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## **Puppet Theatre in Greek preschool Education: Kindergarten Teacher Views**

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### **Abstract**

The article presents the results of a research in the field of Greek preschool education concerning the use of puppet theatre by teachers. The central question is: in what ways, but also on the basis of what educational/ pedagogical considerations, do teachers use forms of puppet theatre in the education of preschool children. The research was carried out among a representative sample of 977 teachers. The results point to an extensive use of puppet theatre, supported by a compact set of teachers'

views which tend to indicate puppetry either as an animistic communication tool or as a theatrical medium.

### **Introduction**

Historically, Greek preschool education and puppet theatre have had strong ties since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the latter made its appearance in the country under both western and eastern influences and was already becoming an established children's show during the 1930s (Lenakakis et al., 2019). In the 1930s, children's plays had started coming to the fore and French-educated teacher artists staged them for teaching purposes (Giannopoulou, 1933). Both forms, i.e., puppetry as children's performance or classroom activity, carried on through the Second World War, and the Greek civil war (1946-1949). Royal Decree 494 of 1962 was the first legal instrument to provide for preschool puppet theatre oriented towards language education, and for the possibility of purchasing the necessary equipment from the free market. Nowadays puppet theatre forms part of undergraduate and postgraduate university curricula for teachers (Lenakakis & Paroussi, 2019; Riga & Tselfes, 2021), as well as of the state nursery school curricula (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). There are more than 50 Greek theatre companies offering puppet theatre performances, running workshops for young puppeteers and teachers, and holding festivals (<https://forum.unimahellas.org>).

One can, therefore, safely assume that the Greek cultural and teaching tradition, the education sector, and the arts sector do promote and disseminate puppet theatre as good-quality children's show and preschool education medium, which is definitely not thought to be the case with older ages though. As documented in the international literature, puppetry can enhance communication and creativity in preschool and early primary school settings, positively influence emotional learning, strengthen cooperation, bring humour and imagination into the teacher-learner relationship, help with second language learning, touch upon global development issues and political issues, and be inclusive for children with special needs (Kroflin, 2012). However, as Susan Linn (2005) writes in *Puppetry in Education and Therapy, Unlocking Doors to the Mind and Heart* by M. Bernier O J. and O'Hare (Eds.):

How we, as educators and therapists, harness the power of puppetry depends on our experience, inclinations, and training. There is no "right way" to do it and one finds enormous variety, ingenuity, and creativity in the types of puppets described in this book, and in the ways they are used. (p. viii)

According to nursery school teacher guidelines, teachers should organise their lesson not on the basis of separate subjects but of activities "that make sense to the children themselves" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 587), which is what most of them do (Paroussi & Tselfes,

2018). Consequently, puppetry in Greek preschool education seems to work as a relatively autonomous system of communication between pupils and teachers with a variety of orientations worth exploring.

Although the distinctive trait of puppet theatre is the theatrical animation of inanimate objects, its materialisation entails a multitude of different arts in the theatrical (scriptwriting, scenery drawing, lighting, etc.) and in the visual arts domain (puppet and prop design and making, managing materials, etc.); hence our reviewing of literature about the more general topic of arts in education, and the more specific one of puppetry in education. We are interested in American research work pointing to ten different art directions as a result of curricula writing and implementation (Bertling & Moore, 2021): some more artistic (artistic behaviour, discipline-based art, design), others more social/cultural (community-based, multicultural, social justice, visual culture), and others from different disciplines (environmental and interdisciplinary subjects, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). We are also interested in research findings about puppetry in education offering various possibilities of use; T. Kröger and A.M. Nupponen (2019) mention generating communication, supporting a positive classroom climate, enhancing creativity, fostering co-operation and integration into a group, and changing attitudes. This research trend is mainly based on studies testing, substantiating and evaluating individual puppet theatre teaching objectives: approaching and including people with disabilities (Dunst, 2012; Karaolis, 2021), learning, exploring and familiarising oneself with scientific issues (Brits et al., 2014; Keogh et al., 2008; Simon et al., 2008; Tselfes & Paroussi, 2009), mediation in communication through animated objects (Forsberg Ahlcrona, 2012; Remer & Tzurriel, 2015), aesthetic and cultural enhancement of learning outcomes through play (Lindqvist, 1996; Paroussi, 2012), developing language skills (Fisler, 2003), differentiated teaching (Lenakakis et al., 2017), and others. The Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), who work together with the education sector, put forward additional research proposals focusing mainly on the fact that children grow aesthetically, emotionally and morally through puppet theatre, which also improves their creative thinking (Kroflin, 2012; Majaron & Kroflin, 2002).

