

**EECERA SIG Gender Balance  
International Research Conference  
Hersonnisos, Crete, Greece, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2014**



Tsigra, Meni (2014)

**Children's views on male and female Kindergarten teachers**

Presentation on the SIG Gender Balance Research Conference, 7.9.2014,  
Hersonnisos/Greece

In this presentation we focus on children's views on male and female Kindergarten teachers by reporting /analyzing findings from four case studies in public Kindergartens in Greece. Using a post-structural perspective and methodological tools such as brainstorming techniques, children's drawings and narratives, we will try to raise the following questions: How children represent male and female teachers with respect to their style of teaching? And, what kind of relationships do they develop in their daily interactions with their kindergarten teachers? Do they conceive their kindergarten teachers in stereotypical, non-stereotypical or neutral positions in relation to their gender? Are their views related to school culture or to their parents' conceptions about male and female roles in kindergarten?

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«Children's views on male and female  
kindergarten teachers»

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The training of kindergarten teachers in ECE in Greece

In Greece, the prospective teacher in ECE has to pass entrance examinations at the University level by the Department of Preschool Education (an eight semester course).

The university degree enables one to work (after passing a special pedagogical national examination):

- (a) in public or private kindergartens, attended by children of 4-6 years old and administered by the Ministry of Education,  
and
- (b) in public or private child care centres, attended by children of three months to six years old, and administered by the Ministry of Welfare.

## The research and research questions

◆ In this research, we focus on children's views on male and female teachers by analyzing findings from two case studies in public kindergartens in Greece.

The main questions are:

- ◆ How children represent male and female teachers?
- ◆ Do children differentiate male and female practices in the class?
- ◆ Do children conceive them in stereotypical, non-stereotypical or neutral positions in relation to gender?
- ◆ Are their views related to school culture, to their parents' conceptions about male and female role in kindergarten, or both?

## Methodology

◆ The question that I asked the children was: «What do they do with their teachers in the class and in the playground?»

In order to get answers I used:

- **Brainstorming technique:** Where children as a team express their views, and they are recorded on a large piece of paper.
- **Children's drawings and narratives:** Drawings, also, have been used as a fun or enjoyable way for children to express their own views, and to organize their narratives. They are a quick way to gain considerable amounts of information.

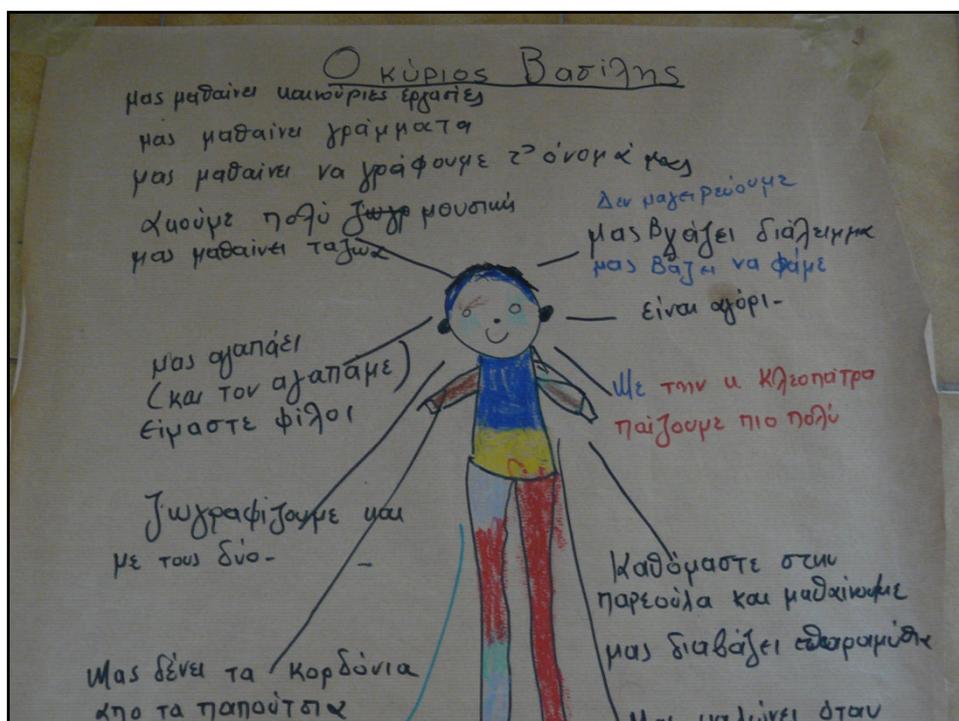
Children, in both techniques, were asked to draw portraits of their teachers and then to talk about them.

