



## An innovative approach to the teaching of Homer's Odyssey at A' class of Greek Gymnasium based on the educational material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey"<sup>1</sup> and "Odysseus raft"<sup>2</sup>

Dimitra Kamarinou

PhD in Education

kamarinou@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

This research attempts to investigate qualitatively and within the context of teaching of students of A' class of Gymnasium in the Odyssey and teachers who teach the Odyssey, the relationship between cognitive performance with teaching materials "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft". The survey involved both students and teachers of the A' class of Gymnasium of a public School. The students attended a course which was constructed diversified as to course material teaching. The selected research tools included a questionnaire for teachers, a questionnaire (assessment tests) for students, students' worksheets and observation of students and the research was carried out by the researcher. The analysis of the obtained data shows that the implementation of teaching with specific teaching materials had a positive effect on performance and student learning.

### Indexing terms/Keywords

Innovative teaching material, student skills, student learning, training of teachers

### Academic Discipline And Sub-Disciplines

History; Education

### SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION

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### TYPE (METHOD/APPROACH)

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## INTRODUCTION

The educational material “Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey” has been created in order to give effective solutions to issues that emerge during the teaching of Homer’s Odyssey in the Greek school (A Gymnasium = 7th graders) from the textbook that the Ministry of Education provides.

The first is the lack of didactic material that combines and crosschecks the Homeric references with the historical data of the Mycenaean civilization. In the school textbook of Odyssey there are images and photos of archaeological data. Being just a few and without detailed explanations beyond a brief caption, they cannot provide to students an integrated historical frame and thus they cannot easily be used as historical resources. For instance the floor plan of the best preserved Mycenaean palace, the so called Nestor’s palace, has been placed in the school textbook without the reading key, which would help students to identify the rooms with their utilization. Though students are supposed to learn how to search for the historical truth of the Homeric verses, the appropriate didactic material is not provided to them. Although, the ancient history textbook that is taught in this grade could provide it. Still this is the second most important problem. The few pages in the ancient history textbook about the Mycenaean civilization are not sufficient enough to reveal details and the cultural framework of the Mycenaean world that would coincide with the Homeric references. A third problem is that the educators’ community does not have easy access to the archaeological publications about the Mycenaean civilization or is not much concerned to update the school textbooks on the recent archaeological findings. For instance the Odyssey textbook fails to mention that according to current archaeological research the passage on the construction of Odysseus “raft” is in fact a precise and detailed description of a Mycenaean ship’s shipbuilding process and not of a “raft”.

From the aspect of didactic methodology the secondary education in Greece is still mainly teacher centered lacking the utilization of innovative educational material. This results to the students’ learning difficulties and underachievement. Like in other countries, in Greece as well, the school’s orientation toward the University exams seems to dominate the educational system (Clough & Thompson, 1987)<sup>3</sup>. The close relationship between the difficulties and the Greek school’s structure shows that the failure in learning reflects, up to a degree, to the failure of effective teaching. A child that fails is a child that has not been provided with a successful teaching methodology (Franklin, 1987)<sup>4</sup>. Improving teaching methodology can transform the Greek school to a more appealing and interesting learning environment for the students, resulting thus to the effectiveness of teaching. This is why this research is important. It applies a teaching methodology, through the utilization of innovative educational material aiming at the improvement of Homer’s Odyssey teaching. It is possible that even through the support of the traditional teaching with innovative didactic material, the students’ interest will arise, inevitably leading to better achievements.

## Theory

### Experiential learning

Experiential learning (Wellington, 2000)<sup>5</sup> is a learning process in which the learner directly involved in the studied reality. So he is not a passive reader of textbooks, but participates in pedagogical processes which require his own actions and activities in order to learn, understand and shape attitudes and behaviors.