Based on the above, we tend to assume that there is, perhaps, no limit to the teaching goals which could include the art of puppetry in a research context. There is an increased possibility for puppet theatre to work *de facto* as a distinct semiotic system / medium of communication (Jurkowski, 2013, p. 90), the research focus being a) the ways in which puppetry influences classroom relationships (communication structure, teamwork dynamics, aesthetics of teaching, etc.), and b) the children's learning outcomes (knowledge, attitudes, aesthetics, skills, creativity, etc.). Similarly, there are researchers suggesting that puppet theatre can be used in adult education, too, as a therapy tool, and as a means for impacting on certain social behaviours and attitudes (e.g., Pathak & Shah, 1984; Skinner et. al., 1991; Linn, 2015).

We only found one research project about the greater education domain: Korošec (2013), which looks into preschool and primary school teachers and their national curriculum, given Slovenia's long tradition in artistic puppet theatre. Researchers explain that puppets are used as a teaching tool in the broader context of drama in education (Korošec, 2013, p. 497), and that they are considered to improve children's socialisation while simultaneously developing their imagination and creativity. Teachers, however, use them less and less as pupils progress from preschool to primary education and on to higher grades (Korošec, 2013, p. 616). In order to fully understand how puppetry is used selectively in education, we also need to take into account the characteristics of the nature of this medium that is being internationally marginalised as theatrical art (Schumann, 1990), as “children's” show, and as a teaching tool for “little” children. The central question, therefore, of this research is about the ways, approaches and objectives in response to which Greek teachers use puppet theatre with preschool children. Answering this question through patterns (Davidson, 1973-74) connecting individual teacher considerations and ways of use (Al-Amin et. al., 2021) would be relevant for pre-service and in-service teacher education and training (Davies, 2010; Wood & Bennett, 2000) but, also, for researching into the contemporary international art in education trends (Bertling & Moore, 2021; La Porte et al., 2008), and into the integration through arts trend in particular. On the one hand, integration through arts seems to be generally promoted in the name of cognitive integration, inclusion and creativity (e.g., Lenakakis & Paroussi, 2019; UNESCO, 2006, 2010, 2015) but, on the other hand, it is under pressure because of curricula standardisation and effectiveness mapping (Donahue & Stuart, 2008; Paroussi & Tselfes, 2018; Saputra et al., 2021).

This central question of ours is a summing up of the following five points:

1. Do Greek teachers believe that their pre-service studies and in-service training have given them a thorough grounding in puppet theatre as an art form and as a preschool education tool?
2. Do Greek teachers assess puppet theatre differently depending on whether it is used for entertainment or teaching purposes?
3. How do teachers decide about the teaching value of puppetry and how much do they appreciate each of its components?
4. What are their most frequent classroom activities? How do these activities liaise with the general values that they see in puppet theatre and how competent do they consider themselves to be in order to implement them successfully?
5. Are teacher opinions any different due to demographics, university education and in-service training? Is there a strong pro-autonomy nursery school tradition living on regardless of regulatory requirements and teacher training?

## Methodology

This article presents school year 2016-2017 field research findings based on a representative sample of Greek preschool teachers who answered the closed questions of our questionnaire.

### *The Sample*

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2018), there were 14,382 Greek nursery school teachers in 2016-2017, 98.75% female and 1.25% male. 57% were in urban areas and 43% in semi-urban and rural areas. The oldest ones were graduates of the two-year programmes offered by the “Nursery School Teacher Academies” (NSTA) which ceased to exist in the mid-1980s. These degrees were recognised as university degrees following a two-year training course their holders completed in the early 1990s. Younger teachers have university degrees from Greece’s nine early childhood education university departments<sup>1</sup>. Many (29.4%) have attended additional training courses (14.6%), earned a second degree in other subjects (5.3%) or even completed postgraduate/doctoral studies (9.5%). The sample of our research consisted in 1,000 teachers from all over Greece. 977 completed questionnaires were collected, corresponding to 7.3% of all nursery school teachers when our research was conducted<sup>2</sup>. 98.5% respondents were female and 1.5% male. Their distribution among urban and non-urban schools was 69.9% and 30.1%, respectively. Their age distribution was: up to 30 years old 3.9% (7.6% in the total population), between 30 and 40 years old 29.2% (29% in the total population), between 40 and 50 years old 54.1% (50% in the total population) and over 50 years old 12.8% (13% in the total population). Based on this data, we can safely assume that our random, 977-respondent-sample was a representative one given its maximum ratio estimation error (for a 95% significance rate) of less than 3.3% plus our stratified sampling through the distribution percentages between the sample and the population, mainly regarding the respondents’ gender, age and qualifications, but less so for the spatial distribution of their schools.

### *The Questionnaire*

Our questionnaire had seven demographic questions (enabling us to assess its representativeness), and five sets of closed questions (6-point, Likert-type scale or multiple-choice questions).

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<sup>1</sup> The stratification of studies cannot be compared with the data of the Hellenic Statistical Authority, as the latter does not take into account the differences between two-year academies and university faculties in its measurements.

<sup>2</sup> 1,021 teachers, out of a total of 14,382, were out of work for various reasons.

