

The «Inclusion of Repatriated Greek and Foreign Migrant Students in School Education»: Program Description of actions and development perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural education can be viewed as a means of school improvement as it exposes the school unit to alternative multicultural teaching and learning environments, thus reinforcing the comparative study between countries and systems, in order to select the most appropriate ones.

A common tenet between various notions of intercultural education is the assumption that the curriculum must include various courses, programs and practices as a means of reducing the impact of disablement of individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; barriers which often inhibit individuals from reaching their full potential and from accessing social, political, economic and educational opportunities (Banks, 1999). Thus, it becomes an urgent necessity for certain strategies to be incorporated into the school system, if the educational system is to at all face the current multicultural reality and the needs of all students within the system. (Markou, 2001: 74).

However, schools do not always have the capacity, the skills nor often the will to incorporate strategies which will bring about the necessary improvements and change on their own. Thus, innovative actions must initially come from sources outside the school.

The development and implementation of the Program 'Inclusion of Repatriated Greek and Foreign Migrant Students in School Education' by the University of Athens with the collaboration with the National Ministry of Education forms such an innovative, support initiative. The Program has as a central focus, the support of multicultural schools by providing models of effective and diverse teaching and learning practices, by using specialized teaching media, by offering training and professional development opportunities and by creating new teaching and learning material. Specifically, the Program provides:

- School based language support measures for repatriated and foreign students
- Training and professional development programs in intercultural education for teachers and other members of the school community
- Psychosocial support of teachers, students and their families
- Specialised teaching and learning resources for language development and support material for intercultural interaction and communication

The present paper sets out to highlight to what extent the support measures within the Program have initiated improvement at the school level. The evaluation process extends to the entire geographical region of Greece, addressing school based issues in both primary and secondary education and covering a period of implementation from 2006-2008.

The methodological approach of the Program rests on the combination/synergy of theory and practice, research and policy formation, as a process of meeting the immediate educational needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds at the school level and meeting the needs of approach support measures at a systems levels: needs which emerge as a consequence of the dramatic demographic change of the community.

Introduction

Within the last twenty five years, Greece has evolved from a country of emigration (i.e. experiencing the movement of the proportion of its population to other countries), to a country that receives and hosts both immigrants and returning Greek immigrants from abroad (Markou, 2001: 11; Rogge, 1998: 316-317; Palaiologou, 2005: 1).

Within a relatively short span of time, Greece has had to undergo a substantial metamorphosis, from a monolingual, monocultural state, to a society defined by its multicultural character. In an attempt to examine realistically the changes which have taken place in Greece and in order to avoid both alarmism and embellishment, focus will be placed on the differentiation points of the recent migration phenomenon, concerning the population influx of returning Greek migrants or migrants of Greek descent and of foreign migrants from third countries (Niessen, 2004: 3-4). Therefore, the basic elements of this differentiation concern both groups of immigrants as areas of specificity for Greece, as a host country.

The first point of differentiation concerns the rate of immigrant influx. For both of the above groups, the migration flow took place in unprecedented numbers (1.100.000 millions, Baldwin, 2004: 3) and over a short span of time, 1993-2000, justifying the use of the term “migration wave”. Greece, as a

migrant entry point for the European Union, has perhaps been the most popular destination for immigrants from Balkan and Asian countries, facing severe social and/or political conditions and financial hardship (Gotovos & Markou, 2003: 68; Getimis, 2002: 7; Gotovos & Markou, 2004: 3). This in turn is reflected in the education system, whereby the number of migrant students in Greek state schools has increased at a phenomenal rate since the early 1990s. According to data from the National Ministry of Education, immigrant students in state schools have increased from 45.000 in 1995-1996 to 130.114 in 2002/2003. A case of point is that, in the second year 2002 – 2003, 8.91% of the total enrolments in state schools of student were students of Greek or foreign migrant background (Gotovos & Markou, 2003: 67-69).

The second differentiation point, as a consequence of the first, was Greece's lack of preparation to deal with the phenomena of this immigrant influx on multiple levels: both referring to the legislative framework and the adequacy of control and administrative regulations, but also the financial, social and educational levels (Gotovos & Markou, 2004: 5).

Education policy has also had to undergo extensive changes incorporating within its framework of educational approach, intercultural education, defined as the dynamic interaction and cooperation process of people from different cultural backgrounds to create societies characterized by equality of rights, mutual understanding and solidarity (Markou, 2001: 75).