In this sense, the term refers to objectives and methods of active learning which in the History of Education have been the core of the work of important pedagogues and bases for theories of pedagogical currents, such as learning through action, «learning by doing», of Dewey, learning by discovery of Bruner, the project method of Frey, the life skills training, lifelong learning etc. Therefore experiential learning means that students are provided by opportunities to experience the problem that is investigating, which is expected to affect the understanding and estimation regarding feelings, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors. The teaching of the Odyssey refers to a bunch of knowledge about the past and also the understanding of methods of analysis, synthesis and approaching learning objects, that referring to a theoretical and spiritual level, which in the traditional school is not related enough to real life. And it is not very easy to be related. In this regard, it is needed to be found with which methods and good practices and how appropriate training materials students can be enabled to actively participate in the learning process and how students can conduct research using the Odyssey as historical source and combining the information with archaeological data.

### Interdisciplinary approach

Countering the traditional model of the compartmentalization of knowledge in teaching subjects the cross curricular approach organizes learning in a way that combines the study of the conceptual apparatus of the different disciplines and their distinct methods of enquiry. In Odyssey the cross-curricular approach includes elements of history (the historical reality of the Mycenaean civilization) sociology (the study of the social structure and the social stratification of the Mycenaean and Homeric societies), economics (the study of the Mycenaean economy), geography, citizenship education, technology, language and literature.

<sup>3</sup> Clough, P. & Thompson, D. (1987). *Curricular Approaches to Learning Difficulties: Problems for the Paradigm*. Dissenting Essays. Philadelphia: The Falmer Press.

<sup>4</sup> Franklin, M. (1992). Culturally sensitive instructional practices for African-American learners with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 59(2), 115-122.

<sup>5</sup> Wellington, J.(2000). *Educational Research. Comtemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. London: Continuum.



## Learning results

Learning results are the statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after the end of the learning period. Learning outcomes are related to the level of knowledge, skills and abilities (Cedefop, 2011)<sup>6</sup>. The learning outcomes in this survey are defined as the school performance of students in certain cognitive tests. The attitudes are defined as "predispositions for learning products and the response with a consistent favorable or unfavorable way with respect to a given object" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980)<sup>7</sup>. Satisfaction is a cognitive state of the student and the adequate or inadequate reward for the sacrifices and efforts being made. (Howard & Seth, 1969)<sup>8</sup>. The degree of satisfaction from the learning environment, substantially strengthens the positive attitudes and perceptions of the students towards an educational process. As for every course, so for the teaching of the Odyssey, the effectiveness of teaching depends on the attitude of students towards the particular subject.

Hannula (2002) describes three evaluative procedures regarding students' attitudes<sup>9</sup>. At first the student during an educational activity is experiencing an unconscious process of cognitive assessment of the situation, which is more emotional, than its individual aspirations. In this first step does not require previous experience. In the second process previous experiences directly affect the engagement of student to a specific learning object. Finally, the third process includes general values that a student has created for a course affecting the overall objectives to be set afterwards. All these evaluative processes that create attitudes, directly influenced by the social context in which the student and the teaching methodology activate, which in this case is being preceded the teaching material.

## Literature Review

In this research the issue of the development and evaluation of educational material falls within the field of curriculum enrichment. Curriculum enrichment is preferred for several reasons. A significant reason is to bring the material in the basic curriculum textbook up to date. The history teaching literature underlines that there is a gap between the historians and the history teachers, both being relatively unaware of each other's issues and of the developments in their specific fields or they intentionally sustain particular biases and distortions in the history textbooks that quite often reproduce ethnocentric attitudes and social stereotypes<sup>10</sup>. The educational material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft" aims at being a companion for the teachers. One of its goals is to enrich and update their knowledge and to provide them and their students sufficient and scientifically reliable support to accomplish the Odyssey textbook's assigned projects and exercises. Curriculum enrichment can be divided in two interrelated types. Extended planning contributes to the enrichment of the instructional program and to individualized enrichment, consisting of the teachers' providing didactic material and learning activities both for the faster learners and for those with learning difficulties and special interests<sup>11</sup>. Another form of curriculum extended planning integrates other subject fields into the study of a particular subject-matter area. The cross-curricular approach is a significant objective whose accomplishment can be facilitated by the produced educational material.

