

Teaching Literature in Contemporary Education: The National Curriculum for Literature in Cyprus

Assistant Prof. Afroditi Athanasopoulou, University of Cyprus

University of Cyprus,
Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
P.O. Box 20537, 1678 Nicosia, Cyprus

athanasopoulou.afroditi@ucy.ac.cy

Teaching Literature in Contemporary Education: The National Curriculum for Literature in Cyprus

Abstract

Today's student-centred and democratic school should create individuals, able to manage various textual, visual and digital practices, interact with each other accepting difference of opinion and cultural diversity, and be active citizens, aware of the "politics of meaning" produced by the numerous, often controversial discourses in our postmodern world.

These objectives call for new school curricula, grounded in interdisciplinarity and the pedagogy of critical literacy, and capable of promoting a holistic approach to knowledge and cultural literacy among the young, providing them with skills and competences for the 21st century.

This paper presents the new Integrated Programme of Study for Literature adopted under the National Curriculum Reform in Cyprus. A joint effort of university professors and school teachers, the Programme has been gradually introduced in Cyprus's school system since September 2011 and aims at cultivating reading and writing skills within a broader critical literacy agenda, enabling students to become critical and creative readers of literary texts and writing practices in correlation with other arts and cognitive fields.

Literature teaching is perceived as a set of knowledge, values and skills, which unfolds gradually from the basics of literary theory and the "grammar" of poetic and narrative texts, for younger pupils, to more complex matters regarding the nature of literature and its functions as an aesthetic, social, historical phenomenon, for senior classes. The literature course is seen as a dynamic field in which students explore various literary texts and other forms of art in a historical perspective, compare different ways of expression and viewpoints, and produce their own texts (alternative life scenarios). The classroom becomes a workshop, which encourages learners' participation, taking into account their interests, preferences and concerns. The analysis of texts, organized in thematic units, is adjusted to the students' age and literacy level and is based on various education materials (texts, music, films/videos, photos) to meet the needs and cognitive skills of every student.

The positive impact of the new curriculum on students and teachers in Cyprus justifies proposing this programme as a good practice that meets EU literacy experts' recommendations on modernising national education curricula to promote literacy.

Keywords

Education reform, integrated curriculum for literature, literary and cultural literacy, critical reading, interdisciplinarity

Introduction

In humanitarian education, which is being alarmingly marginalised in our technocratic age, literature emerges as the ultimate carrier of universal values, while at the same time promoting the distinct linguistic and cultural identity of each nation. This unity between universality and individuality more than justifies the importance of literature in contemporary education, and therefore, in the student-centred and democratic education system of Cyprus.

Despite the debate whether literature can actually be taught so as to constitute a "school subject" – a complex issue, which can hardly be addressed here – there is general agreement, I believe, that dealing with literary texts *can* serve education purposes as it strengthens the awareness of children, sharpens their language sense and their aesthetic criteria, develops their fantasy and their critical and analytical skills (through empathy and emotional involvement). Briefly put, literature with the

intrinsic *polysemy* of its manifestations makes children more capable of perceiving reality in its diversity of aspects and perspectives, and taking a critical stance towards matters of personal and social life, always *in relation to the "other"* (the other view, the other opinion, the other voice). Thus, literature promotes simultaneously awareness of the world and awareness of one's self (which in any case are two sides of the same coin); it helps people, young people in particular, to comprehend and become more aware of their relationship with society, history, culture and ultimately themselves in permanent interaction with "the other".

Thus, the notions of interdisciplinarity, intertextuality, interculturality – these milestones of the postmodern cultural paradigm – intersect with the key issue of teaching literature (and not only literature) in today's student-centred, multicultural and pluralistic education.

It is clear that the authors of a school curriculum for literature today should be concerned with organising the course so as to achieve two essential goals that work in opposite directions: a) ensure that students' contact with literary texts in the classroom would aim at ultimately teaching them to appreciate and address *art* as an *essential component of life*, and b) guarantee that the approach to teaching literature would perceive students as potential readers and would seek to deepen their relationship with literature not only in the general direction of fostering a love for reading but also in the more specific and subtle direction of nurturing reader's sensitivity, literary culture and ultimately *critical* reading of texts in the social, historical and cultural context in which they were created ("literary literacy", "cultural literacy").

