

Intercultural interactions in compulsory education in Chios island

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Summary

The purpose of this paper is to explore the interactions of basic members of the educational community in compulsory education in Chios island. The sample came from 166 native and foreign students. The findings revealed the positive intercultural interaction among the members of the educational community, along with the cautiousness for intercultural interaction from a small part of the students' population. The results highlight the need for further development in intercultural education. Key words: Interculturalism, social networks, compulsory education

Introduction

The integration of foreigners in society is a process that creates inequality, social discrimination and xenophobic-racist reactions, especially in the time of economic crisis (Androutsou & Askouni, 2011:10). Today, Greece ranks among the countries with the highest percentages of foreigners (about 10%) among the EU Member States (Zografakis et al., 2009:12). Most immigrants come from Europe (80%), the rest are 14% Asians, 3.2% Americans and just 1% Africans. (IMEPO, 2009:47). Greece is the only country in the EU, where a nationality of immigrants (Albanian) exceeds 50% of the total of foreigners who live in the host country (Baldwin-Edwards,2004).

The foreign students who participated in Greek education were 41,455 in 1995, 93,650 in 2001 and 130,114 in 2003 and thereby the reduction of the students' population that occurred in the 1990s ,was equalized by the big influx of foreign/repatriated students in Greek education (Katsikas & Therianos,2004:246). During the school years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 the number of foreign students came up to 66,187 in Primary schools and 36,001 in Junior High schools and 70,594 in Primary schools and 36,28 in High schools respectively (National Statistical Service of Greece, 2009: 88). Chios in total of 53,408 residents, according to the 2001 census, has 2,630 immigrants (5% of the total population of the island), (Zografakis et al., 2009:56-57).

The coexistence of native and foreign students within the school led to the formulation of new educational policies which aimed at the smooth integration of foreign students in the educational system of the country. The demand for intercultural education resulted from the need for cooperation and coexistence of different cultural identities within the same society (language, religion, ethnicity, culture) and mainly because of the necessity of management of otherness at school (language, religion, culture, way of life) (Gkotobos, 2008). Intercultural education is

not only directed to minority groups but to the entire education, that is to native students as well (Gkobaris, 2001), focuses more on the interaction among the cultures in question, mainly on the two-way flow of cultural elements (Gkotobos, 2001: 43-44) and refers to relationships and to the renegotiation of existing relationships (Katsikas & Politou, 2005: 23).

So, in the early '80s "Welcome classes" and "Supporting tuition" classes were established. These were designed to help students become members of the Greek school and social environment (Dafermakis, 2007: 106). Important point of the educational policy is the integration of the conception for the utilization of the language and the cultural identity of the «other» students in the context of the Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework (Dafermakis, 2007: 110).

Despite the educational interventions, however, which aim at the facilitation of the immigrants' integration into the educational system, the presence of many immigrants in classes is still considered as a problem. The immigrants' children often face several problems at school (social stigma, Greek language learning difficulties, marginalisation). Teachers, by surveys that have been done, are not ready to manage mixed classes, they feel unprepared and are often frustrated. As a result teachers are led into stereotypical interpretations and negative behaviours (Androutsou & Askouni, 2011: 19. Cummins, 2011).

Students' social networks (parents, friends, teachers) play a dominant role in conceptualizations and in exposed behaviours. The analysis of social networks and their adding value in social life emphasizes the promotion of socialization of individuals, the influence of their identity and behaviour (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993), the strengthening of interaction (Putnam, 2000) and the usurpation of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1985).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the intercultural interactions of basic members of the educational community in compulsory education in Chios island.

Methodology

Sample

The sample came from 166 students. 60 of them (36,1%) were students in the 6th Grade, 52 (31,3 %) were students in the 1st year of Junior High School and 54 (32,5 %) were students in the 2nd year of Junior High School. A number of 43 boys and 40 girls participated per team. 98 students come from urban environment (59%), while 68 come from the countryside (41%). As far as the subgroup of foreign students is concerned, 64 come from Albania (77.1%), while in smaller percentages they come from Bulgaria (4.8%), Russia (3.6%), America (3.6%), Germany (1.2%), Romania (2.4%) and other countries (Poland, Georgia) at a rate of 7.2%. At a number of 83 foreign students, 34 were born in Greece (41%), whereas 49 in their country of origin

(59%). Cautious sampling of all social classes was applied for the selection of the sample.