Since the passing of the new legislation in 1996 for Intercultural Education (Law 2443/1996), strategies have been identified which

- a) ensure that all students, regardless of background, have equal access to educational outcomes,
- b) provide opportunities for all students to develop skills in intercultural communication,
- c) provide schools with the appropriate strategies to ensure that all students reach their full learning potential,
- d) encourage schools to promote intercultural understanding.

The demands from schools for assistance and guidance in meeting the educational needs of children from migrant background created initially a response from the Ministry of Education which however could not cover the full spectrum of the needs of the immigrant children and could not envisage the long term needs of a changing multicultural, multilingual society.

It is within this gap of structured support, the Program "Inclusion of Repatriated Greek and Foreign Migrant Students in School Education" has come to fill.

Intercultural educational interventions in Greece

A common concern among the various considerations of intercultural education is the assumption that the school curriculum must include various lessons, programmes and practices, aiming at satisfying the needs and demands of people from different origins, who have unequal – and unfortunately, occasionally nonexistent – access opportunities to social, political, financial and educational goods (Banks, 1999: 14-15; Banks & Banks, 2004; Billings & Gillbron, 2004; Modood, Triantafyllidou et al., 2006).

Markou, explicates on the general idea of intercultural education which he defines as:

“a reformation process aiming to convert/transform school and society, in order to provide everyone with the means to express themselves, as personal and collective personalities, to program their own cultural demands and receive the support of the state as well as cooperation in seeking their cultural identity, freedom and self-accomplishment (Markou, 2001:73).

The same writer further delineates on the pursuit of cultural identity and self-accomplishment, stressing that intercultural education does not simply require the improvement of educational practices to supply students with knowledge and skills, thus allowing them to equally compete with local children; rather it aims at substantial reformation of the school curriculum and timetable, of its established practices, of its procedures and structures. Otherwise, without these changes, it will be difficult for the educational system to respond to today’s multicultural reality and the needs of all students (Markou, 2001:74; Gundara, 2000).

Similar views are also expressed by Banks, one of the most prominent researchers in intercultural education internationally, who perhaps gives us its most accurate definition:

“Intercultural education is an idea, a movement of educational reformation and a process, the main purpose of which is to change the structure of educational institutions, so that students, boys and girls, each one of them separately and everyone who’s a part of different national, racial and cultural groups, can have equal opportunities of academic achievement in school”(Banks & Banks, 1993:9; Banks, 2008:116).

However, the introduction of the intercultural dimension into the Greek educational system requires a constant and systematic approach, if it is to act

additionally as a vehicle for the necessary modernization and upgrading of the Greek education system.

It was noted that there was a greater connection of migrant student populations in the larger cities, and within the larger cities, there was further differentiation. In the greater Athens area, for instance, the rate of foreign and repatriated students was approximately 10% of the student population, while in many central schools in the area of Athens, foreign students made up the majority of the student population. (Gotovos & Markou, 2003: 67-69). This increase necessitated a decentralized approach and a constant implementation and re-adaptation of the intervention measures chosen so as to meet the ever changing needs of the migrant students and the increasing mobility of their families. To ensure equal educational opportunities for returning Greek migrant students, foreigners and people vulnerable to social exclusion in educational-cultural environments, two issues become central to the Greek Government's initiatives:

- a) intercultural schools,
- b) reception classes and language support classes.

Program and phases of implementation

The Program "Inclusion of Repatriated Greek and Foreign Migrant Students in School Education" has been operated by the University of Athens since 1997 implementing the policy of the Ministry of Education, with the intent of promoting intercultural education to the schools through the implementation of innovative practices and intervention models.

Initially the Program's general aim was from the very beginning to upgrade school units and integrate foreign and repatriated students and their families into the Greek society, including among other, interventions to connect school and family. But even in its entirety, this Program has had a clearly practical orientation, since it attempted to provide support for many schools with the intent to:

- a) develop innovative pedagogical and teaching practices,
- b) recruit specialized teachers,
- c) provide a variety of educational activities,
- d) organize training programmes and
- e) develop new educational materials (Papakonstantinou G. Internal evaluation Retrieved 1/13/2009 from http://www.keda.uoa.gr/pdf/endiamesi_aksiologisi.doc).