## The kindergartens in our research

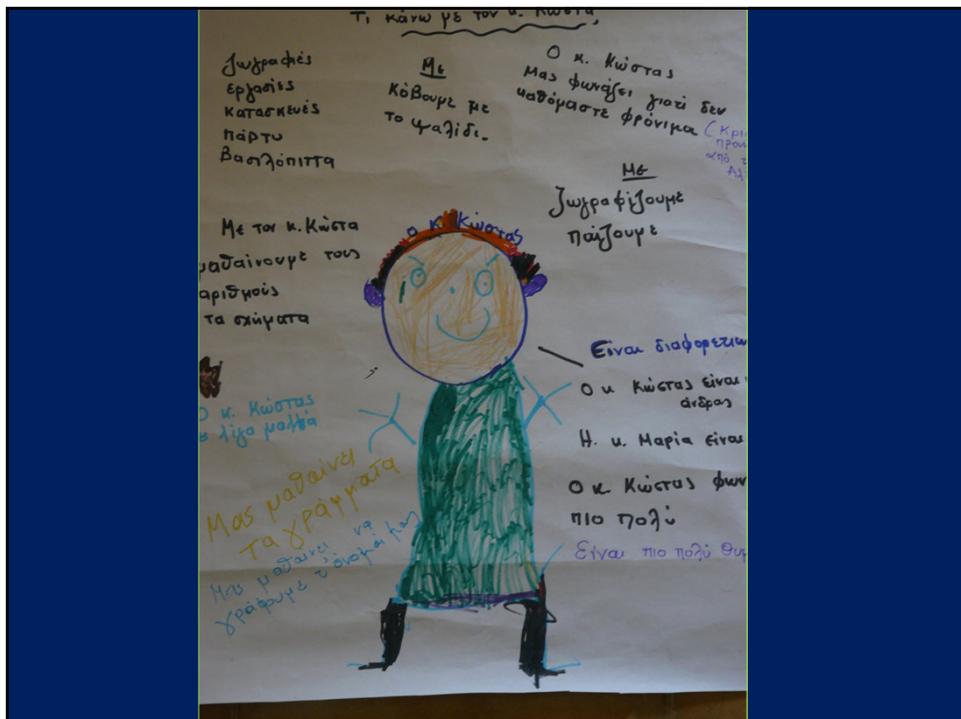
I did my research in two **full-day** public kindergartens (P.K.)

- ◆ Full-day P.K. operate from 8:00 to 16:00, having only kindergarten teachers as staff (excluding support staff).
- ◆ In the P.K. chosen, the male and the female teacher share the teaching hours during the full-day class.
- ◆ **1<sup>th</sup> case study:** 18 children, 4-6 years old (7 girls and 11 boys). Mr Bill and Mrs Kleo were their teachers (in a city of 100.000 ).
- ◆ **2<sup>th</sup> case study:** 17 children, 4-6 years old (8 girls and 9 boys). Mr Kostas and Mrs Maria were their teachers (in a village).

(The above teachers have worked in kindergartens for 10 years)



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### Analysis – First Findings (I)

Children represent their male and female teachers in the following four positions:

- (a) as producers of knowledge/teachers
- (b) as partners in play
- (c) as regulators of children behavior
- (d) according to external appearance.

As to the first position:

(a) male and female teachers as producers of knowledge

**(i) As traditional teachers**

Most of the children represent both teachers (a little more for the male teacher) as traditional

For example: «Mr Bill sits on a chair, .... speaks to us, teaches us, reads to us fairy tales, ...»,

«Mr Kostas teaches us the alphabet, the numbers ...»

**(ii) As non-traditional teachers / as partners in the learning process**

Here, the children use the verbs 'learn', 'play', 'dance', 'sing', 'draw', etc. in plural ('we learn'):

For example: «We sing, we dance and we learn the alphabet with Mrs Maria» or «We dance hoky-poky with Mr Kostas»....

(b) Kindergarten teachers as partners in the play

In both case studies, children say that they play with their teachers.

But, they play in the classroom, in the context of learning and not in the playground, during the break.

Moreover,

Male teachers play less than female teachers.

Therefore,

these positions are related to positions as producers of knowledge and not as partners in children's play.

(c) Kindergarten teachers as regulators of behaviour

A few children represent their teachers as regulators of their behaviour.

We notice that:

◆ Children say that male teachers regulate their behaviour more than female teachers.

