



INVESTIGATING THE TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN MULTI-GRADE PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

Anna Asimaki¹,
Maria Georgakopoulou¹,
Gerasimos Koustourakis²,
Archontoula Lagiou¹ⁱ

¹Department of Educational Science and Social Work,
School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Patras,
Greece

²Department of Educational Sciences and
Early Childhood Education,
School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Patras,
Greece

Abstract:

This research paper makes use of Basil Bernstein's theoretical framework to investigate the pedagogical practices of teachers who work in multi-grade Greek primary schools, and the factors that influence the shaping of these particular pedagogical practices of theirs. The research was carried out using the research tool of the semi-structured interview with the participation of 16 teachers. The main findings of this study revealed that teachers in multi-grade primary schools implement mixed pedagogical practices which combine elements from both a visible and an invisible pedagogy. In particular, visible pedagogical practices were implemented during the teaching of subjects that are considered to be the primary subjects, such as Language and Mathematics. What's more, it was discovered that there was a weakening of the evaluation criteria during the teaching of subjects considered to be secondary, such as History. Finally, the operational teaching conditions in the primary schools as well as administrative factors appeared to influence the shaping of the pedagogical practices that the teachers implemented.

Keywords: multi-grade primary schools, pedagogical practices, regulative rules, instructional rules

ⁱ Correspondence: email pde6716@upnet.gr, liyeosa@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In Greece, three types of school are regarded as multi-grade primary schools. First, there are single-teacher primary schools with a maximum of 16 pupils where one teacher teaches the pupils from all six grades in one classroom. Here, multi-grade teaching is implemented where the 3rd and 4th grade and the 5th and 6th grade curricula are taught alternately, in one school year the curriculum of the lower grade is taught and the following year, the curriculum of the higher grade. However, in 1st and 2nd grade multi-grade teaching is implemented in all subjects except for Language and Mathematics. Second, there are two-teacher primary schools with a maximum of 30 pupils. In these, two classes are created which are made up of either 1st-3rd-4th and 2nd-5th-6th grades or of 1st-5th-6th and 2nd-3rd-4th grades. Multi-grade teaching of the school subjects is implemented in line with what we have already detailed. And third, there are three-teacher primary schools with a maximum of 45 pupils. Here, three multi-grade classes are created which are made up of 1st-2nd, 3rd-4th and 5th-6th grades. Multi-grade primary schools mainly operate in rural areas and the morning teaching timetable starts at 8.10 and finishes at 13.30 (Fykaris, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2022; Timetable Program of Multi-grade Elementary Schools, 2017).

The issue of multi-grade primary schools has occupied the research interest of the scientific community (see: Doğan, Çapan, & Ciğerci, 2020; Dzansi & Amedzo, 2014; Enayati, Zamani, & Movahediam, 2016; Howley, Wod, & Hough, 2011; Msimanga, 2019; Naparan & Alinsug, 2021; Nawab & Baig, 2011; Raggl, 2015; Sangai, 2019; Shareefa, 2020). Research findings revealed the need for the provision of training for the teachers who work in multi-grade primary schools for them to be able to meet the teaching needs of all the school subjects in the short teaching time available and adapt to what is usually an inadequate logistical infrastructure (Charitos, 2008; Downes & Roberts, 2018; Kyridis, Papastamatis, Gkolia, & Mpara, 2001; Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Research findings revealed that in the multi-grade schools, the teaching of 'secondary' subjects is often treated as less important and the teaching time allocated to them is devoted to the teaching of Language and Mathematics. In addition, it emerged that the teachers are under pressure in their attempt to teach all the subjects on the curriculum due to the limited teaching time available and they don't manage to teach everything on the curriculum within the school year. For this reason, they usually have to choose what to teach from each subject and concentrate on the cognitive processing of the items they believe to be the more important (Engin, 2018; Klouvatos, 2013; Pappas, 2007; Plessis & Subramanien, 2014). Then, findings from studies revealed that in multi-grade primary schools, individualised teaching may be implemented due to the small number of pupils in the class (Kyridis et al., 2001; Raggl, 2015), there may be a spirit of teamwork and direct and continuous communication between the teacher and the pupils, strong friendships are formed amongst the pupils and mixed pedagogical practices are implemented which can be distinguished by both the teacher-centred and the pupil-centred elements (Fykaris, 2004; Raggl, 2015; Sangai, 2019; Shareefa, 2020).

