

# Creating classrooms as spaces of «everyday democracy»<sup>1</sup>

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## Introducing the problem

Changing post-industrial societies of the 21st century have led to a change in the way of production and understanding of spoken and written language due to the emergence of new technologies (and multimodal communications) and the creation of multicultural societies

Students are invited to produce meanings that reflect their experiences, create and recreate texts through the use, decoding and negotiation of all communication modes that co-exist in each text (Kress, 2000; Katsarou & Tsafos, 2009: 44).

Need to create "a school able to converse with the complex social reality and provide students with critical analysis tools so that they can cope with the challenges of the present age" (Kostouli, 2015: 163).

## Genres and Social identities

The students were introduced in a multi-semiotic environment analyzing:

- Websites and Videos (saferinternet.gr),
- Posters from cell phone stores
- Advertisements (Vodafone),
- Sites from ICT experts, psychologists
- Interviews from High School Headmasters,
- Interviews from parents,
- Literature texts

## Participatory Action Research

At the same time, students collected data from:

- individual logs
- reviews
- Writing accounts
- Drawing
- Discussing their findings
- training

The data were analyzed and the students wrote their final reports

## Theoretical framework: combining critical literacies and participatory Action Research

### The critical literacy program

Regarding the critical language education program, emphasis was placed on sociolinguistics, mobility, as it is shaped by the superdiversity that characterizes modern societies (Coupland, 2010).

Following Kostouli & Stylianou, (2012) our critical literacy project promoted activities introducing the concepts of pluralism and heteroglossic universe.

In the text production phase the students were able to reflect on their beliefs and transform their attitudes adopting a more democratic orientation.

### Participatory Action Research

PAR is a form of inquiry where all are participants that are involved and organize research at all stages. In our project, students acted as co-researchers by collecting data from their own research logs, from paintings, recording and videotaping dialogues and questionnaires they co-produced with the teacher (Katsarou, 2016). The co-researchers analyzed the data and highlighted specific issues. In the reflection stage, students discussed the results of the analysis and reached specific conclusions.



## Students' accounts

From the LI language course I was able to learn useful things that can keep me safe in the future psychologically and physically to keep me safe, as it concerns the Internet dangers. I also learned how to use words I did not know. My vocabulary was enriched. But the most important lesson for me was our work in groups. I think it is that I have recognized it as our teamwork. The way we worked together, the common understanding and that we were discussing what to do in the classroom. It helped me a lot of the dialogue we made with the teacher and the children in the classroom when we got together in a circle.

There were, of course, some things I want to change. Working with the group was not always good. There were times when some members of the group were not interested in the lesson, they were wasting hour time talking to each other, or listening only to the opinion of others, agreeing without understanding. This way the team did not work properly. Also, there were times when I was tired of the hubbub that dominated the class by the teams. As a result, I can not concentrate and therefore I can not work with my classmates.

The groups analyzed the texts even further. We replied to more questions and we saw the texts from different sides, how a teenager would figure it out. How an elderly person and how someone dealing with it will react.

This process has helped us to express ourselves freely, to say our opinion, to listen to the other who speaks and to cooperate.

## Conclusions

Creating democratic relations between teacher and students



## Commonalities between Critical Literacy and Participatory Action Research

- Constructivist teaching based on students' experiences and use of co-operative practices
- Research within the community
- Forming a democratic teacher identity
- The promotion of students' voice
- Reading and Designing different text genres (questionnaires, interviews, oral conversations, poems, accounts, essays, presentations, posters)
- Critical Discourse Analysis

## Intertextual Analysis

Using the Venn diagram the students realized that texts and writers proceed to certain linguistic choices in order to fulfill their goals. For instance they located that the companies used greediness (chazam-aro) to connect sales with young people



## Implementing the Critical Literacy Program

The subject under study arose from the community, from a student punishment case (her cell phone within the classroom and she was punished).

The students posed the questions they wanted to answer (e.g. why do you punish us for the mobiles, what the dangers, how can we protect them from viruses, etc.)

Following the principle of pluralism, the students brought texts representing different voices. They compared the texts and realized that each discourse community promotes or/and silences specific ideologies (enhancing critical language awareness).

During the production of texts, the students wrote articles, comics, mantinades (traditional Cretan songs), poems and lyrics in well-known songs (parody).

Based on those different perspectives, I developed my own opinion on the consequences of the internet. In general, I have noticed that everybody develops a different approach based on the goals he/she wants to promote. However, my opinion is objective. In my opinion, the internet has mostly bad health and psychological effects. It can be created for a good purpose, such as finding whatever information we want and communicating with our nearby people, but now it does more harm than good. Addiction problems to our health and threats from people who want to hurt us, are some of the problems that the internet can cause. People are alienated by the surrounding world and want to spend more and more time on the internet. Hackers threats and dangerous games provoke death and psychological problems to children, adolescents and adults. The worst thing is that this situation will not be improved soon and the problems will start to grow more and more, making our society increasingly dangerous for us and the generations that follow in the future.

A high school student perceives the effects of the internet in very different way than in adult does. The adult does not use it as much as a teenager. The teenager usually knows less than a teenager. While the teenager is different he wants "good" mobile phone to know it a bit. Also, a teenager has been linked to "Social Media" Instagram, Facebook. A teen knows a great deal about the dangers of cyberbullying but doesn't know how to limit them.

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