

Intercultural Education & Practice in Greece: Needs for Bilingual Intercultural Programmes¹

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ABSTRACT During the last ten years, Intercultural Education has gradually emerged in Greece as a new type of education. This paper attempts to focus on several aspects of the implementation of the Intercultural Education in the Greek context. Specifically, it highlights and addresses the following issues: 1. The multicultural situation in Greece and the discourse on Intercultural Education. 2. The Law 2413/96, entitled Greek Education Abroad, Intercultural Education and Other Provisions, as well as the official regulations related to the establishment and functioning of reception and tutorial classes. 3. The difficulties and obstacles that are present in the current educational system, as well as teachers' and pupils' needs. 4. The language policies associated with the Greek educational system, as compared to the language policies of England and Australia. Finally, it reflects on matters of social justice and equality of opportunities for the new student population of Greece.

Multiculturalism in Greece

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Halkiotis, former Special Secretary of Education for Expatriated Greeks and Intercultural Education of the Greek Ministry of Education, as well as the Sector of Primary Education Studies at the Greek Ministry of Education and Religion for providing me with the statistical data relating to the representation of foreign, repatriated, Muslim and Roma students in the Greek school system.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of communism re-opened borders closed for two decades by the Cold War. With the disintegration of the Iron Curtain, the traditional flow of peoples from East to West resumed on a relatively large scale (Jacobs & Gundara, 2000). During the last twenty years, significant numbers of people with various ethnic identities have entered Greece. In the 1980s, these people were mostly repatriated Greeks, while during the last decade it has been primarily foreign immigrants who have migrated. Multiple terms have been used to describe ethno-cultural differences, such as “migrants”, “minorities”, “repatriates”, “immigrants”, “emigrants”, “refugees” or “foreigners”. Though each of these terms has its own semantic content, their common element is that they divide people into categories based on their cultural background. Moreover, these cultural differences emphasize deviance from what it is regarded as *the norm*.

The multicultural puzzle, which defines the structure of contemporary Greek society, is also reflected in the data that refer to the number of foreign and repatriated students that attend Greek schools (Frangoudaki & Dragonas, 2000). It has become clear that Greek society has not been prepared to accept this new population of children. Greece, contrary to other countries, such as England, Australia and Canada, which accepted a relatively large number of immigrants some decades ago, for the first time has had to tackle this novel and irreversible situation.

The first official record of the number of repatriated and immigrant students in Greece was presented by a scientific team under the supervision of Professor Drettakis for the school year 1995-96. The latest official records refer to the school year 1999-2000. These were published by the Special Secretary of Education of Expatriated Greeks and Intercultural Education. We will more closely examine these data in the next section.

Repatriated and foreign students in the Greek educational system

Table 1² shows both the number of foreigners and repatriated Greek students in Greek primary (excluding Nursery schools), middle and high schools for the school year 1998-1999. At this point, we would like to emphasize that there might be some variations in the data presented below due to the different sources from which they were obtained³ (including independent research, the Ministry of Education and Religion, the Special Secretary of Education of Expatriated Greeks and Intercultural Education, the National Statistical Organization etc.). This is something that often leads to confusion. From the school year 2001-2002 onwards, the *Institute of Education of Expatriated and Intercultural Education* has undertaken to collect and present all relevant data. However, it was difficult to access the most recent data. Nevertheless, according to a very recent article that was published in the newspaper “Kiriakatiki Kathimerini” (27-07-03), the percentage of foreign students in schools is now approximately 10%. These data stem from the Institute of Education of Expatriated and Intercultural Education for the previous school year. This is relevant to the percentages presented in this article.

² The statistical data provided in Table 1 stem from a table used by Drettakis (2001) in his article: Children of repatriated and foreigners go beyond the 5% of the student population, *Contemporary Education (Synchrony Ekpedeusi)*, Vol. 119, pp 39-44. These data derive from the Sector of Primary Education within the Greek Ministry of Education.

³ Numerical data are presented in the following book: Paleologou, N., & Evangelou, O. (ed) (2003), *Intercultural Pedagogy. Educational, Teaching and Psychological approaches*, Atrapos. The data derive from the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and the Special Secretary of Education of Expatriated Greeks and Intercultural Education. See also: Nikolaou, G. (ed) (2000) *Integration and Education of foreign students in Primary School. From “homogeneity” to multiculturalism*, Greek Letters (Ellinika Grammata), tables with the number of foreign and repatriated students in Greek Primary Schools for the period 1995-2000, pp 73-84.

