

# GREEK-CYPRIOI PUPILS' UNDERSTANDING OF NARRATIVE HISTORICAL CONCEPTS

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*Abstract – This article refers to a research study which was conducted in Cyprus in May 1996 and which aimed primarily at examining whether fifth graders (10-11 years) of the Greek-Cypriot primary schools have 'mastered' the narrative historical concepts contained in the official history curriculum. The research also aimed at examining whether the following factors/variables have significant main or/and interaction effect on the fifth primary graders' ability to develop and understand the prespecified narrative historical concepts: a) pupil's age; b) pupil's gender and c) parents' educational status. The research was dictated primarily by the assumed difficulty of pupils' in understanding of narrative historical concepts which have great educational value. According to the results of the study, the pupils failed to master the prespecified concepts and consequently the study verified the existence of the problem. It was also found that parents' educational status affects significantly pupils' performance.*

## Theoretical background of the study

### *The meaning of concepts and their educational significance*

**F**rom a psychological point of view 'concepts' are defined as 'generalisations built up by abstracting particular sensory events, the critical attributes, and classifying them' (Child 1981: 137). This definition indicates the intellectual skills used during the process of concept formation, that is, perception, discrimination, abstraction and classification. Alternatively, concepts can be defined in more concrete terms as ideas, usually expressed in words, to describe classes of natural or technical objects, qualities, attributes, quantities, places, ways of behaving and feeling, acts, events, phenomena, situations and relations having something in common, e.g. 'emperors', 'castle', 'envy', 'liberalism' (Gunning, 1978; Banks, 1973). The words, 'generalisations' and 'classes', as used in the above definitions, clearly indicate that the particular names of persons and places, such as 'Napoleon I' and 'Rome', do not represent concepts (Banks, 1973; Child, 1981; Edwards, 1978; Gunning, 1978).

Concepts can be divided into various categories according to specific criteria and characteristics, such as their depth and breadth, degree of abstractness,

preciseness, and so on. Thus, we speak of simple and complex concepts, high-order and low-order, concrete and abstract, precise and vague, and so on.

The term 'historical concepts' indicates a special category of concepts. Many different classifications of historical concepts have been proposed so far and many different labels have been used to characterise the same class of concepts (Blyth, 1990; Hudgins, 1974; Nichol, 1984). However, the most commonly identified classes of historical concepts are:

- a) 'narrative historical concepts', such as 'civilisation' and 'democracy', which professional historians use when dealing with the subject matter or the narrative aspect of history, and
- b) 'structural', or 'methodological' concepts such as 'cause', 'consequence', 'change', 'continuity', 'evidence', etc., which refer to the methodological or inquiry aspect of history (Hudgins, 1974).

The selection of narrative concepts instead of structural concepts for conducting the present study is a matter of priority given that neither kind has yet been investigated in Cyprus. The former are considered first-order concepts whose development is necessary for the development of the latter, considered second-order concepts (Hudgins, 1974).

The dependence of learning upon language indicates the significance of concept development in general, since language as an instrument of communication and thought consists of and uses concepts and vocabulary (Stubbs, 1976). The educational significance of language is based upon its function and role as:

- a) an instrument of thought in general (Bruner, 1964; Vygotsky, 1962);
- b) a factor promoting conceptual thought in particular (Vygotsky, 1962), and
- c) a means for communication and learning (Barnes, 1976; Edwards and Furlong, 1987).

Concept development and correct language usage take a central place in the National History Curricula for Cyprus (1994), England and Wales (1995) and the United States (1997). This is mainly attributed to the historical language required for dealing with a subject of great educational significance and promoting concomitant aims. The developers of the National Standards for United States History for grades kindergarten through 12 (NCHS, 1997, Ch.1, p.1), stress that history teaching 'contributes to the education of political citizen' constitutes 'the key to self-identity and one's connectedness with all of humankind' and 'opens to students opportunities to develop a comprehensive understanding of the world, and of the many cultures and ways of life different from their own'. The National Standards for United States History, which are in accordance with the History

Curricula for Cyprus (1994) and England (1995), point out that history teaching should aim at developing the following types of historical thinking: a) chronological thinking; b) historical comprehension; c) historical analysis and interpretation; d) historical research capabilities and e) historical issues-analysis and decision-making (NCHS, 1997, Ch.2: 1). It is evident that the achievement of such aims, as those mentioned above, is impossible without a developed historical language. Everything meaningful constitutes 'a complex net-work of interlocking conceptual, propositional and procedural components' (Rogers 1979: 17), which means that historical understanding presupposes conceptual understanding and that skills (how to learn) and content (what we learn) are highly complementary and reinforcing.