Research tools

The questions of the questionnaire used in this survey were related to demographic characteristics (Gender, Age, Nationality, Class, School performance, Educational level of parents) and students' views on integration in the educational and social environment and were based on relevant findings of the International and Greek bibliography and were also based on the experience of researchers in intercultural topics.

Findings

As regards to the groups that students choose, 68.7% of native students responded that their groups consist of both native and foreign students (mixed groups) while the others (31,1%) replied that their friends are natives only. On the other hand, 68 foreign students (81.9%) replied that their groups consist of both natives and foreigners, 13 foreigners (15.7%) replied that their friends are natives only and 2 foreigners (2.4%) replied that their friends are only foreign students.

Making up of the group		Natives-Foreigners		Total
		Natives	Foreigners	
Only natives	Number	26	13	39
	Percentage	31,3%	15,7%	23,5%
Natives and pupils that come from other countries	Number	57	68	125
	Percentage	68,7%	81,9%	75,3%
Only pupils that come from other countries	Number	0	2	2
	Percentage	,0%	2,4%	1,2%
Total	Number	83	83	166
	Percentage	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 1: Making up of the group (p=0,26 > 0,05)

Both foreign and native students replied that the persons who can help them more in a difficult moment are their parents (50.6% foreigners and 73.5% natives). Secondly, foreign students wait for help for their brothers/sisters (22.9%) and then for their friends (16.9%). For natives after their parents, their friends were their second choice (13.3%).

		Persons who can help you					Total
		Teachers	Friens	Parents	Brothers/Sisters	Relatives	
Natives	Number	1	11	61	7	3	83
	Percentage	1,2%	13,3%	73,5%	8,4%	3,6%	100,0%
Foreigners	Number	0	14	42	19	8	83
	Percentage	,0%	16,9%	50,6%	22,9%	9,6%	100,0%
Total	Numbers	1	25	103	26	11	166
	Percentage	,6%	15,1%	62,0%	15,7%	6,6%	100,0%

Table 2: Persons who help ($p=0,13>0,05$)

In the question about the individuals who they would trust more, 67 native students(80.7%) replied that they would trust natives (people of the same origin with them) and 16 students(19.3%) replied that they would trust and people with different origin. As far as foreign students are concerned, 49 students(59%) replied that they would trust people of the same origin with them and 34 (41%) replied that they would trust and persons with different origin.

Persons who you would trust		Natives-Foreigners		Total
		Locals	Foreigners	
Persons with the same origin with me	Number	67	49	116
	Percentage	80,7	59%	69,9%
Persons with different origin with me	Number	16	34	50
	Percentage	19,3%	41%	30,1%
Total	Number	83	83	166
	Percentage	50,0%	50,0%	100,0%

Table 3: Persons who you trust ($p=0,02<0,05$)

In the sentence, "I think my teachers/professors show more interest in natives compared to students with different origin", 62 native students(74.7%) replied that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree", 14 students (16.9%) replied they "neither agree nor disagree" and 7 students (8.4%) replied that they "strongly agree" and "agree" . As far as foreign students are concerned, 38 students (45.8%) replied that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree", 25 students (30.1%) replied they "neither agree nor disagree" and 20 students (24%) replied they "strongly agree" and "agree" that teachers show more interest in natives.

Natives-Foreigners		I think my teachers/professors show more interest in natives compared to students with different origin					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Nativess	Number	39	23	14	2	5	83
	Percentage	47,0%	27,7%	16,9%	2,4%	6,0%	100,0 %
Foreigners	Number	24	14	25	10	10	83
	Percentage	28,9%	16,9%	30,1%	12,0%	12,0%	100,0 %
Total	Number	63	37	39	12	15	166
	Percentage	38,0%	22,3%	23,5%	7,2%	9,0%	100,0 %

Table 4: Teachers' interest ($p=0,03 < 0,05$).