1. The seven demographics questions were, among others, about formal qualifications relating to the use of puppet theatre in education and its artistic characteristics.
2. There were also three sets of questions about four different ways of children / teacher involvement: a) the children and their teacher watch performances together; b) the children and their teacher make puppets together; c) the teacher is the puppeteer and the children are the spectators; and d) the teacher is the puppeteer with the children participating actively in the production. For each of the options, respondents were invited to assess its importance, to discuss frequency and to state whether they were confident about meeting the requirements of each option with the exception of a). 3. Three questions related to the respondents' general opinion about the value of puppet theatre for entertainment and teaching purposes in a classroom's daily routine with no specific reference to children or teacher involvement.
3. Five questions were about puppet theatre input to: a) aesthetic cultivation, creativity and expressiveness, b) shaping of attitudes, c) cultivation of skills, d) acquisition of knowledge, and, e) behavioural change.
4. Two final closed multiple-choice questions were about: a) the sources (narrative contexts) for classroom puppet theatre activities (existing puppet-theatre stories, fairy tales and myths, improvised scripts based on curriculum topics, improvised scripts about some local issue, or something else), and, b) the factors likely to keep a teacher from using puppet theatre systematically in their classroom (complex use, complex constructions, I do not know how this works, I do not consider it a suitable medium, I do not feel confident, I do not have time, I do not have the required knowledge and experience, I do not want to, or something else).
5. We tested a pilot of our questionnaire with 50 teachers from the region of Central Macedonia region and subsequently corrected it following independent comments from two experts.
6. Responses were collected and coded in Excel spreadsheets, and statistically analysed in SPSS-25. Reliability testing was performed for the 19 sets of responses to the questions about opinions and practices using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The calculated value of 0.89 indicates a good to excellent internal consistency of the responses.

### ***The Analysis***

First and second question answers were subject to descriptive statistical analysis of patterns about a) the puppetry in education element in the respondents' pre-service studies and in-service training, and b) their assessment of the entertainment/teaching/organisational value of puppet theatre. Third question answers were subject to linear regression testing of the hypothesis that teachers opinions about the teaching value of puppet theatre depend on

whether they consider it to be beneficial for the children (a. aesthetic cultivation, creativity and expressiveness, b. shaping of attitudes, c. cultivation of skills, d. acquisition of knowledge and e. behavioural change).

Regarding questions four and five, descriptive methods were used for the characteristics of the activities used by teachers (narrative contexts and their difficulties), followed by a factor analysis of the variables about modes of use (significance, frequency and self-confidence), learning outcome assessments, and the functional value of puppetry (as entertainment, as a teaching tool, as a means of daily programme management). We expect this analysis to provide evidence on the general teacher profile and its variations depending on the varying degrees of knowledge about the artistic components of puppet theatre.

## Results

### *Education and Training of Teachers on Puppet Theatre in Nursery School*

Greek nursery school teachers in the private and public sector have significantly different starting points and study paths; 64% hold four-year university degrees, and 36% two-year NSTA degrees<sup>3</sup>. About half of the latter (52.4%) have obtained equivalence for their degrees<sup>4</sup>, while 46.7% have completed a two-year in-service upskilling programme in one of Greece's Nursery School Teacher Training Centres (*Didaskaleia*) (NSTTCs) that closed down in 2011. 22.7% of NSTA degree holders had attended NSTTC upskilling courses, too, together with 13.6% of university graduates.

Regarding our sample, 5.7% of NSTA graduates, and 16.5% of university graduates have attended postgraduate programmes; 16.7% of NSTA graduates and 18.6% of university graduates also hold a second degree mainly outside the domain of education.

Only 10% of Greek nursery school teachers answered that they had not received any education or training on puppet theatre or puppet theatre in education. 69.5% took puppetry in education courses at university, and 59.6% attended state-sponsored in-service training. 17.7% of all teachers have taken such classes for their master's degrees or in NSTTCs, and 30.2% paid for their participation in seminars on the artistic practice of puppet theatre or in workshops run by puppeteers or puppeteer companies.

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<sup>3</sup> Teacher education became part of Greece's university curricula almost 30 years ago, as a result of which the two-year NSTAs ceased to exist.

<sup>4</sup> Hence two-year degree holders could attend university for two more years to earn a university degree.

There is no significant difference as to demographic characteristics ( $\chi^2$  test), the only clear correlation being with general curricula characteristics. Compared to two-year NSTA degree holders, it is university degree holders that were trained most ( $\chi^2=10.08$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), with more senior two-year NSTA degree holders having received state-sponsored training and NSTTC training ( $\chi^2=28.44$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.000$  and  $\chi^2=20.96$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.000$  respectively), which goes to show that both education establishments as well as teachers themselves do take an interest in puppetry in education; about half of the teachers (48.3%) have attended such courses/seminars for up to 10 hours, 25% more than 10 hours, and 7.1% even more than 20 hours.

It is very interesting to see that 30.2% of teachers paid to be trained by professional puppeteers; only 10%, of them, or 3% of the total, have not attended other additional training courses on puppetry in education.