Phase I (1997-2000). During the first phase of the Program, the recommended actions were applied on a smaller scale. In all of the participating schools of the Program, all interventions were piloted during the school year 1997-2000, in order to develop the linguistic and learning readiness of the targeted students, as well as to record and satisfy school needs in relation to this objective.

Phase II (2002-2004). During the second phase, the Program focused more on the production of educational materials, the training of teachers and increased number of school units in order to respond to the demands of Greek society and Greek school needs.

Phase III (2006-2008). At the third implementation stage, emphasis was placed on the practices of the school units, in an attempt to cater to the students needs on a larger scale. Thus, a significant number of teachers (630 to be precise) assumed teaching tasks in Language Support Classes and Tutorial Classes. During this time there was also co-operation with public authorities such as the Local Educational Authorities and the relevant departments of the Ministry of Education central offices. The Program counselors who assist in the implementation process were involved in the following:

- a) the dissemination process of pedagogical and teaching information to a large number of teachers,
- b) the assistance of the schools to articulate the learning needs of foreign speaking students and rank them within a proper support framework,
- c) cooperation with schools regarding their needs of educational materials and briefing teachers on its evaluation prospects,
- d) creating a cooperation network in order for the Program's actions to reach as many schools as possible in the entire country and, finally
- e) expansion of the number of the scientific staff in charge of the Program with partners from other universities as well.

In the following table, all school units and students of the Program are presented for school year 2007-2008 (Papakonstantinou G. Internal evaluation. Retrieved 1/13/2009 from http://www.keda.uoa.gr/pdf/endiamesi_aksiologisi.doc).

Programme Implementation Data

Table 2

*Total School Units and Students involved in the Program
for school year 2007-2008*

Total School Units in the Program (Primary Education)	606
Total Number of Students of Schools participating in the Program	62.410
Total Repatriated and Foreign Students of the Program's Schools	16.000
Total Support Departments	1.580
Total Students at Support Departments	9.000

A prerequisite for the success of this and other similar programs is the consistent qualitative upgrading of the abovementioned school units, in order to provide equal access opportunities to education for all students and smooth social integration.

Methodology of the Program

As it is known in order to design studies and programs of intercultural education, it is necessary to rely on qualitative methods, such as opinion surveys, interviews or content analysis, but also to resort to other methods such as narrative research, alternative historical narrations, historical ethnographies and autobiographies (Tierney, 1995:379-380; Bell, 1998; Siddle, 1996; Kassotakis & Flouris, 2003; Kassotakis, 2005; Flouris & Gagne, 1980). The teaching approaches used in multicultural schools should necessarily take into consideration the students' multidimensional profile, as well as their previous educational experiences. The grid of differentiated learning needs in each class suggests the need to modify traditional teaching approaches, in order for students to develop their learning potential.

The design and implementation of the Program "Inclusion of Repatriated Greek and Foreign Migrant Students in School Education", was based on data both from research and in-school practice. Thus, it was attempted to involve as many teachers in the research activity, as well as researchers – collaborators in practical activities of school and the development of the necessary tools so that teachers themselves could monitor and evaluate the students' activities

and progress. The selected methodology was based on the assumption that all the Program's activities must be interventional and practically oriented and more emphasis was placed on measures' like flexibility, continuation and sustainability.

The Program's key design tasks focused on the following:

1. The development and shaping of a general framework for the planning and development of the institution for foreign students within the educational system. Based on that, specific suggestions were made for educational policy measures, in relation to the emerging management standards of cultural multiplicity, as it was co-shaped by the pertinent state authorities in charge of decision making at all sectors and levels of education.
2. The shaping of a general implementation framework, based on educational strategies was created for specific aspects of school life pertinent to the social integration of repatriated and foreign students. These practices were intended to be piloted initially on a small scale, evaluating the students' social and educational potential and developing further, in the form of specialized action plans, during their wider application.

More specifically:

- a) the background conditions were created in order to internally link the separate action plans, aiming at the configuration of a flexible, articulate intervention scheme, that is, a uniform group of mutually supported interventions, which would maintain the possibility of self-contained experimental application and effectiveness control, in relation with the aims sought after by each intervention,
- b) the environment, conditions and prerequisites to implement all interventions and each of them would be examined separately,
- c) the interconnection points with other innovative intervention Programs of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs would be also examined and
- d) a long-term action plan for the consecutive stages of the intervention's generalized application would be agreed on.

