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Περιεχόμενα

Utilization of web.2 tools in action research for better inclusion of the reception class 7

Papadopoulou Foteini

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Utilization of web.2 tools in action research for better inclusion of the reception class

Abstract

The critical-emancipatory action research took place at the 1st EPAL of Ampelokipi when we found that the inclusion of the Reception Class in the whole school activity was not as expected. Its first reconnaissance cycle took place during the 2019-2020 school year, during which due to the pandemic a total curfew was imposed and distance learning began. The conclusions on the new data created with distance learning and their reflection led us to the next two cycles that dealt with the overall access and inclusion of RC students in education during the pandemic. Throughout the survey, teachers and students communicated via the Internet and a variety of web2.0 tools were used. The conclusions that emerged underlined the importance of using them and the results were used for research and educational reasons for the entire student population of the school unit.

Keywords: action research, web.2 utilization, inclusion, reception class

Αξιοποίηση των εργαλείων web.2 σε έρευνα δράσης για την καλύτερη ένταξη της Τάξης Υποδοχής

Περίληψη

Η κριτική-χειραφετική έρευνα δράσης πραγματοποιήθηκε στο 1^ο ΕΠΑΛ Αμπελοκήπων όταν διαπιστώσαμε ότι η ένταξη της Τάξης Υποδοχής στο σύνολο της σχολικής δραστηριότητας δεν ήταν η αναμενόμενη. Ο πρώτος αναγνωριστικός της κύκλος πραγματοποιήθηκε κατά το σχολικό έτος 2019-2020, στη διάρκεια του οποίου λόγω της πανδημίας επιβλήθηκε ολική απαγόρευση κυκλοφορίας και ξεκίνησε η εξ αποστάσεως εκπαίδευση. Τα συμπεράσματα για τα νέα δεδομένα που δημιουργήθηκαν με την εξΑΕ και ο αναστοχασμός τους μας οδήγησε στους δύο επόμενους κύκλους που ασχολήθηκαν με τη συνολική πρόσβαση και ένταξη των παιδιών της ΤΥ στην εκπαίδευση κατά την περίοδο της πανδημίας. Σε όλη τη διάρκεια της έρευνας εκπαιδευτικοί και μαθητές/μαθήτριες επικοινωνούσαν μέσω του Διαδικτύου και αξιοποιήθηκαν ποικιλία εργαλείων web2.0. Τα συμπεράσματα που προέκυψαν υπογράμμισαν τη σημασία της χρήσης των εργαλείων αυτών και τα αποτελέσματα αξιοποιήθηκαν ερευνητικά και εκπαιδευτικά για το σύνολο του μαθητικού πληθυσμού του σχολείου.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: έρευνα δράσης, αξιοποίηση web.2, συμπερίληψη, Τάξη Υποδοχής

1. Introduction

Action research as a form of educational research is mainly conducted by people in the field and involves not only teachers but also other actors with the aim of improving practices in the field of education. Empirically, one of its great advantages is that its research results and conclusions can be shared by teachers among themselves because they arise through practice and are potentially political dominant ideology together with the deficiencies or omissions of the institutional framework considered a more reliable source compared to more theoretical forms aimed at the professional development of teachers.

At the same time, the process of critical reflection supports the deep understanding and revelation of power relations in education that are not easily perceived at a superficial glance. The total imposition of the social and political framework find fertile ground mainly in the weak vulnerable groups as Elliot vividly described in Action research for educational change¹¹

1 Elliot, J.(1991), Action research for educational change. Philadelphia: Open University Press, p.p.69-89. Retrieved January 8, 2025 from <https://archive.org/details/actionresearchfo0000elli/page/90/mode/2up>

The collectivity of the process, the dialectical analysis of the data and the critical positioning of the research subjects in relation to the needs of the students are integral elements of the research process. Ultimately, the revealing process, through group dynamics, benefits all parties to see and realize the overt and covert pathways of excluding vulnerable groups, especially in times of crisis and difficulty.

In action research we turn to the holistic understanding of a situation that we observe as a whole. According to Carr & Kemmis action research offers a solution to the problem of the theory-practice dichotomy as it produces knowledge of practice based on personal experience and real cases. In summary, there are two vital aims in action research: improvement and participation, with the latter being just important as the former².