### ***Teacher Estimates of the Value and Pedagogical Effectiveness of Puppet Theatre***

Most preschool teachers seem to think highly of the effectiveness of puppet theatre regarding the three main strands and the five different teaching objectives. The mean scores (on the 6-point scale) for all eight of the above variables range from 5.01 to 5.73 with standard deviation ranging from 0.53 to 0.97. Although extremely high for all variables, the mean values present statistically significant differences (paired samples t-tests with significance levels of 0.000). Teachers can, therefore, be said to rate the entertainment value of puppet theatre highly; teaching value ranks second, and daily programme entertainment third. Regarding teaching objectives, they consider puppet theatre to be effective for (in descending order): a) artistic-theatrical education (aesthetic cultivation, creativity and expressiveness), b) the shaping of attitudes, c) the acquisition of knowledge, d) the cultivation of skills, and e) behavioural change. These mean values and the statistical significance of their differences do not change significantly when it comes to teachers that have not been trained in puppetry in education or teachers having attended artistic puppetry seminars, regardless of their number of in-service years and urban or non-urban working environments.

### ***The Way Teachers Form Their Opinion about the Pedagogical Effectiveness of Puppet Theatre***

Regarding the hypothesis that teacher estimates of the overall pedagogical value of puppet theatre are the resultant of their individual estimates of its effectiveness for aesthetic/theatrical education, the shaping of attitudes, the cultivation of skills, the acquisition of knowledge and behavioural change, the linear regression controlling this hypothesis is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Input of Individual Teacher Opinions into Their Overall Opinion that Puppet Theatre is an Effective Means of Attaining Pedagogical Objectives*

| Puppet theatre is an effective means of attaining pedagogical objectives in nursery schools    |                                    |        |       |
|--|------------------------------------|--------|-------|
|  | Standardized<br>Coefficients<br>Bi | t      | Sig.  |
| Puppet theatre contributes to aesthetic cultivation, creativity and expressiveness in children | 0.503                              | 18.812 | 0.000 |
| Puppet theatre contributes to shaping children's attitudes                                     | 0.175                              | 5.616  | 0.000 |
| Puppet theatre contributes to cultivating children's skills                                    | -0.018                             | -0.697 | 0.486 |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's acquisition of knowledge                              | 0.206                              | 7.634  | 0.000 |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's behavioural change                                    | 0.132                              | 5.695  | 0.000 |

Adjusted R Square: 0.991

Table 1 shows that, in the general population, teachers focus on the pedagogical effectiveness of theatrical arts in general when used in education (weights of 0.503, 0.206, 0.175, and 0.132 respectively). The only component we considered to be an input to the overall pedagogical value of puppetry, but teachers seem to disagree, is with regard to skills (non-statistically significant linearity of contribution and low negative weight), which may indicate that nursery school teachers do not think of puppets as a children's activity.

Focusing on the samples two extremes, i.e., the 10% of teachers who were never taught or trained about puppetry in education and the 30.2% who have, we see that both groups accept the theatrical/artistic contribution of puppetry in education, while not thinking much of its skills cultivation potential. The former however, tend not to consider the shaping of attitudes and behavioural change as important effectiveness components (non-statistically significant linearities), and to prioritise the knowledge acquisition component (weight of 0.270 as opposed to 0.206 for the sample as a whole), while the latter tend to focus less on acquiring knowledge (weight of 0.106 compared to 0.206 for the whole of the sample) and behavioural change (weight of 0.096 compared to 0.132 for the whole of the sample), and more on shaping attitudes (weight of 0.262 as opposed to 0.175 for the sample as a whole).

This last finding may indicate that teachers with an artistic experience of puppet theatre tend to positively assess its informal influence on pupils as spectators, while others focus on the traditional expectation of knowledge acquisition. What is most important, in our opinion, is

their general estimate that puppet theatre is not a means for teaching skills development to small children.

### ***Teacher Involvement in Activities Relating to Puppet Theatre***

Such teacher involvement seems generally to be as follows:

- a) Teachers tend to take their pupils to professional puppet theatre performances once or twice a year; they choose the performance, they organise transportation and they think of those performances as very being important for the children's education.
- b) In the classroom, they think that what is most important is for them to puppeteer together with the children, which is a frequent activity and one that makes them feel most self-confident.
- c) Puppeteering for their pupils or making puppets together with them is rated by teachers as less important, although there is no statistically significant difference in mean values. Such activities are just as frequent, but teachers consider them to be less important and feel less self-confident with them.
- d) Nursery school teachers, therefore, seem to corroborate the hypothesis that this prioritisation is the outcome more of a teaching tradition and less of the university education or in-service training received, given our statistical control results.

Regarding narrative contexts, however, incognizant teachers tend to opt for ready-made puppet theatre stories more often compared to their colleagues who either took puppet theatre courses at university or received similar in-service training (see [Appendix C](#)). We consider this fact to substantiate the hypothesis that nursery school teachers who are knowledgeable in puppetry can use it in their everyday teaching as regards classic narratives, curricula topics or topical local issues.

