology changes". (Interview, Teacher 5)

In relation to the above, Teacher 6 suggested a notion of apprenticeship in order to fulfil the demands of practical implementation of theories, and pointed out the need of teachers' own knowledge basis:

I would like to have students in my class or even work closely with recently employed inexperienced teachers. I think that for one or two weeks it would be nice to put two classes together and have the experienced and inexperienced teachers do co-teaching. Students might also observe. You become more ready day by day in Year 1. Psychology plays a role too, you need to have direct and indirect reinforcement and you can look at these issues while at the University. And personally I would include linguistics and Greek language lessons in order that all teachers have an immaculate command of the Greek language.. (Interview, Teacher 6)

Teacher's agency and the central role they place upon self-reflection and self empowerment in terms of taking things in their own hands, combining theory and practice, was also stressed (Teachers 7, 11 and 15). They described an evolutionary path from loyal implementation to individual transformations, and

similarly to others, described the need to have access to a repertoire of activities (teaching and organisational) and methodologies, from which to draw in order to cater for different educational needs:

What I think is important is to have access to lots of different ideas and things that have been tried, not just written as theories. For example with the children's book method, we were given not a theoretical text, but a specific list of books and activities, even lesson plans. So you do them as if blindfolded in the beginning, then you feel confident to peek a little bit and you start adding your own ideas, you remove things that don't work for you. I think that if at the university I had the chance to actually plan and, better still, teach lessons following four –five different approaches, I would be able to understand the pros and cons of each and then mix them so I can teach each year the different children I have (Interview, Teacher 7)

She should be examined, after being taught, every single theory and approach that ever existed for teaching reading and writing. After that, she would need to sit down and write her own approach. And for the university I think it would be important to have theory and practice and have students follow a Year 1 classroom for the whole year and know how they start and where they end. (Interview, Teacher 15)

The application of theory into practice in ITE was emphasised upon by Teachers 11 and 14:

Theories you might include must always be accompanied by specific examples. You may discuss this or that approach, but I believe that different people understand things in different ways. (...)So each time you talk about an approach or a method you need to go beyond its description, into a practical implementation example. (Interview, Teacher 14)

In conclusion it seems that teachers value pedagogical over content knowledge and placing emphasis on the 'what' and not the 'how':

Definitely longer school practicum. You need to prepare them to face the needs and challenges of primary school children, enter the psychology of the age, focus on how to adjust to low level instead of accumulating knowledge. Anyone can teach a simple content the point is how. Year 1 is just about a few things – the way you teach them is the question, and this way is difficult to master. (Interview, Teacher 12)

It is evident from the above that teachers had to struggle to find their way, being confused and uncertain about several aspects of teaching and learning in Grade 1. It is therefore extremely useful to map out features of effective literacy teaching and their underpinning, as this will provide insight for student teachers, teachers and teacher educators. As this chapter has presented the analysis and results of the data collected through classroom observations and interviews, the connection of these findings with the literature review and engagement in further discussion follows.

Chapter 7

Discussion

Introduction

This study aimed to present how an in depth investigation of the practices of Grade 1 teachers in Cyprus and of the teachers' declared understandings that influence their practices can illuminate thinking about the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1. The first year of formal schooling is a critical moment in children's education (Riley, 2007; NSW, 2009) and enabling children to make a successful start to literacy learning is important for many reasons exemplified in the literature. There seems to be significant space for improving our understanding of what exactly happens in effective Grade 1 classrooms and how practices originate. This is particularly true in the context of Cyprus, where there is a paucity of research that combines insight from the research findings into both school and teaching effectiveness and literacy learning. A group of fifteen teachers deemed to be effective across a range of schools in Cyprus was systematically observed and interviewed and the data was rigorously analysed. The study explored snapshots of what these teachers did, coding up different strands of their practice and looking at it holistically again. The term effectiveness was interrogated drawing upon the literature, both international (from the UK, USA and Australia) and local (some available in Greek). This chapter presents the relationship between the findings of this study to the research literature. It identifies the ways in which the observed practices agree with the existing international evidence and where they differ, looking specifically at what the participating teachers may do differently and that has not been widely recognised in the field to date, so thus may add to current understandings of effective literacy teaching. A discussion follows of the findings regarding what underpins the teachers' practices. Also a reference to the limitations of the study is made. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are offered, as the findings of the study contribute to the debate about understandings of effective teaching practices and how such knowledge can inform ITE and CPD programmes.

7.1. Ways in which the practices of Grade 1 teachers in Cyprus agree with the international literature

Paradoxically, given the complexities of literacy teaching and learning and the multiple challenges when supporting learners in Grade 1, particularly in the first few months of the year, teachers in Cyprus are left to improvise and individually design their own curriculum and materials. Nonetheless, many aspects of the observed teachers' practices reinforce what is already known about the field of effective literacy instruction in Grade 1.

All the participating teachers included in their lessons a number of activities focused on teaching letter/sounds and syllables set within word, sentence and text level. Although each teacher placed different emphasis on particular aspects of their language instruction, they all maintained a lively pace in their lessons, changing activities every five to ten minutes. Similar to research findings on effective teachers (Medwell, et al., 2012; Pressley et al., 2001), they all articulated with clarity and confidence their decisions regarding the organisation of the lessons, and they discussed the need to include a range of activities in varying orders, as a mechanism to provide children with many learning opportunities, but also to keep them on task, engaged and motivated. Teachers are faced with the challenge of keeping six-year-old children in their seats for 80-minute-sessions, 'surprising' them with differing patterns of teaching and activities, while in essence repeating similar tasks. It is therefore clear that these teachers have found an effective solution.

While there is a well-defined structure within the lessons and in the organisation of two or three-day units per letter, teachers often diverged, demonstrating a flexibility to reflect not so much on the children's progress, but their level of interest and engagement. The common denominator in the observed lessons was the introduction of letters and the reinforcement of reading and writing through a combination of different types of activities. Taylor and Duke (2013) report that maintaining instructional balance is a key feature across effective literacy teachers' studies. There was a disparity among the teachers regarding the variety of ways and materials used to introduce letters and the allocation of time spent decoding

and encoding, while others added teaching comprehension too. What seemed to be a common feature though, is that, even if these choices seemed not to be adapted to different groups of children and their specific learning needs, teachers placed value on providing children with many learning opportunities, in order to be able to learn to read and write as well as to stay engaged. Wray et al. (2002) also corroborate that effective teachers are those who provide children with maximum, varied and motivating opportunities to learn.

As far as spoken language is concerned, Q & A sequences dominated in the observed lessons. This is indeed a widely occurring structure in studies into classroom talk, identified in the literature as an essential teaching exchange that differentiates classroom interaction from other forms of spoken language. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) were among the first to describe this traditional pattern of talk, which is usually known as an IRE (Initiation-Response- Evaluation) or IRF (Initiation-Response- Feedback) exchange; teachers pose a (usually closed) question, children respond, and teachers provide some kind of feedback. Although Q & A sequences can be perceived as an archetypal and dominant form of interaction between teachers and children and have been for a long time the default mode in the U.K, the U.S.A (where it is also called 'recitation') and, perhaps, worldwide (see Alexander, 2012), they should not be regarded negatively nor as a homogenous set aiming at developing a limited number of abilities.

The type of questioning observed was more often closed and literal rather than inferential or evaluative, and children tended to give the correct answer. As teachers wanted to include as many children as possible, they rarely asked a child to further elaborate a given answer. However, there did not seem to be any evidence on whether teachers systematically and consciously addressed all children or whether they tried to differentiate the questions posed to a range of children. Teachers were able to use these sequences to check comprehension, simultaneously though they seemed to use these sequences as tools for monitoring and assessing the overall progress of children of their classroom. Alexander (2012) discusses the potential of talk as a powerful tool for formative assessment and in the interviews teachers referred to their broader view of assessing children's progress through classroom talk. Overall, teachers used spoken language

effectively, also attending to comprehension and vocabulary, however in their interviews they underplayed the value they place on spoken language. They seemed unaware that spoken language should be developed for itself and not as a vehicle to teach other aspects of learning. Thus, this aspect of their teaching is perhaps an implicit and tacit skill, something teachers take for granted and cater for almost automatically and intuitively. Alexander (2012) also discusses the lesser emphasis given to spoken language, referring to it as the "poor relation of reading and writing" (2012, p.5). He cites evidence to suggest that talk is undervalued in British education (as well as in the American educational culture, as comparative studies have found), as its social rather than its cognitive functions are foregrounded, with the teacher's task being viewed as facilitating rather than intervening (Alexander, 2012).

Regarding the teaching of reading, current debates suggest that explicit, systematic, structured teaching of phonics is particularly critical in the early stages of teaching reading (Rose, 2006; Ofsted, 2010). From an analysis of the classroom observations and teacher interviews, it is clear that Cypriot teachers of literacy are addressing decoding as a priority, at least, during the first three months of Grade 1. All participating teachers incorporated in their lessons a number of activities, often presented as exciting games or competitions, to motivate children in both the introduction of a letter and consolidation tasks on phonemes, graphemes, syllables and words and repeatedly reading sentences and texts. Placing more emphasis on reading as decoding rather than comprehension at these early stages was also reported to be a feature of effective teachers by Juel and Minden – Cupp (2000), who stated that "children who learn to read early on read considerably more than their peers who are still struggling to decode, and through reading they learn things that increase their comprehension" (2000, p. 332). Reading comprehension is more frequently seen as becoming more important as children become more confident decoders, as commented Parker and Hurry (2007) in their study of 7-10 year old children.

Nevertheless, teachers also linked phonemic awareness and decoding to vocabulary, spelling and grammar teaching and so demonstrated an understanding that "in learning to read children must develop a myriad of skills, of which

decoding is only one. They must, for example, be able to understand a text which involves the use of context and grammatical cues, be able to organise their thoughts about a piece of writing (...) and so on” (Hurry et al., 1999, p. 639). The teaching of GPC presented particular interest in the observed lessons and is discussed in a following section.

As far as writing is concerned, teachers emphasised transcription and the explicit teaching of letter formation, providing time for individual handwriting practice, with more than half adopting a multi-sensory approach to reinforce kinaesthetic learning. They emphasised overall the teaching of encoding skills and modelled letter and syllable formation, blending and segmenting. In the Cypriot context, syllables seem to be seen as an important unit for teaching and learning, with a great deal of work also done at word level, particularly sentences but less at text level. There was a universal consensus on the need to make the lessons enjoyable and game-like, choosing interesting activities whilst embedding phonics. Also, beyond the transcriptional nature of activities, such as filling in missing letters or syllables or words, teachers emphasised sentence construction and the sentence as a unit of analysis and composition.

Understandably, teachers provided children with less compositional opportunities. This is in line with relevant findings on the writing development of children at this stage, as “emergent writers (pre-school to early elementary school) often lack the skills and metacognitive strategies required to manage the complex processes of writing” (Zumbrunn and Bruning, 2013, p. 92). On the two occasions compositional opportunities were offered, teachers explicitly guided children during the writing process, echoing research findings on the need to overtly teach strategies for planning and organising writing, as well as self-regulation procedures, as found in the writers’ workshop (Graves, 1983) or the SRSD model of instruction (Harris and Graham, 1996). Thus, teachers modelled the process of creating a text through drawing from children’s previous knowledge and experiences and introducing them to a genre as fulfilling a communicational need, echoing the recommendation supported by the strongest evidence in Graham et al. (2012), that the writing process needs to be taught, as well as how writing is used for a variety of purposes.

It is important to note that teachers' effective practices in spoken language, reading and writing instruction were difficult to separate, as they truly were intertwined and integrated. Teachers often modelled how spoken language is transformed into written and linked it to reading and writing. Overall, the participating teachers aimed at utilising the children's existing and evolving knowledge base, planning for plenty of time to rehearse skills in different contexts and in two or three day-units including speaking, reading and writing. The rigorous teaching of skills was presented in attractive ways and often embedded within a meaningful context. An effort was made to choose topics and texts that were familiar to children. Generally, teachers strove to teach literacy with enthusiasm and structure, providing children with a plethora of learning opportunities in fast paced lessons, modelling skills and creating a learning environment to support and simultaneously to enable children to progress. The teachers' classroom management practices played a significant role, particularly their skill to motivate.

Finally, as far as the observed classroom management practices are concerned, it is important to remember that effective classroom organisation is a parameter that influences children's progress and overall achievement (Wray et al., 2000). The teachers' efforts to create a positive learning climate in order to keep children motivated and engaged has already been alluded to above, still one of the most prominent emerging themes from the data collected was the teachers' emphasis on the need to keep children interested, to provide incentives and maintain high levels of engagement. Teachers seem to have developed a repertoire of ways to do so over the years, and their personal attributes often are manifested in this particular aspect of their teaching. The observed teachers were constantly, tirelessly trying to inspire, capture and maintain children's attention and foster motivation and engagement. Applegate and DeKonty Applegate (2010) refer to a number of studies demonstrating the relationship between motivation, reading and overall achievement, noting the crucial role of teachers, while Taylor and Duke (2013) also quote relevant research findings into the relation of effective literacy teaching and motivating instruction.

The teachers faced no difficulties in managing their classrooms, and had firmly established instructional routines and classroom rules. The lessons were characterised by instructional variety with a number of attention-gaining devices, such as puppets and toys and deployed changes in their voice tone, facial expressions and body movement to capture children's interest and keep them almost entertained, being often reminiscent of talented stage performers.

The teachers participating in this study were selected on the recommendation of inspectors as being particularly effective teachers, as explained in the methodology chapter. Currently, no form of official assessment, quantitative or qualitative, of either teachers or children is available in Cyprus. The observations summarised above support the selection of effective teachers. However, aspects of their practice fall short of international conceptions of good practice and this is considered below.

