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Introducing Critical Literacy through Popular Culture to a Cypriot
third grade classroom: issues and dilemmas

By:

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Abstract

This classroom based research project examines the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture texts in my third grade Cypriot classroom during the 2012–2013 academic year. My main aim was to illuminate the issues and dilemmas that arise when this is put into practice. It was based on an action research methodology and a qualitative research approach and lasted four months (January 2013 – April 2013). The research participants were my fifteen third grade primary students (8–9 years old), eight parents, the school headteacher, the school inspector and I (the classroom teacher). As research methods I used journal entries (by parents and me), interviews (with the headteacher, the inspector and the parents) and transcripts of classroom discussions.

This project made me realise the great impact of popular culture on young people's lives. My students were highly motivated and participated enthusiastically in the critical literacy lessons. By the end of the research projects their literacy competences were developed holistically. Parents also showed great enthusiasm as their children were working on issues they were very interested in and eagerly shared with their families. Parents also praised the fact that they were given the opportunity to see texts differently. However parents were concerned whether traditional literacy issues like spelling and grammar were neglected. I realised that even though I was the main decision maker, my students influenced my decisions. Besides being a teacher I was also a learner as my students were more knowledgeable on popular culture issues. The school managerial team praised the uniqueness and outcomes of my students' learning experiences and the importance of critical literacy for the citizen of today. However they appeared to be sceptical about the introduction of popular culture within elementary education and the future of critical literacy in Cypriot schools.

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CHAPTER ONE

The first chapter of this thesis provides the framework of my research project. I describe the **context** within which I conducted my research project and I briefly outline the **influential concepts** and ideas that guided my thoughts and decisions in relation to this project. In addition, the **main aim** of this project and four additional **research questions** which acted as guides for the project are provided. Finally, I present a brief description of the research **participants and setting** and the **structure** of this thesis.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

THE CYPRIOT PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The Cypriot educational system can be characterised as highly centralised since the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture is the department that is overall in change of the public schools. It is responsible for the management of education, the suggestion of educational bills to the House of Representatives, the implementation of educational laws and the financial costs of public schools (teachers' salaries and construction and maintenance of school buildings). In addition, the Cypriot Ministry of Education and culture is in charge of the design of curricula, the suggestion of school schedules, the selection or authoring of school text books and the assessment of classroom teachers and school headteachers by school inspectors. It is important to note here that school inspectors visit schools on a regular basis

(usually once a month) and work closely with headteachers and teachers on both managerial and instructional matters. My school inspector's visits to my school were giving her the opportunity to be always aware of my project and its outcomes.

Even though public teachers and headteachers are salaried and evaluated by the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, in an attempt to maintain fairness and equity, they are employed, transferred to other schools according to educational needs and promoted by the Educational Service Commission, an autonomous committee.

Primary education is compulsory and provided to young children mainly at public schools (Greek speaking) even though few private primary schools (Greek, English and French) exist. Public Primary education is free of charge. Children start primary school at the age of five years and eight months and finish after six years of study, at the age of twelve. Public primary school students attend school five days a week for seven forty-minute periods every day. The curricula and the schedule of each primary grade is the same in all the primary schools of the island and include the following subjects: Art, Design & Technology, English as a foreign Language, Geography, Health Education, History, Modern Greek Language, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Science, and Religious Education.

THE NEW CYPRIOT LITERACY CURRICULUM

At the beginning of the 2011–2012 academic year a new curriculum was introduced and partially implemented in the Cypriot Public Schools. A full implementation was made in the 2012–2013 academic year, as the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture wanted to give Cypriot teachers time to

become familiar with the new curriculum's features. The concept of critical literacy is fundamentally embedded within the new literacy curriculum giving rise to radical changes in the schooled understanding of literacy, which is making some Cypriot teachers unable to follow (Kontovourki and Ioannidou, 2013).

In the new literacy curriculum titled *Modern Greek Language Curriculum*, critical literacy is defined as the teaching process through which every young person is given the opportunity to critically examine and explore texts and the ways:

> ... the various linguistic elements [of each text] (grammatical phenomena, vocabulary, genre, provided information) contribute in social relations, in the construction of policies and cultural values in the reproduction of stereotypes and in power relations and inequalities between social groups. (p.10)

The main aim of such pedagogy, as declared in the introduction of the *Modern Greek Language Curriculum*, is to help young people "become active citizens, i.e. citizens who operate with fairness, claim their rights in democratic ways and fight all forms of social exclusion" (p.10).

CRITICAL LITERACY AND PRIMARY YEARS

Critical literacy development in the early and primary school education has been considered as one of the "most neglected" areas in literacy teaching (Marsh and Millard, 2000, p. 79). A review of the relevant literature (regardless of the students' age group) reveals that critical literacy has been introduced in schools through the examination of a variety of texts and in relation to an array of themes, topics and techniques. In Comber, Thomson and Wells (2001), Flint (2000) and Marshall and Klein (2009) students investigate everyday issues arising from their social and natural environment. The examination of topics like diversity, slavery, war and

cultural differences through literature is described in Burns (2009), Heffernan and Lewison (2000), Leland and Harste (2000), Meller, Richardson and Hatch (2009) and Stribling (2014). The study of traditional fairy tales through a critical literacy approach can be found in Bourke's (2008) work. Hertzberg (2003) adopts a selection of techniques and forms from drama in order to help her students develop their critical literacy competences.

CRITICAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE TEXTS

Critical literacy in classrooms is also evident in critical literacy literature through the engagement of classroom participants with popular culture texts regardless of the negative feelings that very often adults and educators have in relation to these texts (Green, Reid and Bigum, 1998; Lambirth, 2003; Sanger, Willson, Davies and Whittaker, 1997). A selection of popular culture texts used for the introduction of critical literacy are among others, the media (Egbert, 2009), online fan fictions (Black, 2010), computer games (Partington, 2010), children's toys and popular culture icons (Vasquez, 2000), popular culture films (Morrell, 2002), hip-hop songs (Morrell, 2002), manga hype comics (Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avila, 2006), social media network groups (Reid, 2011) and children's literature that appears on the web (Leu, Castek, Henry, Coiro, and McMullan, 2004).

The introduction of popular culture in the critical literacy curriculum is supported by scholars and educators. Morrell (2002) and Stevens (2001) claim that when popular culture is introduced in the classroom, this should be done from a critical literacy perspective. Similarly, Alvermann and Xu's (2003) fourth approach "to using popular culture in the classroom" is linked to critical literacy (p. 147). The acceptance of popular culture within the critical literacy curriculum is considered an opportunity for the children to be

part of a motivational pedagogy that embraces their favourite out-of-school texts and symbols (Marsh, 2003; Morrell, 2000; Vasquez, 2005) and incorporating them into the classroom curriculum (Hicks, 2001; Millard, 2003; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrilo, Callazo, 2004). In addition, the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture expands the textual selection in the classroom beyond the traditional school-print material (Alvermann and Xu, 2003; Morrell, 2007). At the same time children are provided with texts that refer to everyday problems and concerns in order to help them obtain and develop the essential literacies for the new century (Morrell, 2002; Stevens, 2001; Vasquez, 2003; Willett, 2005) and prepare them for the world outside the classroom walls.

INFLUENTIAL CONCEPTS

It was back in 2010 when I first read Millard's (2003) article titled *Towards a literacy of fusion: new times, new teaching and learning?* that popular culture and its use in the classroom attracted my attention. Up to that time, I could not imagine any popular culture texts entering the classroom walls and used as teaching material. The feelings I had towards popular culture in school settings were negative ones as a consequence of my culture and identity as a Cypriot primary school teacher with teaching experiences in Greek speaking public primary schools in Cyprus.

Popular culture is enjoyed by the majority of Cypriots in places other than schools and educational settings. It is very often associated with low culture, the culture of the masses and the poorly educated people. Well educated people are believed to be a group of people that take pleasure in high culture texts like classical literature, poetry and music. That is why in Cyprus

popular culture and the texts associated with it are viewed as something incompatible with the culture and ethos of the Cypriot educational system. Most of the times Cypriot schools do not allow popular culture to enter their walls and certainly not their classrooms' official or hidden curriculum. Cypriot schools are in favour of and promote literature and music that is associated with high culture.

This is also evident through the research articles that are published in relation to the Cypriot context. Looking into the *Educational Resources Information Center* (*ERIC*) database and the *Google Scholar*, in an attempt to find journal articles related to Cyprus and popular culture, I found only three articles (Skapoulli, 2009; Stubs, 2015; Symenonidou, 2009). What is important to note here is that none of the three articles is referred to the use of popular culture in Cypriot schools or classrooms. It is not an exaggeration to say that the research project described in this thesis is probably the one and only research project that has been conducted in the Cypriot context in relation to popular culture and/or critical literacy within a classroom setting.

As a teacher I used to follow the norm. I promoted only 'good quality' literature and rejected from my classroom all kinds of popular culture forms and icons that appear in children's games and toys. I also remember that I used to ban stickers (e.g. Disney stickers), card collections (e.g. football players' cards and Pokemon cards), video games, toys and children's movies. I was only in favour of books written by well known authors.

Even though I presented myself as a teacher with negative attitudes towards popular culture in the school setting, at the same time I knew that children enter school walls with a plethora of symbols, words, skills and practices related to and obtained from their everyday experiences with popular culture in places other than classrooms or schools (Dyson, 2001; Millard, 1997 cited in Marsh, 1999b). I noticed, from personal experiences, that very often

students use their popular culture experiences to comprehend new knowledge or information at school. In addition, young people spend most of their time exchanging and sharing thoughts and ideas about popular culture. As a consequence popular culture is, as Moje et al. (2004) say, young people's "*primary fund of knowledge*" (p. 60).

Moreover, I, as an individual, have always been fascinated with popular culture. It was as if I had been a person with two identities in relation to popular culture. I had to behave in school as society expected me to behave. As a teenager and college student, I remember that I used to spend more time watching films, TV shows and soap operas than studying. The way I dressed, my hair-style and the things I possessed were also influenced by popular icons. As a university student in the USA I used to listen to the radio and to music like hip hop, pop and heavy metal. In the UK I remember being fascinated with cinemas and films. I even remember going to the cinema to watch "*Toy Story 1*", the first computer animated film, only to find out that I was in a room full of young children and a week later I got sick with chicken pox! I have had this love and fondness for films ever since.

Millard's (2003) article gave me new ideas and new perspectives in relation to my profession. However, it was Freire's (1972) book titled "*The pedagogy of the oppressed*" that shocked me, made me think deeply and reached my emotional world in a way that has never happened to me before. In this book, Freire analyses, among other concepts, the concept of *'manipulation'* in education, a term that I immediately felt to be directly related to my profession as a teacher. I wrote the following words in my personal journal that I believe are of major significance for this paper:

> *The existence of power in my working experiences had made me feel*
> *a bit awkward and at times very content. Reading Freire made me*
> *realise that I was 'a manipulator' that exercises "cultural invasion"*

(Freire, 1972, p. 129). I was an invader in the things my students liked and enjoyed doing and was trying all these years to show them that they were wrong, that they should be engaged with other things. I was in fact presenting the world to them though my own narrow minded perception of the world, my own wrongs and rights, my own good and bad things, my own perception of what is high culture and what is low culture. I have been presenting my own world view as superior in relation to theirs. My views and ideas were assigned with greater value and have not allowed them to present theirs in their own way. My exercise of power over their culture has turned me into a person that felt a superiority over them and their culture. Now I know that even though my actions and ideas were driven by my act of love for them, in other words I wanted what was best for them, this did not make me aware that I was an oppressor and an invader. How can I change things? Well it seems that I need to trust them. I will have to open my classroom to my students' culture, show respect to their ideas, views and beliefs and give them reasons to want to learn, think and act.

Driven by my wish to produce a research project that is up to date and unique in relation to the Cypriot educational system, inspired by the shift in my thinking and finally motivated by the views that appear in the relevant literature that stress the benefits of popular culture within the critical literacy curriculum and the educational community's urgent need to be presented with research projects that illustrate the use of critical literacy in classrooms (Comber, 2001; Lee, 2011; Lopez 2011) I decided to design and perform a classroom based research project on the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture texts in my third grade classroom during the 2012–2013 academic year. This project was based on an action research

methodology and a qualitative research approach and lasted four months (January 2013–April 2013).

MAIN AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My main aim was to see the issues and dilemmas that arise when popular culture texts are used in a primary classroom in order to enhance children's critical literacy development. The purpose of this research project can be best expressed through the main research question:

- ❖ What are the issues and dilemmas that arise when critical literacy is introduced through popular culture in a third grade Cypriot primary classroom?

In addition to the main question four supplementary questions guided me through the research project:

- ❖ What are the children's perceptions when critical literacy through popular culture enters their classroom literacy curriculum?

- ❖ What are the teacher's skills, feelings and understandings when critical literacy and popular culture are introduced in the classroom?

- ❖ What feelings and opinions do parents have when popular culture and critical literacy are employed in their children's classroom?

❖ What are the headteacher's and the school inspector's views and roles when critical literacy and popular culture are used in a primary classroom?

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

The research participants were my fifteen third grade primary students (8–9 years old), eight parents (six mothers and two fathers), the school headteacher, the school inspector and I (the classroom teacher). An introductory unit and two critical literacy units based on popular culture texts were designed by me and then introduced to my classroom. In the attempt to answer my research questions I used journal entries (by parents and me), interviews (with the inspector, the headteacher and the parents) and transcripts of classroom discussions as my research methods.

My classroom was part of a rural primary school in Cyprus, which I decided to call Easthighway Primary School. Easthighway Primary School was a medium-sized primary school (approx. 200 students) located in a Cyprus village.

The majority of the students came from Cypriot working class families. The fathers were either farmers or builders who worked in their community or in the nearby town. Most of the mothers stayed at home and they were fully responsible for the raising of their children. Mothers were also more often the ones who helped children with their homework, met their children's teachers, joined the Easthighway Primary School Parents Association and participated in school activities.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis is divided into the following six sections:

- ❖ <u>Chapter One</u> is the introduction. It outlines the framework of this research project.

- ❖ <u>Chapter Two</u> provides the theoretical context within which this research project stands and identifies the main issues in relation to critical literacy and popular culture with reference to the relevant literature.

- ❖ <u>Chapter Three</u> describes the research context and the methodological issues related to this research project.

- ❖ <u>Chapter Four</u> presents the research findings and develops discussion based on these findings.

- ❖ <u>Chapter Five</u> performs a synthesis of the experiences acquired and the ideas developed during the execution of this research project.

- ❖ The <u>Appendices</u> section contains:

  Appendix 1: Ethical approval letter from the University of Sheffield.

  Appendix 2: Permission from KEEA (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, Educational Research Sector).

  Appendix 3: Day by day description of Introductory Unit.

  Appendix 4: Day by day description of Unit One.

  Appendix 5: Day by day description of Unit Two.

Appendix 6:   Categories of my research data.

Extracts from the data are provided throughout the chapters of this thesis. In order to clarify the source of the data, the following abbreviations are provided:

- ❖ CDI: Classroom Discussion
- ❖ T/RJW: Teacher / Researcher Journal Writing
- ❖ PJW: Parent Journal Writing
- ❖ PFG: Parents' Focus Group
- ❖ SIIN: School Inspector's Interview
- ❖ HTIN: School Headteacher's Interview

Next to each abbreviation, the date (the source was acquired) is provided in the form of day/month/year. Dates are neither provided for Parents Journal Writing (PJW) as parents did not provide dates for their journal entries nor for the Parents' Focus Group (PFG), the School Inspector's Interview (SINI), and the School Headteacher's Interview (SHIN) that were carried out on specific dates (indicated in Chapter Three).

Within the first chapter of this thesis I have provided the framework of my project by briefly describing the context and the concepts and ideas which influenced my decisions. Moreover, I have presented the main aim and the guiding research questions of this project as well as a short portrayal of the research participants and setting. Finally I have offered an outline of the structure of this thesis. The next chapter is a presentation of the ideas and views in the scholarly literature in relation to both critical literacy and popular culture and their use in school settings.

CHAPTER TWO

In Chapter Two I give a literature review of the various perspectives on the relation between critical literacy and popular culture with a focus on their use in classroom settings. This chapter consists of three parts. The first one, which is the smallest of the three, shapes **the theoretical framework** within which this thesis stands. The second part is devoted to **critical literacy**. This part starts with the definition of critical literacy and its use in classroom settings with special attention to Janks' (2000, 2010) perception of critical literacy. It then moves to a brief outline of critical literacy's theoretical roots and influences with a strong focus on the ideas of Paulo Freire. In addition, this part presents the connection between critical literacy and contemporary notions of literacy as well as examples of its use in primary classrooms. The third part examines **popular culture** with special attention to its definition, impact on people's lives and connections to literacy. Alvermann and Xu's (2003) "Four approaches to using popular culture in the classroom" are then analysed whilst paying particular attention to the fourth approach that sees popular culture as a fruitful starting point and component in the critical literacy curriculum (p. 147). Finally the teacher's significant role in a critical literacy curriculum through popular culture is presented.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is situated within the field of New Literacy Studies, associated with the work of a number of scholars and educational researchers, including Cope and Kalantzis (2000; 2009), Gee (2007; 2008), Lankshear and Knobel (2006), Street (1995 cited in Morrell, 2002) and The New London Group (1996). In this social model of Literacy, scholars sketch out an alternative way of understanding literacy that is less dominated by academic traditions. Within academic sites literacy has tended to be strongly skills focused, while the New Literacy Studies pays more attention to practices of literacy in context. Traditionally literacy is seen as an autonomous discipline, something to be acquired; as a social model, literacy is seen to be something as more negotiated, as socially constructed and reflective of the people and the groups who produce texts.

As Lankshear and Knobel (2006) very vividly claim, the concept of 'Reading' and its links to a psycholinguistic perception of language learning was a "long-established field" some forty years ago (p. 7). However, "during the 1980s and 1990s" (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 10) the concept of *'reading'* was replaced by the word *'literacy'* in the titles of books and journals, policy documents, political agendas and school programmes (Barton, 2007, p. 22; Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 12). Even though the change in terminology was not always related to changes in people's perceptions of what literacy represented (i.e. the ability to read and write a printed text) what appears to be a major shift was the disconnection of literacy from psychology and its link to sociology. As a consequence of this shift, the ways literate individuals have been identified (Gee, 2008) and researched has also changed reflecting both anthropological (Heath, 1983) and sociocultural perspectives (Scribner and Cole, 1981).

Gee (2007) considers this shift to be mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, language is not perceived as "the only important communication system" of our contemporary world any more (Gee, 2007, p.17; Vasquez, 2003, p. 124; Vasquez, 2005, p. 202). Nowadays a wide range of modes and media addressed as texts, like images, films, songs, games, and even buildings and the human body, (Christie and Mission, 1998; Pahl, 2014; Vasquez, 2005, p. 202) are used for communication and to construct values, meanings, ideologies, and identities. Secondly, Gee (2007) points out that "many different ways of reading and writing" texts in relation to content and context exist (p.18). For example reading or writing an academic paper is very much different than reading or writing a phone text message.

In addition, Lankshear and Knobel (2006) claim that the shift in the ways literacy is viewed is due to the emergence of *'new technical stuff'* (p. 73) and *'new ethos stuff'* (p. 82). *'New technical stuff'* refers to the changes in areas like technology and media whereas *'new ethos stuff'* to the collaborative and participative nature of the current literacy practices (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 82) naming blogging, on-line fanfiction and Wikipedia (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 82–92). Lankshear and Knobel (2006) very clearly articulate that they perceive these two types of *'new stuff'* to be interrelated as the existence of the first depends on the existence of the second and vice versa (p. 93).

Nowadays literacy is neither considered as a passive process that deals with the "reading and ... writing" ability of people (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 8) nor assessed as a monolithic and measurable group of skills (Hannon, 2000, p. 37) mainly acquired within classroom walls with the use of print texts. Literacy is identified as a "continually changing" set of "context dependent" (Hannon, 2000, p. 37) "social and cultural practices" (Jewitt, 2008, p. 260) "shaped" within social groups, organisations, communities and cultures (Luke and Freebody, 1999, para. 5). These practices are employed by people in their attempts to communicate with others, become members,

construct new identities or preserve old ones and live in the contemporary world. In this world, people communicate and construct meanings not only linguistically (through letter sounds, words or sentences) but also spatially, aurally (e.g. sounds), visually (e.g. images, colours), by gestures (e.g. body position or face expression) and through multimodal patterns (The New London Group, 1996, p. 65; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p. 7; 2009, p. 175).

The existence of multiple literacy practices and the multiple competencies that an individual needs to employ in everyday life have brought about not only a broader perception of literacy but also an innovative way of addressing it. Contemporary philosophers, thinkers, scholars and teachers use the plural form of the word (i.e. literacies) in an attempt to not only show that nowadays more than one literacy or literacy practices (e.g. critical literacy, computer literacy, visual literacy etc.) are evident but also to emphasise that nowadays individuals and social groups communicate and comprehend their world in a variety of ways. Moreover, the plural term 'literacies' suggests that the definition of the literate individual of our times is not the same as it was some decades ago.

Recognising the inseparable linkage between language and the societal framework within which it is practiced, Gee (2008) suggests the idea of 'Discourses'. He describes 'Discourses' as the distinguishing ways a person talks, acts, behaves and feels within a particular framework (Gee, 2008, p. 3). The use of the capital 'D' entails that Gee distinguishes 'Discourse' from discourse as on a sociocultural approach of literacy the focus should not be merely on language. Moreover, the plural form of the term implies that a person is a possessor or a member of an array of different and in many cases conflicting Discourses like families, churches, schools and clubs (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 18). Gee's 'Discourses' entail that literate people should be able to do more things than just read and write. They use language successfully and own the necessary communication and behavioural skills in order to be identified as members of social communities

and function successfully within particular social contexts (Gee, 2007, p. 17–18). In a similar vein, Partington (2010, p. 73–74) and Scribner and Cole (1981, p. 236) describe literate people as the ones who know when, how and where to use their skills, abilities and knowledge while being aware of the effects that their action and behaviour will have on others as well as themselves.

Street (1995 cited in Morrell, 2002) believes that as long as more than one literacy is practiced by people, many students can be characterised as literate even though their literacy skills may be very much different from the literacy practices promoted in classrooms. Carrington and Luke (2003 cited in Marsh, 2003, p. 116) also claim that students who are very often called 'at-risk' are in this situation because schools and teachers do not pay attention or understand their literacies that are usually associated with popular culture and new technologies. Morrell and Andrade-Duncan (2005) found that the under-achieving adolescents that participated in their research project demonstrated high intellectual abilities during the analysis of popular culture texts (p. 265). Similarly, Gainer (2008) observed that DeAndre, a teenager with learning difficulties and deficient social skills, possessed a broad range of literacy skills when he was given the opportunity to communicate in multiple modes (p. 29). Moreover, Maybin's (2013) analysis of children's discussion and responses in relation to an episode from a well known British soap opera reveals children's ability to comment on the plot of the story as well as the feelings, decisions and actions of the characters in an emotional and dynamic way complying with the goals of the official literacy curriculum (p. 65).

In this first part of this chapter I have offered a brief description of the theoretical framework within which this research project stands. Subsequently, a literature review on the concept of critical literacy is

*provided with reference to its definition, roots and influences as well as its
connection to the new viewpoints of literacy and its implementation in the
primary classroom.*

CRITICAL LITERACY

CRITICAL LITERACY DEFINITION

In literature, critical literacy is described as the potential of individuals to
actively interpret and evaluate texts (Morrell, 2002) based on their values
and experiences (Lesley, 2008), after opening their eyes (Flores-Koulish,
2010, para. 14) or wearing a special "set of eyeglasses" (Bourke, 2008, p.
304) that enables them to "read beyond the lines" (Fisher, 2008, p. 26) in
order to examine their world, recognise the rules and relationships that
govern each text's creation, effects, and outcomes (Morrell, 2002), become
conscious of the existence of power relations in both the texts and the world,
see things, even familiar ones (like long standing social beliefs) in new and
innovative ways (Van Sluys , 2005), express themselves freely, take actions
and bring changes to their life and the lives of others (Black, 2010; Corley,
2003; Flint, 2000).

Anyone who is not familiar with the concept of critical literacy might feel
confused by what I have just presented as its definition. However, what
needs to be pointed out at this point is that no unitary definition of critical
literacy exists in the relevant literature, especially when its classroom use is
described. Many authors appear reluctant in providing a generic and clear
definition (Comber, 2001, p. 271) due to its dynamic nature. Critical literacy

in the classroom is very often characterised as complicated due to the complexities and difficulties teachers very often face when they incorporate it in their literacy curriculum (Comber, 2001). In addition, it is entitled with a locally and socially situated nature (Dyson, 2001, p. 35; Comber, 2001, p. 275). People's critical response to a text analysis is guided by their personal beliefs, feelings, prior experiences and knowledge and influenced by the society and community in which they function. Moreover the mere act of critical literacy within a classroom is very much different to the one in another classroom as it is influenced by a number of factors related to distinguishing social and educational circumstances. That is why pre-designed lesson plans and teaching materials for critical literacy development are very often less welcomed by scholars and educators like Comber who calls their existence "dangerous" (Comber, 2001, p. 275).

JANKS' (2000, 2010) PERCEPTION OF CRITICAL LITERACY

Janks (2010, 2000) claims that the critical analysis of texts (i.e. critical literacy) is viewed, perceived and approached differently by different literacy theories and their followers according to the distinctive ways individuals conceptualise "the relationship between language and power" (Janks, 2000, p. 176). As she explains, this "relationship" emphasises one of the following concepts: "domination, access, diversity or design" (Janks, 2010, p. 23).

Domination

Those theorists who identify the connection between language and power as a relation mainly governed by domination see power as something negative and language and other symbolic forms as promoters and producers of inequalities and relations characterised by domination. *'Critical Discourse*

Analysis' and *'Critical Language Awareness'* scholars and theorists (Fairclough, 1992; 1995) stress the constructive nature of texts. They call attention to domination in their attempts to comprehend, during the examination of texts, the ways in which language functions and the impacts it has on readers. During a text analysis they examine the linguistic choices of authors, like verb tenses or the person used, and how these reveal or hide messages and situations.

Access

Access is strongly linked to domination. The educators that recognise issues of domination in relation to language and power try to find ways to help students access the dominant literacy and language forms in order to restrict academic and social marginalisation. *'Genre theorists'* (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993) have given the characteristics of dominant genres that students should have access to. When a text is analysed with the concept of access in mind, then the analysis emphasises how the examined text includes or excludes a group or groups of people from certain activities or social practices. Within a similar vein *'Explicit Pedagogy'* theorists (Delpit, 1988) recognise explicit instruction as a key issue in the promotion of access within diverse and disadvantaged student groups. So the explicit teaching of how critical literacy is exercised and the advantages this practice can have are presented as vital.

Diversity

Students' diverse literacy experiences and languages very easily give rise to domination, conflict and concerns when they enter school premises. New Literacies Studies theorists (like Gee, 2008) and multilingual educators

stress for the necessity of diversity within schools and classrooms in the interest of social equality and as an essential and critical aspect of the learning process in the fast changing world of the 21st century (Hall and Theriot, 2016). In a critical literacy curriculum students and their teachers can examine texts that either present or are originated in diverse language and social practices. Kress (1995, cited in Janks, 2000) believes that when diversity is used creatively and in an unbiased manner in the classroom curriculum, it can be transformed into a vital component of classroom life and an effective teaching tool (Kress, 1995, p. 6 in Janks, 2000, p. 177).

Design

Design acknowledges the creativity of students and their abilities to create and recreate texts and new meanings with the use of multiple modalities mostly available through media and technology as suggested by The New London Group (1996). This is why educational communities are advised to give their students opportunities for production with a variety of semiotic resources (besides reading and writing). Through critical literacy, students and their educators look at texts within a variety of contents and contexts in order to comprehend, represent and even transform their world.

Janks (2000) claims that the four suggested concepts should not be viewed separately as none of the four is more important than the others (p. 178). However she (Janks, 2010) explains that it is not necessary for all four elements to be included within every lesson or activity but rather teachers should make the necessary planning so that all elements are examined within a number of sessions (p. 27).

Even though Janks (2000, 2010) describes the different ways critical literacy is perceived by teachers and scholars according to the literacy theory they adopt, I see the ways in which she conceptualises critical literacy as strongly

reflected within the foundations of the New Cypriot Literacy Curriculum because of how the curriculum positions literacy teaching and development. For example, within the new curriculum critical literacy is not identified as a small component of literacy education but rather as an overarching factor guiding the whole literacy curriculum; this reflects Janks' (2000, 2010) views of critical literacy – that it should be at the heart of teaching. Janks' (2000, 2010) idea of the four components through which critical literacy is seen and practiced foregrounds the importance of a holistic view of literacy development in the primary years and the ability of critical literacy to function as the base of literacy education on which literacy teaching and learning can be either designed, provided or assessed. At the same time it makes us appreciate the capacity of critical literacy to be adapted in every classroom according to distinctive educational goals, circumstances and theory.

At the same time I perceive Janks' ideas as a valuable aid in my attempt to implement critical literacy in my classrooms. Firstly she makes clear that a critical literacy curriculum should in the first place appreciate the diverse languages, cultures, genres, texts and modes students have experiences with in their out-of-school life and welcome them in the classroom settings. At the same time students should be explicitly taught what to look for when they analyse a text and how to work with critical literacy. Students should also be provided with "access to dominant forms" like "dominant languages, dominant varieties, ... dominant literacies, ... [and] dominant genres" (Janks, 2010, p. 24). Through critical literacy, teachers and learners as a group will examine why and how power and domination is evident within texts and literacy practices and at the same time by having their own experiences as a starting point they will be able to redesign their living experiences.

CRITICAL LITERACY ROOTS AND INFLUENCES

Even through "critical literacy ... [is] rooted in the tenets of critical theory propounded by the Frankfurt school at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 40), it is very often perceived as "synonymous" (Mayo, 1995, p. 363) to Paulo Freire's work. Freire was an educator and philosopher who developed a literacy program with a critical perspective for economically and socially marginalised adult learners in Brazil in the 1960s. Freire's literacy program aimed to give learners the opportunity to learn to read while they participated in discussions that intended to uncover the messages and power relationships presented in texts and in life (Marshall and Klein, 2009, p. 219). In a vivid way, McLaren and Giroux (1994) describe Freire as the person who has given the opportunity to many individuals to move beyond their social contexts and historical moments and be advocates of change (p. xiii).

THE FREIREAN PEDAGOGICAL THEORY

Freire considers society in general and schools in particular as preservers and promoters of both oppression and conflict. According to Freire, teachers' existence and knowledge are very often considered the most important features in the teaching process (Luke and Woods, 2009, p. 3) while students are perceived as people with inadequate creativity, imagination and dreams. As a consequence students are not 'masters of their thinking' (Freire, 1972) but experience a '*culture of silence*' as they are not allowed to express their personal views and ideas freely. Most of the times they are presented with pieces of information with no meaning and significance to them (Freire, 1972, p. 45) that they are expected to memorise. Their learning is '*an act of depositing*' where "the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (Freire, 1972, p. 45). This 'banking' instruction, as

Freire calls it, turns learners into passive human beings whose thinking and actions can be controlled or monitored.

Freire (1972) wishes for people to be "neither oppressor[s], nor oppressed" (p. 33). People should liberate themselves and be responsible for their actions through their involvement in the organisation of their learning experiences ('*reflective participation*') (Freire, 1972, p.41) in a manner that helps them realise their need for liberation and question their social and historical situation ('*conscientization*') (Freire, 1972, p. 42).

Even though teachers and students are not presented by Freire as being the same, neither are they viewed as being in an opposing or conflicting relation. The tension that they may experience is, according to Freire (1985a), "reconcilable" as it can be released through the democratic behaviour and attitude of the educator (p. 177). Freire advises teachers to go beyond the "monotonous, arrogant and elitist traditionalism where the teacher knows all, and the student does not know anything" (Freire, 1985a, p. 177). Both teachers and learners learn, act, question, comprehend and achieve. Everybody's ideas, opinions, points of view, beliefs and experiences are treasured as valuable. Teachers and students articulate their thoughts and ideas, give suggestions in relation to their world and education, solve problems, think critically and create a democratic and oppression-free society.

Freire (1998) also sees teaching as a profession that expects from its workers to be honest, well prepared and brave enough to try and implement new, and many times innovative teaching ideas (p. 3). Moreover, Freire suggests schools to not "blindly" present its students with pre-designed curricula, programmes and teaching materials suggested or created "by some experts in their offices" (Freire, 1998, p. 8). These, according to Freire, should be created in collaboration with the people directly involved in the

learning process, reflecting the interests, experiences and wishes of the learners.

CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE NEW LITERACIES CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The recognition of literacy as socially situated cultural, historical, and institutional practices (Gee, 2000, p. 126) and of language as participation in these practices makes the role of critical literacy in education of major importance. Through critical literacy, learners are given the opportunity to become "researchers of language" (Comber, 1994, p. 661) who are conscious of the literacy practices they participate in and the ways language is used and affects their lives (Ludwig, 2006, para. 2). Students learn how to pay attention to the purposes, views and values that are evident within the text's production and representation (Lesley, 2008, p. 188). They are able to see the ideas presented in a text from different perspectives by conducting multiple readings of it (Mellor and Patterson, 2004, p. 83). Nothing that is provided within a text is perceived as fact or as stable. Every single idea can be challenged or interpreted differently as long as it is viewed and examined from different angles.

In addition, critical literacy's inclusion in the literacy classroom gives students the prospect to express their concerns and any discrimination and unfairness they experience in their everyday life, transform themselves into agents of social and communal change (Flint, 2000 p. 32) and create a world that is fair and unbiased (Janks, 2014, p. 355). In Comber et al. (2001) the 2nd and 3rd graders of a low-income community in Australia who got involved in a local project used their drawings, writings and experiences related to their neighbourhood lives in order to raise their voices and bring change to their community.

Black (2010) sees the ability of people to have "strong, critical and responsible public voices" (p. 78), express ideas and concerns effectively, and question long-standing or "taken-for-granted assumptions" while being advocates of change (Comber's interview in Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 62) as an advantage of the citizens who live in the highly diverse and rapidly changing 21st century information age (Jewitt, 2008, p. 241). Comber (2015) also claims for the necessity of critical literacy and action for the promotion of social and educational justice and equity through a critical examination of the reasons, effects and characteristics of contemporary poverty (p. 363). As she describes, in older times education and schools were means through which adolescents and young adults could make changes to their lives and futures and move away from poverty and its negative consequences (Comber, 2015, p. 363). However, in our times social separation on the basis of private property and income (poor families live in disadvantaged areas) promotes social disparities (e.g. crime, detrimental physical environment and discouraging public resources) and educational inequalities (under-resourced schools) (Stanley, Richardson and Prior, 2005, p. 102–103 cited in Comber, 2015, p. 363).

Flores-Koulish (2010, para. 5–6) and Egbert (2009, p. 30) believe that the authority that is given to contemporary humans in order to construct, edit and present on-line information for public use is another reason why the young people of our times should be in a position to use this information sensibly and look at it with a critical eye. An example that is very often mentioned in the relevant literature is the information provided on Wikipedia. Wikipedia is an on-line information place where anyone (Internet user) can be a reader, writer or editor. Very often Wikipedia readers come across information that is inaccurate, misleading or even a far cry from reality. Regardless of the fact that the Wikipedia team invites its information providers (writers or editors) to be unbiased it is according to Davies and Merchant not possible (2009, p. 95). The Wikipedia contributors, just like all

writers, are people who occupy their positionality and carry their own values, views, and experiences. Thus, whatever the power position of an author, her/his perspective can always be challenged and questioned.

Someone might claim that even though critical literacy is described as an 'emancipatory' process (Gee, 2008, p. 62) that can be transformative and revolutionary, which gives the opportunity to learners to understand and challenge the phenomena of oppression in their life, it is not possible for young students to bring major changes to the balance of power, the financial and social capital and the way cultural institutions function. Never the less, I believe that this realisation should not give rise to feelings of discouragement and pessimism. The exercise of critical literacy by a group of school children might not be that transformative. However, the participation of students in a critical pedagogy should be viewed as a valuable supply for their peer, family and community microcosmos and a valuable prospect for their communal, social and professional future life.

CRITICAL LITERACY IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

In the relevant literature, critical literacy has been characterised as "the ... most neglected" field in the early years and primary education (Marsh and Millard, 2000, p. 79) and the area that has "relatively few accounts ... in primary classrooms" (Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 45). Even though the introduction of critical literacy in early and primary years appears to be limited, it has nevertheless been conducted with a selection of texts genres and techniques.

EXAMPLES OF CRITICAL LITERACY INTRODUCTION IN PRIMARY YEARS

Vasquez (2000, 2001, 2004), an inspirational critical literacy early childhood educator, uses young children's everyday classroom incidents and popular culture experiences for critical literacy development. Bourke (2008) introduces critical literacy in his first grade classroom with the examination of well known fairy tales. Meller et al. (2009), McDonald (2004), Heffernan and Lewison (2000) and Leland and Harste (2000) stress the importance of the careful selection and use of high-quality children's literature that focus on social and historical issues (like slavery, democracy and otherness) and the cautious addressing of questions in the critical literacy curriculum.

The critical analyses of texts and images that appear in children's literature are described in literature as advocates of discussions and debates in relation to situations that are far beyond what is believed to be the norm that raise young people's awareness on human existence and interaction. For example, Crafton, Brennan & Silvers (2007) describe how a group of first graders used their critical literacy competencies developed through children's literature in order to take civil action and bring change to the life of a homeless community member whose story appeared in the daily news (p. 514). Furthermore, Egbert (2009) considers the use of shocking and even offensive texts that appear on the internet in the literacy classroom as an excellent opportunity for young students to make use of their reading and writing skills, content-area knowledge and critical literacy abilities. Finally, Black (2010) perceives young people's contribution to on-line fanfictions to be of major importance as it encourages them to participate in critical discussions and become active designers of the world around them.

It is worth mentioning that Australian schools appear to be the ones that have been using critical literacy to a greater extent (Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 42) even though Australian scholars very often claim that teachers

do not make use of the full potential of critical literacy as it is mainly used for the analysis of texts and not for the production of texts or for social action (Comber et al., 2001). According to the relevant literature this could be due to the fact that primary teachers encounter a number of dilemmas and concerns that lead to complexities when critical literacy enters the classroom walls.

TEACHERS' DILEMMAS AND CONCERNS

Comber (1999) claims that critical literacy produces many negative and quite different feelings and reactions among teachers and school administrators like "suspicion, curiosity, fervour, doubt, uncertainty, distrust, confusion" (p.5). Comber (1999) also gives a list of teachers' fears, which she calls 'myths' in an attempt to show that they are based on a questionable foundation (para. 6). According to her, many educators wonder whether critical literacy diminishes young students' enthusiasm and interest for school life and learning. Educators and scholars also believe that children's acquaintance with critical literacy moves the students away from the "love of reading" and the enjoyment that is acquired during the reading of a book (Donnelly, 2005a, p. 13 in Freesmith, 2006, para. 6).

Moreover teachers consider the age appropriateness for working with the critical analysis of texts (Flint, 2000, p. 31) and the possibility of turning learning into an unpleasant and stressful experience for their students (Heffernan and Lewison, 2000, p. 17; Burns, 2009, p. 421) and the children into "cynical, … [and] too serious" human beings (Comber, 1999, para. 5). Teachers are also concerned that parents might object to their children's engagement with issues and texts that present controversial themes (Heffernan and Lewison, 2000, p. 20).

Teachers also feel uncomfortable with the limited time they have for this activity. Comber (interview in Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 62) opposes this view by claiming that critical literacy should start from the beginning of the school year and used within every activity and lesson of the curriculum. To use Smith's (2001) words: "critical literacy isn't something you should 'do' an hour a day; rather, it is something that should be infused throughout" (p. 157). In this way, critical literacy is not perceived as a curriculum subject but rather a teaching objective. As that, teachers are expected to be alert and grasp the opportunities or as Vasquez (2000) calls them, '*the critical incidents*' that appear within the classroom which serve as springboards for the development of a critical curriculum that encourages thinking, conversations and social action (p.12).

Moreover, what teachers very often experience during their first acquaintance with critical literacy as greatly discouraging, is that critical literacy makes the lesson dynamic and its route indefinite (Vasquez, 2000). In a critical literacy curriculum nothing is artificial. The "real world" seen through real problems and social issues enters the classroom (Heffernan and Lewison, 2000, p. 15) as the discussion and text analysis and production are based on authentic problems and texts. Moreover the teacher's power is lessened as the lesson is guided by students through their ideas and experiences (Norton, 2007, p.12). Comber (1999) uses the phrase "unchartered territory" to describe the spaces that lessons might move into (para. 25). That is why designing a lesson plan with critical literacy elements can neither follow a prescription nor have a fixed form in the traditional mode of 'teacher says, pupil says'. Moreover, critical literacy development should not be the only teaching goal of a literacy lesson or unit. Lesson plans should be designed having in mind a holistic development view of language which, among others, includes critical literacy development.

Relevant research also shows that the barriers during the implementation of critical literacy in a classroom are related to either the personal or professional incompetence of teachers in relation to textual practices and literacy theories (Comber, 2001; Kontovourki and Ioannidou, 2013). Fisher (2008) carried out a research project within three primary classrooms in the UK. Her findings show that even though all three teachers claimed that they were using guided reading[1] in their classrooms none of them helped her/his students develop their critical literacy skills. Teacher participants were not in a position to support the learners' move beyond the text lines and the passive act of responding to teachers' questions. The learning time was not enriched with children's experiences, multiple readings of texts and discussions that questioned long standing beliefs of normality, reality and truth. According to Fisher (2008) the reason for this incompetency on behalf of teachers was due to lack of proper and effective tutoring (p. 27). That is why the relevant literature gives great value to both teacher education (Flores-Koulish, 2010; Marshall and Klein, 2009; Reid, 2011) and teachers' in-service training (Smith, 2001; Vasquez and Egawa, 2002) in both new literacies and critical literacy theories.

The connection between critical theory and leftist political ideas and affiliation appears to be another reason why critical literacy is either supported or withdrawn from classroom and school curricula reflecting political agendas. According to Donnelly (2005), the inclusion of the concept of critical literacy in the national curriculum of Australia reveals the need of the left wing oriented political agendas to bring changes to society and education through a left-ideologically driven position of the world. The case of Cyprus also illustrates this point where critical literacy in the Cypriot literacy curriculum was introduced when the government was leftist

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[1] Guided reading is a method of reading instruction carried out in small groups. It promotes differentiated teaching based on the individual needs of the students. One of its main aims is the development of students' critical literacy skills.

oriented[2]. However, I perceive the inclusion of Freire's ideas and critical literacy within the Cypriot official literacy curriculum to be linked to a paradox. While critical literacy acts as a defence against any hegemonic or power relations, its enforced introduction in Cypriot classrooms and schools potentially compromised the emancipator aspect of critical literacy. At the same time, Cypriot teachers who followed the guidelines of the curriculum, in this case the critical literacy curriculum, were turned into state cultural agents whose teaching actions and decisions reflected the views, beliefs and political agendas of the hegemonic educational and state authorities.

As of the time of writing this thesis, a conservative right wing oriented government has been in power that initially suggested changes to the literacy curriculum of schools without however, making changes to the official curriculum. One of them was the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture's announcement[3] of the elective implementation of critical literacy in the Cypriot classrooms and the reintroduction of language texts books.

LITERACY MODELS THAT EMPHASISE CRITICAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Within the relevant literature, a number of literacy models highlight the importance of critical literacy during literacy learning in institutional education. In the following part I present three of these literary models in the chronological order they were suggested. These models are:

❖ The "Three-dimension (3D) model" (Green, 1988).

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[2] In February, 2008 the first left-oriented Cypriot government was elected having as president of the country the secretary general of the Cypriot communist party (AKEL) Mr Demetres Cristofias. A few months later, the Cypriot Council of Ministers decided (Decision 67.339 , Date . 11/6/2008) the review of the Cypriot public schools curricula.

[3] On the 21st November 2013, the Director of Primary Education posted on the official website of the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture '*The changes of the literacy teaching in primary schools*'. More information can be found in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

❖ The "Four resources model" (Freebody and Luke, 1990; Luke and Freebody, 1999).

❖ The "Multiliteracies Model" / The "Learning by Design Model" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; 2015).

The Three- dimension (3D) Model

In his 1988 journal article, whose main aim is to "contribute to educators' understanding of the contextualised nature of literacy, especially in its relation to school learning" (p.156) Green suggests the three dimensions of literacy that should guide teachers in their holistic view of literacy (writing, reading and speaking skills should not be separated from each other). These are:

❖ The '*operational dimension'*, which refers to the ability of students to successfully use the/a language system at a given context. In our society, which is very much influenced by technological innovation, this dimension is extremely complex as in addition to written texts young learners have to be in a position to understand and convey meaning from diagrams, images, numerical data, sound messages, and signs (Ludwig, 2003).

❖ The '*cultural dimension'* of literacy refers to the "meaning aspect of literacy" (Green, 1988, p. 160). In other words it refers to the ability of learners to understand that texts are not only related to context (the situation within which they are produced or used) but also to content (the subject of the text under investigation). This entails that students should be able to read, and produce written or oral texts from a variety of genre types successfully. In relation to school literacy, Green argues that cultural learning in school mainly refers to subject– area learning. This argument is supported through the following

thinking: "learning a subject inevitably involves being socialised into the subject . . . socialisation into the culture . . . of the subject . . . [is] socialisation into the culture in general" (p. 162).

❖ The *'critical dimension'* is the third and last dimension of literacy suggested by Green. According to him, the '*critical dimension'* of literacy is as important and interrelated to the other two dimensions even though very often schools and teachers support and encourage the operational and the cultural aspect of literacy. The '*critical dimension'* of literacy is the dimension that encourages the provision on behalf of the learners to think critically on what they have learnt or what has been taught in the classroom and at the same time articulate and share their thoughts with others. This, according to Green, will provide the learners with a decisive and a central role during the teaching and learning process and will make them aware that texts may be conveyed and interpreted in many ways (Ludwig, 2003).

The Four Resources Model

In the relevant literature the '*Three-dimension (3D) model*' of Green is very much associated with '*The Four Resources Model* '(Iyer, 2007; Ludwig, 2003). This model was suggested by Freebody and Luke (1990) and has been used extensively in education (Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 42).Based on this model, successful readers employ four roles during their experiences with texts:

❖ *The role of a code breaker*
(Break the codes related to letters, words, and sentences)

❖ *The role of a meaning maker*

(Comprehend/understand what the text says and be able to respond to questions drawn from the text)

❖ *The role of a text user*

(Use a text that is the most appropriate according to time, place, and occasion)

❖ *The role of a text critic*

(Critically analyse the provided text)

According to its creators, this literacy model is a "normative" model, a model that reflects its creators' cultural, societal, political and moral views, beliefs, decisions, choices and thinking in relation to literacy at a particular time and historical moment (Luke and Freebody, 1999; para. 4). That is why after almost a decade Luke and Freebody revised their model (Luke and Freebody, 1999) to reflect the "development in theoretical and empirical understandings of literacy" (Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 42). Their new revised model emerged in response to the new ways with which educational communities and societies face, understand and practice literacy as well as to the new meanings that long-standing concepts (like reading) have obtained. As such the new version of the four resources model includes the following four *'families of practices'* (Luke and Freebody, 1999):

❖ [Learners] break the code of written texts by using fundamental features and architecture, including alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, and structural conventions and patterns;

❖ [Learners] participate in understanding and composing meaningful written, visual and spoken texts taking into account each text's interior meaning systems in relation to their available knowledge and their experiences of other cultural discourses, texts, and meaning systems;

❖ [Learners] use texts functionally … by knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform inside and outside school and understanding that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality, and their sequence of components;

❖ [Learners] critically analyze and transform texts by acting on
knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral … and
that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned
in novel and hybrid ways.

(Luke and Freebody, 1999, para. 21)

A major change in the terminology used in the new version of the model is
the replacement of the word 'role' by the word 'practices'; a change that also
appears to be rooted in the redefinition of literacy as "a matter of social
practices" (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 12). As the authors claim, the
term 'role' is nowadays defined by sociology as something predetermined
that somebody has to "fit into" (Freebody, 1992, para. 11). As long as
literacy is not viewed as "skills, schemata, competencies" but as things that
are "done . . . performed, and achieved" the replacement of the word 'role'
by the word 'practices' is seen as a necessity (Luke and Freebody, 1999,
para. 16). Nowadays human beings encounter, witness and participate in "a
set of socially organised practices" (Scribner and Cole, 1981, p. 236). These
practices are deeply rooted in cultural and societal contexts and are related
to the development of technology and the multimodality of texts (Luke and
Freebody, 1999, para. 5).

Another change that appears in the new version is related to their attempt to
include in their model not only reading activities but "reading and writing
activities" that together assist for the development of an "effective literacy"
instruction (Luke and Freebody, 1999, para. 20)

What I consider to be a major similarity between the two versions of this
model is the importance of all four roles/family of practices for a successful,
adaptable and fully literate individual (Rush, 2004, p. 39). Freebody and
Luke (1990) claim that schools have successfully demonstrated the first two
tasks (p. 11). However young learners have not been educated into being
able to use the appropriate text at a given occasion and at the right time. Nor
have schools helped students' abilities to critically analyse texts.

Rush (2004) says that Freebody and Luke's model should neither be seen as a "stage model" nor as a "developmental sequence" (p. 39). Each resource should not be seen as a prerequisite for the accomplishment of the next one, something that is very often assumed by teachers (Rush, 2004). As Rush (2004) points out teachers very often postpone "text analysis skills" until their students have fully mastered "comprehension skills" (p. 39). All four elements of the model should be combined during the learning process and none of the four should be seen as more important than the other or sufficient on its own (Rush, 2004, p. 51). However, what Luke (2000) points out is that in the early primary school grades it might be useful to deal with the different elements of literacy separately (p. 454).

The Multiliteracies Model / The Learning by Design Model

In the introduction of the book they edited, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) talk about the broadening meaning of language and the inventiveness of the concepts of 'multiliteracies' and 'multiliteracies pedagogy' by the *'New London Group'* (1996). In an attempt to support the *'New London Group'* gathering and the mutual ideas they presented in public, Cope and Kalantzis (2009) and Kalantzis and Cope (2010) talk about the changes in communications and the world in general that required an urgent modification in literacy instruction. Traditionally, literacy teaching embraces written language and applies heavily on printed texts. However, the development in technology within the last decades enables the use and combination of multiple modes, something that I discussed earlier.

In their 2009 article Cope and Kalantzis describe the presentation of the 'multiliteracies pedagogy' by the *'New London Group'* as a "programmatic manifesto"— a statement that is based on practical perceptions and experiences (p. 165). Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggested the "four

factors" of the Multiliteracies Model which are: "*Situated practice ... Overt Instruction ... Critical Framing ... and Transformed Pedagogy*" (p. 31). A few years later, the same authors "reframed these ideas somewhat and translated them into the more immediately recognizable 'Knowledge Processes': *experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying*" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, p. 4). A grouping of the four factors of the Multiliteracies Model and the four ways a person learns ('Knowledge Processes') gives the following list:

- ❖ *"Situated practice / Experiencing"* (physical and emotional engagement with known and unknown situations)

- ❖ *"Overt Instruction / Conceptualising"* (understanding of language, concepts, symbols and experiences)

- ❖ *"Critical Framing / Analysing"* (interpretation and reflection of designs, symbols and other forms of representation)

- ❖ *"Transformed Pedagogy / Applying"* (an adaptation of the acquired knowledge into various situations that very often are complex and confusing).

(Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, p. 4)

The multiliteracies pedagogy approach is described by its founders as a pedagogy where the learners are the key decision makers in the personal knowledge process (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p. 172); similarly to the way scholars and educators perceive critical literacy. However, Mills (2006) sees the *'critical framing / analysing'* way of knowledge as the one more relevant to critical literacy (para. 8). Based on this knowledge process students analyse texts both *functionally* and *critically* (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p. 186). Through a '*functional analysis*' students interpret and examine the

operating relations that are present in a text like the origins of a text and its outcomes. Moreover learners look at the similarities and differences between the examined text and other texts (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p. 186). During a '*critical analysis*' the main aim is the revealing of the interests and intentions that are related to the production of a text, the articulation of an idea or the execution of an action (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p. 186).

Within the second part of this chapter I have described critical literacy with reference to relevant literature. Firstly I have provided the definition and perspectives of critical literacy giving attention to Janks' (2000, 2010) perception of critical literacy. Then I have given the main ideas of Freire's pedagogical theory and I have moved to a presentation of the connection between critical literacy and new literacies. I have ended this section with the use of critical literacy in primary classrooms and the description of three literacy models that stress the importance of critical literacy. Within the next part of this chapter I look at the concept of popular culture through a literature review of its definition, place in people's lives, connections to literacy and its use in schools.

POPULAR CULTURE

DEFINITION OF POPULAR CULTURE

A review of the relevant literature suggests that 'culture' is a very complex term (Alvermann and Xu, 2003, p. 146) since the term has been used for centuries and has obtained quite a number of dissimilar and in many cases diverse meanings (Hebdige, 1979, p. 5). Due to the difficulties in defining the

term 'culture', the definition of 'popular culture' is also challenging and in many cases problematical. A literature review on popular culture reveals a number of definitions and classifications of the term. A definition that is closer to my own understanding of popular culture is provided by Mukerji and Schudson (1991) and refers to the ideas, practices and artefacts of a group of people at a particular place and time that derive either from tradition, people's beliefs and values or from "political and commercial centers" (p. 3).

Popular culture texts and products are very often associated with low culture. Marsh (2003) believes that the separation between low and high culture is incorrect because most of today's high culture texts used to be regarded as low culture when they were produced (p. 112). In Cyprus, for example, people perceive Cypriot folk tales and songs to be related to high culture even though they have hardly ever considered how these texts were regarded when they were first created. So, popular culture is not merely a phenomenon of our times. It is, it was and it will always be part of all societies, historical moments and places (Stevens, 2001, p. 552) even though its forms have always been transformed according to the framework it has been positioned (Marsh, 2003; p. 113).

Popular culture is also related to time, place and a specific group of people, it is "practiced locally", varies "from context to context" (Morrell, 2007, p. 249) and is very often short lived (Marsh, 2006, p. 168 ; Marsh and Millard, 2000, p. 188). In order to describe this slippery characteristic of popular culture, Alvermann and Xu (2003) use the following five words: "nailing gelatine to a wall" (p. 146).

POPULAR CULTURE IN OUR LIVES

Popular culture is so inextricably embedded in our daily lives and influential towards all of its aspects that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate it from "the rest of our lives" (Dolby, 2003, p. 258). Even though it gives rise to a large amount of entertainment and pleasure as well as to negative feelings like offense and addiction, it is very hard and even impossible for us to keep away from it (Dolby, 2003, p. 258). Williams (2007) says: "popular culture forms reproduce and distribute the most powerful narratives and icon images that dominate our lives" (p. 680). The same idea is supported by Dolby (2003) when she very vividly states: "Popular culture is a central force … it reaches into our homes, cars and classrooms and influences what we buy, wear, listen to, watch and think about" (p. 258). Nowadays, popular culture is influenced and at the same time supported by the development of technology, media and computers, and most of the times driven by economical objectives (Dolby, 2003, p. 258).

CHILDREN AND POPULAR CUTLURE

In contemporary times, adolescents and children are the age groups that have more experiences and are more familiar with popular culture compared to any other age groups (Cheung, 2001, p. 56). Young people (like many adults) watch TV shows, movies, videos, football matches, and commercials; they read best sellers, magazines, comments, mail advertisements, blogs, fanfiction stories, mangas, instant messages, comics; they write comments on social networks and customer feedbacks, they send or receive emails as well as SMS[4] and MMS[5] messages; they use their web and phone cameras for keeping in touch with others and exchanging experiences; they meet others through social networks; they

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[4] SMS (Short Message Service): Sending texts messages to and from mobile devices.
[5] MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service): Sending messages with a multimedia contents to and from mobile devices.

explore web sites; they play computer and video games; they create their avatars; they make collections on popular culture icons; they listen to and compose their contemporary music and they do on-line shopping. In addition, popular culture icons and symbols appear on young people's toys and games, day and night wear, schoolbags, pencil cases and stationery, food packaging, lunchboxes and lunch bags, hair accessories, shampoos, cosmetics, First Aid bandages, jewellery, bed linen and bedroom curtains (Marsh, 2003, p. 114; Marsh and Millard, 2000; Wohlwend, 2009, p. 57).

Literature also reveals the great impact popular culture has on young people's lives (Dyson, 2003). It influences their identity building, relationships, wishes and value formation (Cheung, 2001; Dyson, 2003; Kontovourki, 2014; Williams, 2007). When Moje et al. (2004) researched a group of Latino teenagers they found that popular culture was the major source of knowledge *('primary fund of knowledge'*) for these adolescents as they used to spend most of their time "talking, reading, and writing about various forms of popular culture" (p. 60).

Popular culture also influences children's playing experiences (Dyson, 2003; Marsh and Bishop, 2014; Marsh and Millard, 2000; Smidt, 2004; Willett, 2005) and gives them the opportunity to have feelings of enjoyment, enthusiasm, impulsiveness, autonomy and creativity (Willett, 2005, p. 143). Adults are very often witnesses of children playing with or collecting artefacts and toys that are manufactured on the basis of popular culture characters, icons, and texts (Marsh and Millard, 2000, p. 58); their role-playing is also influenced by popular culture stories, songs, or film conversations (Dyson, 2003). In addition, children make their own texts and artefacts based on popular culture which according to Rowsell and Pahl (2007), are linked to young people's identities, experiences and preferences (*sedimented identities*) . Vasquez's (2003) nephew, a keen Pokémon card player, redesigned his own Pokémon characters on cards. He both tried to make them look as faultless as possible and gave them distinctive identities. In

Willett (2005) a nine-year-old boy named Oyvid created a story named "*The Baddies*". His story's characters were a mixture of superheroes retrieved from different sources and media forms. All these examples show that children's occupation with popular culture texts is in fact a successful and fruitful negotiation. During this negotiation children are able to show attachment for certain popular culture texts or symbols, detest others, make decisions, give suggestions, design texts or icons and redesign new ones.

Due to the local and short-lived nature of popular culture, it is impractical to give a specific list of today's children's popular culture preferences and activities. Morrell (2007) talks about the "heterogeneity of youth popular culture" (p. 249). As Marsh (2003) describes this heterogeneity, in many communities the list of popular culture images or items children encounter might be very small, produced within the community, adapted from adults' popular culture products or even shared with adults and not related to images and icons originating in television or the movies (p. 113).

NEW LITERACIES AND POPULAR CULTURE

A correlation between the new literacies and popular culture is stressed in the literature. Commeyras (2001) talks about the 'ubiquity of reading': reading and literacy is everywhere and not only in books. Apart from language our world is dominated by signs, images, sounds, symbols and objects (Vasquez, 2003, p. 124) that humans frequently use in order to understand or represent their ideas, thoughts and experiences, and to become self-assured learners (Willett, 2005, p. 148). Popular culture texts and text sources, like graffiti, instant messages, video games, comics, fan-fiction, and web pages, are in fact places where literacy and literacy practices are present. Morrell (2002) sees popular culture as an excellent mode through which students can gain new literacy skills (p. 72). This is due to the fact that popular culture texts and forms—like "images, words, actions,

symbols, artifacts"—(Vasquez, 2003, p. 123) contain the new literacies which are part of our lives and are used by contemporary people in order to communicate with others, understand their world and learn new things (Vasquez, 2003; Willet, 2005).

DILEMMAS AND CONCERNS ABOUT POPULAR CULTURE

Snaevarr (2007) claims that popular culture is a major threat to high culture and civilization, book reading and social life (p. 5–9). He believes that the involvement of people with popular culture is the reason why contemporary societies witness a decrease in the number of people interested in literature (p. 5), theatre (p. 8), classical music (p. 7) and "serious" books (p. 7) and at the same time an increase in the number of children facing health problems (due to less exercise and a passive lifestyle of watching television or playing video games) and learning difficulties (p. 6). Luke and Luke (2001) recite the often heard accusation that video games are the reason why young people develop both physical and emotional problems (p. 102). They, as well as Gee (2007), defend video games by illustrating the skills required for playing a video game as significant and complex.

Lewis (1998) describes the source of people's concerns with popular culture to be its association with profit and consumerism (p. 118). As Dolby (2003) outlines, the producers of popular culture are driven by profit-making interests whose major goal is to satisfy as large a number of consumers as possible by creating ideas allied with contemporary people's wishes, hopes, and dreams. For example, manufactures have exploited the appeal that films, television stories and tales have on young people by producing items based on favourite characters (Marsh, 2003) like "*The Little Princesses*" of Disney, which made a profit of four billion USA dollars from around the world in 2007 (Wohlwend, 2009). "*The Little Princesses*" collections included

"films, DVDs, toys, fast-food meals, music CDs, books, interactive webpages, video games, costumes, clothing, bed linens, school supplies, makeup kits, and even Cinderella cleaning supplies" (Iger, 2006; Noon, 2005 in Wohlwend, 2009, p. 57). That is why Buckingham (2000 in Arthur, 2005) sees the border lines that separate "information, entertainment and advertisement" within children's popular culture to be unclear (p. 171). In this indistinct environment where consumerism meets culture and enjoyment children and their families are mainly viewed as consumers, something which they are usually not aware of.

People are also concerned with the violence that is evident in popular culture texts. Many of them believe that children's aggressive behaviour and tendency to use violence to be due to the existence of violence in films and video games (Willett, 2005, p. 146). Adults also have feelings of uneasiness because of the ways gender roles and people who belong to minority groups are presented (Arthur, 2005, p. 171–172). In popular culture texts, male characters mostly appear as warriors, fighters and superheroes and as being braver, cleverer, stronger, more autonomous than women characters (Arthur, 2005, p. 172). In addition people of colour or members of minority groups are repeatedly omitted from the media (Arthur, 2005, p. 171).

Adults also express concerns over the presence of negative role models in popular culture. They are sceptical of the popular culture texts (like films, television programs, commercials, and songs) where smoking, drinking and drug use appear as common and ordinary forms of behaviour (Williams, 2007, p. 680). Moreover, movies, magazines, video clips, TV shows and the world of fashion reproduce unrealistic images of women and their bodies (Williams, 2007, p. 680). Moreover, age appropriateness is an issue that raises feelings of discomfort over the use of popular culture by children. For example, in Gainer (2007) Sam's (his ten-year-old niece) parents are wondering whether she is very young to listen to "sexually explicit lyrics in popular music" (p. 106).

POPULAR CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

Alvermann and Xu (2003) suggest "Four approaches to using popular culture in the classroom" (p. 147) curriculum. As the authors stress, even though they are more in favour of the fourth approach, these approaches are not "an island unto itself" (p. 154) and that is why educators can choose one or the other according to the objectives of the lesson, or the ethos of the school.

THE FIRST APPROACH

The first approach is related to the disallowance of popular culture to enter the classroom walls. Even though popular culture appears to have an integral part in children's and adolescents' home lives and the majority of children enter schools with a plethora of words, symbols and practises (in other words, knowledge) derived from their encounters with popular culture forms (which are evident in their home and community experiences) (Dyson, 2001; Millard, 1997 in Marsh, 1999b), popular culture (or particular forms of it) is very often banned in the classroom. Within the relevant literature this phenomenon is related to a number of perceptions, concerns, ideas and long standing beliefs that those responsible for the education of young people (educational authorities, school managerial groups, teachers and parents) have in relation to popular culture.

Callahan and Low (2004) see the uncertain and debatable contents and cultural values of popular culture texts as a major banning factor (p. 52). According to Dyson (1998), children are attracted and charmed by popular culture images and icons for the same reasons that parents and teachers are not pleased with them. Popular culture images and icons introduce and

highlight "dominant desires and pleasures" like strength (physical or social), beauty (mostly physical), success and wealth (Dyson, 2003, p. 333). In Green et al.'s (1998) research project, the teachers criticized the individualistic nature of the electronic media (like games) and the fact that their students spent less time on reading. Electronic games were also rejected by the teachers in the research project conducted by Sanger et al. (1997). Those teachers not only expressed doubts and oppositions related to the educational potentials of games but they also excluded games magazines from their classrooms without getting familiar with the content of these magazines or becoming informed about their prospective advantages (p. 39).

In addition, Marsh (1999a, 1999b, 2006) and Lambirth and Goouch (2006) consider the reason for the exclusion of popular culture from educational premises to be the tendency of the classroom and school curriculums (formal and hidden) to give more weight to the culture (ways of living, behaviours, ideas and customs) of the leading classes of a society while excluding the cultures (like popular culture) and literacy practices of other societal groups. As a consequence, the "cultural capital" of many children does not meet the cultural demands of school, thus leading very often to school underachievement (Dumais, 2002, p. 45).

The ephemeral characteristic of popular culture (Marsh, 2006, p. 168; Marsh and Millard, 2000, p. 188) is very often criticized by teachers who see it as an unstable curriculum means. The popular culture texts that a teacher used in her/his classroom last year may not be possibly used the next year as they may not be among the experiences of this year's students. If curriculum is viewed as an end product or a set of teaching goals, lesson plans, methods, texts, textbooks and predesigned teaching materials then this position is correct. However, curriculum cannot and should not be reduced to the above. Curriculum emphasises the process and not the final product. According to Kincheloe (1998), curriculum is: "an active process … a holistic

life experience, the journey of becoming a self-aware subject capable of shaping his or her life path" (p. 129). The experiences and identities teachers and students bring to the classroom are of major importance for the learning process.