Program guidelines and development fields

The Program's interventions, as shown in the Technical Reports for all three phases, did not only target migrant and repatriated Greek students, but

Greek students, as well. Particular emphasis was placed on both Intercultural Schools and schools with high numbers of repatriated and foreign students. The interventions measures were also implemented in schools with low percentages of foreign speaking students, as a means of averting potential issues particularly as students numbers were on an increase.

The geographic allocation of the Program covered the entire country, focusing on areas of educational priority, where high percentages of school failure and drop-outs were indentified. Based on the above, the following guidelines were followed:

1. support measures for repatriated and foreign students,
2. updating the briefing of educational community members,
3. psychosocial support of teachers, students and their families,
4. production – reproduction of educational material and
5. internal evaluation.

These guidelines were adopted at all three phases of the Program's implementation. More specifically, measures were taken and emphasis was given on specific domains, such as teaching approaches and measures to learn the Greek language (related to the first guideline), teacher training and professional development (related to the second guideline), psychosocial support (an element of the third guideline), production of supporting educational material (which is an element of the fourth guideline) and internal evaluation of the Program (fifth guideline). We subsequently present all actions implemented during all three phases of the Program, all of which have the five specific guidelines of the Technical Reports as reference points.

Support measures for repatriated and foreign students

In accordance with articles 34 and 35 of that law, Intercultural schools can, following Ministerial approval, tailor the school curriculum to the specific educational, social, cultural or educational needs of their multicultural and multilingual students. A total of 26 intercultural schools have been set up throughout Greece since 1996. A school can only be describe as intercultural when repatriated Greek and/or foreign students account for at least 45% of the total student body. These schools, which will continue to increase in number, guarantee equality of opportunity to every student in the country, while the cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning utilized in these schools have a positive knock-on effect on the Greek educational system as a whole. Of the

26 schools, 13 are primary schools, while there are 9 junior high schools and 4 senior high schools. The educators in these schools receive special training, and are selected on the basis of their knowledge on the subject of intercultural education and teaching Greek as a second or foreign language.

Reception classes have existed since 1984 for the needs of returning Greek migrants to Greece. Through Ministerial Decree these classes changed to accommodate the changing needs of the students. The Ministerial Decision No. F10/20/G1/708 (FEK1789 V/28-9-99) of 1999 encompasses the last amendment following the LAW 2413. Reception classes operate parallel to the school curriculum and are for the needs of first and second phase learners of the Greek language for newly arrived students in both primary and secondary educational schools. Language support classes operate after school hours and offer language support across the curriculum for migrant students in both primary and secondary schools, experiencing language difficulties.

Training for teachers and educational community members

The need to train teachers and other members of the educational community on issues of intercultural education was considered as an essential component of the Program in order to shape the reflective and pedagogically flexible teacher required by modern multicultural societies. The training of active teachers is a prerequisite for an effective school unit and the students' social integration, in order to reinforce their study at school and assure maximum possible effectiveness of innovative interventions (Evangelou & Palaiologou 2007: 1).

The educational aims include the following:

- a) dissemination of information to the wider educational community as well as raising their awareness, regarding the requirements of the modern multicultural society and their consequences on education and school,
- b) dissemination of information and raising the awareness of teachers and education executives on issues regarding theoretical and practical views of intercultural education,
- c) dissemination of information to teachers in issues of pedagogy, teaching and instructional methodology, allowing them to be able to respond to the requirements of multicultural classes of teaching Greek as a second language,
- d) dissemination of information and raising the awareness of teachers on psychosocial problems as well as behavioural problems of repatriated

- and foreign students in order to attain their smooth integration and socialization,
- e) creation of conditions to ensure school and social operation of school units,
 - f) dissemination of information to educational administrative executives and school advisors, regarding the existing conditions in school units and the newly emerging needs,
 - g) promotion of co-ordinated interventions on school unit and administrative level as well.

Psychosocial support for teachers, students and their families

The Program also provided specialized training for teachers in terms of the application of the sub program “Social and Emotional Conduct at School: Intervention in the system for the psychosocial support of foreign and repatriated students”.

This sub Program aims at strengthening the counseling skills of teachers, allowing them to face the difficulties of modern school classes and contribute to the students’ psychosocial support, raising their awareness and developing their skills in community, intercultural understanding and cooperation. In addition, it aims at creating a positive atmosphere and promote mental health within the school environment, facilitating both the learning process and the students’ general adaptation to school life and to the wider social environment (Hatzihristou et al. 2004:11-19).