The aim of this paper is to investigate the pedagogical practices implemented by teachers who staff multi-grade primary schools, as well as to look for the most significant factors that may influence the practices in question.

The paper starts with a section on the theoretical framework, which is followed by a section on the research questions and the methodology, then the research findings are presented and analysed and the paper ends with a section containing the discussion and conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

This research made use of the concept of framing from Basil Bernstein's theoretical framework (2000, 2015) as it allows us to observe and interpret the pedagogical practices that are implemented within the school classrooms through the daily interaction between teachers and pupils, sociologically (Koustourakis, 2014, 2020; Moore, 2013; Morais, 2022). Consequently, the concept of framing can be used to highlight and analyse the pedagogical relationships that are manifest in multi-grade primary schools. This is because it contributes to the uncovering of the choices and possibilities as much of the teachers, as transmitters of school knowledge, as of the pupils, as receivers, in shaping the nature of the pedagogical practices implemented, which may range between the following two extreme points. If a teacher-centered approach is chosen and all the dimensions of the teaching activities are absolutely clear and known to the pupils, which may be the use of a particular school textbook to determine the material of a specific subject or the way pupils are evaluated, then a visible pedagogy is being applied and framing is strong. A pupil-centered approach to teaching is linked to the implementation of invisible pedagogies and a weak framing (Bernstein, 2000; Ferreira, & Morais, 2014; Koustourakis, 2014, 2018; Morais, 2002). In fact, within the school classrooms, mixed pedagogies are implemented and these draw on elements from both visible and invisible pedagogies (Bernstein, 2000; Koustourakis, 2013, 2014, 2018; Lamnias, 2002; Morais & Neves, 2011).

The concept of framing, according to Bernstein's theoretical approach (2002) is illustrated through the relationship between two discourses, the 'Regulative discourse' (R.D.) and the 'Instructional Discourse' (I.D.), of which the R.D. is dominant and influences the ways in which the forms of I.D. are manifest. More specifically, the R.D. reveals the interactions which take place inside school classrooms, as well as the relationships that are formed between the teacher-transmitter and the pupils-receivers. In addition, the R.D. reveals the degree of control of the pedagogical communication on the part of the transmitter teacher and how visible and explicit the hierarchical relationships might be during the educational process within the context of the classrooms in the multi-grade primary schools. In particular, when the teacher clearly sets the operational rules of his classroom, the desired form of pupil behavior and the way daily school work is to be carried out, directing the teaching acts and the pupils' choices in a clear and visible manner, then a strong framing of R.D. is being applied,

which is an element of a visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000; Koustourakis, 2013, 2014, 2018, 2020; Moore, 2013; Morais & Neves, 2011).

Then, the I.D. which reveals the way the teaching work is carried out in the interactive framework of the school classrooms in multi-grade primary schools is analysed through the following components (Bernstein, 1990, 2000; Koustourakis, 2017, 2018, 2020; Morais, 2002): (a) In the selection of school knowledge to be taught to the pupils. In this case, when a teacher who is teaching in a multi-grade rural primary school relies on the everyday knowledge of the pupils to explain the school lessons, then he is implementing a weak framing of I.D. in selection. (b) In the sequencing of the presentation of school knowledge during the teaching of the material of a particular school subject. In the case where the teacher follows the logic of the approach to the material according to the way this is arranged in the content of the textbooks of the particular lessons when teaching the various lessons on the curriculum, then a strong framing of I.D. in selection is being implemented. (c) In the time devoted to the teaching of a specific school subject (framing) in the framework of the implementation of the daily timetable. In the case where there isn't enough teaching time for a subject in the school classroom, and the need arises for the learning effort to be continued in the pupils' home, then a strong framing of I.D. in pacing is being implemented. And (d) in the criteria applied for the evaluation of the pupils' learning effort and their comprehension of the school knowledge taught to them. When the pupils are clearly aware of the way they are to be evaluated then a strong framing of I.D. in criteria is being applied.

