

## Teaching Modern Greek History with Multimedia & the Internet as Cognitive Tools The Emerging Prospects and Conflicts

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### Abstract

This paper highlights the emerging prospects and conflicts from the application of new technologies, primarily computer-based multimedia and the Internet as cognitive learning tools in the modern Greek history classroom. The relationship between the use of multimedia technology and the teaching of modern Greek history is a very recent one as the materials and the case studies available are limited. Nevertheless, the emphasis in the use of multimedia and the Internet as cognitive learning tools rather than instructional media tools in the hands of designer-developers for the purpose of creating prescribed linear communications and interactions in order to transmit information to the learner creates both opportunities and deficits when dealing with modern Greek history. Aspects of modern Greek history that are on purpose overlooked by the official curriculum surface when collecting and analyzing primary sources, while ideas such as the understanding of the Greek nation as an eternal entity, not a product of history are easy to communicate in a traditional linear fashion but very difficult in a constructivist learning environment when students are again asked to create history via the use of primary sources. "Some of our best thinking results when students try to represent what they know. Thinking is embedded in the tasks and functional requirements of cognitive tools" (Jonassen et al., 1993).

The case of Greece is an important one to study because of the strong emphasis the Greek educational system attaches to the teaching of Greek history from antiquity to the present for purposes of highlighting a national identity (Avdela, 2000). At the same time the official Greek state is promoting heavily the use of computer based multimedia and the Internet setting the stage for new opportunities in learning which in turn promote creative thinking that are bound to challenge the official line. Rich in contemporary history the modern Greek history classroom is an excellent setting to apply new technologies as cognitive learning tools rather than as instructional media. Additional challenges such as the particularities of the modern Greek language with its ideological and political manifestations in texts in correlation with the socio-economical and political complexities experienced by Greek political life offer additional leverage for creative thinking on part of the learners to challenge the official linear history timeline promoted in the textbooks.

## Introduction

Our current interest in computers and multi-media was preceded by a century of experimentation with precisely articulated techniques for organizing school practice, specific approaches to the design of school buildings, and an abiding enthusiasm for systematic methods of presenting textual and visual materials (Godfrey, 1965; Saettler, 1968). From the era when standard practice was the behaviorist linear approach to using instructional media to the more contemporary practice of using multimedia and the Internet as cognitive learning tools in the bibliography, it is understood that the use of computer technology to support learning has been difficult to document and quantify (Clark, 1994; Russell, 1999), leaving the role of computers in the classroom precarious. The Greek history classroom has remained mostly unaffected.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the emerging prospects and findings from the application of new technologies, primarily computer-based multimedia and the Internet in a new way: as cognitive learning tools in the modern Greek history classroom. In the past, instructional designers have been invested with these tools for the purpose of "designing" instruction – developing materials which, in effect, only constrained the learners (Perkins, 1986). The only people who significantly benefit from the design process and the use of those tools were the designers, not the learners (Perkins, 1986). The author realized that most of the benefits were reaped by the instructor-designer rather than the student who ought to be final recipient. The author then moved from the role of designer-developer for the purpose of creating prescribed linear communications and interactions in order to transmit information to the learner to the role of facilitator placing the emphasis in the use of multimedia and the Internet as cognitive learning tools. Creating student-centered modern Greek history lesson plans for high school and university level students shows how useful it is to capture and transmit these findings. When a Greek history teacher uses new media such as multimedia and the Internet as cognitive learning tools there appears to be some very interesting results regarding the depth and perceptions of the students that did not appear to have been observed previously.