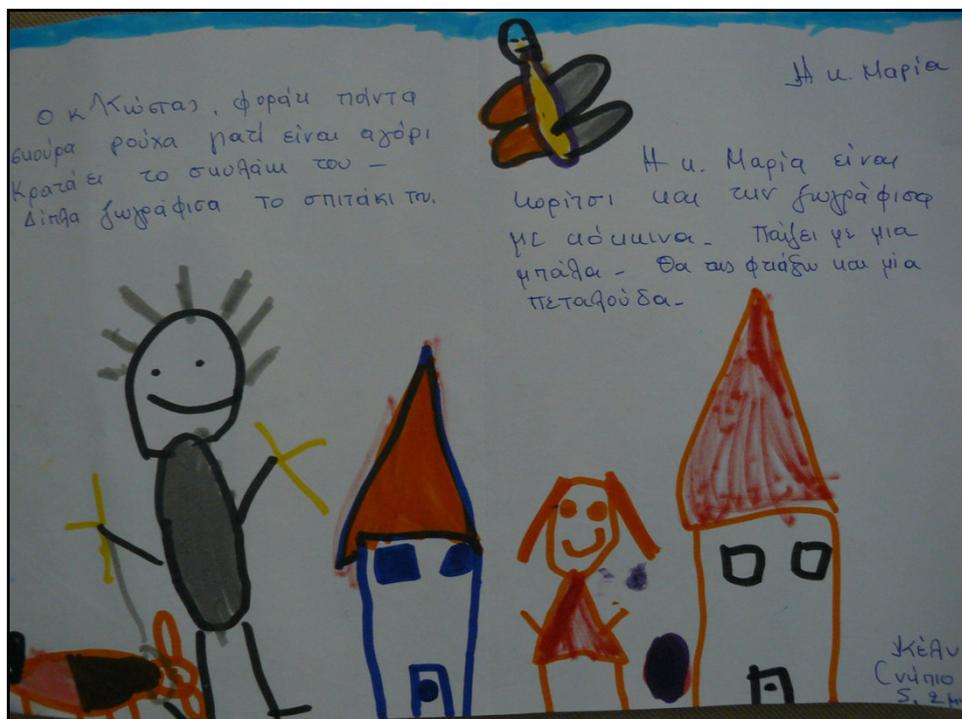
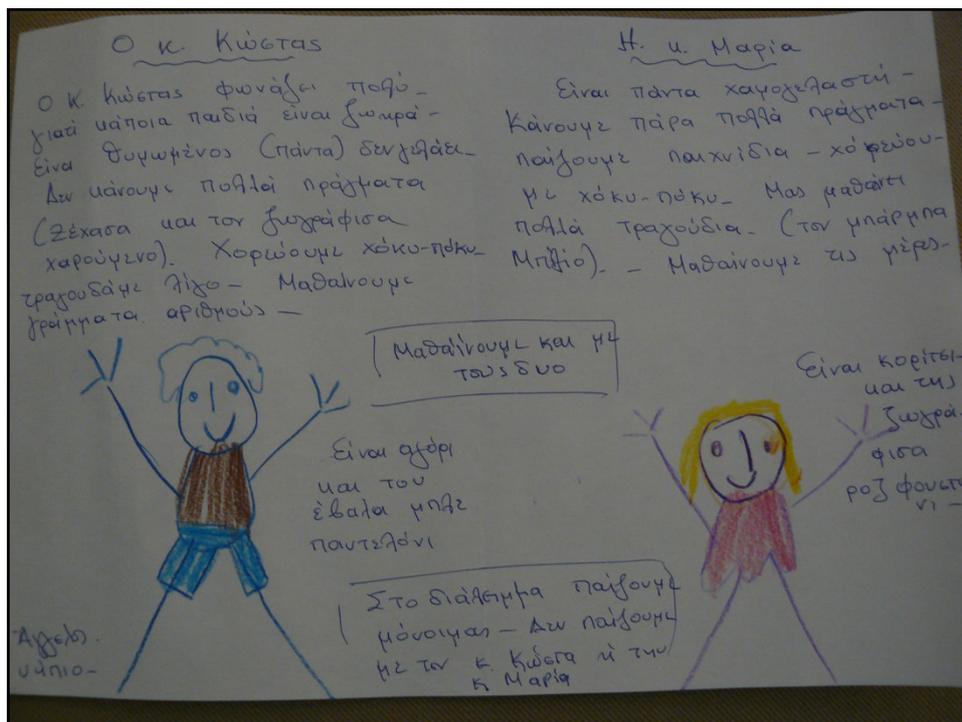
-- Especially in the 2<sup>th</sup> case study, children say that «Mr Kostas is angry all the time».

◆ Children say that teachers regulate their behaviour because of their bad behavior, e.g., for Mr Bill («Mr Bill scolds us when we fight» or «when we do foolish things»).