The development of concepts is usually pursued as an aim in itself since their content constitutes significant and basic knowledge that pupils should develop, e.g. 'feudalism', 'crusades'. Concepts' transferability and applicability to other situations and contexts reduce greatly the need for constant learning or relearning as one encounters new situations (Banks, 1973; Bruner, 1960; Gunning, 1978). Furthermore, concepts help pupils focus their attention on a special aspect of a situation, such as the 'social classes' of an ancient society, and thus the possibility of random observation is reduced (Banks, 1973). A special category of concepts, namely the organisational ones, such as 'economy' and 'foreign policy', which summon up a background web of supporting ideas and information, help pupils organise the historical knowledge and content (Nichol, 1984).

### **Research findings into primary pupils' ability to understand and develop narrative historical concepts**

A number of research studies have thus far been conducted to investigate the degree of primary pupils' understanding and the way of development of narrative historical concepts derived from economic, political, social and religious history (for example 'despotism', 'serf', 'manor', 'king', 'trade', 'parliament', 'government', 'nationalism'). These research studies can be divided into two categories according to their basic aim and the kind of approaches by which the subjects had been taught the concepts. The research studies of the first category aimed at examining whether the acquisition of narrative historical concepts follows the same pattern, sequence and time stages identified by Piaget (Charlton, 1952; Coltham, 1960; De Silva, 1972; Furth, 1980; Hess and Torney, 1967; Wood, 1964). The subjects of the studies had been taught the concepts through traditional direct teaching. Various testing techniques have been used such as multiple-choice tests (Charlton, 1952), drawing, picture choice, model selection, verbal

definition (Coltham, 1960), questionnaires (Furth, 1980; Hess and Torney, 1967; Wood, 1964), contextual cues (De Silva, 1972). The variety of the testing techniques enhances the soundness of the results which, in general, revealed primary pupils' difficulty in understanding and developing narrative historical concepts fully and showed that:

- a) Pupils develop narrative historical concepts gradually and sequentially. The conceptual growth follows three sequential stages, which correspond to Piaget's pre-operational, concrete operational and formal operational cognitive stages of development. Pupils' understanding of historical concepts becomes more complex, abstract and generalised as they get older.
- b) There is retardation in conceptual understanding in history. The transition from one stage to another occurs later in pupil's chronological and mental age than Piaget suggested and varies according to the concept and the individual.
- c) There is time lag between a pupil's ability to experience concepts and his ability to realise their meaning and significance in a conscious way.
- d) Primary-school pupils rarely gave complete and circular explanations of the concepts. Their answers emphasised only one isolated aspect of the overall inter-relationships and were concrete, particular, personal, partial, dominated by perception. The domination of a specific and particular referent of a general idea was the main cause for its misunderstanding.

The research studies of the second category, which were conducted more recently, aimed at examining the effectiveness of certain child-centred approaches for concept development. They revealed that primary pupils can develop narrative historical concepts at a quite sophisticated level through visual aids (Rogers, 1984), inductive approach (Booth, 1987) and open-ended discussion (Booth, 1987; Cooper, 1992). Again various kinds of testing techniques have been used such as interviews, tests and questionnaires.

### **Factors influencing primary pupils' understanding and developing narrative historical concepts**

Primary pupils' difficulty in understanding and developing narrative historical concepts is attributed to: a) their stage of cognitive development, and b) the nature of the narrative historical concepts.

According to Piaget's theory (1950, 1977) for children's conceptual growth and his proposed chronological framework, the great majority of primary graders go through the concrete operational level of their conceptual growth. Consequently, they have not yet developed the necessary classificatory ability

in particular and their conceptual thought in general so as to develop various concepts fully. Vygotsky's research findings (1962) also revealed primary pupils' difficulty in developing concepts fully.