This is the rationale behind the new Integrated Programme of Study for Literature, which was developed in 2009-2010 in the framework of the National Curriculum Reform in Cyprus's compulsory education. The Programme has been gradually introduced in the school system of the Republic of Cyprus since September 2011, starting with primary and lower-secondary levels (adoption in upper-secondary level is pending). A joint effort of university professors and school teachers, the Programme was developed with the decisive involvement and scientific guidance of the author of this paper who bears responsibility for its content. Following is a brief description of the Programme's philosophy and most important innovations vis-à-vis what existed in literature teaching prior to its adoption.

1. What is new in the new Integrated Programme of Study for Literature (IPSL)?

Education practice in Greece and Cyprus has long ago demonstrated that the teaching of literature is often plagued by empiricism, subjectivity and reliance on obsolete and inefficient teaching methods despite the significant achievements and contribution of international and national education research, especially in the last few decades. The "root of evil", perhaps not the only one but in my opinion, the strongest and most persistent, is conventionalism, which results in an *unbridgeable gap* between "academic" and "school" literature, between the "ex cathedra theorists" of literature and the "field workers" of literature in school classrooms. The most important consequence of this state of affairs on the *entire* education system is that school curricula fail to incorporate an extensive body of valuable research and are mostly developed by Ministry of Education bureaucrats without benefitting from the involvement or guidance of education experts. There are, of course, other less obvious but equally important causes and reasons for this situation, which have to do with the fragmentation of the education system's *entirety* into separate "trade associations" of kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, lower-secondary school philologists, upper-secondary school philologists, university professors, which look at each other with suspicion, accusing one another for the poor education of the students they receive from the previous level. The ensuing inevitable aristocratism, especially on behalf of those highest on the education pyramid, the condescending attitude of university professors towards the "poor relatives" from the rest of the education system and the reaction of the latter, their "allergy" to any theory, have the unfortunate outcome of perpetuating empiricism in school teaching practices and hindering the transposition of valuable academic knowledge of literature into general education, which as per *the democratic and humanistic ideal* is accessible to everyone. When all is said and done, the unbridgeable gap and mutual suspicion between those who produce research and theory and those who teach at school

turn the necessary dialogue into a tragic “monologue among deaf” in which the big losers are ultimately the students but also the teachers themselves.

Far from claiming universal validity, these findings reveal the need for collaboration between university professors and primary and secondary school teachers, but also the benefit of offering university courses on methods and approaches to teaching literature. Currently, the programmes of study in the vast majority of universities in Greece and Cyprus *do not* include such courses, as they are generally looked upon as inferior.

On this backdrop, the fact that the Integrated Programme of Study for Literature implemented in Cyprus’s general education has been developed with the *joint* effort of university professors and school teachers constitutes a promising step towards bridging the gap between the theorists and the practitioners of education, or at least a sign that the need for bridging this irrational and counterproductive gap has been finally understood.

A key innovation pointing in the same direction is that the Integrated Programme of Study does not treat levels separately from one another, but constructs the literary education of school students, progressing gradually from grade to grade and from level to level to ensure **a comprehensive, circular knowledge of literature** that is being accumulated without gaps and voids from primary through upper-secondary school. The second innovation of the IPSL has to do with the *economy* of its internal organisation: instead of having a plethora of thematic units, which repeat from grade to grade and are often arrayed without any connection or consistency between them (as was the case before), in the new IPSL, the content for the literature course in all levels is organised around four overarching **thematic axes** and unfolds in a *spiral* fashion from level to level within a limited number of (related but not identical) thematic units. This ensures consistency and helps avoid omissions or repetitions between grades and levels. In other words, the curriculum operates as a **system**. Another important feature, perhaps the most important one, is that the IPSL came to fill an inexcusable gap in Cyprus’s compulsory education, since prior to its introduction there were no comprehensive study plans, let alone an integrated curriculum for literature, either in primary or in secondary school. All that existed were the so-called “content programming guidelines”, which instructed teachers what texts from the literature textbooks and anthologies to actually teach!

