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TEAM-in-Europe: Greece - Case Studies of Good Practice in Greece

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Introduction

Multiculturalism is a term, as with many others, that has often been criticized as lacking one fixed meaning. Initially employed in post WWII Canada and specifically in the late 1950s, since then its use spread to other countries. But when people use the term they often mean different things. The rise of the multicultural movement in Western countries in the past four decades has often stirred up a vivid discussion among theorists as to the way a state and specifically the education community should deal with the phenomenon of multiculturalism.

To talk about multiculturalism we need to first need to look at how 'culture' is perceived, as it is an integral part of the concept of multiculturalism. Here too many definitions abound. Kymlicka (1995) is among those who see culture's importance in the lives of human beings as stemming from its serving as a context for individual choices, while others see it as constituting a person's identity (Margalit & Halbertal, 1994) or as Löfgren (1981: 30) sees it, it is 'the common world of experiences, values and knowledge that a certain social group constitutes'. In other words culture, determines the way a person perceives his or her position in the social and natural worlds, as well as everything that takes place within a person's life.

Multiculturalism as we perceive it is concerned with the principles and practices of 'accommodating diversity' in ways that guarantee interconnectedness, without loss of the essential elements in the process. Thus, a basic objective of multiculturalism is not the promotion of minorities as such, but the evolution of a society in which diversity is recognized as a legitimate and integral facet of the society. Multiculturalism in itself has a transformative power which requires 'identification with a growing circle' (de Swaan, 1994). If we accept that multiculturalism is intrinsically good and valuable, then diversity itself is a virtue and should be seen as such and maximized within the educational arena.

We argue that multicultural education necessitates dealing with local, European and global diversity, but which at the same time must give all three aspects the recognition they are due.

Purpose

Teachers currently find themselves adrift in a seemingly endless sea of school reform literature and policies. Moreover, the debates about educational issues do not always positively influence many classroom practitioners, as the discussions tend to remain on a theoretical and/or epistemological level. Practitioners face additional challenges, such as inadequate training, lack of resources, and huge bureaucracies, which drain precious energy from the primary goal of opening students' minds (Spinthourakis & Katsillis, 2003).

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Within the Teacher Education Addressing Multiculturalism (TEAM) in Europe project we have worked to identify teacher innovations and actions which exemplify good practices in the area of multiculturalism, education and teaching in an increasingly culturally diverse society. In this paper we briefly outline some concepts related to multiculturalism, culture and education and then describe the background of several of the best practices identified in Greece during the duration of the TEAM in Europe project (2003-2005). In the second part of the paper we briefly outline reflections on our participation in the TEAM in Europe field visits to two of our project partners located in Iceland and Poland respectively.

Part I - Background

The Greek Ministry for National Education and Religious Affairs implemented a system created to address the educational needs of social groups with a particular social, cultural or religious identity in 1996. Cross-cultural education was until this point not overtly present in Greek national educational policy.

In schools that have been labeled *cross-cultural*¹, the standard curriculum is adapted to meet the students' specific needs. It should be noted that out of the 4 primary schools used as examples of 'good practice' only one has been labeled *cross-cultural*, while the rest have ethnic minority students, but do not meet the posed criteria to be described as such. Despite this lack of official status as cross cultural schools, efforts are being met to meet the specific social, cultural and educational needs of these students.

Although Greece has traditionally been a very ethnically and religiously homogeneous country, and to a certain extent remains as such, many efforts have been made in the last ten years towards the direction of sensitizing educators and school authorities in issues pertaining to multicultural/intercultural education (Spinthourakis et al., 2005). The formal Greek educational system appears to be generally supportive of multiculturalism, in principle if not always in actual institutionalized practice.

Many of the school based and implemented good practices were realized in the Flexible Zone (Evelekti Zoni – Ευέλικτη Ζώνη) program in which the project methodologies are used. A specific consideration for the application of a cross-thematic approach is included in the newly produced and implemented national cross-thematic curriculum. In the case of the Flexible Zone, no single subjects are taught. Teaching is based on the investigative and participatory methodologies that maximize the use of cross-thematic concepts. This programme consists of two to four teaching hours per week and is used for carrying out projects and activities chosen by the individual classes. The themes of these projects may not belong to a specific subject but they should be of interest to the pupils. The Flexible Zone programme is considered in the cross-thematic curriculum text as a suitable way to sensitize the educational community and promote a cross-thematic and holistic approach to learning. This Flexible Zone program has already been

