



# Intercultural Education Issues in Greece

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**Abstract:** In modern times is more and more understanding the phenomenon of the influx of students, which are originated from different cultural backgrounds in the Greek education system. Because of this major phenomenon teachers should address specific students to develop a multicultural awareness, broaden their skills knowledge and methods to achieve better planning and better organization of intercultural education. In this article we will analyze the term intercultural education and education models, the role of the native language in foreign language learning, the problems of intercultural education program and then we will provide recommendations for the integration of an intercultural approach to the education system. Finishing the article, we will make an overall assessment that we have already reported extracted conclusions.

**Keywords:** Poupolitismiki, Intercultural Education, Training Models, Native Language, Problems, Recommendations

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of intercultural was first appeared in Greece in the 1980s as theoretical analysis and in the 1990s as an impact of a big immigration wave, coming from different areas, such as Balkans, Asia, Africa, the countries located at the former soviet was approaching Greek Society Union. The law 2413/1996 establishes intercultural education system [1]. In last decades, Greece has been transformed from a country, which sends immigrants, to a host country. As a result, Greek community has many multicultural characteristics. This multicultural character, which the Greek society has, reflected to education. In Greek schools, studies not only Greek children, but also children from different countries [2, 3]. In the year 2005-2006 at primary and secondary education the number of foreign student was estimated at about 1.445.104. Also, during the school season 2009-2010, the majority of foreign students in Greek primary and secondary education, were from Albania, Bulgaria, Roumania, Georgia, India and Armenia (source of primary school address Attica prefecture). [4] Nowadays, the number of foreign is increasing as a result of the large influx of immigrants coming in Greece, especially from other countries, such as Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, the character of education should be humanitarian and the teacher's role crucial. Education and especially intercultural one, as a carrier of human rights, has the talk to prepare

students to be citizens of multicultural society, by strengthening mutual the virtue of the respect and acceptance of diversity. In this sense intercultural education has to play a crucial role in the education system of European countries, such as Greece, promoting the smooth intergration of pupils from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, we will present the meaning of intercultural education and training models, which are used by Western countries in order to be faced the phenomenon of immigration. Finally, proposes is going to be given in order the intercultural term embodiment the education system. [5]

## 2. Meaning of the Term Interculturalism

According to a dominant academic and political approach the term of multiculturalism describes an existing situation, a situation in which many cultures, live within specific borders. This term is not only refers to ethnic or national differences, but also to linguistic religion and socio-economic one. With this meaning there has not ever been multicultural society. On the other hand, interculturalism is more dynamic concept as it has the meaning of interaction and constantly enrolling relationships between different cultural groups, which are in contact. This term is not only refers to the coexistence of different cultural, but also to an

enduring influence between them and the ability to create common cultural models.

In contrasting multicultural education promotes acceptance or at least tolerance towards different cultures in a frame of a dominant cultural group. The multi-ethnic education has as goal to strengthen the democracy, giving to all cultural groups equal access to social, economic and cultural available resources. This type of education, first of all recognizes the equality of all cultures and trying to utilize all the resources which students bring with them. [4]

- The term intercultural education poses a difficulty in this clarification. This is because many meanings that surround it, further complicate the clarification. In the word dictionary of the new Greek language (Mpampiniotis lexicology center) is informed that the term intercultural includes anybody who is associated with different cultures or combines different cultures while polytismikos is anybody who, is characterized by the coexistence of diverse and cultures, distinguished between them. [5]
- It is impossible to give a clearly briefed, universally and widely accepted definition of intercultural education. Given the variety of concepts for education and corresponding variety of possible definitions of culture, leads almost to a lack of a simple and universally agreed definition, which is not being surprised at all. [5]
- Intercultural education can be understood as the process of communication between cultures. There is a great interest in society to meet people of other cultures and these cultures too. As the poetry Homer, sings to *Odyssey A' Rapsody*, by using the hero Odysseus "Multi people have seen and have learned their minds", which means that Odysseus saw the cities of many people and learned their cultures. This happens to be intercultural education too, where the mixing of cultures leads to an understanding and humanization balance. [4]
- According to intercultural education guide, the term intercultural education could be explained as a mean of an action or a tool which goal is to develop skills and attitudes, necessary for everyone to achieve effective interaction in a multicultural society. [6]