In the case of the study that follows, an attempt was made to detect the way in which Regulative Discourse and Instructional Discourse are shaped during the implementation of the pedagogical practices of the teachers who worked in multi-grade Greek primary schools and who were tasked with a daily basis with the job of teaching the range of subjects as foreseen in the curriculum of Greek primary education.

3. Research Questions - Methodology

In this research paper, we are concerned with answering the following research questions:

- What pedagogical practices are implemented by the teachers in the multi-grade primary schools?
- What are the most significant factors influencing the pedagogical practices implemented in these schools?

The research was carried out during the 2021-2022 school year and the strategy of purposeful sampling was applied. In this case, the researchers selected the sample in which the participants served the purposes of the aims and research questions of the research in the best way (Iosifidis, 2008, p.64; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008, p. 172). Sixteen teachers working in multi-grade primary schools participated, nine of whom were women (56.3%) and seven were men (43.7%). The average age of our research subjects was 30 years old and they had an average of seven years of teaching experience.

In addition, during the time the research was being carried out, 4 teachers were working in one-grade primary schools (25% of the total number of teachers in the sample), 8 were teaching in two-grade primary schools (50%) and 4 teachers were working in three-grade primary schools (25%).

In order to study the issue in question more thoroughly and investigate the views of the participants in-depth, the research tool of the semi-structured interview was used. While this research was being conducted, care was taken to apply the codes of conduct and ethics. More specifically, the research subjects were informed of the purpose of the research, they participated voluntarily in it and their anonymity was ensured as well as respect for their personal information (Creswell, 2016).

When the research had been completed, the interview material underwent qualitative content analysis, taking the 'theme' as a unit of analysis (Cohen et al., 2008). This is part of the content from which a clear and complete meaning emerges and which can be classified into a particular analysis category (Kyriazi, 2011; Robson, 2007). In fact, our research material was classified into one of the following four analysis categories, which emerged from the purpose and the theoretical framework of this research:

- A. Regulative and Instructional rules in multi-grade primary schools.
- B. Various means and places of approach to the curriculum in multi-grade primary schools.
- C. The effect of educational factors on the shaping of pedagogical practices in multi-grade primary schools.
- D. The effect of administrative factors on the shaping of pedagogical practices in multi-grade primary schools.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Regulative and instructional rules in multi-grade primary schools

According to the 'Timetable Program of Multi-grade Elementary Schools' (2017), which is the regulative principle for the implementation of the educational process, pupils must arrive at school between 8.00 and 8.10. In addition, before lessons start, the bell rings and the daily school prayers are said. Indeed, the sound of the bell as much as the saying of prayers constitutes symbolic borders which highlight the moments in time after which the daily educational programme begins (Bernstein, 2015). However, as emerges from the representative excerpts below, the teachers in the multi-grade primary schools often adapt the regulative rules of the 'Timetable Program of Multi-grade Primary Schools' (2017) so as to deal with the special circumstances and meet the needs of all their pupils. In particular, 7 teachers (43% of the teachers in the sample) stated that they decide to extend the pupils' arrival time and begin their daily lessons with a small delay so as to ensure the equal participation, without discrimination, of all the children in the educational process:

"We begin at 8.30 because the last four pupils arrive at that time. We gather together either in the yard or undercover if it's raining, for prayers – as the legal framework determines – and then we go into the classrooms for lessons." (Interview 5 – I.5)

"The pupils usually come to school between 8.15 and roughly 8.40 at the latest. Then we ring the bell, go into the classroom and say prayers." (I.9)

In this case, the implementation of a strong framing of regulative rules is chosen since the teachers constitute the dominant factor in determining the manner in which their school operates (Bernstein, 2000) and on their own initiative they decide when they judge it necessary, to re-frame the implementation of the daily school timetable, taking into consideration their pupils' special circumstances.