REPATRIATED & FOREIGN STUDENTS, AND INDIGENOUS POPULATION IN PRIMARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS, SCHOOL YEAR: 1998-99					
SCHOOL YEAR	REPATRIATED	FOREIGN	REPATRIATED & FOREIGN	GREEKS	TOTAL NUMBER
Primary Schools	27,687	28,426	56,113	590,446	646,559
Middle School	11,976	5,761	17,737	362,372	380,109
High School (Academic stream)	1,880	609	2,489	136,933	139,422
High School Vocational stream)	2,443	955	3,398	262,393	265,791
TOTAL NUMBER	43,986	35,751	79,737	1,352,144	1,431,881
<i>Source: Drettakis (2001: p 40)</i>					

Table 1: Data for repatriated & foreign students and the indigenous Greek population, school year 1998-99 (Source: Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003)

Table I reveals an important decrease in the number of repatriated and foreign students in secondary education (Middle and High Schools). There appears to be a dramatic decrease during the transition from one school level to the next. This drop is much more extreme than among Greek students.

The data highlight that there is a serious problem with school “drop-out” rates. This can partially be explained by the fact that many repatriated and foreign students work from an early age in various part-time activities and professions. As a result, they often abandon their schooling at an early stage, sometimes without having completed their compulsory studies. We assume - even though there are no official statistical data - that the attendance of repatriated and foreign students in Tertiary Education, compared to that of the indigenous population, would be almost negligible.

REPATRIATED, FOREIGN STUDENTS, MUSLIMS, ROMA AND INDIGENOUS POPULATION IN PRIMARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS, SCHOOL YEAR: 1999-2000							
SCHOOL YEAR	REPATRIATED	FOREIGN	REPATRIATED & FOREIGN	MUSLIMS	ROMA	GREEKS	TOTAL NUMBER
Nursery School	1,530	5,882	7,412			142,559	149,971

Primary School	17,918	40,653	58,571	7,065	8,500	377,400	451,536
Middle School	8,693	13,373	22,066	1,623	1,500	136,933	162,122
High School	2,499	3,102	5,601	250	250	393,201	399,302
TOTAL NUMBER	30,640	63,010	93,650	8,938	10,250	1,050,093	1,162,931
<i>Source: I.P.O.D.E. (1999-2000)</i>							

Table 2: Data for the repatriated, foreign students and the indigenous population, school year 1999-2000 (Source: Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003)

Table 2 shows an increase in the number of repatriated and foreign students compared to a year earlier. Those attending nursery school represent 5% of the total population of children attending nursery schools in our country. For primary schools, this percentage is even higher: 16.4%. (for a further discussion of these statistics see: Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003). School drop out rates are especially high for Roma children after primary school.

SCHOOL YEAR	REPATRIATED	Former Soviet Union countries	North Epirus	FOREIGNERS	Albanians	REPATRIATED & FOREIGNERS
1995-1996	19,559	11,691	5,658	10,634	7,083	30,193
1999-2000	17,918	11,831	4,251	40,563	8,500	58,571

Table 3: Foreign and Repatriated students in Primary Schools

Table 3 reveals that there was a significant increase in the number of repatriated and foreigner students from 1995- 2000. (9.7%). Albanians are by far the largest group of immigrant students in the country. Their numbers increased by 400% from 1995-2000, which represents 80% of all foreign students in Greece. This sheds further light on the drop out rates mentioned earlier.

In general terms, the majority of repatriated and foreign students reside in urban areas, though many also reside in rural areas where they attend small rural schools with no special educational provisions.

SCHOOL YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF CLASSES	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS
RECEPTION CLASSES	500	8,537
TUTORIAL CLASSES	701	4,957

Table 4: Distribution of repatriated and foreign students in Greece in Reception Classes and Tutorial Classes (Source: Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, Sector of Primary Education Studies)

Table 4 discusses access to reception and tutorial classes. In total, 20.5 % of foreign and repatriated students attend these classes.