It is claimed that young pupils have not acquired the necessary amount of life experience, historical knowledge and advance linguistic skills to handle and develop narrative historical concepts characterised by a distinct nature. A distinctive feature of historical concepts is their vagueness resulting from their abstract and categorical character as well as from the variability of common words' meanings. The abstract and categorical concepts of political and economic history, such as 'constitution' and 'trade cycle', require developed linguistic skills and cause ambiguity and misunderstanding to the immature pupils (Bernbaum, 1972; Burston, 1972; Coltham, 1960; Edwards, 1978; Steele, 1976). The assumed reliance of history upon common words of every day language, such as 'factory' and 'trade', raise particular linguistic difficulty to young learners because their referents vary according to the historical period, context and situation in which they are being used (Bernbaum, 1972; Burston, 1972; Edwards, 1978; ILEA, History and Social Sciences Inspectorate, 1994).

Research evidence into primary pupils' conceptual understanding in history revealed that pupils' age and gender account for their performance differences. Coltham (1960) and Wood (1964) found that, as the pupils got older their responses became more complex, abstract and generalised. Charlton (1952) and Coltham (1960) discovered that the boys scored more highly than the girls did and moved through the stages more rapidly.

Pupils' performance differences can be also logically attributed to parents' social class, which constitutes an influencing factor of pupils' experience, linguistic development and attitudes towards learning and schooling. According to the theory of linguistic deprivation, working-class pupils, unlike middle- or upper-class pupils, are not sensitive to the symbolic language of the school because they learn limited linguistic strategies and lack the necessary social experience (Bernstein, 1971, 1973, 1975; Chomsky, 1969; Deutsch, 1961). According to the theory of interaction explanation, working-class pupils' educational failure is the result of the wide gap between teacher's culture and pupils' culture which in turn causes mutual failure in communication between them (Barnes, 1976; Burston, 1972; Mercer and Maybin, 1981; Robinson, 1981). Parents' social class determines their high or low expectations of their children's progress in school and the degree of their support and help which influence their children's interest, motivation and attitude towards schooling accordingly (Douglas, 1964; Himmelweit, 1951; Musgrave, 1979).

## **The purpose of the study and its significance**

The results of previous research studies on primary pupils' understanding of narrative historical concepts lead to the assumption that primary fifth graders' (10-11 years of age) face difficulty in understanding and developing such kinds of concepts, particularly the sophisticated ones, if these concepts are not taught in a systematic and effective way. The crucial educational significance of the assumed problem, which has not yet been extensively explored (Blyth, 1990), along with the fact that a similar research has not been conducted in Cyprus justify the conduct of the present research which aims at giving an answer to the following questions:

- (a) Have primary fifth graders (10-11) mastered the narrative historical concepts contained in the aims of history teaching?
- (b) What is the difficulty index of the prespecified concepts? Which ones are: i) very easy; ii) easy; iii) intermediate; iv) difficult; v) very difficult?
- (c) What is the nature of the concepts that prove to be difficult or very difficult?
- (d) Do pupil's age, gender, and parents' educational status affect pupils' performance?

The present investigation can be justified as follows: Age and gender remain pupils' characteristics; parents' educational status comprises an influential social factor which, according to the literature review, affects pupils' understanding of concepts. The research findings are expected to contribute to the scientific research process in general and to the further exploration of the assumed problem in particular. Furthermore, the outcomes of the research are expected to have both short-term and long-term effects on pupils by: a) informing teachers, administrative authorities and history textbook authors about possible pupils' difficulties in understanding narrative historical concepts and the possible impact of the prespecified variables; b) initiating fruitful discussion and interchange of ideas which will eventually lead to the improvement of the history curriculum and the production of better and more suitable textbooks; c) indicating to teachers their obligation to adopt and apply effective teaching approaches, and d) pointing to parents the impact of their educational status on pupils' concept formation.

