

Diversity acceptance among Greek primary school students

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970's with a culmination in the 1990's Greek society has witnessed a remarkable shift. From a nation of emigrants, Greece has turned into a host country for immigrants. Their numerous presences added to repatriated Greeks, gypsies and religious minorities have affected the status quo ante of Greek schools dramatically.

How has Education been affected? Are primary school students open to otherness while at school? What is their attitude towards those of different ethnical and race origin in their everyday life?

The purpose of this research is to record the answers primary school students give to some of these questions.

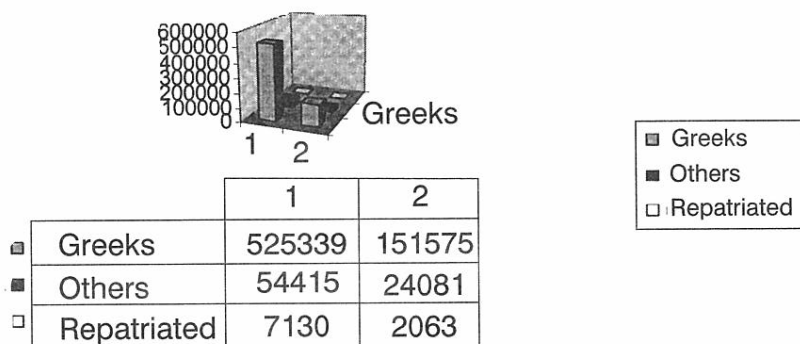
Mainly the variables of ethnic origin, grade and sex are examined in relation to students' openness to children of different ethnical or race origin.

The results of this research will be useful, to get a fair idea of how things are among contemporary primary students in Greece as far as diversity acceptance is concerned both inside as well as outside school premises.

Introduction

In today's globalised world, international migration has proved to be one of the most important issues for developed and developing nations alike as it could be of mutual interest both of the sending and receiving countries if managed effectively. In this context Greece has switched from a migrant sending country and a mere transit country into a major destination country for migrants and thus it has shared the migration dilemmas as other countries of the European Union and beyond. The particularity of the Migration Phenomenon in Greece, unlike other European countries that there has been a gradual transition lasting for decades, is that within a short period the presence of large numbers of migrants¹ with different cultures created a need for rapid integration² (Zavos, 2006). So it makes sense the fact that 2008 has been designated European Year of intercultural Dialogue by the European Union.

1 = school population in Greece, 2 = school population in Attica



Source: IPODE (Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies)
www.ipode.gr (5-11-2008)

School year 2006-07

On a national level the Greek motto is “Together in diversity” and the aims of the campaign are as follows:

“ The basic aim of the National Strategy is to consolidate the idea and the practice of the intercultural dialogue in the Greek value system, in other words the complete and final strengthening of the tolerance and respect of the other. The parameters, which were especially taken in consideration when preparing this Greek National Strategy, are the following: A. Relations of Greece with other countries and B. Existence of groups with particular ethnic, religious or/and cultural features within the Greek territory (ex. a large number of immigrants)... National Strategy aims at the creation of a frame”

[http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/1052.0.html?&L=0/\(15-10-2008\)](http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/1052.0.html?&L=0/(15-10-2008))).

The question that comes up is whether the frame that will allow and encourage the free and creative expression of the various cultural groups within the Greek territory, “additionally contributing to creativity and innovation”³ really works. In this changing landscape, it's through education aiming at children and young adolescents that these principles can be effectively transported and rooted in society (Benedek, 2006). So to see how effective the whole strategy is, it could be worthy to study what is the impact, how it affects the attitudes and personal beliefs of contemporary students⁴.

The presentation of the findings of the empirical research that follows is in this direction.

The research

The sample

It is a pilot research conducted in spring 2008 in state schools of Attica where almost 40% of the population of Greece live. Schools were chosen according to their location so as to have data from areas of different socioeconomic level, to study the effect of this variable on the attitudes. The sample consists of

213 primary school students. The boys were 54,4% of the population, while the girls were 45,6%.

