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## Drama Education as a means of promoting inquiry-based learning

Elissavet Giannopoulou, Asterios Tsiaras, Theodora Papaioannou



### Abstract

This research investigates the impact of Drama in Education on the development of the ability for inquiry-based learning in primary school students. More specifically, it focuses on the assessment of Drama in Education Projects which were designed according to the principles of inquiry-based learning and implemented within the scope of the school subject of Drama Education, with a view to empowering the intrinsic motivation of 4th Grade primary school students and encouraging them to take initiatives so that autonomous inquiry-based learning would be achieved. During this research, the applied data collection methods were a questionnaire and participant observation. According to the results, it has been established that Drama in Education Projects contributed to developing the participants' self-efficacy. At the same time, it emerged that Drama in Education positively influenced the acquisition of critical, creative and inquisitive thinking skills.

**Keywords:** *Drama Education; Drama in Education Projects; inquiry-based learning*

### Introduction

Drama Education is offered to students of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Grades in public and private schools in Greece for one teaching hour per week. According to the corresponding Issue of the Official Government Gazette (OGG No 1471/B/22-11-2002), it was part of Aesthetic Education (Art, Music, Drama) up to 2011, taught as an optional subject in the afternoon programme of All-Day Primary Schools. In 2011, with

the Curriculum of Studies (Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework [DEPPS]) it was introduced in the morning core programme as an hourly subject for all six grades of 800 public primary schools implementing the Unified Reformed Educational Programme, within the scope of a project funded by the European Union (Pedagogical Institute, 2011). Since 2016, it has been a compulsory hourly subject in all public and private primary schools across Greece, though only up to the 4th Grade.

According to Tsiaras, the main aim of Drama Education in primary schools is to reinforce the students' expressive and creative abilities so that they can safely "communicate" their ideas and feelings to their schoolmates. A basic technique of Drama Education is dramatic play, which focuses on numerous and different corporealizations and whose ultimate goal is "*the triptych of self-realisation, comprehension of the world and socialisation*" (Tsiaras, 2007, p. 11).

Drama Education is considered a pedagogical tool which can boost both students' creative and critical thinking and their collaborative skills, since theatrical techniques can help develop students' independent, inquisitive thinking. More specifically, Drama Education, through the techniques of Dramatic Art and Theatre in general, constitutes a learning tool which helps students act as independent researchers of self-awareness and develop the ability of inquiry-based learning (Rowe, 2012).

### Theoretical background

Drama Education aims at "*developing students' cognitive, mental and sensory potential, cultivating their linguistic and expressive ability, developing their collaborative skills, the acquisition of autonomy, as well as promoting their mental and emotional development by means of comprehending the contribution of dramatic art to defining the identity of individuals and societies*" (OGG No 1471/B/22-11-2002). In particular, as far as the 4th Grade students who participated in the aforementioned research are concerned, Drama Education aims at: "*a) reinforcing children's intellectual and mental abilities so that they can function collaboratively, defining themselves and others more easily and putting emphasis on initiative and collectivity, b) familiarising children with acts that can lead to dramatisation, developing oral speech and linguistic expression, as well as reading literary texts, and c) using the theatrical code as a tool for learning and coming into contact with other codes (subjects), but also analysing dramatic texts, developing critical thinking and writing (writing workshop)*" (Pedagogical Institute, 2011, pp. 127–128).

In the framework of the specific subject, a teaching method that can be used is inquiry-based dramatisation which, according to Papadopoulos (2010), is a "*pedagogical and artistic procedure as well as a teaching method*" (p. 121). Through inquiry-based dramatisation, students devise, improvise and create events where they act and think, while exploring their natural and social environment as well as human behaviour and experience. Of particular importance is the fact that students cooperate and reflect, thus changing their comprehension of the world, they acquire deeper knowledge of the issues they research, while their perceptions are channelled back into their social group, enriched through their interaction with it. Consequently, learning becomes a process of exploring the collective perspective of an issue which results in their acquiring knowledge about it (Papadopoulos, 2010, p. 121).

More specifically, inquiry-based learning is a powerful and effective learning model because it is based on gradual acquisition of knowledge, thus reducing the cognitive load, and it contributes to the achievement of knowledge by allowing students to engage in multiple fields. In addition, the teaching approaches implemented in the framework of the inquiry-based learning model not only achieve important educational

targets, such as content knowledge and application of scientific methods, but also develop skills such as cooperation and self-directed learning (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007, p. 2). The specific teaching model follows interconnected stages that make the student acquire the qualities of a researcher who will act for the common good, starting with gradually changing their attitude towards learning as well as towards life at an individual, local and subsequently universal level (Argyris 2001; Claxton, 2008; García, 2011; Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996; Rowe, 2012).