The main issue in the utilization of educational material for the above reasons is what the criteria for its evaluation can be. The below described synthesis of the research suggestions helped us define the evaluation criteria for the educational material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft". Research on textbook evaluation suggests that the below questions can be addressed<sup>12</sup>.

A. The structure of the educational material.

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<sup>6</sup>Cedefop, (2011). *When defining learning outcomes in curricula, every learner matters*. Retrieved 15/10/2015 from <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/18079.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Ajzen, I. & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

<sup>8</sup> Howard, A. & Seth, N. (1969). *The Theory of Buyer Behavior*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

<sup>9</sup>Hannula, M. (2002). Attitudes towards Mathematics, Emotions, *Educational Studies Mathematics*, 49, 25-46.

<sup>10</sup> Dragonas, T. & A. Frangoudaki (1997), National consciousness among European adolescents: A Psychosocial approach. In M. Angvik & B. von Borries (eds), *Youth and History: A Comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents*. Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung.

Dragonas, T. & A. Frangoudaki (2000), Youth and History, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* (Special Issue) 18, 2, pp. 229-391.

Frangoudaki, A. (2000), Reproduction of the Patterns of Interstate Power Relations in the Conceptions of 15-year-old Students in EU Countries: The Persistence of Prejudice. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Volume 18, Number 2, pp. 355-374.

Georgiadis, F. & Zisimos A. (2008), Diversity in History classrooms in Greece: Research on teaching history to culturally diverse pupils. In: J. Ramdeger & M. Wagener (eds), *Chancenungleichheit in der Grundschule. Ursachen und Wege aus der Krise. Jahrbuch Grundschulforschung*. Wiesbaden: Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaften. XIIIpp. 239-242.

Westbury, I. (1991), Textbooks. In: A. Lewy (ed.), *The international Encyclopedia of curriculum*. Oxford: Pergamon Press. Billington, R.A. (1966), *The historian's contribution to AngloAmerican misunderstanding*. New York: Hobbs, Dorman. Schueddekopf, O.E. (1967), *History teaching and history textbook revision*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

<sup>11</sup> Martinson, R. A. (1968), *Curriculum enrichment for the gifted in the primary grades*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. Thomas, R.M. & Thomas, S. M. (1965), *Individual differences in the classroom*. New York: McKay.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, T.H. & Armbuster, B.B. (1984), Content area textbooks. In: R.C. Anderson, J. Osborne & R.J. Tierney (eds.), *Learning to read in American schools: Basal readers and content texts*. New Jersey: Erlbaum. Armbuster, B.B. & Anderson, T.H. (1984), Textbook analysis. In: A. Lewy (ed.), *The international Encyclopedia of curriculum*. Oxford: Pergamon Press. Krause, G.R. (1976), Do's and don'ts in evaluating textbooks. *J. Read* 20: 212-214.





Is the structure clearly apparent to the readers? Is it clearly divided in chapters, subchapters and thematic units? Does the structure clearly be connected with the textbook's chapters? Is there a balance between the length of the chapters and subchapters and the new information and ideas they incorporate in terms of the students' ability to comprehend and remember?

B. The content of the educational material.

Can it serve as a teacher's companion that aids teachers to effectively teach students of different skills some of the difficult issues? Can it aid the students monitor their own cognitive process while studying? Does it update the information given in the basic textbook? Can it contribute to a cross-curricular approach? Does it connect new ideas with information and ideas already learned? Can it support the organization of experience based activities in the classroom and in other learning environments? Does it somehow link to the students' life experiences?