7.2. Ways in which the practices of Grade 1 teachers in Cyprus differ from the international literature

One of the major differences between the practices in the Cypriot context with the international literature in the field was evident from the very outset of the study. As mentioned above, with the current lack of official guidelines and emphasis on assessment, teacher effectiveness is judged by individual inspectors, who act independently and subjectively, often placing different values on what each teacher can or should do. This situation of foregrounding individual agency and of an absence of a common educational policy was reflected at a teacher - classroom level. In all the classrooms visited, the overall organisation of lessons on a daily basis, and at a macro level of weeks and months, was reported to be entirely up to the teachers' personal preferences and judgment as to what was appropriate for Grade 1. This is a highly idiosyncratic situation, with teachers' classrooms viewed as their own domain, and having the highest possible level of autonomy and independence in a series of immensely important choices: i.e. the order in which to teach letters, the identification of learning units, the use of materials and the overall approach followed. In fact, the observed teachers did not demonstrate, in essence, great variation in practice, as they all engaged children in letter, word, sentence and text level activities, albeit with different emphases. Thus, while

teachers touched upon different things trying to maximise the variety of activities within their lessons, there is a lack of a clearly agreed outline of what to do and when, for how long, and in which order.

Variations in children's existing knowledge base and developmental stage would indeed lead to this multiplicity, nonetheless, the Cypriot curriculum does not include any suggestions of timing or a proposed order of teaching letters. This is in contrast to the U.K. context for example, where each scheme used can allow children to form specific words from the very first few consonants and vowels taught. Clearly, there are differences between the two languages, however the important point is that a suggested path, supported by an educational rationale, to follow could be offered. The current situation where teachers change the order of letter introduction each year is clearly not a prudent way to move forward. The order in which to teach letters should not be changed annually, and as different synthetic phonic schemes offer different (but clear) educational rationale about the proposed order, a systematic approach is needed.

The different takes on the issue amongst teachers and even the changes the same teacher may make from time to time without much argumentation, indicate that more scrutiny and oversight is also needed regarding the organisation of the teaching two or three day units based upon the exact level of acquisition to be expected. The number of children floundering in a class should be stipulated in order to justify an extension of the time suggested for teaching each letter along with stipulated consolidation work. Without imposing constraints on teachers, an evidence-based guide could be issued (currently not available) regarding the most effective order of letter introduction, indicative teaching timeframes and levels of what is to be expected by the end of the year.

Regarding spoken language practices, as mentioned above, children were provided with more listening and responding and less speaking opportunities, which were generally quite controlled by the teacher. Thus, there were more Q & A sequences than opportunities to develop and sustain conversations and tell narratives or to use spoken language for different purposes and various audiences or simply to talk about what the children were interested in. Sustained shared thinking was

evidently absent, though relevant research also reported that this is a weakness often observed in classrooms elsewhere (Parker and Hurry, 2007). Alexander (2012) argues that Q & A sequences as a mode of classroom talk mainly tests and does not foster children's thinking, but the main issue here is that teachers should attempt to promote a repertoire of different patterns of classroom interaction.

Children need to be shown how to conduct certain dialogues, as it was evident in the observed lessons that children struggled on the occasions provided with opportunities to work on such tasks. There is thus a need to actively provide an environment for children's speaking, as this cannot simply happen. This links to ideas of reciprocal teaching as an effective intervention to improve reading comprehension through scaffolding younger children's participation in dialogue (Hampson Jones, 2010) and other research about the lack of children's talk in the context of reading comprehension (Parker and Hurry, 2007) and about dialogue in the classroom in general (Alexander, 2012). Still, the age of the children is a factor to be considered, as they are still young to engage in whole class dialogue sessions without being shown a model of how to do so, particularly if lengthy.

The strong didactic nature of the observed lessons, evolved largely around the teachers in the lead, and children were not provided with opportunities to take over executive control. This diverges from what Taylor and Duke report, that effective literacy teachers do not take "an overly teacher – directed stance toward instruction" and that they "refrain from doing too much talking" (2013, p. 4). Nevertheless, this could be viewed as a manifestation of the underlying pedagogy the teachers seem to enact; as teacher agency is central in all classroom learning but even more in spoken language (Alexander, 2012), teachers at this age/stage may have to take the centre stage in order to model and explain and prompt children to respond. The explicit teaching of basic literacy skills occupying such a large proportion of the work done in the classroom, children's age and abilities and perhaps a local cultural and historical understanding of Grade 1 classroom practices, may all be parameters that contribute to this approach to the teaching of spoken language.

While the teaching of reading observed matches what is broadly promoted in the literature regarding the focus on skills and decoding and embedded the teaching in a meaningful context, some points of divergence were observed. First, teachers may have foregrounded decoding and emphasised aspects of phonological - phonemic awareness, in their lessons, nevertheless some aspects reported in the literature as important were not observed. For example, a focus on onset/rime were absent, however this aspect is not as pertinent in the Greek language as it is in English.

Second, beyond the universal teaching of skills, a systematic effort to model the use of reading strategies in order to comprehend a text was not widely observed. This is understandable given the fact that in the first trimester of the year, teachers may be more focused on decoding and thus allocate at this particular time of the year less (if any) time in discussing texts or in developing meaning accessing strategies.

This was also a common denominator in the teaching of writing. As mentioned above, the participating teachers placed emphasis on helping the children to master basic transcription (i.e., letter formation, handwriting and spelling) and sentence construction skills (i.e. punctuation, capitalisation, etc.). They provided time for explicit and direct instruction as well as practice. Still, Graham (2006) stressed for the beginner writer the intellectual effort expended on letter formation, determining correct spelling and punctuation, and on sentence construction, which means that other essential writing processes like planning, evaluating, revising, and so forth are diminished. Compositional writing was understandably less of a priority for the teachers at this particular stage of the development of young writers. While interconnections were made with other aspects of language teaching, writing was seen more as a tool for teaching the new letter and decoding-encoding rather than expecting children to be successful writers of texts at this stage. Graham et al. (2012) reported that positive changes in the writing skills of children in Grades 1- 6 are produced from comprehensive writing programmes, based on explicit instruction of encoding but also accompanied by instruction in the strategies needed for planning, drafting or revising different kinds of text.

Also, attention to foundational understandings of literacy was more limited than might have been expected, particularly given that teachers do not appear to have a clear picture of children's entry-level skills. These were not often featured in either the observations or interviews and teachers did not explicitly teach concepts about print and foundational understandings about texts, which are highlighted in the literature of early literacy acquisition. Nonetheless, teachers were observed giving children the opportunity to learn these through a number of activities, i.e. as they each wrote daily the day and date in front of the children on the board, as well as in discussing the title, author, the front and back covers of books. Thus, intuitively it would seem, teachers addressed the support of this important understanding, though it was not attended to systematically and was not explicitly stated as a necessary aspect of early reading instruction. It is highly likely that the teachers considered this knowledge as being covered in preschool and believed that more emphasis was needed.

This leads to one of the major discrepancies. Remarkably, the observed teachers lack any formal knowledge of what each child knows and can do either at the beginning of the school year or in fact as the year continues. Suggate and Reese (2012) suggest that beginning reading instruction does not work as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach arguing in favour of differentiated instruction, however, with the suggestion of the value of effective assessment of cognitive skills at school entry, namely, concepts about print, alphabetic knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness and level of vocabulary. It can be argued that the systematic assessment of these skills enables a teacher to select instructional approaches and appropriate content, as well as fittingly vary them. Thus more implicit instruction could be more apt for some children (i.e. those with more cognitive entry skills), and more teacher-managed, explicit instruction for other children (those with less developed cognitive skills). Other researchers also stress the importance of assessment, which particularly in the case of writing can not only be undertaken by the teacher, but can also include peer- assessment and self-assessment, leading, in later grades, to self – regulation (Graham et al., 2012; Taylor and Duke, 2013).

The implications for educational practice are that reading and writing instruction requires early assessment of the critical cognitive learning skills so that beginning

literacy instruction can be appropriately differentiated to meet the learning needs of all the children. The principle is that children will not suffer if they receive a greater amount of phonics if they do not need it, but it will hurt children to miss out on the phonics instruction if they do need it (see Tunmer and Chapman, 2003). The participating teachers however, were unsure of what children had covered in the previous year of obligatory preschool attendance, both in terms of the preschool curriculum and individual learners' literacy levels. Clearly, this is a systemic weakness that needs to be addressed at the highest levels possible and the responsibility does not lie solely with the classroom teachers.

Furthermore, along with the lack of initial assessment, teachers appear to have neither awareness of the necessity nor a system to closely and systematically monitor the children's learning progress. Whilst there is no culture of formal record keeping, teachers do appear to have a vague idea of where each child stands. Assessing each individual pupil's progress, phonic knowledge and skills frequently and in detail, along with the rigorous monitoring of the implementation of the stipulated reading programme is stressed in the literature (OFSTED, 2010, NRP 2000). Assessment is acknowledged to be of critical importance so that teachers can diagnose learning needs, promptly identify children at risk, provide feedback to learners and parents and plan the next stage of teaching, as well as report to the educational system at large (DEST, 2005).

Teachers in this study do not have rigorous means of checking whether or not children are learning, but most importantly there do not seem to be strategies in place where learning has not occurred. This does not match international notions of effective practice, which require a good pairing between instruction and the learner's level of knowledge and developmental stage, as celebrated in the IRA's position statement (2000). Differentiated instruction is promoted, having as a prerequisite teachers' deep knowledge of the reading process, an understanding of the strengths and needs of children, and the ability to teach responsively. Struggling readers or children with a mother tongue other than Greek or the higher achievers cannot be sufficiently supported without monitoring and assessing their needs. It is essential to collect data to inform good teaching decisions and instruction

(Taylor et al., 2000). As Clay (2005) stressed, the primary consideration in reading instruction should be awareness of both the needs and strengths of each child.

Possibly as a consequence of the lack of differentiation an absence of group or individualised work was observed. Reading and writing instruction occurred at a whole class level in the observed lessons. As it has been argued, the choice to exclusively employ whole group instruction prevents the needs of all children being met, as they fail to be provided with an opportunity to learn actively with systematic monitoring. The importance of small homogenous, needs – based instructional groups, that can vary and which are based on skills or strategies targeted is stressed in the literature (OFSTED, 2010) and research evidence argues that the combination of whole class, group and individual teaching has been found to be the most effective (Wray et al., 2002). In addition to whole class instruction, small group instruction is more conducive for struggling readers and writers, targeting their specific needs and allowing them to have more opportunities to respond and receive feedback. Research evidence supports that effective teachers of literacy have been reported to spend much time scaffolding and coaching small groups, “prompting children to use a variety of strategies as they were engaged in reading during small-group instruction or one-on- one reading time” (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 136). The same applies for spoken language, as activities and strategies for organising group talk can be employed and so shift the focus from the questions posed by the teachers. The introduction of a version of reciprocal teaching for small group work might be a practical way of managing a pedagogical change from children as passive listeners into children as questioners and active agents in their own learning progress.

Such ways of working were not observed in the classrooms visited; in fact, no teacher heard a child read individually and nor was reading fluency targeted. The activities chosen for the observation day are indicative of the value placed on what was or was not showcased. In their interviews, teachers indicated restrictions of both time and resources as the constraining parameters for group work and differentiation. Indeed, the workload is considerable and the absence of TAs renders whole group instruction understandable, still there is clearly an urgent need to rethink reading instruction in correlation to classroom management,

children grouping, assessment, feedback and differentiation. Above all justifications that can be offered, a recurrent theme and an overarching factor that impedes the otherwise monumental work teachers manage, is the lack of accountability at every level of the Cypriot educational system, an issue that will be revisited later on.

The teaching of literacy in Grade 1 is a highly complex, multifaceted endeavour, involving factors and aspects in such an intertwined way that it is very difficult to regulate and thoroughly comprehend. It has been so and it will remain so and this is common knowledge. This study has provided insight into how these intricacies are materialised in fifteen Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus and has documented what teachers do and do not do in relation to what is already known in the field of effective teaching of literacy to children at this important stage. Still, there were examples of strong practices observed that seem to be extending aspects of current research evidence.

Specifically, the teachers' practices regarding GPC teaching were particularly systematic with the decoding and recognition strategies being modelled by an impressive array of attractive activities for identifying and blending individual phonemes/graphemes into syllables and words. In the lessons observed there were interesting examples of inventive phonological awareness teaching in association with visual awareness (giving visual and mnemonic cues to the children in order to distinguish a new letter). Teachers demonstrated great creativity and endless energy in generating ideas, so as to present game-like activities for explicit phonics instruction and attempts to embed the GPC instruction into meaningful contexts. They managed to balance the tension between a rigorous decoding and encoding instruction with elements of a playful, meaning – oriented framework, and a flexibility to keep children engaged.

Particularly syllables seemed to be a focal unit of analysis and much work was done at that level. This practice would appear to be long-lasting in Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus, and although at some point it was officially dismissed, it seems to remain central in teachers' practices, along with the emphasis on sentence structure. Thus, while syllable blending and segmenting is seen as a key

skill for decoding, the repeated highlighting of where and how a sentence begins and ends, what it consists of, how it can be expanded, etc., reinforces comprehension and demonstrates the importance of understanding what a sentence is, spelling and punctuation.

This leads to another important issue that emerged, which is the particular role that grammar teaching seems to have in Grade 1 in Cyprus, with a close interrelationship with the teaching of spoken language (as well as reading). The majority of the teachers placed emphasis on meta-language and the formal teaching of grammatical phenomena (i.e. rules for word endings, punctuation, etc.) at this early stage of literacy teaching. This route of formal grammar teaching is not a common practice in early literacy teaching in the UK system and it could be argued that this might lead to cognitive overload in the lessons. The nature and structure of the Greek language, as it is highly inflected with many irregularities and variations in spelling reflecting its historical changes, may lead teachers to reinforce learning by repeatedly associating reading with spelling and grammatical rules. Teachers thus attempt to cultivate an awareness of word endings and grammatical rules prior to formally teaching them, setting the foundations for later on and regularly linking reading and writing instruction with sentence structure, capitalisation and common spelling rules. There is evidence that the teaching of grammar can improve children's literacy (Bryant and Nunes, 2009). However, as it has been remarked elsewhere (Carlisle, 2010), further research is needed in order to provide guidance whether this is indeed beneficial for the learning of these very young children and, if yes, to suggest when and how the particular phenomena should be addressed.