### Methodology

This research was of an experimental character and was carried out implementing a quasi-experimental design (experimental group & control group without the groups being matched in their qualitative characteristics) (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008, p. 361). The sample was selected using the judgment sampling method (Robson, 2007). To define the representative research sample, a statistical formula with three variables was used: the standard error, the confidence interval, and the standard deviation. The first two were defined ad hoc. The research sample was N=162 – six classes of 4th grade students (EG: N1=81, CG: N2=81 students) of a large private primary school of East Attica. It should be mentioned that during the aforementioned research the theatre expert assumed a dual role as she acted both as a facilitator during the Drama in Education Projects (Papadopoulos, 2010) and as a researcher following the ethics applying to research in an educational framework (Cohen et al., 2008).

The data collection methods employed were the questionnaire and participant observation. Initially, a pilot survey was conducted in order to define cronbach  $\alpha$ , the degree of internal consistency of the questionnaire, and whether the particular questionnaire could be used for the assessment of the students' self-efficacy in the subject of Drama Education (Iosifidis, 2003; Sarafidou, 2011).

The questionnaire,<sup>1</sup> which was based on questions from the rating scales of students' attitudes in connection with the learning strategies of Paul R. Pintrich and Elisabeth V. De Groot (1990), was adapted to Drama Education and comprised twenty (20) statements in a Likert-type scale, which uses 5 points from "Never true" to "Always true". This questionnaire was given to the experimental and control groups at different times, before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the teaching interventions. Some representative statements included in the questionnaire are: "In Drama Education, I prefer to engage in activities that give me the opportunity to learn new things" and "I think that everything we learn in Drama Education is interesting".

Participant observation with the use of a research diary was also employed with a view to recording interaction, cooperation, motivation, and participation of students during the implementation of the activities of Drama in Education in the framework of the inquiry-based learning process (Mason, 2003, p. 137; Sarafidou, 2011, p. 54).

### Description of Drama in Education Projects

The Drama in Education Projects were carried out in the 2018–2019 school year over a period of six months (October 2018 to April 2019) during which there were twenty



two (22) one-hour teaching interventions, one in every group (experimental & control). In particular, the students of the three 4th Grade classes which comprised the experimental group participated in two Drama in Education Projects, which were designed according to the inquiry-based learning model of Short, Harste and Burke (1996). The six basic steps of inquiry-based learning, which were followed in the design and implementation phases of the specific projects, concern: 1) building on prior knowledge, 2) required time for identifying and formulating questions, 3) expression of opinions in order to induce reflection on the matter under investigation, 4) exchange of ideas and knowledge that have been acquired with the use of theatrical techniques, 5) design of new research questions and reflection on issues, and 6) undertaking of action by the students (Short et al., 1996, pp. 56–57, 279, 281 & 288). The students of the three 4th Grade classes which formed the control group were taught the same thematic units but in the “traditional” way that Drama Education is usually delivered.

Below is a brief presentation of the two Drama in Education Projects which were carried out with the experimental group and concern dramatic play and the techniques of dramatic art (Stanislavski, 1999; Alkistis, 2008; Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou, 2007, 2018; Govas, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2010; Tsiaras, 2016) and were chosen to contribute to the inquiry-based learning model.

#### *1st Drama in Education Project*

The topic of the Drama in Education Project adhered to the principles of the inquiry-based learning model. Namely, the topic was determined by the students themselves and was investigated through questions related to their interests (Short et al., 1996). More specifically, the project began with a projection on the smart board of images on ancient Greek vases which depicted professions in ancient Greece. The students combined the information from the representations on the vases with information from a chapter called “The poetry and religion of ancient Greeks” in the 4th Grade history textbook and embarked on their own research into the lives of Athenians in ancient Greece. In pairs or in teams, they chose the roles they would assume and presented themselves in front of the entire class, e.g. as a paedotribe with his pentathletes, or a piper, or a pedagogue, or a mother with her daughter in the gynaeceum teaching her how to sew or in the kitchen teaching her how to cook (Kosti, 2016).