The technique applied in this action research is developed in three phases in the context of the spiral arrangement which is its main characteristic. There are many models of action research, but almost all of them accept the circular or spiral process, consisting of four stages: identification / observation, planning, action / monitoring and critical reflection / evaluation like the educational action research of Katsarou & Tsafos³. This circular arrangement is repeated as many times needed to optimize the result. In this way, a spiral shape is created that involves creative reflection. Each moment (cycle) draws on the previous moment to justify it and envisions the next moment to realize it.

In schools we often face irrational ways of thinking, unproductive and harmful ways of acting and social structures where the human relations promote inequality, injustice and coercion. We chose critical or emancipatory action research because it aims at the mutation of the above conditions and it is always connected to social action. It aims to change the educational world for the better, through the improvement of collective social practices. It is always critical since it is constantly trying to understand and improve social reality. It is also activist since it aims to create forms of cooperative learning through action. Kemmis explained in 1993 how action research aims to help people understand themselves as active agents as products of historical and socio-cultural conditions⁴.

2. A critical-emancipatory action research for better integration of the Educational Priority Zone Reception Class

2 Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1984). *Becoming Critical: Educational Knowledge and Action Research*. London & Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, p. 165. Retrieved October 2, 2021 from: <https://docer.com.ar/doc/xcx0051>

3 Κατσαρού, Ε. & Τσάφος, Β. (2003). *Από την έρευνα στη διδασκαλία: η εκπαιδευτική έρευνα δράσης*. Αθήνα: Σαββάλας, p.p. 56-57.

4 Kemmis, S. (1993). *Action Research and Social Movement: A Challenge for Policy Research*. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 1 (1), 1-8. Retrieved October 2, 2021 from: <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v1n1.1993>

When in 2019, the Eurydice report “Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures” was released by the European Commission, we noticed that we had to investigate in depth our students needs. This comparative study about what top-level education authorities across Europe do to promote the integration of students from a migrant background into schools revealed that a whole-child approach to teaching and learning was needed⁵.

Our research team was immediately concerned about collecting and analyzing data based on three central axes that affect the lives of reception class students. As we observed fluctuations in their cognitive performance, we sought to study the effects of the school, social, and familial context in which the reception class students lived and operated because we assumed that they have to do with their overall inclusion.

We decided to carry out a critical-empirical action research like the ones Katsarou has done⁶ because we found that the inclusion of the Educational Priority Zone Reception Class in the overall school activity of the 1st Vocational Senior High School of Ampelokipi did not meet expectations. The identification of the problem as well as the initial planning were done by the teacher-researcher who worked in the school unit at the time and she is an English language teacher in collaboration with critical friends from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The personal interest regarding the subject also arises from the fact that the educator-researcher took part from 2016 to 2018 in the Management, coordination and monitoring group of the education of refugee children of the Greek Ministry of Education.

The school unit having a tradition of years of operation of the Educational Priority Zone Reception Class and a school culture friendly to the issues of acceptance of the “Other”, had the intention to work in this direction and support the implementation of the action research. After all, the overall students profile has included, since its foundation, immigrant and refugee students with percentages exceeding half in some years.

It is worth saying that the Educational Priority Zone program has been operating since 2017 and it was the only morning Vocational School of the urban complex of western Thessaloniki that recommended the establishment and operation of an Educational Priority Zone Reception Class while the demand and needs of the wider region far exceeded availability. Given that it was not possible

5 European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019. Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved October 28, 2024 from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/39c05fd6-2446-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

6 Κατσαρού, Ε. (2016). Εκπαιδευτική έρευνα-δράση: Πολυπαραδειγματική διερεύνηση για την αναμόρφωση της εκπαιδευτικής πράξης. Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Κριτική, 400.

to accommodate more than one Reception Class due to building and infrastructure limitations and the maximum number of students allowed by law is 17 plus the fact that the mobility observed in these populations is high anyway. The education of refugee children is a changing situation as the facts are constantly changing. Tsioumis indicates that the constant movement of refugee populations creates difficulties in creating a routine school situation for children, while the departure of older children and the arrival of young ones disturbs the class⁷. Among other things, an additional administrative burden is created for the school unit, which possibly hides and discourages the inclusion of a similar student population. Despite this, the operation of the Reception Class was uninterrupted and during the school year the number of students enrolled was rarely less than 17.

At the time, however, in all Greek schools there were a series of resistances and limitations both in the educational staff and in the student population, and a series of stereotypical perceptions of refugee and immigrant populations as a result of more general political-economic pressure and the ideological dominance of neoliberals and the pursuit of excellence, as far as my experience is concerned.