## Review of Related Literature

Historically, the application of new technologies in the classroom, at first primarily of computers running basic programs and later of more advanced multimedia and the Internet, were utilized as linear instructional media rather than cognitive learning tools (Jonassen et al., 1993). When all communications in the classroom are linear and the interactions are pre-described, learning stagnates. Students appear to lack motivation; an observation made as early as the 1980s by Greek historian and Byzantinologist, Ioannis Karagianopoulos reported that "...the burden of acquiring knowledge falls upon the student. The best and wisest instructor cannot deliver if in front of him are disinterested, reluctant students..." (p. 10). Today, influenced by constructivism, the practice of using technologies as cognitive tools represents a significant departure from the traditional conceptions of the past. Rather than putting the new technologies in the hands of educational media developer-specialists that by definition must select sources they deem most important but as a result constrain the learners' learning processes, the technologies are taken away from the specialists and given to the learner to use as media

for representing and expressing what they know (Jonassen et al., 1993). Constructivism is the educational theory that states that learning takes place in contexts, and that learners form or construct much of what they learn and understand as a function of their experiences in a given situation (Schunk, 2000). The history classroom is ideal for a constructivist approach as the subject is much better understood contextually. The process of building historical knowledge, not transmitting facts and dates by using these tools, engages the learners much more and results in more meaningful and transferable knowledge (Jonassen et al., 1993). Constructivism as a movement, derived mainly from the works of Piaget (1970), Bruner (1962, 1979), Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and Papert (1980, 1983) and is considered both a psychological and a philosophical approach. In the contemporary classroom, this constructivist evolution via the use of new technologies is part a product of psychological and a philosophical discourse but also a necessity as “We live in a world where young people get most of the knowledge from screens, not pages” (Davies et al., 2003 p. 15). Using screens that are interactive and that require thinking skills rather than the ones of the past which were passive television or video screens enhances learning. When using cognitive tools in the classroom, information and intelligence is not encoded in the educational communications which are designed to efficiently transmit that knowledge to the learners. With cognitive tools, the traditional design and development processes are eliminated (Jonassen et al., 1993).

As humans, we seem hard-wired for multiple input, and constructivist use of multimedia and the Internet cater to that natural inclination. (Menn, 1993) One theory that appears to explain the depth of the perceptions the students experience when using new technologies to depict and understand the past by constructing knowledge rather than been given information is the ecological perspective by Gibson (1979). The ecological perspective consists of a form of direct realism that opposes the indirect realist based on predominant approaches to perception. When applying the ecological perspective of Gibson to educational technologies and the use of the Internet, these new elements in the classroom afford the most meaningful thinking, especially when used as tools not as linear instructional-presentation media. The use of new technologies as tools reflects in practice the movement from a behaviorist to a constructivist paradigm. (Saettler, 1968) By taking the tools away from the history instructional designers, they are given back to the history students, as tools for knowledge construction rather than media of conveyance and knowledge acquisition. Gibson (1979) proposed that we ought to always examine the relationship between the perceiver and his environment. Historical objects and important events such as battles and great inventions are understood to a perceiving student by the meaning of structured information, thus affording possibilities of action by the student. From Gibson’s perspective, perception is not created by the brain, but is a part of the world where information can be found. The process of learning is, therefore, holistic. It cannot be understood by simply analyzing human responses to attributes of technologies that carry the messages to be learned. In fact, it is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the effects of the affordances of technologies.

Today, history is seen as the medium that will lead to a better understanding of the human endeavor through an organized scientific interpretation of the chronological

narrative. New technologies such as multimedia and the Internet are expected to help depict, explain, explore and interpret that human endeavor.

In the recent past, during the years 1996-7, large sections of Greek society became familiarized with the Internet. In the first part of 1996 the doubling of Internet users was noted for the first time, while after the end of 1997 users reached into six-digit figures as the psychological barrier of 100,000 personal connections was finally surpassed (NET Letter 1996, 1997). This period was also marked by the mass introduction of large financial enterprises onto the Internet, the beginning of governmental and other institutions presence in cyberspace and the development of the first on-line Internet services in Greece (Doukidis 1999).

Around the same time the first Greek chatrooms were established, the first on-line publications and television and radio websites appeared, and the networking of the national education system also began. On the other hand, despite these steady trends of expansion, over this two-year period there remained a sense that the social maturation of the Internet had not been achieved and that Greece was still in the process of becoming "acquainted" with contemporary technological reality (Veskoukis, 1997).