The explanation is the same as to the reasons why teachers tend to avoid using puppetry in the classroom systematically (see [Appendix D](#)). 46.1% feel they lack puppet theatre knowledge and experience, which, for us, is a cause for concern as to how much knowledge and experience a teacher should possess to successfully manage puppet theatre. 62.5% of our sample's 10% consider themselves to be incognizant about puppetry in education, which also goes for 46.1% of the total sample, and for 36.2% of teachers having studied puppetry at university or having received artistic training in puppetry.

### ***Teachers' Alternative Profiles***

Factor analysis of variables relating to ways of use, learning outcome estimates and the functional value of puppet theatre gave us our more general teacher profiles and their

differentiations depending on how much teachers know about the artistic components of puppet theatre.

Respondents having received training on the artistic side of puppetry were analysed separately. For those 301 teachers (30.2% of the sample), results in [Appendix A](#) explain 57.2% of the variance, showing that they hold interlinked views on: a) its functional value and nature being recreational, pedagogical or useful for renewing the classroom atmosphere, and b) the importance/value of the different ways of handling it together with the children: watching performances, acting for or with the pupils, making puppets. This is the strand of *attitude* towards puppetry and the ways of using it (which explains 17.4% of the variance).

Regardless of the above, teachers are unanimous about learning outcomes, i.e., artistic/creative/expression skills, changes in attitudes and behaviours, and acquisition of knowledge and capacities, which is the strand of *learning for pupils* and explains 16.2% of the variance.

Having said that, those teachers seem to think of puppet theatre and their professional duty in the following two ways which are clearly different to and independent from the first two axes, i.e.:

- a) an independent axis of self-confidence about what they do (attending performances, performing with or to the pupils, making puppets); a strand of *assessment of control over the activities* that explains 12.4% of the variance; and,
- b) an independent strand of frequency (as to attending performances, performing with or to the pupils, making puppets); a strand of *frequency of use*, which explains 9.7% of the variance and could also denote a stand-alone daily programme organisation-wise.
- a) For the 676 teachers (69.8% of the sample) who are knowledgeable about puppet theatre in education, results in [Appendix B](#) explain 63.5% of the variance; these teachers tend to think that the following views of theirs are interlinked: a) the functional value and nature of puppet theatre as something entertaining, educational or contributing to renewed classroom atmosphere; b) its learning outcomes (artistic/creative/expression skills, changes in attitudes and behaviours, knowledge and skills acquisition); and c) the importance/value of attending performances, performing for or with the pupils, and puppet making. We consider this to be an educational, holistic, value-based strand of thought about puppetry in the classroom regarding *both teachers and pupils* and explaining 27.4% of the variance.

For these teachers, their relation to puppetry comes under strands of thought which are different to and independent from the first strand:

- a) an independent strand of self-confidence about the ways they use puppet theatre (performing with or for the pupils, making puppets); a strand of *assessment of control over the activities* explaining 11.4% of the variance;
- b) an independent strand of the frequency of classroom puppetry uses (attending performances, performances with or for the pupils, making puppets); an *in-school use* strand explaining 9.7% of the variance;
- c) an independent strand of the frequency of attending professional performances; a *theatrical-extracurricular* strand explaining 6.1% of the variance; and,
- d) an independent strand of the significance and frequency of attendance for performances by the teacher to the pupils; a *theatrical-in-school* strand intersecting with the more general educational strand, and with the in-school-use strand, and explaining 8.9% of the variance.

As evidenced by these results, puppet theatre training for nursery school teachers does make a difference regarding the Greek tradition in preschool education.

## Discussion

### *The Medium's Educational Nature on Site*

The undergraduate studies of practising teachers are highly diverse; former two-year academy graduates were taught to approach puppet theatre and preschool education as the continuation of family life (Lenakakis et al., 2019), i.e., puppet theatre was used to entertain the pupils and puppets were more of a classroom toy or an arts education tool. University graduates, on the other hand, and, to some extent, two-year academy graduates having earned university degree equivalence were taught to consider preschool education as an antechamber for school life and social life. To them, therefore, this was a teaching tool<sup>5</sup> for specific purposes and objectives, while many teachers from both categories have been trained by professional artists to bring inanimate objects to life, and by academics to apply more modern approaches.

Given the above, and the fact that puppet theatre is used almost in every classroom (see 4.4), it is perplexing to see that, for approximately half of the teachers (46.1% of the sample), the reason for not using puppetry systematically is the lack of “knowledge and experience”. We believe that this is because of the differences in the teachers’ communication experience on school premises, with their dynamic peers, mainly younger teachers (Paroussi & Tselfes,

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<sup>5</sup> Depending on the approach followed by each university in their curriculum.