The most significant outcome of the findings is the unique emphasis these effective teachers seem to place on a motivating and stimulating pedagogy. In the lengthy duration of the lessons they deliver, they have developed a repertoire of ways of involving and keeping the children engaged, energised and interested in the many literacy activities they provide. Current evidence from research into effective literacy teaching seems to consider classroom management peripheral, but the kind of motivational pedagogy observed interlinked with literacy instruction and should not be undervalued. In this study, classroom management techniques were

observed to be blended with pedagogy and literacy teaching in a very intricate way. This is reminiscent of Schulman's (1987) PCK discussed in the literature review which has been widely reported in the literature, more within the effectiveness pedagogy research than literacy in particular, but albeit the existing findings, the particular manifestation in the classrooms visited seems to be slightly different. The observed teachers demonstrated a distinctive ability to weave together the development of skills with engagement within their personally and idiosyncratically developed literacy curriculum. They thus differed from the teachers Grossman (1990) described who had a strong knowledge of the official curriculum and its aims.

Another difference is that in the case of the observed teachers, this pedagogy is more teacher than children- led. In the field of PCK and in literacy motivation and engagement research (Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997; Baker et al, 2000) engagement is closely associated with a close monitoring and assessment of the progress of the children, which as mentioned above, is limited in the Cypriot context. However, the observed powerful practice of enthusiastic GPC instruction happening along with spelling, syntax and punctuation teaching is a manifestation of the conscious effort teachers make to deliver enriching, motivating lessons with as many learning opportunities as possible. Be it deliberately or unintentionally, teachers dominate children's attention and scaffold children's learning, intertwining aspects of the Greek language structure, and modelling ways to link form and function in language use.

This repertoire of strategic, interlinked, non-static decisions for maximising results was compared by Pressley and Harris (2006) to skilled baseball managers. In reviewing the development of research on strategies instruction and how this has influenced different subject areas teaching and learning, they stressed that people in different situations can be taught to use strategies they do not use on their own. As successful academic performance in different domains requires specific strategies for the many different types of tasks and challenges children encounter from preschool through high school (2006, p. 281), it is highly likely that teachers themselves would also benefit from an explicit strategies instruction making clear how to motivate children in the literacy learning process

7.3. The teachers' declared understandings influencing their practices

The analysis of the data indicated that there are various notions and factors underpinning teachers' practices and to which they attribute their skills and knowledge about Grade 1 literacy teaching. Specifically, teachers referred to their background theoretical knowledge, their understandings of the content and the pedagogy of Greek language and literacy teaching, the curriculum and materials used, broader relevant notions, their own experience, their collaborations with other practitioners within and outside their classroom and their ITE.

The participating teachers indicated that there are varying degrees of subject knowledge present amongst them, as well as disagreements regarding several theoretical issues, i.e. the validity of extensively using syllables as a unit of analysis during the introduction to the decoding process. This echoes research findings regarding the different personal epistemologies teachers may have (Johnston et al., 2001). Interestingly though, theoretical frameworks and curricular knowledge were in the best case seen as peripheral in shaping the instructional approach teachers follow. In fact, some teachers utterly dismissed their importance, usefulness and relevance to their teaching. Curricular knowledge is often replaced by textbook knowledge, and the official textbook is elevated as a guide of what to cover and when, but this again is often loosely followed, with teachers having strong opinions on the path they choose to follow, and the materials they select to enrich the literacy programme that they deliver. It is important to note that the confidence and ability to do so, could possibly be characteristic of only these experienced, effective teachers. Less experienced or less able teachers could struggle finding their way without specific instruction guidelines and overall regulation. So guidelines would be useful, particularly, for them.

There seems to be an overall hesitation ranging to utter refusal to admit to adhering to any formal body of theoretical knowledge. All teachers foregrounded the importance of experience, reflection and their own agency in shaping their practice. The curriculum, various official and unofficial materials, planning resources, ideas for activities and methodological approaches seem to merge into an amalgamation that underpins their practices. This is a more tacit and private

body of knowledge, which teachers highly value and seem proud of. Over years and through reflection and collaboration with other Grade 1 teachers they seem to have developed an internal mechanism, which allows them to organise their teaching.

The teachers also downgraded the theoretical aspects acquired through their ITE in favour of all practical learning acquired later, although, prescription was not what they would suggest. Instead, they would value an opportunity to review a variety of approaches and their actual implementation, something they eventually have done throughout the years of their experience. They thus have developed through a juxtaposition of different practices a unique database of instructional repertoires and materials that they find important to annually revisit. This is in line with arguments made in the literature for work-based learning (Eraut, 2000,2004). It is important however to note that it seems that the primary motivation for the annual changes made is the teachers' effort not to remain static and to refresh their ideas based on their own instincts of what seems to work better; notions of any measures of effectiveness were not reported. This study has highlighted that the relationship between teachers' practices and their declared understandings of what underpins their practices may be far more complex and problematic than previously acknowledged, as not only do teachers synthesise in unique individual ways different theories and approaches, but further more they take them through their personal filters and view them with their own lenses. Thus, based on the personal theories they have developed through experience they reach different interpretations of effectiveness and literacy teaching.

The underpinning of teachers' practices seem therefore to be the result of their personal professional journeys, their accumulated knowledge and experiences, their successes and failures, blended with the various influences from other teachers. Monteiro and Bueno (2008) also found that teachers' practices are underpinned by knowledge gained in relation to their educational work, but also with the knowledge acquired throughout their lives, from childhood to professional experience. In studying the knowledge base and practices of successful literacy teachers in Brazil, family and professional relationships (becoming mothers or working with a colleague they admired) were found to

transform teachers' pedagogical and educational practice. In addition, teachers were reported to have used different teaching styles in different periods of their careers.

Perhaps it is the experience of entering Grade 1 less prepared than they would have wished that leads teachers to negate the impact of theoretical knowledge and of their ITE on their practices. An aggravating factor to this is also the fact that it seems to be less tightly specified than in the higher grades. Through the trials they faced teachers are led to foreground experience. Still, they do have a strong albeit tacit set of knowledge and theories that guides them and allows them to demonstrate many of the features of highly skilled and effective teachers in the literature. It is thus a very interesting challenge for ITE and CPD providers to systematise these underlying notions, make them explicit and ensure that all essential aspects about teaching literacy is included in all teachers' understandings. The extent to which effective practice was learnt from ITE or from serendipitous experience of other teachers and exactly how it has developed has thus crucial implications for appropriating ITE programmes and developing an agenda for continuing professional development.

These are further issues to which the participating teachers also alluded. In their interviews, they may have expressed strong opinions regarding the teaching of literacy in Grade 1, still it was evident that they universally would welcome an official policy that would establish a common path and would validate their choices. For example, their choices on the order of the introduction of letters, whether letter formation and practice should come on the first or the second day of instruction, the allocation of lessons and the range of texts and activities to be used for each new letter, etc. They suggested formalising collaborations amongst teachers and introducing a more formal support mechanism, through approved databases and systematic on-going professional development. This is in line with suggestions made in the literature regarding the perspective that needs to be adopted in professional development, which emphasises drawing links between knowledge, practices, experiences and collaborations within specific contexts (Borko, 2004; Darling – Hammond, 2006).

In conclusion, the participating teachers seem to share essential understandings of the importance of a systematic phonics instruction in combination with a whole language ethos, which although very different from its UK realisation, still foregrounds comprehension aspects in meaningful learning opportunities. This produces successful practice; nonetheless the extent to which this is widespread cannot be identified, due to the selection of participating teachers and other research design limitations discussed next. Still, the value of the data is not so much to report how widespread practices or are what was standard across each teacher and what was lacking, but to provide insight, to identify features of effective literacy teaching that need to be made explicit in ITE and which need more dissemination in continuing professional development programmes. Specific recommendations are made below, first though a reference to the limitations of the study is needed.

7.4. Limitations of study

The primary limitation of this study is the size of the sample and the use of only fifteen teachers, which prevents generalisation to a larger population and settings. Including a larger sample of Grade 1 classrooms would have led to broader generalisations for future studies and revealed more information relative to the teachers' practices and their underpinning. The fact that no empirical verification of the effectiveness of the nominated teachers took place and the inspectors were relied upon for the selection of the participating teachers is also a significant limitation, albeit, there was no alternative that would have been possible within the scope of this study. It is also important to clarify that it is not claimed that the observed lessons are standard practice. It remains however a significant fact that the participating teachers chose to showcase what they did. In other words, even if the lessons were in any way 'staged', they included what the teachers thought was important to be observed.

It is also significant to acknowledge that the presence of an observer with a university affiliation may have influenced the data collected about the beliefs and practices of the participating teachers (Aubrey et al., 2000; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). The teachers may have believed that some practices would be valued more than others, and they may have foregrounded them despite what they do everyday.

The teachers “may dissemble, present an ideal self, or tell the researcher what they think the researcher should, or wants to, hear” (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, p. 344). Nonetheless, as mentioned before, it remains significant that what they chose to do, is seen by them as exemplifying effective practice. Also, teachers quite frankly stated their reservations about the value of their own ITE.

7.5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has yielded primarily practice-oriented findings, providing useful insight for student teachers, teachers, teacher educators, researchers and educational authorities. In Cyprus and elsewhere, often in the literature and policy documents emphasis is placed on details of curriculum coverage, levels of attainment, effectiveness models, etc., that is the 'what', but not about the 'how'. The findings of this research project aim towards setting an agenda for discussing both the 'what' and 'how' of effective literacy teaching in Grade 1 can be disseminated and transmitted, how collaborations can be fostered among all interested parties and to question broader conceptualisations of ITE and CPD. Further to these practical implications there are also theoretical aspects to be considered, which also point toward future directions.

The teachers observed and interviewed and the analysed data provide a lens into teaching practices in Grade 1 classrooms, illustrating not only some of the strengths and weaknesses of these practices, but also providing insight for ITE and CPD. This is possible, as the analysis has allowed a juxtaposition of these effective teachers and what happened to them. And although an argument could be made that it is perhaps unnecessary to intervene, as sooner or later teachers reach such levels of expertise, this would be highly problematic for inexperienced teachers, those who are only satisfactory, and, most importantly, for those children attending the classrooms of teachers who are struggling. The findings of the study have relevance for understanding the mission that teachers accomplish and the difficulties that any teacher who would teach Grade 1 with little preparation would face.

7.5.1. A theoretical framework

It is imperative to consider the theoretical implications that have surfaced in this study. The evidence from research into literacy in the early years is quite heavily theorised. Although there may be different approaches spanning from those who favour a developmental view of learning, where the internal processes of general development or literacy acquisition are prioritised, to more social aspects of literacy learning, Grade 1 and particularly its first three months have such requirements regarding the formal introduction of children to reading and writing that an emphasis needs to be placed on decoding and encoding skills. This study has adopted a cognitive stance on literacy acquisition, but it had furthermore attempted to combine this knowledge base with an argument for the importance of identifying effective teachers, their practices and the understandings that influence their choices.

However, in the areas of effectiveness and teacher development more emphasis is placed on the teachers themselves and on the impact on the teacher as a learner of differing classroom experiences. Similarly, teacher development and research into their beliefs and understandings also argue for the importance of individual experience and agency. Therefore, while there seems to be a tension between the views of literacy acquisition that underpin the understanding put forward in the thesis' second chapter and how these relate to the understanding of social aspects of learning and development underpinning the following chapters, in reality this may constitute one of the more important contributions of the findings to theories of literacy pedagogy. Specifically, the findings indicate the importance of a coherent and comprehensive theoretical framework that needs to underpin the whole spectrum of the life long journey of literacy development. Such a framework would include basic principles arising from the insight of the research areas covered in the relevant chapter above, but would also allow appropriation based on arising needs, more importantly it would provide an explicit path for moving from the initial need to emphasise the cognitive aspects of literacy learning to broadening the scope to attend to more social aspects later on.

7.5.2. Foregrounding evidence

The need to clarify a currently complicated situation regarding distinct theoretical words that need to be combined as well as the overview of the changing directions in Grade 1 literacy teaching in Cyprus and the data from this study, establish the need to make choices based on evidence. In Cyprus this does not happen. There is a pressing need for a long delayed governmental initiative to document practices on a national level in Cyprus, and introduce measures of monitoring and assessing teacher effectiveness and pupil outcomes. Any reform or policies issued on the teaching of literacy in Grade 1 need to be based on a comprehensive and valid account of the way in which effective literacy is taught. This was unfortunately not the case in the latest Cypriot educational reform leading to the current curriculum (MEC, 2010). It is perhaps studies like this one that could be conducted with a broader scope, in order to yield the relevant, essential information.

For example, while teachers were found here to have similar teaching practices and in the emphasis on motivation, engagement and positive overall attitudes, parental involvement was an area in which very varied practice seem to exist. Resonating with research findings supporting parental involvement can have a hugely positive impact on children's attitudes and academic performance, and having long-term implications (Nokali et al, 2010; Epstein, 2001), teachers did highlight the importance of a close cooperation between school and home but practice varied considerably. Nonetheless, teachers often seem to impose upon parents obligations they may not be able to fulfil, at the cost of their children's progress. A point raised by a participant teacher was the need to receive relevant training and Stelmack (2005) reviews a number of typologies of parental involvement programmes that could guide teachers in establishing effective partnerships and manage a number of related issues, like the type of involvement, including homework assignments. The issues of parental involvement and the role parents play in the different types of homework teachers allocate to children are particularly interesting issues for future studies.

It is important to note that in their interviews, a number of issues which deviated from proven effective practice, were acknowledged, as not being according to the standards the teachers themselves would like to maintain. Others may be the

result of unawareness or of consolidation of practices transmitted among colleagues over time. In any case, research into the particular context of Cyprus that would lead to the development of coherent, evidence-based literacy programmes, may provide a solution to many of the current challenges. International research findings and experiences may be a useful source of information and inspiration; nonetheless systems cannot just be grafted on from one context to another. Culture does matter, particularly when the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1 is at stake.

7.5.3. Introducing Accountability

Albeit the engaging ways and creative ideas of the many gifted, tireless teachers in this study, it is clear that minimal monitoring of individuals occurs and remedial or specifically differentiated materials and activities for slower learners are non-existent. Teachers seem to place emphasis on the need to work hard to make lessons fun and game-like, and even the purpose of materials chosen seems to be making the lessons interesting while embedding skills in something meaningful. But the pressing question that arises is how much learning actually takes place, and what progress is each child making.