## **Methodology**

### *The research method and design*

The descriptive evaluative process has been used in the framework of this research study for determining the extent to which Greek-Cypriot primary fifth graders have mastered the historical concepts. The evaluation used is criterion-

referenced because it basically aimed at describing, interpreting and evaluating pupils' performance according to a criterion. The prespecified arbitrary criterion or the set standard used for making mastery or non-mastery decision was: at least 75% of the concepts contained in the test (approximately thirty-one concepts) should be easy or very easy. Thus, for making mastery or non-mastery decision it was necessary that the difficulty index of each concept be established, the difficulty index values be grouped into five intervals and the concepts be categorised according to their difficulty level as follows: a) very easy (80+); b) easy (60-79); c) intermediate (40-59); d) difficult (20-39), and e) very difficult (0-19). The criterion used for the categorisation of the difficulty index values, and consequently of concepts, was percentage. Papaioannou (1981) has adopted the same categorisation of the difficulty index values.

The *ex post facto* research method has been also used for investigating the effect of the prespecified independent variables (pupils' age and gender, parents' educational status) on pupils' performance (dependent variable).

The design of the research involved forming two groups of pupils that differed on each independent variable and comparing them on their performance. The various groups were formed in retrospect, that is, after the administration of the test. According to their age, the pupils were divided into: a) pupils aged 10.25 to 10.75 and b) pupils aged 10.75 to 11.25. According to their parents' educational status, the pupils were divided into: a) pupils whose parents studied at a primary school or/and gymnasium, *lykeion*, technical-vocational school and b) pupils whose parents studied at a college or university.

### *Population and sample*

The population of interest, that is, the group of pupils to whom the results of the study have been generalised, was all 2772 Greek-Cypriot primary fifth graders who studied during the school year 1995-96 at the various public schools of the town and district of Limassol.

The sample of the research on which information was obtained was a group of 600 primary fifth graders drawn from the above population by the use of two combined random sampling methods: the stratified random sampling and the cluster random sampling. The steps followed during the sampling process are:

- (a) The population was identified, that is 2772 primary fifth graders.
- (b) It was found that of the total number of the fifth graders 2082 pupils (75.1%) studied at urban schools, and the rest, 690 pupils (24.9%), at rural schools.
- (c) The urban schools were divided into three categories: a) central urban schools; b) peripheral urban schools, and c) suburban urban schools. The rural

schools were also divided into two categories: a) semi-rural schools, and b) main rural (remote) schools.

- (d) It was decided that a sample of 600 pupils be drawn from the above-defined populations. Seventeen urban and eight rural schools were randomly selected. Each of them provided a class of pupils (cluster random sampling). The total number of the urban fifth graders in the sample was 451 and that of the rural graders 149. Thus, the proportion of urban and rural pupils was the same in both population and sample, that is 75.1 and 24.9 per cent (stratified random sampling). The proportion of pupils who studied at the various subcategories of urban and rural schools was also the same in both population and sample.

It can be argued that the random sampling process adopted and the large size of the sample selected secures that the sample is representative of the population and function in such a way that: (a) the independent variables operate randomly for the different groups being studied and b) pupils having different amounts of the characteristics in question(s) are satisfactorily represented in the sample.

### *Instrumentation and statistical techniques*

A multiple-choice test was constructed and administered to the sample of pupils after its testing in a pilot trial in order to measure their understanding and development of the prespecified narrative historical concepts. Furthermore, a questionnaire was carefully prepared and addressed to the sample of pupils in order to collect the necessary data for the investigation of the possible effect of the independent variables on pupils' performance.

Descriptive statistics were used for the estimation of the reliability of the tests and the item/concept difficulty index. The reliability of the test (0.86) was estimated by Cronbach's Alpha formula.

Three-way analysis of variance is the inferential statistics used for the investigation of the main and interaction effect of the independent variables on pupils' performance.

## **Results**

### *Pupils' performance*

Table 1 presents the concepts' difficulty levels. The information presented in the table gives explicit answers to three of the research questions by showing: a) the number of concepts which are very easy or easy for the pupils, that is the



necessary information for making a mastery or non-mastery decision; b) the number of concepts which fall into each difficulty level, and c) the nature of concepts which fall into the difficult or very difficult levels.