### 3. Education Models in Western Countries

#### 3.1. *The Assimilationist Model of Education*

The term of assimilation generally means the process through which people with different ethnic backgrounds participate in the daily life of a broader society, having renounced the elements of their cultural identity. In the part of education, this means that all students regardless of their ethnic and cultural background need to acquire knowledge and skills that will help them to participate in the common national culture, which is the only way too. In order to be achieved that, the aim of this education model, should be the

learning of the official language (the language of the host country) and also the natural culture. [7, 11]

#### 3.2. *Model of Intergration of the Other*

The term integration implies recognition that every immigrant group is a carrier of a culture, which should accept the effects of the host country, but the same time has an impact on society and is involved in its daily routine. The cultural diversity is accepted, providing that does not prevent the integration and does not endanger the cultural values of the dominant society. [7, 11]

#### 3.3. *Multicultural Model of Education*

Multicultural model was first appeared in the 1970s, when it was realized that in many countries the national separation reproduced from generation to generation in such way that assimilation and integration did not give substantial solutions to the problems which children had being faced to in school. Therefore, there has been a change from ethnocentric model to cultural pluralism, which is known in teaching of the term multicultural education.

Supporters of this model believe that social cohesion is promoted not only through the recognition of cultural particularities of migrant groups but also through a formation of a common framework within all cultures can coexist and grow without endangering the unity and social cohesion. [7]

#### 3.4. *The Anti-racism Education Model*

The anti-racism education model was first developed in the middle 1980, basically in England and America. Proponents of this model criticized the multicultural education model. The anti-racism model has as priority the equality in education. To achieve this goal, this model targets to transform the structures and systems that promote inequality. Secondly, it promotes justice and equal opportunities in all communities sectors. Finally, the anti-racism model consider as greater instance to release the community from emancipation and facism standars. [7]

#### 3.5. *Intercultural Education Model*

Intercultural education model was also appeared in the 1980, mainly in Europe. According to European council, Unesco and the EU, intercultural education is a principle that permeates the school schedule and has as an action to promote equal opportunities in education and society too.

Intercultural education means meeting, conflicts for many sides and development at various levels. It has, as necessary condition the existence of at least two languages and cultures. Also, intercultural education has the below offices: [9]

- a) Authority (office) equivalence of cultures.
- b) Equal opportunities and finally
- c) The acceptance and utilization of intercultural-bilingual pupils.

According to the final report of the European council (1986), the basic characteristics of intercultural education

are: [8]

- a) Have the scope to direct experience of children in host countries.
- b) Causes the mutual influence of cultures of origin and host countries.
- c) Review and revision school criterias basic on society and national.
- d) Means for evaluating the opportunities in life and achieve maximum social and economic inclusion.

Making a brief of these education models which were presented to the address, multiculturalism model of assimilation has been criticized as narrow ethnocentric because is trying to learn immigrants the language of the host country and focus on bringing them to the new culture ingoring their culture, as they are obliged to forget their origin. In the end intercultural model is an integrated model, which aims to create open societies, which are characterized by fairness, understanding and mutual acceptance between its members.

#### **4. The Role of the Mother Tongue in Foreign Language Learning**

A very important prerequisite for the teaching of a language as a second or foreign is the admission to the school of the mother tongue of the students, including cultural heritage, which it conveys from each country.

The native language is the main way, by which people communicate with people of the closer family or wider social environment, structuring their thoughts, form concepts, understand the world around them, expressing their feelings and develop their personality. Indifference or Ironically, and the worst mockery of «weak» school students about their mother tongue may have significant impacts in many parts of their lives, such as psychological, pedagogical and social. On the other hand, researches have shown that the persistence of the exclusive teaching and cultivation of a second foreign language, like that of the host country to the children of foreigners and perpetrators, leads them to poor performance and failure in comparison with the performance of their monolingual peers.

