

Multicultural classroom. Designing activities with Roma children.

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Summary

The mobility of peoples and their settlement in our country has created a new dynamic in dealing with population groups with particular linguistic, cultural and social characteristics. At the same time, it brought to the fore the case of the Roma, who have been active in Greece for decades without being fully integrated into the social and educational context of the country. School is an important mechanism for participation in educational, social and cultural capital while preserving their own cultural heritage.

The purpose of this study is to design and shape educational activities and general cognitive and social culture in a school with pure Roma children, so that learning takes place through playful processes that contribute to linguistic, social, cognitive development, the cultivation of imagination and creativity, as well as the awareness of the cultural heritage of these children and the way they perceive and process the world.

Key words: Multiculturalism, education, learning, social interaction.

Introduction

The school is a social subsystem, an organised institution that performs predetermined social functions and which, together with the family, constitutes the two most important socialisation agents. The school promotes and supports student competence by providing the student with knowledge and skills that will help him/her to integrate into the employment system (Zacharia, 2018). Schools preparing students for the reality of the 21st century should take into account the fact that cultural diversity of students is the norm on a global scale, due to the intense mobility of populations due to various factors (economic migrants or movements due to military conflicts). Consequently, the aim of the school is not to contribute to transforming cultural diversity into educational inequality, but to adapt the curriculum and teaching approaches by making use of students' talents and aptitudes, as well as by strengthening their self-image and their place in the group. Particularly in this particular school, where children of Roma origin attend, we can see that each child has different conditions for learning, different interests and needs. The flexibility of the programme, as well as the playful activities that will be described, bring the children into contact with all the subjects, while at the same time focusing on cooperation with each other and with the class teacher, on the formation of a positive attitude and confidence in themselves and their abilities and, consequently, on staying and lasting in school.

Main part

The principle of interculturality-The case of the Gypsies.

In the Council of Europe report (Georgogiannis, 2015) the intercultural approach is defined on the basis of the following four elements: 1) the majority of our societies are multicultural with trends of widening multiculturalism; 2) each culture has its own specific characteristics

that must be recognized and respected; 3) multiculturalism is a potential privilege; and 4) in order to make use of the privilege of multiculturalism, interaction between cultures must be ensured without disappearing the identity of each one. The main goal of intercultural education is cooperation and harmonious and equal coexistence, highlighting diversity as a prerequisite of any learning process, thus contributing to the liberation from prejudice (Nicolaou, 2011). Consequently, education should ensure conditions for the student to develop a responsible, democratic and free personality with social and humanistic principles, to acquire strong self-concept, emotional stability and positive disposition for cooperation and self-motivation. The Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe, and in 1955 the Greek state, by legislative decree 3370/55, granted Greek citizenship to Greek gypsies for the first time. However, many gypsies in 21st century in Greece are surrounded by social exclusion. In the field of education, school attendance is affected both by the socio-economic status of the Roma and by the racism and discrimination they suffer. When a Roma child enters the school institution, he or she is required to interact with people beyond the family environment.

The outcome of this communication process will directly and indirectly affect various aspects of his/her life (Alexopoulou & Penteris 2016). Difficulties faced by a Roma child at school are usually attributed by teachers to biological characteristics rather than socially limiting characteristics. It is not enough for a family to want to send their child to school, the school must also be ready to accept children from a minority that carries a strong stigma of diversity. In recent years, and specifically for the years 2016-18, the programme "Integration and education of Roma children" has been implemented, which in action 1 includes the strengthening of access and attendance in pre-school education. Emphasis is placed on informing and raising awareness among families of Roma children about the importance of education, familiarizing them with the school culture and creating a climate of trust between school and family. All of the above combined (as we will see below) with the creation of a pleasant learning climate and with a teacher who will enhance children's communicative discourse and encourage skill development will create the supporting factors for Roma children's progress (Benekos, 2007).

The role of the school and the teacher.

Myers (1992), as cited in Kyrezi & Siatra (2015) found that school is a multicultural environment that integrates children with different cultural, linguistic, social backgrounds already formed by their families. Many of the children crossing the school threshold for the first time are expected to speak in an unfamiliar language, relate to a large group of children their age, engage with abstract symbols and generally do things that are not part of their normal routine. The inability to deal with any differences will make the new experience difficult.