Luke and Luke (2001) believe that teachers' concerns and feelings of uneasiness in relation to popular culture in the classroom cannot be reduced to the anxieties they have in relation to its negative connotations and characteristics such as low culture, merchandised nature, violence, sexism, biased gender representation and others. According to them, these feelings are basically due to the deficiency teachers feel in relation to technology that is so evident in popular culture compared to their students, and at the same time their inability to "keep up" with the technological skills children continuously develop (p. 103). Luke and Luke (2001) call teachers and parents "outsiders" to children's "exclusive community, anti-language, symbol systems and frames of reference" (p. 103). Adults most of the time do not feel comfortable in a world where children are the skilled and experienced ones (Luke and Luke, 2001, p. 104). It can be argued that this phenomenon relates more to older teachers whose life history and educational background is foreign to today's children's life and experiences. However, as Callahan and Low (2004) point out, even the most "hip" and young teachers might feel remote and threatened in relation to popular culture due to their inability to keep up with the changes that occur in technology and in their student's lives (p. 52).

THE SECOND APPROACH

Alvermann and Xu (2003) claim that the second approach to the use of popular culture has as its main and only aim the critical analysis of culture forms. Based on this approach students are taught by their teachers how to become keen "reader[s], viewer[s], [and] listener[s]" who are not deceived or

manipulated by popular culture texts (p. 147). When this second approach is used in the classroom the pleasure that popular culture gives to children and adolescents is ignored. That is why Gainer (2007) calls this approach an "adult-centered-critique" that it is far removed from young people's mentality and desires (p. 112-113). Dolby (2003) very brilliantly states: "... it is unrealistic to expect that youth will reject popular culture because of its commercial nature, or its potentially racist, sexist, violent or homophobic content." (p. 264).

This approach is influenced by the belief of a number of sociologists and educators that young (as well as older) consumers of popular culture are passive (Kellner 1991, 1995 cited in Knobel, 1999). However, research projects have shown the opposite. Knobel (1999) observed Layla and her friends (a group of teenage girls) and found out that even though popular culture (like television, radio, movies and magazines) was part of their everyday life routines, they were not passive consumers and reproducers of the information they acquired. They were in fact actively revising and commenting on it in order to serve their own needs and wishes. Buckingham's (1990, 1993 cited in Marsh 1999a) research projects on the way children interact with television have shown that young people are well-informed and highly critical of media texts. In a similar vein, Rodriguez (1999 cited in Marsh 2003) observed three Dominican pre-school children and discovered that they were frequently raising questions and comments while they were watching television. In another relevant research Dyson (2003) observed a group of first graders and their teacher Rita, who had a permeable attitude towards her students' popular culture in the classroom curriculum. Dyson (2003) found out that during their playing, singing, and role-playing time Rita's students were not passively grasping the popular culture material but were using this material in a constructive way (p, 344). Maybin (2014) recorded "two unofficial reading activities" of popular culture texts that a group of children in a late primary classroom did (p. 59). The

analysis showed that students were using their emotionality, creativity and critical competencies to comprehend the provided texts (Maybin, 2014, p. 62). Even though this comprehension was in line with both the PIRLS test and the official curriculum, children's unofficial readings were more creative and communicative than their readings of canonical school texts.

THE THIRD APPROACH

The third approach emphasises the enjoyment and pleasure children receive and experience when dealing with popular culture and neglects the necessity of critically analysing it (Alvermann and Xu, 2003, p. 148). Teachers who view popular culture as a way to create happiness and enjoyment in their classrooms do not offer their students the prospect to develop their critical alertness as they do not give them the opportunity to ask themselves and discuss with others the impact of popular culture texts and ideas on themselves as well as their feelings and experiences related to particular popular culture forms (Alvermann and Xu, 2003, p. 148). According to Callahan and Low (2004) very often the pleasure that students experience with popular culture is used by teachers as a joyful way to start the lesson in order to move later on into something they perceive as more educationally important and significant (p. 57). The majority of the student teachers that participated in Marsh's (2006) research project expressed positive feelings in relation to popular culture as a motivation enhancer (p. 168). However, none of them viewed popular culture as a proper valuable literacy practice for the development of pupils' critical literacy competences (Marsh, 2006, p. 168).

The popularity of popular culture among youngsters is very often viewed by teachers and researchers—even those who do not believe that the study of popular culture is a useful literacy practice in itself—as an excellent way to enhance motivation (Marsh, 2006, p. 168). Lambirth and Goouch (2006) list

eight features as motivating factors for engaging with writing. The sixth factor on their list is "freedom to use cultural connections" (p. 146). In this case, children's culture is, among other things, their popular culture. Marsh (1999b) states that motivation and more specifically 'intrinsic motivation'— the motivation that is related to personal likes and interests originating from everyday lives—is vital to successful learning (para. 7). When popular culture is used in the classroom it "touches the lives of students" (Cheung, 2001, p. 58) as they are engaged in something which they enjoy, comprehend and are familiar with that leads to learning development and academic achievement (Parry, 2014, p. 14). Lesley (2008) describes her experiences with a literacy group of six at-risk adolescents in her attempt to help them achieve academically. She came to the conclusion that her participants' critical involvement in the group discussions that led to constructive learning outcomes occurred only when they were presented with activities related to popular culture and the media reflecting their preferences and interests (p. 187).

An example of the motivation that is evident when popular culture is used in the classroom is provided by Marsh (1999a, 1999b). In her research project titled 'Teletubby Tales' (Marsh 1999b) (based on 'Teletubbies', *a* well known BBC children's television program) Marsh made a 'Teletubby custard cream' with a group of pre-school children. To their teachers' surprise even children who were not usually fascinated with literacy activities, were very much interested in writing their own recipe motivated by the 'Teletubbies' activities. In a second project, Marsh (1999a) put a Batman and Batwoman cave in a nursery classroom. She enriched the cave with literacy material like pens, pencils, notebooks, paper, a notice board for messages, a computer and two diaries. The popular culture symbols of Batman and Batwoman not only motivated the children to engage in literacy activities (like writing notes, messages, and journal entries) but also helped them realise the importance and the many different purposes of reading and writing in our daily life (p. 126).

THE FOURTH APPROACH
(A CRITICAL LITERACY PERSPECTIVE)

Alvermann and Xu's (2003) fourth approach reflects a critical and reflexive attitude towards popular culture texts while achieving an equilibrium between pleasure and critical analysis (p. 147–148). As Alvermann and Xu point out, popular culture texts are an efficient way to enhance student's critical awareness (p. 152). Similarly, Morrell (2002) and Stevens (2001) believe that when popular culture is presented in the classroom then the teaching process can be best approached from a critical literacy perspective. Morrell (2002) articulates the previous belief with the following words: "Any pedagogy of popular culture has to be a critical pedagogy where students and teachers learn from and with one another while engaging in authentic dialogue that is centred on their experiences" (p. 73).

The ability of popular culture to promote the critical literacy development of students is related to a number of reasons. Firstly, educators and scholars recognise children's great familiarity with popular culture texts and forms (Marsh, 2003, p. 114). Morrell (2000) portrays the introduction of popular culture texts in the literacy curriculum as an approach to help students "tap into their huge reservoirs of [prior] knowledge" in order to make connections between the things they already know with new knowledge (p. 29). Willet (2005) moves a step further when she claims that by allowing the use of popular culture texts and icons during the teaching/learning process, children can "tap into sources that are meaningful and important ones that children can feel confident to discuss" (p. 148).

In the diverse and challenging settings of contemporary classrooms attempts need to be made so that every child feels welcomed and is provided with opportunities for educational achievement (Morrell, 2002, p. 72; Morrell and

Andrade-Duncan, 2005, p. 248). Popular culture has the potential to be used for the promotion of both "academic and critical literacies" due to its acceptance and appeal by the majority of the classroom population (Morrell, 2002, p. 72). Dolby (2003) sees popular culture as "a social glue" that brings people together due to common interests, knowledge and understanding (p. 259). Marsh (1999a) characterises popular culture use in the curriculum as "one of the first hooks" where children who belong to minority groups or culturally and linguistically different environments "can hang on", feel welcomed and encouraged to participate in classroom activities (p.127). Moreover, Black (2010) sees the critical analysis of popular culture and media as an important skill for non-native students as they very often draw heavily on the life style and ways of talking illustrated in popular culture in their attempts to develop acceptable identities in their new life context (p. 75–76).

Due to the existence of negative social issues (like sexism, racism, violence and consumerism) in popular culture, teachers very often develop negative feelings towards its inclusion in the classroom. However, when these issues are examined within a critical literacy curriculum with the use of popular culture texts, children use their keen knowledge of popular culture texts (Marsh, 2003, p. 117; Morrell, 2002, p. 74) and their confidence in discussing issues relevant to them (Willett, 2005, p. 143). As a consequence, children are helped to look at socially perceived problematic issues from different perspectives and angles (Vasquez, 2005, p. 205), develop their abilities as critical thinkers and writers (Arthur, 2005, p. 168; Schmier, 2014, p. 45), and even use their writings and actions to bring social change in a way that is natural and meaningful to them (Morrell, 2007; Schmier, 2014, p. 45).

In a critical literacy curriculum that includes the use of popular culture, children are working with familiar texts and images that make the introduction of critical literacy unproblematic as the age of the children is of

no significance. Children are treated with respect and are viewed as individuals with potentials no matter how old they are (Comber, 1999, para. 11). Morrell (2000, 2002) describes how he helped his 12th grade at-risk students develop a critical understanding of colonial texts (that are part of the school's official curriculum) by incorporating in his literacy lessons elements of popular culture (like music and movies). In one of the critical literacy units he designed, the adolescents were introduced to "*The Odyssey*" by Homer and the film "*The Godfather*" by Ford Coppola. As Morrell says, the film was a starting point that both motivated his students and helped them critically analyse both texts by having their beliefs, values, experiences, prior knowledge and familiarity with popular culture forms as their guide (Morrell, 2002, p. 75–76). By using group work, discussions, and presentations students looked at social phenomena in a way that would have been very difficult if popular culture was omitted.

Popular culture consists of a vast amount of textual resources. Sanford and Madill (2007, p. 452) and Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006, p. 48) stress the ability of popular culture visual texts to be an effective medium for a critical literacy curriculum related to the attributes that constitute them like colours, shapes and sizes. Popular culture texts' inclusion in the literacy curriculum gives the opportunity to teachers to present their students with pleasurable and challenging activities (Dyson, 1998; p. 396) and extends literacy education outside traditional school print material like books and text-books (Alvermann and Xu, 2003; Morrell, 2007, p. 248). Moreover, popular culture in the classroom works as a springboard for the students in their attempts to produce a variety of texts that are closer to their own interests like films, songs, games and web pages (Morrell, 2007, p. 248). In their book titled *Literacy and Popular Culture*, Marsh and Millard (2000) give a plethora of examples on how popular culture can be used for critical literacy development in classrooms. They suggest among others the interpretation of the messages that appear on advertisements and product

packages, the examination of the production and representation of comics and the critical analysis of songs' lyrics.

TEACHER'S ROLE WHEN POPULAR CULTURE ENTERS THE CRITICAL LITERACY CURRICULUM

When popular culture enters the critical literacy curriculum, teachers have a critical role. Firstly, they need to employ an analytical approach (Comber, 2006) that is mostly accomplished through a close observation of the classroom events and linked to an awareness of the theoretical dimensions of literacy. Teachers need to be conscious of the ways literacy is different in comparison to how it was viewed in the past (Comber, 2006). Kim (2003) considers that the best way to develop this awareness is by providing teacher with concrete theoretical and instructional support through teacher training programs (p. 119).

Secondly, they need to be flexible and easily adjustable to educational changes. The ephemeral nature of popular culture needs this kind of flexibility and adjustment. Updated knowledge and on-going education should be their helpers on both their students' popular culture preferences and their own ability to critically examine the world around them. Moreover, teachers should be aware of the impact of popular culture in their own experiences and the reasons they enjoy its forms (Lewis, 1998, p. 119). This will assist them in the process of understanding and appreciating their students' feelings about their generation's popular culture.

In addition, teachers need to be open (Millard, 2003) and respectful towards their students' "social world" (Arthur, 2005, p. 179) that is constructed by their communities, families, cultures, lives, values, and interests (Morrell and Andrade-Duncan, 2005) as well as their understandings and capabilities.

Moreover, they should show respect for the connection between popular culture products and children's life and appreciation for popular culture texts per se. Realising and being aware that children obtain a great amount of experiences, knowledge and pleasure when they are dealing with popular culture is probably a starting point (Misson 1998 cited in Marsh, 2003, p. 120). Millard (2003) argues that only if children are provided with plenty of opportunities to have fun with popular culture, will they be able to effectively develop critical awareness (p. 8). That is why there is an interesting balance to be met in using popular culture and critical literacy together. Whilst the teacher aims to engage her/his classroom with popular culture texts and show appreciation for what her/his students enjoy, she/he should be careful not to destroy children's enjoyment and alienate them during critiquing the stereotypes and controversial issues in texts.

Dyson (2001) recognises two social spheres in every classroom: the official sphere (what the teacher brings to classroom) and the unofficial sphere (what the students bring to school from home) (p. 17). Teachers are expected to give their students the opportunity to illuminate this unofficial sphere and make it part of the classroom curriculum. However, this can only be done if educators re-evaluate what they have thought of as "standard" teaching practice (Marsh, 1999a, p. 118). Teachers should appreciate the importance of their pupils' out-of-school cultural preferences, values and interests (Morrell and Andrade-Duncan, 2005, p. 249) and provide them with the opportunities to adapt them into "meaningful tasks" in class (Millard, 2003, p. 6). Such a curriculum, that respects students' out-of-school experiences and knowledge and integrates them into the classroom activities is addressed by Dyson as a "permeable curriculum" (Dyson, 1993, para. 2). In such a curriculum children are the key players during the learning process as their textual and media resources choices and decisions are valued as of major importance. As Marsh (1999a) explains, contemporary children's choices are influenced by popular culture texts as these texts are "closer to their everyday lives than some of the other texts

they encounter on the nursery and classroom bookshelves" (p. 119). The capability of the "permeable curriculum" to view children as decision makers and in addition as people responsible for their lives and learning reminds us the objectives of critical literacy education (that have been mentioned earlier) and especially the viewing of children as social change factors (Flint, 2000, p. 30–31).

Hicks (2001) suggests that it is important for schools to adopt "hybrid pedagogical spaces" in which learners' experiences and interests are implemented within the classroom curriculum (p. 147). Moje et al (2004) call these hybrid spaces "third spaces". These hybrid spaces are constructed when people's experiences and abilities gained from their interactions with family, peers, or other community members (first space) are combined with skills and understandings acquired from official bodies like school, work, and the church (second space). Millard (2003) calls this 'fusion' of students' "out-of-school interests" (p. 6) into the classroom practices and requirements a "transformative pedagogy of literacy fusion" – that she characterises as a delicious and nutritious "diet" for the learning process (p.8).

In the final part of this chapter I have illustrated the concept of popular culture through an analysis of its definition and characteristics and its connection to the new perspectives of literacy. Great value has been given to the introduction of popular culture in the class and the central and critical role of the classroom teacher when critical literacy development is promoted through popular culture texts and icons within schools and classrooms. The next chapter of this thesis describes the methodological issues related to this research project.

CHAPTER THREE

The aim of this chapter is to display the methodological issues raised from and related to this highly practical classroom research. Firstly, I offer a very brief summary of **the context of this research project** as well as an outline of its main aim and its research questions. An analysis of the major **methodological issues** related to the present research project follows. This analysis includes an examination of the research approach, methodology, and methods and the data analysis approach with reference to relevant literature. In addition, I give a portrayal of my positionality and a selection of my experiences and views in relation to education and schooling in an attempt to provide the readers of this thesis with my values and beliefs that influenced my methodological decisions.

THE CONTEXT OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

In the 2011–2012 academic year a new curriculum was introduced in the Cypriot Educational System. It was fully implemented in the 2012–2013 academic year, with in-service training sessions being provided to teachers during the 2011–2012 academic year in an attempt to help them understand the aspects of the new curriculum. The new feature that is included in the new literacy curriculum is the concept of 'critical literacy'. Critical literacy, as described in my literature review chapter, can be very briefly described as the ability of human beings to examine the origins, operation, effects, and outcomes of a text as well as the "power relations" that are present within

the text under investigation based on the values, beliefs and prior knowledge of the reader (Morrell, 2007, p. 237).

The relevant literature describes the introduction of critical literacy in classrooms through the examination of a big range of texts and in relation to a variety of topics and techniques. The introduction of critical literacy through popular culture texts within educational institutions (Morrell, 2002; Sanford and Madill, 2007; Stevens, 2001) and the encouraging outcomes of such an introduction have been stressed by teachers and scholars (Alvermann and Xu, 2003; Hicks, 2001; Marsh, 2003; Millard, 2003; Moje et al, 2004; Morrell, 2000, 2002, 2007; Stevens, 2001; Vasquez, 2003; 2005; Willett, 2005).

Popular culture texts are liked and favoured by the majority of the Cypriot population in contexts other than schools and classrooms. In Cyprus, popular culture is associated with low culture, the culture of the not-well educated people. In Cypriot schools, literature and music affiliated with high culture are promoted and cherished. Popular culture is believed to be incompatible with the traditions and ethos of the Cypriot Education and its institutions. As a consequence, Cypriot schools do not allow popular culture to get inside its premises and to be included in either the official or even the hidden curriculum.

Having as my starting point, the views that appear in relevant literature which stress the effectiveness and benefits of the inclusion of popular culture within the critical literacy curriculum I conducted a project on the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture texts in my third grade primary school classroom in a rural area in Cyprus in the academic year 2012–2013. For the implementation of this research project, I acquired ethical approval from the University of Sheffield (see appendix 1) and permission from the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (Educational Research Sector) (see appendix 2). I designed this

research project with an action research methodology and a qualitative research approach. I organised an *Introductory Unit* and two critical literacy units based on popular culture texts (*Unit One* and *Unit Two*) and then introduced these to my 8–9-year-old students who had previously chosen the topics based on their personal preferences and likes. All three units were implemented within fifty-five teaching periods on the basis of 'authentic' classroom circumstances, existing classroom organisation and accessible classroom resources. The project lasted four months (January 2013 – April 2013) and twenty-six participants contributed to the completion of it.

The main aim of the *Introductory Unit* was to explicitly introduce to my students the meaning of texts, the roles of the sender and receiver of a text and the ways a text can be examined (possible questions that can be asked). *Unit One* was based on *"The little chick cheep"*—a very popular song among Cypriot children. Our classroom discussions and activities revealed the consumerist side of popular culture. *Unit Two* gave us the opportunity to examine gender stereotypes in sports. A day by day description of the *Introductory Unit*, *Unit One* and *Unit Two* can be found in appendices 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

THE MAIN AIM AND THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

During the design process of my research project, I was not interested in seeing if the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture texts in primary years is indeed beneficial. Nor was I concerned with finding an appropriate approach through which young children can develop their critical literacy skills. I assumed the benefits of the introduction of critical literacy within the primary classroom and the use of popular culture in the critical literacy curriculum as a clear starting point because of the relevant literature I had read and the endorsement from the Cypriot Ministry of Education and

Culture and reflected in the '*Modern Greek Language Curriculum*'. My main aim was to focus on the issues and dilemmas that arise when popular culture enters a Cypriot primary classroom in order to promote critical literacy development. This can be best expressed through the main research question of this project:

❖ What are the issues and dilemmas that arise when critical literacy is taught through popular culture in the context of Cypriot primary schools?

In addition to the main question four supplementary questions guided me through the research project:

❖ What are the children's perceptions when critical literacy through popular culture enters their classroom literacy curriculum?
❖ What are the teacher's skills, feelings, and understandings when critical literacy and popular culture are introduced in the classroom?
❖ What feelings and opinions do parents have when popular culture and critical literacy are employed in their children's classroom?
❖ What are the headteacher's and the school inspector's views and roles when critical literacy and popular culture are used in a primary classroom?

THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The research participants were my fifteen third grade primary students, eight parents (six mothers and two fathers), the school headteacher, the school inspector and I (the classroom teacher). My choice to include each group in my project reflected my research questions and was influenced by a number of factors.

I wanted to have my young students as one of my research participant groups as I am aware that children are a "muted" group of people within conventional research projects (Niemi, Heikkinen and Kannas, 2010, p. 137). Their voice is very often absent from research projects. Moreover within schools we witness children being detached from instructional decisions in relation to their education. However being in classrooms for more than 20 years I have developed the belief that children are able to actively take part in both the construction of their classroom curriculum and research projects related to their lives and cultures (e.g. Marsh, 2012). I was convinced that my students' involvement in this project would have enriched the outcomes of this project.

Parents were chosen as the second research participants group. Parents often participate in projects that examine their children's home or school experiences and learning outcomes. As such, asking my classroom's parents to take part in my research project would not be considered so unusual. However if we locate ourselves in the Cypriot context, asking parents to express themselves in relation to their children's classroom activities can be perceived as a courageous decision. Cypriots are very interested in their children's schooling. However, based on personal experiences, this interest is very often perceived by teachers as synonymous to negative involvement and interference. That is why Cypriot parents are very often excluded from the decisions taken within school communities. By asking parents to participate in this project, I was giving them the opportunity to both evaluate and influence their children's formal education.

The school headteacher, the school inspector and the classroom teacher were also participants in this research project. All three participants are interested in the design of classroom activities and the learning outcomes of these activities. Their involvement in this project was vital because it provided valuable insides in relation to the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture in a third grade primary classroom.

ACQUIRING CONSENT FROM THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Approaching my research participants was a three step process. Firstly, in September 2012 I talked to my school's headteacher about my research project as well as about my wish to have a short meeting with him and the school inspector in order to inform them and ask them to participate. The school headteacher had arranged a meeting for the day of the first visit of the school inspector to my school. During that meeting, I presented my project through a poster I prepared and then I gave them a written description of it. I also invited them to participate by taking part in an interview meeting. They were very positive and instructed me to arrange an interview appointment with them in a few months time. The consent forms were given to them in a later stage. On the same day, during the staff meeting I informed my colleagues about this research project explaining its topic, aims, participants and methods. I also reassured them that none of their actions or words would become part of the project's data without their permission.

Secondly, on the 5th October 2012 I had a two-hour meeting with the parents of my students. I hosted them in our school's computer lab where I gave them a two-part presentation. The first part was on the new Cypriot primary curriculum and the second part was an outline of this research project. The school headteacher attended this meeting and positively contributed to it through a brief analysis on the importance of critical literacy for the new generation. He talked about the great amount of texts that contemporary readers come across and the urgent need of literacy and language education to move beyond a superficial understanding or comprehension of texts. He stressed the duty of contemporary schools to help students develop their critical skills in order to analyse the messages that texts carry. He also pointed out the value of research projects within school premises. I have the feeling that the headteacher's contribution, a highly respected

individual, not only gave them a better understanding of what critical literacy was but also demonstrated his support for my research project. Before leaving, the parents were given an analytical description of this research project to take home study and decide whether they wanted to become research participants.

> *When parents left they seemed a bit puzzled. I was not in a position*
> *to say if they agree to participate or not. [...] It seems that I will have to*
> *change the topic of my research project!*
>
> *(T/RJW: 5/10/2013)*

A few days after the meeting with parents I talked to my students about the research project. They looked enthusiastic and eagerly wanted to know if other students would be participating as well. To my negative answer they appeared very happy, as if they were special. I gave each child three consent forms to take home. The first consent form was to be filled in and signed by the parents (in relation to their children's participation). The second one was to be filled in by the parents (in relation to their own participation) and the third one was to be filled in by the children themselves. I asked them to discuss with their parents the possibility of participating in the project and return the consent forms to me. All of my students returned their consent form with a positive reply fading away all the concerns I had in relation to the possibility that one or few of my students wouldn't like to participate in the project. In addition, eight parents decided to participate in my research and signed their consent forms.

In this first part of this chapter I have provided a brief description of the research context as well as the aims of this project. In the next part, I describe the methodological decisions I made (approach, methodology and methods) with references to relevant literature. My methodological decisions

were influenced by my life history, experiences and values that I also
illustrate within the following part.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

A strongly held opinion by many researchers and scholars is that
methodological decisions are significantly influenced by the researchers'
'ontological' and 'epistemological' assumptions (Sikes, 2004, p.18). Both
'*Epistemology*' and '*Ontology*' are of Greek origin. '*Epistemology*' has its
roots in the Greek word of "*épistème*" which literally translated means
'science'. '*Ontology*' originates from the word '*on*' ('*onta*' is the plural) that
can be very naively translated into life and living being. The ontological
values and beliefs held by a researcher are in fact transformed into
epistemological assumptions via the methodological decisions she/he makes
(Sikes, 2004, p. 18). That is, the researcher's choices (methodology,
approach, and methods) are influenced by the ideas, beliefs and views held
by each individual researcher correlated with the ways researchers
understand the notions of reality, knowledge, and truth as well as the nature
of human existence and its relation to the environment (Sikes, 2004, p. 18).
In addition to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of
researchers that influence their methodological decisions, relevant literature
points out that the researchers' abilities and skills (Greenbank, 2003, p. 273)
as well as their personal preferences (May, 2001, p. 49) play significant
roles.

The pre-mentioned issues have developed through the years into two
research approaches: the quantitative approach and the qualitative
approach. The quantitative approach is associated with the terms *positivism*

and *objective*, and the words: *scientific, reality and truth,* (Powell, Mihalas, Onwuegbuzie, Suldo and Daley, 2008). Social and educational researchers affiliated with the quantitative approach believe that scientific methods similar to those used in traditional science should be used (Powell et al., 2008). These include the provision of accurate and specific terminology, the existence of hypotheses and the analysis and presentation of research data through the use of numbers and statistical terms (Charles, 1995, p. 21; Pring, 2000, p. 248). In addition, quantitative researchers believe that that truth can only be discovered if their beliefs, views and values are isolated from the research process (Sarantakos, 1993 cited in Greenbank, 2003, p. 792).

The qualitative approach is associated with the terms *subjectivity* and *interpretivism* as well as with the words: *multiple realities, consensus, opinion and perception* (Powell et al., 2008). This approach strongly holds the belief "that there is no single, legitimate way to make sense of the world" (Eisner, 1992, p. 14) as experiences, values, beliefs and judgements are essential parts of any research process (May, 2001, p. 49). That is why qualitative researchers do not try to separate themselves from their research participants in order to accomplish objectivity (Greenbank, 2003, p. 793). The information provided by a qualitatively approached research is mostly descriptive and interpretative giving great importance to words.

Within the research community these two approaches are very often seen as two opposite stances as they find their roots in different epistemological paradigms (Howe, 2009, p. 768; Pring, 2000, p. 248). As a consequence many scholars show their preference and even devotion to either the quantitative or the qualitative methodology through their writings (Powell et Pring, 2000, p. 248). However there are others, like Charles (1995), who argue that even though this dichotomy is understandable it is at the same time false due to the fact that qualitative and quantitative approaches "sit at opposite ends of continuum" (p. 21). Hannon (2000) makes this assertion

clearer when he says: "I am unwilling to accept the implication that when I turn to quantitative methods I am no longer concerned with qualities" (p. 80). Pring (2000) moves a step further when he says that a "false dualism" exists in educational research and that the two approaches can actually assist each other by paying attention to the qualities that each approach carries (p.259).

A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

I have chosen the qualitative approach for my research project. I strongly believe that the verb 'chosen' used in the previous sentence is not the most appropriate. I am more than certain when I say that I did not choose the one or the other research approach. It is more of a preference for the one over to the other. This preference of mine is deeply rooted into who I am, as I have been formed through my experiences, my life history, my personality, my character and my values.

I am a Greek-Cypriot, a woman, a third-grade primary teacher, a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister. My life experiences and the influence of my culture have turned me into a person who strongly believes that nothing is stable and that everything can be seen differently if it is viewed from another angle or perspective. I also acknowledge the importance and value of each individual as an equal and valuable component of the society. That is why I am in favour of social equality, not in the sense of providing the same things to everybody but providing to every human being what she or he needs. My personal and professional life, my actions and my behaviour are guided and deeply affected by the concept of respect and appreciation of other humans and my environment. Trying to analyse the existence of these attributes I am aware that they are due to the fact that I was brought up in a very loving family that cared greatly not only about its members but also about other

community members who were in need. Both my parents carried out philanthropy in their community. My mother, for example, has been visiting the children's hospital in Nicosia every Friday afternoon with a group of friends for more than 25 years in order to offer coffee and cakes to the parents and relatives of the hospitalised children.

In addition to social equality, I am in favour of educational equality that promotes the right of each individual to have equal access to education. This is an aspect of my character influenced also by my family and experiences in relation to education. My father was an employee at the local telecommunications authority, now retired and my mother was and still is a housewife, even though she graduated from *Lykeio*[6] and was offered a place at a university, something that her family prohibited. Back in the late 1960's women were discouraged or at least not encouraged to participate and join Higher Education, an attitude that reflected and reinforced women's servile place in Cyprus society. However, my parents wanted their three daughters (me and my sisters) to study at a university. In those days, there was no university in Cyprus and there was a time when my father had to support three students in three different countries which meant working two jobs with my mother deciding to join him in the workforce for that period of time.

My family supported me financially and gave me the opportunity to gain experiences from different educational systems. I obtained a diploma in early childhood education from the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus, a BSc degree in elementary education from Northern Illinois University, USA and an MEd degree in Information Technology from The University of Sheffield in the UK. These experiences have turned me into a flexible and critical individual and a teacher open to suggestions and new ideas. Moreover I have developed the belief that schools are in fact complex settings as they very often present their students with learning experiences that are detached from their interests, wishes and abilities. That is why my main aim during the

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[6] *Lykeio* refers to the upper secondary education in Cyprus.

teaching and learning process has been to understand my students' wishes and abilities and to give them the opportunity to enjoy learning.

I love my job and every September, when schools open, I feel very lucky and blessed as I am doing a job that gives back to me so many wonderful experiences. I am not a strict or a tough teacher. Within my classroom being a high achiever or a low achiever is not taken into consideration. Every child is proud when she/he manages to accomplish something that was difficult for her/him before. I want my students to be in a position to be aware of their abilities. I also expect them to be respectful towards others and the environment. I try to show them the importance of helping and accepting others the way they are while at the same time getting into other people's shoes in order to understand their feelings. Very often other teachers say that I spoil my students. However, I know that what I am doing is in fact giving them the attention and love they need. I believe that being happy and secure at school is more important for children than learning. The children are aware of the loving and caring feelings I have for them. That is why they very often turn to me when they have difficulties either at home or with other teachers.

When I was a student at high school, I was a science major, as I was very good at mathematics and physics (areas most of the times associated with quantitative research approach). This continued through my undergraduate years as a student teacher in the USA. During my Master's degree studies in the UK I realised that people's behaviour, thoughts, values and abilities cannot be examined or reduced to numerical data. I also realised that the researcher's values inevitably influence her/his research procedure, options and decisions in relation to: the topic under examination, the approach, the methodology or the methods used (May, 2001, p. 50–51).

The previously mentioned sides of my personality reveal that I am an individual who is unwilling to research a group of people by examining their

ideas and experiences while their voices are muted and reduced into numbers and represented by statistical terms and graphs. I deeply understand and respect quantitative researchers' choices and actions as I know that they are also guided by their own personal values. I am not putting forward a claim for the rightness of qualitative over quantitative research methodology. I am making a claim for the rightness of this research approach for myself based on my values as well as the rightness of qualitative methodology for this particular research project and its goals.

My research project was conducted in a classroom (a natural real life environment) while lessons were carried out and a plethora of issues arose besides my concerns related to the implementation of this research project. Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2007) use the word 'ideal' when they describe the correlation between the qualitative approach and natural research environments (p.137). This is supported by the ability of qualitative approach to make visible the ways research participants understand and interpret their experiences and perceptions within the context or society in general (Greig et al., 2007, p. 136). My participants' emotions, feelings and viewpoints are respected and presented as a central component of this project. In addition to the capacity of qualitative approach to examine natural settings, it is also successful when used in research projects where the participants are children (Greig et al., 2007, p. 136–137). Working with children in a research project based on a qualitative approach gives the opportunity to researchers to "capture" the perceptions and experiences (Greig et al., 2007, p.138) of children through their words, actions and artefacts, something that cannot be possibly revealed through numbers, statistics and graphs. By having a qualitative approach for my project I am giving the opportunity to children and their parents to have a voice that is listened to and appreciated (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Lastly my own perceptions, feelings, ideas and thoughts are going to be part of this project and this can be best achieved by the adoption of a qualitative approach (May, 2001, p. 59).