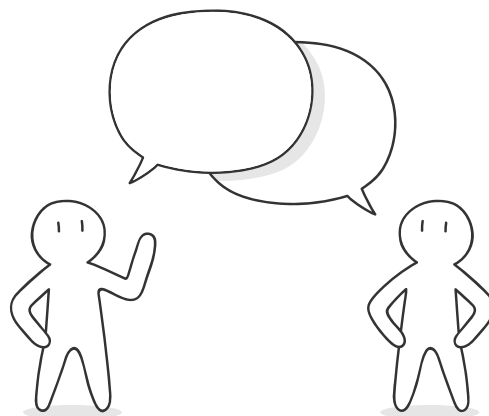
Subsequently, there was a barrage of questions, mainly about educational methods, taught subjects and ways of dressing in ancient Greece. The facilitator guided the students to search for information relevant to the roles they wanted to play in the next class. Once the information was gathered, a dramatic play began during which the students walked around at different paces, depending on the facilitator’s instructions, wearing a piece of cloth or holding a flute or a walking stick, depending on their role (Tsiaras, 2016). This team play developed using the technique of the “frozen/still image”, which came alive at the touch of the facilitator, and finished with each student making a self-presentation based on the information they had collected and addressing it to all the other students, who stood still (Papadopoulos, 2010). Then, the students wrote down in their Drama Education notebooks a thought about the roles they played and what they

enjoyed most, which they announced to their classmates. A game of reflection followed where students formed a circle and took turns corporealising a word that described a feeling they had experienced (Avdi & Chatzigeorgiou, 2018).

A discussion followed involving the comparison between ancient and contemporary education, which served as a means of project development. More specifically, the facilitator took advantage of the reference to Homer and used the aforementioned 4th Grade history textbook to present a brief account of Homer’s life (Eliadi, 2009). The children took notes of the most significant information. Then, she asked the students what questions they would ask Homer if they could travel back with a time machine<sup>2</sup> and meet him. Thus, a dramatic play began with students arranged in a circle as a kind of rehearsal in which they corporealised this travel in time and then they were divided into teams. The members of the teams decided who would play the roles of blind Homer and of his guide and the rest prepared to act as reporters.

Each student-reporter drew a theatre curtain in their Drama Education notebook and wrote down two questions they would like to ask Homer under the title “An imaginary interview with Homer”. Then, the members of the teams collaborated in acting out this travel through time. Before they began their presentations, they listened to an audio on YouTube where an actor playing the part of Homer was reading verses from the *Iliad* in ancient Greek. The audio with the title “Pronunciation of Ancient Greek, Homer”<sup>3</sup> greatly impressed the students, who asked to listen to it again while speculating on what it reminded them of.

The next activity began with a dramatic play set in Homer’s time by means of a time machine (Alkistis, 2008), which was built in cooperation with the students and had an hourglass shape and a metal head made of CDs bearing representations of the Antikythera mechanism. At the beginning of the activity, the students left the room. Then, the first to enter was blind, old Homer carrying a walking stick and supporting himself on his student-guide, who helped him sit on a wooden log. Afterwards, the rest of the students entered, moving freely as if in “time travel”, gathered and kneeled around Homer to pose their questions. Finally, the students drew under their theatre curtain a scene depicting themselves and engaged in a play of reflection, where each student corporealised a word describing a feeling they experienced upon completing the Drama in Education Project.



### 2nd Drama in Education Project

The topic of the project was derived from the inquiry-based learning model (Short et al., 1996). Namely, an initial discussion was held concerning the venues which staged the works of the ancient Greek playwrights, who drew inspiration for their plays from Homer, and this stimulated an exploration of ancient Greek theatres. The students formed teams and each team chose an ancient theatre, they then did their research and collected the necessary information, and finally undertook the task of staging a play in one of Greece's ancient theatres. The teams were named after the theatre they had chosen: Dionysus team, Epidaurus team, Dithyramb team for street theatre in the form of a procession, Italian (proscenium) stage team for modern staging in the "Italian box". The theme of the plays selected by the students was the Trojan War, an idea which emerged from their interviews with Homer.