In multi-grade primary schools, multi-grade teaching of the pupils is employed and the teachers are called on to teach a lot of cognitive objects at the same time and to different grades (Fykaris, 2002). In this case, explicit hierarchical rules are implemented as the teachers have the dominant role in regulating the means of transmitting school knowledge. In fact, as far as the order of approach to school knowledge in the daily school timetable is concerned, it appears that linearity is adhered to at the multi-grade schools. Hence, 14 teachers (87.5% of the teachers in the sample) stated that they started the school day teaching Language and followed this with a Mathematics lesson. In addition, it appeared that all the research participants implemented visible pedagogical practices while teaching Language and Mathematics, which are seen as primary subjects (Bernstein, 2015). This finding is in line with the conclusions of research by Koustourakis (2007, 2012), Koustourakis, Zacharos and Papadimitriou (2014) and Asimaki, Sakkoulis and Vergidis (2016) which revealed that the Language lesson and Mathematics are seen as being of primary importance and possess high status on the contemporary curriculum of regular primary schools where one teacher teaches a class of pupils in the same grade, and multi-grade Greek primary schools.

In particular, in the case of the Language lesson and Mathematics, the teachers in the sample, as regulators of the time and place of the transmission of knowledge, determine with precision the teaching processes that are to be implemented (Bernstein, 2000, 2015). The following representative excerpts are characteristic:

"Starting the Language lesson I give the bigger classes a worksheet, I give them an exercise from the Language textbook again and then I tell them to move on to the next lesson and to read it. When the pupils from the bigger classes are occupied, I do the lesson with the smaller classes and this process alternates throughout the day." (I.6)

"When I do Mathematics with sixth grade, I begin with questions to see what the pupils have understood and what they find difficult and then we move on. At the same time Fifth grade has been given a Mathematics photocopy with exercises from the previous chapter and they solve them while I finish with the Sixth grade Mathematics theory. Then I go back

to Fifth grade to teach the corresponding theory and the Sixth grade pupils do exercises in the workbook." (I.4)

In fact, as emerges from the representative excerpts below, when the teachers teach Mathematics to the bigger classes in the Primary School, to devote more teaching time to their effort, they occupy the pupils in the smaller classes with something easy and fun. This finding is in line with the results of the study by Klouvatos (2013) in which it was discovered that in order to win additional teaching time for the transmission of the cognitive objects that they consider to be of primary importance, teachers in multi-grade primary schools give the pupils from other classes various kinds of school work to do so they have something to do while they are teaching. Moreover, while multi-grade teaching the lessons to the various classes in their multi-grade primary schools the teachers select to implement explicit hierarchical rules, precisely determining the 'how' and the 'what' of the school knowledge that their pupils are to approach in order to keep them quiet and occupied. This finding is in line with Raggl's research (2015) in which it appeared that the teachers in multi-grade primary schools implement a strong framing of hierarchical relationships in order to meet the demands and special circumstances of their teaching job.

"Usually, in order to gain time to explain things while I'm doing Mathematics with the older pupils, I'll get the younger kids to colour in numbers, make stuff out of plasticine, do some crafting or work on a photocopy." (I.9)

The research results revealed that the rules of sequencing are explicit when approaching the subjects that are seen as secondary, too, as, according to the curriculum for this particular kind of school (Timetable Program of Multi-grade Elementary Schools, 2017), which constitutes the definitive regulative principle (Bernstein, 2000), only very 'tight' margins of time are foreseen for teaching them, and they are allocated the time span of half a teaching hour:

"As far as History is concerned, there will definitely be a linking with previous knowledge before we continue, a revision to see where we are and then I will teach the next chapter. Don't forget, time is very limited." (I.1)

The teachers in the sample stated that their pedagogical practices for teaching the subjects seen as primary, like Language and Mathematics, as well as for the rest of the subjects on the curriculum, could be characterised through the implementation of a strong framing of pacing. This is because, as can be seen in the following representative excerpts, the time available based on the regulations contained in the 'Timetable Program of Multi-grade Elementary Schools' (2017) is not sufficient to teach them completely:

"Every year it's a race to get through the Language syllabus. A lot of the time I know that it won't be possible." (I.16)