There were 20 students per class in average with a standard deviation of 3. They were students of the second, the fifth and the sixth grade⁵. Greeks were 83,6% of them while 4% of the population was Repatriated⁶. The rest 12,4% were of different origin, the vast majority of which second generation children of foreign immigrants and few of them – 3,7% Roma.

Assessment instrument – (Questionnaire)

The questionnaire used was adapted from Maria Jose Diaz-Aguado et al. scales of behavioral disposition towards other ethnical or cultural groups questionnaire (Diaz-Aguado, 2000). The scale was Likert type, with four levels (very much, a lot, not much, not at all). The questionnaires were rated and only those fully answered were processed.

Students were asked how much they like participating, or would like to participate, in various activities with children from another ethnic or cultural group both in school premises and out of school.

Analysis of results

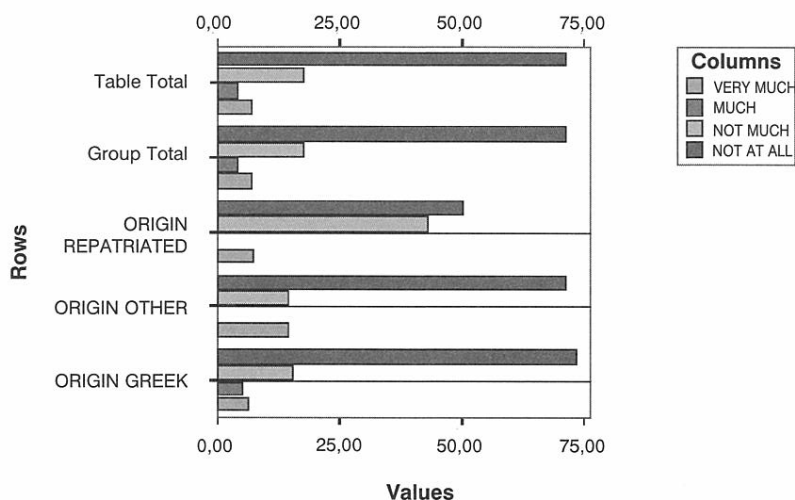
There has been an SPSS analysis⁷ of the data.

The first set of questions is meant to detect whether students are open to otherness while they are at school.

The data analysis suggests that most of them would not prefer to go to a school where all the children were of other origin. The ones most against the idea were the Repatriated (50% NOT AT ALL – 42,9% NOT MUCH – 7,1% VERY MUCH). The Greek students and the Others seemed to share the same degree of preference as follows: Greek students (73,4% NOT AT ALL – 15,4% NOT MUCH – 4,9% MUCH – 6,3% VERY MUCH) and Others (71,4% NOT AT ALL – 14,3% NOT MUCH and the same percentage for VERY MUCH).

To the question whether they would like to do group work with children

of other origin the Greeks were the least willing to (33,5% NOT AT ALL – 21% NOT MUCH – 18,9% MUCH – 26,6% VERY MUCH), while the Others and the Repatriated gave almost the same positive answers (Others: 30,8% VERY MUCH and the same MUCH – 15,4% – 23,1% NOT MUCH and Repatriated 21,4% VERY MUCH – 42,9% MUCH – 14,3% MUCH – 21,4% NOT AT ALL).