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This project was based on an action research methodology. Action research is very often described as "practitioner based research" (McNiff, 2002, para. 16) as it is mostly conducted by practitioners who are interested in their own practice or in solving a practical problem/question within their own working place. The main aim of an action research process is the formation of change not only in the way practitioners do things during the teaching-learning process but also in the way they view their practices and their working environment (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch and Somekh, 2008; Kemmis, 2010, 2009; McNiff, 2002). Kemmis (2009) very vividly describes action research as the transformation of three things: "what we do… what we think and say, … [how] we relate to others and things and circumstances around us" (p. 463).

Kemmis (2010) moves a step further and claims that the main objective of action research is to help those conducting an action research project to live a better life, a life that is inspired by wisdom and experience, an idea that is related to the Aristotelian concept of '*phronēsis*' (p. 419). According to Aristotle, by living the right way ('*praxis*'), reflecting on these experiences and acquiring the appropriate knowledge people gain the wisdom to live well and operate wisely (*phronēsis*) (Kemmis, 2010, p. 419). So '*phronēsis*' is accomplished by *'praxis'* and not the other way round. If action research and its aims are connected with these Aristotelian ideas then we can view action research as the act of *'praxis'* and *'phronēsis'* as its outcomes. The ability of action research to promote a self-reflexive process not only on behalf of the researcher but also on behalf of the rest of the participants involved in the process is widely stressed in literature (McNiff, 2002; Niemi et al., 2010). Participants become conscious and at the same time answer questions related to the values that inform their life while at the same time they think critically and deeply about their own position in relation to the setting under investigation (McNiff, 2002, para. 39).

According to Kemmis (2010) this line of thought makes us realise how different action research is in relation to other research approaches since '*phronēsis*' is not usually considered as the product of research (p. 422). A traditional research project is conducted in order to add an amount of knowledge to existing knowledge and not to help the researcher and the research participants learn how to live a better social, personal or working life.

In addition to the pre-mentioned distinction that exists between action research methodology and traditional research, further differences can be noted. Firstly, action research projects do not begin with a hypothesis (McNiff, 2002, para. 10). Their starting point is either an idea or a suggestion or a thought that the researcher tries to investigate and find the best solution (McNiff, 2002, para. 10). Besides that, in traditional social research, researchers are interested in and as a consequence investigate the lives, actions, feeling, ideas and experiences of other people whereas in action research the investigation of the life, actions, feelings, ideas and experiences of the researcher are also under investigation. The voices of all the participants (researcher and research participants) are highly respected and valued as important aspects of an action research project (Niemi et al., 2010, p. 137).

Moreover, a complexity in relation to the process of action research is presented by action research scholars. Altrichter et al. (2008) stress the idea that action research should not be viewed as a step-by-step method (p. 11). As long as action research investigates an ongoing practice, any action taken in relation to the research influences the practice and vice versa (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 11; McNiff, 2002). Therefore any suggested action research steps overlap or reappear during the research project. As an alternative, action research is described as a set of "many 'mini' action research cycles" (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 11), as "a spiral of cycles"

(Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerritt, 2002, p. 130) or as "a series of cycles" (McNiff, 2002, para. 30). As new subjects need to be examined, new action research circles appear. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988 cited in Altrichter et al., 2002, p. 130) portray each action research circle as a set of four phases: *planning, acting, observing, reflecting*. In an attempt to describe each action research circle McNiff (2002) states that action research "involves identifying a problematic issue, imagining a possible solution, trying it out, evaluating it … and changing practice in the light of the evaluation" (para. 22).

In the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) describe seven different action research approaches that are considered members of the big *'action research family'*. If I use their classification, my research project is a '*classroom action research*' project (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, p. 561).

Altrichter et al. (2008) give five aspects of classroom action research that distinguish it from other forms of action research (p. 13). The first is that classroom action research is designed and entirely carried out by people who are highly interested in what happens in a classroom (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 13). More often such research is conducted by a teacher wishing to either answer a question she/he has or improve her/his teaching practice, understanding, and/or classroom conditions (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005, p. 561). However it is not strange that others indirectly interested in the classroom work might be involved like pupils, parents, school headteachers, school inspectors and the local community within which the school is situated (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 13).

The second characteristic of classroom action research is that the starting point is a practical question (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 13). This question is very often related to the teaching and learning process and more specifically

to issues that arise in classrooms every day. An example can be an idea a teacher might have on a new teaching method and how to best implement it.

The compatibility of any action research project with the educational principles of the school is the third aspect of classroom action research (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 13). It is not expected by a teacher to work on a project that the school community feels it does not suit its ethos. Nevertheless, trials should be made on behalf of the teachers who undertake such projects to improve and further develop their classroom's conditions and give their students the opportunity to experience new learning opportunities (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 13).

Fourthly, an action research project can be put into practice with a plethora of research methods. This is an advantage that gives the teacher the opportunity to choose methods she/he feels more comfortable with and at the same time use as little financial resources as possible since teacher research projects are very often not funded and it is the teacher that incurs all the costs (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 13).

The last characteristic of classroom action research, as it is described by Altrichter et al. (2008), is the connection between reflection and action and how they affect each other during the whole research process, an aspect that has already been described in a previous paragraph of this section (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 14)..

RESEARCH METHODS

Trying to answer my research questions I used three research methods: journal writings (from parents and myself), interviews (with the headteacher, the school inspector and the parents) and transcripts of classroom discussions during the teaching-learning process.

Table 3.1: An outline of the obtained data.

RESEARCH METHOD/ DATA TYPE		QUANTITY OF THE DATA	TIME THE DATA WAS OBTAINED
Journal Writings	Teacher's Entries	Forty six entries	January - September 2013
	Parents' Entries	Thirty nine entries	January -April 2013
Interviews	Individual Interviews (School's Managerial Team)	One thirty-minute interview with each participant	2nd of August 2013 (School Inspector) 7th of September 2013 (School Headteacher)
	Focus Group Session (Parents)	One fifty-minute session	11th of April 2013
Classroom Discussions		Thirty five teaching days (two forty-minute teaching periods each day)	January - April 2013

JOURNAL WRITINGS

Many research projects conducted in schools and classrooms adopt ethnographic approaches and give detailed descriptions of the happenings in the context under investigation (Burgess, 1981, p. 75). As a consequence, journal entries are very often used by educational researchers in order to help them understand their own practice and values that influence their social and professional life (Jago, 2003; Zembylas, 2004) and even bring change to it (Holly, 1989) like in action research projects (Altrichter et al., 2008; Baumann and Duffy-Hester, 2000; Newbury, 2001). Moreover, researchers use students' journal writings in order to understand the learning process (Carlisle, 2011; Kostos and Shin, 2010) and to assess the learning outcomes (Dianovsky and Wink, 2012).

As a research method, journals are portrayed in a variety of ways. They are described as "a very powerful means" for collecting data (Holly 1989, p. 71), a "serious … source of data" (Janesick, 1999, p. 506–507) and a "central" (Newbury, 2001, abstract) element of the whole research process. Moreover, this research method is characterised as an "alive and well" method (Janesick, 1999, p. 511), meaning it is a well reputable and appreciated method among the research community mainly due to the acceptance of narratives (e.g. oral histories, stories, annals and chronicles, photographs, memory boxes) (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, 1999) and their wide use by researchers (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 3; Conle, 2001, p. 22).

In relation to the demands of this research method on the researcher, authors and scholars argue that it is a fairly easy and simple research method (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 15) while at the same time it is demanding and stressful as researchers (and/or research participants) are expected to be self motivated and "keep up with the demands of journal writing" (Janesick, 1999, p. 515) that are basically frequent and habitual writing.

Teacher's Journal Writings

Schatzman and Strauss (1973 cited in Newbury, 2001, para. 13) and Burgess (1981, p. 76–78) divide the context of a researchers' journal or diary into three categories. The first category is related to the descriptions of events and happenings during the research process; the second to the articulation of the researchers' feelings, thoughts and ideas in their attempt to create meaning and understand their experiences; and the third to the methods, approaches, steps and decisions made by the researcher in relation to the research project. Even though I have included all the three pre-mentioned categories of research notes within my journal, I have included a fourth category of notes in my journal. This was the articulation of choices and thoughts I made in relation to teaching while the project was carried out. My research project was extremely linked with my profession as a teacher. My choices as a teacher affected my research project outcomes and vice versa; this aspect of the project becomes clearer and more comprehensible later in this chapter.

Now, the inclusion of this additional aspect to my project confirms something that appears in the relevant literature: journal writings in teacher research projects appear to be used differently than in other disciplines. Altrichter et al. (2008) describe journal writing as a link that includes not only the decisions and experiences educators have in relation to their research project but also the choices and actions made by teacher researchers in relation to their profession within their educational settings (p. 17). Newbury (2001) uses a very vivid metaphor in his attempt to describe this function of the research journal. He says: "The research diary can be seen as a melting pot for all of the different ingredients of a research project – prior experience, observations, readings, ideas – and a means of capturing the resulting interplay of elements" (para. 7). Newbury (2001) also cites Schatzman and Strauss (1973, p. 105) who illustrate the research journal as "the vehicle for

ordered creativity" that is as a means of demonstrating and clarifying the decisions made and the actions taken by the researchers (para. 7).

In the process of analysing my feelings in relation to keeping a research journal, I realised that it was a very personal affair for two reasons. Firstly, the purchase of my research notebook and the decisions that influenced this purchase were driven by my own personal style, preferences and past experiences. When I was doing my Masters degree dissertation research project I used my journal entries as the major research method. At that time, an aspect that helped me stay motivated was the appearance of the research notebook, notwithstanding how naive this sounds. In order to choose a research notebook for this project, I visited three different bookstores. I wanted to purchase a very 'attractive' notebook, an aspect I valued a lot and turned out to be a positive and rewarding feature at the end. On the very first page of my journal I wrote:

> *Finally, I found you! You are so beautiful. I cannot wait writing in you!*
> *(T/RJW: 30/7/2012)*

Secondly, I have been treating the content of my journal with caution and confidentiality. I have not showed it to anyone and I do not intend to do so. Even though some parts of this journal are going to be used in this thesis, I am aware and concerned not to use any names or incidents that either identify people, events and places or cause offence to anyone or anything.

I preferred having a paper notebook instead of loose pieces of paper or an electronic device (like a computer) for a research journal. This decision was driven by a number of reasons basically related to my preferences and accessible resources. Firstly, I wanted to have my journal with me all the time and I thought that a paper notebook would have been quite handy and practical to carry around. A convenient alternative would have been the use of a computer or a tablet as it would have provided me with the opportunity

to have my research notes in an electronic format ready for data analysis and use in this thesis. However, I rejected this idea as I own a big and heavy laptop that is very inconvenient to carry around. In addition, my laptop's battery has not been working that functionally for a long time. So even if had had it with me I would have needed to locate a power supply to plug it in. Moreover, I see myself as an individual who values perfection and pays attention to detail. That is why I rejected the use of loose pieces of paper stuck in a file as I viewed it as a quite messy and less organised way of gathering my experiences and thoughts.

Every new journal entry was written on a new right-hand page of my research journal notebook and was marked with a date. The left pages were used for additional pieces of information, notes, supplementary thoughts and quotes from relevant literature. The left pages were also helpful during the data analysis process. It is important to mention at this point that a closer examination of my journal entries reveals that some incidents or situations were narrated with the use of more words and vivid description than others. I have the feeling that this phenomenon was related to my mood for writing. As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, journal writing as a research method is a very demanding process and in my case was not much different. The physical tiredness I very often experienced and the lack of time were factors that influenced negatively the quality of my entries.

During the first weeks of my research project I used to write every night before going to bed. However, by that time I had forgotten many details and I was less productive and less eager to write in my journal.

> *It is very difficult for me to write in my journal [...]. As I am teaching the whole day, I cannot remember the details of one particular lesson.*
> *(T/RJW: 4/2/2013)*

So, I made myself find time for writing soon after work. Very often, I used to write in the quiet and undisturbed environment of my car while I was waiting for my daughter to finish her afternoon activities. This appeared to be a very productive practice. I had my journal with me all the time for immediate access. Occasionally I wanted to write a thought or a comment but the timing was not that convenient (like in the middle of the night or while I was grocery shopping). However, I wrote in it any time I felt like it. This shows that my mental process was not confined within specific time limits.

I personally believe that a very important aspect of my research journal is the language I used for my journal entries. Narrating experiences and feelings in a foreign language was a challenging task. Even though I was aware that I could express myself better in Greek (my mother tongue) I decided to use English for my journal entries, as I knew that I should use English for writing up this thesis. There were times when the flow of my thoughts was interrupted due to lack of knowledge of a particular word or term. Instead of stopping and searching for the word either in a dictionary or a translator I used to continue writing having a word or even a phrase in Greek, which I translated in English at a later stage.

Parent Participants' Journal Writings

The written comments made by parent participants in the notebooks I provided for them were similar to the narrative manner of my journal entries. In these notebooks, parents articulated their experiences, ideas and feelings in relation to the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture in their children's classroom. Parents' entries were reflections of their casual and unstructured observations of their children at home, the after-school conversations between parents and children on classroom activities, and parents' readings of their children's critical literacy notebooks. Parents were expected to send me a note once every fortnight even though they were free

to send it sooner than that. During the first parents-teacher meeting, some parents informed me that they were feeling stressed to take part in this research project as this was their first time participating in such research. Trying to make them feel more comfortable and this experience a positive one I asked them to send anonymous notes to me as I wanted them to feel free to write either positive or negative comments. Moreover, I was not the person in charge of collecting the notes coming from the parents. There was a box in the classroom where the children used to put their parents' notes in it.

I used to read parents' notes whilst carrying out this research project. At the beginning, this action was mainly driven by my curiosity. However, I realised that reading these notes while the project was in progression and not at the end was beneficial and a significant part of my action research methodology. These notes were providing me with valuable pieces of information in relation to my teaching, my students' learning outcomes, the selected texts, the classroom activities, the classroom environment as well as ideas on how to move forward with the critical literacy units. In other words, they were a kind of feedback and at the same time a type of assessment.

In addition, reading parents' notes while the project was underway made me realise how difficult it can be for a teacher researcher to integrate into the research project the two identities of researcher and teacher. Equally challenging is managing the dilemmas and emotional complexities teachers go through when they do research within their own classrooms. These controversial feelings were exacerbated by the fact that some parents sent notes very rarely. Moreover, the notes parents sent in relation to *Unit One* were more than those relating to *Unit Two*. I strongly believe that the main reason for this was because the second unit was introduced in my classroom a few days after the '24th March 2013 Eurogroup actions'[7] that

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[7] For more information: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/9951858/Cyprus-bailout-timeline.html

had a major effect on the lives of Cypriots. After a lot of thinking driven by feelings of uneasiness I decided not to express my apprehension to any of the parents. I believed that doing so would have jeopardised the friendly and very important parent-teacher relationship. At that time, my identity as a teacher was stronger than my identity as a researcher, especially when I was at school. I honestly admit that I appeared more interested in my profession as a teacher than my role as a researcher interested in collecting adequate research data. My identity as a researcher was more dominant when I was at home and I was working for the research project or after the school year ended.

The Baumann and Duffy-Hester's (2000) analysis of 34 research projects conducted by teachers reveals the fact that teachers who conduct research in their classrooms first of all feel a teacher and then a researcher (p. 94). This is because teacher researchers live, work and are very much responsible for the learning experiences and well being of the pupils they have in their classrooms. Moreover, the pre-mentioned authors claim that teacher researchers cannot be viewed or considered as participant observers (Baumann and Duffy-Hester, 2000, p. 94). Participant observers are the researchers who gain access within a community in an attempt to observe it and produce a research report based on their observations.

What could have been very beneficial and rewarding for the parent participants was the exchange of letters between them and me. Even thought this is a feature I thought of putting into practice, I decided not. If I were to send them a letter back then anonymity would have been compromised and as a consequence they might have been restricted and unable to write their true feelings. In addition, I had a strong feeling that I could not handle such a time demanding activity. This research project required me to handle other time consuming activities like selecting popular culture texts for classroom use, designing lesson plans, translating and

transcribing classroom discussions, preparing the interviews and at the same time appointed with the duties of a full time teacher.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews appear to be an extensively used method for acquiring knowledge of human experiences, values and beliefs (May, 2001, p. 125). Interviews are used by a wide range of professionals like: "sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists, clinicians, administrators, politicians, pollsters and pundits" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 1–2). Interviewing is described as "a qualitative data-gathering technique" (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 703) and a "reliable research instrument giving valid data" (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997, p. 304).

Very often researchers and scholars categorise interviews based on the amount of structure they carry (May, 2001; Opie, 2004; Wellington, 1996). The first type is called a 'structured interview' and it can be described as an interview with pre-determined questions (Wellington, 1996, p. 26). The interviewer is not allowed to diverge from the order of the questions, the phrases or the words used (Wellington, 1996, p, 26). If the interviewer interviews more than one person she/he is expected to do all the interviews in the same way. The second type of interviews is the 'semi-structured interviews'. Its main characteristics are the flexible schedule in relation to the order and the wording of the questions as well as the ability of the interviewer to ask additional questions (Wellington, 1996, p, 26). Wellington (1996) calls semi-structured interviews as "a compromise" between 'structured interviews' and 'unstructured interviews' (p. 26). 'Unstructured interviews' are the third and last type of interview. They are very often considered as the "the most valuable" of the three types (Wellington, 1996, p. 27) because they can provide the researcher with a great amount of data for analysis as the interviewees articulate their feelings, experiences, ideas,

thoughts and dreams freely (Opie, 2004, p. 118) without being constrained by a restricted array of questions (May, 2001, p. 124).

Interviews are either labelled as 'individual interviews' or as 'group interviews'. This distinction is driven by the number of interviewees participating during an interview session. In an individual interview one interviewee is present whereas in a group interview many interviewees take part. Focus groups are similar to group interviews. May (2001) makes a distinction between a focus group and a group interview (p. 125). According to him, a group interview is the process whereby a group of people answers a number of questions raised by the researcher simultaneously and in turn. On the other hand, during a focus group session participants do not only answer the questions raised by the interviewer. They are also given the opportunity to talk to each other and take part in a conversation (May, 2001, p. 125). Nevertheless, nowadays all group interviews are addressed as focus groups even though the features of this method (e.g. the structure of the interview) vary (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 705).

The focus group method is presented with a number of advantages compared to individual interviews. It is portrayed as a method which produces a large amount of valuable and comprehensive data that is mainly the product of a shared experience as participants "jog each other's memories and thoughts" (Wellington, 1996, p. 30). In addition, people might be more reluctant to participate in an interview than a focus group (Wellington, 1996, p. 30). Being in a group of people they know or have common experiences with appears to be a stress-free experience (Wellington, 1996, p. 30).

In addition to the decisions on the interview type that researchers are expected to take, they are advised to be careful when they select the techniques they will employ in an attempt to decrease the biases, mistakes and problems that arise during an interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.

3). Oppenheim (1992) talks about the "hidden agenda" that every interviewer should have in order to make the interviewees say things they might not have said if they knew the questions in advance (p. 70). In addition to the techniques, relevant literature gives suggestions on the role the interviewer is expected to play during an interview, the skills and abilities that an interviewer is required to have or develop (Opie, 2004, p. 111) and finally the careful design of the interview questions (Kajornboon, 2005, para. 9).

Oppenheim (1992) talks about "interpersonal skills of a high order" and gives a practical list of these skills (p. 65). According to him, interviewers are mainly required "to maintain control of the interview, to probe gently but incisively and to present a measure of authority and an assurance of confidentiality" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 70). That is why, any interviewer's "tone of voice, pleasant and polite manner, deportment, choice of dress ... management of personal space ... acceptant and non-judgmental attitude and willingness to listen" are important (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 70). Kajornboon (2005) describes the interviewers' necessary abilities as fourfold: "an ability to listen … an ability to be non-judgmental … a good memory … an ability to think in his/her [interviewee's] feet" (para. 12). In a similar vein, Fontana and Frey (2005) describe a successful interviewer as a person who is "flexible, objective, empathetic, persuasive, [and] a good listener" (p. 704). However, many interviewers are more privileged than others not because of their skills or abilities but mainly because of the characteristics they possess which very often are beyond their control like gender, age, social, educational and cultural background, ethnic orientation and language accent (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 65).

Researchers who choose the focus group method are advised to pay attention to a number of issues raised during the research process that are not evident during an individual interview. Firstly, they should take care of the sitting arrangement as all research participants should have "eye contact" and their voices should be properly recorded (Wellington, 1996, p.

30). Secondly, interviewers should be in a position to avoid the domination of the group by a single participant or a small group of them with prober handling (Wellington, 1996, p. 30). They should encourage participants to express themselves freely and give all group members the opportunity to participate.

An issue of great importance for the interview process is the existence of rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees (May, 2001; Opie, 2004; Spradley, 1979). Spradley (1979) describes the concept of *'rapport'* as "a harmonious relationship" that derives from a sense of respect and "trust" between the interviewer and the interviewees (p. 78-79). Wellington (1996), keenly observes that even though establishing rapport is of great importance, its existence varies according to the ability of the researcher to create it, the interviewees' position and interest in the research topic and finally the life history and experiences of both the interviewer and the interviewees (p. 28). May's (2001) advice to interviewers who want to develop rapport is to put themselves in the position of the interviewees (p. 130).

Reflexivity appears to be of great importance during the whole interview process. According to Opie (2004), researchers who want to use interviews as a research method should think critically and reflexively whether they are capable of undertaking such a task or as he very vividly says "[to] act as an interviewer" (Opie, 2004, p. 112). Moreover, Holstein and Gubrium (1995 in Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 697) advise researchers to think critically about the outcomes and importance of an interview, the circumstances under which it was conducted, and how differently the whole process would have been if the context was different. Similarly, Scheurich (1995) claims that an interview and its outcomes are influenced by and depend upon the place, time, and conditions under which it was conducted (p. 240). That is, if an interviewer addressed the same questions to an interviewee at a different time and place the information obtained would have been different. During

the representation of the data produced from an interview, Fontana and Frey (2005) stress that the researchers should confess the problems and difficulties they encountered in an attempt to show their audience the complexities of interviewing as a research method (p. 714).

There are a number of conceptions, trends, approaches and theories in relation to interviewing and its various aspects. Two approaches that have been highly influential for this research project are the *empathetic interview approach* (Fontana and Frey, 2005) and the *active interview* (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995).

The *empathetic interview approach* can be best understood if we think of interviewers who take an ethical standpoint towards the interviewees and as a consequence are highly concerned with the ethical dilemmas raised during the whole interview process (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Fontana and Frey (2005) state that the *'empathetic interview approach'* cannot be understood as "a methodology of friendship" even though this is how it appears to be (Kong et al., 2002, p. 254 in Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 696). It is more of an approach that shows respect to the complexities of human nature. This attitude and concern for morality is stronger than any other concern that might appear in a research project in relation to either the methodology or the theory that influence the research project (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 696).

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) describe the *active interview* as a type of interview where both parties are active and influence the whole process (p. 4). The active interviewers encourage the respondents to enrich the interview process with their ideas, experiences and views. It is a "give and take" process or "a kind of improvisational performance" (p.17). In other words it is like a play or a performance that is characterised by spontaneous actions. However, during the whole process nothing is amorphous or unfocused. The interviewer is the person in charge of providing the

interviewees with a guide that can either be a list of themes that are going to be discussed or even a set of questions that will assist the interviewees narrate their experiences and thoughts more easily (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 76). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) state that active interviews do not necessarily produce more "realistic or authentic conversations" even though interviewees may feel like that (p.17).

Individual Interviews with the School's Managerial Team

For the completion of the two individual interviews, I met each participant twice. During the first meeting I had a short conversation with each participant. Following Kajornboon's (2005) suggestions in relation to interviews' ethical issues, I informed them about the objectives and goals of my research project, the reasons why they had been selected and the length of the interview (para., 12).

In addition, I gave each participant an 'information folder' that consisted of six sections. The first section was the description of the research project. The second was the consent form that included ethical issues (e.g. confidentiality and withdrawal rights). The third one included the *'Ethical approval letter'* from the University of Sheffield (appendix 1) and the permission from KEEA (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, Educational Research Sector) (appendix 2). Ignoring the claims that providing the interviewees with the interview schedule prior to the interviews "damages the spontaneity of answers" (Opie, 2004, p. 113–114), I included in the fourth section of the folder an outline of the interview topics in the form of questions. This decision was based on a stressful and embarrassing experience I had as an interviewee a few years ago where I was unaware of the interview questions. I felt that putting my research participants in a similar situation would have been unethical. The fifth section of the file contained a day by day description of my critical literacy teaching units in

Greek (*Introductory Unit*, *Unit One* and *Unit Two*) (appendices 3, 4 and 5). Within the last section I included the critical literacy notebook of one of my students. In addition to the short discussion and the 'information folder', on our first meeting we talked about practical arrangements of the interview such as the date, time and place. I was very flexible with the interview arrangement and let the participants give suggestions and make decisions.

> *I gave her (the school inspector) a call in order to arrange the interview meeting. She was very polite and friendly. [...] She told me that she had been on holidays. She suggested that we meet on Friday. She asked me about the time but I let her choose. She said 9:30 am at her office. Even though this was not a convenient time for me ... I accepted.*
>
> (T/RJW: 30/7/2013)

> *He (the school headteacher) seems to be very busy these days. His children are back home for summer. I told him that we can do the interview anytime and anywhere he wants. I also told him that I would wait for him to give me a call.*
>
> (T/RJW: 3/8/2013)

The interview with the school inspector was conducted in her office within the Ministry of Education and Culture building on the 2nd of August 2013. The interview with the school headteacher was carried out at his house on the 7th of September 2013. In both cases, the interviewees welcomed me in a very friendly and warm manner. The school inspector was sitting behind her desk and had a seat for me in front of her. The school headteacher was waiting for me in the friendly and cosy sitting room of his residence. In both cases, before and after the interview sessions we had a friendly conversation in relation to schools and the Cypriot educational system. Even though the description of the research project that was included in the

'information folder' mandated the use of a tape recorder during the interview, I asked both the participants' permission to use it.

Providing the participants with the interview topics/questions, some time before the interview sessions, proved to be a very helpful decision. I realised that my research interviewees were given the opportunity to think about their answers prior to the interview, make notes and feel more relaxed. In addition, the answers they provided were detailed and in depth, both of which are requirements of great importance for this thesis. Moreover, their comments in relation to my teaching and the units I designed were very encouraging.

> *Leaving her office I realised that I had a very big smile on my face. I am very happy from the outcomes of this interview.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 2/8/2013)*

Before both interviews I was feeling stressed and confused. Trying to analyse these feelings I realised they were due to the existence of power (Scheurich, 1995). Critical theorists regard the interview as a process where "asymmetries of power" exist but in which the less powerful party, which most of the times is the interviewees, finds ways to overcome the existence of domination through resistance (Scheurich, 1995, p. 246). In a very interesting article, Scheurich (1995) claims that during an interview a chaos/freedom situation emerges where interviewer's and interviewees' behaviour, desires, needs and wishes do not fit within the dominance and resistance binary but are related to other issues that might occur during an interview like the unconscious reasons of the interviewees for participating in an interview or the feelings they possess or develop during the interview session (p. 248).

In my case, I felt to be the weakest party. Both my interviewees were individuals in higher positions than me within the school hierarchy. In

addition, they had been the evaluators of my teaching for the last five years. I realised that these feelings of discomfort were present before, during, as well as after the interviews. Before the interview sessions, I paid attention to being punctual, properly dressed, and well organised.

> *Thinking about the coming interviews makes me feel awkward. I feel powerless. I cannot do anything about it.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 20/7/2013)*

During the interview sessions I realised that I was paying extreme attention to my movements, my actions, and my words. There were times when I felt that I was observing myself. After the interviews and on my way home I tried to recall the conversation and the way I behaved and acted towards the interviewees in order to reassure myself that I had not done or said anything that would have spoilt my image as a good teacher.

> *I realised that she [the school inspector] views me as a very skilful teacher.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 2/8/2013)*

Once again, my two identities (as a teacher and as a researcher) were in conflict with my identity as a teacher winning the battle. Even though my two identities cooperated in order to complete the interview (my teacher identity gained access to the participants and my researcher identity conducted the interviews) I was mostly connected with my teacher identity.

Focus Group Session with Parent Participants

Even though I was able to grasp parents' feelings and perceptions (in relation to the introduction of critical literacy through popular culture within their children's classroom) from their journal entries, I decided to meet and talk with them in a group interview. The use of a second method for the

examination of the parents' feelings and perceptions should not imply that their journal entries were inadequate. I judged that through focus group meetings parents would be given the opportunity to meet each other, say things they were not able to narrate in their journal entries, listen to other parents' views and ideas and finally ask questions in relation to the units I presented to their children. Moreover, I wanted to show them my gratitude and appreciation as participants in my research project and reassure them that this project was by no means for my own personal benefits but it was beneficial for their children as well.

The focus group session was held in the classroom on the 11th of April 2013 at 7 o'clock in the evening. We hardly found a day to meet as parents appeared to be very busy and in some cases unwilling to come to the meeting. Four out of the eight parent participants were present at the meeting. The second meeting that was scheduled for the 14th of June 2013 was cancelled, as only two parent participants were able to attend. It was almost the end of the academic year so there were no more chances to arrange another meeting. Personally, I empathised with the parents' attitude. As has been mentioned earlier, this research project was conducted while the people of my country were experiencing challenging and in many cases unmanageable social and financial conditions.

Before the meeting, I informed parents on the unstructured style of the focus group (like an informal conversation) through a short written message. As I made clear to them, my aim was to have the parent participants take part in a conversation where their views in relation to the teaching units that were introduced in their children's classroom would be expressed. A couple of days before the focus group meeting, I wrote down the discussion topics. During the meeting, these topics were translated into questions that acted as the basis of the conversation. I did not send to parents either the interview questions or the expected discussed topics. In hindsight, this was probably a

mistake on my part as the parents came to the meeting a bit puzzled and nervous.

> *None of the parents wanted to have tea or coffee. They seemed*
> *stressed. Now, I understand how they felt. They were not 100% sure*
> *of what to expect. I did a very BIG mistake. I should have sent the*
> *discussion topics to them some days before the meeting.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 11/4/2013)*

Even though the parents came to the meeting with feelings of uneasiness I realised that my friendly and pleasant attitude made them feel comfortable and willing to talk. This approach was not the outcome of a feint or a technique in order to make them feel at ease and talk. It was the result of my behaviour being driven by the feelings of sensitivity and emotionality that reflected a sensible and at the same ethical way of viewing my research participants as equal partners in a situation (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 696).

> *Most of the time, I felt that I wasn't in charge of the meeting even*
> *though I was guiding it with my questions. I felt as if I was in a very*
> *contradictory situation. Knowing that parents appreciate what you are*
> *doing makes you feel great. They had so many things to ask. For one*
> *more time the view that very often teachers have in relation to*
> *parents' inability to judge learning outcomes has been refuted!*
>
> *(T/RJW: 11/4/2013)*

I contributed equally with the research participants as I took an active role in the conversation. On that meeting, I revealed my feelings, ideas and emotions and I also answered questions asked by the research participants (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 697).

Recording and Transcribing the Interviews

The individual interviews and the focus group discussion were recorded with the use of a digital recorder that I bought especially for this project. The use of a recording device for recording interviewing data appears to be the most common approach due to its ability to preserve what has been articulated for data analysis at a later stage (Thomas, Nelson and Silverman, 2011, p. 358). Besides recording, the verbal part of the interviews was also transcribed. For the transcription of oral discussions, two modes are suggested by scholars and researchers. The first one is called '*a standard layout*' (Swann, 1994, p. 41) which looks like a dialogue in a theatrical play. The second type is the *'column layout'* where each participant has a column of her/his own (Swann, 1994, p. 41). I used the *'standard layout'* as I consider it a mode easier to handle. No names were used so that identification wouldn't be possible.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

I used my classroom discussions as the third method for this project. My journal entries, the parents' notes, the focus group discussions and the individual interviews provided me with data in relation to the feelings, perceptions and dilemmas of the adults involved with the teaching-learning process. However, I needed to be provided with information relating to the children's perceptions during the lessons. As I was the classroom teacher, it was impossible for me to take any field notes from observations while the discussions were in progress. As such, I decided to record classroom discussions.

According to Swann (1994) an audio or a video recording is in fact "a permanent", as she calls it, record of human oral language and participation (p. 39). Researchers can use the transcripts obtained from the recordings in

order to go back to the discussion any time they want to look for emerging issues while it is also a detailed piece of evidence of what happened during the discussions such as what was articulated, who participated and who didn't, the time spent for the discussion and the amount of involvement of the research participants (Swann, 1994, p. 39).

In order to record the classroom discussion I used the same voice recording device I used for the interviews. Through voice recordings I was able to capture only the verbal, spoken language my students. As a consequence, I missed the non-verbal means of communication (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 116) like face expressions and body language that give significant insight into the participation of the observed individuals. Nevertheless, I decided not to video record my lessons as I believed that I would have had to deal with a number of difficulties and constrains. Firstly, it would have been extremely difficult to obtain consent from both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the parents to video record children's faces and actions. As Jewitt (2012) mentions video recordings "can heighten concerns in relation to ethics and anonymity" (p. 7). In addition, I had the feeling that bringing a video recorder in my class would have been a very complicated task associated with concerns such as who would be in charge of it and its position within the classroom.

