

Democratic school governance for inclusion: a whole community approach:



Understanding the process of refugee children's inclusion in the Greek educational context

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I. The target group: Identification

POPULATIONS ON THE MOVE

the European “refugee crisis”

Migration and asylum seeking: major political issues since the 1990s. Since 2015, they have been intensified by the Syrian war.

The majority of refugees passing through Greece come from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Palestine, Algeria, Congo and other countries rocked by war and violence (IOM, 2017).



I. The target group: Statistics

- During 2015 over 800,000 refugees crossed Greece from Turkey through the Eastern Aegean Islands.
- Decrease in arrivals since March 2016, due to an agreement between European Union and Turkey.
- There is no clear picture as far as the number of refugees in Greece is concerned, considering that there are everyday arrivals and departures (an estimation is 60,000).
- Most of them are temporarily residing in 40 camps.
- It is estimated that the number of refugee minors in Greece amounts to 20,000 (36.7% of refugees).



I. The target group: Research

The literature comprises mainly of historical, ethnological and folklore studies. Refugee populations are divided to expatriates, repatriates and allogeneic refugees.

- Studying mainly Greek-speaking refugee populations.
- Limited research on the recent refugee flows, so far.
- No research on education of refugees or refugee children.
- Some research on second generation students.



II. Education policies: State

The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (MERR), after appointing a Scientific Committee to suggest measures towards refugee children's education, has founded (for children aged 6-15):

- Afternoon reception classes for children living in camps (14.00-18.00) called "Reception School Annexes for Refugee Education" (RSARE) since October 10, 2016.
- Morning reception classes for children living in cities (approx. 800 children).

And in the near future will found kindergarten classes inside the camps.



II. Education policies: State

Reception School Annexes for Refugee Education (RSARE):

- 2,061 refugee students in primary schools.
- 742 in lower secondary schools.
- 684 students in reception classes in the morning programme.
- 70 primary and 35 lower secondary schools host RSARE structures.
- The MERR recruited 234 supplementary (most of them part-time) teachers and appointed Refugee Education Coordinators to support RSARE in the camps.
- Special curriculum for primary education (Greek, English, Mathematics, ICT, Physical Education, Art and Drama Education)
- Responsibilities for RSARE are allocated to the School Principal and the regional School Advisor.



II. Education policies: Civil society

- Heterogeneous assortment of bodies (Greek and international NGOs, collectives, unions, associations, universities, solidarity groups, refugees initiatives) organise activities in the camps.
- Educational activities for children mainly of creative engagement (painting) and psychosocial support.
- Some lessons (primarily English, secondarily Greek, Mathematics or Arabic).



III. Methodology: The research field

- In a primary school, which is located at an inner city area at the centre of Athens. 'All- day school' (optional extended afternoon programme)
- 383 students, of mixed socioeconomic and ethno-cultural background.

RSARE

- The school receives refugee children which reside in the *Atlantis* camp.
- 69 students enrolled in RSARE, but only 45 were attending when the observation was launched.
- 3 RSARE classes according to children's age.
- Fluidity as the main feature of school attendance.
- No communication between morning and RSARE students until mid-March.



III. Methodology: RSARE Grade C

STUDENTS

- 17 students (11 girls, 6 boys), from Syria, Afghanistan and Iran.
- 10-13 years old.
- No reliable data on exact ages and years of prior schooling (approx. 3-5 yrs.).

TEACHERS

- 5 part-time teachers with experience 3-10 yrs., 1 with 25 yrs.

ATTENDANCE

- 10 students of regular attendance, 6 relatively low attendance, 2 or 3 appear once every two months.



III. Methodology: Action Research

Through active engagement in the school life, the project's researchers aim at mutual learning and understanding of the context, reflecting on existing experiences and creating transforming practices.

Goals:

- a) To facilitate the reception of the refugee children at school.
- b) To encourage communication among the refugee students and the All-day programme students.
- c) To transform school community into an inclusive system.



Ethical issues

- Protection of the participants' anonymity
- Use of pseudonyms
- No photographs showing children's faces



IV. Analysis

- a) Interaction among refugee children is mediated by nationality and gender (homosociality).
- b) Interaction among RSARE teachers and refugee children:
 - Generally friendly
 - Discipline problems (sometimes 'fights')
 - Different inside and outside of the classroom
- c) Performance:
 - Difficulties in Greek lessons, better in Mathematics
 - Most children do not do homework



IV. Analysis: The school community

- a) Morning teachers' stance towards the RSARE presents divergences (skepticism/indifference vs. explicit support).
- b) Non-refugee parents' early reactions seem to have been smoothed out.
- c) Refugee parents care about schooling, but have limited communication with the school (RSARE teachers' visit to the camp and indirectly through the Refugee Education Coordinators).
- d) Joint events initiatives: a few by the Deputy Principal
- e) Refugee and non-refugee children's communication is improving, both groups are receptive.
- f) The RSARE teachers were receptive to the researchers' support, but also put limitations to their role in the classroom, reluctant to transform their practices.
- g) Children (especially girls) were very friendly towards the researchers seeking to sit with them during lessons.



IV. Analysis: The school community

- e) RSARE teachers' relationship with education officials is tense:
- They maintain that they are underpaid (part-time teachers), despite the very demanding educational framework in which they work.
 - They complain for insufficient support and trainings, but they resist to the offered ones by the School Advisor.
 - They are suspicious towards the perceived as 'superiors'.
 - They resist to joint activities with the morning school.
 - The intervention of the Principal and our stable presence seem to be critical in reinforcing some kind of cooperation.



V. our intervention with Grade C

A series of joint actions that would involve the development of communication of RSARE and the extended programme of the school with the ultimate goal to assist and participate in the school's closing events.