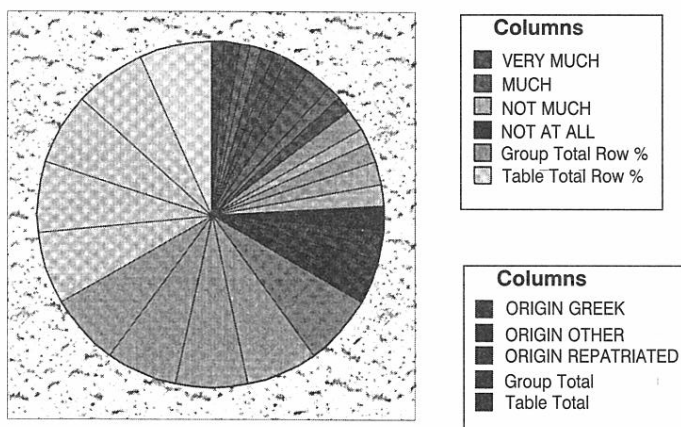
Graph 2: School attendance

Almost the same picture we get with the question whether they would like sitting next to children of other origin in class. The Others and the Repatriated had a positive disposition (Others: 38,5% VERY MUCH – 15,4% MUCH – 23,0% NOT MUCH – 23,1% NOT AT ALL and Repatriated 35,7% VERY MUCH – 21,4% MUCH – 14,3% MUCH – 28,6% NOT AT ALL). The Greek students seemed to be less willing (31,9% NOT AT ALL – 22% NOT MUCH – 17 %MUCH – 29,1%) to sit next to children of other origin.

The rest of the questions are to find what the attitude of students is when outside school. The first question asked was if they would like to invite a girl

or boy of different origin to their house. The majority of Greek students (64,3%) wouldn't like to. In particular only 17,5% would VERY MUCH like to, another 18,2% would MUCH like to, as for the rest 31,4% would NOT MUCH like and the remaining 32,9% would NOT AT ALL like to invite home. When the students of other origin were asked their answers were quite the opposite as 57,1% of them would VERY MUCH (21,5%), or MUCH (35,7%) like to invite boys and girls of other origin to their house. A 21% would NOT MUCH like to and 21,4% would NOT AT ALL. The preferences of the repatriated were equally divided as 50% of them would VERY MUCH (14,3%) or MUCH (35,7%) like to and NOT MUCH (28,6%) or NOT AT ALL 21,4%).

Graph 3: Inviting home



When the Greek students were asked if they would like to go to a boy or girl's birthday party of different origin more than half of them –51,1% – would either VERY MUCH (36,2%) or MUCH (14,9%) like to. A 21,2% would NOT MUCH like, and the rest 27,7% would NOT AT ALL like to. When coming to Others the majority of them 66,7 % wouldn't like to, 41,7% NOT AT ALL, 25% NOT MUCH, 8,3% MUCH and only 25% would VERY MUCH like to go to a birthday party. The Repatriated seemed to be more willing to go 57,1% VERY MUCH and 42,9% NOT AT ALL.

Then they were asked if they would like to go on a school trip with children of different origin. The majority of all three categories were against. To start with the Greeks, 74,1 % of them gave an answer ranging from NOT AT ALL (51%), to NOT MUCH (23,1%). The other 25,9% would MUCH (18,2%) or VERY (7,7%) like to go on the trip. The answers of the Others seemed to be quite the same as a 71,5% would NOT AT ALL (50%) or NOT MUCH (21,4%) like to and only 28,5% would MUCH (21,5%) or VERY MUCH (7,1%) like to. The Repatriated were less against the idea. A 57,2% of them would NOT AT ALL (28,6%) and the same percentage would NOT MUCH like to, while 42,8% of them would either MUCH (21,4%) or VERY MUCH like to go on a school trip with children of different origin.

The answers to the question if they would prefer to have more friends of different origin are as follows. Only the Others were for the idea as a 78,5% of them would VERY MUCH (57,1%) or MUCH (21,5%) prefer to and only 21,5% were against because they would NOT AT ALL prefer to. The preferences of the Repatriated were equally divided between preferring (21,4% VERY MUCH – 28, 6% MUCH) and not (7,1% NOT MUCH – 42,9% NOT AT ALL). When coming to the Greek students a 53,8% of the answers were negative (37,0% NOT AT ALL – NOT MUCH 16,8%) and positively disposed was a 46,2% (17,5% MUCH – 28,7% VERY MUCH) to have more friends of different origin.