The official discourse on Intercultural education in Greece

It was not until 1996 that Greece took its first serious institutional steps towards addressing the issues relating to multicultural classrooms, through a law that we will refer to as ‘Law 2413/96’. The establishment of an "Office of Intercultural Education" within the Ministry of Education, and the aforementioned law, entitled "Greek Education abroad, Intercultural Education and other provisions" represented the first official recognition by Greek authorities that diverse communities had specific educational needs. The Law consists of eleven chapters, of which only one refers to the Intercultural Education in Greece. In this chapter there is a general reference to the aim of Intercultural Education, its content and its organizational structure. More specifically, the legislators propose the establishment of “intercultural schools”. These are to be a new type of school to be attended by mostly repatriated Greeks and foreign immigrants.

Despite legal measures to address the effects of immigration in schools, however, in practice immigrants are subject to assimilation pressures, since none of the governmental measures that have been implemented encourage the maintenance of one’s ethnic identity (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003). Additionally, Greek schools, as

Mouzelis (1998) has pointed out, do not cultivate critical dialogue or the exchange of ideas between different cultures and religions. This is considered to hinder the integration of foreign students into Greek society.

The main concrete attempts to address diversity needs relate to the creation, in 1999, of “Tutorial Classes” or “Reception Classes”, as referred to in Table 4. “Tutorial Classes” provide a couple of hours of after school tuition for minority children. Though the amount of tuition that students receive varies per school, in practice the amount of time spent in such classes (often in small groups) can vary between 3 and 10 hours per week. Students in ‘Reception Classes’ receive 5 to 10 hours of instruction per group. The amount of hours will depend on how many years the student has attended school, how many years of remedial instruction s/he has followed and to what extent he/she is linguistically competent. Absolute beginners receive 10 hours of instruction per week. During the rest of the school day they attend mainstream classes and they are expected to acquire the language through classroom immersion, which is tailored to the linguistic level of Greek students.

Further legislation, put forward by Greek Ministry of Education and Religion (G.M.E.R.) in 1996, in collaboration with Greek Universities and financed by the European Union, supports three large educational programs. These relate to three specific groups of students:

- Muslim Children
- Repatriated and Foreign Students
- Gypsy Children.

Mr. Halkiotis (2000, pp. 49-50), Former Special Secretary for Education of Greek Diaspora and Intercultural Education at the G.M.E.R., and one of the legislators, has recently commented that: “The G.M.E.R. attempts to ‘open new roads’ through these programs”. He has also emphasized that the Ministry is committed to:

- adding an intercultural dimension to the educational system;
- helping students enjoy the opportunities education offers to their utmost, so that later on they may participate actively in society, while at the same time maintaining their own cultural identity;

- promote exchange among students to bring to the surface the special and significant cultural elements they carry with them and thus enrich their knowledge and experience through a constant process of interaction - a form of *'communicating vessels'*.

The second phase of the implementation of these programs started in 2003. In practice, implementation of such programs means that Greek educators will have to work harder to confront the difficulties associated with the actual implementation process. These difficulties relate mainly to a lack of language skills that frequently leads to school failure.

Research has shown that difficulties at school and the home lead to large drop out rates among migrant students. (Paleologou, 2000). Though problems related to housing and unemployment affect many in Greek society, they are more profound among minority groups (Gundara, 2000). The implication of such findings is that intervention also needs to take place at this level. Moreover, the academic achievement of both minority and indigenous students is very poor in schools characterized by a high percentage of repatriated Greeks and foreign immigrants (Paleologou, 2000).

Current provisions and obstacles in schools – teachers' needs

Research in Greece is showing that the arrival of migrant children in Greek schools is accompanied by adjustment difficulties in school, at least when they first arrive (Georgas & Papastilianou, 1993; Hatzichristou, 1995; Paleologou, 1999, 2000). In general, it has been found that children who enter a new environment or one different from their family environment experience difficulties both with respect to achievement and psychosocial behavior (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983; Cowen & Hightower, 1986, 1989; Ladd et al., 1987, 1990, 1996). This is especially the case for children who migrate from another country (Ladd & Price, 1987; Hatzichristou & Hopf, 1992, 1993; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Paleologou, 1999, 2000). It has also been found that the self-esteem of foreign students is quite low (Leondari & Kyridis, 1996). Though some of these problems can be

attributed to language issues, many are related to other issues, such as: (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003).