The educational landscape of our country(Greece) is changing under the influence of two main factors: the under-birth rate of the Greek population and the ever-increasing presence of foreign students. The coexistence of all these children, but also of Roma children with different social characteristics, is shaping a new reality with changes such as the

modernisation of the educational system, the adoption of the model of intercultural education, the exploitation of the educational and social capital of all students, the revision by the teacher of the attitudes and perceptions already formed and the application of new pedagogical methods. According to Banks (1981), as cited in Zacharias (2018) in order to maintain a positive environment in the interculturally oriented school all aspects of the school must be examined and transformed including teachers' policies and attitudes, teaching materials, assessment methods, counselling and teaching styles. The aim of the school should not be to assimilate and eliminate diversity but to promote the preservation of student heterogeneity. It is essential that changes in programmes are accompanied by the use of flexible child-centred methods, methods that give students an active role (Dimitriadou & Efstathiou, 2008). Collaborative methods, work plans, games, drama, role-playing are particularly conducive to changing students' perspectives and are a basic prerequisite for understanding, understanding and communication inside and outside the classroom (Kessidou, 2014).

Banks & Tucker(1998), as cited in Zacharias (2018), inform that teacher and student learn together, share their culture and construct new knowledge in the classroom. Consequently, a "good" teacher is not only one who has adequate mastery of his/her subject, but also one who is aware of the social reality surrounding him/her, perceives social changes in time, is characterized by empathy, especially in terms of understanding the problems of others arising from the situation they experience, and cultivates reflection on the "normalities" that have been taken for granted for many so far (Kessidou, 2014).

Every child has different interests and needs, but every child is capable of learning. In the case of school exclusion of Roma children, the exclusion is reinforced by the low social background of the family and the illiteracy of the parents. The aim of the teacher is not to promote today's culturally diverse pupils into tomorrow's marginalised adults, but to understand, appreciate and recognise alternative forms of language and culture. Moreover, for the proper management of the situation in the schools of the 21st century, it is considered necessary for the teacher's continuous training in intercultural education, with the aim of professional empowerment and the implementation of educational activities in the school, which in turn will serve as a training and reflection for him/her, so that he/she can observe his/her classroom and identify any problems in his/her daily practice.

Designing educational activities with Roma children in a classroom.

Roma children move and form their identities between two cultures and two languages. They grow up speaking Romani at home and in their community, while in their daily interactions with the wider community they speak Greek. The conditions of Roma



upbringing, as well as the school's low and lowered expectations of these children and the blaming of these children for their poor performance, lead to their exclusion from the school community. Teachers should demand

success from all children, as all children regardless of their environment have a readiness for learning (Mytakidou, 2011). The school can act as a unifying mechanism to ensure quality and equitable education for Roma children by offering them more and equal opportunities to participate in the learning process, a program that is constantly redesigned and based on flexibility and creativity (Tressou & Mytakidou, 2015). Based on the above (since 2012 when we took over this class with a pure Roma population), we tried to use the talents and aptitudes of the young students, to enhance their self-image, as well as through play and the flexibility of the curriculum to engage the children in all subjects and in learning through interaction and collaboration, not only with each other as a group, but also with parents and other schools.



Figure 1.The children know

themselves and their bodies through mirror play

Figure 2. Activities in the space



Figure 3. Representation of the Greek-Italian war.



Figure 4 .I place the body parts in the right place.



Figure 5. Painting the "Moonwalker"



Figure 6. Following the lines!



Figure 7. Parents participate in the Christmas celebration.



Figure 8. The P made with the body of children **Figure 9.** Creating freely!



Figure 10. I place myself and my friends inside the board.



Figure 11. Dog race - who will be the first to place the snowman parts.

All the activities are designed together with the children, for the children, while through free play, music, painting, IT, storytelling and the playful approach to letters and numbers, the

children enjoy every day, enhance learning, cooperate, while at the same time participating in European projects. By using the body and utilising all the materials, objects and spaces in the nursery, we engage the children in all subjects in a way that is meaningful to them.

Conclusions.

In order to ensure that Roma children have more and equal opportunities to participate in the learning process, a supportive learning environment with an emphasis on intercultural principles and human rights, which takes into account the practices of all those involved in the process, as well as an emphasis on the use of alternative learning methods, especially play, is needed to make learning more interesting and enjoyable and in turn contribute to improving the experiences of Roma children during their stay at the school.

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