Each team obtained new information about their play from the chapter titled "The Wooden Horse"<sup>4</sup> as well as information from Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, which was given to them by the facilitator. Before starting to create a structured play, they engaged in a team game of concentration, where students with their eyes closed moved towards the source of a sound and pretended to be inside the Trojan horse. Then, they distributed the roles (Agamemnon, Achilles, Priam, Paris, Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena and Cassandra). The facilitator gave them information and instructions for the self-presentation of their chosen character<sup>5</sup> and asked them to scrutinise the information concerning the role they had selected so that they would present themselves by reciting the lines of the specific character in the theatre of their choice. The director-theatre expert of each team was in charge of presenting information about the team's chosen ancient theatre at the beginning of the performance.<sup>6</sup>

After the presentation of the ancient theatre and the self-presentation of the characters, the students acted out a short dialogue that they had written themselves drawing on the 4th Grade Anthology of Literary Texts<sup>4</sup> and on Euripides's *The Trojan Women*. The facilitator's instruction to the students was that their play had to have a beginning, a middle and an end,<sup>7</sup> as well as conveying a message<sup>8</sup> and that each team member would write down their lines<sup>9</sup> in the notebook of one of the students in the team, in the order these were to be delivered. In this way they would "communicate" the improvised play among themselves.

Each team's presentation began with the audience, which consisted of their classmates, imitating the sound of the warning bell, rung three times. The pause between the bell sounds created a ritualistic atmosphere. Then, the members of the presenting team assumed the positions of actors and announced the theme of their play and the theatre where it was staged. At this point, the student who had undertaken the post of the director-theatre expert read out the information about the specific theatre and then each student made a self-presentation as the character they had chosen. Following this, they performed in the *logeion* (marked with two chairs) or around the marble altar (marked with a round piece of cardboard), since all this was preceded by a discussion about the main parts of the ancient theatre, a need that arose from the information they had examined.

It should be mentioned that the facilitator explained to the students the role of the prompter as she herself served as one, holding the team's notebook when they began acting out their

short dialogue. After the final bows and many "bravos", there was a discussion aimed at discovering the part of the play which carried an anti-war or other message. When one of the students shared the message they had perceived, the facilitator asked: "In which part of the play did you understand this?" Then, they wrote comments in their notebooks, such as: "What I enjoyed most was playing the part of Cassandra and pretending to make prophecies." At the end of the Drama in Education Project, the facilitator and the students visited the computer room with the interactive tables, where the students played a game of knowledge, where they had to match words describing a part of the ancient theatre with their definitions and the picture depicting it.

### Results of Drama in Education Projects

During these projects, each student created a curtain with themselves at the centre, with elements of their role, with drawings or information, which was recorded in their portfolio. The results of the projects as far as inquiry-based learning is concerned rely on the data emerging from the students' notes and on participant observation.

In particular, regarding the first Drama in Education Project, the students of the experimental group did their research and gathered the facts they needed to engage in dramatic play or in the self-presentations of their roles and extracted information from the sources in order to implement the techniques of dramatic art. To begin with, the students posed questions related to the topic under investigation, such as: "Were there schools?", "How did they go to school?", "What did they learn?", "What sports did they do?", "Why weren't the girls allowed to go to school?", "Who taught them at home and what?", "Supposing I was learning music, what kind would that be?", "What kind of music did they listen to?", "How old was the pedagogue?", "How are we going to play these parts?", "What are we going to wear?", "How did children dress back then?". They sought relevant information. Some of the words that are connected with the search for information are: information, vase, clay pitcher, grammarian, paedotribe, guitarist, pentathlon, gymnastics, and dance, while some verbal utterances related to the role play they performed are: "I am the paedotribe and today I'll teach my students gymnastics. I will not wear out the little ones", "I am Hesiod's pedagogue, I take him to school and I help him every day – that's my job", "I played the part of the mother. I enjoyed most when my daughter and I danced Greek dances", "My name is Agamemnon, I am a paedotribe and I teach the pentathlon".

Additionally, as regards the second Drama in Education Project, the students gathered information about ancient and international theatre by examining their architecture. By collecting information about several ancient Greek theatres, they came to the conclusion that: "The more ancient the theatre, the more popular it is!" By creating theatrical plays (e.g. *The Trojan War*, *The Wooden Horse*, *The Spoiled Celebration*) inspired by a text about the Trojan War included in the 4th Grade Anthology,<sup>4</sup> they came into contact with Euripides's tragedy *The Trojan Women*. While preparing for the self-presentation of their chosen character, they researched and gathered information about many mythical heroes (Cassandra, Helenus, Hecuba, Priam, Andromache, Astyanax and Polyxena). Finally, they presented the theatrical plays that they wrote in their capacity as actors: "In the framework of the subject of Drama Education,

we carried out research on the Trojan War and wrote a play. Its title is *After the War* and it is on at the theatre of Dionysus."