Furthermore, the refugee-immigrant populations themselves potentially perceive parts of their exclusion from social life as a social “disadvantage”⁸ and they sometimes perceive it as cultural or even biological deficiency. As a result, it is observed that they consider it almost natural not to have full access to a series of social rights that are self-evident for the rest of the members of a community. In the school environment, this is sometimes expressed in the reluctance they show to claim self-evident rights stemming from the Greek Constitution and International Conventions on the rights of the child, wherever they are and wherever they come from.

2.1 Object and objectives of the action research

2.1.1 Research questions about the Reception class

In the 1st Vocational Senior High School of Ampelokipi, as in all Secondary education, the program of Educational Priority Zone Reception Classes for refugee children operated for the first time during school year 2017-2018 and continued during school year 2018-2019 as well as during the school year report of the 1st and 2nd cycle of the action research, 2019-2020. In school year 2020-

7 Tsioumis, K. (2018). Refugees and Citizenship Education: Research and Proposal for Interventions at the University of Thessaloniki (conference presentation). 20thConference of Cicea, May 10-12 2018, Warsaw-Poland. Retrieved October 2, 2021 from: <http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/318268?ln=e1>

8 Social protection of human rights. Disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Retrieved October 28, 2024 from: <https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/key-issues/disadvantaged-and-vulnerable-groups/>

2021 the Reception Class was established and operated again but the action research that continued followed the students of the previous year who now joined the departments and sectors of the second Vocational year. The reflection of the research led us to their overall access and inclusion in the education system and we decided to investigate additional reasons for their exclusion from distance learning.

Reception Class lessons are held in a separate classroom during the first three hours of the school program every day. The School teachers' association, as provided by the legislative framework, decided that the Reception Class students would also attend the following school subjects: English, Physical Education, Mathematics, IT and Creative Zone Activities, as in the two previous school years when the respective decisions led to successful results with promotion to the next grade, while the only reason students were rejected was due to insufficient attendance (absence).

The long delay in the recruitment of teachers to staff the Reception Class led to a series of misunderstandings and irregularities in the students' attendance until January 2020. In the previous 2 years, Reception Classes had started operating much earlier and the students were making significant progress in vocabulary and communication by Christmas, although this does not imply that there were no important issues from common subjects and the whole school life.

2.1.2 The identification of the “problem”

The motivation for identifying the “problem” was stemmed from the fact that, at the given time, the 1st Vocational Senior High School of Ampelokipi joined a nationwide program. One of its objectives was to ensure the universal and regular participation of all students in the school's common extracurricular activities and fostering a spirit of understanding and cooperation. The title of the “Action Plan” submitted by the school unit was “Connecting School with Social Needs through Volunteering” and included some basic intra-school sub-actions such as the blood bank and the connection of the Reception Class to the school life. It also built upon previous actions and initiatives such as the social grocery store of the municipality of Ampelokipi-Menemeni, the SOS Children's Village in Filiro and environmental actions in collaboration with the Environmental Center of Evosmos-Kordelio.

The group of students who participated in the program numbered around 30 students and included students from all classes, sectors and specialties of the Vocational School. Unfortunately, in the initial phase, there was no declaration of participation from any Reception Class student even though it was theoretically one of the requirements of the program. Our initial goal was to reveal all the relationships and parameters that hinder the smooth and integrated coexistence

and cooperation of all members of the school community so as to empower its most vulnerable members, to transform distorted attitudes, perceptions and practices and with the ultimate goal of their emancipation.

2.1.3 Our main objective

We wanted to investigate the network of reasons that prevented the participation of Reception Class students in school activities. Our main objective was to investigate school conditions as well as other factors related to extra-school conditions concerning ideological, socio-political or personality formation issues or anything else that arose during the conduct of the action research. Having noticed some sort of differentiation in their school performance between reception class students who lived with members of their families and unaccompanied minors, we tried to investigate their living environment as well.

Unfortunately, due to the general curfew in March 2020, the nationwide program could not be completed because it envisaged a series of life-long activities that became impossible to carry out in the next school year and to have all the required deliverable results. However, some of the actions were carried out and used for the action research and its reflection towards the end of the school year and the beginning of the next one with the participation of the Reception Class students.