"There isn't enough time to teach all the History syllabus because you have to teach it in two half-hour lessons a week. So, you decide which lessons will be combined and which you will leave out." (I.15)

Finally, as far as the implementation of evaluation criteria to check the pupils' understanding of the transmitted school knowledge in the multi-grade primary schools is concerned, it appeared that the teachers in the sample go in two different directions. In Language and Mathematics, which are seen as being of primary importance, explicit and predetermined evaluation criteria are used, in the form of exams and small tests. These criteria are made known to the pupils and explained clearly. In contrast, in the curriculum subjects that are seen as secondary, such as History, Environmental Studies and Religious Education, the teachers implement a weak framing of evaluation criteria which tends towards the implementation of an invisible pedagogical practice (Bernstein, 2015):

"The means of evaluation for the main lessons of Language and Mathematics is through an exam at the end of each unit. It'll be a small test, either in Language or Math, and there'll be exercises that we've done lots of times so I can see whether they have understood the material." (I.9)

"In History and Environmental Studies, we have a little chat. I don't perform any evaluation. I want the children to enjoy the lesson and I believe that that is the case." (I.5)

Consequently, it appeared that the teachers who work in multi-grade primary schools select the implementation of 'mixed' pedagogical practices, which draw as much on a visible pedagogy as on an invisible one (Asimaki, Lagiou, & Koustourakis, 2022; Bernstein, 2000; Koustourakis, 2007, 2012, 2018). This is despite the fact that to a large extent, the implementation of elements linked to a visible pedagogy is actually expected.

B. Various means and places for approaching the curriculum in the multi-grade primary schools

In the case of pupils considered 'weak' since they can't satisfy the explicit sequencing rules of a visible pedagogy, teachers often choose to implement corrective instructional strategies (Bernstein, 2015). In fact, research findings have shown that in multi-grade primary schools, the teachers can work in an individualised fashion to help pupils who are struggling to approach and understand school knowledge (Kyridis et al., 2001; Raggi, 2015). In the case of our study, it emerged that the teachers in the sample chose to reduce the quantity of school knowledge that the pupils considered 'weak' were required to approach and understand:

"I give out less spelling and reading out loud in Language and fewer exercises in Mathematics to the children who can't keep up with the rest of the class." (I.7)

"I give the children who struggle with spelling less, so instead of a sentence I give them a couple of words. I do the same in Mathematics." (I.8)

The existence of an 'all-day' class at the multi-grade primary schools may work as a supplement and contribute to the completion of the approach to the school knowledge transmitted in the morning school programme. This is because the 'all-day' class aims to get the pupils ready for the next day by preparing the homework activities that the teacher set them (Klouvatos, 2013). In the case of the multi-grade primary schools, it emerged that during the 'all-day' class special effort was made to cover the pupils' gaps in learning and to explain the difficult parts of the material of all the subjects on the curriculum:

"Lots of my pupils go to help in the fields or with the animals that their parents have in the afternoon, so where's the time to study?" (I.4)

"These children, the boys especially help with the family budget a lot. They'll go to the fields, ride the tractor, do whatever jobs their parents ask of them." (I.9)

Finally, the teachers in the sample believe that a prohibitive factor in setting homework to consolidate school knowledge is the fact that many of the students in the multi-grade schools in mountainous, semi-mountainous, rural and outlying areas are of migrant origin. In fact, these pupils' parents either don't know Greek very well or don't have an adequate level of education so as to help the children with their homework (Pappas, 2007). The excerpts that follow are characteristic:

"There's no help at home at our school because three of the six children are of Albanian origin and their parents, even if they wanted to help them, unfortunately, can't do so." (I.7)

"We have lots of pupils from other countries in the school and in Language, in particular, their parents can't help them because they don't speak Greek." (I.11)

C. The effect of educational factors on the shaping of pedagogical practices at the multi-grade primary schools

The teachers in the sample claimed that performing their daily educational effort is made difficult by the factor of "multi-grade teaching", that is to say, both the daily simultaneous teaching of many curriculum subjects to various grades in the primary school and the need to approach and cognitively process their syllabus, as well as the simultaneous teaching of pupils from different age groups and different school grades:

"I have to teach Mathematics, for example, to three different classes and that is very difficult." (I.1)

"It's really difficult to go and do a lesson with three different classes at the same time." (I.4)

In Greek primary education, a collection-type curriculum is implemented which includes various school subjects (Bernstein, 2000, 2015). In fact, this particular curriculum, which was established with the educational reform in the area of school knowledge in 2003 is the same with regards to the syllabus of the lessons taught in both the regular primary schools and the multi-grade primary schools (Koustourakis, 2007, 2012). In this case, the large volume of material to be taught across the various lessons, combined with the limited teaching time available for teaching them, according to the current "Timetable Program of Multi-grade Elementary School" (2017), constitute significant factors that make the daily educational and teaching work of the teachers in the multi-grade primary schools difficult:

"The syllabus is huge and can't be covered in a single-grade school. We have to do 25 minutes of History a week, while in the large schools, they have two teaching hours a week. Does anybody believe that in that short teaching time, we can cover a book with 36 chapters?" (I.13)

"The volume of material that I have to cover in a year is very big and I can't do it. For example, in Language, we have 7 teaching half-hours whereas in the regular schools, the teaching of Language in the higher grades takes place over 7 full teaching hours a week." (I.16)

The limited teaching time foreseen in the official curriculum for the teaching of the school subjects in multi-grade primary schools leads the teachers to "reformative" and "modifying" strategies as far as the shaping of the daily timetable is concerned (Pappas, 2007). In particular, 13 teachers (81.25% of the teachers in the sample) stated that they consciously recontextualize the school knowledge to be taught (Bernstein, 2000) so as to devote more teaching time to the lessons of Language and Mathematics, which they consider being more important and essential to be taught to their pupils:

"Unofficially, it is certain that you will 'steal' time from another subject in order to cover Language and Mathematics..." (I.1).

"In Mathematics and Language, I need more time, so I am forced to spend less time on some other secondary subject" (I.3).

Similar to the excerpts above are the findings of the study by Koustourakis (2012) and Klouvatos (2013) from which it emerged that since the available teaching time is insufficient in multi-grade primary schools, the secondary cognitive objects are often 'sacrificed' so that Language and Mathematics can be taught.

Another factor that influences the shaping of the pedagogical practices for the teaching of school knowledge of the teachers in our research, and which is due too to the small number of pupils in the multi-grade primary schools, is the frequent absence of pupils from the class:

"When pupils are absent from school we usually don't move on with the syllabus. Because when I have three pupils in fourth grade and two are absent, I can't move on. What can I do with the one? And when the other two return, do I go back?" (I.10)

"If a number of pupils are absent from school, we won't go on with the material, so I lose time." (I.11)

Finally, another significant factor that makes the shaping of pedagogical practices difficult for the teachers who work in multi-grade primary schools, is the inadequate infrastructure and essential audio-visual equipment (Klouvatos, 2013; Kyridis et al., 2001; Msimanga, 2019; Pappas, 2007; Tsolakidis & Fokidis, 2010). The teachers in the sample tried to overcome this problem by bringing their own technological equipment (laptops, speakers, projectors) to school in order to make their lessons comprehensible and interesting for their pupils:

"In most multi-grade schools, I have worked in, there isn't a projector, there isn't an interactive whiteboard, there isn't a television where the pupils can watch something educational. So, a lot of us teachers use our own teaching aids in order to do our lesson better." (I.1)

"The teaching aids are a very important factor influencing our practices, because they are missing. Using them, we could gain additional teaching time." (I.9)

D. Influence of administrative factors on the shaping of pedagogical practices in multi-grade primary schools

In multi-grade primary schools, and especially in single-teacher schools, the teacher who is placed there takes on administrative responsibilities too, regarding the running of the school. This fact, which is linked to the inadequate or non-existent training of these teachers (Kyridis et al., 2001; Shareefa, 2020) is apparent from the findings of this particular study and it creates significant difficulties.