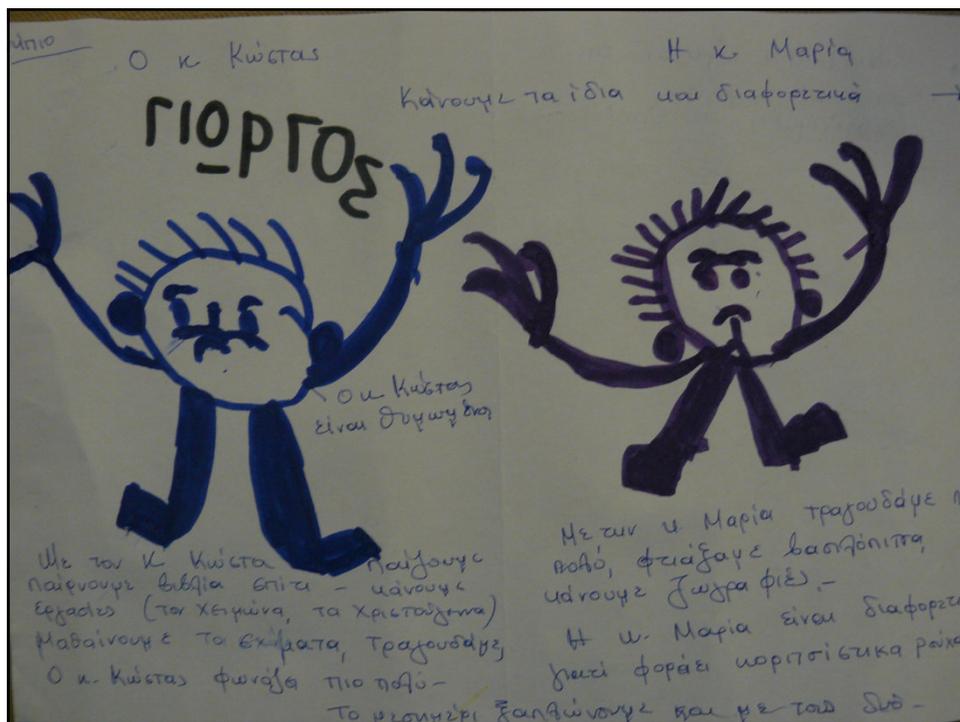
(d) Children differentiate their teachers according to their external appearance

◆ A lot of children draw their male and female teacher with different colors and hair (e.g. «I 'll draw Mrs Kleo with pink clothes, because she is a girl» or «I 'll draw them with different colours because Mr Kostas is a boy and Mrs Maria is a girl»... Especially in the 2<sup>th</sup> case study (Kostas and Maria).

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A first discussion (I)

..... *researchers and similar findings* .....

◆ Few studies have investigated preschool-aged children's views about their teachers.

These studies focused on female teachers and they highlighted that children represent them as **nurturers, participants in play activities, providers of learning opportunities and regulators of their behaviour.**

◆ Sumsion (2005), and researchers of a feminist perspective, focused on children's views on their male teacher, pointed out also, that children represent them as **teaching, playing, regulating children's behaviour...**

◆ These similar findings show that children's views on teachers are related to **School Culture ...**

A first discussion (II)

(Views related to stereotypical, non-stereotypical and neutral gender positions)

A first interpretation of children's views is that gender is not salient in an explicit way.

Three questions arise:

◆ Do children represent their teachers in neutral gender positions?

◆ Do they represent male teachers in stereotypical positions? (more «traditional», play less and regulate more their behavior than female teachers)

◆ Are male teachers really engaging in monitoring roles more than female teachers, or children simply acknowledge to male teachers the right to do it ?

Are children's views related to teachers' views ?

Having these questions in my mind, I tried to relate children's views to teachers' and parents' views.

-- Male teachers say that they are not so traditional teachers as children portray them ...

-- In contrast, female teachers say that:

- ◆ male teachers are more traditional in their teaching style
- ◆ children accept male teacher regulation/monitor more naturally.
- ◆ Nevertheless, female teachers accept the positive role of male teachers in kindergarten and support their entrance ...

Are children's views related to parents views?

● Children's parents, in both case studies, are very enthusiastic with male teachers and support their entrance to kindergarten...

● An interesting finding is that:

Although children don't seem to differentiate between their male and female teachers, most of the parents say that children bring home different experiences of their teachers: male teachers, compared to female teachers, seem to be **more significant** for children.

### Conclusions (?)

Despite the limitations of this research

Some conclusions are the following:

- ◆ Children represent both teachers in the same positions
- ◆ Children represent male teachers in social gender stereotypical positions (as traditional teachers, regulators of their behavior, non participants in the play...) (It is an acceptable model of masculinity in Greece)

Moreover,

Children's views are related to:

- ◆ school culture
- ◆ daily life/activities in kindergarten
- ◆ teachers' personality
- ◆ social gender stereotypes (parents views)

The point is that we need more **micro- and macro research** on children's views

**Thank you for your patience**