Then when they were asked if they would like a boy or girl of different origin as one of their best friends, all of them seemed to share the same preferences, with almost half of the Greek students (31,9% VERY MUCH – 19,1% MUCH – 12,8% NOT MUCH – 36,2% NOT AT ALL) and the Others with the Repatriated giving the same answers (35,7% VERY MUCH – 14,3% MUCH – 14,3% NOT MUCH – 35,7% NOT AT ALL).

To see how much trust they would have in children of other origin they were asked if they would like to tell one of them a secret. The Others very more negative (57,1% NOT AT ALL - 28,6% NOT MUCH – 14,3% VERY MUCH. The Repatriated seemed to be more positively disposed than the others (35,7% NOT AT ALL – 21,5% NOT MUCH and almost the same for VERY MUCH and MUCH).

Then there was the question whether they would they like to be a foreigner

could they be born again. Most of the answers were negative. 89,5 % of the Greek students wouldn't like to (79,7% NOT AT ALL – 9,8% NOT MUCH), compared to 71,4% of Others (64,3% NOT AT ALL – 7,1% NOT MUCH) and the 64,3% of the Repatriated who would NOT AT ALL like to be a foreigner. From those who were for the idea only 10,5% were the Greek students (7,7% VERY MUCH – 2,8% MUCH), 28,6% were the Others who would VERY MUCH like to , and 35,7% of the Repatriated (28,6% MUCH – 7,1% VERY MUCH) would like to be a foreigner if they could be born again.

Another similar question dealing with origin was whether they would like it if their parents were foreigners. The least happy with the idea were the Others (78,6% NOT AT ALL – 14,3% NOT MUCH – 7,1% VERY MUCH). Moreover, only one fifth of the Greeks (12,6% VERY MUCH – 7,7% MUCH – 5,65 NOT MUCH – 74,1% NOT AT ALL). The Repatriated seemed to be not that negative against the idea of having foreign parents compared to the rest (57,2% NOT AT ALL – 7, 1% MUCH – 35,7% VERY MUCH).

Discussion

What could be said out of the statistic data analysis is that students at Greek State Primary schools are not that open to otherness. But that would be a simplistic way to put the matter. Although the questionnaire used had no open questions, 32% of the participants⁸ felt like they had to give a reason for their answers. So they went on writing a few notes right under the Likert scale. The two questions the students seemed to have strong feelings about, where whether they would they like to be a foreigner could they be born again, as well as if they would like it if their parents were foreigners.

Only three of the comments showed negative feelings against foreigners⁹. In one it was stated: “Only the thought of it makes me sick”. And in the other: “No. With the exception of Greece, in most other countries mafia and selling of guns flourish”. And the third one: “Because I don't like other races”.

Apart from these three students, there were a lot of others that had given a 4 (NOT AT ALL like to be born a foreigner) simply because they were proud of their own origin and the legacy that comes with it. “I love to be

a Greek. My country has the most glorious history in the whole world". "Greece has a lot of nice places to visit and lots of antiquities"¹⁰. And another 5th grade girl student. "Because I love Greece". Of course there were children coming from other countries that had given a 4 answer because "I like to have been born a foreigner. I love MY COUNTRY".¹¹

In addition, one of the 6th graders, a boy, who had given a 2 answer (he would much like to be born a foreigner), he wrote: "I would like to be from a foreign country. That would make me special in class". Another one commented: "Because all counties have their own civilization.

The rest of the comments about being born a foreigner, revealed rather a fear of the consequences than the fact. A six-grade girl wrote: "No. Because then none would make friends with me". And another one went one: "No. Because people mistreat foreigners and they hit immigrants". There were many more answers with the general idea that foreigners are criticized for their way of living and that would make students feel embarrassed and uncomfortable.

