Designing curricula for adult refugees and migrants: A multilingual, critical literacy perspective

Bessie Mitsikopoulou, Evdokia Karava, Maria Iakovou, Thalia Dragona
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Linguistic and Cultural (Super)Diversity at Work: From theory and policy to action and (digital) practices

ECSPM 2020 Symposium, Tilburg University, 8 December 2020
Curing the Limbo

• A three year pilot project (2018-2021) for the city of Athens

• Funded by: Urban Innovative Actions (UIA), an initiative of the EU aiming to provide urban European areas with resources to test new and unproven solutions addressing urban challenges

• Budget: 5 M €

https://curingthelimbo.gr
CTL – A project overview

The innovative idea – the city and the refugees come together exiting the state of ‘limbo’, collaborate and co-exist

The challenge – to create a holistic and innovative model for integration through education, affordable housing, job counselling and collaborative actions in the neighborhoods of Athens

The strategy – activation, participation, becoming part of the city

The methodology – the action research methodology, each step is planned, implemented, discussed and re-designed based on real time results. The process is dynamic and flexible – Plan – Act – Observe _Reflect

Project partners:

Municipality of Athens

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Athens Development and Destination Management Agency
Project description

• “At the core of the project lies the recognition that integration is inseparable from education, employment, housing, community and active citizenship – these are all elements that Curing the Limbo brings together in order to develop mechanisms that help refugees leave their limbo status and gain autonomy in their everyday life” (Polyak, 2018, Project Journal No 1)

Integration: a two-way process involving mutual accommodation and change on the part of both the migrant and host society.

It addresses:
• Adult migrants who have been granted refugee status (18+)
• Asylees in Athens
• Arabic, Farsi, French speakers
Project aims

To develop:
• refugee’s soft skills through
  o language courses-Greek and English
  o creative expression and ICT seminars
  o professional counselling services tailored to their needs

To offer:
• employment services (job counselling and job search assistance)
• incentives and tools for the acquisition of affordable housing

• To bring together refugees and active citizen groups through mutually beneficial joint activities, encouraging a meaningful relationship between new and existing residents. Synergy with *synAthina*, an initiative hosted by the Municipality of Athens which facilitates the work of local citizen groups to improve the quality of life in the city.

The neighbourhoods of Athens are at the centre of refugee integration. *SynAthina* explores opportunities for connecting *Curing the Limbo* and the communities at the local level.
Learning Greek and English

Why Greek?
• The language of the host country

Why English?
• To enhance refugees’ communication opportunities with speakers of other languages (English as a contact language)
• To increase refugees’ employment opportunities
• To bring together learners from different cultural backgrounds providing a shared experience (learning a language)
• To enable refugees to understand part of the linguistic landscape of Athens

Even basic knowledge of both languages would help learners build linguistic bridges and help reduce prejudices and promote positive coexistence within the community (Gruenewald, 2003).
Experience with adult refugee language programmes

**Olympia**
18-28/08/2016
Summer Academy
“Beyond the Refugee Crisis-Studying in Europe”

**Eleonas**
08/2016-03/2017
Reinforcing Third Country Adult Nationals with basic communication skills in Greek and English

**Flears**
06/2017-02/2018
Foreign Language Education for Adult Refugee Education

**Curing the Limbo**
01/2019-6/2021
Mothers’ Language Courses
3 academic coordinators
2 on-site coordinators
5 highly qualified Greek language teachers with experience in adult second language education and refugee education
5 highly qualified English language teachers with experience in adult foreign language education and refugee education
2 photography instructors with experience in migrant education
General features of the curriculum

• Adopts CEFR’s levels of proficiency

• Organizes courses in consequent cycles of 60 hours of instruction

• Sets up the parameters and leaves it up to the teachers to build their syllabus for each one of their classes

• Is task and project based, organized in terms of broad themes and functional genres (selection of two to three themes per cycle and classwork organized around a project related to themes)

Themes: myself and others; daily and social life; my home and neighbourhood; environment; nutrition and market; health, fitness and sports; means of transport and travelling; work and employment, arts and culture; digital world
Designing a curriculum for language courses

Given the diversity of learners’ group (age, country of origins, schooling experiences, cultural experiences, language background), we decided to develop a flexible common curriculum for both languages.

Why common for both languages?

• To approach languages as components of an individual’s plurilingual repertoire (not as compartmentalized separate languages).

• To ensure that the teaching of both languages is permeated by the same view of language, language learning theories, and language teaching methods and techniques.