TABLE 1: The Difficulty Levels of Narrative Historical Concepts

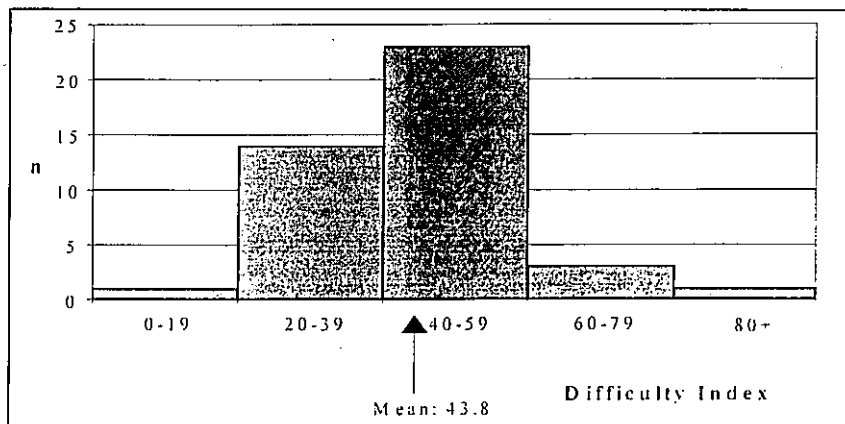
CONCEPTS	DIFFICULTY LEVELS				
	VERY EASY 80+	EASY 60-79	INTERMEDIATE 40-59	DIFFICULT 20-39	VERY DIFFICULT 0-19
amphitheatre				21.5	
Arabic raids				38.1	
Arabs			56.8		
architectural style			56.4		
Byzantine Empire		61.6			
campaign				26.5	
castle				30.6	
charity			48.7		
church				34.7	
civilisation			51.1		
civil war			42.2		
country church	82.0				
crusades			54.4		
Decree of Religious Tolerance		75.0			
Demi			48.2		
democracy			40.1		
economy			53.1		
emperor				22.9	
enclaved persons			40.2		
fall			42.9		
Fine Arts				21.2	
fresco		74.6			
general				23.4	
gladiator			46.2		
hippodrome			48.2		
holy relics				33.1	
hymnography			48.9		
invasion					19.5
Lam			43.4		
legislation			50.8		
monument			40.6		
national anthem				37.7	
orator			46.2		
patriarch			45.6		
refugees				25.2	
relief				33.4	
revolution			58.4		
Roman Empire			55.8		
Roman Law				24.7	
Senate				25.5	
State organisation			59.8		
Temple			50.4		

Thus, as shown in Table 1:

- a) The pupils failed to master the prespecified concepts given that only four concepts out of forty-two (9.5%) seem to be easy or very easy for them.
- b) One concept is very easy, three concepts are easy, twenty-three concepts are of intermediate difficulty, fourteen concepts are difficult and one concept is very difficult.
- c) The concepts, which fall into the difficult level, are not similar in nature. They differ as regards their depth (total number of attributes), breadth (degree of generality), degree of abstractness and preciseness. For example, concepts such as 'castle' and 'amphitheatre' are more concrete in nature than the concepts 'Senate' and 'national anthem', which fall into the same level.

A much better picture of the concepts' difficulty levels is afforded by Figure 1, which presents the frequency histogram. As illustrated in Figure 1, thirty-seven concepts, that is, the great majority (approximately 88%) have a difficulty index which ranges from 20 to 60. It is clearly shown that only four concepts seem to be easy and very easy for the fifth graders (their difficulty index is over 60). As shown in Figure 1, the mean value of the concepts' difficulty indices is 43.8 out of 100 and falls within the level, which includes the more frequent cases.

*FIGURE 1: The Frequency Histogram of Concepts' Difficulty Levels*



A careful study and analysis of the pupils' item responses revealed their difficulty in realising concept meaning in a conscious way. A proportionally high number of pupils were attracted by the concrete referents (examples or results) of an activity/idea or by one isolated aspect of the overall interrelationships and thus failed to select the generalised correct definition of the idea/concept.