Between 1996 and 1997, the Internet for the first time commanded a place within the Greek public sphere as a social technology, in other words, as a structure engaged in the social production and consumption of meaning. This imposing and demanding presence, in turn, was responsible for generating much public discourse about technology that reverberated throughout the media ecology. Newspapers and magazines found themselves searching for new tropes capable of conceptualizing and expressing the uncomfortable materiality posed by the new digital world (Bilalis, 2003).

At the same time there are currently a plethora of publishing efforts on the Internet by individuals and organizations such as the Foundation of the Hellenic World ([www.ime.gr](http://www.ime.gr) and [www.e-history.gr](http://www.e-history.gr)), the Society for the preservation of Historical Archives ([www.edia.gr](http://www.edia.gr)) and history related magazines such as "Anistoriton" (ΑΝΙΣΤΟΡΗΤΟΝ) ([www.anistor.co.hol.gr](http://www.anistor.co.hol.gr)). These efforts promote access to primary source materials for historical research by both history teachers and students.

Changes in the Greek classroom were slow. Legislators inspired by the the numerous foreign produced documentaries with Greek subtitles shown on the private-subscription only NOVA channel passed in 1993, legislation no 2121 that allowed teachers to freely record such documentaries on video cassettes or DVD disks and show them in schools without violating copyright laws.

The new technologies were used mostly for their own sake and did not penetrate the social sciences or the history classroom. The use of technology as a tool to reconstruct and interpret the past was not taking place both for ideological and for school-culture reasons. When explaining his theory of history as "interpretation," Carr compared the fish one samples in a store with the fish in the ocean (Carr, 1961, p. 46). Carr debated that a historian, as the shopkeeper, has the job of deciding which fish, which "facts," to arrange

and display as he pleases. Just as all of the fish in the ocean cannot fit into a store, neither can all of the facts fit into a presentation of history; it is up to the historian to make the presentation (Carr, 1961). The contemporary historian who teaches history, whether in college or in high school, is called upon in a similar fashion to provide much more than the delivery of the chronological narrative. This is not particularly true. In Greece, the continuity of a “Hellenic Identity” from antiquity to the present constitutes an essential component of the modern Greek national identity. (Avdela, 2000) Therefore, it is essential that the “fish samples” are carefully pre-selected and displayed appropriately. The “father” of modern Greek history, Kostantinos Papparigopoulos, wrote his classic work *The History of the Greek Natio*”, first published in 1885, with this very point in mind. The Greek nation from antiquity to Byzantium to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to him, is understood as a natural, unified, eternal, and unchanging entity (Papparigopoulos, 1992), Mirroring this idea in the highly centralized Greek school system; history teaching is organized around a detailed official syllabus (and usually a single corresponding textbook) in which the national narrative of a natural, unified, eternal, and unchanging Greek nation is reproduced in school (Avdela, 2000).

### **Findings from the Case Studies**

After examining the literature on technology integration and constructivist principles, the researcher found an apparent complementary relationship between technology and learning within a constructivist framework that seemed a sound and advantageous course of action for both teachers and learners. With these principles in mind, the author conducted numerous modern Greek history workshops in the course of two years utilizing custom-made multimedia presentations and the Internet as starting points and then asking students to create their own presentations to depict their own understanding of the material presented. The high school students were between the ages of 16 and 18 while the college students were between the ages of 18 and 21. Teachers who participated were of mixed age groups, both sexes, and different computer ability. The author motivated the teachers to ask their students to examine scanned documents, manuscripts, diaries, journals, newspapers, speeches, interviews, memoirs, documents produced by government agencies, personal letters, maps, photographs, propaganda posters and other primary material from various sources on the Internet. Most of these items were found on free websites (as subscription services on the Internet regarding Greek history currently do not exist). The students were able to download audio recordings, moving pictures or video recordings, research data, and pictures of objects or relevant artifacts such as works of art or roads, buildings, tools, and weapons.

As a first observation, when a teacher escaped the confinements of the official text book, *The foundation for teaching history in Greek schools*, it became obvious that the teacher had few if any additional sources for reference or inspiration. When using the Internet to collect information, the traditional ethnocentric concept of the nation that had been reinforced (Avdela, 2000) became the first victim when the students were familiarized with the discovery of historical knowledge from other non-standardized sources.