2018), through the Internet<sup>6</sup>, and through training, too. Having said that, nursery school curricula and teacher guides are not explicit, which is in tandem with the medium's nature. It is a rather difficult task for anyone to systematically organise the presence and use of an animistic medium, and to claim doing so in the pursuit of rational and scientifically substantiated goals and objectives. It can, therefore, be assumed that puppet theatre in Greek preschool education may be presented as a teaching tool, but it ends up working as a *free system of communication between children and teachers* (see Introduction) in an extremely autonomous framework for teacher action with very limited central guidance (Paroussi & Tselfes, 2018). This system of communication is based either on the artistic driving force of the objects/puppets (Forsberg Ahlcrona, 2012), or on the children's animistic approach to material objects: hence the extremely high percentage of teachers saying that they play puppet theatre and make puppets together with their pupils (see section teacher involvement in activities relating to puppet theatre) without considering skills development to be a major teaching component here (see the way teachers form their opinion about the pedagogical effectiveness of puppet theatre), which means that, for teachers, this is a communicative activity. As seen in teacher involvement in activities relating to puppet theatre, too, this is what they consider to be the main teaching objective of puppet theatre due to the artistic nature of this medium, i.e., an aesthetically improved and creative ability of expression in children.

### ***Evaluation of the Medium***

Based on the above, the use of puppetry by Greek preschool education teachers seems to be an instance of a self-organising activity whose basis and guiding variable (Mainzer, 1994) is the animistic children's language respecting and enhancing the medium in question.

This hypothesis is substantiated by the following: functional value together with teaching value components solidly rank first irrespective of any free variable (see 4.2); doing puppet theatre together with the children prevails, and teachers feel proficient even with no prior training in puppetry in education or in puppetry as art; teachers considering themselves inadequate (see section teacher involvement in activities relating to puppet theatre) often do puppetry for their pupils, too.

On the other hand, teachers don't see much of a teaching value in puppet theatre as a means of influencing children's behaviour; they don't think of it as effective for knowledge acquisition and attitude shaping purposes (see teacher estimates of the value and pedagogical

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<sup>6</sup> A Google search for "educational puppetry in kindergarten" in Greek would generate more than 100 sites and blogs.

effectiveness). They consider puppet theatre to be a means of content- and context-dependent communication potentially enabling knowledge acquisition and attitude change, but not in any decisive kind of way compared to other teaching activities, as corroborated by research on the parental medium of theatre in education (Mages, 2018). They seem to think that the shaping and projection of behaviours is rather hindered by the heroes/characters of the animated objects whose animistic matrix gives them unlimited behavioural freedom and possibilities, unlike the freedom and possibilities that realistic educational/social constraints would allow, even under the theatrical convention.

### ***Teacher Profiles***

Teachers who have, to a certain extent, been initiated into the art of animation and puppet theatre tend to relate to the medium and to their pupils in four different ways of thinking. Firstly, they certainly do not approach this medium's functional and pedagogical value as they do with learning outcomes such as attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behaviours, with the exception of aesthetic cultivation, creativity and expression, i.e., the only learning outcome justified by the medium's artistic nature and expected of it. They do not consider, that is, puppet theatre to have any teaching objectives or content, or any skills that pupils could learn from it; it is just an artistic means of communication enabling communicative management, at best, for their pupils and for them, too. As shown by their third and fourth way of thinking, their proficiency of use of the medium and the frequency of use are not interrelated nor are they related to the medium's value or the children's learning outcomes.

Regarding teachers who were taught about puppetry at university or received in-service training, their way of thinking explains less than one third of the variance, does see functional and pedagogical value in the medium and is similar to their approach of any other learning outcome. That is to say, they consider puppet theatre to be communicative in a pedagogical way and combined with the learning outcomes of content, skills, and attitudes, in addition to its artistic aspect. Such ways of thinking include their personal estimates of self-esteem about puppetry management and organisational estimates of frequency of use. As for the former category of teachers, it is up to the latter category's cognizance and programming, too. The latter category has two additional artistic trains of thought: one that is about the frequency of attending professional performances, and one more about the frequency of their own performances for their pupils. In our view, this approach identifies the communicative medium of puppetry with pedagogical approaches and actions, bringing it closer to a children's language and decoupling it from its artistic dimension that is only relevant to children's shows by professional puppeteers or by teachers, excluding other learning activities.

### ***Restrictions and Implications***

Our research attempted to capture the characteristics of the generalised use of a marginal theatrical/artistic medium (puppetry) in Greek preschool education, bearing in mind that this medium goes back to becoming marginal again right after nursery school. Differences in the university education and the in-service training received about the teaching and artistic value of the medium can be seen in the teachers' ways of thinking and in the forms of effectiveness pertaining to how they act locally, which our tool cannot clearly discern, hence the need for such case studies regarding the assumption that puppet theatre constitutes a resilient albeit animistic channel of communication for teachers and children in a rationalistic teaching universe.

Nevertheless, one can quite safely formulate some fairly credible proposals for (Greek) teacher education.