C. The vocabulary of the educational material

Is it easy for the students to comprehend the vocabulary? Are the terms explained in the text, through images, or/and in an appendix? Are new concepts explained by examples from the material world, by images or/and whenever possible with historic narration texts?

The above questions regarding the criteria for the educational material's evaluation are posed to the participants of this research.

## Research

### Purpose of the research

The aim of this research is to evaluate the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft" both as a companion for the teacher in Odyssey teaching and as didactic material for A Gymnasium students through its implementation in A' class of the Greek Gymnasium (7th graders). It was evaluated by the students and 8 teachers within a qualitative research frame.

1. In which ways and in which units of the Odyssey and History school book's can the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft" be utilized?
2. In which ways can this didactic material support experience based activities in the school classroom?
3. In which ways can this didactic material support experience based activities in archaeological sites and museums with Mycenaean exhibits?
4. In which ways can this didactic material contribute to the cross-curricular approach of Odyssey and its linkage to the Mycenaean civilization chapter of the History textbook?
5. Is it appropriate as a companion for the teachers who teach Homer's Odyssey and History of the ancient times?
6. Can the objective teaching goals be accomplished through the utilization of the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft"?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research sample and framework

A group of students and a group of teachers formed the study sample. Specifically, the survey was applied to 20 students of a public junior high school in a rural, mountainous region of Greece and to 8 teachers.

The choice of the population held under Non-probability sampling, with convenient sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007)<sup>13</sup>. The survey was conducted during the period of October-February (5 months). The selection of the survey sample was based on the rules governing the qualitative sampling, the appropriateness and adequacy. The selected sample should be suitable for research and adequate not enough in quantity but in providing information. This is called feasibility sample, which has the knowledge, the will and the attributes to provide more comprehensive and thorough answers that address the research questions. The selection of students and teachers was made on the basis of their interests in the innovative teaching materials and their positive attitudes towards the whole process.

### Research Method

The research aim and questions demand a qualitative methodological approach that allows an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the learning process, the results, the views and the students' attitudes while implementing the cross-curricular program based on the innovative didactic material. Their views regarding the learning experiences can be brought into light and their needs and expectations, which would otherwise remain unsaid, can be revealed. The qualitative approach is considered as the most appropriate for this research, since it fosters in examining the importance that the persons involved put on the learning experience processes, their interpretations and their views on specific

<sup>13</sup> Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed Method Sampling: A Typology with Examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77-100.



issues (Cohen et al, 1994)<sup>14</sup>. Being an interpretative and flexible research methodology, the qualitative research allows the researcher to aim at what the teaching and the learning experiences mean for the participants. Beyond the in-depth analysis the qualitative methods allow the participants' voice and their expressions to be heard (Eisner 1991)<sup>15</sup>. The expectation of the researcher in this study is to develop the fullest possible range of knowledge on the educational situation and to derive the participants' meanings and valuations, while actively participating in the program, enlarging the understanding of the possible impact of the specific didactic material inclusion in teaching Odyssey To fulfill this aim qualitative curriculum evaluation treats curriculum as the experience of the student and the teachers involved.

Drawing on the basic purpose of the investigation, meaning to obtain information in depth and giving particular importance to the development of thoughts and opinions of teachers and students, focus groups were selected as the most appropriate data collection tool along with the case study. It refers to the interaction, communication between individuals, led by researchers with the aim of posting information related to the subject of research.(Cohen et al, 1994)<sup>16</sup>.

### Reliability and validity of research

The validity, the reliability and the generalization measure the quality and the broader dynamics of the research. Although these terms do not have the same meaning in quantitative and qualitative research, qualitative researchers should take this into consideration in order to demonstrate the value of their findings. Reliability is synonymous with consistency and reproducibility over time, research tools and in groups-occurring (Cohen et al, 1994)<sup>17</sup>.

