

## **Preschool teachers' personal theory and their effect on didactical approaches; the case of Sinking/Floating**

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### *Abstract*

Curriculum reform, which is an issue of great interest over the last decades, influences teaching practice and shapes teachers' views on what constitutes a legitimate curriculum. At the level of curriculum implementation, teachers are in an empowered position; it is in their hands to "put the pieces together". The experience, background and personal theory about teaching and learning of each teacher effects the way he/she interprets –and consequently implements- educational policies. A number of previous studies have expressed the concern that teachers often resist changing their role in the classroom, resulting to a significant inconsistency between the official curriculum and the applied curriculum. This concern motivates the present study, given a number of additional adjustments in Greek preschool education, which in the last 25 years has involved the enactment of new curricula, and the foundation of Pedagogical Departments at University level. These adjustments have resulted in significant changes in the intended profile of the preschool teacher, who is expected to readily adopt contemporary teaching methods and transform innovative pedagogical premises into classroom practice.

The purpose of the study is to reveal to what extend the didactical approach of Sinking/Floating in preschool classrooms is influenced by teachers' variant theoretical background. Data were collected through 3 semi-structured interviews with the classrooms teachers followed by 3 in-classroom observations during the approach of Sinking/Floating. The main object of the interview was to reveal the way they usually teach the specific concept whereas the observation reveals the way they finally teach it. The 3 participants represent the main groups in which preschool teachers pertain according to their theoretical studies and background. NVivo10 was used for the content analysis of the recorded material. The analysis was based in both preset and emergent categories:

C1 – Context within which the activity is integrated

C2 – Introductory questions

C3 – Experimental process

C4 – Criteria used for selection of materials

C5 – Listing of findings and conclusions

Data are not faced as simple variables; they are rather examined flexibly, through an interpretive perspective in order to compose a more complete image.

Teachers seem affected by traditional pedagogy, even if they have been trained to use contemporary pedagogical and didactical methods. The main "issue" is located mostly in C3, the experimental process, which is far from the contemporary science teaching methods. Teachers' effectiveness is a subject that has recently gained researchers' systematic interest. The "expert" teacher uses his/her cognitive arsenal and the appropriate strategies to fulfill each task. He/she is capable to overcome well established practices, to evaluate and continuously reframe his/her actions; he/she is always in a reflective process. In order to reach the "expert" teacher, there is a need to cultivate their ability to analyze and reflect on teaching and learning. Teacher education processes should intend to lead to reflective teachers who will be able to connect theory and practice and to proceed to the most appropriate choices.