In the sentence, "my classmates and my teachers/professors respect my language, my religion etc.," 57 foreign students (68.7%) replied that they "strongly agree" & "agree" (that is their classmates and teachers respect their diversity), 17 students (20.5%) replied that they "neither agree nor disagree" and 9 students (10.8%) replied that they "disagree" (that is they do not respect their diversity).

My classmates and teachers/professors respect my language, religion e.t.c.	Frequency	Percentage	Total of all
Disagree	9	10,8%	10,8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	17	20,5%	31,3%
Agree	24	28,9%	60,2%
Strongly Agree	33	39,8%	100,0%
Total	83	100,0%	

Table 5: Respect of foreigners' language and religion ($p=0,024 < 0,05$)

In the sentence, "my parents often communicate with my teachers, in order to be informed about my progress" 70 native students (84.3%) replied that their parents often communicate (agree & strongly agree) and 12 replied that they "neither agree nor disagree" whereas as far as the foreigners are concerned, 36 students (43.3 %) replied that their parents often communicate with their teachers (agree and strongly disagree), 24 students (28.9%) replied they "neither agree nor disagree" and 23 students (27.7%) replied they "disagree" or "strongly disagree".

Natives-Foreigners		My parents often communicate with my teachers/professors and are informed about my progress					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Natives	Number	0	1	12	39	31	83
	Percentage	,0%	1,2%	14,5%	47,0%	37,3%	100,0%
Foreigners	Number	2	21	24	29	7	83
	Percentage	2,4%	25,3%	28,9%	34,9%	8,4%	100,0%
Total	Number	2	22	36	68	38	166
	Percentage	1,2%	13,3%	21,7%	41,0%	22,8%	100,0%

Table 6: Communication between parents and teachers ($p=0,00 < 0,05$)

As far as the same opinion is concerned, that is "my parents often communicate with my teachers and are informed about my progress" specifying the analysis between first and second generation immigrants, the following is observed : As far as the first generation immigrant students are concerned, 18 students(36.8%) state that their parents do not often communicate with their teachers ("disagree" or "strongly disagree") 16 students(32.7%) state they "neither agree nor disagree" with this view and 15 students(30.6%) state that their parents often communicate with their teachers ("agree" or "strongly agree"). As far as the 2nd generation immigrant students are concerned, 5 of them (14.7%) state that their parents do not often communicate with their teachers ("disagree" or "strongly disagree"), 8 students(23.5%) state they "neither agree nor disagree" with this view and 21 pupils(61.8%) state that their parents often communicate with their teachers ("agree" or "strongly agree").

Foreigners		My parents often communicate with my parents/professors and are informed about my progress					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
2 nd Generation immigrants	Number	0	5	8	16	5	34
	Percentage	,0%	14,7%	23,5%	47,1%	14,7%	100,0%
1 st Generation Immigrants	Number	2	16	16	13	2	49
	Percentage	4,1%	32,7%	32,7%	26,5%	4,1%	100,0%
Total	Number	2	21	24	29	7	83
	Percentage	2,4%	25,3%	28,9%	34,9%	8,4%	100,0%

Table 7: 1st and 2nd Generation Immigrants; Communication between parents and teachers ($p=0,02 < 0,05$)

Discussion

The relationships that the children develop with children of the same age, the acceptance by the group of their classmates and the positive comparison with them plays an important role in their smooth psychosocial and emotional development. (Manos, 2000). The majority of students choose "mixed" groups. 2/3 of the natives have mixed groups, while 1/3 of the natives associate only with natives. The positive fact is that most native students "include" in their groups and foreign students despite the prejudices that are sometimes heard for foreigners. The intercultural contact in the classroom, eliminates prejudices, reverses the negative "image" for foreigners and allows the integration of these in groups of natives. The native classmates are the "significant others" to whom the foreigner student counts on in order to be "recognized" by the classroom group and in order to gain self-confidence and positive self-image. To a large extent, foreigners (82%) have "mixed" groups, as the company with natives is for these the "Passport" for recognition and acceptance by the host society, while it increases their self-esteem as well. The 2-group relationships are very important in creating feelings of acceptance or rejection of the foreign student's identity. The groups offer their members a social identity, which can contribute positively or negatively to their self-perception (Papastamou, 1999: 160-161). Maintaining relations with their own people, on the one hand, and maintaining relationships with members of the broader society (native), on the other hand, are primary elements in the selection of the immigrants' strategy of acculturation.