2.1.4 Research team

The problem and the questions of the action research arose from the everyday life of the school in the access and inclusion of the refugee students in the common subjects and the whole school life and became the object of the group's reflection. One of the key questions right from the start was whether teachers' perceptions and attitudes play a role in relation to their role in this integration process concerning a vulnerable population group.

The initial research team that conducted the first cycle of the research consisted of 2 philologists and 2 English teachers, the philologist of the Reception Class and one vice-principal of the school, who is a Mechanical Engineer.

During the second and the third cycle, a group of teachers who taught common subjects to Reception Class students joined the research (1 IT teacher, 1 Physical Education teacher, 1 Physics teacher and 1 Nursing teacher who was teaching them in the Creative Zone Activities).

3. Methodology

3.1. Choosing the participants

The discussion with the Reception Class students regarding their non-declaration of participation in the “Action Plan” program revealed us that most of them declared ignorance, indifference and a lack of motivation. They seemed to see themselves as members of the school community with limited rights and capabilities. Subsequently, a semi-structured questionnaire was created, with a few open questions to capture the students’ profiles and some closed questions to identify the special characteristics that possibly affect their attitude toward school life using research ways that Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh introduced in 1993⁹.

Initially, the Reception Class students were 14 males and 3 females and then from January 2020 there were 12 males and 2 females attending the Greek courses continuously as well as the joint courses decided by the teachers’ association. Therefore, there were no significant issues of school dropout during the school year. Nevertheless, there were malfunctions in their participation in the common courses as well as difficulties in their integration into the rest of the common activities and the entire school life.

Out of the 14 Reception Class students, only 11 were able to answer the initial questionnaire. The rest were outside of Thessaloniki during the first cycle of the survey due to reasons related to asylum procedures. By the end of the school year they did not appear at school and from indirect information we were informed that they left for European countries through family reunification programs.

3.2. The three cycles

The whole action research was conducted through 3 cycles:

The first cycle entitled “Designing Interventions”, took place during the 2019-2020 school year from October 2019 up to March 2020.

The second cycle entitled “Asynchronous Distance Learning”, took place during the 2019-2020 school year from April up to June 2020.

The third cycle entitled “Up to the Synchronous Distance Learning”, took place during the 2020-2021 school year from September up to December 2020.

3.3 Participatory observation & diary notes

The author who was one of the English teachers working at the school at the time, kept a diary of school life through participant observation of all activities during lessons, breaks and extracurricular activities and coordinated the conduct of the

9 Altrichter, H., Posch, P., Somekh, B. (1993). Teachers investigate their work: An introduction to the methods of action research. London: Routledge, p.74.

survey, meetings and data collection to study.

At the end of the first cycle, the composition of the Reception Class was recognized in relation to the origin, the family environment and the placement of the students in relation to the school, both for the Reception Class and the Greek language courses as well as for the common subjects and the whole of school life.

3.4 Interviews

In order to further investigate whether the teachers' perceptions and awareness of the institutional framework on the part of teachers influence the inclusion of Reception Class students, we decided to conduct some semi-structured interviews via Skype starting with the Reception Class philologist and the vice-principal of the school. The Reception Class philologist is the teacher who works with the students most of the program hours and the vice-principal, because his position has a more global view of the overall operation of the school, the school program and administrative issues that may affect inclusion of Reception Class. The semi-structured interviews combined with analysis and reflection by the group provided additional data on the topic that concerns us in the present research but also created new questions about the environment in which the students raised.

The philologist of the Reception Class, who had relatively little teaching experience but had also worked in the previous school year in a Reception Class in eastern Thessaloniki, stated: "The previous year was particularly disappointing as all the students of that Reception Class were rejected due to absence. However, considering that teachers also have a share of responsibility for school drop and school failure, I will take part in all the discussion groups to help in a deeper understanding of the causes".

The vice-principal is an educator with a special interest and involvement in intercultural education issues who observed that "many of our explicit or implicit perceptions are influenced by our ideological starting point". This evidence is confirmed by diary entries of events that occurred during the course of the action research.

We decided to get in touch with the parents/guardians who live with the Reception Class students and design interventions in relation to the new conditions created by the pandemic which no longer allowed face-to-face meetings.

In the period between April and May 2020 through semi-structured Skype interviews with people belonging to collaborating associates, we had gathered information about the environment in which the Reception Class students live and the restrictions they experienced. We had obtained asynchronous and synchronous communication with all Reception Class students via webex platform. From these communications, information emerged that confirmed the lack of learning support from their living environment.