¹ A school can be labeled *cross-cultural* when repatriated Greek and/or foreign students account for a minimum of 45% of the total student body.

experimentally applied for three years with a high degree of success in the academic years 2002-2005 in many schools (more than 3000). More specifically, it might be relevant to mention that the evaluation of the pilot application of the programme resulted in:

- A percentage between 60-68 % of the participant teachers believing that apart from the fact that the project based methodology promotes investigative learning and teaching, the cultivation of better relations among the various interested groups in school (teachers, pupils, parents etc) is promoted;
- The Flexible zone being found to contribute to the development of a creative and cooperative schooling climate (<http://pi-schools.gr>).

Flexible Zone is an innovation introduced into the Greek Educational system in the early 2000's. From the academic year 2005-06, the Flexible Zone is a part of the formal innovations available for implementation by all primary schools in Greece.

Briefly, it is based on the following pedagogic initiatives:

- Increased degrees of freedom to the class teacher.
- Greater involvement and active participation of students in the planning and execution of their own learning.
- Promotion and connection of school knowledge with language, arithmetic and social literacy skills.

Greek Best Practices

The six good practice case studies in connection with teacher training, knowledge and practice in relation to multicultural education in Greece were identified within the framework of the TEAM research project and involve schools and institutions. More specifically, four of the multicultural projects are involved with primary schools. One case involves the University of Ioannina Laboratory of Studies on Emigrant Hellenism and Cross-cultural Education and the final one has to do with one of the three Regional Offices of the Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies, specifically the Patras-Achaia Office.

Many of the best practices can be found in initiatives undertaken by individual teachers. After careful review of best practice candidates, the following six cases were briefly outlined.

Good practice 1: 'A School Open to the World': is the way the First Primary School of Akrata, a rural school in West Peloponnese (Akrata) is often referred to. The student enrollment is currently at about 130. The majority of the pupils are White Greek children and the only ethnic minority group currently represented is Albanian. Some of the Albanian students have recently immigrated to Greece while others are second generation.

Addressing multiculturalism at the school is generally done through the prism of culture. The main idea is 'teaching in multicultural classes through literature and culture'. This practice is based on student-teacher initiative and uses cooperative methodologies with a

content that reflects cultural representations mainly through literature. ICT is used to support the whole procedure that is shared among a number of schools in Greece and abroad. More specifically the goals of the school are to offer teachers:

- The opportunity to experiment with new teaching methodologies for reading and social literacy.
- Access to children's literature as a vehicle for traveling beyond the confines of school based knowledge.
- An 'audience' for the children's work so that motivation is increased towards their involvement in the 'knowledge games'.
- The opportunity to publish reviews', pamphlets and brochures outlining the highlights of their 'acquaintances' with literature.
- Help and support for the organizing and presentation of school cultural events.

Good practice 2: Cross-Cultural Education in Greece - Regional Offices of the Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies (IPODE).

The dual role of IPODE and its decentralised offices is the promotion of Greek language and culture among both expatriated Greeks and foreign immigrants or other vulnerable groups and the implementation of the principles of cross-cultural education. Towards this end, the IPODE is entitled to:

- Design curricula,
- Produce teaching material,
- Train teachers and other education stakeholders and personnel,
- Supervise the implementation of local educational programs and to reinforce it,
- Evaluate pedagogically the impact of educational interventions in the domain of cross-cultural education,
- Conduct research,
- Counsel the state about novel interventions and innovations as related to cross-cultural education.

There are many different types of activities undertaken to meet the goals of the IPODE. Examples of the activities the Patras decentralized office has executed include, a) Education stakeholders training event entitled 'Current trends in cross-cultural education', b) Organization of Primary and Secondary Education Principals and Local Education Office Directors of training meeting on the subject 'Modern Approaches in the Cross-cultural Education'. Particular attention was given to aligning the school reality with the requirements of living in a modern multicultural society. c) School children's drawing competition entitled 'All different, yet all equal', and d) Children's Rights Day Event: production of calendars with the best art work. Best art works used as illustrations for the 2006-07 Calendar developed to help provide funds for UNICEF. All of these attempted to provide hands-on work related to the subject.