Another observation had to do with the evolution of the modern or Greek language that the students discovered when accessing primary sources such as recordings of political speeches or newspaper articles. In one of his most famous statements, the Irish writer George Bernard Shaw combined contemporary moral problems with ironic tone and paradoxes by stating: “England and America are two countries divided by a common language” (Pearson, 1975). In Greece, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and up to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century one could claim that Greeks were people of one country divided by the written and oral manifestations of a common language. This interesting fact is lost in the textbook because it is written in the spoken language of today. That is not the only loss since the evolution of modern Greek had the peculiar fate to be connected to a great extent with national issues, political ideologies, and academic or philosophical movements. At first, modern Greek was called upon to prove the direct linkage with classical Hellas and the Christian Byzantine Empire (Loizos, 2003). Although the pronunciation of modern Greek has changed considerably from ancient Greek and the ancient pronunciation can never be reconstructed with certainty, the orthography of the first still reflects features of the latter (Allen, 1974). Hence, the link with ancient Greece gave claims to the land and the territories occupied by the modern Greek state. The quest for a modern Greek State was adopted by Greek scholars educated in the classical tradition, which were repelled by the Byzantine influence in Greek society and were fierce critics of the ignorance of the clergy and their subservience to the Ottoman Empire. Their reaction was manifested by the promotion of Katharevousa, a language created during the early 19th century by a graduate of the university of Montpellier Adamantios Korais. The name Katharevousa means more or less "clean one" and contained archaicised forms of modern words, purged of "non-Greek" vocabulary from other European languages and Turkish and a (simplified) archaic grammar (Allen, 1974). Up until the 1920s the link with Byzantium was necessary for the realization of the “Great Idea” of liberating Constantinople and the western coast of Asiatic Turkey known to Greeks as Asia Minor. Following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the native socialists along with many literary figures inspired by the spirit of Volkgeist wished to speak and write the language of the simple people or the Dhimotiki (Loizos, 2003). On the other hand, the conservative right supported Katharevousa which was used only for official and formal purposes such as political speeches, letters, official documents, and newscasting. This long-lasting political and linguistic debate led to the development of parallel orthographies, vocabularies, syntaxes, and grammars that officially ended in the reformation of 1980, when the demotic language with the monotonic system was imposed by law (Loizos, 2003). Today the ancient Greek grammar and syntactical rules that Katharevousa had adopted and many words from Katharevousa have influenced and entered Dhimotiki during the two centuries of its existence, so that the project has left a very noticeable trace in the modern Greek language, especially the written form.

Students come across numerous publications written by Greeks living abroad, scholars from the “Greek Enlightenment” era between the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the war of independence in 1821. During this time there was a plethora of prominent Greek scholars contributing to the Enlightenment. But the two who played the most decisive roles were the ‘bard’ and leader of the national uprising Rigas Velestinlis, and the scholar and spiritual leader Adamantios Korais. The former published a number of books urging the

education of the Greeks, and with his revolutionary songs and political manifestos called the people to rise up against the Ottoman oppressor. Rigas, protomartyr Greek poet, and liberal European, was arrested by the Austrian secret police and was turned over to the Turks who tortured and executed him, while the latter, Adamantios Kora's, researcher into ancient Greek writers, inspired philologist and the publisher of classical texts, from his base in Paris (where he lived and died), tried to influence conditions in the homeland, again, by laying particular emphasis on education and the development of the language of neo-Hellenism (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2001). A website was discovered that contains "patriotic Songs of Rigas" where the songs can be downloaded and the music as much as the lyrics can be appreciated.

Certain areas in Greece remained out of Ottoman Control for several years or for the entire Ottoman occupation of Greece. Such areas were the "Agrafa" mountain range and the villages of Mani and Souli. Students access websites with conventional pictures of those areas and discuss their geographical location and the difficulty of occupying mountainous regions. Using satellite photographs, they try to compare the regions and determine the strategic advantage of those regions. When comparing satellite pictures found on the web with similar regions in other countries, several students commented that Afghanistan shared a similar history of invasion, occupation, and resistance and a very similar geography.