In view of the above, it is obvious that the Integrated Programme of Study for Literature *rationalises* and *systematises* the teaching of literature from (pre)primary education through the end of the general education cycle. This **systematisation** seeks to ensure that the teaching of literature would:

- correspond effectively to the *nature* of literature (until now literary texts were often used merely as teaching aids in language classes);
- be *feasible* within the available time frame and *effective*, i.e. seeking to deepen knowledge rather than relying on repetition (moreover fewer thematic units per grade mean less “inactive” texts, which never get to be taught);
- *balance* the types of learning it nurtures, i.e. offer proportionately both aesthetic culture *and* literary literacy, emphasising not *only* on content but *also* on form, and ultimately,
- serve the *mission of education in the 21st century*, forming well-educated individuals, equipped with the necessary skills, attitudes and competencies to deal with complex scenarios in their adult lives as active and creative citizens.

More specifically, a major challenge of the literary course is to form **sensitive and critically minded readers** aware of the “politics of meaning” produced by the vast – and often controversial – multiplicity of texts (discourses) in our postmodern world.

2. What is the content of the IPSL?

Taking into consideration the relationship of literature with the world that surrounds us, the content of the IPSL is structured around the following four thematic axes: **Literature and Nature; Literature and Society/Human Relations; Literature and History/Cultural Tradition; Literature and Fantasy** (the latter relates specifically to “the world of literature”). These thematic axes are expounded (itemised) per grade and level into a few **thematic units**, as follows:

PRIMARY EDUCATION

- **Thematic axis: Literature and Nature**

Thematic units

Grade 1 and 2 (age 6-8): Geophysical and biophysical environment: seas, lowlands and mountains – animals, wildlife and pets

Grade 3 and 4 (age 8-10): Human geography: traditional/rural and urban environment – the “rural” man and the “urban” man

Grade 5 and 6 (age 10-12): Natural lifestyle and the athletic ideal (*anima sana in corpore sano*) – destruction and protection of the environment – endangered species

- **Thematic axis: Literature and Society/Human Relations**

Thematic units

Grade 1 and 2: All the same, all different (with emphasis on *school life*)

Grade 3 and 4: All the same, all different (with emphasis on *family life*)

Grade 5 and 6: All the same, all different (*human characters in modern social life*)

- **Thematic axis: Literature and History/Cultural Tradition**

Thematic units

Grade 1 and 2: Folklore and popular traditions – Folk history (legends) – Popular religious life

Grade 3 and 4: History and collective memory in literature

Grade 5 and 6: The history of my land in oral and written literature

- **Thematic axis: Literature and Fantasy**

Thematic units

Grade 1 and 2: Imagination and humour

Grade 3 and 4: Fantasy and adventure

Grade 5 and 6: Science fiction and virtual reality

LOWER-SECONDARY EDUCATION

- **Thematic units – Middle school grade 1 (age 12-13)**

Childhood and school years: School life: past and present – the “Eden” of childhood – Relationship/conflicts between adults’ and children’s perspective of the world

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and Society/Human Relations**

Folklore and literature: Legends, myths, fairy tales, animal stories – Folk and popular (rebetiko) songs – The renewal of tradition in modern literature

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and History/Cultural Tradition**

Humour and literature: Comic elements in literature in comparison/contrast with other non-literary expressions of humour: comics, jokes, graffiti, etc., with emphasis on the dynamics of the sudden shift in established conventions (*incongruity*), which produce laughter

▶ matching thematic axes **Literature and Fantasy** and **Literature and Society**

- **Thematic units – Middle school grade 2 (age 13-14)**

Literature and ecology: Ecological awareness through literature, popular and contemporary, Greek and foreign, with emphasis on current environmental problems and their impact on the quality of life

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and Nature**

The journey in literature: The different motives and meanings of travel throughout time – Changes in the culture of travel (traveller vs. tourist) – Emphasis on the *symbolic* dimension of travel in literary texts

▶ matching thematic axes **Literature and Nature, Literature and Fantasy, Literature and Society/Human Relations**

Human relations – Human characters: Comparison between human characters and relations *at different times and in different social contexts*, with emphasis on the attitudes (positive/negative) governing human relationships, e.g. solidarity/racism, tolerance/rejection of the other, the value of friendship, etc.