The techniques used in this research in order to increase reliability and proposed for qualitative research are:

A. Prolonged occupation: The researcher has to spend time within the under study environment and to acquaint the participants' trust. The researcher of this study is an experienced in innovative didactic approaches secondary school teacher (25 years) and a researcher in both education (PhD) and Mycenaean archaeology and Homeric philology awarded by the Academy of Athens.

B. Tripartite intersection sources, methods, evaluators: Refers to the use of more than one source that the cross-referencing to give reliable results. This is achieved by cross-checking both the students themselves and from information collected by teachers.

III. Suitability of references: It is the collection of other assets (other material) retained for possible retesting (abroad). The researcher when conducting research taking notes with the consent of the participants. This material is available.

D. Control by participants: The data, interpretations and conclusions are controlled by participants themselves. Following the investigation, the written documents given back to participants (after 5-7 days) to read and certify that they actually responded and continue to agree with their words, and given the opportunity to clarify any misconceptions that were recording what they wanted to say.

The validity is that a research tool actually does that which seeks to measure (Cohen et al, 1994). In qualitative research the validity can be ensured by the depth, the richness and content of the data collected by the participants accessed through triangulation and selflessness of the researcher (Cohen et al, 1994). In this research, using the questionnaire as a data collection tool, an attempt was made to the respondent to answer more honestly. An important element is the validity and generalization of research, in terms of the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other contexts or groups. Because of the small and often non-representative sample of qualitative research, generalization can be achieved by a detailed description of the data and findings of the investigation, so as every reader to understand the experiences, compare them with their own and to conclude whether these data can be of useful. Many researchers believe that the liquidity and flexibility of methods such as case study (as in this research), increase reliability.

### Research Tools

In the present investigation, because of the short range and specific objective, as research tool were used:

A. A questionnaire given to teachers and students with 21 questions, of which 11 had indicated a positive relationship with the learning of specific teaching material and the 10 negative relationship. They asked respondents to note the extent to which they agree or disagree with each sentence. The scale used was Likert format as follows: Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree / Disagree Neither (3) Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). The rating for the positive proposals were consistent with the numbers are in parenthesis, while for negative sentences given inverse score, in terms of the Strongly Disagree takes 5 degrees, the Disagree 4 degrees respectively and the rest.

B. The observation. Observation is one of the most typical methods of qualitative data collection. It is widely used in studies as a tool to support the development and understanding of aspects of the phenomenon under examination in a particular environment (Malderez, 2003)<sup>18</sup>. As regards the observation within the framework of the classroom, Ellis (1990)

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison K. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

<sup>15</sup> Eisner, E. W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison K. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison K. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

<sup>18</sup> Malderez, A. (2003). Key Concepts in ELT: Observation. *ELT Journal*, 57(2), 179-181.



argues that perhaps the only way to realize and understand someone how and what students learn is to observe them directly in the classroom<sup>19</sup>. This observation provides the researcher with many possibilities. For the purposes of the survey, an observation form has been created. The main points of the observation form were the motivation, confidence and performance displayed by the participants throughout the duration of the teaching intervention classes. Relevant fields completed during and after the end of every teaching hour. As for the comments, verbal characterizations were used in terms of a numerical scale in order to avoid time consuming and untimely recording. In some points, however, where the circumstances required, the choice was descriptive analysis and notes, all of which helped to further understand the process in the classroom. Although the application of the questionnaire and observation were important considerations in the conduct of the study, we sought to triangulate research results using the assessment test.

C. The assessment test. The assessment test gives scope to the teacher to make the collection of information which reflects the performance of the participants that directly correspond to the questions of the survey.