**TABLE 2: Analysis of Variance of Age, Gender and Parents' Educational Status by Groups of Pupils' (10-11) Performance**

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	SUM OF SQUARES	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	MEAN SQUARE	F	P
A. Age	117.345	1	117.345	2.292	0.131
B. Gender	182.957	1	182.957	3.574	0.059
C. Parents' Educational Status	1457.649	1	1457.649	28.473	0.000
AXB	70.457	1	70.457	1.376	0.241
AXC	7.911	1	7.911	0.155	0.694
BXC	24.534	1	24.534	0.479	0.489
AXBXC	35.552	1	35.552	0.694	0.405
Explained	1899.205	7	271.315	5.300	0.000
Residual	27951.648	546	51.193		
Total	29850.854	553	53.980		

p < 0.05

*The independent variables' effect on pupils' performance*

Table 2 presents the results of three-way analysis of variance with age, gender and parents' educational status being the independent variables and pupils' performance the dependent measure. The statistical significance level 0.05 was set out. As shown in the table, fifth graders' performance is significantly affected at the 0.05 level by parents' educational status. The comparison between the means of scores obtained by the two groups of pupils representing the two levels of the variable reveal that the pupils whose parents are of high educational status (X:19.64 out of 42) performed better than the pupils whose parents are of low educational status (X:16.45 out of 42). It should be pointed out that the difference between boys' and girls' performance approaches the significance level of 0.05.

**Discussion**

The present research aimed at examining whether fifth graders have mastered the concepts prespecified for their educational level and finding out how many concepts fall into each difficulty level. The research also aimed at identifying the

nature of the concepts that proved to be difficult or very difficult and examining whether pupils' age, pupils' gender and parents' educational status have significant main or/and interaction effect on pupils' ability to develop and understand the concepts. The descriptive and inferential statistical analysis gave the following answers to the research questions:

- a) The pupils have not mastered the concepts; while only four concepts out of 42 (9.5%) seem to be easy or very easy for the pupils, thirty-one concepts (75%) did not meet the prespecified mastery criterion.
- b) One concept, that is, 'country church' proved to be very easy for the pupils and three concepts, that is, 'Decree of Religious Tolerance', 'fresco' and 'Byzantine Empire' proved to be easy. A group of twenty-three concepts proved to be intermediate in difficulty and a group of fourteen concepts difficult (see Table 1). One concept, that is, 'invasion' seems to be very difficult.
- c) The concepts, which seem to be difficult for the sample of pupils, such as 'castle', 'national anthem', 'Senate', 'Fine Arts', 'holy relics', etc. differ as regards their degree of depth, breadth, abstractness, preciseness.
- d) Pupils' understanding and development of the prespecified concepts are significantly affected by the parents' educational status.

The most important outcome of the study is that fifth graders failed to master the prespecified historical concepts whose significant role for the achievement of the aims in history teaching is unquestionable. It should be noted that pupils failed to master concepts which are considered concrete and simple, such as 'castle' or 'amphitheatre' or concepts, such as 'invasion' and 'refugees', used by Cypriot pupils and teachers in the classroom very often and which are associated with the recent history of the island.

In the light of the outcomes of the research certain important issues are raised that need to be considered and discussed. First, pupils' failure to master the concepts in general and the concepts which are considered concrete and simple in particular should be interpreted with reference to previous research findings and relevant theories and attributed to the influence of certain factors. Similarly, the influence of parents' educational status on pupils' understanding and development of concepts should be explained. Finally, the identification of the possible factors (e.g. the effectiveness of teachers' approaches and the availability and use of the suitable teaching aids), which influence pupils' conceptual performance, leads to and necessitates the formulation of certain practical recommendations for promoting pupils' conceptual thinking in history.

Pupils' failure to master the prespecified concepts is consistent with previous research findings discussed above (Charlton, 1952; Coltham, 1960; De Silva,

1972; Furth, 1980; Hess and Torney, 1967; Wood, 1964), which revealed directly or indirectly primary pupils' difficulty in understanding and developing narrative historical concepts. In particular, the present research study has affirmed the findings of the previous research that primary pupils face difficulty in realising the meaning of historical concepts in a conscious way and that the domination of specific and particular referent of a general idea constitutes the main idea for its misunderstanding.