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and Society/Human Relations**

- **Thematic units – Middle school grade 3 (age 14-15)**

Literature and universal values: Natural vs. social aspects of fundamental values and human rights – freedom, justice, democracy, equity, respect for diversity and so forth – and the need for *proactive vigilance* in order to safeguard them.

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and Society/Human Relations**

My country and its people: The world of Cyprus in popular and contemporary literature, with emphasis on the multicultural environment of Cyprus throughout time and the current problems of Cypriot society

▶ matching thematic axes **Literature and History/Cultural Tradition, Literature and Society, Literature and Nature**

Literature and adolescence: the world of young adults and the current problems of the new generation – novels of adolescence or apprenticeship: portraits of teenagers on their way to adulthood, with emphasis on poetic teenage love and identity formation

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and Society/Human Relations**

TRANSITION TO UPPER-SECONDARY EDUCATION

(The IPSL establishes a link between middle school grade 3 and high school grade 1 to ensure a smooth transition to upper-secondary education)

- **Thematic units – High school grade 1 (age 15-16)**

Love in literature (the “other” as self): similarities and variations in the expression of love and affection in classical and modern literature under the impact of different social conventions, cultural paradigms, sensitivities and tastes

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and Society/Human Relations**

The self as “other”: emphasis on methods of constructing the image of the “other”/foreign in literature and building awareness of the *dialectic dynamics*, which the dialogue with “others” has in the construction of the self

▶ matching thematic axis **Literature and Society/Human Relations**

Satire and satirical texts: types of satirical discourse and ways to introduce ambiguity: parody, satire, irony and their function for exercising *social criticism*, and potentially bringing about *change*

▶ matching thematic axes **Literature and Fantasy and Literature and Society**

The complete curriculum covers all upper-secondary education grades. However, as mentioned earlier, the implementation of the IPSL in high school is still pending and therefore, will not be presented here. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that in high school grades 2 and 3 the course of literature is organised so as to give students a comprehensive idea of the historical development of the literary phenomenon in modern and postmodern times. Since students at this level are mature enough to grasp more complex matters, emphasis is placed on the major literary movements of the 19th and 20th century, which have played a decisive role in shaping modern aesthetics and literary tastes.

It should be noted that for each thematic unit, the IPSL specifies **concrete teaching objectives**, which are spelled out so that each teacher might know what they are expected to achieve in the classroom: what should students learn, what values, attitudes and behaviours should be cultivated around a theme (e.g. environment, popular tradition, human rights), and above all, what knowledge and skills should students develop in order to be able differentiate literary texts from all other types of discourse. To ensure that this particular type of knowledge and skills would be achieved, the IPSL also specifies in detail the **parameters of literary literacy**, which students are expected to achieve, depending on their grade, i.e. the cognitive level consistent with their age. This is an innovation that deserves to be discussed a little further, since so far school education in Greece and Cyprus had given no systematic attention in to this intrinsic element of literature, i.e. the relationship between form and content.

3. How is literary literacy perceived in the IPSL?

The term “literary literacy” refers to the gradual introduction of students into the “grammar” of literary language and the basic theory (and history) of literary genres as a necessary prerequisite that would allow them to become competent (critical) readers of literature and of any other text, and would ultimately provide them with a sound basis to achieve cultural literacy. This gradual introduction moves from the simplest to the most complex notions, following the cognitive development of the students, and *relies always on literary texts* (**never** on “theory hand-outs”, which students are expected to memorise, as was previously the case).