In order to monitor children's progress though, the initial point of departure needs to be known. There is a need for a clearer recognition and account of children's previous knowledge and skills (Riley, 1996). Although teachers seemed to be aware of the need to do so particularly in Grade 1, it appears that institutionally there is a lack of an explicit and systematic way to achieve this, and teachers collect information on the children's progress from different sources on the one hand, but on the other, without much or, in some instances, no documentation. Thus the lack of formal assessment of the key stages of learning, inevitably, contributes to a virtually non-existent level of accountability.

Accountability, or the lack of it, seems to be the key notion in the discussion of the effective teaching practices in Cypriot Grade 1 classrooms. Teachers daily overwhelm themselves in their colossal effort to teach children how to read and write. This task is itself immensely difficult and complex, and should be supported by the educational system. On the contrary, the system adds to the demands both

teachers and children face, as it does not provide a clear framework of the approaches to be followed. And even if this could be seen as a way of entrusting practitioners with the responsibility to judge, based on the children's educational needs, which instructional approaches are more apt, the fact that they are left with no formal indication of what is to be expected at the beginning and the end of the year, how it is to be monitored and assessed unnecessarily further confounds the teaching and learning process. Instead of research findings to inform official reports, decision-making on almost every level is shifted to practitioners and is more often than not based on widespread practices, opinion, personal preference and intuitive judgments.

Along with the educational authorities, the school as a unit and the head teachers as the leaders of their schools seem also to be not accountable. Although the role of the headteacher has long been stressed and re-affirmed in the effectiveness literature (Mortimore et al. 1988; Taylor, 2002), in the Cypriot context the headteachers do not seem to actively participate in instructional decisions. Head teachers should evolve from heads of administration to learning leaders within their schools and support Grade 1 teachers in their efforts.

The teachers themselves are currently without an official support mechanism to guide them and to, simultaneously, hold them to account for their work. A central implication is that teachers are focused on teaching the skills, but not on whether all the children are learning and making progress. Teachers are thus left to find a way to overcome tensions from the transition from preschool and emergent literacy to the systematic teaching of literacy, nonetheless without a clear picture of what children know or what mistakes they make and why. Consequently, differentiating teaching and materials with respect to different learning styles and current knowledge of the child becomes more difficult in a context where traditionally differentiation does not seem to have had a place. And, as mentioned above, beyond the general expectation that by the end of Grade 1 children should advance their decoding - encoding skills, no explicitly delineated end of year goals to be achieved are defined. Crucial information regarding important aspects of language and literacy teaching (i.e. the spectrum of texts and grammatical

phenomena to be introduced) is also not explicitly provided, nor are the expectations, thus teachers are left unaccountable.

7.5.4. ITE and CPD

The observed practices of strong and motivating pedagogy as a hallmark of effective teaching, along with the participating teachers' comments that ITE had not been useful, could be due to the lack of attention given to pedagogy rather than the overwhelming offering of theoretical information during their preparation. This suggests a need to rethink the process of transmitting this kind of knowledge and skills to student teachers, as well as to teachers on in-service training programmes, so to fill the gap between the training received and realities faced in the classrooms.

It is evident that there is a disconnection between University and school settings, and that any de-contextualised discussions even around more "practical issues" (i.e. reviewing materials, designing lesson plans, etc.) fail to fully capture the intricacies involved in developing the kind of motivational/literacy related pedagogical skills observed. While a detailed, prescriptive curriculum for ITE might offer some affordances (i.e. set benchmarks and become a mechanism of increasing accountability), the problem of tying together aspects of theory and practice remains.

A powerful tool to address this issue would be the development of a series of video clips, enabling student teachers, teachers and trainers to appreciate fully those invaluable moments that cannot be fully captured in plans or evaluations or even through classroom observation. This would allow multiple viewings, analysis and discussion before and after a viewing. Also reflection upon why and how teachers develop a range of different types of knowledge and skills within the particular context of their classrooms. Similar benefits are offered by classroom observations and exemplary lessons, nonetheless the logistics of such solutions, in terms of administrative and financial demands, are becoming forbidding, particularly in the economic climate in Cyprus and the budget cuts on education. Being able to play and pause clips, discussing and problematising the choices made, would allow

work-based learning in schools to move to universities' auditoriums. It would also make explicit connections of aspects that teachers take for granted, and knowledge and skills that are tacit and implicit.

It is important to have shared understandings and a common language as far as effective practices are concerned in Grade 1. If a learning continuum could be developed from ITE to the very first teaching experiences and further ahead in continuing professional development, it would ensure that best practices are identified and disseminated and evolving needs of teachers are met. Strangely enough, what an effective teacher should do in a classroom, i.e. appropriate instruction according to the children's existing knowledge base and skills, is what the educational system should do for its teachers.

Stakeholders (ITE and CPD institutions, educational authorities, professional bodies, schools, as well as parents associations) should commonly work towards developing a mechanism to ensure that Grade 1 teachers (in service or in preparation) share the same understandings of what effective, successful literacy teaching entails and have the means to share expertise. While the development of such a number of channels of communication might be rejected as an acutely complex and, constraining, expensive suggestion, particularly in the current economic climate in Cyprus and elsewhere, technology, as mentioned above, offers an even better solution.

Nonetheless, teaching is a practical profession and actually performing the art of teaching children is essential. Thus, offering teaching opportunities within and outside classrooms is also crucial, and these could span from an activity to a whole lesson, on an individual level, with a partner or in team teaching. But it remains crucial, that teachers at any stage of their careers, should have access to an informed body of information, an arsenal at their disposal, so as not to depend so much on colleagues, school circumstances and other unpredictable factors that might lead their professional development to excellence or equally likely, to mediocrity.

This study documented the laborious, admirable efforts of effective literacy teachers in Grade 1 classrooms in Cyprus. In the particular context, effective teachers are seen as creative resourceful performers, with a rather teacher-centred approach, developing rich and rigorous literacy programmes. They are offering wonderful learning opportunities, but with no mechanism to recognise individual capacities and to differentiate accordingly. This is, however, predominantly a systemic problem, as the Cypriot educational system does not offer its teachers crucial information and it does not hold accountable anyone involved. This results in relying on hearsay, ideological orientations and arbitrary personal preferences as the guiding forces behind the crucially important decisions made.

The findings of this study will help inform the re-conceptualisation of ITE undergraduate courses and CPD workshops. Without overstating its importance, it is recommended that the aims and procedures followed here could be replicated on a grander scale to inform the re-conceptualisation of the literacy teaching practices in Grade 1 in Cyprus. A broader and deeper investigation of teacher practices with a substantive and representative sample of teachers is therefore needed. Perhaps by an ad-hoc committee, and including consultants from countries like the U.K., with longstanding experience in monitoring pupil outcomes and teacher effectiveness. This would ensure that future official educational policies implemented would be based on evidence. The aim would be not to remove teacher creativity, reflection and agency but to build on the best practice in the field, to develop these for the local context and, crucially disseminate them to all teachers. This study has also highlighted the importance of continuing research into the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1, both in Cyprus and beyond. The study argues that supporting the acquisition of the complex skill of becoming literate is itself complex. It needs highly knowledgeable teachers with an understanding both of the empirical research evidence, and the different theoretical perspectives, which in turn inform their pedagogy. Children's life chances depend upon such Grade 1 teachers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to head - teachers

Dear [...]

I am contacting you in reference to our telephone conversation regarding a study I am conducting as part of my PhD studies at the Institute of Education, University of London.

My study, supervised by Dr. Jeni Riley and Dr. Jane Hurry, is investigating the effective teaching of literacy in Grade 1. After obtaining a relevant permission from the Ministry of Education and Culture (see attached document), I contacted the Larnaca District Educational Office, where the Inspectors suggested teachers considered to be effective. As some are placed in your school, I would like your permission to visit your school to collect data. With the consent of the teachers, I will need to observe literacy lessons and take notes. I will also need to discuss with the teachers their lessons in informal interviews. Finally, I will ask for a brief form on background studies and former experience to be filled in, as well as copies of any materials used in the lessons. All visits will be arranged to accommodate the school's schedule and the teachers' preference.

I would like to stress that the teachers' anonymity will be safeguarded and pseudonyms will be used the school, the teachers and the children of the classrooms. Of course, the findings of the study will be available for the teachers' use and your records. I would like to arrange meeting to further explain to you and the participating teachers all the above.

I would like to thank you in advance and please do not hesitate to contact me for any additional information you may need.

Kind regards.

Elena Kyriakides
tel: 99571977
e-mail: elenakyr@ucy.ac.cy

Appendix 2: Teachers' background information form

NAME				
SCHOOL				
AGE	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE	2-5	6-10	10-20	More than 20
YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN YEAR1				
OTHER YEAR GROUPS TAUGHT:				
TEACHING TRAINING COURSE	Pedagogical Academy		University: _____	
QUALIFICATIONS (WRITE SUBJECTS)	BA BSc BEd MA MEd MPhil MSc PhD Other			
IN- SERVICE TRAINING RELATING LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	Year	Description		
OTHER SEMINARS AND TRAINING	Year	Description		
CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE AND/OR PARTICIPATION	Year	Description		

Appendix 4: Teachers' overall experience and experience in Grade 1

T	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Exp.	20	12	11	10	14	16	12	15	17	13	14	12	11	17	13
Exp.G1	5	9	11	6	8	8	7	6	11	9	7	7	5	14	5

Appendix 4: Teachers background information

T	ITE institution	MA/ Post-grad diploma	Seminars/ In-service training	Ex. lessons taught/ observed
1	Aristotle University Thessaloniki	Complementary programme at the University of Cyprus	Other subject areas and computer skills	-
2	University of Cyprus	Educational Studies	-	2
3	University of Cyprus	-	-	3
4	University of Cyprus	-	-	many
5	University of Cyprus	-	Drama Education	-
6	National Kapodistrian University Athens	ICT and Education	Conferences in Greece	many
7	University of Cyprus	Educational Leadership	Teachers Association Conferences	2
8	National Kapodistrian University Athens	Curriculum and Instruction	Language/ linguistics in primary education	-
9	Pedagogical Academy Cyprus	Complementary programme at the University of Cyprus	ICT in Education	-
10	University of Cyprus	Arts Education	Arts and Creativity Drama Education	many
11	University of Cyprus	MA Mathematics Education - UK	Children's literature	Both
12	University of Cyprus	-	Classroom management	Both
13	University of Cyprus	-	Learning difficulties	Both
14	Pedagogical Academy Cyprus	Complementary programme at the University of Cyprus	-	Both
15	University of Cyprus	-	-	Both

Appendix 5: Observation Schedule

Time	Teacher/Child Talk	Teacher/Child Behaviours	Resources/materials	Comments
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Observation:	Date:	Time:	School:	Class:	Teacher:
Lesson Focus:			Aims and goals:		

Appendix 6: Prompts checklist

Focal points	Explanation
Methodologies used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phonics ▪ Whole language ▪ Emergent literacy ▪ Balanced, etc.
Nature of tasks set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Context of task ▪ Hierarchy/order of tasks and transition from one to another
Materials used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Books/handouts/use of board/etc.
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Descriptions, discussions, opinions, arguments, storytelling, narrations, etc.
Reading activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phonological awareness/ Alphabet knowledge ▪ Reading words/sentences/texts ▪ Shared reading/guided/ individual/ etc.
Writing activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letter related ▪ Word/sentence/text level
Metalanguage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skills/strategies ▪ Grammar/Spelling and punctuation/Sentence structure
Assessment and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content/ Behaviour related ▪ When and how
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children's academic engagement ▪ On-task talking/working ▪ Motivation/enthusiasm (teachers' and children's) ▪ Participation
Classroom management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environment created ▪ Rules/routines/ misbehaviour management ▪ Time management ▪ Coordination and assistance provided, reinforcement and feedback ▪ Differentiation
Classroom environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is displayed (classroom walls, etc.) ▪ How it is connected/used while teaching

Appendix 7: Semi-structured interview schedule

Part 1: General Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about being a Grade 1 literacy teacher? (did you choose to be one?) • How do you organise your planning? (year - month - week - daily?) • Where do you focus at the beginning of the school year on the Greek curriculum document? What materials do you use and why? • How would you describe your methodology for teaching reading and writing? • How do you value the textbooks provided and how do you use them? • If you could make any changes on the way year 1 literacy material and content is offered and organised, what would it be?
Part 2: questions about the lesson observed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think today's lesson went? • What, in your own words, were the aims and objectives set? • Did you follow your initial plan today? Where did you divert and why? • How did you decide which activities to do? • How did you monitor what the children did in the lesson? • Did anything happen that you did not anticipate/surprised you? • Did you face any difficulties? • Did any particular children face any difficulties? • Do you think the children have learned what you hoped they would? • Would you change anything from today's lesson and why?
Part 3: questions in relation to what underpins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of theoretical background would you say a Grade 1 teacher needs to rely on? What have you found to be most helpful? Where/how did you learn this yourself? • In the teacher's aid book there are a number of methods mentioned. Do you

their practices	<p>prefer one? Do you follow a specific one or do you combine more than one? How did you decide on this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your sources of information/inspiration? What, would you say, do you rely on most? • Where are you influenced from? What about the influence of your colleagues, inspector, head teacher? • How well do you think one needs to know the Year 1 curriculum/ the pre-school curriculum (does it play a role?) • What is the role of your ITE in your work today? Did you have other professional development courses on literacy? What do you remember/use from the courses? • If you could suggest a curriculum to better prepare a student teacher to teach in year 1 what would it be? • If you would prepare a list of the top 5 things/skills/knowledge a teacher should have to effectively teach literacy in Year 1 what would they be?
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Appendix 8: Examples of early codings (extracts from Observation 1)

a. Early Example of Codings

Time	Teacher/Child Talk	Teacher/Child Behaviours	Resources/materials/coding
7:45	T: Ok everybody. Let's start getting ready for our lesson. I need you to take out one pencil, your eraser, your ruler and one coloured pencil.	She stands in front of them with her hands folded. The children talk to each other and get prepared	Routine: silencing
	T: ok stand up, ready!	Date information She writes on board Wednesday October Autumn 13.10.2010 and draws a cloud partly obscuring the sun	Routine: date Modelling word-sound association and how to write dates (genre)
7:50	T: So, what day is it today? SS: Wednesday! T: Now, now, where are our good manners. Raise your hand as we agreed. And the month? S: October T: And our season? S: Our season is autumn T: This is a very good answer. And the date is the 13 th . And would you say the weather is the same with yesterday? How was it yesterday? S: It was the same. Some clouds and some sun.	Prayer The children stand up and they start saying the Lord's prayer. The teacher turns her back to model how to make the sign of the cross in the beginning and the end of the prayer. Date information As the children respond she turns to the board and shows/rewrites their answers	Routine: prayer Auditory memory and genre modelling
	T: Do you want to start with Mr. Elephant? SS: Yes! T: Good morning children! I heard that you have a visitor today that's why I woke up. But I am not quite up yet. Can you read	Activity 1: Alphabet reciting She wears a hand puppet and changes her voice to "play" the elephant. Elephant puppet	Modelling writing-encoding Reinforcing sentence structure Letter knowledge Engagement-interest (puppet)