The quality of the recordings was very good and I could record whole classroom discussions as well as discussions during small group work. At the very beginning, recording made me anxious as I wasn't feeling very confident using it. The first time I used the recording device my students were staring at it, while I stopped the recording function a couple of times in order to check that everything was working properly. I even asked my students to talk louder than usual.

> *Teacher:*   *Theo, speak loudly please*
> *Mary:*   *Theo, do not talk so quietly. Your voice won't be heard*

on the recorder.

(CDI: 7/1/2013)

There were times when students who were sitting close to the recorder tried to get even closer to it by bending their body. Very often children were making comments on others being naughty or badly behaved in the classroom while the recorder was on.

Alicia: Hey kids! Stop talking. The recorder is on!

(CDI: 23/1/2013)

Transcribing Classroom Discussions

A major disadvantage of the transcription of classroom discussions is its time consuming aspect (Altrichter et al., 2008, p. 119). Scholars give researchers a number of suggestions to overcome this inconvenience like transcribing only the very first ten minutes of the discussion or listening to it for two to three times and then transcribing what appears to be of great importance. I decided to transcribe the whole text as I felt that in that way I would have the opportunity to work with a detailed account of the discussion carried out in the classroom. I spent a lot of time transcribing classroom discussions: half an hour of discussion took five to six hours to transcribe.

I followed the *'standard layout'* for transcribing my classroom discussions. It would have been extremely difficult and confusing to use the *'column layout'* where each participant has a separate column. However, I am aware that the *'column layout'* would have provided valuable pieces of information on the amount of participation and contribution to the teaching-learning process of each individual pupil. I gave my students Anglo-Saxon pseudonyms so that it would be easier for my audience to understand whether a child is a girl or a boy. Even though the existence of gender differences among the pupils

under investigation in relation to critical literacy and popular culture is not a focus in this thesis, a group of readers might like to know explicitly the gender of the child that speaks.

TRANSLATION

A distinctive aspect of this research project is that the research data obtained from the parent participants' journals, the interviews and the classroom sessions were in Greek and then translated and presented in English. My life history as 'a foreigner' in countries other than my own have made me realise the complex and biased nature of language as well as the difficulties people who speak different languages to each other face when communication is required. Language has the ability and power to reveal the differences and similarities between people and societal groups and at the same time to reject or accept people from educational, societal and political activities (Temple, 2002, p. 5 in Filep, 2009, p. 60). Moreover, each particular word carries with it a meaning that is very often related to the culture, the society and sometimes the situation or the setting within which it is used.

Relevant literature emphasizes that translation should not be viewed as the mere transcription of a text from one language (the source language) to another language (the target language) (Filep, 2009; Temple and Edwards, 2002). The presentation of a conversation, a sentence, a phrase or even a word in another language is a process that requires more than just literal translation because even though specific concepts have their literal equivalence these concepts may carry different emotions and histories in different languages (Temple, 1997, p. 97). Filep (2009) claims that translation is a translation of the culture or, in other words, an understanding of the culture and the concepts the source language carries (p. 69). Simon (1996 in Temple and Edwards, 2002, para. 4) also claims that the process of

translation is not an act of working with words but rather a process of working with concepts, meanings and the context within which these are located. That is why the researcher's or translator's awareness of the culture of the source language is very often stressed (Birbili, 2000; Filep, 2009; Saville-Troike, 1989; van Widenfelt, Treffers, de Beurs, Siebelink, & Koudijs, 2005).

Scholars believe that when researchers study their own culture these concerns and prerequisites are diminished (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 109). Researchers who belong to the same race, ethnicity or culture as their research participants are able to use their personal knowledge and experiences (Peña, 2007, p. 1255; Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 109) in order to understand and interpret sayings, actions and feelings. When the researcher and the translator are the same person and this person is a fluent speaker of the source language (like in my case) then the translation outcome will be influenced by the researcher's life history and experiences and her/his fluency in the target language (Birbili, 2000, p. 2).

When a text is to be translated the first decision that the translators and/or researchers make is whether a literal translation or a free translation is to be followed (Birbili, 2000, para. 10). A literal translation is a word-by-word translation. Honig (1997, p. 17 in Birbili, 2000, para. 10) mentions that this type of translation is very often seen as fair play towards the participants' words and gives the reader the ability to understand better the mentality of the community under investigation. However, literal translation is criticised by a number of authors (Birbili, 2000; Filep, 2009; Temple and Edwards, 2002; van Widenfelt et al. 2005). This is because literal translation may produce sentences and phrases which are poorly constructed, less readable and meaningless (Birbili , 2000, para. 10; van Widenfelt et al, 2005, p. 140).

When free translation is chosen the main aim and task of the translator should be to produce conceptual equivalence. In other words the meaning of

the source text should be the same as the meaning of the target text (Birbili, 2000, p. 3). Temple (1997) suggests that in order to maintain conceptual equivalence translators might need to use words other than the "literally translated equivalents" (p. 610). This however is a very difficult task when the translator is asked to translate a phrase or a sentence that consists of grammatical or syntactical structures that do not exist in the target language (Ercikak, 1998, p. 544 in Birbili, 2000, para. 7).

For this research project I decided to use a free translation as I felt that the Greek syntax and way of talking literally translated into English would have produced sentences and phrases that could not be comprehended or understood. There were times when I faced great difficulties and had to ask for help when I had to translate an idiom, a phrase or a word mainly because I was not aware of the English equivalent. Another aspect that caused me a lot of difficulty was my inability to show through my translation the uniqueness of the way my participants speak. Even though Cyprus is a Greek speaking country, Cypriots use the Cypriot dialect along with Modern Greek during their spoken communications. In addition I was not able to successfully communicate in translation the expressions that young people use nowadays.

DATA ANALYSIS

According to Myhill (2013) the same research topic can be examined with either the use of qualitative or quantitative data. Quantitative data is the data that is expressed with the use of numbers, analysed through a positivist approach and represented with the use of graphs and tables. On the other hand, qualitative data cannot be measured. Qualitative data is expressed with the use of words, analysed following an interpretative/hermeneutic process and provides depth of awareness of the investigated issue.

As described earlier, my classroom based study examined the issues that arose when critical literacy through popular culture texts was introduced in a

third grade Cypriot primary classroom using the perceptions, feelings, understandings and opinions of the research participants. The pre-described research methods used for this research project produced a large amount of qualitative data consisting of journal entries and transcripts from interviews and classroom discussions.

From the very beginning of this research project I understood that the data analysis is by no means a straightforward or unproblematic procedure. The idea that the whole data analysis process is influenced by the views and interests of the researchers has been confirmed by my personal experiences during this process. As such, I am in agreement with Schutt (2012) when he points out that: "researchers, with different backgrounds, could come to markedly different conclusions" (p. 320). I, as a person with a number of identities and experiences, pay attention to and value things, ideas and concepts differently than other researchers and vice versa. So the data analysis and conclusions of this research project are distinctive and reflect, to a degree, my biography, positionality, experiences, and beliefs.

In addition to that, I realised that I was part of the data and the data was part of me. Being one of the research participants coupled with the attachment and familiarity I experienced with them, made me unable to handle my data in a detached and unemotional manner. That is why I approached my data with sincerity, respectfulness and reflexivity.

Looking at my data analysis in an investigative manner, I recognise that I adopted both an inductive and a deductive process. During the inductive process I let the data guide me through in an attempt to uncover emerging themes and ideas (Myhill, 2013). However, during the deductive process— which was the most common practice in my data analysis process—prior readings, inspirational educational theories and research projects with similar topics or themes to mine inevitably influenced my thinking and the suggestion of themes and ideas based on the analysis (Myhill, 2013).

During both processes, the great amount of data that was collected required me to become intensely familiar with it. I constantly re-read parts of it and made notes next to it in its paper version for later use—a state characterised by messiness and confusion. These can be described as initial trials to uncover the key themes and ideas and find relations within it. Influenced by the relevant literature referring to data analysis (Dey, 1993; Myhill,2013) I decided to assign codes to my selected data, a task that turned out to be highly productive and practical. At that point my main aim was to assign each selected amount of data with a code. I had all the codes written on a paper for easy access. What was, however, surprising was that as more data was coded, new codes were emerging making me go back and forth in my data in order to change some of the assigned codes into more specific ones.

By the end of the data coding process I came up with a plethora of codes: I tried to find connections between them and group them based on common attributes. It was then that I realised that my four supplementary research questions could be major aids. I therefore developed four files within which I moved the data that was related to each one of the questions/participant groups. Even though I was aware of the existence of software especially designed for data analysis, I felt that by approaching my data the way I did, I had control of the whole process no matter how time consuming this turned out to be. My word processor's 'cut', 'move', 'paste' and 'find' features helped me handle my data with ease. More specifically the last one turned out to be very useful as it gave me the opportunity to look for specific keywords within the large amount of data that I had to handle. The software I used, the computer's own editing software, served me well in organising the data as I coded and re-coded it.

My entries had to be put in a kind of order. It was then that the data categories for each research question emerged and I could see how they were answering each question. What needs to be pointed out at this point is that coming up with these categories was not an easy task. I had to think

extensively, make and remake decisions. After my data was coded and categorised (see appendix 6) I moved on with the writing up of the data analysis and discussion chapter of this thesis that follows.

In this second part of this chapter I have demonstrated my methodological decisions in relation to the approach, the methodology, the methods and the data analysis approach used with references to the relevant literature. I have also described my values in relation to life and education that inevitably influenced the decisions and actions taken for the conduction of this project. Within the next chapter I present a data analysis and a discussion based on the findings of this research project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Within the fourth chapter of this thesis, I provide an analysis of the data and a discussion based on this analysis in an attempt to answer my main research question which refers to the issues and dilemmas raised when critical literacy through popular culture was introduced in my third grade Cypriot primary classroom. This chapter is divided into four parts. Each part answers one of the supplementary questions of this research project. The first question refers to **children's perceptions**. The second one is related to **teacher's skills, feelings and understandings**. The next section answers the third question that illustrates **parents' perceptions and feelings**. Finally the last section examines **the school managerial team's views**. I need to mention at this point that within this chapter I will neither take my reader through the official curriculum nor will I describe individual lessons or participants. My focus is on the issues and dilemmas that arose and so I have organised my data accordingly to maintain this focus.

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS

In the first part of this chapter I answer the first supplementary research question that refers to my third grade students' perceptions when critical literacy was introduced through popular culture texts in the literacy curriculum. The data was obtained from the classroom discussions (CDI), and my journal writings (T/RJW). Based on the analysis four themes emerged:

❖ Children as popular culture followers

❖ Children as motivated and enthusiastic learners

❖ Children as critical literacy embracers

❖ Children as developing literacy students

CHILDREN AS POPULAR CULTURE FOLLOWERS

The impact of popular culture on contemporary young people's life (Dolby, 2003; Williams, 2007) has been identified as a central source of enjoyment and pleasure (Dolby, 2003) and an influential factor in their experiences (Dyson, 2003, Moje et al., 2004), relationships, identity building, value formation (Cheung, 2001; Dyson, 2003; Kontovourki, 2014; Williams, 2007) and playing (Dyson, 2003; Marsh and Millard, 2000; Willett, 2005).

My decision to work on this project put me in a position where I could take a closer look at my students. Through regular observations that were recorded in my research journal I came to the conclusion that popular culture was a vital component of the family, social and communal lives of Easthighway youngsters as it influenced their thinking, actions and behaviour.

Children and adolescents from Easthighway, just like their parents listened to popular culture music; watched shows, soap operas, and commercials on TV; read magazines, comics and sports newspapers; cheered their favourite football teams on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons; visited the movies; joined social media networks; shopped from the internet; shared experiences, pictures, wishes and ideas on-line; played electronic games; owned goods and collected artefacts that presented or were related to their favourite popular culture icons; got dressed and had their hair cut

reproducing the latest trends in fashion and attended hip-hop, football and Zumba[8] afternoon classes.

The following classroom discussion uncovers the great impact of popular culture on my students' out-of-school life:

Theo: *Yesterday afternoon, after my football class, I went to 'Jumbo'[9] to buy a costume for the carnival. I want to get dressed as Spiderman. There I saw a ball that had "The little chick cheep" on.*

Teacher: *Really? Children like products that have "The little chick cheep" on them.*

Irene: *That is right. Children ask their parents to buy all these products.*

Olivia: *We cannot buy all the products related to "The little chick cheep"! It can be very expensive.*

Andy: *Can you imagine having a quilt with "The little chick cheep" on? It would be fun!*

Nick: *How about a matching pillow? That would be nice too.*

Helen: *During the carnival, many children will get dressed as 'The little chick cheep'.*

Mary: *I will definitely get dressed as "The little chick cheep".*

Olivia: *My cousin who is in high school painted "The little chick cheep" on her nails!*

Helen: *Wow!*

Sandy: *On Sunday, I went to see a play called "The little chick cheep" with my sister and my mother at the theatre. We did not know that we had to book a ticket in advance so*

---

[8] Zumba is a fitness program that combines elements from dance and aerobics. It has been very popular among the Cypriot population for the last couple of years.
[9] "Jumbo" is the biggest toy store chain in Greece and Cyprus.

we were not able to get in. My mother could have

booked it from the Internet. The theatre was full!

(CDI: 4/2/2013)

Even though the Cypriot school ethos did not favour the use of popular culture in classrooms, popular culture's presence was evident in Easthighway primary school classrooms. Easthighway youngsters owned and brought to school bags, lunch boxes and stationery items that presented popular culture icons. Their playing, talking, listening, reading, writing and sharing during recess in the school yard was also influenced by popular culture. However, the two critical literacy units that were introduced through popular culture texts in my classroom allowed popular culture to enter the classroom walls officially. They gave my students the opportunity to show their fondness, familiarity and attachment towards popular culture texts and icons openly and at the same time bring all their popular culture experiences from home in the classroom and introduce them to other classroom members without any hesitation.

During the implementation of both critical literacy units my third graders frequently used their experiences with the media and popular culture during classroom discussion. Television had a prime place in their popular culture sources. It is not an exaggeration if I say that my students used to watch whatever was presented on their home TVs from early in the afternoon until late in the night. Very often they gave examples retrieved from popular culture texts like commercials and TV shows in order to explain an issue as in the following excerpts from classroom discussions:

Olivia: Men can dance well too [besides women]. On the
            "Dancing with the Stars"[10] many men were professional
            dancers.

                                                    (CDI: 10/4/2013)

Nick: I have never seen or heard of a woman driving a racing
            car.
Theo: There is a Nurofen[11] TV commercial that shows a
            female car racer!
Nicole: Yes! I know that commercial. It shows a woman driving
            a racing car.

                                                    (CDI: 11/4/2013)

Olivia: I know what economic crisis is. I saw it on the News on
            TV. A family had nothing in their fridge but an egg. The
            Red Cross bought them food, clothes and toys.

                                                    (CDI: 22/4/2013)

Helen: Olympic games can be fun. We watched the London
            Olympics on TV last summer.

                                                    (CDI: 12/4/2013)

In addition, when children were asked to put forward ideas for examination in
the critical literacy units, these were mainly related to popular culture and
influenced by the media. For example, the web they produced with their
recommendations on the boys/girls unit consisted of the following topics:
sports, nutrition, games, pets, life style, economic crisis, school, human

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[10] "Dancing with the Stars" is a dance competition TV show where each dancing pair
consists of a professional dancer and a celebrity.
[11] Nurofen is a pain-relief medication. Even though I tried to find this commercial I couldn't.

bodies, toys, cars and motorbikes, music, colours, books, nature, TV, puppet shows, cartoons, movies, religion, fashion, parties and cameras. As the analysis of my students' suggestions is not an aim of this thesis, a brief examination of them shows the great influence popular culture had on their lives.

CHILDREN AS MOTIVATED AND ENTHUSIASTIC LEARNERS

In the relevant literature, when popular culture enters the classroom walls the learning process is described as highly motivational and characterised by a high degree of participation and involvement as students are presented with something close to their experiences that they are interested in and like (Cheung, 2001; Marsh, 1999a; 1999b). For example, when Marsh (1999a; 1999b) presented two groups of children with literacy activities based on popular culture she observed that even the children who were not usually fascinated with literacy activities participated in them. Parry (2014) believes the motivation that popular culture fosters among young learners to be not only related to the enjoyment they feel but also to the satisfaction they experience by successfully participating in classroom activities and achieving academically. As my students were so much interested in the topics discussed and examined in the classroom they enthusiastically and willingly participated in classroom discussions. Observing this, I wrote in my research journal:

> *The lesson was lively and the children wanted to talk a lot. Even when the bell rang for recess they did not want to get out of the classroom and waited for our discussion to finish.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 7/1/2013)*

The children were not bored with what we were doing in class. It seems that popular culture texts turn students into motivated and alert learners.

(T/RJW: 14/2/2013)

Even younger or older students from other classes who were hosted in our classroom for a day or two due to their teacher's absence[12] used to express their wish to participate in our discussions; something uncommon for visiting students.

They wanted to sit next to my students, not at the back of the classroom as they usually do, and participate in the classroom discussion.

(T/RJW: 24/1/2013)

My students' great interest in the learning process was also evident by their willingness to produce written texts too; something they were not that enthusiastic about when the literacy school textbooks were used. With both units children participated in a plethora of meaningful and pragmatic writing activities like replying to a real person's blog, conducting a survey among school children, performing multiple readings of authentic texts and writing letters to organisations and authority boards. As they were writing about issues that were meaningful and familiar to them, their writing attempts were more enjoyable and manageable. I describe this enthusiasm in my journal:

Children want to write! And they write quickly, quietly and beautifully. Most of the times when they were asked to write they used to feel anxious and stressed due to the difficulties they have in writing.

(T/RJW: 6/2/2013)

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[12] In Cypriot primary schools, when a teacher is absent a substitute teacher is usually in change of the class. However when no substitute teacher is available the students are split into groups of two or three children and are placed in other classrooms and work on a quiet activity that does not disturb the hosting classroom's routines.

After the completion of *Unit One* my students requested the introduction of another critical literacy unit though popular culture. Asking them to give me reasons they said:

> *Sandy:*   *We like being "Keimenoereunētés".* [13]
>
> *Sofia:*   *We missed these notebooks. We wrote many things and we would like to write more.*
>
> *Andy:*   *We used to write nice things in this notebook.*
>
> *Eve:*   *We like working in this notebook and we would like to start a new unit. We are very proud of being "Keimenoereunētés".*
>
> *Steve:*   *We talked a lot.*
>
> *Theo:*   *We have learned many things.*
>
> *Olivia:*   *Yes, we have learned many things that are not done in schools.*
>
> *(CDI: 2/4/2013)*

An analysis of their sayings reveals that my students' motivation and enthusiasm were not merely related to the fact that they were dealing with texts they enjoyed. My students realised that popular culture texts, which were usually distant from classroom activities, were actually giving them the opportunity to present themselves as capable and successful learners. Their occupation with texts they enjoyed, easily understood and successfully dealt with helped them learn more, improve their writing and communication skills and become better students.

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[13] 'Keimenoereunētés' was the Greek name my students used to call themselves meaning 'text researchers'. In the Greek language this word does not exist. Nick, a boy from the class, invented it during a discussion and the rest of the class found it very 'cool' and started using it.

CHILDREN AS CRITICAL LITERACY EMBRACERS

Even though popular culture was an important motivational factor for my students' classroom learning experiences, critical literacy was successfully embraced by my students. In the relevant literature, critical literacy is described as the ability of people to critically analyse the whos, whys, hows, whens, whats and wheres of a text in an attempt to reveal the power relations that rule its production and representation (Morrell, 2002) and suggest or bring changes (Black, 2010; Corley, 2003; Flint, 2000). Through critical literacy learners become conscious of the uses of language in their life (Ludwig, 2006, para 14) and the ideas and values that are presented in a text (Lesley, 2008). Students are also able to think critically, see things from different perspectives, question long-standing beliefs, and act as changing factors (Flint, 2000).

The exercise of critical literacy in our third grade classroom provided my students with the opportunity to be participants in an encouraging learning environment where their home and out-of-school experiences had a significant place in the learning process. In our classroom no one was more privileged or had more power than others as everybody could show her/his true feelings without being afraid of being portrayed as weak, incapable or diverse. During a discussion on male and female dominated jobs Clark said:

> Clark: *I do not care what people say about cooking and that women are the ones that usually cook. I love cooking and I will always do.*
>
> *(CDI: 10/4/2013)*

Moreover, within our classroom setting students could ask questions, express their concerns and doubts, agree or disagree with others based on their personal views and experiences. Everybody appeared knowledgeable

and capable of dealing with the issues presented in the classroom. For example, during a discussion Olivia expressed an opinion based on her experiences and Hannah disagreed with it influenced by an incident she had during her hospitalisation:

> *Olivia:*   *Girls can treat sick people better. Women nurses are better than men. My great grandmother has a woman nurse taking care of her. She is very nice.*
>
> *Hannah:*   *I do not agree. When I was in hospital, men nurses were better than women. Men were quicker and behaved better than women.*
>
> *(CDI: 2/4/2013)*

My students could articulate their ideas, opinions, experiences, likes and dislikes without any restraint, strict guidance and official evaluation from the teacher. There were no right or wrong answers, good or bad ideas, interesting or boring experiences. For example, during our classroom discussion on gender stereotypes Hannah narrated a very touchy incident relating to a health problem she experienced. I believe that the uncomfortable theme of the incident would not have been articulated in public if an honest, respectful and supporting atmosphere that was promoted by critical literacy had not characterised our classroom routines.

> *Hannah:*   *A few days ago I was crying and my brother was laughing at me. He was telling me: "she is crying, she is crying". My father said to him: "Let her cry, she is a girl". However when I was very sick and I was hospitalised and the doctor had to take bone marrow sample from by back, my father was crying a lot even though he is a man. His tears were running.*
>
> *(CDI: 2/4/2013)*

In addition, children were able to think critically and find new connections and meanings in texts like in the following example where they were discussing reasons as to why the "The little chick cheep" song was created in Italy first and then in Greece:

> Mary: Italians and Greeks listen to the same song.
>
> Helen: Yes, but in Greece it is in Greek and in Italy it is in Italian.
>
> Steven: In Italy it was created by a radio to make grownups happy.
>
> Eve: In Greece people feel happy listening to it too.
>
> Nicole: Yes but in Greece it was created for children not adults.
>
> Olivia: And for making toys with the little chick cheep on and selling them to the parents of the children.
>
> Nick: So we have two different audiences, at two different places, for two different purposes for the same text.
>
> (CDI: 4/2/2013)

A critical stance towards texts became a simple and habitual task for my students. They were applying critical literacy routines not only on popular culture texts but on every text and life incident they encountered. One morning I entered my classroom and found a group of boys talking a lot in a high pitch. I described the unfolding of this incident in my research journal:

> I said good morning to everybody and then I continued: "it seems that the boys are talking too much this morning!" Nick then replied: "What you have just said is a stereotype". So I replied: "I do not think so. I didn't say that because I believe that boys talk more than girls. I said that because I saw you boys talking".
>
> (T/RJW: 9/4/2013)

This incident reveals how critical literacy enabled them to become articulate young people with self-esteem who had the courage to question others' ideas and views. There were times when my students were questioning long standing ideas that were deep rooted in the patriarchal Easthighway society; I observed this happening on three different occasions:

> *Olivia felt really strange when she saw a woman driving a racing car. Her mother, who is also a colleague and a parent participant in this project, gave me a call last night telling me that her daughter expressed the wish to participate in male dominant sports.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 12/4/2013)*

> *During recess I entered my classroom and I found three boys sitting around a round table chatting. One of them was drawing female dresses. He said to me: "I like drawing dresses. Most famous designers are men, right?" I am amazed as this is an incident I did not expect to see among the boys of my classroom especially with the presence of other boys. They are revealing their likes to others without being afraid of being rejected.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 16/4/2013)*

> *During the photo taking boys decided to sit at the front and girls stand at the back.[14]*
>
> *(T/RJW: 16 /4 /2013)*

Even though I used to see this criticality as a positive and a rewarding learning outcome there were a few times when their critical skills scared me and made me remember Comber's (1999) description of the fears that

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[14] Traditionally in Easthighway Primary School boys stand at the back and girls sit at the front during photo taking.

teachers usually have in relation to critical literacy and the possibility of turning young people into "cynical, … too serious and depressive" human beings (p. 6). In our last critical literacy discussion, after my students' request, we watched a short online video they had been watching on TV the last couple of days. The video consisted of messages by a group of Cypriot athletes[15] in an attempt to request donations for the therapy of Marianna Zachariadi[16], a young Cypriot athlete with a severe health problem. My main teaching objective was to show my pupils the multiple readings that could be carried out for one single text. After watching the video I asked them to put themselves in the place of a number of viewers: Marianna, her family, the athletes who participated in the video, athletes who did not participate in it and Cypriots. Then I asked them to articulate the feelings and thoughts that each individual or group might have after watching the video. While we were watching the video for the first time I started crying; a quite normal characteristic of my over emotionality. However Hannah said to me in a cold manner:

> *Hannah: It seems that the film makers have accomplished their*
> *mission: to make you feel sorry for the athlete and*
> *donate money.*
>
> *(CDI: 22/4/2013)*

Even though Hannah's words shocked me, at the same time they made me appreciate the significance of critical literacy in our contemporary times where citizens live in a rapidly changing, demanding and diverse world that is constantly supplied with new ideas, views and pieces of information (Jewitt, 2008). The promotion of critical literacy in the primary school curriculum should in fact be a requirement, a duty on behalf of teachers rather than an option (Crafton et al., 2007). Teachers should help their

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[15] Kyriakos Ioannou, Eleni Artymata, Apostolos Parellis, Constantinos Charalambides, Demetris Christofi and Andreas Avraam
[16] Marianna Zachariadi (25 February 1990 – 25 April 2013) was a Cypriot pole vaulter. She died of Hodgkin's lymphoma at the age of 23.

students succeed in analysing texts, situations, images and even phenomena and bring changes to their lives (Sanford and Madill, 2007).

CHILDREN AS DEVELOPING LITERACY STUDENTS

My students' great interest and involvement in the teaching-learning process helped them develop not only their critical literacy but also their more traditional literacy skills. As the issues that we were dealing with in the classroom were very interesting to my students, their understanding in relation to the examined issues was also greater, even from the first day of the introduction of critical literacy:

> *All kids were on the point and were able to give more examples than I could think of!*
>
> *(T/RJW: 7/1/2013)*

My students also had the desire and eagerness to read more extensively and find more information about the examined texts. Some of them carried out independent readings at home in an attempt to answer the questions that were raised in the classroom and solve their curiosity. The day after I presented my students with a post from Danae's Blog that talked about the frenetic behaviour that overlooked Greek society in relation to *'the little chick cheep'*, I wrote in my journal:

> *My students told me that they found Danae's blog on the Internet and have seen her face. They said she is blond. It seems that they used the link I had on the bottom of the copy from her blog and got into her blog.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 3/2/2013)*

Their writings also showed a progression: they were using more difficult words and they were paying greater attention to the content of their writings, the spelling of the words used and the appearance of their handwriting. I outlined this progression in the following entries:

> *Before the units were introduced my students were not so enthusiastic about writing. Now, to my great surprise, their writings are much better in quality. They even use more difficult and complicated words and phrases than before.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 24 /1/2013)*

> *They paid attention to both the spelling and their handwriting.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 6/2/2013)*

My students were also able to comprehend and understand texts better in a more traditional way while at the same time learning new vocabulary became easier as did applying the new vocabulary in the classroom discussions and in their writings. In May, after the completion of the second critical literacy unit, we went back to the literacy textbooks only to find out that my students were able to handle school texts with more ease. I wrote in my journal:

> *I am amazed at how the children are able to comprehend the introduced text so easily and even guess the meaning of many unknown words. It seems that the critical literacy units have helped them a lot in their reading comprehension skills.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 13/5/2013)*

So in addition to their critical literacy abilities, my students developed their literacy competencies holistically. Their reading, writing, spelling, vocabulary and comprehension competencies that are usually assessed in the literacy

classroom showed significant progression that was also observed by parents (an issue that is examined later within the present chapter).

Within the first part of the present chapter, I have analysed the perceptions that my third graders had when critical literacy through popular culture was introduced in their classroom. In the following part I answer the second supplementary research question of this thesis that refers to the teacher's (my) skills, feelings and understandings that were present or developed when critical literacy and popular culture entered my classroom.

TEACHER'S SKILLS, FEELINGS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

In this section of this chapter I answer the second supplementary question of this project that refers to the skills, feelings and understandings of the teacher when critical literacy through popular culture was introduced in the literacy curriculum of a third grade Cypriot primary classroom. The data was obtained from my research journal (T/RJW) and transcripts of the classroom conversations (CDI). The data analysis brought about four themes

- ❖ The teacher as a literacy fusion dietician
- ❖ The teacher as a learner
- ❖ The teacher as the main decision maker
- ❖ The teacher as a the owner of an Aeolian bag

THE TEACHER AS A LITERACY FUSION DIETICIAN

Millard (2003) calls the "fuse" of students' "out-of school interests" into the classroom practices and requirements "a transformative pedagogy of literacy fusion" (p. 6). She describes it as a delicious and nutritious "diet" for the learning process (Millard, 2003, p. 6). This metaphor successfully delineates my attempt to introduce critical literacy through popular culture in my classroom.

The key factor in this attempt was 'love'. Freire says: "it is impossible to teach without the courage to love" (Freire, 1998, p. 3). In this project, 'love' was reflected in the respect, encouragement, openness and safety that characterised the classroom atmosphere.

> *A respectful atmosphere can create an honest discussion.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 22/11/ 2012)*

The relevant literature stresses the importance of teachers' feelings of respect towards students' experiences, capabilities, understandings, and pleasures that usually originate in and are influenced by popular culture icons and texts (Arthur, 2005; Morrell and Andrade-Duncan, 2005). My classroom's critical literacy units were designed based on my students' wishes after observing them during free playtime and articulated by them during discussions. When these discussions and observations first started I used to have the feeling that my students' sources of understanding and enjoyment were far beyond and completely different from mine:

During free time a group of students were playing with Beyblades[17]. I immediately felt detestation towards them but at the same time realised the pleasure that kids get from this toy.

(T/RJW: 26/11/ 2012)

As has been described in Chapter One, my identity as a Cypriot teacher developed a hostile attitude towards popular culture texts. However, working through my resistance towards my students' popular culture text preferences gave me the opportunity to become familiar with the popular culture texts and icons that my students were interested in. That is why my decision to introduce critical literacy through popular culture in my classroom required me to gain knowledge from my students during classroom discussions and conversations in the school-yard during recess.

During classroom discussions in relation to the possible topics of our critical literacy units, children suggested themes, gave ideas and provided alternative choices.

Teacher: *OK … let's look at our web. Which is your most favourite topic?*

Girls: *Fashion!*

Boys: *No, no!*

Teacher: *Cartoons, films, toys? Which one?*
We could start with 'cartoons'. However if we start with this topic you will have to help me as I have no idea about cartoons. Then 'films' is another topic we can start with and I would definitely need help on that too.

(CDI: 5/4 /2013)

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[17] Beyblade is a spinning toy that is brought to speed with the use of a "launcher'. The players launch their Beyblades in a plastic arena. The Beyblades strike each other. The last still spinning is the winner.

My ignorance on a variety of popular culture issues that my students were suggesting could have jeopardised my status and power in a traditional lesson. However in our critical literacy lessons this was not an issue. Critical literacy requires the free exchange of ideas. There is no right or wrong answer but rather a clear or unclear idea influenced by the experiences of the participants. I was aware that it was my responsibility to help my students recognise this critical literacy potential:

> Teacher: Girls are not allowed to read this webpage. Why is that?
>
> Nicole: I am not sure if what I will say is correct …
>
> Teacher: Do not worry … carry on!
>
> *(CDI 11/4/2013)*

What needs to be pointed out at this point is that even though I had a permeable literacy curriculum in my classroom that reflected the contemporary views of literacy teaching, there were times when I was attached to traditional language concepts like spelling and grammar:

> *Spelling and grammar exercises need to be added to my unit, something I did not realise at the beginning.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 9/1/2013)*

I was feeling that by omitting spelling and grammar activities I was providing a less effective literacy education to my students.

> *I feel that they are not progressing. Tomorrow I will assign to them some more grammatical exercises in relation to the spelling of verbs.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 22/1/2013)*

These ideas of mine were influenced by my early experiences with teaching literacy back in the early 90s but mainly, as examined in another part of this

chapter, as a response to parents' expressed feelings in relation to this issue.

