

The History of Preschool-Preprimary Education in Cyprus

[Ιστορία της Προσχολικής-Προδημοτικής Εκπαίδευσης στην Κύπρο]

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Dr Maria Michaelidou, an outstanding educator, who climbed up the ladder of educational leadership through her career, details the establishment and progress of Early-Childhood Education in Cyprus in her book *The History of Preschool-Preprimary Education in Cyprus*. To bridge the gap in the literature with regards to the development of Preschool and Preprimary Education in the Republic of Cyprus, she builds a historical narrative extending from as early as the archaic and classical times to the 21st century. Her book is an essential read for all of us educators in Cyprus, as it encourages a critical reflection on the ways contextual socio-political and historical factors may challenge and/or enhance Preschool and Preprimary Education. At the same time, the book is a must-read for policy-makers and curriculum developers in Cyprus, as it highlights the need to overcome —through highly-organised initiatives, policies, and practices — the detrimental, prevailing assumptions that are still undermining the role of Preschool and Preprimary Education in Cyprus.

When considering the book as a whole, one observes that it successfully builds a coherent and comprehensive narrative by drawing upon meticulous research and in-depth and longitudinal study. The book is organised in a way that masterfully links the historical narrative developed to portray Preschool and Preprimary Education in Cyprus with theory, evidence-based research, biographical data and memoirs, press releases, state reports, and photographic material. To this end, the book contributes to the scientific foundation of Preschool and Preprimary Education in Cyprus building on research data, historical comparisons, and modern approaches that draw upon teachers' voices. In terms of the analysis, the author has been very descriptive of her findings stemming from both primary and secondary research,

and has done a great work on bringing an extensive core of research studies and evidence together. Her detailed study provides a platform for macro-micro integration, as it encompasses multiple levels and axes of analysis: from the State to the school, the teacher, and the parent.

The monograph is written in a scientific way that is better suited for readers who are already familiar with educational discourse, on the one hand, and the history of Cyprus, on the other. In more detail, it draws linkages between the history of Cyprus and the formation and development of Preschool and Preprimary Education. In the first six chapters, the author highlights that Early-Childhood Education is part of the evolving history of Cyprus that is grounded in our culture, and which is thus manifested not only in pertinent policies, curricula, and structures, but also in teacher education and training, as well as parental involvement. In the last chapter of her book, Dr Michaelidou highlights the legacy of outstanding pedagogical personas from Europe, Greece, and Cyprus, whose work should also be embedded in Early-Childhood Education and guide its development. Although all chapters add to the development of the historical narrative, some chapters stand out. For example, it is noteworthy that Chapter 2 analyses every single article in the press that related to infants and Preschools and was published throughout the whole period of the British rule extending from 1878 to 1960.

In addition, Chapter 6 is one more notable chapter, as it draws upon primary data from a survey conducted with early-childhood educators examining their perceptions of Preschool and Preprimary Education in Cyprus. The researcher placed a number of questions to the participant teachers, such as the following: ‘What would you concern as the highest achievement of Preprimary Education in Cyprus?’, ‘Do you have a role model in your career?’, and ‘What can be done to enhance Preschool teachers’ roles?’. The analysis of teachers’ perceptions is indeed invaluable, especially for the improvement of Early-Childhood Education in Cyprus. Nonetheless, over the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in listening to children’s voices in educational research and scholarship. Thus, there is an evident need for the pursuit of a richer understanding of the policies, practices, and experiences pertaining Preschool Education through children’s eyes. The monograph would have benefitted substantially by incorporating children’s voices with regards to their experiences in Pre-School Education in the author’s primary research and analysis.

Moving a step forward, the title of the book righteously differentiates the institution of Preschool Education from the institution of Preprimary Education. Whilst Preschool Education in Cyprus is optional for children up to the age of five and mostly provided by private or community schools, Preprimary Education is obligatory and mostly provided by public schools administered by the State. In the book, the author thoroughly reflects on this distinction in Chapters 5 and 6, where she discusses the various types of Preschools (private, communal, and public), and the development of Preprimary Education in the 21st century, respectively. However, it would be interesting to see separately, nonetheless comparatively, the specific challenges and suggestions for Preschool Education vis-à-vis the challenges and suggestions for Preprimary Education.

Coming to the concluding chapter of this book, the reader would expect to be provided with some specific reflections and suggestions stemming from the preceded well-organised and thorough analysis. Having said that, it is clear that the analysis could have further been enriched by the discussion of the implications of this historical research of Early-Childhood Education in Cyprus. It would be interesting to see the author's remarks in response to questions such as the following: What are the implications of this book for future policies and curricula of Early-Childhood Education in Cyprus in terms of development and implementation? What are the lessons to be learned for teacher education and training, parental involvement and other crucial issues raised in the book? What are the wider implications for other studies to be carried out in the field?

In conclusion, this monograph is a manifesto of Dr Michaelidou's passionate love for Preschool and Preprimary Education. Her devotion to the institution is imprinted on every single page of her book. At the same time though, her extended examination of the landscape of Preschool and Preprimary Education in Cyprus from both a historical and a practical angle provides sound and robust arguments for the long-term benefits of quality early education. This book is therefore a political manifesto for the need to expand and improve publicly- or privately-funded Early-Childhood Education.

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