3.5 Web.2 teaching tools

During the first cycle, it was considered appropriate to use the digital educational material of UNHCR “not just numbers”¹⁰ with Greek subtitles, which includes short videos with stories of refugees and immigrants from different countries and how they are presented by the media. The activity “Opinions” was chosen because it aims to cultivate critical thinking and not to decide whether opinions are right or wrong.

The activity possibly contributed to a tightening of relations between the students as in the discussion that developed they entered the position of the “Other” and felt that their personal and/or family stories have many points in common. They were given the opportunity to discuss their participation in the “Action Plan” and some even stated that it does not seem like a bad idea to take part at least in those that were planned to take place at or near the school. The students submitted their opinions on a wiki created for this purpose and were grouped into chart pies and bars to be more easily understood by the teachers’ association.

Wanting the Reception Class students to understand the functioning of modern western societies of the crisis but also to express their feelings in relation to their own experiences and wants, we planned the next action. The following action was decided to take place in the English class using the interactive material “Remarkable People”, with the selection of the film “Should I stay or should I go”¹¹. The film lasts about an hour and includes 6 Greeks who faced the dilemma of staying or leaving our country. Having analyzed the interviews of the people in the environment where the Reception Class students live, as well as their own testimonies, we realized the main dilemma they faced from the beginning, namely staying or not in our country according to their wishes and not based on the situation in which they accidentally found themselves. Our ultimate goal was for them to see that any person can find themselves in such a position for various reasons.

The “Remarkable People” platform enables the viewer to see the film and intervene in its development. The film is in Greek but has English subtitles. The Reception Class students surprised us with the interest they showed even though there were some technical difficulties.

At the beginning of June 2020, when the students’ attendance increased

10 Not just numbers. A survey on the impact of 9 years of war in Syria. Retrieved October 1, 2020 from: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/not-just-numbers>

11 Meeting with remarkable people. A platform of interactive documentary films. Retrieved October 2, 2021 from: <https://remarkablepeople.gr/film/should-i-stay-or-should-i-go/>

significantly if not fully restored, we decided that it is the right time to carry out an intervention for joint action. The implementation of the “Action Plan” program and one of its sub-actions concerning the Community grocery store of the municipality of Ampelokipi-Menemeni was shaken up. We were supposed to see the shelter - located in a building in an adjacent former military camp - and interview the volunteers collecting food and clothing. We managed to make this visit before the traffic ban and the video was being made. One of the deliverables of the program was a promotional short video that the students decided to make to play in local media and on the Internet. The school offered the necessary technological infrastructure and know-how due to the operation of an IT sector in it.

In September 2020 the research team started the design of the 3rd cycle almost immediately because we wanted to see if the interventions of the previous two cycles made any difference in the reference topic of better inclusion.

Our goals were to give the Reception Class students the opportunity to co-exist, co-create and co-act with the rest of the students in a natural environment that does not refer to the regulatory space of the school with a specific arrangement with the aim of tightening of the relationships between them. The instructions were that they would exchange experiences with each other about how they experienced the period of lock down in the place where they were. This place was chosen because, in addition to trees, flowers, greenery and soil, it has a large gazebo and stone seats in a circular arrangement. The entire action was videotaped and edited by the students and used for the “Action Plan”.

From the students’ dialogues, as expected, other issues arose that related to the natural environment because they were deprived of it during the confinement and also on the occasion of garbage thrown in the field of the simulation excursion. Reception Class students appeared to have greater familiarity with the natural environment as they came from rural areas of their countries. In summary, the students used all the stimuli of the environment, animate and inanimate, both in the discussion with each other and in the proposals for the creation of the promotional video. For the time being, the students had shown us that the scope for improving relations between them is large and exploitable.

Choosing a vocational field is not easy for any student as it depends on many factors and not always the ones they should. Issues such as the pressure of the family environment, the student’s inclination and wishes, immediate work rehabilitation, gender stereotypes and pressure from teachers to create or maintain working hours are just a few of the factors that conflict with one another. The deadline for final domain selection is usually mid-October. The vocational sectors that operated in the 2nd grade at our school, during the school years of the action research was carried out, were the following: Electronics and Automation, Mechanical Engineering, Financial and Administrative Services, Informatics and

Health-Care-Wellness.