8:00	<p>really loud your alphabet to me?</p> <p>SS: <i>The children read aloud in chorus the pictures above the board (/A/ Aeroplano (airplane), /B/Biblio (book) and so on). Then they continue with a rhyme song about the vowels:</i></p> <p>Τα φωνήεντα είναι εφτά και φωνάζουν δυνατά Αα Εε Ηη Ιι Οο Υυ Ωω. (the vowels are seven and they shout out loud /a/, /e/, /i/, /i/, /o/, /i/, /o/)</p> <p>T: Well done. Mr. Elephant was asleep as he told you and he needs you to remind him how Aris and Marina spent their vacation.</p> <p>S: At the beach</p> <p>T: Say it all</p> <p>S: Aris and Marina spent their vacation at the beech</p> <p>T: Now I seem to have forgotten. Where did Orfeas spent his vacation? Who else?</p> <p>S: At a farm</p> <p>T: Together with whom?</p> <p>S: Titina the chicken</p> <p>T: And our other friends? Ioanna? What do you think?</p> <p>S: I think...</p> <p>T: What do you think?</p> <p>S: At her grandmother's</p> <p>T: Another opinion?</p> <p>S: I think she went to the grocery</p> <p>T: She spent all her vacation there?</p> <p>S: Yes, I agree with him</p> <p>S: And I agree with him</p> <p>T: Hmm... Let's open our books to see what really goes on. Page 26...Quickly, quickly now, with your little mouths shut...so let's see... No, leave the text for now and look carefully at the picture. Who are the friends joining us today? Because I know you are excellent spies I want you to look at the picture and tell me beautiful little sentences for the grandfather, Ioanna and the parrot. Start them nicely, "Ioanna...", "Grandfather..." and use nice words from the picture"</p> <p>S: The parrot is near the bicycle</p> <p>T: Oh! The parrot flies over a bicycle, said Ioanna. Wow! Look how many wagons this little sentence has!</p> <p>S: Joanna eats ice cream</p> <p>T: This is a small sentence. Ok, let's make it bigger. How can we show that the ice cream</p>	<p>Pictures above the board (classroom environment)</p> <p>Activity 2: Vowels</p> <p>She writes on the board the letters as the children shout them out</p> <p>Activity 3: Content recapitulation</p> <p>The teacher stands in front of the boards asking questions to the children</p> <p>She addresses a girl who does not raise her hand</p> <p>The children open their bags to get their books</p> <p>Textbook</p> <p>Activity 4: Sentence production based on text' picture</p> <p>Some start attempts to read the text</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board whiteboard</p> <p>She points to another student</p>	<p>Letter knowledge - sound letter association</p> <p>Engagement-motivation (puppet)</p> <p>Provoking participation</p> <p>Feedback - assessment</p> <p>Time management</p>
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8:10	is nice? Ioanna eats a...	She writes the sentence on the board	Metalanguage: sentence structure
	S: delicious T: Very nice! A delicious ice cream. What do you have to say about the grandfather?		
	S: The grandfather holds a melon. T: Let's make this one also bigger!	She writes the sentence on the board	Writing modelling-encoding
	S: The grandfather holds a big lemon T: And one sentence for that man there. S: What does he do? T: He sells fruit		Sentence structure (metaphor for words)
S: The fruit seller sells melons and water melons. T: What else do you see that's interesting? SS:...	She writes the sentence on the board Students talk together	Metalanguage: simple sentences and sentences with adjectives Function of adjectives Modelling writing - encoding	

b. Subsequent Example of Coding

T i m e	Teacher/Child Talk	Teacher/Child Behaviours Resources/materials	CODE
7 : 4 5	T: Ok everybody. Let's start getting ready for our lesson. I need you to take out one pencil, your eraser, your ruler and one coloured pencil. T: ok stand up, ready!	She stands in front of them with her hands folded. The children talk to each other and get prepared Date information She writes on board Wednesday October Autumn 13.10.2010 and draws a cloud partly obscuring the sun whiteboard Prayer The children stand up and they start saying the Lord's prayer. The teacher turns her back to model how to make the sign of the cross in the beginning and the end of the prayer.	CM CM
7 : 5 0	T: So, what day is it today? SS: Wednesday! T: Now, now, where are our good manners. Raise your hand as we agreed. And the month? S: October T: And our season? S: Our season is autumn T: This is a very good answer. And the date is the 13 th . And would you say the weather is the same as yesterday? How was it yesterday? S: It was the same. Some clouds and some sun. T: Do you want to start with Mr. Elephant? SS: Yes! T: <i>Good morning children! I heard that you have a visitor today that's why I woke up. But I am not quite up yet. Can you read really loud your alphabet to me?</i> SS: <i>The children read aloud in chorus the pictures above the board (/A/ Aeroplano (airplane), /B/Biblio (book) and so on). Then they continue with a rhyme song about the vowels: Τα φωνήεντα είναι εφτά και φωνάζουν δυνατά Αα Εε Ηη Ιι Οο Υυ Ωω. (the vowels are seven and they shout out loud /a/, /e/, /i/, /i/, /o/, /i/, /o/)</i> T: <i>Well done. Mr. Elephant was asleep as he told you and he needs you to remind him how Aris and Marina spent their vacation.</i> S: <i>At the beach</i> T: <i>Say it all</i>	Date information As the children respond she turns to the board and shows/rewrites their answers Activity 1: Alphabet reciting She wears a hand puppet and changes her voice to "play" the elephant. Elephant puppet Pictures above the board (classroom environment) Activity 2: Vowels She writes on the board the letters as the children shout them out Activity 3: Content recapitulation	CM plus CM AC CM AC R StrL SL CM

8 : 0	<p>S: Aris and Marina spent their vacation at the beech T: Now I seem to have forgotten. Where did Orfeas spent his vacation? Who else? S: At a farm T: Together with whom? S: Titina the chicken T: And our other friends? Ioanna? What do you think? S: I think... T: What do you think? S: At her grandmother's T: Another opinion? S: I think she went to the grocery T: She spent all her vacation there? S: Yes, I agree with him S: And I agree with him</p> <p>8 : 0</p> <p>T: Hmm... Let's open our books to see what really goes on. Page 26...Quickly, quickly now, with your little mouths shut...so let's see... No, leave the text for now and look carefully at the picture. Who are the friends joining us today? Because I know you are excellent spies I want you to look at the picture and tell me beautiful little sentences for the grandfather, Ioanna and the parrot. Start them nicely, "Ioanna...", "Grandfather..." and use nice words from the picture"</p> <p>S: The parrot is near the bicycle T: Oh! The parrot flies over a bicycle, said Ioanna. Wow! Look how many wagons this little sentence has! S: Joanna eats ice cream T: This is a small sentence. Ok, let's make it bigger. How can we show that the ice cream is nice? Ioanna eats a... S: delicious T: Very nice! A delicious ice cream. What do you have to say about the grandfather? S: The grandfather holds a melon. T: Let's make this one also bigger! S: The grandfather holds a big lemon T: And one sentence for that man there. 8 : 1 0</p> <p>S: What does he do? T: He sells fruit S: The fruit seller sells melons and water melons. T: What else do you see that's interesting? SS:...</p>	<p>The teacher stands in front of the boards asking questions to the children</p> <p>She addresses a girl who does not raise her hand</p> <p>The children open their bags to get their books Activity 4: Sentence production based on text' picture Some start attempts to read the text</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board</p> <p>She points to another student</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board</p>	<p>SL StrL</p> <p>CM</p> <p>CM SL</p> <p>StrL SL</p> <p>StrL</p>
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c. Later Example of coding

T i m e	Critical Incident	Teacher/Child Talk	Teacher/Child Behaviours	CODE	Comments
7 : 4 5		<p>T: Ok everybody. Let's start getting ready for our lesson. I need you to take out one pencil, your eraser, your ruler and one coloured pencil.</p> <p>T: ok stand up, ready!</p>	<p>She stands in front of them with her hands folded. The children talk to each other and get prepared Date information She writes on board Wednesday October Autumn 13.10.2010 and draws a cloud partly obscuring the sun whiteboard Prayer The children stand up and they start saying the Lord's prayer. The teacher turns her back to model how to make the sign of the cross in</p>	<p>CMM CMR CMR</p>	<p>While CMR (date) also FU: modelling SL into W (word-sound association and how to write dates</p>

7 : 5 0	1: "scenario" - motivation for recap and linking old with new lesson and reading text as a way to verify opinion s/gather info (motivation)	<p>T: So, what day is it today? SS: Wednesday! T: Now, now, where are our good manners. Raise your hand as we agreed. And the month? S: October T: And our season? S: Our season is autumn T: This is a very good answer. And the date is the 13th. And would you say the weather is the same as yesterday? How was it yesterday? S: It was the same. Some clouds and some sun.</p> <p>T: Do you want to start with Mr. Elephant? SS: Yes! T: <i>Good morning children! I heard that you have a visitor today that's why I woke up. But I am not quite up yet. Can you read really loud your alphabet to me?</i> SS: <i>The children read aloud in chorus the pictures above the board (/A/ Aeroplano (airplane), /B/Biblio (book) and so on). Then they continue with a rhyme song about the vowels:</i> <i>Τα φωνήεντα είναι εφτά και φωνάζουν δυνατά Αα Εε Ηη Ιι Οο Υυ Ωω. (the vowels are seven and they shout out loud /a/, /e/, /i/, /i/, /o/, /i/, /o/)</i> T: <i>Well done. Mr. Elephant was asleep as he told you and he needs you to remind him how Aris and Marina spent their vacation.</i> S: <i>At the beach</i> T: <i>Say it all</i> S: <i>Aris and Marina spent their vacation at the beech</i> T: <i>Now I seem to have forgotten. Where did Orfeas spent his vacation? Who else?</i> S: <i>At a farm</i> T: <i>Together with whom?</i> S: <i>Titina the chicken</i> T: <i>And our other friends? Ioanna? What do you think?</i> S: <i>I think...</i> T: <i>What do you think?</i> S: <i>At her grandmother's</i> T: <i>Another opinion?</i> S: <i>I think she went to the grocery</i> T: <i>She spent all her vacation there?</i> S: <i>Yes, I agree with him</i> S: <i>And I agree with him</i> T: <i>Hmmm... Let's open our books to see what really goes on. Page 26...Quickly, quickly now, with your little mouths shut...so let's see... No, leave the text for now and look carefully at the picture. Who are the friends joining us today? Because I know you are excellent spies I want you to look at the picture and tell me beautiful little sentences for the grandfather, Ioanna and the parrot. Start them nicely, "Ioanna...", "Grandfather..." and use nice words from the picture"</i> S: <i>The parrot is near the bicycle</i> T: <i>Oh! The parrot flies over a bicycle, said</i></p>	<p>the beginning and the end of the prayer.</p> <p>Date information As the children respond she turns to the board and shows/rewrites their answers</p> <p>Activity 1: Alphabet reciting She wears a hand puppet and changes her voice to "play" the elephant. Elephant puppet Pictures above the board (classroom environment)</p> <p>Activity 2: Vowels She writes on the board the letters as the children shout them out</p> <p>Activity 3: Content recapitulation The teacher stands in front of the boards asking questions to the children</p> <p>She addresses a girl who does not raise her hand</p> <p>The children open their bags to get their books Activity 4: Sentence production based on text' picture Some start attempts to read the text</p>	<p>CMR</p> <p>CMR CME</p> <p>ACg Rw</p> <p>StrLm</p> <p>SL CMRE</p> <p>SLs</p> <p>StrLs</p> <p>CME</p> <p>CMT SLs</p>	<p>(genre) auditory memory-genre</p> <p>Picture/AC association</p> <p>While premium aim to recap, SL and StrLs</p> <p>Picture as aid for SLs</p> <p>Modelling</p>
8 : 0 0					

8 : 1 0	2: while using the picture as an aid to produce orally sentenc es she also teachers sentenc e structur e and the function of adjectiv es as that part of speech which can enlarge a sentenc e and provide addition al info about the noun	<p><i>Ioanna. Wow! Look how many wagons this little sentence has!</i> <i>S: Joanna eats ice cream</i> <i>T: This is a small sentence. Ok, let's make it bigger. How can we show that the ice cream is nice? Ioanna eats a...</i> <i>S: delicious</i> <i>T: Very nice! A delicious ice cream. What do you have to say about the grandfather?</i> <i>S: The grandfather holds a melon.</i> <i>T: Let's make this one also bigger!</i> <i>S: The grandfather holds a big lemon</i> <i>T: And one sentence for that man there.</i> <i>S: What does he do?</i> <i>T: He sells fruit</i> <i>S: The fruit seller sells melons and water melons.</i> <i>T: What else do you see that's interesting?</i> <i>SS:...</i></p>	<p>She writes the sentence on the board</p> <p>She points to another student</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board</p> <p>She writes the sentence on the board</p>	<p>StrLs</p> <p>SLv</p> <p>StrLs</p>	<p>simultaneousl y GPC, Ws</p> <p>Wagons- metaphors for words</p> <p>Implicit metalanguage (adjectives to make bigger sentences)</p>
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Appendix 9: Codes