For teachers, arts education in puppetry should creatively become part of its pedagogy through some kind of transdisciplinary approach, i.e., with research-structured and mutually accepted transformations of both pedagogy and art; because as long as university teachers go on teaching the pedagogy of puppet theatre and artists (claiming not to care about pedagogy) do the same for its art, nursery teachers are unlikely to link teaching activities guided by pedagogy to learning outcomes driven by the artistic product. Teachers seem to lack ways to observe and evaluate skills that children inevitably develop as they bring the physical constructs of puppet theatre to life on their own or with their teacher. The classic skills of movement, orientation, etc. explicitly included in nursery school curricula are too simple compared to giving movement and pace of life to inanimate objects. The fact that nursery school teachers probably do not see the latter whenever their pupils try them out can be explained if we assume that they have not been trained to see them and assess their quality or, perhaps, that they underestimate them as "childish" and ignore them. In any case, teacher education should address these issues, especially nowadays when skills and competences prevail (over knowledge) as learning outcomes worldwide.

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## Appendix A

### Rotated Component Matrix Related to the Views of Artistically and Pedagogically Trained Teachers

| Variables   | Component                |                     |                      |                            |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
|   | Puppetry<br>significance | Pupils'<br>learning | Teachers'<br>control | Applications'<br>frequency |
| Puppet theatre is entertaining for the children   | <b>.634</b>              | .267                | .002                 | -.132                      |
| Puppet theatre is an effective means of attaining pedagogical objectives  | <b>.571</b>              | <b>(.486)</b>       | .064                 | .084                       |
| Puppet theatre enriches the daily programme   | <b>.557</b>              | <b>(.329)</b>       | .297                 | .108                       |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's aesthetic cultivation, creativity and expressiveness                                   | <b>(.443)</b>            | <b>.470</b>         | .156                 | -.002                      |
| Puppet theatre contributes to shaping children's attitudes  | .251                     | <b>.747</b>         | .104                 | .037                       |
| Puppet theatre contributes to cultivating children's καλλιέργεια δεξιοτήτων   | .192                     | <b>.763</b>         | .143                 | .089                       |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's acquisition of knowledge   | .154                     | <b>.729</b>         | .085                 | .070                       |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's behavioural change   | .179                     | <b>.756</b>         | .147                 | .101                       |
| I believe it is important to attend puppet shows with my pupils   | <b>.689</b>              | .105                | .019                 | .204                       |
| I believe it is important to make puppets for puppet shows with my pupils   | <b>.593</b>              | .203                | .348                 | .224                       |
| I believe it is important that I perform puppet shows for my pupils (the pupils are spectators)                                 | <b>.677</b>              | .174                | .225                 | .083                       |
| I believe it is important to perform puppet shows with my pupils (the pupils actively participate in the play as co-puppeteers) | <b>.567</b>              | .170                | .332                 | .139                       |
| I feel confident when performing a puppet show for my pupils (the pupils are spectators)  | .307                     | .079                | <b>.730</b>          | -.012                      |
| I feel confident when making puppet-show puppets with my pupils   | .127                     | .128                | <b>.797</b>          | .202                       |
| I feel confident performing a puppet show with my pupils (the pupils actively participate as co-puppeteers in the puppet show)  | .113                     | .230                | <b>.784</b>          | .119                       |
| How often, on average, do you attend organised puppet theatre performances with your pupils?                                    | -.038                    | .047                | -.056                | <b>.573</b>                |
| How often do you perform a puppet show for your pupils (with the pupils participating as spectators)?                           | .363                     | .053                | .122                 | <b>.651</b>                |

---

|  |       |      |      |             |
|--|-------|------|------|-------------|
| How often do you all, nursery school teacher and pupils, perform a puppet show together (basically pupils' role-playing integrated into a set of interdisciplinary activities)?    | .238  | .093 | .110 | <b>.784</b> |
| How often do you make puppets for a puppet show with your pupils (activity of acquiring skills, knowledge and abilities by the children through making puppets for a puppet show)? | -.035 | .062 | .273 | <b>.723</b> |

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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