- one cause of student ‘failure’ is the pressure they receive to assimilate. There are few if any measures that encourage the maintenance of one’s ethnic identity (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003);
- many textbooks in Greece are ethnocentric (Damanakis, 1997, Paleologou, 2000, 2001);
- counseling and psychological support services in schools are insufficient. They need to be extended to help all students overcome their emotional and social difficulties (Paleologou, 2000);
- reception and tutorial classes can be improved, by including Intercultural Education principles. Teachers need to learn how to manage diversity and use appropriate teaching methodologies in the classroom (Gundara, 1994, Paleologou, 2001).

Although recent legislation provides for the teaching of Greek as a second or foreign language to immigrant students, in practice this only occurs in specific pilot schools within the framework of larger experiments in the area of Intercultural Education programs (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003). Research has shown that teachers experience a certain amount of anxiety and feelings of ‘inadequacy’ when working in tutorial or reception classes, also because there are too few bilingual textbooks that are non-racist or prejudiced in their content.

There is clearly a great need for teacher training with intercultural dimensions. Such training should include teaching methodology, as well as psycho-pedagogical techniques, that help teachers work more effectively in multicultural classrooms and deal more appropriately with their immigrant students’ difficulties and problems (Paleologou, 2000, 2001). Many authors have emphasized the importance of teacher training to combat racism and practice educational policies that promote social justice in schools (Zeichner, 1997, Gundara, 1994).

Needs for a ‘bilingual intercultural model’

If we examine the bilingual policies of our country in its schools, and assess them according to the criteria put forward by Fishman (1976), we must conclude that bilingual education is basically absent at the moment. We do see the implementation of limited bilingual programs in a few experimental reception and tutorial classes (for example in Menidi in Athens). In these classes, repatriated students from the former Soviet Union receive instruction in their mother tongue through experimental books created by the Centre for Intercultural Education at the University of Athens. However, when they attend mainstream classes they are only taught in Greek. Transitional bilingualism programs (Fishman, 1976) are not to be found at all in Greece. These are programs in which mother tongue teaching is used in the first classes of primary school. Gradually, mother tongue teaching decreases and is replaced by the official language of the host country.

On the whole we can conclude that repatriated and foreign students do not appear to have the same opportunities as their indigenous classmates (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003), even if we move beyond language issues. Immigrant students, especially those who enter the Greek educational system at a later age, face unequal opportunities in their studies, since their educational and cultural capital is completely ignored or considered to be inferior. Educational exclusion of immigrant students is a possible consequence, which can lead to social exclusion later if not dealt with. (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003).

As mentioned before, Intercultural Education principles offer a guiding light to address the problems we cite above. The basic principles of an Intercultural approach include: awareness and respect for cultural variation, solidarity with 'others' and the elimination of nationalistic ways of thinking. However, institutional changes are required to translate intercultural principles into classroom practice. This applies especially to the principle of multicultural awareness and the elimination of the nationalistic ways of thinking. Such principles can be taught effectively within the framework of humanistic education.

In sum, the Greek educational system is facing new challenges and will have little choice but to seek solutions through adequate provisions and school practice. It is for

these reasons, according to Mr. Halkiotis, that the basic pillars of the Greek educational process should be (2000, p. 49):

- A non-ethnocentric consideration of various cultures.
- The recognition of the importance of other cultures by treating them as equal.
- The elimination of stereotypes of any kind and respect for diversity.
- The promotion of tolerance, which constitutes a fundamental role of social cohabitation and at the same time an important moral virtue.
- The reinforcement of intercultural communication.

Seven years after the implementation of the Law 2413/96, research has revealed that Intercultural Education programs are needed in schools that address the needs of all students, whether they have immigrant or indigenous backgrounds. Such programs will serve to help all students develop their intercultural abilities, attitudes and attributes. These will be needed by all of us to survive in the modern era of globalization. Furthermore, Intercultural Education programs will promote basic democratic values and the human rights of all (Paleologou, 2000, 2001).

The application of a Bilingual Intercultural Education “model” in Greek schools, with appropriate bilingual textbook teaching methodologies, is a matter of urgent concern. Such models will be especially effective if they integrate cooperative learning into their methodology. Cooperative learning methods have been shown to decrease the gap between immigrant student achievement and that of indigenous students. (Batelaan & Van Hoof, 1996) They also put human rights, equal opportunity and social justice into practice

The role of ICT in modern multicultural classes should also not be ignored. The development and use of appropriate educational software that can be used to teach Greek as a second or foreign language is of great importance. The educational value of ICT for modern school classes cannot be underestimated, also where its contribution to Intercultural Education is concerned.