> *I told her [a colleague/mother participant in the research] that we are doing great and we have also done some grammatical and vocabulary work. I know that Cypriot teachers pay a lot of attention to grammar and parents worry about spelling.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 12/1/2013)*

At that time I was not familiar with the practice of allowing students to address meaningful issues related to their everyday lives and to express their views freely and compose their own texts based on these issues thus using grammar and spelling in meaningful and stimulating ways.

THE TEACHER AS A LEARNER

As I was responsible for organising and presenting the activities to my students based on their likes, wishes, ideas and suggested texts anyone would assume that I was the most knowledgeable person in the classroom. However the data reveals a learning facet of the critical literacy teacher. Freire (1998, 1985b) describes the critical teacher as a learner and teaching as a process of ongoing learning. In a very vivid way, he says: "Teachers should be conscious every day that they are coming to school to learn and not just to teach" (Freire, 1985b, p. 16). This portrayal moves beyond the traditional view of teachers as those who know everything and students as those who know nothing.

Incorporating critical literacy in my classroom's literacy curriculum, a concept I wasn't familiar with in the Cypriot "mono-literacy school" system (see

Katsarou, 2009), required me first and for all to get familiar with the ideas of critical literacy.

> *I need to learn how to see texts critically.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 15/3/2013)*

So I read articles and books that presented critical literacy (e.g. Freire, 1972) and popular culture theory, illustrated practical ideas on how these two concepts could be incorporated (e.g. Marsh and Millard, 2000) or were used (e.g. Marsh 1999a, 1999b; Morrell, 2002; Vasquez, 2000) within classroom settings. I also attended two in-service sessions and studied the *Modern Greek Language Curriculum*. All these gave me a foundation to build on. Nonetheless the data uncovers that the unfamiliarity I experienced with the practical side of critical literacy made me feel incapable and unready. I kept postponing both the planning of the units and their introduction in my classroom. A month before the introduction of the first unit I wrote:

> *I keep putting off the introduction of my first critical literacy unit. I am afraid about how to start, how to continue, and how this unit will end. I haven't tried it [critical literacy] in practice before. I feel like swimming in a very deep and rough sea.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 4/12/ 2012)*

My lack of critical literacy experiences in classroom settings also gave me doubts about my professional choices and decisions:

> *Maybe this is a bad start by an inexperienced critical literacy teacher.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 18/1/2013)*

I was even unable to say whether my teaching routines were in fact critical literacy:

I do not know if what I am going through is how a critical literacy lesson should be.

(T/RJW: 29/1/2013)

Moreover I was not aware if the messiness and dilemmas I faced, an issue discussed later, was due to my incompetency or to the way things usually are in critical literacy lessons,.

Oh what a mess. It is not simple at all! Is it because I am inexperienced or is this how things are!

(T/RJW: 26/1/2013)

My inexperience also made me incapable of grasping the opportunities for further analysis or discussion:

I feel that I keep leaving things behind. Things are still not coming naturally.

(T/RJW: 5/4 /2013)

During one of our literacy sessions on women in male dominated sports, my students guided the discussion in relation to their mothers' age[18]:

Sandy:	*How old is she? [Danica Patrick[19]]*
Teacher:	*I do not know. We have to look it up.*
Mary:	*She must be around 28.*
Sandy:	*My mom is 31*
Eve:	*My mom is 31 too.*
Olivia:	*My mom is 32.*
Teacher:	*Kids, let's move on. Look at the next text.*

---

[18] Easthighway mothers usually get married and give birth to their first child at their late teens.

[19] Danica Patrick is an American female race car driver.

(CDI 11/ 4 /2013)

In this case I was unable to recognise the prospect for a fruitful discussion on issues related to women's place in the Easthighway community. However, there were times when I did recognise the emerging opportunity but I felt insecure to bring it for discussion in the classroom mainly due to the controversial nature of its topic, an issue that is also discussed in detail in another part of this section.

Nevertheless, many of the critical discussions I had with my students helped me discover issues and ideas in texts I had never thought of or realised their existence before.

> *I have been using this text in my literacy curriculum for the last ten years and I have never thought about this issue before or have talked about it before in any of my classes.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 25/1/2013)*

During the reading of the accompanying text to "The little chick cheep" song on YouTube the following conversation surfaced:

Nick: *They [creators of the song] want to show that it is a very successful song, a very entertaining song. The text says that "it closes its [the little chick cheep] eye and carries you away".*

Sandy: *The text also says that this song fades "the unpleasant atmosphere".*

Teacher: *Why is the atmosphere unpleasant?*

Olivia: *Crisis [meaning Economic crisis]*

[. . .]

Mary: So 'fades the unpleasant atmosphere' means: stop

            feeling sad and stop thinking about our problems.

Helen: In Greece people do not have money. How can

            somebody listen to it as long as they may have no

            computer, no radio, no TV?

Teacher: I have never thought about it before. You are right. The

            people in need are not able to listen to it. That is for

            sure. The bad atmosphere cannot go away!

                                                  (CDI: 29 /1/2013)

The data analysis also reveals that my students were very knowledgeable and interested in an array of popular culture issues unlike myself. As Gainer (2007) describes, when popular culture enters the classroom, teachers are not the most skilled and knowledgeable anymore (p. 109). The expertise is shared with the students and the learning process is transformed into a dynamic exchange of ideas and views among the classroom members (Callahan and Low, 2004). During our discussion on the types of texts that are evident nowadays the children guided the conversation around 'Mr Bean' who I knew very little about.

Theo: How about Mr Bean! Isn't his shows visual texts?

Teacher: Visual texts? Why?

Nick: There are subtitles. Aren't there?

Teacher: I do not know. I haven't watched Mr Bean for a long

            time.

Nick: Yes, there are subtitles!

Teacher: Does Mr Bean talk?

Students: Yes.

Theo: When they ask him for his name, he says 'Bean'.

Teacher: Are there any other sounds in the film?

Students: Yes!

> *Andy:*   *He sometimes says "Mmm", when he doesn't like*
> *something.*
> *Teacher:*   *Really? I didn't know that.*

(CDI: 9/1/2013)

My third grade students were in fact my teachers even though somebody might think it the other way round. I saw it as a mutual exchange of pieces of information and knowledge where pupils and teacher taught each other and learned from each other. I talked about this with a colleague:

> *I reassured her that while her students learned she would be learning*
> *too.*

(T/RJW: 15/3/2013)

In this learning process, the act of reflexive thinking was my constant partner. It accompanied me from the very first day I planned each unit and continued throughout up to their completion. It helped me know myself better by discovering my strengths and weaknesses and improved my decision-making. In other words it made me a better critical literacy teacher. Credit must be given to my students and their parents who were my ongoing helpers in this process as their reactions and comments were giving me messages on how to move on and what changes I needed to make as can be seen in the parents' section of this chapter.

THE TEACHER AS THE MAIN DECISION MAKER

Even though my students were the owners of a voice that was appreciated and listened to as they could express their ideas freely and both units were designed based on their wishes, the data analysis reveals that I was the

main decision maker in the teaching/learning process. I was responsible for the texts that were presented in the classroom.

> *Helen:*   *This is a very short text!*
> *Teacher:*   *I brought to you only a small quotation of the whole text*
> *(CDI: 2/4/2013)*

In addition, I was planning the lessons, designing and presenting the activities to my students and making decisions on the lesson procedure:

> *Andy:*   *Let's watch the little chick cheep song in the Cypriot dialect.*
> *Teacher:*   *Not now. Please, open your notebooks.*
> *(CDI: 23/1/2013)*

I was the person in charge of creating the majority of the questions and inviting students to participate in classroom discussions:

> *Teacher:*   *That is right. Do you agree or do you disagree? Does anyone want to add something?*
> *(CDI: 2/4/2013)*

I was the peace-keeper when conflict-ridden issues were introduced or discussed in the classroom.

> *Sofia:*   *Let's say that APOEL is a good team and that OMONOIA is a bad team[20].*
> *Students:*   *EEE! (Voices of disagreement)*
> *Teacher:*   *Wait guys. What Sofia might mean is that two people can talk to each other and express their opinion in relation to football teams. Right Sofia?*

---

[20] *APOEL* and *OMONOIA* are the two most popular football teams in Cyprus.

Sofia: *Yes!*

(CDI:7/1/2013)

I was also explicitly modelling for my students how to think and express their ideas by demonstrating my own way of thinking and exercising text critique.

Teacher: *OK. Anybody else? Yes Andy.*

Andy: *Well...*

Teacher: *Let me help you. Let's think of something we are familiar with, like the presentation of our school athletes in our school newspaper. How are the athletes presented? Aren't they presented in a sympathetic way? What are the words used that show this? Why is that?*

(CDI: 12/4/2013)

When my students were leading the discussions into areas related to their interests and experiences that I was either not fond of or unable to follow this happened when I let it happen. As Street (1984 in Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 41) points out Freire's model does not provide answers to questions related to the autonomous learning model and the students' empowerment. My students were in fact empowered through my power as power was handed over to them when I wished to do so (Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 41).

Theo: *Boys are better in football than girls.*

Sandy: *Really?*

Theo: *Yes. Let's say we ask Eve or Mary or Sofia to play football, to be a goal keeper. She will not manage.*

Teacher: *OK. Let's analyse it. Why is this phenomenon happening?*

Sofia: *Because we (girls) do not usually play football and we also do not attend football academies like the boys do.*

> Teacher: So the ability of somebody to play football is related to what?
>
> Nick: If they like it.
>
> Sandy: If they have it as a hobby.
>
> Teacher: Or if they spend time playing football?
>
> Sofia: I want to attend a football academy but my mother does not allow me to do so.
>
> Teacher: There are some times that our parents disagree with what we want to do.
>
> Olivia: Let's talk about musical instruments. Piano is not a girly musical instrument. It is for everybody. The people who invented the piano were men.
>
> Teacher: That is right. Very famous pianists are male.
>
> Helen: The same thing happens with cooking.
>
> Teacher: That is more than true. The most famous cooks in the world are men.
>
> Helen: The finalists in the Master Chef TV program were two men.
>
> Clark: I do not care if people say that cooking is not for men. I like cooking.
>
> Sofia: My father can cook very well too.
>
> *(CDI: 2/4/2013)*

Recognising the contrast between my leading role in the critical literacy lessons and Freire's theory made me feel vulnerable.

> *I feel uncomfortable with the fact that I am still leading them. Am I in the centre of the teaching/learning process?*
>
> *(T/RJW: 19/4/2013)*

According to Freire, students and not teachers are in the centre of teaching as students are actively involved in the learning process. As a consequence

of the confusing feelings I had, I even perceived the act of correcting my students' writings with a pen, a common teacher practice, as an exercise of power:

> *I cannot use a pen to correct them (students' writings)! I do not feel comfortable. It is as if I am showing to them (students) how powerful I am.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 27/1/2013)*

The introduction of critical literacy in my classroom made me realise that Freire' encouragement of learners to grasp power and for teachers to facilitate this process is complex. My responsibility as the classroom teacher and the value I was giving to my position were more important than my conviction in letting my students lead. At the same time my students had me as their constant reference to either endorse or disagree with an opinion thus making my presence in the classroom central and my status well-built.

> *Sandy: What is your opinion teacher? What do you think?*
>
> *(CDI: 5/4 /2013)*

THE TEACHER AS THE OWNER OF AN AEOLIAN BAG

In Homer's ancient Greek epic poem *The Odyssey*, Aeolus, the keeper of the winds, gave Odysseus a bag. In this bag, Aeolus tightly captured all the bad winds so that Odysseus and his crew could easily and safely sail home. However, when the sailors opened the bag out of curiosity, all the bad winds came out, causing an enormous storm that extended their journey into a ten-year adventure.

Each teacher owns one of those bags where difficulties and dilemmas are kept. I have the feeling that when teachers teach in the same way with the use of the same predesigned teaching materials year after year they feel secure and relaxed and their bags are closed. They sail in safe waters without having any fears of possible storms or adventures. However when they decide to introduce in their classroom something innovative and new then it is most likely that they have opened their bag.

In my case, I perceive my choice to introduce critical literacy through popular culture as an act of opening my Aeolian bag. However this act was not driven by curiosity. It was driven by courage. Freire (1998) believes that "it is impossible to teach without ... the courage to try a thousand times before giving up" (p. 52). During a discussion with a fellow teacher, I outlined the courage attribute of critical literacy teaching:

> *I told her that the only way to feel comfortable with it [critical literacy]*
> *was by having the guts to put it into practice!*
>
> *(T/RJW: 15/3/2013)*

My decision to use popular texts gave rise to major difficulties and dilemmas. Firstly, popular culture texts' short-lived nature required me to make decisions and organise classroom activities within a short time span making my work more demanding.

> *Popular culture is so temporary. In September my students were*
> *fascinated with Beyblades. At the moment they mention all the time a*
> *song titled "the little chick cheep"*
>
> *(T/RJW: 22/11/2012)*

> *I need to organise my fist unit on the 'little chick cheep' before my*
> *students do not like it anymore.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 26/11/2012)*

Popular culture texts were also leading the lessons into unexpected and unpredictable spaces filled with the real world through everyday social issues (Heffernan and Lewison, 2000) that I usually felt unable or too uncomfortable to handle (Comber, 1999). During our discussion on Danica Patrick I wrote in my research journal:

> *Two boys were laughing and I knew that the reason was because they had probably seen her nude pictures as a model on the internet. I made no comments as I felt that I could not handle it.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 15/4/2013)*

In this case, I could have discussed with my students the presentation of the female body in the media. Even though I was aware of my duty to help my students examine the presence of power relations in everyday texts, my students' young age was holding me back. I was feeling that I was responsible to protect my students from a number of topics and images. By being aware of the cultural, social and ethical boundaries of my profession, that are not written in any official book but guided by the practices of the Cypriot society, I had control over the presentation of a number of issues in my classroom. In the following classroom discussion I avoided to discuss the issue of sexual orientation as I felt that I could not cope with a prospective discussion in a classroom setting with 8-year-olds.

Nick:	*A girl might look like a girl but she could have the soul of a boy.*
Theo:	*It is not their fault. God made them like that.*
Teacher:	*Yes.*
Mary:	*I have an aunt who talks like a man but she is a woman.*
Teacher:	*This might be due to the way her vocal cords function.*
Nick:	*Not really. She might look like a woman but she has the soul of a man.*

Teacher: *I understand Nick what you are saying. OK. We have*
              finished our discussion for today.

                                                     (T/RJW 10/4/2013)

However in April 2013, I took the risk and introduced in my classroom a controversial text that carried a number of ethical dilemmas with strong links to power relations, consumerism and sexism. During our discussions on sports and gender, children talked about sports newspapers and their wish to have one in the classroom. After a reflexive thinking, I decided to bring sports newspapers[21] in my classroom. On that day we had the following discussion:

Nick: *Women in very few clothes!*
Eve: *Why do they show models in this sports newspaper?*
Teacher: *Yes, that is true. Why?*
Sandy: *Is it proper?*
Teacher: *What do you think?*
Theo: *They want to make the newspaper look more attractive.*
Teacher: *Attract who?*
Sofia: *Men*
Nick: *The people who publish this newspaper are definitely*
              men!
Alicia: *Boys buy these newspapers because it talks only about*
              football and naked women who boys like them a lot.
[…]

Teacher: *So according to you, this should stay as it is or it should*
              change?
Theo: *Stay as it is. We like it.*
Eve: *I disagree. I do not like newspapers with naked women.*
              In magazines it is fine but in newspapers … no way.

---

[21] Cypriot sports newspapers usually include pictures of half-naked female models.

Nick: *I like that it says so many things about football but I do not like the naked women.*

Theo: *I prefer having football and other sports but football themes should be kept together so that it wouldn't be difficult for somebody to look for what they want.*

Eve: *I still do not know why they have naked women in this newspaper.*

Olivia: *To attract boys!*

Mary: *Most boys, when they see these pictures they get excited.*

Nick: *It is very normal, right?*

Teacher: *Yes it is normal, I agree.*

Eve: *Have they thought how women might feel when they buy this newspaper? And also this naked girl who is in the newspaper might not feel well if they spot her in public. I feel sorry for her.*

Sandy: *She probably likes it.*

Nick: *She is getting money from this.*

Teacher: *Yes, but it is the newspaper's responsibility to decide what to publish and what not.*

Nick: *I could have done the same for money.*
(Laughing)

Theo: *Some time ago, I went to the local mini shop to buy a newspaper for my grandfather and I saw a magazine at the very back that had a naked woman on the cover.*

Teacher: *OK. But I wouldn't like buying a sports newspaper with naked women.*

Theo: *Your husband would like to read your newspaper all the time because of the naked women!*

Helen: *My mother owns a magazine and I once looked at it and it was full of naked women.*

Teacher: *Yes. This is probably a magazine for adults.*

> Sandy: *Full of naked women?*
>
> Teacher: *Yes there is this type of magazines.*
>
> Nicole: *When boys look at these types of pictures they get excited, you know!*
>
> Teacher: *Yes I know.*
>
> *(CDI: 19/4/2013)*

Children were able to discuss with each other, give their opinions, retrieve incidents from their prior experiences and get into somebody else's shoes. Regardless of the professional satisfaction I obtained from this activity, the following days until the day I had the interview with the school inspector I was constantly stressing about the possibility of being given a negative feedback:

> *I cannot stop thinking about the sports newspaper activity. What will the school inspector say about it?*
>
> *(T/RJW: 1/7/2013)*

To my great relief during the interview, the school inspector not only talked about the incident but also praised the way I introduced this activity in my classroom and the beneficial outcomes for my students:

> *The most important factor is the way a teacher approaches any incident and text in the classroom and not the incident or the text itself.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

Going back to this incident and looking at it from a different angle, I realised that my work carries an irony. Even though I was working with critical literacy, a practice whose main aim is to empower people by questioning the power relations in texts and practices and interrogate those in power, I was still expecting approval for my teaching decisions by those held the power.

Heffernan and Lewison (2000) believe that teachers seem reluctant to discuss controversial topics with their students as they perceive the exposure of their personal opinions and views as inappropriate (p. 16). However, according to Leland and Harste (2000) teachers should be aware that teaching is a non-neutral form of cultural practice (p. 4). Teachers carry with them their cultural and ideological positions that are inevitably revealed through the presentation of their ideas and their approaches to schooling, teaching and learning (Leland and Harste, 2000, p. 5).

In addition to the controversial topics and themes that are evident in popular culture texts, the language that is very often present in these types of text is sometimes offensive and inappropriate for school use. This presented me with difficult dilemmas that I had to negotiate carefully. Even though I was aware that my students had unrestricted experiences with inappropriate images or offensive language within their community and homes, I could not present them in a school setting. That is why I decided to omit, remove or change some parts of the texts, indicating where I made the changes and explaining the reasons:

> *I had to delete some words from Danae's blog and put the symbol '[…]' there. I could not give a text that includes bad words and swearing to the kids. What are the parents going to think about me?*
>
> *(T/RJW: 3/2/2013)*

> *Sandy:*　　　*Why do you stop the show here?*
> *Teacher:*　　*I am going to show you only parts of it as bad words are used in the rest of the show.*
>
> *(CDI: 18/4/2013)*

The originality of popular texts also made their use quite difficult when the language used is taken into consideration. There were times when the chosen texts were in English that I had to translate; an issue which made me realise how difficult it is for young Cypriot students[22] to analyse and work with original texts.

> *I come across (on the internet) some wonderful articles and videos but they are in English. That is a major constraint.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 7/4/2013)*

In addition to that, even if the selected texts were not in a foreign language they included a plethora of unknown or difficult words for my third graders. Hence, I had to give my students time to understand the meaning of these words so that the analysis of the texts could be easier:

> *While I was reading the text, kids were stopping me in order to ask for the meaning of unknown words.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 11/4/2013)*

In my attempt to work out what my boundaries were I put forward my identity as a mother who is close to the Cypriot ethical and cultural beliefs:

> *I decided that I will show and give to my students the texts that I wouldn't mind my daughter's teacher present to her.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 6/22013)*

Putting myself in the shoes of my students' parents, I was able to present them with what I would accept my daughter's teacher to present to her. Even though this practice worked perfectly for this project it carried a number of challenges and prospective questions. Firstly, a parent might have had different views and beliefs than mine, an issue I did not consider back then.

---

[22] The official language of my school is Greek.

Secondly if I was not a mother, how could I have worked out what my boundaries and filters were?

In addition to the dilemmas linked to popular culture and authentic popular culture texts, an analysis of the data shows that more energy, creativity and organisation were required for the implementation of the critical literacy activities compared to the existing literacy teaching material:

> *The planning of critical literacy lessons is tough.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 12/1/2013)*

Someone might argue that as long as critical literacy enriches the language lesson with the wishes, likes and experiences of the participants and turns it into a learning experience with an unpredictable path then no prior organisation is required. However my experience revealed the opposite. During classroom conversations, my students and I were bringing to class new ideas that required further examination. So the initial organisation of the whole unit was insufficient. I was continuously preparing and redesigning my teaching and lessons. Every night I had to prepare new material, find texts and organise learning activities:

> *Developing a critical literacy unit can be described as having a BIG*
> *IDEA (well planned) that you add new activities to day after day.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 12/1/2013)*

In my attempt to satisfy my students who were more interested in other school subjects I introduced an interdisciplinary approach that required further planning, effort, and creativity:

After the discussion my students had with the school nurse on healthy nutrition habits, the children drew their own 'little chick cheep' that eats healthy food.

(T/RJW: 6/2/2013)

The gym teacher visited the class and talked to us about the different parts of the body that are trained with the gym equipment 'The little chick cheep' uses.

(T/RJW: 7/2/2013)

As a consequence of all these I was tired on a regular basis something I rarely experienced in my professional life:

I am sick in bed … but I must do some work. I feel that I cannot stop, not even for one day.

(T/RJW: 12/1/2013)

In addition to the element of tiredness that this attempt required was its time constraint characteristic. Relevant literature illustrates teachers' expression of discomfort towards critical literacy due to the limited time they have to work with it. In contrast to teachers' views, Comber (interview in Larson and Marsh, 2005) and Smith (2001) believe that critical literacy should not be considered as another school subject but rather as a teaching goal that is integrated in the whole classroom curriculum starting from the first day of schooling. However, in the case of this project that consisted of two units embedded in the classroom curriculum whose majority consisted of literacy teaching based on language text books and predesigned literacy activities, time appeared to be a major issue.

I was constantly under stress as time was limited for both the critical literacy units and the syllabus deriving from the literacy textbooks. I had the sense

that I was getting behind schedule compared to the other third grade classroom of our school that did not have critical literacy in its curriculum. I was worried about how the parents and my school's managers would react to this situation due to the value that it is often ascribed to textbooks.

> *We (Cyprus educational system) haven't moved from that textbook obsession yet.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 12/1/2013)*

In order to overcome this problem and forestall any possible negative reactions I decided to work on both my literacy textbook syllabus and the critical literacy units on a parallel basis:

> *I have decided to work from the language text book along with the critical literacy unit. So nobody will have anything to say, no colleague, no parent or the headteacher!*
>
> *(T/RJW: 29/1/2013)*

Even though this action made me feel that I was progressing with both my literacy goals evenly, it was also highly subversive as it unlocked another wind from my bag. It led to a frightful realisation regarding my professional situation that was similar to Demko's (with Hedrick, 2010) allegorical description of scripted schooling in the introduction of her article:

> Picture this: you are watching a horror movie in which the town is full of zombies that have had their brains sucked out. The former humans are walking through the town lethargically repeating the same thing over and over again. Unfortunately, this is much like the typical secondary reading classroom where the school districts have adopted some sort of scripted reading program (p. 62).

Working on both of them at the same time made me realise that my experiences with textbooks and predesigned material were making me feel bored, ineffective, unproductive and uncreative. Predesigned teaching

materials are thought to "constrain and control both knowledge and teaching" (Ball and Cohen, 1996, p. 6), "corrupt teachers' professionalism" (Ball and Cohen, 1996, p. 7) and lead to the "deprofessionalization of teachers" (Kitchen, 2009, p. 46). With the use of critical literacy I was feeling free and creative. I had the privilege "to teach" (Demko, 2010, p. 64) as I could form judgements, think critically and be viewed as a capable professional who could make choices (Kitchen, 2009):

> *I feel awkward when I go back to the old things, back to the textbook that does not give me much freedom…. I am bored.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 17/2/2013)*

Within the current section of this chapter, I have analysed the skills, feelings, and understandings that I, as the classroom teacher, had when critical literacy through popular culture texts was introduced in my third grade classroom. In the next part I attempt to answer the third supplementary research question which refers to parents' perceptions and feelings.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND FEELINGS

In this section, I provide an answer to the third supplementary question about parents' perceptions and feelings in relation to the inclusion of critical literacy through popular culture texts in the literacy curriculum of their children's classroom. The data were obtained from eight parents who voluntarily participated in this research project and contributed to it with

journal writings (PJW) and a focus group session (PFG). From the data analysis four themes arise:

- ❖ Parents as popular culture fans
- ❖ Parents as critical literacy neophytes
- ❖ Parents as traditional literacy supporters
- ❖ Parents as influential learning factors

PARENTS AS POPULAR CULTURE FANS

Arthur (2005) examined parents' perceptions in relation to popular culture. Her findings showed that parents supported their children's interests in popular culture texts and icons. Moreover, they believed in the impact of these texts on their youngsters' social as well as educational life (p. 168). They stated that the multimodal nature of these texts supported their children's language learning and literacy education (p. 169). In addition popular culture was described as a vital component of their children's childhood that helped them escape from daily life troubles (p. 170).

The data obtained from this research project showed that the Easthighway parents had positive views regarding the introduction of popular culture texts within a primary classroom. They perceived this kind of text as suitable for learning due to the enjoyment they create. A mother wrote the following entry in her journal:

> *My son worked with this unit very happily without showing any negative feelings. I like it when my son feels so happy at school. Learning is very often not that pleasant!*
>
> *(PJW)*

When parents were asked at the focus group about possible themes that they believed their children could work with, a mother spontaneously answered:

> *Parent 1:   The themes should be suggested by them, not us.*

And another mother added:

> *Parent 2:   It is their unit not ours.*

The parents who gave these answers were aware that their children's choice would most probably be related to popular culture as popular culture texts and icons are their first choice at home. They felt that through popular culture their children would participate in enjoyable, easily comprehendible and familiar experiences. Describing the motivation their children experienced, a parent said:

> *My daughter was showing great enthusiasm when she was working with both the critical literacy units.*
>
> *(PJW)*

When parents observed their children doing their homework they described the great enthusiasm children were showing and the fact that they asked for less help from parents:

> *We face no difficulties at home when my child has homework. The whole thing seems so interesting that my daughter loves working at home with it.*
>
> *(PJW)*

My daughter did not let me help her with her homework. She wanted to work by herself and describe the bird the way she best understood it.

(PJW)

In addition to the motivational aspect of popular culture, parents also witnessed the ability of popular culture texts to make connections between home and school. Children brought home what they were learning at school and at the same time communicated and shared their learning with their families due to common likes and experiences. As a consequence of this, parents gained greater insight into their children's school activities and experiences while children presented themselves to their parents and siblings as highly knowledgeable, as experts.

A mother described the following incident:

My daughter got really excited with Danica Patrick. This afternoon she was watching Formula 1 with her father and she started talking to him about how brave Danica is and how important it is for people not to have stereotypes.

(PJW)

A student also mentioned during a classroom discussion:

Alicia: *I told my father about "The little chick cheep" song. My sister wanted to listen it so my father switched on the computer. She listened to it ten times.*

(CDI: 29/1/2013)

Having popular culture texts in my classroom curriculum has helped me discuss with my students contemporary issues that are presented within their

community or in the media; something parents not only spotted but praised as in the following journal writing:

> *Our children are given the opportunity to understand contemporary stimuli that they come across in their everyday life especially through the media.*
>
> *(PJW)*

Even though parents expressed positive feelings for the acceptance of popular culture in our classroom, the data reveals a sense of unease towards popular culture in their children's life. Several studies reveal a number of concerns among adults related to age appropriateness (Gainer, 2007), violence (Willett, 2005), negative role models (Arthur, 2005; Williams, 2007) and the profit/consumerism aspect of popular culture texts (Dolby, 2003; Lewis, 1998).

During the focus group the following conversation transpired between two parents:

> *Parent 1:*   *I liked that you* [referring to me] *haven't done in class anything about football. Boys talk about football all the time. It is like an obsession.*
>
> *Parent 2:*   *Yes, that is true. It is the first and only thing they have in their mind!*
>
> *(PFG)*

This conversation reveals that Easthighway parents were mostly concerned with the fondness their children showed towards popular culture. Parents were worried about the time their children were spending on particular popular culture forms (like football) making them unable to either acquire new hobbies or find out other potential activities.

PARENTS AS CRITICAL LITERACY NEOPHYTES

The introduction of critical literacy within a primary classroom is very often characterised as complex and dynamic (Comber, 2001). These complexities are related to the difficulties educators face when they attempt to incorporate it in their classroom's literacy curriculum and the different faces it can take according to the social and educational situation of the classroom (Comber, 2001). In addition, teachers raise a number of concerns on the effects critical literacy might have on young students' education and the possible objections that parents might have (Heffernan and Lewison, 2000, p. 20).

Soon after the first meeting I had with parents where I informed them about the project, I wrote in my journal:

> *They [parents] were not asking questions and they were very silent. They seemed to be confused. I believe that their confusion was not due to the project but due the concept of critical literacy and how it can help their children. The school headteacher realised that and gave additional information to them.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 5/10/2012)*

This reveals that parents were completely unaware of what critical literacy is, how it is used and what its benefits are for contemporary people of all ages. A parent wrote about it:

> *Critical literacy is a topic that makes parents feel a bit puzzled. We know nothing about it. Many parents know nothing about its benefits.*
>
> *(PJW)*

Their initial lack of awareness of critical literacy could have put this project in jeopardy and the inclusion of critical literacy in their children's classroom

unwelcomed. I have the feeling that parents' concerns and feelings of doubt were diminished due to two reasons. Firstly, the headteacher's contribution to the meeting was vital. In my journal I wrote:

> *The headteacher's comment on the importance of critical literacy and critical thinking for children has made them* [parents] *think about it.*
>
> *(T/RJW: 9/10/2012)*

The second reason is the trust they showed towards me and my work. I have a strong feeling that this trust was not related to the traditional power relationship between teacher and parents but to my reputation as a 'very good teacher'. Parents believed that what I was doing was for their children's academic benefit and that even though their children's classroom was presented with innovative and many times controversial issues, I had the abilities to handle it successfully. A parent said at the focus group:

> *Parent 3:   Sometimes I read my daughter's notebook, sometimes I do not. However, we trust you and believe that what you are doing is for their benefit.*
>
> *(PFG)*

The feelings of trust they showed towards the school and their children's teacher have acted as positive factors that gave them the opportunity to see the implementation of critical literacy in action and the positive outcomes of it on their children's development. Parents were able to observe a number of encouraging critical literacy effects on their children that they described in their journal writings. Parents talked about critical skills, creativity, and the ability to see things from different perspectives.

> *They have developed their critical skills, their creativity, learning outcomes and research skills.*

My daughter can now see texts with a different eye. She can see small details and analyse texts in a way that she could not do before.

I saw my daughter being able to make connections between things in an innovative way and take someone else's position

(PJW)

Parents also commented on their children's participation in classroom discussions. In these discussions children were able to express themselves freely. When critical literacy is put into practice, no idea is perceived as wrong or right. It all depends on the position the analyser takes.

I like that our children are given the opportunity to say what they want to say without being afraid that they are wrong or right. I also like that they are given the opportunity to use arguments in their discussions.

(PJW)

As has been mentioned before, this project was the very first experience with critical literacy for the parents. A parent confessed in one of her/his journal writings:

I am 34 years old and I have never before looked at things as critically as now. Thank you.

(PJW)

And another one wrote:

From the very first unit I realised that even behind the simplest text a whole background exists.

(PJW)

In daily life parents and children come across issues adults feel uncomfortable or unable to discuss with their daughters or sons, like consumerism, stereotypes, sexism, and women's images in the media. The fact that these issues were examined in the classroom through critical literacy was praised by parents:

> *I felt enthusiasm and relief that has been given the opportunity to my child to work on issues that I was not able to introduce to him in such a young age.*
>
> *(PJW)*

Even though this journal entry shows parents' positive stance towards critical literacy's potential to bring forward issues that many parents feel uncomfortable to discuss with their children at the same time gives rise to the necessity on behalf of the classroom teacher to clearly indicate her/his boundaries (as has been discussed previously in this chapter). In addition it uncovers the societal and parental role that very often Cypriot schools are entrusted with to educate the new generation based on the ethical and moral values of our community.

PARENTS AS TRADITIONAL LITERACY SUPPORTERS

As previously described the Easthighway parents cherished the enjoyment their children experienced from the taught units, the active involvement their children had during the teaching and learning process, the improvement of their children's critical literacy competences and the opportunity that was given to their children to share learning with them. The data obtained during this process also showed that parents were interested in the traditional literacy competencies of their children mostly writing and composition. Even though nowadays literacy is perceived as "a social practice" (Jewitt, 2008, p.