• To enhance cohesion within the same project (common understanding of the aims and objectives of language learning).
Development of curriculum

A multilingual project

- Two languages are taught (Greek and English), learners’ languages (French, Farsi and Arabic) have been used in class in the context of ‘functional multilingual learning’ (Sierens & van Avermaet, 2014)

- Foregrounding the development of plurilingual competence (draw on the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text or produce one, use mediation skills among individuals with no common language)

A critical literacies project

- Reading the word and the world (Freire)

- A critical account of resilience is adopted which defines it as a contextual and social construct, multidimensional and unique in each context (Price et al, 2012)

- Based on three interrelated theoretical approaches and pedagogies (multiliteracies, intercultural and place-based)
Underlying pedagogies  (a) A multiliteracies pedagogy

Expanding the agenda of multiliteracies project (New London Group, 1996), Kalantzis & Cope (2015, p. 3) added two new ‘multis’

- the first ‘multi-’: *social diversity*, the variability of conventions of meaning in different cultural, social or domain-specific situations

- The second ‘multi-’: *multimodality*, as a result of the new information and communication media.

A multiliteracies pedagogy for refugees and migrants aims at making language teaching and learning inclusive of cultural, linguistic, communicative and technological diversity towards active citizenship in a globalised world.
Multiliteracies in practice

**Teachers as designers**, design syllabi for each one of their classes, using available designs, design their learning resources and materials (no textbooks) – (a lot of training involved here)

**Learners as designers**: involved in authentic tasks connected to real life situations, exploring different genres and themes, raising not only critical language but semiotic awareness as well (learning how to mean through visual and other modes, learning what meanings are construed in another culture).

- Creation of a digital collage about learners’ lives using family photos, photos of their hobbies, favourite pastimes, their professions, etc. with captions.

- Design of a digital cookbook with the recipes of their favourite dishes on one page and a photo of the dish on the other.

- A leaflet for newcomers in the city with important places to see (in both their language and English) accompanied by photos they have taken.

- The *Refugees’ Voice*: A newspaper organized by English language learners reporting their news and articles on topics of their interest.
Multi-for social diversity and for multimodality

• A variety of language courses: General and specialized language courses covering diverse social needs and contexts (e.g. certification courses)

• Greek and English classes in collaboration with IRC – a project partner – employment specialists talking about how to prepare for an interview, write a cv...

• English and Photography: Learning how to convey meaning through photos (enhancing multimodal understanding) – collaboration with audiovisual – development of a common a posteriori syllabus for both subjects.
Underlying pedagogies
(b) Intercultural pedagogy

Beyond passive co-existence, the development of intercultural competence in our classes involved:

- **knowledge** of different world cultures
- **understanding** the impact of culture on one’s own and other people’s world views and behaviour
- **attitudes** valuing cultural diversity, cultural otherness and openness
- **skills** to discover and interpret information about other cultures, flexibility and adaptability
Conditions for intercultural dialogue

Can we teach empathy?

- **a)** tolerance to diversity from all sides concerned, recognition and respect for the diversity of cultural traditions, ethnic identities and religious beliefs

- **b)** creation of appropriate opportunities for learners to engage in intercultural encounters and contexts promoting intercultural contact between refugees and local groups.

*Empathy as a lived experience*
Creating Identity texts

Activities aiming to enable refugees tell their stories and be heard (Cummins, 2006). Even at the level of the basic user (A1), bilingual and multimodal identity texts helped learners to talk about their experiences.
Exploring art at the Museum of Islamic Art

Understanding each other through art

The Benaki Museum collection of Islamic art, which includes examples of all its local variations from as far as India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, the Middle East, Arabia, Egypt, North Africa, Sicily and Spain, ranks among the most important in the world.
Developing alternative perspectives through art
The example of the vulnerability project

In the Vulnerability Project, Syrian Artist Abdalla Al Omari reimagines world leaders as refugees and portrays them as vulnerable and outside their positions of power. http://www.abdallaomari.com/thevulnerabilityseries

Using these paintings as a starting point, learners discuss the effects of this alternative perspective.
Underlying pedagogies (c) Place-based pedagogy

Features: inspired by critical pedagogy, experiential, contextual and problem-based learning, connecting place with self and community, civic engagement, developing stronger ties with the community by engaging in worthwhile language learning experiences.

Principles of place-based education helped connecting the language curriculum with the project’s aim of inclusive social integration: to encourage learners to support the needs of the local community and participate in citizen led activities.

- Lessons outside the classroom (teachers’ initiatives)
- Connecting refugees with local groups of active citizens (in collaboration with synAthina)
Examples of place based learning: Visiting Evangelismos Hospital

A visit to Evangelismos, the biggest and busiest hospital in Athens (walking through the corridors of the hospital, going to the emergency room and outpatient clinics, reading the labels, etc.), understanding the process to be followed in case of illness.

A medical guide in three languages
Greek – Farsi – Arabic
Visiting a DIY department store (Praktiker)

When covering the home thematic unit, learners visited a DIY store where they participated in a number of activities (e.g. identified the names of different household objects, treasure hunt games, etc) and took pictures which they presented in class in the next lesson.
Exploring Athenian neighbourhoods

Mapping the various Athenian neighbourhoods and specific landmarks (in the thematic unit “My neighbourhood”).