Good practice 3: The Laboratory of Studies on Emigrant Hellenism and Cross-cultural Education (EMAΕΔΕ), University of Ioannina, Department of Primary Education:

The EMAEΔE functions as a nationally authorized university research laboratory. It is administratively situated in the Department of Primary Education of the University of Ioannina which is located in North Western Greece. In brief its aims are the research and promotion of education of Greeks of the diaspora and the emigrant Greeks as well as cross-cultural education.

Selected examples of ongoing and recent EMAEΔE activities that represent best practices include seminars and symposiums with themes such as: a) 'Immigrant Reception by Civil Services and Cross-cultural Communication', b) 'Cross Cultural Didactics and Social Representations', and c) 'Viability and School Programs of Study' (Durabilite et programmes scolaires). These and other workshops tend to be presided over by an international group of specialists from Greece and several other European countries. The participants are afforded the opportunity to participate in discussions and role-playing situations taken from actual events, either deriving from the experiences of the workshop leaders and/or their own experience.

Another EMAEΔE best practice is its symbiotic relationship with the National Pagoniou Center for Children's Welfare located about 50 kilometers northwest of Ioannina. The Center was originally established in 1923 as a residential center to provide for the care and education of refugee children who were identified by social services as being in need of specialized educational services and a support infrastructure. EMAEΔE's relationship with the Center can be characterized by the following activities. EMAEΔE provides professional consultancy and training services to the Center's personnel and staff. The consultancy and training services provided may include but are not limited to issues related to evaluation and assessment, intercultural communication, intercultural psychology, intercultural didactics and pedagogy. It is also conducting a study on the current status of the Center, its character and needs in order to be a viable and effective residential center in the 21st century with respect to meeting the needs of the students who reside at the National Pagoniou Center for Children's Welfare. The study is also looking into the efficacy of the Center's becoming an Intercultural Education Center. Perhaps though, in terms of multiculturalism and teacher education, the most innovative aspect of their relationship is that through EMAEΔE, undergraduate students of the University's Department of Primary Education can complete their Supervised Student Teaching Practicum at the residential Center. Students registered for the course Intercultural Didactics may apply for the 30 student teaching practicum slots available at the Center. If accepted, each of the three groups of 10 students (30 in total) goes to the Center for one week (10 student teachers per week over a period of three weeks during the fifth semester of their undergraduate studies). The student teachers live at the Center and observe and conduct their student teaching within the local two-room primary school's classes. They live in the Center's student residences alongside the institutions residents and spend their time socializing with the children and youth as well as the institutions' personnel. They serve as study mentors and tutors to the residents so as to help them prepare for their assignments for the next school day. The student teachers also plan and conduct studies on related themes aligned with the students and the personnel of the Center.

Good practice 4, 5, and 6:

The final three good school practices have one common 'factor' of influence and we will focus on this factor. The three schools involved are under the purview of the same educational counselor/school advisor. We feel that this element is very noteworthy especially with respect to the concept behind the TEAM project which looks at the issue of multiculturalism and teacher education; as the educational counselor/school advisor appears to be an important catalyst needed to initiate innovations within schools where teachers might otherwise not have the 'time' needed to become involved in self-education.

In the context of an overall democratisation of Greek society and education, the educational-pedagogical aspect of the role of the school inspector (which was first established in 1895) led to their replacement by school advisors (Euridyce; Vamvoukas, 1982). The new position's role has as its main emphasis the provision of guidance and support of teachers in their pedagogical and teaching functions (Papagueli-Vouliouris, 1999). Their responsibilities and tasks are concerned with consultative pedagogic guidance and with the promotion and evaluation of the quality of the educational work in schools. Each school advisor/counselor oversees a number of schools (usually around fifteen), which he/she has to visit on a regular basis. The positions for school advisors/counselors are advertised every five years. Applicants are selected with specific reference to academic and professional criteria. To apply they must be currently full time permanent teachers and/or principal/headmaster with exceptional experience and advanced academic qualifications that usually do not include a doctorate.

'Dr. KP', the school advisor for our three last examples of best practices, represents a very small portion of Greek school advisors/counselors in that she holds a doctorate in education. Additionally, she is considered to be a very good researcher maintaining close ties with the University of Athens' Department of Primary Education, specifically the Sectors of Comparative and International Studies in Education and Psychology of Education. It is also worth noting that she held the position of the principle-headmistress at the Intercultural School of Athens (Alsoupolis) prior to being selected as a primary school advisor/counselor. Her field of specialization is 'Pupils critical thinking and self-evaluation'. Within this framework, she promotes, among other things, educational innovations and teacher initiatives.