The comparison of the Greek situation to England and Australia

In the next section we will examine how the Greek situation compares to the one we find in England and Australia, especially pertaining to their language policies. Both countries have a longer history of educational policies that have addressed the multicultural nature of classrooms (dating back to the 1960s).

We see that there are few provisions for mother tongue teaching in England, also with respect to the availability of appropriate materials and venues where such teaching could take place. English has remained the basic language of teaching. Furthermore, there are few bilingual programs to be found in the public education sector, apart from some minor experimental projects that lack continuity from one educational level to the next (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003).

Australia is a country of immigrants and therefore many immigrant communities have been able to develop strong organizations to communicate their educational needs. Consequently, the educational reality is one that we would define as pluralistic (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003). In Australia, various provisions help foreign students learn their mother tongue and also maintain their cultural identity. Such provisions are apparent in the Curricula, appropriate instructional materials, the variety of support services, as well as the number of qualified teachers in this area. (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003). In general terms, we can draw the following conclusions (Paleologou & Evangelou 2003, p. 224-232):

- The initial assimilative tendencies associated with educational and language policies were similar in all three countries (Greece, England and Australia). Progressively, the policy of integration was adopted and later a shift to a pluralist model took place.
- Theoretically, the institutional frameworks that regulate educational policies are quite flexible - they are based on democratic principles. However, in practice, many of the expected provisions have not been applied or only minimally.
- Early on there was a focus on intensive teaching of the official language, while various programs for teaching one's mother tongue developed much later on.
- Immigrant children initially attended separate classes or even different schools during their first years of arrival.
- The decade of the 1980s was characterized by a series of positive developments in England and Australia. The National Policy of Languages was applied for the first

time in Australia in 1987. A year later, the National Curriculum was instituted in England for the first time in history. The changes in these two countries had much in common with respect to improved provisions for immigrant students, 'teaching English as a second language' and the teaching of other languages. Similar developments took place later in Greece.

- The English and Australian educational systems are quite decentralized. However, England and Wales do not have a language policy for foreign immigrant students - this is only the case in Australia.
- Judging by the number of languages offered in local schools, one can see that the possibilities of learning one's mother tongue are more likely in Australia, less likely in England and almost non-existent in Greece.
- The character of Greek educational policies is assimilative, while in England the educational policies have adopted a multicultural and antiracist character. However, one can notice the remaining influences of previous assimilative orientations in England. Contrary to this, Australia has adopted a multicultural approach, recognizes and celebrates cultural diversity, promotes pluralism, and encourages the learning of languages other than English.
- Despite the promotion of bilingual programs (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003), all three countries give the highest priority to the teaching of the official language.

Conclusions

Now that Greece has officially adopted Intercultural Education, what does this imply for classroom practice and the attainment of educational objectives? The answer is obvious given our research and that of others: until now, until this point Greece treats foreign students as monolingual. It ignores their linguistic background and it teaches them with books that are intended for Greek children in Germany or the United States.

Especially in comparison to developments in England and Australia, Greek educational policies have not yet been heavily influenced by the principles of Intercultural Education. Greek policies do not sufficiently address the challenges of

multicultural classrooms. One of the consequences can be the exacerbation of discrimination and xenophobia in schools (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003).

In widening our scope from Greece to a larger geographical area we must be very cautious to avoid falling into the trap of euro-centrism, thereby building walls around what is considered 'European'. Such a tendency can bias the way we view non-Europeans and threaten our global identity.

We must stress the positive steps taken in recent years by the Greek Ministry of Education to address the changing student body, especially since this is a new phenomenon. It is to be hoped that the few educational programs that support mother tongue learning and the development of corresponding instructional material will increase considerably in the near future. It is important that bilingual programs continue after the completion of primary education. Intercultural Education constitutes the most appropriate model for educating immigrant students, and this should be supported throughout the entire period of a child's linguistic growth, thus beyond adolescence (Paleologou & Evangelou, 2003).

In conclusion, the effective implementation of Intercultural Education requires first and foremost adequate and concrete educational programs. Otherwise lofty discussions will not be translated into reality. A key factor will be to successfully cultivate a school ethos that supports the implementation of effective Intercultural Education practices throughout the entire school community. Greece has a long way to go, but it is on the right path.

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