General Category	Level 1 code	Level 2 code
<p>Theoretical understandings/ beliefs (ITE and Inspiration) Initial Teacher Education (ITE) ITE: not remembered ITE: not used ITE: theory courses ITE: pedagogy courses ITE: practicum Inspiration I: colleagues</p>	<p>ITE</p> <p>I</p>	<p>ITEnr ITEnu ITEth ITEped ITEpr</p>

<p>I: head teacher I: inspector I: books I: websites I: training seminars I: exemplary teaching sessions</p> <p>Own Experience Language Knowledge Curriculum Knowledge Textbook Knowledge</p>	<p>OE LK CK TK</p>	<p>Ic Ih Ii Ib Iw Itr Iex</p>
<p>Approaches - Methodologies</p> <p>A: shared reading A: guided reading A: textbook A: children's names A: classroom environment A: multisensory A: connections A: whole language A: phonic analysis A: pictures A: syllables A: children's books A: own material A: analytic-synthetic A: Real experiences</p>	<p>A</p>	<p>Ash Agr At Acn Ace Am Ac Awl Aph Ap Asy Acb Ao Aas RE</p>
<p>Practices</p> <p>Level 1: Classroom Management</p> <p>CM: time management CM: routines and rules CM: misbehaviour management CM: feedback and reinforcement CM: engagement CM: differentiation CM: recapitulation/evaluation activities CM: planning CM: organisation of children CM: organisation in whole class session CM: organisation in groups CM: organisation in pairs CM: individual work</p> <p>Level 2: Oracy and literacy Teaching</p> <p>Foundational Understandings</p> <p>FU: big picture of literacy FU: nature of written language FU: concepts about print</p> <p>Alphabetic code</p> <p>AC: phonological/phonemic awareness AC: orthographic awareness-grapheme awareness AC: grapheme-phoneme correspondence AC: work on grapheme level AC: work on syllable level AC: work on word level AC: work on sentence level</p> <p>Structure of language</p> <p>StrL: grapheme StrL: syllable StrL: word</p>	<p>CMT CMR CMM CMFR CME CMD CMRE CMP CMO</p> <p>FU</p> <p>AC</p> <p>StrL</p>	<p>CMOwc CMOig CMOip CMOi</p> <p>FUbp FUNwl FUcp</p> <p>ACph ACo ACgpc ACg ACsy ACw ACs</p> <p>StrLg StrLsy StrLw</p>

StrL: sentence		StrLs
StrL: text		StrLt
StrL: grammar		StrLgr
Spoken Language	SL	
SL: speaking/sentences		SLs
SL: metalanguage (use of terminology)		SLm
SL: vocabulary		SLv
SL: genre (story telling, lists, recounts, etc)		SLg
Reading	R	
R: grapheme		Rg
R: syllable		Rsy
R: word		Rw
R: sentence		Rs
R: text		Rt
Writing	W	
W: grapheme, letter formation		Wg
W: syllable		Wsy
W: word		Ww
W: sentence		Wse
W: text		Wt
W: spelling and punctuation		Wsp
W: exposition to genres		Wg
W: copying/handwriting		Wc

Appendix 10: Additional Quotes from the Findings

10.1. Oracy and Literacy teaching practices

10.1.1. Overall lesson structure

“So in the first one or two days I am a traditional teacher doing exactly what the textbook and the workbook provides as texts and activities and the following day, the one you observed, we get more creative and out of the box. This provides the children the opportunity to learn the letter through another text and set of activities and strengthen their knowledge of it”. (Interview, Teacher 6)

“We always touch upon the same points: what it looks like, what it sounds like, what it’s name is, how we write it, syllables, and then connecting the new with the known letters and syllables we already looked at, creating words, and so on”. (Interview, Teacher 15)

“I spend time on the texts that include consonants; at the beginning two or a third day, but on this third day we will also go through the vowel’s text too as I explained. On the first day we look at the text with a variety of activities as you saw today. On the second day we do more writing and practise as well with more handouts with more activities for the letter under focus and with activities with different degree of difficulty. I do not give as second text or another additional, because then the scope opens too much. If I come with a second text, a second process of discussing it, as I did on day one, then I do not have time to drill and go deeper. I become more of a traditional, conventional teacher on day two: they get reading cards to read sentences and words with the focal letter, repetitions, practice, etc. And I follow the order of the book in order to keep up with its story line. And there are concessions I make, i.e./t/ and /p/ should not be in the beginning and in proximity to each other, this is a bad choice, because they are soundless and they are similar. The book could kick off with a /m/, a /l/, /r/ these would be easier. So, I do like this continuity. Now with this new trend and critical literacy they put forward now as the core of the educational reform we are going through, I don’t know what will happen. I will give it a try. As I told you I am not afraid to revisit the way I work. But definitely after Christmas. The focus now is to acquire the reading mechanism”. (Interview, Teacher 14)

10.1.2. Spoken Language

Q&A for picture description

T: So, what do you see?

Si: It’s the picture from yesterday and another one

Sii: It’s today’s lesson

T: Yes, but what do the pictures show? What do you observe?
 Si: It is night time in one and day time in the other
 T: What else?
 Sii: There are different friends in the pictures.
 T: Yes
 Siii: There are three children in each picture only they are not the same
 T: How about the feelings of the heroes? Can you tell?
 Si: They are a little bit scared in the one picture but in the other you can't tell because they have their backs turned
 Sii: You can only see Ioanna and she seems happy.
 T: Ok, let's focus on the new picture then. Why do you think Ioanna is happy?
 Si: I think because she is having fun with the parrot
 T: Who else is in the picture?
 Sii: Ioanna, a parrot and Orfeas and Aris.
 T: And where are they located?
 Si: Outside.
 T: Who is outside?
 Si: Orfeas and Aris are outside Ioanna's house.
 T: That's better! And can they see Ioanna in the yard...in the door...
 Sii: In the window.
 T: Correct. So Orfeas says to his friend "Ari, a girl in the window", but Aris knows her from school. We know her too!
 SS: It's Ioanna!
 T: Aris says to Orfeas that Ioanna likes music a lot. What does it mean? Do you like music?
 SS: Yes
 T: So what does one do when he likes music?
 Si: He listens to the radio
 Sii: He plays guitar
 Siv: He listens to cd's and i-pod
 Sv: He sings
 T: Excellent. Ioanna sung too all day long. So here we already have a text. I will read it for you once (...)
 (Observation, Teacher 10)

T: Do you know this animal?
 SS: It's a snail!
 T: It's a snail, yes. So what do we know about snails?
 Si: They carry their houses on their back
 Sii: They come out when it rains
 Siii: My granddad eats them!
 SS: ... (laughs and comments)
 Siv: They are disgusting!
 T: ok, ok. You know a lot. Now look at this picture from our book. Who can tell me what she sees?
 Si: It's Aris and Orfeas and Marina
 Sii: And they have a snail!
 T: So what happened?
 Siii: I think they bought a snail
 Siv: You can't buy a snail!
 Siii: But it's in a shop's bag
 Siv: They must have taken it from their yard and stored it in this old bag they had in the house
 T: Ok. So where exactly are they now?
 Si: They are in the living room, maybe the kitchen, but definitely inside, not in the yard.
 T: And how exactly did the snail find itself in the bag?
 Si: They put it there to be their pet. That's why they put earth in the bag, so the snail feels like home(...)
 (Observation , Teacher 8)

Q&A for grammar teaching

So we start with the sentence, we break it down in words, and locate then the first letter of each word. And I work with more sentences, which we break down in words and we mix their order or make new sentences comprising of new words. These sentence transformations are an important part in the way I work. (Interview, Teacher 15)

Q: Let's go through now the methodology of teaching a child how to read
 T: Ok. We start with them understanding what a sentence is. A sentence consists of words. We count the words. They need to understand that a sentence is something that has a beginning and an ending, so we start with a capital letter and we finish with a full stop. The sentence breaks in wagons, the words, we count them. This is our work in the beginning, in the first few days. The goal is for them to comprehend the notion of the sentence, that it

consists of words and then we isolated one word so they understand that this word consists of letters and that these letters have voices – sounds. (...) I think that everything comes very natural. (Interview, Teacher 11)

Opportunities combining learning foci

“And usually on the first day I want them to speak and talk about the textbook’s picture so they have the feeling that they have a sense of ownership of the text, they sort of thought of it, we then practise reading and I insist on punctuation and reading with a certain...flair, and then it’s the letter and different activities about it (how it sounds, how we write it, words with it). If I see that in any of these we need more time and space then I will do more writing practice again in a second day, as well as reading and then take a third to do some role playing, and write different texts (stories, lists, dialogues) according to what goes well with the textbook” (Interview, Teacher 10)

10.1.2. Reading

T: He took her to the Land of ‘Ks’. Where all the ‘ks’ things are. Let’s see what they might have found there...

Si: ξύλο (wood)

Sii: ξιφίας (swordfish)

Siii: ξωπικό (elf)

Siv: ξίφος (sword)

Sv: Ξένιος (name)

Svi: ξύδι (vinegar)

Svii: ξύστρα (sharpener)

Sviii: ξυλόφωνο (xylophone)

T: Do you notice anything?

S: They all start with a ‘ks’

T: Since we are in the land of ‘ks’. Now read for me what I circle...So who is our king for today?

SS: KS!

T: Look around and tell me if we have something in our classroom that starts or includes ‘ks’

Si: τάξη classroom!

Sii: Μαξιλάρι (pillow)

Siii: Ξύστρα (sharpener)

Siv: Ξυλάκια (sticks)

Sv: Τσάντες (bags)

T: No! Careful! ‘τσ’ (ts) is different from ‘ξ’ (ks) say it...

Sv:...

T: All say it...

SS:...

T: A name maybe?

SS: Αλέξανδρος (Observation, Teacher 9)

T: Now pencils down, close your eyes and think of a word starting with p...Open!

Si: πάπια (duck)

Sii: παραμύθι (story)

Siii: πάπυρος (papyrus)

T: Wow. This was a kind of paper ancient Egyptians used children, it wasn’t like our paper but a slightly different material

Siv: πίσσα

T: Now, when we say this in Cyprus we refer to gum, the one we chew, but in Greek generally we use it in the expression black like pissa – really black

Si: παπάς

T: The priest is papas, when you call your dad you say papa, but when we write dad we write ‘μπαμπάς’

Sii: παίζω (I play)

T: I play. I. Which /o/ do we write?

Sii: omega – it’s a verb ending

T: Brilliant

Siii: πούπο

T: What’s this? What does it mean?

Siii:...

T: That is not a word. Think again

Siv: πούπουλα (feathers)

Sv: Περικλής

T: And because it’s a name...

Sv: If we write it, we use capital

Svi: παγωτό (ice cream)

Svii: πεταλούδα (butterfly)

Siii: What is this?

T: You haven't seen one? You don't know the word? It's this! Definitely you have seen one, yes? Πεταλούδα (shows a picture) (Observation, Teacher 12)

T: Ok. Now, all eyes here...Now, look here at the parrot. /p/ has teamed up with /a/ and together they shout /pa/. Here /p/ has teamed up with /e/ and together they shout...

SS: pe

T: Here /p/ meets /o/ and they shout...

SS: po

T: and here /p/ meets our little ghost and together they shout

SS: /poo/

T: Right. Do you know any other words that start or contain this little syllable?

S: παπαγάλος (parrot)

S: μπάλα (ball)

T: No, say it out loud; it's /b/ not /p/

S: παπί (duck)

S: πεπόνι (melon)

T: There isn't a /pa/ here, but there is a /pe/. Let's continue with /pa/

S: πάμε (we go)

S: παραλία (beach)

S: Παναγία (Holy Mary)

T: I need to ask a question. Should I write this also with a small or with a capital letter?

S: A big one because this is a name

T: It is a name, yes, and also out of respect

S: παπούτσια (shoes)

T: Ok, give me now /pe/

S: πεταλούδα (butterfly)

S: πένα (pen)

S: παιδί (child)

T: Ok, I will write this one here, because it sounds like /pe/, but, look, we write it with the two sounds that are /a/ and /i/ but that shout together like /e/. Ok, /po/ now

S: πόδι (foot)

S: ποδήλατο (bicycle)

S: ποπός (rear, bottom)

T: Ok, who's next?

S: πίπα (pipe)

S: παπί (duck)

T: Yes! It does not start with /pi/, but it contains it

S: πιπίλα (soother)

T: Remember we also have pi (πη) pi (πι) and this po (πω). Can anyone read these words?

SS: πηγάδι (pigadi), πύραυλος (piravlos), πώμα (roma)(Observation, Teacher 1)

"It's important for the child to read all the syllables and if they find it difficult I ask them to concentrate on the first sound and then the second but not in isolation, in continuum so they learn to read in a running, flowing form and not interrupted. So to read /milo/ (apple) they must first read /mi/ and then /lo/ but their voices must be continuous mmmmmiiiiiiiiilloo" (Interview, Teacher 3)

"Basically there are some activities that you do each and every time when you first introduce a new letter."(Interview, Teacher 11)

I wanted to work at a text level today, focus on generic conventions and vocabulary, but you see we do a bit of grammar, a bit of phonics and writing, we even do general knowledge and common sense, you know with the phone numbers at the end...(Interview, Teacher 9)

T: Excellent. A parrot it is. Let's try to write a poem like the one we just read. Read it again for me...

SS:...

T: Ok. How do we start?

Si: Snail, snail...