### Questionnaire results

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23, was used for the analysis of the quantitative data. To begin with, the scale of the questionnaire was analysed with the use of descriptive statistics. In detail, mean values were calculated for each scale. Then, statistical checks were conducted (paired sample t test and t-test), in order to determine potential statistically significant differences. It must be noted that a normal frequency distribution test was run which showed that the distribution is good, as well as a parametric test.

A statistical check was carried out (paired sample t-test), which detected statistically important differences both in the control group and in the experimental group. P-value was lower than 0.01 for both the aforementioned student groups.

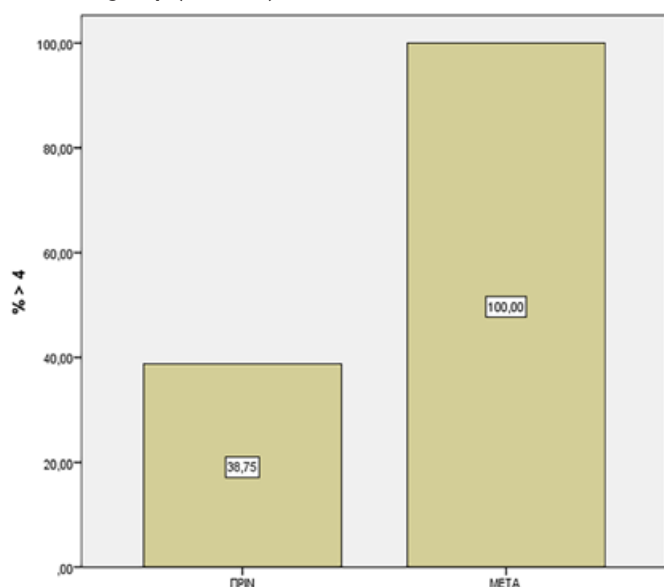
**Table 1: Mean values for the control group and the experimental group and differences before and after the intervention**

Group		Mean Value	Reference Value	P-value
Control	Before	3.5925	0.31	
	After	3.6169	0.3	<0.01
Experimental	Before	3.7931	0.27	
	After	4.8450	0.26	<0.01

According to the results presented in the table above, it is evident that, following the Drama in Education Projects, control group students express positive opinions about their self-efficacy. However, there is little improvement in their perceived self-efficacy in the subject of Drama Education after the interventions (M.V.=3.61 versus M.V.=3.59).

By contrast, the students of the experimental group express themselves positively about their self-efficacy, while they also show significant improvement after the Drama in Education Projects (M.V.=4.84 versus M.V.=3.79). Their great improvement can also be seen in the following bar chart.

**Graph 1: Percentages of perceived self-efficacy of the experimental group (score>4)**



**Table 2: Differences between the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG)**

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	SELFELEGXP	3.5925	80	.31007	.03467
EG	SELFELEGXP	3.6169	80	.30502	.03410
Pair 2	SELFELEGXP	3.7931	80	.27337	.03056
ΠΠ	SELFELEGXP	4.8450	80	.26868	.03004

According to the results of the analysis, statistically significant differences were observed in both groups. It is obvious from the table above that the values for self-efficacy in both groups, CG= 3.5925 in the control group and EG=3.6169 in the experimental group, were already satisfactory because both groups had been taught the subject of Drama Education over the past three years.

More specifically, the results show a slight initial lead (measurements before the interventions) for the experimental group versus the control group in what concerns their perceived self-efficacy ( $MV_{EG} = 3.7931$  and  $MV_{CG} = 3.5925$ ). The statistical check (paired sample t-test) showed a statistically significant difference ( $P < 0.001$ ). However, the difference (0.2) is small, which could be due to the fact that the specific students attended Drama Education classes before the implementation of the Drama in Education Projects, or it could be attributed to the students' intrinsic motives related to this particular subject.

However, it is obvious that following the Drama in Education Projects, which were carried out according to the principles of inquiry-based learning, the value of self-efficacy in the experimental group saw a great increase, reaching 4.8450, therefore marking a difference of  $4.8450 - 3.7931 = 1.0519$ , which corresponds to an increase by 22% in the initial value. Conversely, the value of self-efficacy in the control group, who were taught in the "traditional" manner, marked a negligible increase of  $3.6169 - 3.5925 = 0.0244$ . This means that the initial value rose by 0.67%. This infinitesimal increase occurred because of a research limitation, which meant that the control group was also taught the subject of Drama Education for an hour per week.