The role of the School Advisor with particular reference to the impact multiculturalism has on the Greek Educational System at the classroom level includes:

The School Advisor helps by promoting initiatives to broaden didactic knowledge in dealing with heterogeneity and differences, especially in a preventive and flexible sense. In this way teachers can be helped to learn how to react with flexible methods as well as with a flexible curriculum in regard to children with linguistic and culturally differentiated origins before the difference or the problem develops. Thus, the teachers can work to prevent rather than correct problematic behaviours and inappropriate teaching methodologies and teaching strategies. This can be seen as contributing to helping develop an awareness of the role of integration towards inclusion. They also initiate collaboration with other schools to exchange information and carry out cooperative research projects. Finally, they can be instrumental with respect to the

management of knowledge within and across schools through the structuring of co-operation and planning of instruction in formal meetings of the school team. This last point enables teachers to have access to and to store knowledge and competencies with respect to dealing with heterogeneity and differences in case of the presence of a multicultural school population. Promotion of co-teaching can be seen to have a similar effect.

Our 'best practices' School Advisor, 'Dr. KP', is a school system based example of someone who best exemplifies how to be an effective resource for teachers in dealing with multiculturalism in schools. Three of her schools where she has served as an activity catalyst are the 104th Primary School of Athens, the Intercultural school of Alsoupolis and the 107th Primary School of Athens. All three are inner city schools. Examples of the activities that have been developed in conjunction with these schools (respectively) are the projects entitled as follows: a) Can All Students Be Successful Problem Solvers in their Individual ZPD, b) Learning the History of the place of our origin with project methodologies and, c) Learning with a cross-curricular approach-Teaching history and culture through geography.

One of the fundamental aims of the School Advisor's activities with respect to multiculturalism is to promote programs that will help create bonds to support ethnic minority students who risk becoming marginalized. The projects aim at motivating the pupils as much as possible. Through the projects, activities are organized to help teachers come up with more innovative methods of teaching reading and arithmetic, for example. These efforts also place emphasis on helping the students feel at ease with their identity and that of others in their school. The projects also seek to bring the parents and school institution closer. Parents have also been encouraged to be active members of the school endeavors.

The selected best practices share a fundamental characteristic. All the activities, projects, collaborative enterprises entered into and seminars have a strong emphasis on the 'praxis' element but with a clear link to the theoretical. The objective is for the participants to return to their worksite equipped with tangible skills and relevant information to better deal with the realities of working with immigrant populations.

Part II - Reflections on best practices observed in Poland and Iceland

One of the rewarding aspects of the TEAM project was the opportunity to visit three countries - Poland, Iceland and England. After random selection, the Greek TEAM members were assigned the aforementioned countries where we would have the opportunity to visit schools and institutions chosen as 'best practice' examples. More specifically, in September 2005, we visited the Reykjavik Comprehensive College and the River School in Reykjavik. Later, in November, we visited Poland and more specifically, the *TAK* Primary School of the Society of Alternative Education in Opole and the *One World Association* in Poznan. In early 2006 we visited the Longwood Primary School within a suburban area of north London and Springfield University Initial Teacher Education programme located in a suburban town in the central/east midlands of England.

We present our reflections on the first two countries. On the surface and compared to Greece, Poland and Iceland appear to be quite different, but in essence, they share a common core, which lies in the fact that multiculturalism, albeit in its infancy in these countries, is very much a fact that all three countries have had to face in the last few decades. Visiting both countries provided the opportunity to see first hand the philosophy and the approaches both countries have adopted in dealing with this new reality of multiculturalism.

In Reykjavik, the first visit was to River School, which is one of the reception primary and early secondary schools for immigrant children. The director of the immigrant department at the school has designed her own website with information about the countries her pupils have come from. What makes the director's work so commendable is the fact that recognizing the lack of support her immigrant students have had she designed created and worked on the website initially on her own but then with the support of her students. Her zeal for working with the immigrant students was pervasive throughout our stay at the school. She clearly acts as the 'voice' of all students in that she tries to cultivate awareness among the students, teachers and her local community alike, a task which is definitely a challenge in a country and an educational system, admittedly progressive, but with no prior experience with immigrants. Finally, it appears that the students have embraced this website and log on to it at any given opportunity. This website is their 'window' into the world where they are able to explore aspects of their own ethnic background and share them with the other immigrant students and the Icelandic students of the school and beyond.