The research team decided to design an intervention as soon as possible in order to study how these pressures affect students' decisions and if there are increased parameters of constraints for refugee students that make them more vulnerable. The actions and reflection of the previous two cycles were taken into account to design the interventions.

The intervention-action concerned all 2nd grade students for the preparation stage to choose a vocational sector and the presentation of this sector choice. The students were encouraged to keep a diary for a month and write in a wiki information related to their area of interest in order to present their sector choice only with movements (physical theater) what they wanted to express in relation to this area. For example, their calendar should cover the following questions:

• What are they telling me to choose? • What should I choose? • What do I want to choose?

The final phase took place as an excursion to the area of the neighboring former military camp due to the restrictions that still existed due to the pandemic. The presentation was done by sector giving the possibility to change the sector choice. Most students kept their original choice but some changed it not always with absolute certainty. It is noteworthy that many students enriched their way of physical expression inspired by the entire process that preceded it. There was even a proposal to create a film with the dramatization of the school's fields and specialties. With the help of the movie-maker and audacity, a 10-minute video with background music of their preference was created for internal future use and a joint digital poster with the same theme as a souvenir of this joint activity.

3.6 The teacher's association meetings

The reflection on the issue of satisfying the communication and cognitive needs of the Reception Class students led to the design of an intervention-discussion at the meeting of the teachers' association for the appropriate update and implementation of the institutional framework.

It became clear that the teachers' association did not have an overall perception of the needs and operation of the Reception Class in order to make collective planning and support it. In a way, they treated the Reception Class as an integral but detached part of the school unit. In addition, there was a distorted perception that the participation of Reception Class students both in common subjects and in the whole of school life is at the teachers' discretion and not institutionally enshrined as a rule.

At the same time, the research group of teachers imposed on the weekly tele-meetings via webex of the teachers' association, the issues of the

integration of the Reception Class students should be in permanent discussion and negotiation. There was some resistance as there were very serious operational and infrastructure issues for all members of the school community, so the special engagement with Reception Class students was characterized as a “luxury”. Besides, the asynchronous distance learning that was qualified for that time by the Ministry of Education was not mandatory for either the teachers or the students.

The teachers’ association meeting was urgently called by the research team to intervene to improve the program schedule and to have an open discussion of the “problem” related to inclusion of Reception Class from the data until then. Any change in the program affects all the students and teachers of the school unit. Our intervention to change it in favor of the attendance of the common lessons by the Reception Class students met resistance mainly under the pretext of burdening the “many” against the “few” who “are given the opportunity to enroll in our school” and “many of them came illegally to our country and they might take the job of one of our children” are some recordings of the teachers’ meeting.

The school principal was aware of individual attitudes of teachers that excluded Reception Class students from the whole of school life and declared that he would see to it that “there is no discrimination at our school”. The vast majority of teachers remained silent during the stormy meeting that concluded that there was little scope for improving the program schedule for the benefit of Reception Class students to attend the common courses decided by the teachers themselves in accordance with the Education Ministry instructions and legislation.

The school teachers’ association decided that teachers should be able, if they wish, to use the school’s space and technological infrastructure to communicate or provide e-learning. All the members of the action research team were in this category, so during the first phase of the pandemic we met at school and used its good technological infrastructure.

The research team met for the first time in person at the beginning of March 2020 when the new improved school program had already started to operate. It was considered appropriate to inform the new members of the research team of the findings from the questionnaires on the Reception Class students’ living environment in order to plan how we could investigate possible causes of integration difficulties related to this.

4. Analysing data

After having collected all the research material, the research team classified it into three categories depending on the related area of concern: educational, living environment and social context restrictions and limitations for the reception class students.

We designed our interventions according to the findings throughout the entire action research after reflection and redesigned our teaching methods and approaches. Overall, all findings confirmed our first perception that there were multiple factors which prevented the reception class students from feeling a fully integrated part of the school.

4.1 Origin of the RC

The Reception Class consisted of 6 students from Afghanistan (4 boys & 2 girls), 2 from Iran (boys), 1 from Iraq (boy), 1 from Syria (boy) and 1 from Albania (boy). These 11 students participated in all 3 cycles of the action research.