### Conclusions

According to the results of the present research, it has been established that Drama Education is an alternative method of teaching texts, using an experiential approach and reinforcing the students' collaborative culture, self-efficacy, and ability for inquiry-based learning. This alternative method of teaching through drama makes use of theatrical techniques which guide children: to the discovery of their expressive means, their potential and their self-efficacy in a spiral, inquisitive course of self-awareness, to the corporealised expression of their beliefs through roles, thus eliminating any factors that

inhibit self-exposure, to the production of original written texts, which attests to the children's creative imagination, to the solution of social issues through critical "outside the box" thinking, to the discovery of universal values with a view to adopting them in adult life for the common good, to the cultivation of their personality through a holistic, anthropocentric type of education developing skills such as active participation in the solution of existing social problems, as well as to the investigation of the deeper truth in whatever they do (Benton, 1984; Aulls & Shore, 2008; Walker, 2013; Tsiraras, 2016).

The results of this research are consistent with the results of similar research which employed inquiry-based learning as a teaching model (Short et al., 1996; Argyris, 2001; Claxton, 2008) as well as with the results of research on Drama in Education as a powerful motive for the reinforcement of the students' self-efficacy and the production of original written work (Papaioannou, 2016).

The results of the statistical analysis of the answers to the questionnaires used in the main research branch, starting from the null hypothesis that Drama in Education techniques do not in the least affect the ability of 4th Grade primary school students for inquiry-based learning, showed an even more significant difference in the self-efficacy of the students in the experimental group, a fact which indicates that their ability for autonomous inquiry-based learning was significantly reinforced. Consequently, it transpires that the null hypothesis is not valid and it was established that the techniques of Drama Education considerably affect 4th Grade primary school students' ability for inquiry-based learning. Specifically, the present research was conducted based on the answers to the questionnaire issued to the specific sample and aimed at testing the initial hypotheses. The findings proved that at the end of the research the self-efficacy of the students in the control group increased minimally, only by 0.67%, while the self-efficacy of the students in the experimental group increased by 22%.

Similar were the results of the Drama in Education Projects which were carried out with the use of an experiential method based on the principles of inquiry-based learning, such as the graduality in which every issue is guided to emerge from the previous one, the scaffolding of knowledge and of the answers that the students themselves analyse and produce. It was established that the students acquired inquisitive skills as they employed critical and creative thinking in order to build their role or their play and they comprehended the importance of mental, physical and emotional balance that someone gains when they assume the role of an artist-researcher in the framework



of a team project. Through this process, each student's "ego", that is each team member's "ego", defined itself and was fed back into their social group (Kondoyianni, 2012, pp. 44–47).

Furthermore, according to the data of participant observation, it transpires that every time that the students presented their plays to their classmates, they seemed satisfied with what they had created. Actually, it was obvious that they gradually conquered and comprehended a part of their self-efficacy (Sapir, 1921; Vygotsky, 1966) while forming a positive self-image and boosting their self-confidence (Rowe, 2012).

Finally, it can be concluded that the students acquired many characteristics of the student-researcher, according to Rowe (2012). They acquired skills which are necessary when doing research, they enjoyed their independence in the learning process, they discovered concepts, ideas and issues of both local and global significance and they engaged in critical and creative thinking. Moreover, they identified and approached complicated problems and expressed their view in a self-confident and creative manner, while the majority collaborated with their classmates efficiently and eagerly.

#### Notes

1. It should be mentioned that the specific questionnaire was planned for the purposes of a doctoral dissertation (Papaioannou, 2016, pp. 83–84 & 168–169).
2. Acting out travel through time, the "Time machine" technique (Kondoyianni, 2008, p. 268 as cited in Papaioannou, 2016).





3. Use of the link <http://piramatikoneiroland.blogspot.gr/2013/02/blog-post.html>.
4. *The Wooden Horse* by Kalliope Sfaellou (Anthology of Literary Texts, 3rd & 4th Grades of Primary School).
5. Answering the questions of Stanislavski's Given Circumstances.
6. The specific technique is also employed in the various stages of inquiry-based learning (Sotirchou, 2007, p. 68).
7. According to Aristotle's dramaturgical techniques (Lignadis, 1988).
8. The ultimate objective of the play, according to Stanislavski.
9. A variation on the technique of circular storytelling and acting.

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