260), traditionally speaking and as these parents viewed it, literacy is the process of reading and writing print texts that is assessed on the basis of a group of measurable literacy skills (Hannon, 2000, p. 37).

In their journal writings two parents talked about the ways the two units helped their children in this area and how content they were about that:

> *It is impressive how much writing they have produced in a variety of ways. This helps their composition skills like syntax and enunciation.*
>
> *(PJW)*

> *I liked that my daughter really wanted to produce a nice piece of writing by choosing the most appropriate words like adjectives. This has never happened before.*
>
> *(PJW)*

However, parents appeared concerned as during the introduction of the critical literacy units, the official language text books were not used. A parent was worried that the children's literacy education might not be as constructive as that of the other third grade classroom of the school. This parent asked me during the focus group:

> *Parent 4:*   *What about the textbooks the Ministry of Education provided the schools with? Have they been rejected in your classroom? Is it possible that when no text books are used, our children will be able to achieve academically?*
>
> *(PFG)*

Parents concerns on the temporary discontinuation of the literacy textbooks brought about a discussion on traditional literacy issues like grammar and spelling.

> *Parent 1:* *Texts from language texts books are not so important.*
> *Grammar is more important and as long as you keep*
> *doing it I feel happy.*
>
> *Parent 2:* *And spelling is very important too.*
>
> *Parent 3:* *Yes that is true. As long as our children are learning,*
> *the units from the texts books are not that important.*
>
> *(PFG)*

A parent also raised a question and at the same time made a suggestion that combines critical literacy and literacy textbooks:

> *Parent 4:* *Is it possible to do critical literacy based on the texts in*
> *the textbooks?*
>
> *(PFG)*

This suggestion is of great interest for the Cypriot context where the use of literacy textbooks is compulsory and I believe that it is an issue that needs to be researched further.

The action research methodology of this project gave the opportunity to parents not only to think reflexively and critically about their feelings and perceptions but also to become agents of change in their children's education. Even if this aspect is not so much related to the third research question but to the special characteristics of this project I believe that it would be an omission and lack of attention not to talk about it. So in addition to the three pre-mentioned themes in the next paragraphs I talk about how parents acted as influential learning factors.

PARENTS AS INFLUENTIAL LEARNING FACTORS

Easthighway Primary School parents were highly concerned with their children's learning outcomes and school experiences. Almost all of them participated in the school activities either during work time or in the afternoon or evening. I consider their involvement in this project as a reflection of this interest. A mother wrote about her participation in this project:

> *As long as this is something that our children will benefit from, I do not need to think about it.*
>
> *(PJW)*

Through this research project I was also able to see how well-informed many parents were in relation to their children's learning and classroom life. This information was mainly acquired through their children's narrations of their classroom experiences, the discussion they had with their children and also from their children's notebooks and writings.

> *Parent 1:*   *My son talks about it all the time. It is not an exaggeration that I know with great detail what you are doing in class.*
>
> (PFG)

> *I read my son's text book and saw from it what you are doing in class.*
>
> *(PJW)*

This project has also acted as a vehicle that has given parents the opportunity to be part of their children's education in a dynamic and constructive way. This research project has viewed parents as partners in the learning process instead of passive viewers. They were able to talk

freely to their children's teacher. They could articulate both positive and negative opinions and feelings on the critical literacy units.

> *I personally believe that the second unit you are doing in the class is excellent.*
>
> *(PJW)*

> *Next unit should not take as long as this one.*
>
> *(PJW)*

> *Parent 2:* *The first unit was very interesting and really exciting.*
>
> *(PFG)*

> *I like what you are doing. Keep up the good work.*
>
> *(PJW)*

Parents also suggested topics and themes they believed their kids should work on within the classroom critical literacy curriculum. What is important to mention at this point is that parents suggested the topics mainly based on their own experiences, likes and preferences. In some cases they suggested a topic not because they believed that it would be interesting for their children but because it would be important for the development of their ethical values.

> *Parent 3:* *Have you thought about including something about Paralympics as people still have stereotypes on that issue? And also people get courage when they see people with disabilities succeeding.*
>
> *(PFG)*

 In many cases, parents' views influenced my decisions on the way a unit should move on. They were in fact agents of change of their children's education in a way that probably had never happened before or will never occur again.

> *The last couple of days my son feels bored and tired. You should probably stop this unit and move to another one.*
>
> *(PJW)*

> *I read a note from a mother today. She tells me that the unit it taking too long and that the kids have started feeling bored with it. Now I know that I must stop it. I must stop right now, right today!*
>
> *(T/RJW: 18/2/2013)*

> *It is important that you haven't abandoned grammar or spelling ... just like the other third grade of our school*
>
> *(PJW)*

Within the current section of this chapter, I have analysed the feelings and perceptions parents had when critical literacy through popular culture was introduced in their children's classroom. In the next part I attempt to answer the fourth supplementary research question which refers to the school headteacher's and the school inspector's views and roles.

THE SCHOOL MANAGERIAL TEAM'S VIEWS AND ROLE

Within this section, I answer the fourth supplementary question of this research project that refers to the views and role of the school managerial team (school inspector and headteacher) when critical literacy through popular culture enters a primary classroom. My decision to present the school headteacher and the school inspector as a team was driven by the fact that they are the main evaluators of teachers' professional competency within the Cypriot educational system. The data was collected from an interview with the school inspector (SIIN) and another one with the school headteacher (HTIN). The following topics emerged from the data analysis:

- ❖ The managerial team members as critical literacy advocates
- ❖ The managerial team members as critical literacy's future wonderers
- ❖ The managerial team members as popular culture sceptics

THE MANAGERIAL TEAM MEMBERS AS CRITICAL LITERACY ADVOCATES

Very often critical literacy is viewed by educators and scholars as complicated and unsuitable for young students (Flint, 2000) making critical literacy one of the most avoided areas for the literacy curriculum of early years and primary education (Larson and Marsh, 2005; Marsh and Millard, 2000). However research projects conducted within primary classrooms (e.g. Comber et al., 2001; Crafton et al, 2007; Vasquez, 2004) reveal children's capabilities to work effectively and productively with critical literacy.

Similarly, the school's managerial team eulogised the inclusion of critical literacy in the new Cypriot primary literacy curriculum and described it as an important and enriching factor of Cypriot education. The team said:

The inclusion of critical literacy in the literacy curriculum is significant.

(SIIN)

I see this as an improvement of the Cypriot educational system.

(HTIN)

The team also made positive comments on the critical literacy competencies of young students.

I have realised that children can easily work with it [critical literacy] and have it as part of their everyday learning routines.

(HTIN)

In addition, the team viewed the inclusion of critical literacy within the primary curriculum as a conduit through which the new generation would be able to develop their critical skills and grow into responsible, caring and mindful adults.

If children start from this age they will become better consumers and citizens.

(HTIN)

Critical literacy benefits can be observed in the future . . . I see critical literacy as a way to have active and critically thinking . . . and highly involved citizens who are interested in their communities and in other humans . . . who are not manipulated, who think.

(SIIN)

The managerial team's ideas also revealed a societal responsibility of schools and the potential of critical literacy education to prepare the citizens of tomorrow. A number of educators and scholars (Black, 2010; Egbert, 2009; Flores-Koulish, 2010) discuss the significance of critical literacy in our present day where humans witness major social and economic changes and are constantly presented with a plethora of ideas (Jewitt, 2008, p. 243). Through critical literacy contemporary citizens are given the opportunity to question and discuss the ideas that are presented to them, while having the capacities to suggest and bring changes.

Moreover, the team considered the introduction of critical literacy in the Cypriot primary schools to be in line with the needs that derive from the economic crisis and the social corruption of the Cypriot society. The team viewed the inclusion of critical literacy in schools as an opportunity given to schools to become agents of change. In addition, the introduction of critical literacy in the Cypriot educational system was viewed by the team members as one of the ways that would help Cypriot society move to a prosperous future that would rely on moral principles and beliefs like responsibility and respect. In a confessional manner, the headteacher said:

> *I believe that the Cypriot society needs it … it will help our society get improved. It will help us see and admit our mistakes. I honestly believe that through critical literacy people can improve themselves and their environment.*
>
> *(HTIN)*

The managerial team members strongly supported the inclusion of critical literacy in the Cypriot primary schools. However, informed by the way critical literacy was welcomed by the Cypriot educational community, they expressed their doubts regarding its future within the Cypriot educational system. This aspect is discussed in the following section.

THE MANAGERIAL TEAM MEMBERS AS CRITICAL LITERACY'S FUTURE WONDERERS

As the headteacher very vividly described, when critical literacy entered schools it created a number of negative feelings among the teachers' population:

> *Teachers were scared and wondering what this thing was.*
>
> *(HTIN)*

In relevant literature, teachers very often treat the introduction of critical literacy in classrooms with hostility, doubt and feelings of discomfort and anxiety (Comber, 1999; Smith, 2001; Vasquez, 2000). One of the reasons for this is believed to be teachers' personal or professional incompetence in relation to textual practices and literacy theories (Comber, 2001; Kontovourki and Ioannidou, 2013). During the 2011–2012 academic year, Kontovourki and Ioannidou (2013) examined Cypriot primary teachers' perceptions and practices in relation to new literacy curriculum. Their data analysis showed that critical literacy was limitedly used in Cypriot primary classrooms having teachers' ignorance of the theoretical background of critical literacy as one of the main reasons. The managerial team revealed this lack of awareness on behalf of Cypriot teachers. The school headteacher said:

> *We were not fully prepared when critical literacy was introduced in our schools.*
>
> *(HTIN)*

This ascertainment on behalf of the school headteacher reveals the fact that the decision to introduce critical literacy in the official curriculum was taken by policy makers in part of a curriculum change. This policy decision was actually trusted upon teachers without any involvement on behalf of them.

Moreover teachers were neither given adequate time nor effective training in order to understand this new concept.

Even though the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture organised in-service training sessions for teachers on the new literacy curriculum and the notion of critical literacy (e.g. the massive in-service training sessions in December 2010), the teachers in Kontovourki and Ioannidou's (2013) research project described these sessions as limited, insufficient and not in line with their needs. The managerial team described the training sessions as highly theoretical whereas teachers were expecting something more practical:

> *They [training sessions] present it [critical literacy] in a very theoretical way. Your work has given me a new perspective of it, critical literacy as part of everyday life.*
>
> *(HTIN)*

The school inspector also mentioned the inadequate time that was given to teachers to get familiar with the new curriculum; an aspect that created unenthusiastic feelings among teachers and a doubtful prospect for further implementation of critical literacy in Cypriot schools.

> *It was very difficult for teachers to get to know the curriculum within a short time.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

Moreover the team talked about the difficulties teachers had during the design of critical literacy units due to its time consuming feature.

> *[. . .] many teachers have done more that they could. [. . .] It [critical literacy lesson planning] is an exhausting experience.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

They also talked about how the locally and socially situated nature of critical literacy affects its implementation in schools as the exchange of pre-designed lesson plans and educational resources between teachers is usually unsuccessful. Relevant literature (Comber, 2001; Dyson, 2001) stresses the fact that when the same lesson plans and texts are used in two different classrooms the outcomes are always different. These are influenced by the social and educational circumstances under which each classroom and its participants function. The school inspector explained:

> *If you give this unit to another teacher it may not be as successful as yours. Because it is not designed based on the needs and preferences of his children. That is why putting critical literacy in practice is very difficult.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

She perceived as a solution to educators' teaching problems the publishing of a 'teachers' guide' that would give teachers ideas on texts that could be used and practical solutions for everyday classroom problems related to critical literacy. As she explained, this guide would minimise the time spent for the lesson planning:

> *I believe that teachers should be provided with a well written teachers' guide on literacy. In order to be effective, teachers cannot look for material 24 hours per day. It is very tiring.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

The school inspector's suggestion is highly linked with the compassion and interest she used to show to the teachers she supervised. At the same time it reveals the great value that the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture officers gave to the official curriculum. However I have the feeling that this suggestion is not in line with the distinctive characteristics of critical literacy.

Critical literacy is something to be negotiated among classroom members and something that can grow naturally within a classroom according to the wishes and views of the classroom members.

In addition, the school inspector believed that the sharing of experiences through a teachers' network would have helped teachers, especially those with disapproving views towards critical literacy.

> *A teacher might not be as positive for this approach or needs more time to work on it. Working together in a group can help this teacher.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

According to the relevant literature, networks of teachers appear to be greatly welcomed and appreciated. A very interesting example that had positive outcomes is described in Lewison, Flint and Sluys (2002) where the researchers organised teachers' meetings on a monthly basis. Through these meetings the teachers helped each other to become familiar with critical literacy.

Finally, the school inspector described the existence of unclear guidelines on the side of the newly elected or newly appointed Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture officials who requested an evaluation of the new literacy curriculum, after the Cypriot presidential elections in 2013.

> *There are still not clear guidelines on what will happen. The new curriculum is going through an evaluation. Many people support critical literacy greatly but there are others who have their doubts.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

Three months after my interview with the school inspector, on the 21st November 2013, the Director of Primary Education posted on the official website of the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture: '*The changes of*

the literacy teaching in primary schools'. In reference to critical literacy, the director said:

> It [critical literacy] is neither deleted nor rejected. However, "critical literacy" is not in the heart of teaching [as it is described in the new curriculum]. It is redefined as a pedagogical tool related to the critical approach (critical investigation and analysis) of texts and leads to the development of a critical attitude towards them (in Greek).

Nowadays, in 2016 at the time of writing this thesis, critical literacy is mainly implemented by teachers who believe in its potentials and have developed their critical literacy teaching skills through independent study. No further training or professional support has been provided to teachers.

THE MANAGERIAL TEAM MEMBERS AS POPULAR CULTURE TEXTS SCEPTICS

In addition to the strong support of the Easthighway managerial team on the introduction of critical literacy in the Cypriot primary schools, they also agreed on the prospect of popular culture texts in the critical literacy curriculum.

> *I believe that they [popular culture texts] help the introduction of critical literacy greatly.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

Their approval of the use of popular culture was mainly due to the motivation that was present when my students worked with popular culture texts, an issue that finds support in the relevant literature (Cheung, 2001; Marsh, 1999a; 1999b; Parry, 2014).

> *I see it [popular culture] as an important aspect and it can be used in schools as it is closer to children [. . .] through this [. . .] they*

[children] get enjoyment and at the same time do critique and see beyond the obvious.

(HTIN)

If there is no motivation you [teacher] can accomplish nothing. If they [students] do not like it [the text] they won't work with it. What we [teachers] present to them should be close to their likes.

(SIIN)

When the managerial team members were asked to comment on the critical literacy units I had introduced in my classroom they expressed scepticism and in some cases disapproval of my choices. These were not related to the advantages of popular culture or the texts per se but to the themes, issues and dilemmas that emerged from these texts.

To be honest the first unit [Unit One] seems to be a unit that carries risks.

(HTIN)

This kind of texts brings a lot of dilemmas. [. . .]. These texts concern me a lot.

(SIIN)

Within a similar vein the headteacher talked about not only his concerns but also outlined the feelings of other school teachers:

We were a bit puzzled with the first unit [Unit One] and we were not that fond of it.

(HTIN)

The concerns among teachers in relation to popular culture texts and their perceived negative influences on young people have already been

presented through an analysis of the relevant literature in previous sections of this thesis. Through the corresponding analysis of the managerial team's views a number of issues arise. Firstly, the team members felt that these themes were above and beyond the children's mental abilities and wondered whether children were able to function properly and effectively.

> *I am wondering, how deeply children were able to think and whether they are interested in them.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

 The team also described the emergent topics as too serious for young children and appeared to be unsure of the effect they would have on the emotionality of young students and their enthusiasm towards learning and schooling.

> *Looking at your units, I wondered how dangerous it is to examine this kind of issues with young children and whether this might affect their sensitivity, feelings and child innocence . . . controversial issues should be approached with great sensitivity and carefulness.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

As a solution the team suggested more pleasurable topics that they believed would not affect the children in any way.

> *Easier topics, more enjoyable, this is how it should be.*
>
> *(HTIN)*

As an example, the team suggested children's literature and books written by well-known authors. They portrayed this kind of texts as interesting, enjoyable and necessary for the emotional stability of young people. They said:

In primary school we must present to our students a lot of fairy tales, mythology and texts from literature where values are evident. Highly notable literature texts, like classics, give the opportunity to emotions to emerge and there is no other way to do that.

(SIIN)

I would suggest more texts, some literature books, books with humour, like the books of Trivizas[23], or books that children like.

(HTIN)

Even though the team members showed feelings of concern and uneasiness towards the topics and issues that emerged from the popular culture texts, they praised the educational outcomes of the units. In a very contradictory manner, the school inspector said:

The way you introduced it to them . . . makes me see that it was great. However, theoretically speaking I was puzzled . . . But I know that as you are a talented teacher with teaching capabilities you were able to bring this subject to a third grade classroom and make it fit in that classroom.

(SIIN)

The headteacher, with similar feelings articulated the following:

In your case, your units succeeded even though they deal with this kind of issues mainly because you were prepared and knew how to deal with it.

(HTIN)

A further analysis of what has just been said uncovers the value the managerial team attaches to the role of teachers for a successful

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[23] *Eugene Trivizas is a very famous Greek children's book writer.*

introduction of critical literacy through popular culture texts in primary classrooms. Their views show the characteristics of the effective critical literacy teacher, an issue that is analysed in a previous part of Chapter Four. At the same time, the team members' appraisal of the teacher's role and contribution in a successful introduction of critical literacy through popular culture inevitably reveals their feelings and views in relation to their contribution and role in the whole process: they identified themselves as observers of the process and evaluators of the outcomes but unable to influence teachers' choices and decisions. They perceive every group of students and their teacher as unique and major decision makers.

> *From the material teachers gave to me to look at I can say that teachers have done a lot of work in this area. When critical literacy enters classroom a lot of preparation and decision making is a required, teachers need to know the theory behind critical literacy, understand the national curriculum, organize the lessons, be flexible, be creative and even adjust the unit they have planned. And also need to spend time in order to find the material and organize the activities.*
>
> *(SIIN)*

Nevertheless, I believe than an indirect influence existed. The everyday presence of the headteacher in the school area, the informal relations that many of the children and their parents had with the school headteacher, the frequent visits of the school inspector to my classroom and the values and beliefs that all of them carried influenced many of my decisions and choices. In three different cases I wrote in my journal the following entries that show this inability on behalf of the teacher to feel free of external influences when critical literacy through popular culture texts enters the literacy curriculum:

> *If I continue like this, I may have problems with either the parents or the school inspector.*

(T/RJW: 9/1/2013)

As long as a colleague asked me about the grammar in the syllabus, my school inspector might ask me this too. So what can I do?

(T/RJW: 10/1/2013)

At a moment I caught myself talking in a very quiet voice as I did not want to be heard by the headteacher as the secretary's office is next to my classroom.

(T/RJW: 22/1/2013)

The above three quotations from my journal entries not only reveal the dilemmas and difficulties that I encountered during my trials to use popular culture in my classroom's critical literacy curriculum but also uncover the irony I described before: I introduced critical literacy in my classroom, a power interrogating practice, and I was still expecting approval from those that held the power.

Within this last section of the fourth chapter of this thesis I have analysed the views and role of the school's managerial team on critical literacy introduction through popular culture in a third grade classroom. In the next chapter, which is the last one, I provide a reflection of the ideas developed during the conduction of this project, the analysis of the obtained data and the writing process of this paper.

CHAPTER FIVE.

My teaching experiences demonstrated the teaching profession as highly sociable and companionable; strong relationships are usually developed among co-teachers. However, my decision to incorporate popular culture—a concept not often used in Cypriot schools— in my third grade primary classroom's critical literacy curriculum and examine the issues and dilemmas that arose from these texts, turned my work experience during the 2012–2013 academic year into a lonely ride and myself into a solo traveller. My colleagues were not the travelling companions that I used to share with teaching stories and practical ideas. They were neither interested in listening to my stories nor applying any of my ideas in their classrooms. However, it was much later, after the completion of my research project that I realised that I was not at all alone. My fellow travellers during that year were my research participants (my students, their parents, the school headteacher and the school inspector). Together we travelled a journey that was characterised by experiencing, reflecting, learning and sharing. During that journey we helped each other live a better life, whether personal, professional or academic, with wisdom. This act is reflected in the 'mementos' we gained from this trip that turned it into an unforgettable experience.

As such, within this last chapter of this thesis I present our journey through a synthesis of ideas and experiences that were developed or retrieved during the conduction of this research project, the data analysis and the writing process of this paper with reference to the relevant literature. These ideas and experiences are packed in **three groups of 'souvenirs'**: 'the popular culture inspired souvenirs', 'the critical literacy inspired souvenirs' and 'the surprising souvenirs'. I need to mention at this point that this presentation is

carried out through my own eyes reflecting on my personal values and perceptions regardless of the fact that all the research participants joined this journey. I only hope that the rest of the research participants are going to be satisfied with this discussion. Moreover, within this last chapter I present **the significance of this project**, with special attention to its connection to the relevant literature and its contribution to the field. Finally **my 'take away(s)'** from this project and **my final considerations** are presented.

THE THREE GROUPS OF 'SOUVENIRS'

'THE POPULAR CULTURE INSPIRED SOUVENIRS'

This research project made the adult participants recognise the great impact that popular culture has on young children's lives. Children's skills and practices in relation to popular culture are described as a central aspect and an integral part of their childhood (Dyson, 2003). Popular culture and its symbols very often appear on children's belongings (Marsh & Millard, 2000; Wohlwend, 2009), influence children's playing (Dyson, 2003; Marsh & Millard, 2000) identity building, relationships (Dyson, 2003; Williams, 2007), societal values (Cheung, 2001) and knowledge (Dyson, 2001; Marsh, 1999b; Moje et al., 2004). This research project helped us (adult participants) become conscious of the large amount of knowledge that child participants acquired from their encounter with popular culture texts. At the same time it revealed to us the capacity of popular culture texts to be successfully implemented in the critical literacy curriculum. Morrell (2002) and Stevens (2001) believe that the best teaching approach that can be used when

popular culture enters a classroom is critical literacy. In a similar vein, Sanford and Madill (2007) stress the ability of visual popular culture texts to be effectively used in the critical literacy curriculum.

My students were bringing their home and out-of-school popular culture experiences to the classroom, which I embraced within our classroom literacy program with respect and appreciation in *'hybrid pedagogical spaces'* (Hicks, 2001) and a *'transformative pedagogy of literacy fusion'* (Millard, 2003). Both the managerial team and parents expressed their approval and satisfaction for this action of mine. Using Gainer's (2008) words, popular culture in my classroom served "as a bridge between students' out-of-school literacies and curricular goals of schooling" (p. 29). Parent participants showed their support and trust towards their children's popular culture choices in a manner similarly to the parents in Arthur's (2005) research project. Moreover, when parent participants of my project were asked, they were in a position to accurately name their children's favourite popular culture texts and icons thus revealing parents' awareness of their children's popular culture preferences.

In addition to realising the great impact popular culture has in the lives of children, this research project helped us appreciate popular culture as a motivational factor for successful learning. The managerial team mentioned the importance of presenting to children texts and topics that interest them, like the ones retrieved from popular culture. I observed my students enthusiastically participating in classroom activities and expressing pleasure in their classroom experiences. Their parents described the zeal with which their children approached their homework and the eagerness they showed in sharing classroom happenings with their families. Similar to my own research journal observations, in relevant literature teachers and researchers observe learners showing greater enthusiasm, experiencing no difficulties to follow classroom activities or staying on task and developing

better understanding of the new knowledge (Cheung, 2001; Comber 1998; Lesley, 2008; Marsh, 1999b; Vasquez, 2005).

However, I have the feeling that the motivation my third graders' were experiencing was not merely related to the enjoyment they were getting from these texts. As Parry (2014), very vividly, explains: "it is not just the sheer pleasure of sharing popular culture texts that increases children's motivation in literacy activities (as important as this is). I propose that it is also the ability to fully participate in classroom learning" (p. 14). My students were aware that our classroom routines were setting expectations from them to act in certain ways within our classroom walls. As my students were working with something they were familiar with and enjoyed, they could be productive, feel successful, achieve academically and maintain their identity as 'good students'.

Dolby (2003) calls popular culture '*a social glue'* as it brings together people from different social backgrounds. In my socially homogeneous classroom, popular culture functioned as 'a learning glue'. It brought my students together regardless of the different learning capabilities, skills, pieces of knowledge and experiences that each of them had. Popular culture and critical literacy helped them participate in the learning process successfully and function productively and effectively in the classroom. They even realised that learning can be fun as they gained much pleasure during lessons.

In addition to our realisation of the great influence popular culture has on youngsters' lives and its capacity to act as a motivational factor during the teaching-learning process, we came across a number of dilemmas related to popular culture. Firstly, parents appeared concerned about the great amount of time their children were spending with popular culture and they described a kind of obsession that characterised their children's activities with popular culture.

Secondly we got in touch with popular culture's short life. The short lived nature of popular culture and the anxiety this promotes among the teacher population is described in the relevant literature (Marsh, 2006; Marsh and Millard, 2000). In Marsh (2006) the student teachers that participated in her project "expressed the view that popular culture texts were generally too trivial and ephemeral in nature to warrant a specific focus" (p. 168). My students showed great excitement at the beginning of each unit but after a short period of time they felt bored as they became more interested in different popular culture topics or icons. This quick change of heart and the transience of popular culture was something that parents described vividly in their journals. In addition, my lack of personal awareness on a variety of popular culture themes and my need of time to get familiar with them brought on the possibility that my students would not be attracted to the selected popular culture texts by the time I would have been ready to introduce them in the classroom. This realisation made me aware that literacy teachers who use popular culture in their classrooms should be alert, highly reflexive and easily adjustable as teaching plans might need to be changed at the last minute. The managerial team suggested that the popular culture units be short in time so as to make students' disinterest in a lesson theme impossible.

Moreover, we realised that popular culture texts very often present or give rise to discussions on cultural issues that are very inflammatory. I admit that at the beginning I was neither careful nor capable of handling such controversial issues like sexism, racism, consumerism, homosexuality and violence. This sloppiness could have put my professional dignity or position in jeopardy. However as my units were progressing, I realised that my role was critical as a responsible primary teacher. Even though critical literacy and critical pedagogy both reflect a radical and analytical theoretical approach towards life and texts and they both support the use of authentic texts, I realised that my decisions should have reflected an amount of

respect towards my students' family wishes and culture. This was to be upheld regardless of the fact that some parents expressed satisfaction that controversial issues were discussed in our classroom because they felt unable to discuss these at home with their children. Nevertheless the young age of my students required me to protect them by allowing them to have access to texts within a controlled context, which the managerial team keenly supported. We all realised that using popular culture texts in a third grade primary classroom is by no means the same as teaching adolescents or university students. Older students are in a position and have the legal and social right to make their own decisions, something young students' parents and teachers do for them. This consideration reveals the need to suggest a possibly different style of critical literacy through popular culture when it is used in the primary classroom.

Lastly my decision to use popular culture, the culture of the masses, as a vehicle for the development of critical literacy, which is not in line with the ethos of most Cypriot schools, required me to constantly justify to others my decisions and actions, which was both annoying and educative. I had to explain to others the reasons for choosing popular culture, the idea behind this decision and the beneficial learning outcomes of this practice for my students. At the same time, this act of defending my research project made me develop a clearer understanding of the concept of popular culture, its place in today's people's lives, its educative prospect and the superficial manner of portraying it (as a culture of inadequate importance and worth).

'THE CRITICAL LITERACY INSPIRED SOUVENIRS'

In addition to popular culture, this research project gave us valuable insights in relation to critical literacy and its use in classrooms. The school headteacher praised the practical nature of this project and talked about how

it had given him a clearer view of what critical literacy looked like when it entered school premises. Parents and I admitted that prior to our acquaintance with critical literacy we were looking at texts in a shallow manner. We were mostly concerned with an effortless comprehension of them without being interested in finding out the reasons why a text was produced, the messages that the author wanted to pass on to her/his audience or the existence of power relations.

Janks' (2000, 2010) perception of critical literacy and the four concepts related to it were major aids in the introduction of critical literacy in my classroom. Besides recognising and appreciating the value of my students' and their families' lives' cultures and texts and accepting their use in the classroom's curriculum and activities (Janks' concept of *Diversity*), an issue discussed in the previous section of this chapter, I explicitly taught my students how to practice critical literacy (Janks' concept of *Access*). I showed them what to look for when they were examining a text and the importance of critical literacy in our lives. We were examining the ways and the reasons power is evident within texts. More specifically we were looking at how the selections of specific words or pictures either uncover or hide ideas and views (Janks' concept of *Domination*). Concurrently, by having my students' preferences, ideas and creativity as a basis we created and transformed texts in multiple modes while looking at them through different angles (Janks' concept of *Design).*

Furthermore, my students came across situations where they had to think, make decisions and view things through somebody else's eyes. Each student was in a position to reveal her/his character and illustrate to the others her/his personal feelings, fears, likes and thoughts. Children talked freely without any hesitation or fear of the possibility of giving a wrong answer. In a critical literacy lesson there is no right or wrong answer. Those participating in a discussion give their answers based on their personal beliefs and experiences. At the same time, my students showed respect to

the presence of differences between classroom members. They were also given the chance, through this project, to realise the importance of understanding and caring for human beings, the human voice, and the environment as a whole.

Moreover, being involved in the design and completion of this project made any fears some of us had in relation to young students' ability to use critical literacy fade away. As Comber very beautifully describes "[Critical literacy] is child centered [as it]… does not treat children as infants but with respect and expectations" (Comber, 1999, para. 13). My students examined the messages in texts with great ease and were able to make connections and develop arguments. Their reading comprehension and traditional literacy competencies were also improved.

In literature, critical literacy is portrayed as a necessary and useful practice of our times as it promotes social and communal change (Comber et al.'s, 2001; 2015), free exchange of ideas and thoughts (Black, 2010, p.78) questioning of long-standing or taken for granted beliefs (Jewitt, 2008) and wise and conscious handling of on-line information (Flores- Koulish, 2010; Egbert, 2009). Adult participants showed their appreciation for critical literacy as an important concept in the lives of contemporary youth who live in a rapidly changing and information driven world. What concerns me at this point is the fact that even though the managerial team expressed support and positive views for critical literacy, I cannot ignore the fact that their position within the Cypriot educational hierarchy obliges them to present not their personal, but the official views of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which at that moment were quite favourable towards critical literacy. This later realisation reinforces the paradox (see Chapter 2) linked to the introduction of critical literacy—an innovative and revolutionary concept—to the official national curriculum of Cyprus.

Nevertheless, the use of critical literacy in my classroom turned out to be a destabilising experience for myself for a number of reasons. Firstly, it jeopardised my power, status, and traditional role in the classroom. It was Gainer's (2008) idea that made me realise the complexity of my role as a critical literacy teacher: "When engaging students with critical media literacy, teachers must try to move fluidly between roles, ranging from that of learner to that of guide and sometimes authority" (p. 113). Secondly, I was not the most knowledgeable person in the classroom as teachers usually are in traditional classrooms. As the discussion topics were selected based on my students' preferences, there were times when my students were more knowledgeable than me. Thirdly, realising the existence of power in my profession and my personal exercise of power over my students made me vulnerable and fragile, especially when I had to guide my students or assess their work. Finally, my inexperience in relation to critical literacy made my professional life chaotic. I usually had doubts about my decisions. Moreover, my teaching experience was time consuming, tiring and exhausting.

I need to admit at this point that even though both my critical literacy units helped my students see things and even long standing assumptions and ideas with a different eye and brought changes to the ways my students were viewing texts, everything took place within the limited space of our classroom or school. These new ways of looking at things were not introduced back to the community in an organised way in an attempt to either influence others or bring social and communal changes as in Comber et al. (2001) where 7-8 year old students raised their voices and brought changes to their community. My students were revealing their new classroom experiences only to their family members at home.

Back then, I believed that my hesitation to suggest and implement changes in our community was related to my feelings of anxiety deriving from my inexperience of working with critical literacy with young children. However, it was Bishop's (2014) ideas that made me look at this hesitation from a

different perspective. It gave me the prospect that my reluctance might not merely be a personal weakness but rather an outcome of the incompatibility between critical literacy and classroom routines. As she explains, the schools' role is mainly to maintain the beliefs of the hegemonic groups of society and not to challenge them. That is why, even though critical literacy was introduced in my classroom, this was done within specific limits and no attempts were made to challenge the status quo. In addition, as critical literacy theorists are reluctant to suggest any teaching method (Bishop, 2014) —even though teachers rely heavily on methods—my trials to introduce critical literacy in my classroom were characterised by messiness and uncertainty. I was constantly questioning my actions and decisions which nonetheless turned out to be highly reflexive and educative at the end.