It goes without saying that the term *grammar* of the literary language is used in the program in the sense that we have inherited from the tradition of Russian Formalism, and refers to **structural analysis** (i.e. how the individual elements of poetic and narrative language form a *system*), while the *theory* (and history) of literary genres seeks to elucidate the variety of forms and manners in which literature reflects (simulates, recreates) reality, constructing its own “world” that enters into a dialectic relationship with the real one.

To put it briefly, the goal of literary literacy under the IPSL is to ensure that students would understand progressively, as they mature, that the imaginary “game” of literature is a *serious* endeavour, which does not happen arbitrarily but has **laws** (a system) and **codes** (genres and types of texts) that evolve over the years, reflecting changes in the prevailing social conditions and hence the attitudes and tastes of the people (sensitivity shift).

4. What are the methodological innovations of the IPSL?

The aim of teaching is not to make students learn by heart the analysis of certain literary texts (as was largely the case so far), but to expose them to sample texts of Greek and world literature (which can therefore be renewed or replaced by other equally suitable and of similar quality), so that children might get to know, understand and love the world of literature, thus developing *internal motivation* for reading.

The IPSL introduced the following main innovations in teaching methods, compared to the existing practices in the literature course:

I. Particular emphasis is given to the **comparative examination** of literary texts. Instead of teaching each individual text separately and then abandoning it for the next, literary texts are now **examined together in clusters** that create **a network around an overarching theme** (hence the organisation of the content into thematic units). This method seeks to foster critical thinking and cultural literacy in students by highlighting the *socio-historical dimension* of literary texts along the axes of old/new, traditional/modern, local/global, etc. The methodological principle of *comparison*, which is central to the philosophy of the new IPSL, perceives the classroom as a community of readers, a literary workshop in which a creative dialogue takes place between texts, teacher and students.

The comparative examination of texts further cultivates literary literacy in students by highlighting the distinctive features of literary discourse (the difference between poetry and prose, the characteristics of poetic and narrative language, the key terms and concepts of literary analysis). Moreover, literary texts are also compared with other forms of artistic expression (visual arts, cinema, music, etc.) so that students might understand the connection between literature and other forms of art but also its singularity as regards the techniques and ways of expression.

II. Texts are taught placing **equal importance on both content and form** (figures of speech, metrics, narrative techniques). Thus, students come to realise not in theory but *through the texts themselves* the indissoluble bond between form and content in literature; they come to recognise that it is not “what” but “how” that matters in literary discourse, and that content in fact emerges through the expressive and narrative means of the text.

III. Particular attention is also given to **establishing relevance** and **fostering empathy**. That is why the issues raised by the literary texts under consideration are always discussed from a *modern-day perspective*, which is more familiar to the students and more likely to provoke their interest. Thus,

students become aware that literature is not produced in a vacuum and does not belong in a platonic “world of ideas” but relates to actual reality, to the experiences and concerns of people in real life.

IV. In order to develop creative imagination and encourage young people to act upon their creative inclinations, the IPSL promotes **creative writing**. Students are expected to produce (and are evaluated on) their own texts, so that they can understand “from within”, *experientially*, the specific conventions (and challenges) of literary writing in order to become **not** necessarily “writers” but rather more critical and more capable *readers*. Overall, the organic integration of creative writing (and reading) in the literature course seeks to nurture a more systematic and permanent relationship of students with the practice of reading and a more informed and critical attitude to literary and any other texts, as well as to the different worldviews they propagate (**critical reading**).

5. How is the IPSL implemented in the classroom?

The IPSL, by its nature, requires the adoption of a student-centred teaching model based on the principles of new pedagogy that promotes **collaborative and experiential learning** through construction of knowledge, inquiry-based learning in groups, empathy, classrooms organised as literary workshops and reading clubs, critical literacy, holistic knowledge, cultural literacy, etc. Most importantly, under the new curriculum, teaching is adapted to the level of readiness of each student, following the principle of **pedagogical differentiation**. At the same time, it is complemented by **targeted use of new technologies** to add more depth to literary phenomena, issues and authors, and enhance the understanding of literature. Finally, the knowledge gained in the examination of literary texts spans interdisciplinary boundaries and is correlated with other subjects (language, history, science, psychology, art education etc.) so as to impart **holistic education** to the students.