- Activities developed by our team and activities developed by RSARE and morning teachers themselves:
 - ❖ Freinet's Little Books and correspondence
 - ❖ Creation of a banner by the children, working on the topic of children's rights ('all children want...')
 - ❖ Joint games in the yard, animation film projection



V. Intervention: *facilitating communication* Exchange of the Freinet's little books among the RSARE and the all-day school students

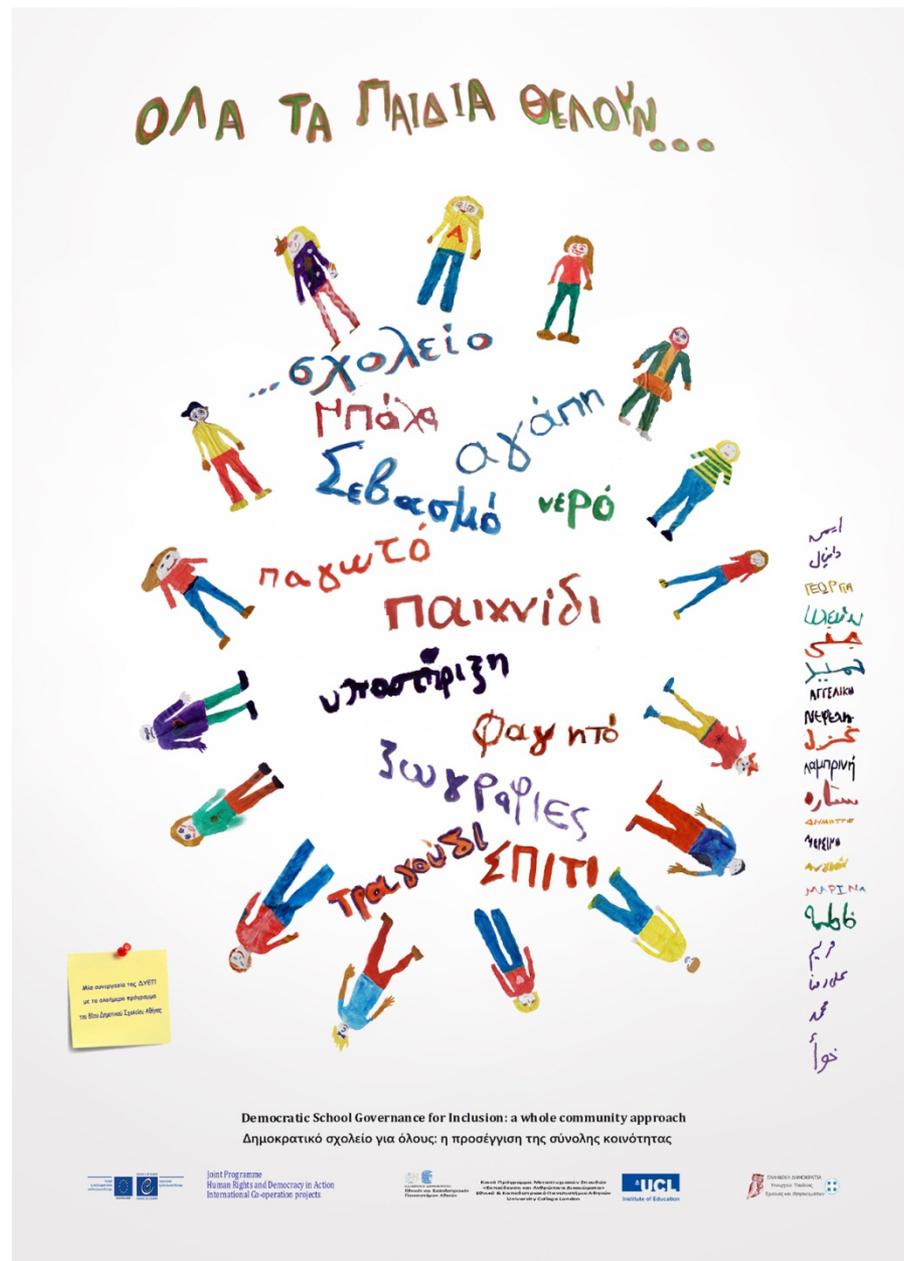




V. children's rights banner



V. Poster on the collaboration between the two students' groups. 'All children want...'





VI. results of intervention

after our negotiations with the the Principal and the teachers

- A joint school break was introduced and some limited common activities were put forward, in which only certain teachers took part.
- Teacher's unwillingness to allow RSARE students presence in the closing school event were overcome. However, refugee children were not invited to actively take part in it.
- A rather 'closed' celebration was organised in collaboration with morning Grade E in which RSARE students participated with a crafts' exhibition, games in the yard, and in the theatrical performance with a song. **In this event refugee parents were invited for the first time at school and had the opportunity to address the school community (interpreters).**
- the teachers who participated in joint activities had the opportunity to approach each other, but there were difficulties in communication and cooperation between them.



VII. conclusions

- The institution of RSARE has been constructed as a transition stage from the “moving identity” to that of “schooling identity”.
- RSARE bring the new populations within the venues of public education.
- RSARE provide for a bridge between the life on the move to that of formal schooling.
- RSARE has been configured as a distinctive structure in the school, a fact that could allow fragmentation strategies as those witnessed in this project.
- The work status of the RSARE teachers is a cause of tension.



VII. conclusions

- RSARE teachers did not have significant experience or special training in order to cope with these exceedingly demanding working conditions.
- Morning and RSARE teachers were reluctant to design, implement and/or participate in inclusive strategies collectively. An interpretation is that the teachers *strategically* used the argument that their professionalism was under threat in order to not modify traditional teaching styles and develop creative and contextualised pedagogic strategies (governance mentality)
- The Principal has been a key actor, as the only link between the two groups of teachers.