

Teaching literacy as social practice to Roma children: Insights from a program-in progress

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This paper presents the basic premises of the program we are currently developing for the teaching of Greek language to Roma children in classrooms with a diverse population.

Moving away from the decontextualized notion of school literacy – defined as a set of skills children need to acquire in order to participate fully in meaning making within classroom communities, literacy is seen as social practice. The acquisition of school literacy is described as an ideological and deeply political process that is not limited to the development of children's linguistic and communicative competence; it is rather defined as the gradual appropriation of specific Discourses that suggest certain stances toward language, texts and knowledge and ultimately certain literate identities.

Do all children acquire these Discourses? What are the tensions and difficulties and possibly acts of resistance registered in this process? While the way various kinds of student literate identities are proposed, taken up, get rejected and are variously negotiated requires a close analysis to classroom processes, given the highly centralized nature of the Greek educational system, useful insights can also be drawn from the textbooks used in the Greek schools. This paper, then, analyzes the textbook used in the 2nd grade of the Greek Gymnasium for this paves the way to advanced literacy. An analysis of the structure of the various units indicates that children have in fact to navigate within a rich textual universe constructed out of texts, language exercises as well as reading and writing activities. Such universe is a deeply ideological structure consisting of gaps between units that need to be filled in by the students. The change in the texture of the units (proceeding from nondialogical to dialogical units) and the types of linkages established between reading and writing activities within and across units are analyzed.

In what ways does this knowledge of the textbook structure affect the teacher in his/her practice with a diverse student population, including Roma children? The implications are discussed in detail.

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