4.2 School context

Overall, the responses were positive to the question of whether they come to school every day and whether they like the Greek language. Out of 11, 4 answered that they didn't go to all the common general education classes every day. All answered that they liked to participate in common school activities (excursions, educational visits, cinema, etc.), while 1 answered "I don't know", which was an option, and 3 "No" to whether they like to go out their daily routine. When asked if they have friends from other classes, 1 answered "I don't know", 3 "No" and 7 "Yes". The group answered that they know the school program and the teachers who teach the common subjects.

The interviews-discussions, mainly with Reception Class philologist and the analysis of the diary notes through participatory observation collected several elements of exclusion and discrimination, many of which also emerge from the answers and discussions with the Reception Class students. Compared to her previous experience, she realized that, "since in the current school there is no apparent intention of the teachers to reject students due to performance, she herself adopted the attitude of the students that "even if whatever the school gives us is lacking, it is nevertheless better than nothing."

The interview of the vice-principal of the school gave information about administrative issues and issues of planning and organization of the school, but also illuminated aspects of perceptions and attitudes of teachers of the common subjects that are not officially declared but determined by the public debate and dominant perceptions in a negative way.

In the focused discussion that followed "not just numbers" activity with the students, there was an exchange of concerns, giving the students the opportunity to describe their feelings and their own ideas for better participation in common lessons and common actions once the school program malfunctions were overcome. The Reception Class students explained the difficulties that

discourage them from participating in the common courses as it is not easy to follow them with the level of language skills they had acquired so far. Two Reception Class students very hesitantly noted that they had difficulty in the common subjects due to noise from the whole class.

Communication difficulties were mentioned by teachers as another problematic element of the education of these students, which unfortunately could not be addressed from the beginning. In addition, factors such as heterogeneous classes and deficiencies in infrastructure led to a certain extent a high percentage of teachers to consider teaching in refugee populations a very tiring and demanding experience¹².

However, the Reception Class students considered it very “normal” not to attend the common lessons when the teachers irregularly allowed them to do so or even when they excluded them from the educational process stating that “they thought so or had such information”.

4.3 Social context

All 11 Reception Class students saw the film “Should I stay or should I go?” although they did not succeed as a whole in making interventions in it to change its development. However, the Reception Class students who were not able to make a “new” film submitted some of their thoughts to the e-class in the form of a descriptive report. Their feelings were varied but all the Reception Class students were dominated by identification with the heroes and the expression of similar mixed feelings. They told us that for the first period of the pandemic, this activity was a “way out” of the closure as they were experiencing an opportunity to realize “how similar people are”.

In the reflection that analyzed the above events, positive thoughts were expressed about the response of the Reception Class students, but also reflection on the dominant perceptions that dictate xenophobia and intolerance for populations that do not have ethnic or religious proximity. We also realized that the teachers who had the least contact with the Reception Class students, had the most extreme xenophobic attitude and reproduced all the stereotypes and fake news of the Internet.

The team of teachers, evaluating the second cycle as a whole, found with pleasant surprise how much the dynamics of the common group of Reception Class

12 Παπαδοπούλου, Φ., Χιονά, Σ., Φελεκίδου, Β. & Καλόγηρος Β. (2019). Πρώτες εκτιμήσεις της διαδικασίας ένταξης των προσφυγόπουλων της Κεντρικής Μακεδονίας στο ελληνικό εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα (2016-2017). Στο Αλεξάνδρα Ανδρούσου, Μαρία Σφυρόερα, Αγγελική Βελλοπούλου, Στέλλα Δέλη, Ελένη Διδάχου, Ευφροσύνη Κατσικονούρη & Σοφία Σαΐτη (επιμ.) Βιβλίο Πρακτικών του 11ου Συνεδρίου της ΟΜΕΠ: 1ο Συνέδριο της Ελληνικής Επιτροπής της ΟΜΕΠ, Από εδώ και από παντού: εκπαιδευτικές αλλαγές και παιδαγωγικές πρακτικές για ένα ανοιχτό σχολείο, 3 -5 /11/ 2017, Αθήνα. Retrieved October 2, 2021 from: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uf1nn-AjXtU1PjFjny9EvNRLly9IVGFQ/view>

students changed in creative ways the experiences of quarantine. The Reception Class students' need for freedom, care freeness, relaxation and creativity was evident. All the Reception Class students experienced confinement in a harsh way in whatever environment they lived in and came to the point of homesickness for school which under normal circumstances they treated as coercion.