SS: No!!! parrot parrot

T: Ok. Honest mistake! The poem is about a parrot this time, so...
 Si: Parrot, parrot
 T: Should I call you.... Remember when we had 'σαλιγκάρι' the name chosen was 'Σαλιάρη', now for 'παπαγάλε'...
 SS: μεγάλη
 T: Ok it will do. 'Parrot parrot should I call you Big;
 S: Miss it rhymes!
 T: That's the point! So who can think of other names for our poem? Maybe...
 Si: Niko?
 Sii: Ntino?
 Siii: Konstantino?
 T: Ok. I think I have it: Παπαγάλε, παπαγάλε μήπως να σε πω Μεγάλε; Μήπως Νίκο; Μήπως Ντίνο; Μήπως να σε πω Κωνσταντίνο; Round of applause to all! (Observation, Teacher 8)

10.1.4. Writing

"The first day, and this is what you saw today, we do the introduction of the letter, we read the text and we don't really write anything, just a bit, if we have time. We do writing on the second day, and we practise a lot on the letter. And on the third day we do a more creative written activity. For the lesson you saw, for example, I will ask them to continue the dialogue and ask the parrot if he wants different things to eat. But at the same time I will work on punctuation, on the correct spacing of the words, on using the capital letter; there are always multiple goals in the first year! Mixing different approaches "touching" all levels of language. Sure, some written assignments are needed to enrich the ones offered, or help with syllables, but not many added assignments need to be given. By October the children can write unknown words with known syllables. For example omelette; it's a word we don't teach and they don't have in their books but they know the syllables and they are able to write it". (Interview, Teacher 1)

(...) we do the more extensive writing after we have worked on the letter, so tomorrow they will write. My basic principle is that language is unified and that all linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) must be simultaneously and equally cultivated. But today I introduced /r/ so we didn't write a lot. (Interview, Teacher 3)

"Look here for a second: /s/ capital with line parallel to your notebook's line, zik-zak and again straight line; lower case like /o/ and a line and whenever at the end of a word you so the little /s/ worm like this. Ok? Do the /s/s on the second exercise once you finish the first. Your books, quickly..." (Observation, Teacher 8)

T: Now I give you these little cards and you need to look at the picture and the word and write down what's missing. (Observation, Teacher 15)

T: I have here a list, but the problem is that the parrot thought the words were edible and ate some letters. Let's help before Marina sees this mess! (Observation, Teacher 14)

T: Let's try to write a poem like the one we just read. Read it again for me...
 SS:... (The children read the text again ("Snail, snail, should I call you Saliari? Maybe Tasos? Maybe Souli? Should I call you Spitouli?")
 T: Ok. How do we start?
 Si: Snail, snail...
 SS: no!!! parrot parrot
 T: Ok. Honest mistake! The poem is about a parrot this time, so...
 Si: Parrot, parrot
 T: should I call you.... Remember when we had 'σαλιγκάρι' the name chosen was 'Σαλιάρη', now for 'παπαγάλε'...
 SS: μεγάλη
 T: Ok it will do. 'Parrot parrot should I call you Big;
 S: Miss it rhymes!
 T: That's the point! So how can think of other names for our poem? Maybe...
 Si: Niko?
 Sii: Ntino?
 Siii: Konstantino?
 T: Ok. I think I have it: "Παπαγάλε, παπαγάλε μήπως να σε πω Μεγάλε; Μήπως Νίκο; Μήπως Ντίνο; Μήπως να σε πω Κωνσταντίνο;" Round of applause to all!
 SS:...

T: You read it
SS:... (Observation, Teacher 8)

T: Now, I will distribute your little boards and I want you to make sure you take the one belonging to you and clean it if you haven't last time. I need you to write 'tha'...

T: now 'the'

T: Write 'tho' and I want the /o/ of the hour

T: Now choose the /i/ you prefer and write 'thi'

Si: Miss I know all of them and I will write all three

Sii: There are more than three /i/ you know...

T: Choose what you want, but quickly, because I want you to write me the word θεά (goddess) ...remember to accent it correctly

T: Now you will write θήκη (case)

S: Miss we did this earlier

T: I wrote it though, now you write it. Remember which /i/ you need. It's η θήκη – i in the front so you need the /i/ of the sun in the ending. Look here, like η Νίκη, η ζώνη...

Return to your seat and will come by. Write θέση (seat) and remember to remain in it. And in θέση don't be confused about which /s/ to write...

T: And a final word. I want you to write πιθάρι, το πιθάρι and because it's 'to' in the front in the ending you need to put the /i/ of the Indian... and while you do it come Panteli, you finished so early, and write it on the board. (Observation, Teacher 15)

10.2. Classroom Management Practices

10.2.1. Motivation and Engagement

"And in the 80-minute session every day I do everything. At least I try to do phonics and whole language and everything because the quick change of activities helps in discipline and attention, the movements, the games". (Interview, Teacher 3)

"I always want to do a lot different activities, the lesson needs the variety" (Interview, Teacher 1)

"Children are so easily bored and tired and they need to keep them engaged, they want change all the time and not the same things because then they don't pay any attention." (Interview, Teacher 4)

"I tried to show you how we work and I hope you understood that in each lesson we have some stable – repeated activities and I also introduce a new one each day so as to keep them interested" (Interview, Teacher 6)

"...But these are different ideas and you have to mix them up to keep them interested." (Interview, Teacher 8)

"You know when I started in Year 1 we worked with handouts we made before using the "My language" textbooks, again just before Christmas. But the problem was that the sentences we used were boring: "I love my school. My classroom is beautiful. I love my mother", etc. At least with the story books the children can read sentences related to the story we read, we change the titles, we do dialogues, they expect to play roles, retell stories, find the heroes, these are more fun stuff". (Interview, Teacher 7)

"But what you saw today is how I prefer to work; children's books are really helpful. Children seem to like working this way" (Interview, Teacher 2)

10.2.2. Children Monitoring

"I am a strong believer in the importance of giving them time and space to work on their own and you saw that too, and I also think that it is important to do many recapitulations (remember the activity with /n/ word although we were doing /k/?)" (Interview, Teacher 6)

10.2.3. Differentiation

"On the second day we get to practise more and I can really see who is at which point. Like at that point where they had to write words below pictures? It would have been less difficult for them if I had written the words on the board, but that would have taken away my chance to see what they can do. I can take my time to see where each child stands and offer them individual support. Obviously I would love to have more time to spend with each, but within the constraints of the system I think that's as good as it can get." (Interview, Teacher 5)

"And then at the end of the lesson, we give a lot of time for writing and then I can really focus on each child individually, see what difficulties they face and support them within the time we have" (Interview, Teacher 7)

"You cannot do different things. What can I do, give three different texts? When we read together from the board what will we be reading? At home though it is different and I do tell them. And I think the book is designed that

way too. The few sentences that are highlighted, those will be for some children and others will have the whole text, so not all children learn all the text, although most children take pride in doing the whole text. So in the homework I will write that they need to practise the reading of the highlighted text and only those that want they may try to do as much as they can. Or I will give a list of words (I do that) and give the instruction that from the 15 let's say they will need to be able to read seven. I might tell them to choose on their own words to learn. For example when we did the recap of /p/, /t/, /s/, /k/ I gave them an endless list of words to have and I told them to pick ten, which ever they want and circle them, so I know which ones they practised at home and I tell this to the parents too and I have to tell you that they enjoy this, having to choose which ones to learn, they enjoy that I did not force them to do something. So homework is differentiated and in the classroom I may not have the same expectations from all the children, but they will all try to read the text with me, they will try to do the activities, and of course, some will not have enough time and some may not manage..." (Interview, Teacher 13)

"Look, there are those who acquire the mechanism of syllabification. Some do not manage to do so in the same timeframe. Now for example most of the children are there, but some still face difficulties, they get confused, they do not understand for example the notion. When we start to do more reading, some will have no problems and some will struggle, those who didn't manage to understand the syllables. The very good ones, don't need to go through each syllable in a word to read it and they can read the words straight away. So you have those who as soon as they see a word they read it out loud immediately, those that say the syllables silently and then read the word and those who will need more time. So these are my levels more or less. This as far as reading is concerned. When it comes to writing, then ok, we need them to write correct sentences with a start and an ending and then we start to add to them with vocabulary and things like that. For those who are left behind we don't have additional support time. We have some 'reinforcement' periods within the week, but there you still have the whole class, the good ones and the weak ones, so during that time you try your best. You give an assignment to the good ones, something to keep them busy and you try to monitor the weak ones who you give something simpler". (Interview, Teacher 11)

"And while we are on differentiation I will answer you the question about children with Greek as L2. I use similar materials, but I simplify some things, I assign some of the activities and not all, because the activities have a gradual level of difficulty, with them they will go up to a point. And with the children that did not speak any Greek they did learn how to read anyway. We work more on their vocabulary, but they do well. After we meet the heroes, the humans, we do a unit on getting to know the book's animals. Initially I try to offer more clues to children with Greek as L2, but these benefit native speakers as well. So when I have many speakers of other languages we say i.e. that /π/ in /παπί/ (duck) has two legs like a duck so that they remember the shape of the letter and it walked like this saying /pa/, /pi/; so the whole class walked around going pa, pi, pa, pi and of course they remembered it throughout the year. From there we compared the word with 'παπαγάλος' (parrot) which is bigger (we clapped the syllables) and has a /s/ in the end, so we provide many visual clues, sound clues etc. For the 'σαλιγκάρι' (snail) I show them the picture and I insist on tracing its 'house' so we associate the letter with a picture, and again compare and contrast with another word like 'σκύλος' which starts and ends with /s/ but has this funny letter /υ/ in the middle, so they concentrate on something that helps them remember the word by. I have a nice picture of a cat with a curly tail that shapes /γ/ beautifully, so they associate /γ/ with /γάτα/ (cat). And everything we do we put on the classroom walls. In the beginning it is kind of empty and colleagues frown upon this a bit, but I built it gradually with what we have covered, which is a reference source for the children, i.e. for spelling."

10.2.4. Parents' role

"Parents in Year 1 are extremely important. They help a lot. We invited them in the other day and I gave them directions. If parents do not help you in Year 1 it is very difficult, because no matter what you do in the classroom you need to practise. Syllabification is purely exercise and practice. The children simply have to learn what each letter sounds like and be able to combine the sounds in the syllables. If you can't do that, there is a problem. I explained at the meeting what we do in the classroom and what I want them to do at home... the parents need to extend and practise at home. So they need to sit with their children and read the sentences asking questions about the story we read in class, so they can recall the content. Because I don't have time to practise with the letter case, the one I ask them to by from the bookstore, they need to create syllables and small letters with them, and it is important to make revisions - I don't want them to practise only the new letter but the previous ones as well. And when they read a word or create it I ask them to say it slowly syllable by syllable. It is crucial for the parents to do fun activities as well (i.e. finding words starting with our letter in newspapers and pictures from magazines) but also practice listening and writing words correctly and, here I insist, copying words and sentences correctly. Spelling words correctly starts now and the children need to understand this. And I also ask them to read a lot of children's literature at home, so they can develop their vocabulary and encourage children to love and appreciate books. And they need to do this without changing their voices to make them sound more childish (you can't imagine how many parents have this misconception) and then they can try pausing for children to make assumptions about what will happen next, ask them to retell the story and gradually children will read books on their own. (Interview, Teacher 11)

"I expect nothing from anyone. The minute they are outside my classroom the work is finished. How can I rely on anyone to do what's my job to do? There are parents who don't speak Greek, parents who cannot, don't know or don't want to help, so I believe that it is my sole responsibility. I almost never assign homework (perhaps some drawing or really simple things now and then) and I make sure that I do what needs to be done here. I send minimal homework, only things I am confident they can do completely alone, because parents in this school work

long hours and their Greek is limited. You saw the two boys, the Egyptians? They arrived three weeks ago and I am amazed at their progress, but there is still much work to be done and I hope I could do more but I can't. I wish we had some additional support time". (Interview, Teacher 5)

"I am glad you ask. I send at home daily an announcement, informing parents what happened in the classroom. I describe what I did and what they may do at home. I am very against homework. It is the duty of the teacher to teach and at home parents have chores, plus work of their own. And I know this because I am a mother of three and I am more aware of what time restrictions arise. So at the early stage the directions for the parents would be to sit if they can and play with the envelope containing the cards with the words. Parents can thus see what words and letters the children know and feel themselves safe that their children are doing well. When I was at my old school, I had many children with Greek as L2, so I wrote the announcements in both Greek and English! Here I do not need to do that." (Interview, Teacher 14)

"Parents are a huge story. Honestly Elena you need to possess a certain kind of talent to be able to handle them, otherwise they create for us many problems. This year, you cannot imagine what we went through. It was my colleague's first year in Year 1. First, parents make comparisons, a lot. Secondly, they interfere with everything and have something to tell you about everything and the children carry in the classroom with them all the problems from their house, and that you have to deal with too. I have this girl, she was sitting in the back in the cardigan today, every morning she comes in crying. And I asked her and she says her parents fight with each other all the time and when I told the mother she cries so much she was like 'I don't know why on earth she cries' and you cannot really interfere. What can you do? Step into the internal issues of a family? You can't, but still you have to deal with all this because the child is in your classroom going through so many different things and especially in year 1 you have small children and they are immature and you cannot ignore this. How do you communicate with the parents?...I send instructions to the house. I write during the last break of the day on a piece of paper what homework we have, what they need to do and something they can do, i.e. I might write 'today we did /n/, you may practice with the cards case, find pictures starting with this letter,' and so on, so I give this kind of instructions or orally when they come to see me (and not the ones that should be coming come) so I tell them to have them read something from the TV or a label in the house, or have them take a note or practice. So everyday I write them down the homework and maybe an idea so that the parents know how to help. But I have to tell you that this school I work at is not as high standards as others. To be fair it is not as bad as it's reputation, but the same as anywhere you get different cases of children, of course here you have problems and less support from the house". (Interview, Teacher 13)

10.2.5. The role of ICT in Grade 1

"Even before projectors and ICT in schools I used overheads because you cannot communicate with small children unless they have it in front of them. You cannot say "go in page this and that and see there below that..." this is an utter waste of time. And it is a big deal for me to be able to save time, which I can take advantage of in different ways". (Interview, Teacher 14)

"And also ICT. How to use ICT in Grade 1. All I knew was handwritten slides for the overhead and for making paper labels. And know you can't work without computers in Year 1 and interactive boards. Technology changes I know and always new gadgets come along, but it's the culture they need to cultivate at the university, the culture of ICT in Grade 1. And they also need to keep us up to date. You know when the interactive boards were installed they gave us 40minute presentation. 40 minutes the first day we set eyes on the boards and that was definitely not enough for me to learn how to use it. You saw me today. I know I don't use it's full potential but I do know how. And children are so easily bored and tired and they need to keep them engaged, they want changes all the time and not the same things because then they don't pay any attention". (Interview, Teacher 4)

10.2.6. Transition from Pre School

"Although I have to admit I am not sure where they should take the children by the end of the preschool year (I don't think there is an exact benchmark anyway- it's not that we have, but with us we know they need to learn to read and write!) preschool is very important and at some point I would like to work with a teacher from a preschool, collaborate and see if coordinating will mutually help us" (Interview, Teacher 8)

Q: So is preschool something you draw upon? You look at the curriculum, the way they work?