### Pilot research

For validity and reliability reasons it has been deemed as essential the pilot research applied to students with similar characteristics with the population under study in order to ensure the reliability of the tool and the validity of the investigation, it was considered necessary to pilot application of teaching material in subjects with characteristics similar to the population envisaged in order to identify any problems and ambiguities before the start of data collection. This didactic material was therefore given to students of different classes of the same school, who did not participate in the survey, but were willing to offer their assistance in this section. The goal was the testing and evaluation of teaching materials "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft" in order to check its suitability based on the following criteria: understanding the vocabulary of the texts by students, validity content in relation to the content of the modules of the Odyssey and the achievement of the objectives of the teaching intervention. Moreover such a criterion relating to teachers is the educational suitability as reference material for scientific investigation and documentation of references to elements of the Odyssey of the Mycenaean civilization.

During the pilot implementation, the questions in the questionnaire and the evaluation tests were further checked, in order to increase the reliability of tools (Sands, DI, & Barker, HB, 2004)<sup>20</sup>. In this way, the teaching materials would receive the final form through the application of alternative statements and necessary changes, in cases where it was considered necessary (Iraossi, 2006)<sup>21</sup>. Students have stated that they had some difficulty either to understand or to answer questions, which did not change the original design of the teaching material.

## Results

### Accomplishment of the objective teaching goals regarding specific units of the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft".

The objective goals were that the students should be able:

1. to describe elements of the political, societal and economic structure and organization of the Mycenaean civilization, and of the organization of the Mycenaean palatial centres.
2. to describe the form and the shipbuilding process of a Mycenaean – Homeric ship based on the Homeric passage that describes the building of the so called Odysseus' "raft".
3. to crosscheck the information from the Homeric epic with the historical data by using the resources.
4. to accomplish a field research in a Museum with Mycenaean exhibits and in an archaeological site.
5. to develop critical thinking and group work skills.

The provision of the appropriate didactic material to students is a significant focus for efforts at school improvement and has significant effects on assisting the learning of lower social status students. Research reports a positive correlation between textbook material and student achievement. The teachers confirmed that this didactic material provides the essential body of information on the historical reality of the Homeric civilization needed for the students understanding and practicing research skills. The results from the evaluation tests showed that the objective goals were accomplished for all students. Consequently the triangulation of the results shows the sufficiency and the efficiency of the didactic material regarding the learning achievements. Student were able to describe political and social life of the Mycenaean civilization, cross check information, accomplish field research in a Museum, develop critical thinking and team work. More specific results based on the criteria for the didactic material evaluation are presented below.

<sup>19</sup>Ellis, R. (1990). *Instructed Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>20</sup> Sands, D. I., & Barker, H. B. (2004). Organized Chaos: Modelling Differentiated Instruction for Preservice Teachers. *Teaching & Learning*, 19(1), 26-49.

<sup>21</sup> Iraossi, G. (2006). *The Power of Survey Design: A User's Guide for Managing Surveys, Interpreting Results, and Influencing Respondents*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.





### **Introduction to the research methodology from the resources.**

Though the Greek national curriculum fosters in that goal, it is hardly achievable within the traditional teaching framework. The reason is the lack of relevant teachers' and students' experience, as well as the lack of sufficient and not fragmental material that would facilitate their research. By combining and composing the information from *Odyssey* and from the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the *Odyssey*" and "Odysseus raft" the students were able to accomplish small scale historical resources research, both individually and in groups, reconstructing aspects of the Mycenaean culture and civilization, thus fulfilling a fundamental guideline of the national curriculum. By crosschecking the archaeological data that were presented in the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the *Odyssey*" and "Odysseus raft" they also reached conclusions regarding the following questions: is the information in Homer's *Odyssey* historically reliable? Are the Homeric references to aspects of the material world valid for the Mycenaean period? They examined thus in practice the issue of anachronisms in Homer, which as the teachers have stated is otherwise a difficult one to comprehend. Finally they integrated their research with a synthesis of the material they studied creating final products in the form of power point presentations or essays. The content has been judged by the teachers and highly marked as reliable and including enough information, which in fact had been derived from the didactic material. Even creative writing exercises, like "a day in the life of a Mycenaean prince", which are usually risky if the students don't possess an integrated corpus of knowledge, were written without historical mistakes and anachronisms.