'THE SURPRISING SOUVENIRS'

The 'surprising souvenirs' gained from this journey were not linked to any of the research questions of this project. The first one was in fact a product of the unique methodology of this project. The action research methodology and the highly participatory research methods of this project brought about our potential to successfully contribute to the formal education of contemporary children: from challenging teachers' capabilities to organise their classroom learning environment from scratch and enabling parents' to influence their children's academic intakes to empowering children to hone their negotiation skills.

My involvement in this project gave me the opportunity to make judgments and handle difficult situations. I overcame my emotional difficulties related to the introduction of something new and innovative in my professional life. Moreover, on numerous occasions I successfully justified to my colleagues, headteacher and school inspector the significance and effectiveness of what

I was I doing in my classroom. I organised from scratch an introductory unit and two teaching units influenced by critical literacy based on my students' suggestions. I selected and evaluated the texts that were presented in the classroom and finally designed literacy activities based on these texts. No matter how difficult and time consuming the whole process was, I had the feeling that I was regaining my skills and competences as a teacher, my self-respect and the feeling of joyfulness and fulfilment that usually comes from teaching. I had not realised up to that moment that my teaching experiences were overshadowed during the past decades by the use of text books or mandated and pre-designed teaching material.

In addition to my contribution, parents' participation in this action research project can be characterised as active and operational. Parents were able to think deeply and reflexively about their children's school education and express their feelings without any hesitation or fear. However, their journal entries and interviews not only illustrated their views and wishes in relation to their children's classroom and learning environment but also worked as influential factors for their children's formal education in a way that they were not given the opportunity to do before. This research project reveals the ability of parents to add to their children's official school life; an issue that is very often neglected or forgotten by policy makers, educational authorities or schools.

This project also revealed young students' abilities to shape their learning environment. When they were given the opportunity and freedom to make decisions on the context of their learning experiences, young students demonstrated excellent negotiation skills. They negotiated the themes of the units and the discussion context. They guided the discussions into areas that interested them or were related to their experiences. They also negotiated the power relations and leadership in the classroom. By being in a position where the discussions and topics were in their hands they reversed the power and leadership on their part. My students' writings were not under

investigation in this project due to the constraints of translating children's writings in a foreign language. However, it would be an omission not to mention that my students' writings also revealed this capacity for negotiation too. Their writings from the critical literacy inspired lessons reflected their personal ideas and views and exposed their uniqueness.

Another unpredicted keepsake that I personally 'purchased' from this journey was coming to grips with the core theory on which the new Cypriot literacy curriculum was developed. According to the view expressed by the managerial team, Cypriot teachers seemed unable or unprepared to use critical literacy in their classroom. That is why both the school inspector and the school headteacher presented the future of critical literacy within Cypriot schools as uncertain. I personally have the feeling that Cypriot teachers' inability or reluctance to comprehend and adapt critical literacy in their classrooms reflects their misunderstanding of the theoretical background of the new literacy curriculum, something I became conscious of due to my commitment to this project. Before getting involved in this project I perceived the concept of critical literacy as the distinguishing feature of the new curriculum while assuming that the theoretical background of literacy remained the same. I was not aware (and probably neither was the majority of Cypriot teachers) that the inclusion of critical literacy within the new literacy curriculum suggested a broader way of viewing literacy and language. Within my literacy lessons I valued spelling and grammar more than any other literacy skill. I was aware but could not comprehend the fact that, nowadays, people communicate not only through sentences and words but with the use of other semiotic systems. That is why literacy cannot be perceived as the reading and writing ability of humans and, as a consequence, it cannot be assessed on the basis of measurable and fixed reading and writing skills (Hannon, 2000, p. 37). Moreover, literacy cannot be described as the group of skills acquired within classroom walls. In our contemporary world, literacy is better described as a set of practices that are acquired in a plethora of contexts within which the literate individuals

participate successfully and functionally while communicating effectively with others.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROJECT

Although the present research project might be of interest to a group of readers because of its topic, the major interest and at the same time significance arises from its foundation in classroom practice and in real classroom situations. According to Comber (2001), a need exists in the educational community for research projects on the implementation of critical literacy within real school and classroom settings in an attempt to investigate among others: classroom routines and discussions; relationships between teacher and students; philosophical and cultural beliefs that guide the educational system in general as well as the school and classroom practices; subjects and topics that seem to be interesting to the children and the teachers; and finally, educational goals when critical literacy is introduced in a classroom. Similarly Lee (2011) puts forward a claim for the importance of classroom based research projects on critical literacy. He says: "no matter how long and how well it has been researched, critical literacy without taking root in our classrooms is still a theory" (p. 101).

MY EIGHT BASIC 'TAKE AWAY(S)'

Having in mind the skills teachers need to acquire in order to introduce critical literacy in their classroom, Lopez (2011) believes that research projects on critical literacy "into classroom practices, where we can learn from what works and how it works is an important 'take away' for teachers who need support in finding an entry point that works for them" (p. 91). Within this section I present, in the form of simple statements, the eight basic 'take away(s)' I acquired from this project:

1. Young students are able to perform critical literacy as long as they are presented with familiar and interesting to them texts.

2. Popular culture texts suit the critical literacy curriculum effectively and act as successful motivational factor due to the familiarity children have for this kind of texts.

3. Popular culture brings together all the classroom children regardless of their different experiences, learning capabilities and pieces of knowledge. That is why I call popular culture a 'learning glue'.

4. Critical literacy in the classroom curriculum promotes respect, openness and appreciation among the classroom members.

5. The role of the critical literacy teacher is complex, dynamic and unclear. A critical teacher can be a learner, a helper, the main decision maker, a guide or a leader.

6. A critical literacy teacher might feel very vulnerable and question her/his teaching decisions and role numerous times. At the same

time, she/he must be able to justify each one of her/his decisions and actions to others.

7. Primary school teachers should be careful with the content of the popular culture texts that are presented in their classroom. They need to be clear about their boundaries. The ethos and culture of their students' families and community should be their guides.

8. Critical literacy teachers should realise that the implementation of critical literacy in a classroom's literacy curriculum takes time. Firstly, they need time to get familiar with the concept itself due to the difficulties they might face in putting it into practice. Secondly they have to be prepared to work hard and for long hours in order to organise their classroom activities. However, the outcomes of such an attempt are intensely rewarding and enjoyable.

MY FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research project is unique in relation to its design and aims. It was designed having in mind my own practice and my own acquisition of knowledge. However, the outcomes of this project were beneficial not only for myself but for the rest of the research participants too. We all gained valuable experiences and acquired new knowledge useful for our personal or professional life. Nevertheless, I expect that my research project will add to the amount of existing knowledge, just like any other traditional research project. What is nonetheless discouraging is that due to the minor attention that is paid to critical literacy and popular culture within the Cypriot educational system nowadays, the completion of similar projects within Cypriot schools and classrooms is unlikely.

This research project reflects the issues and dilemmas raised when critical literacy and popular culture were introduced in a primary classroom, with a particular group of participants within a unique context that is unlike some others within the Cypriot society. That is why generalisation or replica cannot be applied. However, valuable lessons can be drawn in relation to both the implementation of popular culture and critical literacy in elementary classrooms. These include the fruitful potentials of critical literacy and popular culture texts in primary classrooms; the connection that can be established between school practices and home experiences and routines; the bridging of the learning differences and styles among the members of a classroom and finally the promotion of a motivational, respectful and enriching learning environment that is negotiated between pupils and their teacher. In addition, this project uncovered a number of dilemmas mainly linked to the special characteristics of popular culture texts (e.g. the short life of popular culture texts and the controversial issues that popular culture texts usually carry) or the distinctive characteristics of critical literacy (e.g. the students' and teacher's unclear roles and their atypical power relations). These dilemmas required me to work hard, explicitly set my boundaries and be able to justify to others my choices and classroom routines. However, these dilemmas generated a couple of paradoxes related to the emancipatory quality of critical literacy and my personal inability to make decisions without being given approval or permission from those higher in the hierarchy (those holding the power) of my school.

When I first organised this project, one of my aims was to give my research participants the opportunity to have their voices and ideas heard. I strongly believe that the adult participants were offered this prospect. However, I admit that my methodology decisions made my child participants' voice inaudible. That is why I think that an interesting continuation of this present project would be the examination of young children's ideas in relation to the introduction of popular culture and critical literacy in their classroom by

having their own voice communicated through qualitative research methods like journal entries or interviews. In such a case, children will not be merely research participants whose perceptions, feelings and ideas are examined from the incidents they were involved in. Children will have the role of *'knowledge brokers'* (see Marsh, 2012). Children will act and be viewed as persons with considerable knowledge with the opportunity to pass this knowledge to others (Marsh, 2012, p. 508) in a way only they know how.

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Appendices

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Dear Koula

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

Critical Literacy Development through popular culture texts in a primary class in Cyprus

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved.

You can proceed with your research but we recommend you refer to the reviewers' additional comments (please see attached).

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

S. A. Wammal

Dr Simon Warren

Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

cc   Julia Davies

Enc   Ethical Review Feedback Sheet(s)
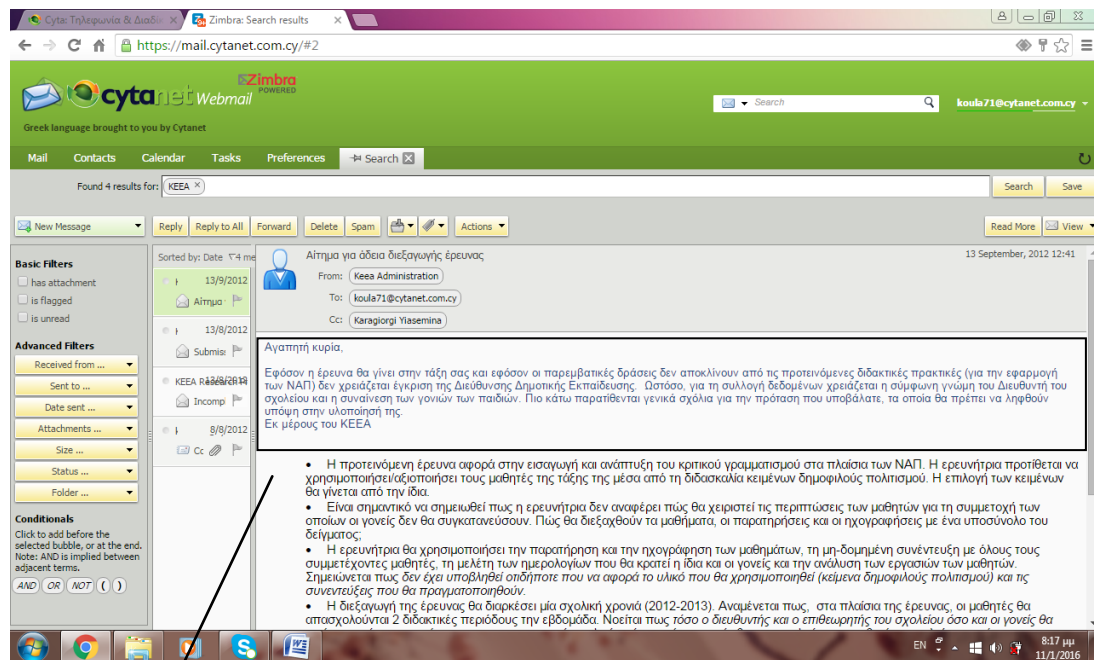
Dear Madam,

As long as this research project will be carried out in your class and your actions will not deviate from the suggested instructional practices (for the implementation of New Literacy Curriculum) you do not need to get approval from the Department of Primary Education. However, data collection needs the consent of the school headteacher as well as consent from the parents of the children. General comments on the proposal are listed below which should be taken into consideration during the implementation of your research project.

On behalf of
KEEA (Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, Educational Research Sector)

Introductory Unit

Day One

We talked about the meanings of 'sender' and 'receiver'. We discussed about the ideal conditions for having a great conversation and the roles of both the sender and the receiver. Children suggested the concepts of: collaboration, willingness, communication, respect, understanding, and tolerance.

We also talked about the different names that senders and receivers have according to the context. In a written text, like a book, the sender is called a writer/an author and the receiver is the reader. On Facebook senders and receivers are called friends whereas on 'Stardolls' (an online game) they are called dolls. Children willingly participated in the discussion and were aware of many things in relation to the Internet, YouTube site, online trade etc. We recorded their ideas on a table in their notebooks.

Day Two

We used the nouns written on the table from day one and identified the male and female forms of nouns in the Greek language, as well as the rules that govern their formation.

Day Three

Children were asked to draw one of their favourite texts. Children drew images of books as well as characters from movies, cartoon and comics.

We also talked about the extended contemporary meaning of 'text' that moves beyond written texts and the reasons for the existence of this phenomenon. Through the discussion we came up with the four different types of texts: written texts, visual texts, audio texts and multimodal texts. Children were put in groups and recorded texts they could identify under each one of the above categories.

Day Four

We discussed the various eras (ancient times, times of our grandparents, modern times) and talked about the genres that were present in every period. It is important to mention here that the kids got their information from a text in their official literacy text. On the same day, children were given a camera to take home. After consultation with the parents, the children photographed their favourite home texts.

Day Five

Children were presented with Rudyard Kipling's poem titled "Six honest serving men". After discussing the poem and why Kipling calls the "What", the "Why", the "Never", the "How", the "Where", and the "Who" as his honest serving men we tried to come up with questions that can be asked for texts. Children found twenty-three questions that were later put in six categories: "the creator" (the sender), the "reader" (the receiver), the message, the content, the time, the place. This activity gave children the opportunity to realise that any text can be analysed with the use of a variety of questions like the above ones.

Day Six

The sixth day was the day after '*Makarios' Day*. We listened Makarios' short speech on the day of the 1974 Coup (July 15, 1974) as it was transmitted from the Pafos Free Radio Station. We talked about the importance of this message and the reasons Makarios wanted to send this message to the Cypriot people. We filled in a table referring to the sender, the receiver, the place, the time, the purpose, the medium, the content and even what else could have been different or what else could have Makarios added to his speech. Children were astonished by the words he used. They also noticed that this text would not have been understood by children due to the difficult words he had used. Children came to the conclusion that this message had specific receivers which in this case were adults.

Unit One

Day One

We watched the video clip of the song "The little cheep chick" on YouTube. The children wrote about their feelings in relation to the song. The aim of this activity was to help children see that a variety of views and emotions exist in relation to a text. Then the children wrote their questions on "The little cheep chick" song. Finally children were asked to write the song as a narrative. The main objective of this activity was to develop children's narrative writing skills. Children were encouraged to use a number of connectors like first, then, after, also, shortly, soon after, shortly after, before, at the end, and finally.

Day Two

I gave the children a problem: I told them that some adults do not know what this bird looks like and I invited them to describe the appearance of the little chick cheep. Many of my students expressed the wish to write with the use of words that are difficult for children because their audience was going to be adults. I realised that my students had started realising that each text is created with an audience in mind. A good activity would have been to ask my students to rewrite their texts for a different audience, like kindergarten children.

Day Three

The children wrote their personal opinions about the little chick cheep song and announced it to the rest of the class. By the end of this activity, my students were aware that a variety of opinions and feelings exist in relation

to this song. It was then that a child suggested asking our schoolteachers to let us know their opinions and views. Every child was responsible for ask a teacher: "What do you think about "the little chick cheep" song? » We collected and analysed the answers and came up with the following conclusions:

a. Our school teachers did not really like the song.

b. The song was mainly liked by teachers who were parents of young children.

c. Many teachers talked about the power of the song to make the children obsess over it (a view that surprised my students).

d. The teachers did not like the ending of the song. They viewed it as very brutal.

Through this activity the children understood the importance of experiences and the life history of a person in relation to the understanding and interpretation of texts. For homework my students had to ask two adults from home and record their opinion about the song. Children believed that it would be very interesting to see the beliefs of our school's children in relation to the song. Children suggested to use the tape recorder and during recess to go around asking children their views. Even though I told them that this is a very interesting idea, I suggested the use of questionnaires. The children were excited with my idea even though they thought it was unfriendly towards our environment due to the waste of paper!

Day Four

We all sat in a big circle on the floor and put two pieces of paper and a thick black pencil in the middle as we were going to prepare the questionnaire for our research. The children were giving ideas and I was scribing. Due to disagreements that were emerging, we were constantly writing and erasing

ideas and questions. Once we got to the final questionnaire, I typed it on the word processor program of our classroom computer. I also asked for help from the Pedagogical Institute in order to give me ideas on how to handle our data. They suggested the TinkerPlots software.

Day Five

I gave children the song but some words or letters were missing. I asked my students to fill in the missing parts.

Day Six

On the sixth day of the unit, I gave children two texts. The first one was the text that accompanies the song on YouTube while the second one is from a blog. I had omitted a couple of words from the text retrieved from the blog as I thought they were inappropriate for use in young children's classroom. We analysed the texts and each child wrote a commentary on each text.

Day Seven

I gave my students pictures showing various products manufactured on the little chick cheep. We talked about them. Each child glued these pictures in her/his notebook and wrote next to each picture a couple of sentences. In the afternoon of the same day, during staff meeting, I informed by colleagues about my students' wish hand out questionnaires to all the school children. The teachers and the school headteacher accepted with great pleasure.

Day Eight

I informed my students that we got permission to hand out the questionnaires. I spent some time explaining to my students that researchers should respect their participants. Starting with the word 'respect' we thought about how we as young researchers, will show respect to our peers. We concluded that:

a. We should inform them first.
b. We should give them time to think about whether they want to participate or not.
c. The questionnaire would be filled in by those who want to participate
d. We should hand out the questionnaires at a time convenient for our participants so that we could not cause any difficulties with their lessons.
e. Each child of our classroom would be responsible for informing one classroom of our school and negotiating with them the time that the questionnaires would be provided to them.

Day Nine

The questionnaires were distributed to the children of our school. The first graders faced problems answering the questionnaires. So we (me and the kids) visited the first grade classes and helped them to answer the questionnaire. It was a beautiful experience that showed respect for diversity, acceptance and mutual aid. Putting the results of the questionnaires in the TinkerPlots program was very time consuming for the children. So I decided to do it myself.

Day Ten

I showed the children the results of their research. TinkerPlots was giving them the opportunity to virtually see the answers and make correlations between the answers and the different variables. I printed the basic graphs for my students and they glued them in their notebooks. Children wrote comments under each graph. During their research, children were keeping a diary where they recorded our actions and decisions.

Day Eleven

Apart from the original song another song (with the little chick cheep as the main character) was created. The new song was called "The Revenge". It was the same song as the first one with the only difference that the little chick cheep did physical exercise and at the end defeats the tractor. I showed my students the song. They reported that this song was giving us the message that exercising was important in life. Then I gave them an article that talked about the importance of fitness in children from a parents' online magazine. We read the article and analysed it. Then we recorded the kinds of exercises the little chick cheep did. We asked our school gym teacher to visit our classroom and talk to us about exercising. On the same day, our school nurse talked to us about the importance of healthy food. The children drew the little chick cheep eating healthy meals.

Day Twelve (part 1)

I asked the English as a foreign language teacher of our school to introduce the little chick cheep in her lessons. I gave her the link to the English version of the song. The children wrote down the names and animal voice in both Greek and English on a table I prepared. This activity gave the children the

opportunity to learn some new words in English and also see that the animal voices are different in different languages.

Day Twelve (part 2)

We looked at the song with my students and realised that there are no verbs used in it. So I introduced the concept of elliptical sentences. Children were asked to write appropriate verbs for each sentence of the song and turn them into non-elliptical.

Day Thirteen

The sentences that my students wrote on day twelve were used to teach the past simple tense and the past progressive tense. They turned the original sentences they wrote from Present Tense to the two new tenses we learned.

Unit Two

Day One

Our second unit theme was "Boys & Girls" (how they are presented, viewed, and expected by society to be: stereotypes about men and women). After a brainstorming session and discussion we thought of possible areas to investigate. The areas suggested were:

• Car / Motor	• Nutrition	• Photo themes
• Electronic games	• Sports	• Movies
• TV	• Toys/Games	• School
• Music	• Animations	• Religion
• Animals	• Economic crisis	• Style / body
• Nature	• Theatre / Puppetry	• Fashion
• Books	• Colours	• Invitations

Reflecting in these area, gave the opportunity to me and the children to become aware that in our society most things could be analysed in terms of gender and that there were socially deeply rooted ideas and views for both sexes. After a debate and voting, it was decided to focus on sports.

Day Two

We looked at the concept "stereotype". I gave my students a text from a parent's online magazine referring to the concept of stereotypes and how gendered stereotypes could influence the behaviour, performance and academic success or failure of children. After reading the text, we analysed it (we looked at the sender, the receiver, the purpose etc). The children used their personal experiences in relation to gender stereotypes in both their families and society in general. They described the position that the Cypriot working woman has nowadays. Some children gave examples of their own parents and how they behave. They recorded a number of stereotypes they knew in relation to gender in their notebooks. Some example of what they wrote:

Girls: Girls are very thoughtful. Girls are perfectionists. Volleyball is a sport for girls. Pink is the colour for girls. Girls wear perfumes. Girls wear jewellery. Girls draw better than boys. Girls can take care of sick people better than boys.

Boys: Boys are naughtier. Football is a sport for boys. Boys are more aggressive. Boys like boxing. Blue is for boys. Boys do not cry. Boys are more interested in the news.

Day Three

I gave the children a text from a blog that belongs to a teacher. The teacher blogger made comments on the gender differences he observed among his students. He said that boys are very often characterised by their female classmates as untidy whereas boys say that girls are careful. He also describes football as a 'boyish sport' and volleyball as a sport for girls. In addition, he uses different words to describe the way boys and girls scream ('booming' voice for boys and 'squeaky' voice for girls). Finally, he says that

boys are interested in video games while girls are more artistic as they are interested in art, movies, and music.

The classroom discussion that followed gave the children the opportunity to express their views in relation to the above text. They said that the text contained a number of stereotypes. Many children expressed the view that a teacher should not have talked like that about his students. Other children said that not all boys like video games and that definitely not all girls like music. Many girls like video games whereas many boys like music. For example, they talked about our school music teacher who is a male. The students then wrote a comment on this text and tried to rewrite a part of it so that no stereotypes would be evident.

Day Four

The children were divided into groups of three. Each group was given a list of sports and they were asked to choose a colour to represent the boys' sports, another colour for the girls' sport and a third colour for sports that are believed to be 'appropriate' for both boys and girls. The children used their personal experiences for the completion of this activity. At the end each group announced their choices. Children also looked into the characteristics of boys' sports which they identified as: a strong body, fast movements, large muscles, intelligence, strength, aggression, and anger. In analyzing the characteristics of the "feminine" sports they came up with: pleasure, nice body, dance ability, good nutrition. After this activity, each child answered two questions. The first asked them to record comments from today's lesson, and the second, to write what new things they learned on that day.

Day Five

I gave children two texts from the Internet. The first was an informative text on the American professional race car athlete Danica Patrick. The second was a webpage article on the ability of women to drive. The article was referring to the latest accident that Danica had and an analysis of the accident from a scientist at the University of Stanford which reached the conclusion that women are bad drivers. This article was accompanied by a photograph showing Danica crying. Reading and analyzing this article we began to suspect that something was amiss. On the one hand, the title of this web site ('girls are prohibited') and on the other hand the ugly picture made us wonder. We looked online and discovered that besides a professional gambler there is no scientist with the name referred to in the article! Then we all understood that this article was full of lies and it seemed that someone wrote to hit at both Danica and women in general. We understood that if something is released on the Internet (and not only) it does not necessarily mean that it is true and that we should be cautious and analytical. Personally, this activity made me think of the ultimate goal of critical literacy: to develop children's ability to not take anything for granted, but to think and analyse all of the information that is given to them. Finally children wrote their personal views under each article.

Day Six

We sat around our classroom computer and watched YouTube clips from Danica's racings, the accident that was referred to in one of the texts from day five and a TV show dedicated to Danica. We found out that Danica is a petite athlete who exercised daily, ate healthy food, and managed to drive a racing car which required great physical strength. The children were impressed with Danica and wrote down their personal emotions and feelings after watching her. Each child also wrote to the athlete a personal note

talking about their impressions of her and her racings as well as the lessons Danica gives children in general and, more specifically, to girls.

Day Seven

Children were presented with an article from a newspaper of the Cypriot Community in London. The newspaper talks about Cyprus' participation in the London Olympics in 2012 and the Cypriot athletes that took part. Analysing the text, the children came to the conclusion that the article talks nicely about all athletes. Children also mentioned the fact that there were more men than women athletes. Then they took the role of an English journalist and thought about which athlete they would write about and why.

Day Eight

The children wrote a formal letter to the Cyprus Sports Organisation asking them to find ways to help more women get involved in sports. Before writing we discussed the way in which a formal letter is written (form and language used).

Day Nine

We watched on YouTube two athletes (a man and a woman) performing the same sport. More specifically both clips were from the 1996 Olympic Games and in particular the floor exercises in gymnastics. The male athlete was the Greek Ioannis Melissanidis and the female the American gymnast Dominique Helena Moceanu. We concluded that for the same sport, male and female athletes competed in different ways and that the juries were looking at different things. The children wrote the differences they observed in their notebooks next to the pictures of the athletes

Day Ten

I gave the children a copy from the Greek Olympic Committee webpage where Melissanidis' unexpected victory is described. I asked my students to take the role of either a Greek or a Chinese (the second in the series ranking athlete was Chinese) sports reporter and write the report she/he would make during the execution of John Melissanidis program. Their reports were recorded in their notebooks and announced to the rest of the class.

Day Eleven

We watched scenes from the humorous Cypriot TV show titled "Patates Antinachtes". On the show, men and women are presented differently in relation to their knowledge of football. Men in the show are presented as more knowledgeable and smart whereas girls are presented as clueless and stupid. The children glued pictures of the show in their notebooks and next to them wrote their personal views.

Day Twelve

We heard the song "Ole, Ole, all", a song that is usually associated with football and the love of the fans for their team. We had a discussion about the messages it gave us. I gave the children the lyrics of the song but some words or letters were missing. I asked them to fill in the missing parts.

Day Thirteen

We looked at sports newspapers. We found out that sports newspapers present football more than any other sport. We also noticed that there were pictures of semi-naked women in the newspapers. Our discussion revealed

that the target audience of this kind of newspapers is men. Children wondered about the feelings a woman would have if she bought this newspaper. They wrote their opinions in their notebooks as well as any ideas they had for the newspaper's editors on how to change the newspaper.

Day Fourteen

A clip on television for the financial support of an ill athlete, Marianna Zachariadi, caught my attention. I found an article on www.elita.com.cy refereeing to Marianna and gave it to the children. We looked at the way in which the author of the article used language (words, phrases) to pass on messages to the audience.

Day Fifteen

The children took the role of a journalist and using information from the text wrote an imaginary interview with Marianna.

Day Sixteen

We watched a video clip created by a group of football players and athletes for Marianna. The main aim of the creation of this clip was to request financial help from the audience. The children commented on the words used and on the fact that football players were presented first even though Marianna was an athlete. They talked about the background music and the photos of Marianna that were presented in the clip. Children were then asked to take five different roles (Marianna; Marianna's relatives; people taking part in the video clip; athletes who did not take part; and the people of

Cyprus) and write the ideas that each group might have had after watching the film. This activity gave children the opportunity to understand that multiple readings can be performed of the same texts.

Data Categories

First Category: Children (Ch)

Subcategories	Code
Popular Culture in children's lives	ChPCL
Popular Culture influences experiences	ChPCLEx
Popular Culture influences home activities	ChPCLH
Popular Culture influences children's belongings	ChPCLB
Popular Culture home experiences enters classroom	ChPCLC
Popular Culture and the media in children's experiences	ChPCLM
Popular culture as a teaching tool	ChPCT
Popular Culture as a motivational factor	ChPCTM
Popular Culture promoted enthusiasm	ChPCTE
Popular culture promoted classroom participation	ChPCTP
Popular Culture promoted academic development	ChPCTAD
Children and Critical Literacy	ChCL
Critical Literacy promoted learning	ChCLLe
Critical Literacy embraced home experiences	ChCLH
Critical Literacy promoted equity between classroom members (children and teacher)	ChCLEq
Critical Literacy promoted respect	ChCLRes
Critical Literacy changed perceptions	ChCLPerc
Critical Literacy Negative issues	ChCLNeg
Children's development of Literacy Skills	ChLS
Children's desire to read more	ChLSMRead
Children's writings showed progression	ChLSProg
Children's Reading Comprehension	ChLSRC

Second Category: Teacher (Tch)

Subcategories	Codes
Teacher and the Critical Literacy Curriculum	TchLit
Teacher adopts a permeable curriculum	TchLitPC
The classroom atmosphere	TchLitPCatm
Teacher attached to traditional literacy	TchLitTrLit
Teacher's exercise of power	TchLitPower
Teacher as a Learner	TchL
Teacher as a Learner of Popular Culture	TchLPC
Teacher as a Learner of Critical Literacy	TchLCL
Children teach the teacher	TchLbyCh
Teacher's Reflexive Thinking	TchLRx
Teacher as the main decision maker	TchDM
Teacher decides the texts	TchMDTexts
Teacher plans the lessons	TchMDlesplan
Teacher presents activities	TchMDAct
Teacher decided procedures	TchMDproced
Teacher asks	TchMDQ
Teacher as a peace-keeper	TchMDPK
Teacher as the model	TchMDMod
Teacher empowers children	TchMDEmCh
Teacher's Skills Dilemmas and Difficulties	TchSDDif
Teacher's skills	TchS
Teacher must be energetic	TchSEner
Teacher must be creative	TchSCr
Teacher must be well organised	TchSOrg
Teacher's Dilemmas	TchD
Teacher has limited time	TchDTime
Teacher's realisations of her professional life	TchDProf
Teacher Dilemmas in relation to Popular Culture	TchDPC

Popular culture's controversial issues	TchDPCI
Popular culture texts' language	TchDPCL
Popular culture texts' short-lived nature	TchDPCshort
Lessons get into unexpected spaces	TchDPCunexp
Teacher disagrees with students	TchDPCdisag
Teacher's Boundaries	TchDPCB
Teacher's Difficulties	TchDif
Teacher's inexperience with critical literacy	TchDifCL
Messiness	TchDifCLMess
Teacher gets tired	TchDifTired
Teacher is stressed	TchDifStress
The panopticon of the managerial team	TchDifPanMT

Third Category: Parents (Pr)

Subcategories	Codes
Parents and Popular Culture	PrPC
Feelings/Views	PrPCF
Positive	PrPCFpos
Suitable for learning	PrPCFposlear
Suitable for contemporary children	PrPCFposCh
Enjoyment and motivation	PrPCFposMot
Connects home and school	PrPCFposH&S
Negative	PrPCFneg
Age appropriateness	PrPCFnegage
Children's attachment to popular culture	PrPCFnegatt
Parents and Critical literacy	PrCL
Awareness	PrCLaware
Feelings	PrCLF
Positive	PrCLFpos
Suitable for contemporary children	PrCLFpossuit
Promotes critical skills	PrCLFposCS

Promotes creativity	PrCLFposcreat
Classroom discussions	PrCLFposdisc
Helped them	PrCLFposhelp
Controversial issues in the classroom	PrCLFposcon
Parents and Literacy learning	PrLit
Concerned about literacy skills	PrLitskills
Concerned about literacy text books	PrLitbooks
Parents roles in this project	PrR
Parents are interested in their children's education	PrRint
Parents are well informed on their children's ed	PrRinf
Parents as part of their children's education	PrRpart
Expressed their feelings	PrRpartexpf
Gave ideas	PrRpartideas
Influenced teacher's actions	PrRpartTch

Fourth Category: Managerial Team (MT)

Subcategories	Codes
Managerial Team and Critical Literacy	MTCL
Approved its use in Cypriot Schools	MTCLappr
Children can work with Critical Literacy	MTCLappable
Citizens of tomorrow	MTCLapprZ
Adults of tomorrow	MTCLapprA
Cypriot Economic Crisis	MTCLapprEC
Wondered for its future in Cyprus	MTCLwon
Due to teachers	MTCLwonTch
Negative feelings	MTCLwonTchNF
Lack of awareness of teachers	MTCLwonTchX
Limited time to get familiar with critical literacy	MTCLwonTchtime
Difficulties	MTCLwonTchD
A decision taken by policy makers and not teachers	MTCLwonPM

Inadequate in-service training	MTCLwonins
Teacher's network	MTCLwoninsnet
Teachers' guide	MTCLwoninsguid
Unclear guidelines by the Ministry of Education	MTCLwonMEd
Managerial Team and Popular Culture	MTPC
Feelings	MTPCF
Positive	MTPCFpos
Motivation	MTPCFposM
Teacher's role	MTPCFposTchR
Negative	MTPCFneg
Themes/topics	MTPCFnegth
Above children's mental abilities	MTPCFnegthMen
Too serious	MTPCFnegToo