



Andreou, E. and Mavrou, K. (2012). 'Η διαφοροποιημένη διδασκαλία με τη χρήση των συμβόλων για το Σχεδιασμό Μάθησης για Όλους στην Ενιαία Εκπαίδευση' [Differentiated instruction with the use of Symbols, for Universal Design for Learning, in Inclusive Education]. In N. Tsaggaridou, K. Mavrou, S. Symeonidou, H. Phtiaka, L. Symeou, and I. Elia (Eds.) [*The Crisis and the Role of Pedagogy: Institutions, Values and Society – Conference Proceedings*] pp. 175-186 Nicosia: Cyprus Pedagogical Association

## Abstract

This article presents qualitative research, aiming to present an effort to apply Universal Design for Learning, using graphic symbols. More specifically, the research is based on the philosophy of inclusive education, through new instructional methods, using a system of specific graphic symbols, for the design and development of instructional materials in the subject of Greek language. This specific programme was chosen, as it has recently been included in the Cypriot educational system after specific software was obtained. As a result, there is a need to investigate different ways of applying it, as well as its effectiveness in the opinions of the students themselves, since their opinions are considered highly valuable for the development of educational research and educational applications, especially within the framework of inclusive education. Data collection was conducted through non-structural interviews with students, with or without learning difficulties, who participated in the programme, and also through keeping a logbook throughout the application of the programme, investigating opinions and reactions during and after its application. The results derived from the research were positive and encouraging towards the employment of such methods.

## Main findings

The introduction of symbols as a differentiated means of instruction was in response to a wide range of learning differences and different interests, as children who participated in this research were of diverse capabilities, a fact which is supported by Tomlinson (2001). Students seemed to require this method, which was especially evident in the initial investigating interview, suggesting that they were looking for something to help them and at the same time express themselves. The method covered the learning styles of all students, regardless of difficulties, according to Universal Design for Learning principles. The use of symbols was a pleasant and very promising approach, especially for students identified as having learning difficulties, since, as one student stated, they 'felt excited because our teacher never used that before' (Student P. ND).

This report indirectly reveals an undifferentiated method of instruction that has been used thus far and which does not give students the opportunity for activity and pleasant intellectual work, as required in any inclusive class. Additionally, students' enthusiasm was not only due to the appearance of symbols and worksheets, but also due to the fact that this was a new way of facilitating and understanding the written instructions, making them more capable and faster in understanding the text or direction, which would otherwise be incomprehensible to them. For example, one student said, 'Yes ... the symbols helped me, and I finished the worksheet on my own. They also helped the classmate next to me. She told me that she could finish them much faster.'

As well as the capacity to facilitate reading for students who find it hard to understand difficult or unfamiliar words, symbols facilitated reading for parents who were native speakers of other languages. One student mentioned that 'my mother likes them ... she understands them' (Schoolgirl T. TA).



As far as this new method is concerned, students suggested that symbols should be incorporated into all subjects and all books, because as one student said ‘... only the person who writes the books understands them; we do not’ (Student D. MD). As a result, through their suggestions, students sent a message that their opinions on issues that directly affect them should matter. Moreover, the students pointed out that there is not only one means of representation (e.g. auditory or visual).

However, students were also concerned about some of their difficulties in their initial encounters with some of the symbols. Moreover, some of the students were unhappy with the worksheet’s aesthetics, noting that ‘... all worksheets should be coloured so that we can have fun with them’ (Student N.). These statements refer to aesthetics that students wish to incorporate in all aspects of their education.

### **Type of material**

Conference proceedings (based on master’s thesis), in N. Tsaggaridou, K. Mavrou, S. Symeonidou, H. Phtiaka, L. Symeou and I. Elia (Eds). *The Crisis and the Role of Pedagogy: Institutions, Values and Society – Conference Proceedings*. Nicosia: Cyprus Pedagogical Association (in Greek), 175–186, ISBN: 978-9963-9828-1-3

### **Web link for additional information**

[http://www.pek.org.cy/Proceedings\\_2012/papers/eniaia\\_ekpaidefsi/Andreou&Mavrou.pdf](http://www.pek.org.cy/Proceedings_2012/papers/eniaia_ekpaidefsi/Andreou&Mavrou.pdf)