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## Appendix B

### Rotated Component Matrix Related to the Views of Only Pedagogically Trained Teachers

| Variables   | Component             |                   |                         |                      |                      |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|   | Puppetry significance | Teachers' control | Applications' frequency | Teacher as puppeteer | Students as audience |
| Puppet theatre is entertaining for the children   | <b>.597</b>           | -.049             | -.070                   | .147                 | .351                 |
| Puppet theatre is an effective means of attaining pedagogical objectives  | <b>.749</b>           | .038              | .058                    | .160                 | .132                 |
| Puppet theatre enriches the daily programme   | <b>.556</b>           | .167              | .065                    | .243                 | .010                 |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's aesthetic cultivation, creativity and capacity of expression                           | <b>.673</b>           | .220              | .057                    | .098                 | .133                 |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's διαμόρφωση στάσεων   | <b>.787</b>           | .150              | .137                    | .065                 | -.076                |
| Puppet theatre contributes to the development of children's skills  | <b>.736</b>           | .178              | .150                    | -.036                | -.245                |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's acquisition of knowledge   | <b>.688</b>           | .126              | .081                    | .153                 | -.134                |
| Puppet theatre contributes to children's behavioural change   | <b>.729</b>           | .153              | .199                    | .031                 | -.070                |
| I believe it is important to attend puppet shows with my pupils   | <b>.669</b>           | .097              | -.042                   | .163                 | .222                 |
| I believe it is important to make puppets for puppet shows with my pupils   | <b>.585</b>           | <b>(.510)</b>     | .088                    | -.018                | -.003                |
| I believe it is important that I perform puppet shows for my pupils (the pupils are spectators)                                 | <b>(.404)</b>         | .024              | -.056                   | <b>.738</b>          | -.009                |
| I believe it is important to perform puppet shows with my pupils (the pupils actively participate in the play as co-puppeteers) | <b>.517</b>           | .355              | -.001                   | .143                 | .357                 |
| I feel confident when performing a puppet show for my pupils (the pupils are spectators)  | .112                  | <b>.502</b>       | .061                    | .718                 | -.050                |
| I feel confident when making puppet-show puppets with my pupils   | .199                  | <b>.849</b>       | .142                    | .090                 | -.047                |

|  |       |             |             |               |             |
|--|-------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| I feel confident performing a puppet show with my pupils<br>(the pupils actively participate as co-puppeteers in the puppet show)  | .220  | <b>.733</b> | .192        | .160          | .213        |
| How often, on average, do you attend organised puppet theatre performances with your pupils?   | -.028 | .077        | .163        | -.059         | <b>.817</b> |
| How often do you perform a puppet show for your pupils<br>(with the pupils participating as spectators)?   | .080  | -.003       | <b>.636</b> | <b>(.616)</b> | .065        |
| How often do you all, nursery school teacher and pupils, perform a puppet show together (basically pupils' role-playing integrated into a set of interdisciplinary activities)?    | .102  | .066        | <b>.848</b> | .070          | .132        |
| How often do you make puppets for a puppet show with your pupils (activity of acquiring skills, knowledge and abilities by the children through making puppets for a puppet show)? | .142  | .284        | <b>.713</b> | -.093         | .007        |
| Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization  |       |             |             |               |             |

## Appendix C

### Narrative Frameworks Supporting the Uses of Puppet Theatre in Nursery School Classrooms

| What sources do you base your play on when performing a puppet show for or with your pupils? |                                     |            |   |            |  |            |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------|---|------------|--|------------|
|  | In the sample as a whole<br>(N=977) |            | Among the pedagogically and artistically<br>informed teachers (N=301) |            | Among non-informed<br>teachers<br>(N=64) |            |
|  | Frequency                           | Percentage | Frequency   | Percentage | Frequency                                | Percentage |
| On existing stories for puppet<br>theatre  | 491                                 | 50,3%      | 139   | 46,2%      | 33                                       | 51,6%      |
| On fairy tales and myths   | 775                                 | 79,3%      | 248   | 82,4%      | 47                                       | 73,4%      |
| On scripts I create myself<br>based on the curriculum  | 613                                 | 62,7%      | 215   | 71,4%      | 34                                       | 53,1%      |
| On issues I have to deal with<br>in groups of pupils   | 671                                 | 68,7%      | 228   | 75,7%      | 28                                       | 43,8%      |

## Appendix D

### Reasons Preventing the Systematic Use of Puppet Theatre in the Classroom

| If you do not use puppet theatre systematically, please note the reasons for not doing so |                                     |            |   |            |                                       |            |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------|---|------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
|   | In the sample as a whole<br>(N=977) |            | Among the pedagogically and artistically<br>informed teachers (N=301) |            | Among non-informed<br>teachers (N=64) |            |
|   | Frequency                           | Percentage | Frequency   | Percentage | Frequency                             | Percentage |
| Because it is complicated to use  | 93                                  | 9,5%       | 27  | 9,0%       | 9                                     | 14,1%      |
| Because it is complicated to build  | 97                                  | 9,9%       | 22  | 7,3%       | 7                                     | 10,9%      |
| Because I do not know its<br>function   | 58                                  | 5,9%       | 19  | 6,3%       | 6                                     | 9,4%       |
| Because I do not consider it a<br>suitable medium   | 4                                   | 0,4%       | 1   | 0,3%       | 2                                     | 3,1%       |
| Because I do not feel confident<br>about using it   | 131                                 | 13,4%      | 29  | 9,6%       | 9                                     | 14,1%      |
| Because I do not have time  | 218                                 | 22,3%      | 74  | 24,6%      | 14                                    | 21,9%      |
| Because I do not have enough<br>knowledge and relevant<br>experience                      | 450                                 | 46,1%      | 109   | 36,2%      | 40                                    | 62,5%      |
| Because I do not want to  | 20                                  | 2,0%       | 9   | 3,0%       | 2                                     | 3,1%       |

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