Pupils' failure to master the concepts contained in the test could be interpreted and explained with reference to the following theories and factors mentioned above:

- a) Pupils (10-11) go through their concrete stage of cognitive development and, therefore, they have not yet developed their conceptual thinking (Piaget, 1950, 1977; Vygotsky, 1962).
- b) Fifth graders' limited linguistic skills, historical knowledge and life experience make difficult for them to understand and develop historical concepts, such as 'civilisation' and 'democracy', characterised by vague, categorical and abstract nature (Bernbaum, 1972; Burston, 1972; Coltham, 1960; Edwards, 1978; Steele, 1976).
- c) The common words of ordinary and everyday language, which are used in history very often, such as 'church' and 'trade' and which may have referents that vary according to the historical period, contexts and situations, impose particular problems to immature pupils (Bernbaum, 1972; Burston, 1972; Edwards, 1978; ILEA, History and Social Sciences Inspectorate, 1994). Pupils' failure to master the concepts might also be attributed to teachers' possible failure to teach these concepts effectively, systematically and appropriately. Recent research studies revealed that primary pupils can develop narrative historical concepts at a quite sophisticated level through visual aids (Rogers, 1984), inductive approach (Booth, 1987) and open-ended discussion (Booth, 1987; Cooper, 1992).

Pupils' (10-11) failure to develop both sophisticated concepts and concepts considered at first sight simple and concrete can be explained as follows:

- a) A particular concept may have both a concrete and an abstract connotation and fall into various categories, e.g. the concept 'holy relics' is concrete, quite general, vague and conjunctive (Oliver, 1985).
- b) The teachers involved possibly failed to clarify all the basic attributes of the concepts to pupils.

The influence of parents' educational status on pupils' performance can be attributed to the fact that this factor determines, to a great extent, their social class

which in turn constitutes an influencing factor of pupils' linguistic experience and development. Working-class pupils learn fewer linguistic strategies than middle-class pupils and lack the social experience, which would make them sensitive to the symbolic orders of the school and competent in thinking and using language (Bernstein, 1971, 1973, 1975; C. Chomsky, 1969; Deutsch, 1961). Interaction explanations relate educational failure of working-class pupils to a mutual failure in communication between teacher and pupil (Barnes, 1976; Burston, 1972; Mercer and Maybin, 1981; Robinson, 1981). Parents' social class determines also their high or low expectations of their children's progress in school and the degree of their support and help, which influence their children's interest, motivation and attitude towards schooling accordingly (Douglas, 1964; Himmelweit, 1951; Musgrave, 1979).

The findings of the present research have certain practical implications and lead to the formulation of certain reasonable recommendations and proposals for the improvement of pupils' (10-11) ability to develop and understand narrative historical concepts. These recommendations concern: a) teachers' training for the effective teaching of the prespecified concepts; b) the development of curriculum material; c) parents' support, help and interest in their children progress in history, and d) further research studies.

It is recommended that both the University of Cyprus as well as the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, which have the responsibility for basic and in-service training of teachers, should run courses/seminars on the teaching of narrative historical concepts. In the framework of these courses and seminars the following aspects could be analysed and discussed: a) the educational importance of narrative historical concepts; b) principles guiding the teaching of the narrative historical concepts, and c) effective child-centred methodological approaches.

It is suggested that suitable teacher manuals, curriculum material and pupil's textbooks be produced which will contribute to effective teaching of narrative historical concepts. Teacher manual book should include adequate information about the content of the prespecified concepts and educationally accepted and effective ways for their development. Packages of relevant audio-visual aids should be prepared and sent to schools to be used by teachers and/or the pupils themselves.

The authors of the history textbooks to be written in the future for the top primary grades should take into account, among other things, the linguistic drawbacks of the existing textbooks (Couloubaritsis, 1994; Skouros, 1990). They are advised to use more analytic and descriptive language that is comprehensible by pupils of this age and introduce in a systematic and effective way the new concepts. It is specifically suggested that: a) the degree of textbooks' language sophistication should be of ascending order, that is, the language of the first

chapters should be more concrete and simple than the subsequent chapters, and b) the meaning of each new basic narrative concept which is introduced should be analysed and exemplified both verbally and visually.

Parents can be persuaded to encourage their children to acquire a more positive attitude towards history by having higher expectations towards their children's progress in this particular subject, showing more interest and offering more support and help to them so as to cope effectively with it.

It is also recommended that the method effect on pupils' (10-11) performance be investigated through experimental research. Pupils' mastery of the prespecified concepts can also be investigated through interviews conducted by the researcher with the pupils individually. The use of the interview instrument for collecting data is expected to provide more information and details regarding pupils' difficulty in developing these concepts.

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