A great deal of organization and structure of the Greek war of independence was provided by the "Friendly Society" that was organized much like a Masonic lodge. Members took oaths and followed ceremonial recognition rituals. The students researched freemasonry on the web and discovered that

The students were trying to discover why the year 1821 was the most favorable for the beginning of the Greek war of independence. The text book offered little insight, but when researching the history of the Ottoman empire on the web they discovered that during the 18th century, hostilities between the Persian and Turkish empires were at an all time high. The Persians occupied Basra in 1776. They held it until 1779, when, the city peacefully reverted to Ottoman sovereignty. In 1821, the two empires again went to war. This conflict was resolved by the first Treaty of Erzerum in 1823. Hence, the year 1821, in correlation with the uprising of Ali Pasha, a local Ottoman ruler in the Northern part of Greece, constituted an excellent time for revolt.

Prominent Greek families support the revolution. The Kountourioti family alone offered over 2,000,000 golden coins for support. The students search the web and discover pictures of the mansion of Lazaros Kountouriotis (built in the 18th century). still standing on the island of Hydra. They plan to see the mansion first hand during an upcoming field trip to the island. The picture shows a rather humble construction which triggered discussion of the level of dwellings at the time and what exactly was considered a mansion then and now.

While searching for reports of the Greek war of independence on foreign web sites, the students discovered that a small number of Greek children (20-30) that had been

orphaned by the war were adopted by American Protestant missionaries and American officers. Most of these children became prominent figures in American society and culture. Since 1821, the Greeks had requested help from the US government. Due to the “Monroe Doctrine” that preached non-entanglement in European affairs the stance had been cautious. Many Congressmen demanded an exception in the case of Greece. These men along with other lobbyists were informally known as “Grecians”. Their reaction reflected the widespread popularity the Greek struggle had among most Americans. Despite eloquent speeches the resolution was defeated.

The students discussed the choice made by Greek political and military leader Theodoros Kolokotronis to meet the army of Dramalis at Dervenakia. Using a web site with satellite pictures, they examined the area and discovered the geographic-strategic significance of his choice.

Lord Byron enjoyed a hero’s welcome in the tortured city of Mesolongi. His poems and fame had helped the cause immensely and the people of Mesolongi overwhelmed him with actions of love and respect. Byron wrote more warm poems that once again publicized the Greek cause throughout the Western world. The students discovered pictures of the young Lord on the Internet. They also discussed his strange personal life not mentioned in the textbook. Last, they made a connection with Byron, Mary Shelley and the novel *Frankenstein*.

The battle of Navarino is listed in every naval history book as the last naval engagement of the era of sails. Never again would war ships battle using the wind. The allied ships entered the harbor and destroyed the bottled-up Egyptian fleet. The destruction of the fleet helped bring about the withdrawal (1828) of Muhammad Ali from Greece. The students researched the Internet to discover information on the port. They found out that the deepest part of Europe is off the S.W. coast of Peloponnese, near the town of Pylos. Others discovered a website that offered underwater images of wrecks belonging to the sunken Ottoman fleet, mostly destroyed due to anchors of heavy ships being slowly dragged to the bottom of the harbour. Such discoveries led to many questions from students.

### **Conclusion**

Constructivist views assert that learning is the active process of constructing rather than passively acquiring knowledge, and instruction is the process of supporting the knowledge constructed by the learners rather than the mere communication of knowledge (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Honebein, Duffy & Fishman, 1993) Truth is determined by the viability of the learners’ understanding in the real world, where viability is culturally determined.

The Greek history teacher is aware of the political significance of the primary sources and their interpretation. In a similar fashion web resources must now consider the authenticity of documents, what person or organization is the Internet provider, and whether the electronic version serves their needs.

Learners function as designers when using technology as tools for analyzing the world, accessing information, interpreting, and organizing their personal knowledge, and representing what they know to others. Students demand definitions, so let me provide my conception of cognitive tools: What you believe them to be will depend upon your experiences with them (Jonassen et al., 1993)

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