"I often feel insecure regarding the administrative side of things no matter how many years have passed, because I have never been taught how to do it. I started at the beginning when

I came into the field, not knowing anything. I took on responsibilities due to having more years of service and without someone having told me what we had to do, what our obligations are.” (I.13)

“Regarding the administrative work, you haven’t been trained and you don’t have the necessary knowledge. So, you ask older colleagues in order to learn what to do and in what way. In the multi-grade schools, you have to be both teacher and admin officer.” (I.16)

In fact, the obligatory acceptance of the role of supervisor of the school unit by the teachers of multi-grade primary schools seems to directly affect their educational work as it burdens them with additional responsibilities (Pappas, 2007; Plessis & Subramanien, 2014; Tsolakidis & Fokidis, 2010). So, 12 teachers, (75% of the teachers in the sample) stated that in order to be able to meet the demands of their dual role, of teacher and administrator, they were forced to devote a significant part of their personal – private time to carrying out their administrative duties:

“Most of the bureaucratic stuff I do after school. There’s nowhere near enough time to do it all at school.” (I.10)

“After 13.30 usually until 16.00 I work on the administrative side of things. I have something to do every day, and a part of the work comes home with me.” (I.13)

The multi-grade primary schools usually receive less funding from the Municipality they belong to administratively and this has a negative influence on their operation, as they don’t possess the necessary economic resources for the supply of materials that are essential for the teachers to carry out their daily educational work (Downes & Robert, 2018). The problem of inadequate funding of these particular schools appears to have a negative effect on the educational effort of the teachers in the sample:

“As far as the infrastructure is concerned, more is needed but there’s no money from the subsidies from the Municipal Board of Education. So, we struggle to cover the basic needs that our school has.” (I.10)

5. Conclusions

From the analysis of our research material, we arrive at the following conclusions: The teachers in the multi-grade primary schools, who participated in this research, appeared to implement mixed pedagogical practices, which combine elements from both a visible and an invisible pedagogy. More specifically, visible pedagogical practices were used during the teaching of those lessons seen as primary, like Language and Mathematics. In addition, it was discovered that there was a weakening of the evaluation criteria during

the teaching of lessons that are considered secondary, like History or Religious Education.

The pedagogical practices that the teachers in the sample implemented in the multi-grade primary schools where they worked, were influenced by the existing educational circumstances, such as their inadequate infrastructure and the insufficient teaching time based on the official curriculum of the Greek multi-grade primary schools. This is because the particular teachers were required to implement the co-teaching of a number of subjects under conditions of a very strong framing of Instructional Discourse in pacing on a daily basis. In addition, administrative factors had a significant effect on the shaping of the pedagogical practices of the teachers in the multi-grade primary schools too, because these teachers experience an increased workload since they had to take on administrative responsibilities closely connected to the administration and management of a school. In fact, the teachers who participated in the research were unprepared and quite inadequate to perform this role, explicitly expressing the need to be provided with well-organized and properly prepared training related to the exercise of administrative duties in the multi-grade primary schools. Closing this paper, we believe it would be of interest to investigate whether the existing Curriculum and school textbooks used in Primary Education are suitable for multi-grade primary schools (1/grade, 2/grade, 3/grade), as well as how this influence and shape the cognitive level of the pupils and the pedagogical practices of the teachers in the multi-grade schools.

About the Authors

Anna Asimaki is Associate Professor in Sociology of Education at the Department of Educational Science and Social Work of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Patras, Greece. She is also a tutor in the Postgraduate Studies Programme in the same Department, teaching Professional Development for Teachers. E-mail: asimaki@upatras.gr

Maria Georgakopoulou is a primary school teacher. She also holds a Master's degree in Education Sciences at the Department of Education and Social Work, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Patras. E-mail: mariageo1997@gmail.com

Gerasimos Koustourakis is Professor in Sociology of Education and School Knowledge at the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Patras, Greece. He is also a tutor in the Postgraduate Studies Programme, Master in Education, in the Faculty of Humanities of the Hellenic Open University teaching Open and Distance Learning. E-mail: koustourakis@upatras.gr

Archontoula Lagiou is a primary school teacher. She also holds a Master's degree in "Education Sciences" and is a PhD candidate at the Department of Education and Social Work, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Patras. E-mail: pde6716@upnet.gr

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