When asked if they would like their parents to be foreigners two of the boys¹² that were for the idea and had given a 1 answer said: "I'd love to, because then I could speak one more language". And a clear-cut answer of another one who would like it, too: "Yes, because I am not a racist".

On the other hand, the typical reason that made students give a 4 answer (not like it at all their parents to be foreigners) as stated in their comments is that they were afraid that "people would make fun of both them and my parents". For some else to add: "My parents wouldn't be able to find a job and a proper place to live in"¹³, so it is of no surprise the fact that the ones who were the least happy to have foreign parents were those who do have in reality.

Conclusion – Suggestions

Are children intolerant against fellow students of different origin or are simply they afraid of what it means to be one of them from what they witness in everyday life and how society treat them? One way or another, there is a lot

to be done to strengthen the tolerance and respect of the other. As intolerance, prejudice, xenophobia and racism could appear in very subtle and insidious forms, the perception that racism is only perpetrated by others and is therefore someone else's responsibility is all-wrong.

Education could be the answer. In various experimental studies¹⁴ it has been confirmed that students' disposition to interact with classmates from other ethnic groups has improved after participating in properly designed programmes applied by trained teachers. Cultural skills are necessary for every individual to deal with the challenges of multicultural society (Kogidou, 2008).

In contemporary Greek schools things should change. But could they? The successful implementation in certain schools makes us all more optimistic. The 132nd primary school of Grava has been one of them. Stella Protonotariou¹⁵ says:

“More or less, we all carry xenophobic notions and attitudes within us. Such behaviors are often witnessed in every day Greek school practice, not only on the part of teachers but from students as well. Through proper work notions can change and racism could be eliminated. This is the case of the certain school”.

Notes

¹ A particular characteristic of the migrants in Greece is that the over 50% of them come from a single country (Mediterranean Migration Observatory Figure 2).

² One has to take into account the fact that from a 2,5% of estimated foreigners of Greece total population in the 1980s, the figure raised to 7% and some sources estimate it even 10%.

³ <http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/1052.0.html?&L=0> / (15-10-2008).

⁴ There has been a research since 2003 with Yannis Roussakis studying teachers' notions on the difficulties of integration or foreign students in contemporary Greek school. The next aim would be to study parents' attitudes in related topics.

⁵ Researches have shown that significant differences are found as a function of grade, with a progressive increase as age increases. The most significant rise occurs between 2nd and 5th grade.

⁶ “Repatriated” are thought to be immigrants who claim to be of Greek origin without necessarily having the official papers to prove it when going back to Greece.

⁷ When this paper was presented in XXIII CESE in Athens, the emphasis was given on variable of boys and girls. The chairperson, Professor Panagiotis Persianis suggested that it would be far more interesting to have an analysis of the variable of origin. So in this paper we follow his advice. In the Conference the presentation was of the answers of the 5th grade students who were more open to otherness than the average of the three grades.

⁸ They were all students of the 5th and the 6th grade.

⁹ All three of them were answers coming from boys of the 6th grade.

¹⁰ They were both answers of 5th grade Greek girls.

¹¹ An Albanian boy of the sixth grade.

¹² Greeks of the 5th grade.

¹³ A Repatriated boy, student of the 6th grade.

¹⁴ Baraja, 1993; Diaz-Aguado, Martinez Arias & Baraja, 1992).

¹⁵ Ms Stella Protonotariou is the ex principal of the 132nd primary school of Grava, a school with modal work in the field. The removal from her post has been a highly controversial subject last winter for educational community.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στην εποχή της Παγκοσμιοποίησης, το διεθνές μεταναστευτικό ρεύμα έχει αναχθεί σε μείζον ζήτημα τόσο για τις αναπτυσσόμενες όσο και για τις ανεπτυγμένες χώρες, καθώς, με το σωστό κυβερνητικό σχεδιασμό, έχει αποδειχθεί ότι μπορεί να αποβεί προς όφελος αμφότερων των χωρών αποστολής και υποδοχής μεταναστών.