### **Combination of the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the *Odyssey*" and "Odysseus raft" with the *Odyssey* school book's units and with the History's of ancient times units.**

A criterion that the educational material evaluation has to address is: Does this material make a systematic effort to help the student connect new ideas with information and ideas already learned, in this case in the *Odyssey*? The teachers claimed that it does, since there are clear references to the topics and the verses of the *Odyssey* and clear structure regarding the chapter titles and thematic. Above all the cross curricular approach contributed to the shaping of clear pictures on each topic that the students would then easier link to their life experiences.

All chapters of the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the *Odyssey*" and "Odysseus raft" have specific references to the relevant Homeric verses. The results of the questionnaires show that the teachers believe that both books of the didactic material successfully combine the archaeological data with the Homeric epic information and they clearly compose important aspects of the Mycenaean civilization described in the Homeric epic. This integrated and enlarged approach of the Homeric life allows the connection and comparison to the students' real life habits and everyday practices (for instance eating habits, food preferences, hospitality customs, kitchen utensils) making the learning relevant to themselves.

### **The didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the *Odyssey*" and "Odysseus raft" facilitates the cross curricular approach in *Odyssey* teaching.**

Units of the educational material present aspects of the society, the economy, the nature, the technology and the language of the Mycenaean and Homeric civilization within the study of the literature, the epic. The contributing subjects of the cross-curricular approach were taught through the didactic material as part of an overarching synthesis, as context to each other and as routes to particular topics contributing to an integrated study of the heroes' life described in *Odyssey* and shaping the relation of the epic content to real life concepts, relationships and situations. This approach arises the students' interest and permits the building of new knowledge on existing life experiences and knowledge patterns. Even in one chapter, for instance in the one that describes the palace of Nestor, which Telemachus visits in rapsody 1, information for a cross curricular approach is given through the presentation of the different use of the palatial chambers. Therefore units from the didactic material were given to the students and were successfully used by them as a basis for the school books' exercises, particularly the cross-curricular ones, which they otherwise had difficulty to accomplish.

### **The didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the *Odyssey*" and "Odysseus raft" supports experience based on activities in the classroom.**

During the implementation in the classroom, the didactic material was used to support the students' learning in the following cases. In effectively preparing and writing cross-curricular essays and exercises from the *Odyssey* school textbook. In supporting and guiding experience based activities in the classroom like: the construction of a model of Odysseus "raft", which is a Mycenaean boat together with its rigging (loose footed brail sail), the construction of models of Mycenaean vases and bronze tool models and of Linear B writing clay tablets. According to their teachers these activities highly motivated the students, even the indifferent ones in the traditional history classes and those with focusing difficulties, facilitated the differentiated teaching and enhanced teamwork and the cooperation among the students involved. The students claimed that these were the learning experiences that they liked most and they kept on asking their teachers for more creative activities like these. The triangulation of the results from both the questionnaires and the participant observation showed that the field research and the creative constructions motivated them more than the classroom textbook work.

### **The didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations in *Odyssey*" and "Odysseus raft" supports experience based on activities in the Museums and archaeological sites.**

Units from the didactic material were utilized as basic reference material for the field research at the best preserved Mycenaean palatial center, "Nestor's palace", in Pylos. The students using the floor plan, the key and photocopied pages from the book "Seafaring and civilizations of the *Odyssey*" worked in pairs and were able to accomplish a research on site



without any guidance from their teachers or from a guide, fulfilling thus the expectation for student centered approach and self oriented learning. The didactic material was also used as basis for the students' research at the Mycenaean room of the Athens National Museum and of the Pylos and Mycenaean Museum as well. The fact that the learning opportunities were successfully expanded beyond the classroom through the utilization of the didactic material was regarded by the teachers as particularly important. The reason was that they themselves have underlined the fact that they don't possess sufficient information on the Mycenaean civilization and they would have difficulty to organize activities and worksheets that would guide the students' research through a museum's exhibition, and avoid professional guidance. Along with the creative construction activities in the classroom these field researches were ranked as highly motivating and interesting for the students.