T: I haven't looked at their curriculum or any other documents, but I visited many times preschool classes to see how colleagues work. When my son was there I had a very good collaboration with his teacher and it was very useful for me. So I think coordination of Grade 1 and preschool would be very helpful, not so much for me to know what they do, but for them to know what children are to expect in Grade 1. I would be willing to turn towards them, but it is them mostly that should look towards Grade 1. There are some essential skills they should cultivate, i.e. copying a word. But children arrive having so many different levels. This is very difficult, to cover so many different needs. (...)And I think there should be a connection with preschool and kindergarten student teachers. It would be nice if children could come from preschool knowing some letters, be able to locate a letter, say words with a specific sound in the beginning and these are things that they do, the problem though is that not all children learn how. And here lies a big difference of preschool and Grade 1: we push more because all must learn. I do feel bad sometimes of the pressure I put on them, but they need to learn (Interview, Teacher 14)

"We went to the preschool, we actually visited the school, with the colleague from the other class and there the teachers told us 'this one can manage and has abilities, this one no' but needless to say that in most cases their predictions are off, they only locate correctly the ends of the spectrum – the really terrible cases and those who do brilliantly, so the very weak and the very advanced, as well as the naughty and problematic ones. They might say that someone is very good, but two of such cases in my class have yet to master syllables. It is different you know at preschool, where you talk, and you do poems and songs and dances and it is a completely different think to sit inside the classroom and concentrate, so she must be a very capable kindergarten teacher so as not to miscalculate. She must understand syllables and do basic activities related to this. For example, last year, the teacher who had my children at kindergarten, she did many syllable related activities and this helped them a lot. Her predictions for the progress of other children were also correct, so I think it is because of this process she went through, with the syllables". (Interview, Teacher 11)

10.2.7. The macro level of planning

"I prefer to do the consonants that you can sound out loudly /r/ for example. I used to leave /p/ towards the end, because it doesn't make much sound, but I cooperate with the other colleague next door, we need to proceed in the same order and be at the same point, so she insisted on doing this now and we need to be in sync". (Interview, Teacher 12)

"This is my fifth year in Year 1. It's a bit automatic by now and I feel I follow a very clear path. For the first two, two and a half weeks I work with the first unit of the book, and I work with syllables, words and sentences. I don't teach anything; this is what we do now; we touch upon them". (Interview, Teacher 1)

"I start from the first day the children arrive to my class with the book. We play a few games to get to know each other, I distribute the book and we go through it: looking at pictures basically. Then I work in the order the book suggests, setting for each and every lesson a set of communicational goals and a set of lexicogrammar goals, which change after Christmas and become more genre or grammar oriented (because we have covered by then all the alphabet)". (Interview, Teacher 8)

"I start with children's books from day 1; from the first lesson. We start with all the vowels; one story, one vowel and then one by one we attach to the vowels the consonants". (Interview, Teacher 12)

"I start in the beginning of the year with the vowels. I place a lot of emphasis on them and spend some time so that when I add consonants the process will be easier and they will be able to make the combinations. So I start with vowels using children's books. Each story I use is for one vowel. I have known other colleagues who start from day 1 with the book and the first unit with the 'pa pa', 'pi pi' teaching the vowels with those pictures and then the consonants, following fully the textbook's order. But I prefer children's books because this way I feel the transition from the preschool is easier (...)I then used the textbook, and I taught the first unit too; but I approached the 'pa pa' as syllables, not to teach the letters, but to have the children read syllables(...)And I had nothing to start from, I did not find any material from others. So I took the textbook, started from scratch and I looked at it and I thought it might be difficult to start from 'pa pa', 'Here is the duck' so I thought I would start with the vowels because my friend who worked in the kindergarten said it was a good idea since vowels are initially covered there, I think it is part of their curriculum to teach a little bit about them". (Interview, Teacher 13).

10.3. The underpinnings of teachers' practices

10.3.1. The role of language content and pedagogy

"I have worked with so many different ways in these past 14 years and I synthesise everything. When we started with Mrs. M (the inspector) initially I believed in that approach, but I had stressed that I didn't agree with telling the story in fewer words. She insisted on that, but I think that if you do so you abolish the conventions of children's books as genres – you kill the story. So in my mind and from different things I had read I came up with ideas for working with genres emerging from children's books that lend themselves for processing in Year 1, ie. diaries, lists, invitations, message...I didn't want to work with just two sentences and I said that to her. We had made a CD and I know you can find this now in different schools, but I don't think anyone said this is H's work, so anyone could take them and use them. So I worked with this approach for some time and earlier I had read many times the Papadopoulos et al. book. They put forward a very different approach to the children's books approach and I never used from a to z; but when you read things you can take different bits from them, things you like. You need to have a vision. For me, when I take a text I want to have a clear theme; if you noticed (when using children's books as well) I want the directions given in the activities to follow the same theme. Not simply 'open your books to write this and that', without a frame, without referring to what came before and what will come next within the whole set of activities stemming from the day's text. The theme needs to have a communicative frame and be in relation with what you read and so you win the children's interest as well. In my first year of employment I was placed in Avgorou. From the two Grade 1 classes one was left and no one wanted it so they decided to give to the "little new teacher". But I had my sister as my teacher. My sister had already worked for six years in Year 1 and she is a very creative person. She has left now Grade 1 and works with older children, but I take my hat off to her because for the whole year she sat next to me. I designed a lesson plan each day and I told her 'Sister this is what I think I will do tomorrow at school. Check it". Back then we worked with sentences, but I did not use any of my sister's materials and handouts. I wanted to do mine so I would feel sure, confident and walk in my own shoes. My

colleague that year in the other classroom was inexperienced as well, she had worked for five years but not in Grade 1 so we did not work with each other, but my sister looked at what I had thought and said 'this yes', 'this no', 'here we work in this exact way' - all the time she corrected me. And then, over lunch and in the afternoons we talked about the lessons. Because we lived in the same house you see we did not have any communication issues, find time to call to each other at an appropriate time or be shy or embarrassed - we discussed every single aspect of it all the time. And I have to tell you that with my sister I graduated a second university learning from her experiences; and when I will decide to leave Grade 1 and work with older children as well, again, I will sit down with my sister. It's a wonderful thing.

We worked with texts, fake texts, made to contain the letter under focus as many times as possible, i.e. 'να η κόκκινη κότα η Κική' ('here is the red chicken Kiki') that sort of thing. We also did whole language, sentences that we cut and this is the way I worked when I was a Grade 1 teacher. But my sentences were also based on visits we made. I didn't work with sentences out of nowhere (I drink nice milk; I love my school, etc). We always did a visit first. I had an inspector, (name), who gave you ideas and direction without telling you exactly what to do. So he encouraged us to do different visits to enrich children's experiences and then we discussed then in the classroom and ended up with a little texts about the visit, made up of the specific sentences the children gave me. Naturally I changed a word here or there, but overall it was very nice because each child felt she contributed with the sentence she have. So we had Maria's sentence, then Mario's etc and thus we ended up with a text. We then cut the sentences into words, but I never insisted much on cutting hundreds of words; we cut 2-3 sentences in order to see that sentences are made up of words and that was that. We learned some words, but not all and this went on until Christmas when the visits stopped and we used "My language".

And at some point when I changed school and inspector I started with the children's books. I remember in the first year that I tried different things and then at Mrs M's insistence, I gathered my material and I published this booklet she then distributed to other colleagues. Then, I changed inspector again. And I do not blame anyone, I learn from people and I get something from each person I work with. The new one did not want to hear about children's books and wanted the textbook. Perhaps she didn't know exactly what we did the children's books approach, perhaps as a reaction to the previous situation, although she observed me teaching with that approach one day and I was really scared she would reprimand me, she spoke positively afterwards about my relationship with the children as it was manifested in the lesson (feedback, reinforcement, corrections, etc) but not about the content of the lesson, the activities, etc. I think she behaved really smartly that day, not putting me down but without saying anything she did not want to say either. So, she came to a meeting in the beginning of the year and gave us a series of stages to follow in order to teach vowels. This was a positive move, because on the one hand, she did not narrow us down too much, but gave us a direction to work with and know what she expected. So, I took her proposed plan and I organised my material putting my personal stamp on it, so I started all over again...I go through vowels first and my materials, which I produced in order to satisfy the inspector's guidelines, but primarily to fit the way I want to work. When I finish all vowels, I start the book... Now with this new trend and critical literacy they put forward now as the core of the educational reform we are going through, I don't know what will happen. I will give it a try. As I told you I am not afraid to revisit the way I work. But definitely after Christmas. The focus now is to acquire the reading mechanism... (Interview, Teacher 14)

10.3.2. The resources debate: Textbooks vs. Children's books

"We gave them sentences which they had to cut and then you needed to make out what each inspector you had each year preferred so you would follow that path. Like for the number of sentences we should do. Basically we all did very different things not all very effective up until November when we all, more or less, worked with the old books. Now this I better because most start with these books from the very beginning and everything goes more smoothly and it's clearer to teachers and students, the sequence I mean of things to be done. I definitely don't do the children's books some colleagues have to do because of their inspector. I start with the first unit and I linger with the heroes. Children like to get to know each of the book's characters so we spent a while in learning their names, and thinking about what they are like, and who they prefer. Children like the characters and they like to follow them in different adventures through the book (...) In general I like them, but you need to have more material to work properly and cover all the needs you want to. And you need to work with the book, which has good material, as well as with your own material so as to expand the book's and make it more interesting and relevant to the kids own material to expand good basis offered by textbook" (Interview, Teacher 3)

10.3.4. Underpinning notions

"The most important thing for a Year 1 teacher is intuition. This is really important; knowing what goes on with your children and I am not referring so much to the academic part, as to all the rest. Excellent communication with the parents; you need to get to different kinds of people in different levels and situations and make sure you understand each other. This is a skill. (...). And individual characters do play a role; I am as a person very keen on creating good relations with children and parents, being close. Our job is very difficult on your psyche. You need a love relation, which is very difficult to achieve with all the children. You have to make them respect you and look up to you. And you know how you can tell? Sometimes that get confused and call you 'mom'. This tells you how well they think of you, how highly they regard you or need you or know you are there for them. And also the parent's opinion of you; if they like you the children like you and if they don't they 'infect' the children too. And I will say you this: in Grade 1, sadly but so true, appearance. The way you look plays a huge role. Many children

don't pay attention if they don't like the way their teacher looks. And you need to smile too (...) and this is an ability the head teacher should have; knowing which teachers will do better with small children. The head teacher must be smart in this way. But I think for Grade 1 there are teachers that have it and teachers that don't." (Interview, Teacher 12)

"I have taught so many times in Grade 1 and each year I learn from my mistakes. We used to do whole language, you know, with the sentences on family, school, autumn they had to learn, but memorising those sentences, cutting words and syllables and then dealing with the letter took too much time and effort. I was taught the opposite way: from the letter to the syllable, the word and then the sentence, but what I do is a combination of these two. I always keep an open mind. I exchange ideas with different colleagues I work with each year. And I add to my approach bits and pieces I find interesting, enriching it. If we can coordinate that makes everybody's life easier, because we can share the work load and have a data bank of materials and hand outs to share, if not I go my own way. (Interview, Teacher 5)

"My goal is to improve each year my last year's approach and choices". (Interview, Teacher 3)

10.3.5. Collaborations

I look in the Internet and search a lot and also I used ideas from seminars and from exemplary sessions. I think they are useful in order to get ideas from colleagues. Especially in the first year I did go to a few, basically any relevant seminars I could find. (Interview, Teacher 13)

Not the exemplary lessons! I think that they showcase the personal approaches of particular teachers in particular situations and I am a unique teacher in my own unique situation. I am inspired from being a mum, from the stories I read to my children. I think becoming a mother has made me a better teacher. I do attend from time to time conferences but usually on art, music, not language and literacy, because I get inspired from the way they work with music in order to teach syllabification and musicality in reading. So I hear things seemingly unrelated to what we do here, but for me they are sources of inspiration (Interview, Teacher 6)

"I wanted to teach Grade 1 since I was a student, but I wanted some support, I was afraid to do it. Then one year my best friend taught in Grade 1 and the next year she gave me all her material and all her notes and she took me step by step throughout the year. She supported me so much. I remember when I first looked at the first unit of the book. I had not the faintest idea where to start, what to do" (Interview, Teacher 1)

" .. And I had nothing to start from, I did not find any material from others. So I took the textbook, started from scratch and I looked at it and I thought it might be difficult to start from 'pa pa', 'Here is the duck' so I thought I would start with the vowels because my friend who worked in the kindergarten said it was a good idea since vowels are initially covered there, I think it is part of their curriculum to teach a little bit about them. So I thought to work first with the vowels and remind them and also the notion of the sentence". (Interview, Teacher 13)

"On my third year I was moved to another school with completely different levels so I changed them again. I have been using this fairy tales approach for the past five years; when I was moved to a school with M. as the inspector, I had to change my material because she insisted on fairy tales. But I liked it too and I started collecting stories that might help me". (Interview, Teacher 11)

10.3.6. ITE

I had a brilliant professor in Athens and she was a big inspiration for me. Not that she trained us explicitly on how to do this (which I would love) but she encouraged us to develop our own philosophy about language teaching, read linguistics, be aware. It's complicated: as a student you cannot understand what linguistics have to do with primary school. But you need to have a good theoretical background, to know where you stand. And of course you need opportunities to see the real action: either visit classes and do some teaching or watch and commend videotaped lessons. It's not ITE that for me is more important though. It's the teachers professional development thereafter. Because once you have taught a year or two you can seek seminars where you can actually benefit from, workshops with colleagues that share similar challenges. I have been to a couple in Athens with the authors of the books we use and I found it particularly helpful to exchange ideas with colleagues and stay up-to-date. (Interview, Teacher 8)