Μέσα σε αυτό το διεθνές συγκείμενο, η Ελλάδα έχει μετατραπεί από χώρα αποστολής μεταναστών και ενδιάμεσου προσωρινού σταθμού, σε σημαντικό πόλο έλξης μόνιμης εγκατάστασης μεγάλου αριθμού μεταναστών. Έτσι, γίνεται κοινωνός των προβλημάτων που εδώ και πολλά χρόνια αντιμετωπίζουν άλλες χώρες. Η ιδιαιτερότητα του ελληνικού φαινομένου έγκειται στο γεγονός ότι, σε αντιδιαστολή με εκείνες που βίωσαν έναν κλιμακούμενο μετασχηματισμό αρκετών δεκαετιών, η Ελλάδα κλήθηκε να αντιμετωπίσει την ανάγκη ταχείας αφομοίωσης πλήθους μεταναστών διαφορετικής προέλευσης, με διαφορετική κουλτούρα, μέσα σε μια συντομότερη χρονικά περίοδο.

Μέσα σε αυτές τις συνθήκες δεν είναι άξιο απορίας το γεγονός η χρονιά που διανύουμε να έχει ανακηρυχθεί ως Ευρωπαϊκό. Έτος Διαπολιτισμικού Διαλόγου. Η Ελλάδα συμμετέχει με το σύνθημα: *Μαζί στη Διαφορετικότητα*. Βασικός στόχος της Εθνικής Στρατηγικής είναι η παγιοποίηση της ιδέας του διαπολιτισμικού διαλόγου στο σύστημα αξιών της ελληνικής κοινωνίας, με σκοπό την επίτευξη και ενδυνάμωση της ανοχής και του σεβασμού του άλλου τόσο σε επίπεδο χωρών όσο και εσωτερικά, με ομάδες ιδιαίτερων εθνικών, θρησκευτικών και πολιτισμικών χαρακτηριστικών.

Το εύλογο ερώτημα είναι, εάν στην πράξη έχει πραγματικά επιτύχει η εφαρμογή ενός τέτοιου πλαισίου.

Ως δείκτες επιτυχούς υλοποίησης της ελληνικής στρατηγικής θα μπορούσαν να εκληφθούν οι στάσεις, οι συμπεριφορές και οι αντιλήψεις των μαθητών του σύγχρονου ελληνικού σχολείου. Προς την κατεύθυνση αυτή κινείται ο ερευνητικός σκοπός της παρούσας εμπειρικής έρευνας. Αποτελεί μέρος μιας ευρύτερης ερευνητικής προσπάθειας που καταβάλλεται σε συνεργασία με τον Γιάννη Ρουσσάκη, με σκοπό την αποτύπωση των στά-

σεων και αντιλήψεων στην Ελλάδα του σήμερα, μελετώντας το τρίπτυχο «μαθητές, εκπαιδευτικοί και γονείς».