However, there is also an important part of native students that choose only natives in their groups, a fact that needs to be more investigated. The immigrant student can find points of convergence with native students. There are common values that unite the different "we" with "others", there are common challenges, common problems and common goals (Androutsou & Askouni, 2011: 26). The fact that the overwhelming majority of native students replied that they would trust more people with the same origin with them, shows that there is still a strong element of nationality to native students, having some reservations for their foreign classmates. On the other hand, foreigners are less cautious and more open to issues of trust towards natives.

Most foreigners (2/3) believe that their classmates and their teachers respect their language, religion and culture. However, there was a number of foreign students (about 1/3 of the sample of foreigners) who replied that natives do not respect their language, their religion, or were cautious to give a specific answer. According to Nickolaou (2000: 48) on the one hand, the foreign students seek to be similar to native students, but on the other hand they have to confront with his family control or the community he belongs to. Therefore, children experience a dilemma at school. Their language stigmatizes them and it often creates negative emotions. So, foreign students often adopt a defensive attitude in the new environment (Nickolaou, 2000: 52).

A part of foreign students (about 1/4) believes that their teachers and professors show more interest in native versus foreign students, while there are many (1/3 of the sample of foreigners) that do not take a clear position or cannot answer. Most of the foreigners however (about half of the sample) believe that their teachers do not "discriminate" them from their classmates. This is reinforced by the fact that foreign pupils have mixed groups (with natives) and as it is known interpersonal contact blunts stereotypes and prejudices that are heard for social groups (i.e. Albanians). With regard to 1/3 of the sample of foreign students who seem to have a negative to neutral position, they agree with Cummins' position (2011: 147) that teachers sometimes appear cautious in bilingual education and in order to fulfil their role, indirectly force the different students to downgrade their identity and to accept/adopt the dominant identity and culture. The integration of immigrants in society, of course, is a process that creates inequality, social discrimination and xenophobic-racist reactions, especially in times of economic crisis, (Androutsou & Askouni, 2011: 10). The interactions between teacher and student (foreigner), and student (foreigner) with classmate (native) are a decisive factor in success or failure at school.

The collaboration of teachers with family, as it has been reported, enhances the chances of students' success and could provide solutions to many problems (Gkiouzelis, 2007: 279). The survey shows that parents of native students communicate more frequently with their children's teachers in comparison to parents of foreigners. This may be due to difficulties in using the Greek language, with resulting feelings of shame or fear in any "shortages" and misunderstandings during communication with the teacher or in view of the expectations they have for their children. The family of the second generation immigrants has the ability to move in both social-cultural systems (country of origin-host country), because of their greater flexibility, while the family of the first generation immigrants generally turns towards the systems of the country of origin (Damanakis, 1993: 56). Several researchers conclude that second-generation immigrants tend to be more oriented towards the host country in comparison to first generation immigrants (Pavlopoulos et al., 2009: 405).

In conclusion, it is revealed that through the interaction of native and foreign students stereotypes, xenophobic perceptions and attitudes that stigmatize and isolate them are weakened or demolished. Even though teachers appear unready to meet the demands of multiculturalism, they seem to be "open" to different cultures and to eliminate discriminatory elements and the strong national element of the past. Foreign students and their families seem to adapt more and more to Greek society, as 2nd generation immigrants seem to be integrated into the host society to a large extent. In times of crisis like the present, anti-immigrant views appear that implicate and deprecate them. The interaction and the powerful two-group bounds that have developed at school and in the wider social environment can be strong cohesive forces that will reduce and pacify the hostile invasion of such practices.

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