Greek, A2 level

Students were shown audiovisual material of old Athens and identified important landmarks and compared changes. A student from Iraq was glad to see what the center of Athens looked like at the time her grandfather had visited Athens for a holiday (1930s).
Connecting language classes with active citizen groups
Helping each other and helping others

During a visit at the Queen’s Tower Estate cooking at the outdoors kitchen of Environmental Park “Centre of the Earth” for people in need.

Participating in the activities of a Greek NGO (Οργάνωση Γη, Κ44) which hosts programs for the integration of vulnerable social groups through sports and connection with nature, our learners practiced talking about food and cooking in Greek and cooked for 100 homeless in Athens.
Conducting a food project at Kypseli Market
A municipal social agora (https://agorakypselis.gr)

Food project at Kypseli social market which houses social economy initiatives, educational and cultural activities. Our learners created labels for the products in Greek or English and offered them to the stall owner.
Going to guided tours in Athenian neighborhoods with photo shoots

- **Urban layers**: Guided tours for people of all ages to get in touch with the social side of street art and redefine their relationship with the urban web and with people who work and live there.
## CTL - Language Programme

### CYCLE 1
**Feb-May 2019**
- 5 Greek classes (A0, A0, A0+, A1, A2)
- 4 English classes (A0, A1, A1+, A2)

### CYCLE 2
**May-Aug. 2019**
- 6 Greek classes (A0, A0+, A0+, A1, A1, A2)
- 5 English classes (A0, A1, A1+, A2, B1)

### CYCLE 3
**Sep-Nov. 2019**
- 6 Greek classes (A0, A0+, A1, A1, A1+, A2)
- 5 English classes (A0+, A1, A1+, A2, B1)

### CYCLE 4
**Nov 2019-Feb 2020**
- 5 Greek classes (A0, A0+, A1, A2, A2+)
- 5 English classes (A0, A0+, A1, A2, B1+)

### CYCLE 5
**Mar-May 2020**
- 5 Greek classes (A0, A0+, A1-, A1, A2)
- 5 English classes (A0, A1-, A1, A2, B1+) English and Photography Course

### CYCLE 6
**June-Aug. 2020**
- 5 Greek classes (A0, A0+, A1-, A1, A2)
- 5 English classes (A0, A1-, A1, A2, B1+)

### CYCLE 7
**Sept-Dec. 2020**
- 4 Greek classes (A0+, A1-, A1+, A2+)
- 5 English classes (A1-, A1+, A2+, B2+)

### CYCLE 8
**Dec. 2020-Mar 2021**

---

**Face-to-face learning**

**Blended learning (what we planned)**

**Emergency Remote Teaching**

**Blended learning**

**Fully online**

(what happened)
Digital practices in face-to-face learning
Digital practices in ERT
Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (Viber, WhatUp groups)
Using an online bulletin board (collaborate, reflect, share links and pictures)
Preparing for B2 level exams during spring lockdown

interactive worksheets, audio extract for a listening comprehension activity, weblinks to reading texts, grammar practice through online games, a song from a student’s Instagram account, online poll answered by students, online discussion activity about Ramadan, guidelines for a writing task, instructions for emails
Reflections and lessons learned

- The common curriculum set the general guidelines enabling teachers to design and redesign syllabi for their classes.

- Systematic evaluation at the end of each 60-hour cycle involving all participants (learners, teachers, course coordinators and academic coordinators) with different evaluation tools: critical reflections, narratives, teacher journals, questionnaires and descriptions of important moments.

- Action research methodology (on-going process with changes being made in each new cycle)

- Systematic training of trainers (pre-planned and weekly during the lockdown)

- Collaborative actions – an integral part of the language programme

- Integration is a ‘shared process’ (van Avermaet, 2019)
So far...
1835 hours of instruction in Greek, 1683 hours of instruction in English
331 certificates of attendance (Greek), 160 certificates of attendance (English)

Source: https://curingthelimbo.gr/the-program-numbers
Related Publications


A Resource Book for Teachers (forthcoming)

- Ιακώβου, Μ., Καραβά, Ε. & Μητσικοπούλου, Β. μαζί με Βασιλειάδη-Λιναρδάκη, Η., Δήμα, Ο., Κατσίνα, Τ., Κουτσογιάννη, Σ., Κουτσουμπό, Μ., Λίζα, Ο., Μακρόπουλος, Π., Μπακαλού, Χ., Σουλτάνη, Α., Τομάζος, Σ., Τσαπάκη, Ε. (υπό έκδοση). Διδάσκοντας Ελληνικά και Αγγλικά σε Ενήλικες Πρόσφυγες: Δραστηριότητες από δράσεις στην πόλη της Αθήνας. Αθήνα: ΕΚΠΑ & Curing the Limbo Project.