Το συγκεκριμένο τμήμα της μικρής κλίμακας πιλοτικής έρευνας πραγματοποιήθηκε την άνοιξη του τρέχοντος έτους σε δημόσια δημοτικά σχολεία του νομού Αττικής. Καταβλήθηκε προσπάθεια για την εξασφάλιση αντιπροσωπευτικού δείγματος, έγινε επεξεργασία μόνο των πλήρως απαντημένων ερωτηματολογίων. Το 83,6%, εκ των 213 ερωτηθέντων, ήταν Έλληνες, το 4% παλιννοστούντες, ενώ το υπόλοιπο 12,4% του πληθυσμού αποτελούνταν από μαθητές διαφορετικής καταγωγής, με το μεγαλύτερο ποσοστό από αυτούς να είναι παιδιά οικονομικών μεταναστών που γεννήθηκαν στην Ελλάδα και τους Ρομά να ανέρχονται στο 3,7%. Τα ερωτηματολόγια συμπληρώθηκαν από μαθητές της Β' και Στ' τάξης του Δημοτικού σχολείου, λόγω του ότι διεθνή επιστημονικά ευρήματα επισημαίνουν μια σημαντική διαφοροποίηση συμπεριφοράς απέναντι στο άλλο, μεταξύ της ηλικίας των 8 ετών και της προεφηβείας, εξαιτίας της αλλαγής του τρόπου με τον οποίο τα παιδιά αντιλαμβάνονται τότε τις κοινωνικές δομές και αξίες. Το εργαλείο της έρευνας είναι ένα ερωτηματολόγιο κλίμακας συμπεριφοράς, τύπου Likert, τετράβαθμης διαβάθμισης (1 = ΠΑΡΑ ΠΟΛΥ, 2 = ΠΟΛΥ, 3 = ΛΙΓΟ, 4 = ΚΑΘΟΛΟΥ). Οι μαθητές ρωτήθηκαν πόσο θα τους άρεσε να συμμετέχουν σε διάφορες δραστηριότητες με παιδιά από διαφορετικές πολιτισμικές ή εθνικές ομάδες στα πλαίσια του σχολείου τους, αλλά και εκτός αυτού. Η επεξεργασία των ερευνητικών δεδομένων έγινε με τη χρήση του στατιστικού πακέτου SPSS 13.

Τα πρώτα αποτελέσματα της στατιστικής ανάλυσης καταδεικνύουν μια τάση επιφυλακτικότητας των μαθητών απέναντι στο διαφορετικό. Πριν όμως καταλήξουμε σε απλουστευτικά συμπεράσματα, θα είχε ενδιαφέρον να προσπαθήσουμε να εντριφύσουμε στα αίτια των απαντήσεων. Ένα απροσδόκητο, όσο και εντυπωσιακό σε έκταση ερευνητικό φαινόμενο, αποτέλεσε το γεγονός ότι το 32% των ερωτηθέντων ένοιωσαν* την ανάγκη να δώσουν γραπτές εξηγήσεις για τις απαντήσεις τους, ενώ δεν υπήρχαν στο ερωτηματολόγιο ανοιχτές ερωτήσεις. Εκεί διαπιστώθηκε ότι ο φόβος μάλλον πηγάζει από τη βίωση της κοινωνικής πραγματικότητας και των συνεπειών που απορρέουν από αυτή για το τι σημαίνει να είσαι διαφορετικός, παρά ως φόβος του φυσικού προσώπου που κομίζει τη διαφορε-

τικότητα. Αυτό που προβάλλει ως επιτακτικό ερευνητικό δεδομένο, είναι η ανάγκη όχι απλής καταγραφής συμπεριφορών, αλλά μέσω ανοιχτών ερωτήσεων η εναργέστερη καταγραφή των αιτίων που τις προκαλούν, ώστε να καταστεί δυνατή η ερμηνεία τους.

Σε ένα ταχέως μετασχηματιζόμενο τοπίο, η Εκπαίδευση είναι το αποτελεσματικότερο όχημα μεταλαμπάδευσης επιθυμητών αρχών στην κοινωνία. Ελπιδοφόρα μηνύματα εμφανούς μεταστροφής προς την κατεύθυνση της αποδοχής και σεβασμού του διαφορετικού υπάρχουν τόσο μέσα από διεθνή ερευνητικά προγράμματα όσο και πετυχημένων καινοτόμων πρακτικών σχολείων στην Ελλάδα.

Το σημαντικότερο όλων πιθανόν είναι να συνειδητοποιήσουμε ότι η προκατάληψη μπορεί να υφέρπει με τόσο συγκεκαλυμμένες μορφές, ώστε η καταπολέμηση της να αποτελεί στοίχημα που, για να το κερδίσουμε τελικά, πρέπει όλοι μας να ενεργοποιηθούμε.

Σημείωση

* Λεξικό Μπαμπινιώτη (1998), σ. 1195.