The experience at the Reykjavik Comprehensive College was equally rewarding. This is a technical and comprehensive upper-secondary school and was the first school at that level to offer immigrant students a course in Icelandic as a second language (ISL). This gave us the opportunity to compare the manner in which second language teaching was conceived and executed in Iceland with the way it is implemented in Greece. This school has a relatively large population of adolescent immigrants. One could say that both the academic and social programmes this school hosts foster a climate of mutual understanding and respect for 'the different'. The teachers at that school spoke of the many new challenges they had to face in dealing with the new situation. The aims of the New Citizens Programme run by the school were 'to prepare pupils for further education in Icelandic colleges' and 'to systematically build up students' Icelandic vocabulary in various areas.' Additionally, it aims 'to teach students about Icelandic society'.

In Poland, an opportunity was given to visit the TAK school, a non-profit non-public school, which implemented the '*Let's Meet the Different – Let Them Not Be Strangers*' programme, a multicultural educational programme developed by Weigl and Maliszkievicz (1998). This programme has a very ambitious aim which is to, a) help the children become more knowledgeable about national minorities in Poland and to, b) help reduce the psychological distance and negative attitudes toward these groups. In order to achieve the aforementioned aims put forward by its developers, the students were given the opportunity to meet immigrants outside the school (as the school had a very small in-house immigrant population) and focus on the similarities rather than the differences between people of different ethnic backgrounds. Many simulation activities were carried

out and students were encouraged to combat stereotypes and prejudices. It should be noted that this school was the idea of a Polish - and not immigrant - parent who was not comfortable with the type of education offered to her children through mainstream state education. She believed in alternative and more progressive education, so she managed, with the help of other concerned parents, to start this school. These efforts appear to have borne fruit and now this school has achieved pedagogical and social goals that other schools look up to in the community of Opole.

The second experience in Poland was connected to the *One World Association*, a non-profit organization, which 'carries out the mission of promoting peace and mutual understanding by means of international and national voluntary programmes and education'. The Association was established in 1992 and from the very beginning has been acting as a part of the international organization Service Civil International (SCI). The Association is very active despite the fact that it has very little funding by means of governmental grants. This association runs many educational programmes, one of them being 'The Different - The Equal' devoted to human rights, refugees, national and ethnic minorities. This programme aspires to 'raise awareness of the above-mentioned issues in Polish society, especially among young people'.

One could draw several parallels between Greece, Poland and Iceland. As mentioned earlier, these countries are quite different in all aspects including their geographical location, their history and culture, and their socio-economical level. However, the issue of multiculturalism has proved to be quite universal and transcends all boundaries in the way it is dealt with in these countries. In essence, teachers in all instances complain about the lack of support from the state and the fact that they believe they are alone on this 'journey'. In all three countries, there is a certain level of prejudice and lack of respect with reference to the immigrant students. These attitudes are exhibited not only by other students but also by parents and surprisingly even some teaching staff members of the schools.

The striking similarity in all three countries is not that much on the level of policies and official programmes introduced by the state and the educational authorities, but the efforts made by the school and more notably by certain members of the teaching staff.

Conclusion

In preparing this paper, it became quickly clear that we grow by sharing, discussing, and finding the appropriate strategy for our respective situations. Reviewing the entire scope and sequence of the TEAM-in-Europe Project has given us a better understanding of what education stakeholders have, do and can ultimately do with respect to understanding and promoting multiculturalism in education.

What becomes apparent from the facts presented is that there is a need for researchers to continue to study the various multicultural components and experiences that influence teachers' perspectives and teaching strategies as to be able to develop clearly thought out and well designed continuing and in-service teacher education programs. It is also imperative that more focused research on the subject of teacher intercultural competence, school curricula (Alachiotis & Karatzia-Stavlioti, 2006) and teaching practices be conducted and shared among the European member states (Spinthourakis, Karatzia-Stavlioti & Roussakis, 2006). It is incumbent on educational decision makers to take

note of the need to research the status quo not from above but from the grass roots and upon this foundation to design and implement effective programs. Such programs are needed if we are to fulfill the goal of achieving effective integration and an awareness of the promise of cultural diversity in a multicultural Greece and Europe.

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