6. What teaching aids are used?

For the purposes of the new curriculum a team of active teachers of literature under the scientific guidance of the author of this paper and other university professors, developed **new set of textbooks** adapted to the philosophy of the IPSL and the new methodology of comparative examination of literary texts. The set comprises a series of textbooks under the general title “Literature: Need of the Soul”, which include a reader and a volume with study questions and activities for each grade. The Reader is designed to be used *by students* in the classroom, while the Questions & Activities Manual is *reserved for teachers* who may choose to diversify and adapt the suggested questions and activities to the potential of their classroom based on the principle of differentiated teaching.

The Reader consolidates the content for literature, which was hitherto segmented in three anthologies: one for Greek, one for Cypriot and one for foreign literature. Thus unified, the Reader now includes *representative* texts of Modern Greek literature (which also comprises the notable literary production of Cyprus) coupled with a fair quota of texts by established authors of European and/or world literature. The texts within each thematic unit are arranged in chronological order and are sorted by genre (prose – poetry). The corpus is *open* and allows teachers a reasonable amount of flexibility in choosing between or replacing suggested texts with other of equal quality that fall within the same topic. The texts were chosen with the following **selection criteria**: relevance to the teaching objectives of the thematic unit to which they belong, literary value, and relevance to cognitive level of the students’ age.

In addition to literary texts, appropriate audiovisual material is suggested for each thematic unit: poems set to music, songs, feature films, video/documentaries, visual art, etc. The use of this material along with the literary texts included in the Reader allows students to gain an *immediate, tangible* understanding of **the impact of literature on other forms of art and its connection with other types of artistic expression**. These “cross-art” correlations are further illustrated in the creative exercises included in the Questions & Activities Manual for the teacher.

Apart from the texts of new Reader, which are often necessarily abridged (especially prose), educators are encouraged to choose and teach other literary texts as well and, most importantly, to

motivate their students to read complete books of literature (a list of relevant titles is provided at the end of each thematic unit). Thus, no notable work of literature is undervalued or excluded from the teaching and learning process.

The Questions & Activities Manual comprises a series of sample questions, exercises and activities, which serve as *guiding recommendation* to help teachers develop their own assignments according to the specifics of their classroom. The coursework is designed so as to ensure that the texts would be examined placing equal emphasis on both content and form, and unfolds in a spiral fashion, as follows:

a) Basic analysis and comparison questions design to test students' reading comprehension skills and their ability to draw parallels between the texts under consideration.

b) Group assignments and interdisciplinary/cross-curricular activities that require teamwork among students, provide for more systematic use of new technologies, and seek to develop more complex text analysis and interpretation skills in correlation with other fields of knowledge and forms of art. In this context, the Questions & Activities Manual also proposes a series of activities designed to encourage **creative writing or other types of creative expression** in which students produce their own texts with *methodological guidance* from the teacher, and are evaluated based on criteria such as adherence to the conventions of the genre and originality.

c) Project-based research work: at this stage, the classroom becomes a **research workshop** or a **readers' club**. Students are required to read a complete literary work and present it to the class or to conduct a small research project combining literature with other subjects (e.g. language, history, psychology, etc.) or other forms of expression (theatre, cinema, music, visual arts, etc.)

Last but not least, the Questions & Activities Manual also contains an additional corpus of literary texts for each thematic unit, which further broadens teachers' choices of content.

7. What changes in student assessment?

For the first time in general education in Cyprus, student assessment is based on specific **education standards**, which stipulate what each student should have learnt in the literature course at the end of each school year, grade and level of education according to the spiral model of knowledge acquisition.

The IPSL provides for **various forms of assessment**, which peak at different times (at the completion of a set of texts, at the end of the semester, at the end of the school year) and promote chasing goals rather than grades. They are designed to ensure bidirectional feedback within the teaching and learning process itself in order to continually adjust, fine-tune and ultimately improve teaching, while enhancing the performance of students in activities that promote creativity, critical thinking and love for reading.