Thus, the school should, where is possible, enhance the cultivation of the mother tongue in foreign mother tongue pupils in both oral as well as in the written word. They should also reinforce them to develop communication skills as well as learning a second language. [15]

#### **5. Problems of Intercultural Education Program**

It is obvious that, the size of the intercultural education program established by the relevant law is minimal, in front of the modern situation. The number of intercultural schools is being estimated in about 0, 17% of the overall public education, while foreigners and repatriates students are approaching the 10% of total school population. In the part of

classes and tutorial sections which are therefore more numerous, are not also seem to achieve their goals. Although, we should recognize that it has not ever been a systematic evaluation of these measures, which are taken, or a valuable study about the performance of foreign students in their studies and the generally influx in the Greek education system. [12, 13]

A major weakness of the intercultural approach adopted by the Greek state, are its aims. The educational policy focuses on the issue of learning the Greek language. The cultural and linguistic diversity of students lies in their lack of knowledge of Greek, but is defined, as a problem solving open. The process, which should be followed in order to resolve this problem is one way only and does not involve indigenous students but only concerns about the weak students. The key feature of these courses is that they do not have Greek as their mother tongue. Otherwise many of those students that have not experienced another country from Greece. Moreover, the implementation of the program so far does not take into account the pupils' mother tongue in order to focus the learning process on the functional relationship between the two languages and the overall transition and socialization of the student from a community / country to another. [14]

#### **6. Proposals for the Inclusion of an Intercultural Approach in the Education System**

- (1) Functional connection of learning the Greek language, should be based on the native language of its foreign and repatriated students. [10]
- (2) Create personalized and flexible programs to aid the weak students within the extended school schedule.
- (3) Establishment of annual training seminars for all teachers and professors in order to inform and sensitize them on issues of intercultural education and obligated observation of these seminars for all taught staff at least once every three years.
- (4) Supporting specific programs and intercultural events in schools has to play an active role for children and their parents.
- (5) The general training of the intercultural approach and principles measures should be taken by the education ministry, in order intercultural education should have a decent realized adjustment with flexibly opportunities. [10]
- (6) Particular emphasis should be given in courses of History, Geography and Civil education, within the exiting curriculum. Corresponding recognition of the role played by international migration from and to Greece in modern history and familiarizing with similar issues concerning not only other European countries, but also the foreign countries of the students.
- (7) Office guidance and counseling should be created. The

role of the teacher-adviser in the intercultural school and the new educational system should be very important. It will help foreign students to realize their potential in the best way, setting realistic goals, to adapt to the social and professional environment and to wide their abilities, which are necessary in order to be absorbed by the Greek society. [1]

- (8) Theatrical performers that will enable students to experience the “other” entering in their position, knowing his emotional state.
- (9) Highlighting common elements (e.g. pain, sadness) and emphasis on mediation and peace education (empathy, solidarity, degradation, ethnocentric thinking, multiperspectivity). [1]
- (10) Bilingual books: Bilingual books is an opportunity for bilingual children to recognize the connection between greek and their language, but also help them to bridge the gap between their two identities while providing to all children in the class (bilingual or not) the ability to develop metalinguistic and multilingual skills. Through the contents of bilingual books, children and teachers could discuss the issue of coexistence of languages and cultures in modern societies, in a manner commensurate with the age of children in each class. [4]
- (11) Another proposal is the matching text. These texts are written by the children themselves and express their own ideas and opinions about languages, their life and education. These texts may be a subject to educational use, both as a linguistic structure, as well as content. [4]

## 7. Conclusions

Propose of this study was to describe the intercultural education and make proposals through which the education system will become more effective. Intercultural education is addressed to both native and foreigners in order to create between them coherence and reciprocity relations. However, intercultural education and its application, within the Greek education system is a very complex issue that remains pending. In the above phenomenon the crucial role should be played by the teachers who will have to face a difficult task, trying to help foreign students to use their forces so that they can cope with the demands and needs of the society in which they have joined. Furthermore the teacher should have permanent education in order to be able to cope with in the new environment and new tasks related to developments cultural skills.

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