During the lock down, we found an increase in domestic violence and in the students' environment, which was also indirectly reflected in the narration of their experiences. It is common for students from the same school or neighborhood to carry over past rivalries involving personal or family relationships. The teachers played a coordinating and facilitating role for the process without special regulatory interventions. Generally speaking, Reception Class students were more reluctant to participate. They took part in discussions but they would not start them if they were not given the floor. Also, they did not decide to take on coordinating roles.

There was a very intense and long discussion between the teachers that also dealt with current events and a crisis in Evros of the time. Out of the total of approximately 50 teachers, 5-6 appeared with extreme racist speech, for the first time in the annals of the school's meetings, who were clearly affected by the developments in Evros, expressed fatigue and indignation at the "burden" of refugees and "stigmatization" of the school due to of the operation of the Reception Class.

4.4 Living environment

Out of the 11 Reception Class students who responded, 7 lived with their families in apartments in the area, 2 with their families in a refugee camp and 2 in a hostel for unaccompanied minors. 3 Reception Class students answered that they had left a family member back in their home country and 3 that a family member lived in another European country.

The closing of the second cycle coincided with the end of a difficult and unprecedented for the Greek school data school year, leaving the start of the 3rd cycle for the new school year 2020-2021. The group's unanimous decision after a thorough discussion was that the research should follow the same Reception Class students who would now go to the 2nd grade of the Vocational school. Although the Reception Class student would not attend additional Greek language classes the following year, our unanimous decision was to follow the same students in the next grade.

A discussion followed with the students of Reception Class about personal attitudes, perceptions and practices in relation to the educational process. It was recorded and revealed above all the immense need for empowerment through action. One of the key elements that emerged was the lack of support from the

students' family environment or the environment in which they lived in relation to schooling and a largely unsatisfied sense of 'belonging'. The low degree of language communication of the Reception Class students - even among themselves since it is not self-evident that there is a common mother tongue in combination with a quite different cultural background total and different perceptions of gender roles and position are elements that emerged through the analysis and discussion.

5. Conclusion remarks

The overall reflection of the 3rd cycle as well as the previous two ones, led us to recognize that normative and sometimes authoritarian practices can crush the dreams and desires of young people. In particular, the most vulnerable parts of society become recipients of heightened pressures and exclusions during times of crisis and poverty.

The teachers of the research group reflected to some extent on our identity as teachers and as citizens of the country. While we did not experience disciplinary issues with Reception Class students, we wondered whether our normative behavior towards other students might be an incentive for them to express more aversion to vulnerable populations.

The full prevalence of views of individualism, neoliberals' views and excellence became more pronounced and evident. We noticed that during the time when there was particular pressure and difficulties for the whole society and the school, some of the members of the school community exhausted their strictness in relation to other more vulnerable members. This transfer of pressure to the most vulnerable members of a community at the same time as the complete lack of care from the state was a cause of discussion and prompted the design of some interventions concerning Reception Class students and how they experienced it.

Through discussion and analysis, the perception and attitude of both students and teachers changed regarding the priorities that must be set in language teaching so that it functions as a supplement to the common lessons, but also the students' need for their daily life language that when mastered, the person does not feel like a stranger and can take part in the common actions of a community.

In the overall conclusions obtained, the importance of using digital tools as means of realization is evident, without which, due to lock down restrictions, it would not have been possible to carry out this action research. The e-mail addresses that the IT teacher made sure to create for all the Reception Class students in the meantime were used and they were helped to register in the Pan-Hellenic network e-class both for the Reception Class courses and for the common courses. Also the webex platform was used for some joint meetings of Reception Class students and teachers to exchange opinions and reflection between teachers.

The results and conclusions were used for research and education in the

following school years for the entire student population of the school unit in the first phase and can potentially be used on a larger scale.

A critical-emancipatory action research, although it has limited local boundaries - empowerment of the specific group that participates in it and their action, but possibly also reflection of the readers of the published report and their corresponding action - can bring about changes on a micro level and macro level. For example, at the micro-level to reveal the distortions of the ideology and transform the worldview of those involved, but also of the wider community, to reframe or change the curriculum based on the real needs and interests of the participants, to democratize the pedagogical relationship, to promote alternative forms of learning and assessment, to work anti-systemically - “like a drop”¹³.

However, we hope that, although the situation is constantly getting worse in matters of Reception Class integration, our research has created a small field of turmoil and reflection at the collective level of the school unit but also in the individualities of the members of the school community as well as the members of the research team. We hope that we have been that “one drop”.

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