### **Summary evaluation of the didactic material**

Can the didactic material "Seafaring and civilizations of the Odyssey" and "Odysseus raft" serve as a teacher's companion that assists teachers to effectively instruct students of different skills and interests some of the difficult issues as well as to help the students monitor their own cognitive process while studying Odyssey?

Regarding the summative evaluation of the didactic material the results are as follows:

#### **The structure**

One factor affecting learning from text is structure, the way that information and ideas are connected together in logical organizational patterns. The teachers said that the chapters of the didactic material link directly the material world, the culture and the civilization of the Odyssey to the relevant Homeric verses, providing thus an integrated picture of the Homeric life. The structure was considered as very suitable, because it facilitated the research of information on specific topics.

#### **The content**

Research has shown that idea density contributes to reading difficulty. The greater the number of new ideas and information per unit is, the less is the likelihood to comprehend and remember it. Therefore each thematic chapter was articulated in three separate units. The first unit is a narrative presentation of the research process, the questions and the methodology based on real personal experiences of the researchers. This is followed by the second unit, where the research results are presented and the body of information structured in subchapters is written. The third and last unit of each chapter is a story whose theme and content are based on the scholar information of the chapter. It is a narrative reconstruction of life scenes from the Mycenaean era written in the form of a short historical novel. What distinguishes it from a common novel is that it is consistent to the evidence and aims at the students understanding of the Mycenaean civilization.

The teachers considered the content as very appropriate as a basis for a cross-cultural approach, because it includes evidence for the economic, political and nautical dimensions of the Mycenaean civilization as well as of the everyday life. There are two types of students that both profit from enrichment materials. The fast learners that have extra time available after completing the regular studying assignments sooner than their classmates and the slow learners. The students that have writing difficulties can engage and develop other skills, like the observation and the creative reconstruction. This didactic material was regarded by the teachers as appropriate to nurture individual and small group learning. The units of the "narrative reconstructions" at the end of each chapter were considered as particularly important for the students' motivation, the understanding of the issues under study and for the accomplishment of the learning goals. The teachers underlined that the "narrative reconstructions" contributed to the enrichment of their own historical narration in the classroom. Both the students and the teachers claimed that the didactic material helped them better understand the Homeric texts and the pictures of Mycenaean artefacts in the school book, read the floor plan and the archaeological palatial center site and organize their research in the classroom and in the field (museums, archaeological site).

#### **The vocabulary**

One of the biggest problems in history teaching is the issue of the difficult vocabulary. The teachers claimed that the vocabulary at the appendix of each book that explained the specific terms contributed to the students' understanding and that the vocabulary in certain chapters, like the "Nestor's palace", was appropriate for the students.

### **Conclusions**

The didactic material covers a significant gap in the Greek bibliography that supports the teaching of the Odyssey at school. It crosschecks information on the civilization of the Odyssey with that on the Mycenaean civilization deepening in a synthetic study of the Odyssey and the archaeological resources. It is useful and appropriate as a teacher's companion and can also be used as a basis for the Odyssey textbooks' exercises, particularly the cross-curricular ones. It can support student centered activities in the classroom and the field research in the Museums and the archaeological sites. Above all it facilitates the implementation of the school curriculum goals for the students' development of research skills from the resources and differentiated teaching.





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### **Author' biography with Photo**

Dr. Dimitra Kamarinou, PhD, has studied philology and education at the University of Ioannina Greece, Würzburg and Bochum in Germany. She has written books and published articles on action research and experience based teaching methodologies. Her working experience ranges from a secondary school teacher and a teacher trainer in innovative teaching methodologies to a High School Principal. She has been honored with the Academy of Athens Award.