The traditional form of assessment through written exams remains in use, however, for the first time the **examination papers** (tests and written final exams) include *untaught texts*, which are examined comparatively with those already practiced. Thus, students are not assessed on their ability to memorise information about specific texts taught in the classroom, but on the **basic skills** they have developed to analyse and form an independent opinion of many other (potentially all) literary texts. The assessment is based on questions that require students to analyse and compare texts with each other or with other forms of art (in a cross-curricular reference to other subjects, such as language, history, etc.) The exercises progress in difficulty in order to correspond more adequately to the learning profile of each student.

A major innovation of the IPSL is that **creative writing and reading** (presentation of complete literary works) are also considered for the purposed of student assessment. Students read books independently or in teams, present them creatively in the classroom and although they are not actually examined on them, they do know that both their reading proficiency and presentation skills will be taken into consideration in their assessment. This approach also encourages students to undertake more complex **project-based assignments**, which develop research and independent writing skills, promote teamwork and cultivate other important competencies.

Conclusion

The Integrated Programme of Study for Literature, adopted in Cyprus's public schools, corresponds to the fundamental principles of modern education that seek to advance critical literacy, holistic knowledge and cultural literacy, while promoting the cultivation of values, attitudes and behaviours for active democratic citizenship. The philosophy of the new curriculum is open and provides great flexibility and choice for both teachers and students to unfold their self-motivation, creativity and individual inclinations. The ISPL contributes to the development of key skills or competencies (such as analytical and synthetic thinking, empathic ability, creative imagination, critical knowledge management, team-working capacity, problem-solving, ability to identify alternative life scenarios and so forth), which are necessary for the smooth integration of young people into the modern, interactive and multicultural society of the 21st century and their effective participation in shaping the future. Last but not least, a distinguishing feature of the IPSL is its coherence, as I believe this brief presentation has demonstrated. **Everything** in the curriculum (thematic units, texts, exercises and activities) **functions as a system** according to the principle of constructivist learning (moving *from the simplest to the complex*).

Thus, students gain a **solid and comprehensive knowledge of the literary phenomenon** in their general education with the ultimate goal of being able to recognise and understand the specific nature of literature, and of art in general, as an **aesthetic and cultural phenomenon**.

The positive impact, which the new curriculum for literature had on students and teachers in Cyprus's compulsory education in the last three years, provides sufficient grounds for proposing this programme as a good practice that meets EU literacy experts' recommendations on modernising national education curricula in order to promote literacy, cultivate reading and writing skills as part of a broader critical literacy agenda, and enable students to become critical and creative readers of literary texts and writing practices in correlation with other forms of art and cognitive fields, such as history, science etc.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the whole team that gave their best selves to develop the Integrated Programme of Study for Literature, and especially my fellow researcher Vassiliki Selioti who helped me summarise an entire curriculum in just a few pages. I also thank my dear colleague Irena Alexieva for her essential assistance with the English version of this paper.

Bibliography

The IPSL presented in this paper is the outcome of **original** research. It does draw upon bibliographic outputs of respective reform efforts in Greece but they are unfortunately in Greek (hence inaccessible to English-speaking reader.) Anyone interested in consulting the Integrated Program of Study for Literature in its entirety, along with all related methodological material, teaching aids and guidelines, may refer to the IPSL official website:

<http://www.schools.ac.cy/eyliko/mesi/Themata/logotechnia/index.html> (in Greek), as well as to the paper *The Curriculum for Public Schools in the Republic of Cyprus. Proposal of the Committee to the Primary and Secondary Education Council*, Nicosia, December 2008, which sets the principles of education reform in Cyprus (in English).

Contact

Afroditi Athanasopoulou, Assistant Professor of Modern Greek Literature
Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
University of Cyprus
P.O. Box 20537, 1678 Nicosia, Cyprus
athanasopoulou.afroditi@ucy.ac.cy