The Program is based on school psychology and theoretical approaches (Hatzihristou H. et al. 2004:14) reflecting modern trends. It is also based on fresh considerations of various models of consultation, dialectic psychological consultation and multiple intelligence. It is addressed to all class students, aiming at creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance and facilitating cooperation in the class and the school community.

Production of educational support material

As it is well known, the multicultural make up of many school demands a different form of learning approach, in order to provide all students with the skills to overcome the barriers to educational outcomes.

A key skill is the knowledge of the language of the host country. The Program, although recognizing the cultural and linguistic asses’s that students

from migrant backgrounds bring with them to the learning settings, set as a priority the learning of the Greek language. The majority of material developed within the Program affected the need for the learning of Greek as a second language for both students in primary and secondary schools in multicultural and multilingual settings.

The educational support materials produced during the years, (2004-2006) of the Program, cover a wide spectrum of student needs from kindergarten to primary school and to secondary school adopting a communicative language approach and incorporating activities and strategies which promote active student participation in the language learning process.

The educational support materials were of high quality and were based on modern pedagogical theories and practices, and received very positive reviews from the entire educational community (teachers and students). In turn, the support materials received approval by the Pedagogical Institute of Greece.

Program Evaluation

An evaluation component, both internal and final summative, has been part of the Program's axes. Evaluations were carried out at throughout the 3 phases of the Program at the end of each implementation year, (Papakonstantinou G. Internal evaluation Retrieved 1/13/2009 from http://www.keda.uoa.gr/pdf/en-diamesi_aksiologisi.doc)

The aforementioned evaluations covered all the Program axes and were based on the following data:

- a) Data collected in the framework of each axis activities. Due to the fact that the Program consists of ten different sub programs, there has been a uniform evaluation for the entire program interwoven with vertical and horizontal interconnections.
- b) Data deriving from special evaluation questionnaires, filled in by representative samples of repatriated and foreign pupils and their parents as well as, trainees and other educators as well as concellers involved in the Program.

In particular, for the purposes of this research, four different questionnaires were disseminated aiming at different population groups in order to ascertain the content that could reflect the Program's actions, leading to comparable results.

As part of the evaluation process four questionnaires, were addressed to:

- a) intervention schools headteachers,
- b) teachers who participated in the support Program,
- c) students from the language support classes and
- d) parents of students in the support classes (Papakonstantinou Internal evaluation Retrieved 1/13/2009 from http://www.keda.uoa.gr/pdf/endiamesi_aksiologisi.doc).

A general conclusion derived from the data analysis of the questionnaires and the Program application, was that the Program has thoroughly covered almost all of the quantifiable objectives that have been set during its planning, clearly depicted in the Technical reports; moreover, many of the quality objectives have also been fulfilled.

On the basis of the Program evaluation (Papakonstantinou G. Internal evaluation Retrieved 1/13/2009 from http://www.keda.uoa.gr/pdf/endiamesi_aksiologisi.doc: 26) per intervention axis certain conclusions were drawn. For instance, regarding the support teaching, the Program covered better than expected the foreseen number of students that would benefit from the Program, while their progress has also been obvious. Demand for setting up support teaching classes was higher than anticipated and therefore the selection of the school units, where the Program finally intervened, was based on specific criteria.

The teacher training and professional development Program was multi-dimensional in its approach. It includes themes relevant to teacher and student relationships, issues about various teaching approaches and classroom management. A key focal point, however, were relevant to the teaching of Greek as second language and intercultural education.

On the other hand, the psycho-social support component addressed all members of the educational community, based on the internal evaluation findings, particularly the interventions school educators who were fully satisfied by their participation in the specific training Program. The seminars aimed at enhancing communication and group communication skills and techniques, a climate of cooperation in the classroom and coping with psycho-social problems; these objectives were primarily attained in the area of Attica, where intervention has been more effective.

Finally, regarding the educational support material, it was strongly believed by the teachers who used it that fully enhanced the support teaching.

It has been estimated that the focusing on the Program's Action Axes, has been positive effects during its application (Papakonstantinou G. Internal evaluation Retrieved 1/13/2009 from http://www.keda.uoa.gr/pdf/endiamesi_aksiologisi.doc:35).

However, certain “weak areas” were identified and could be summarized as follows:

- a) on an economic level, for example, the budget for the creation of support classes has been insufficient; therefore, the Program could not be extended to include more school units, despite the high demand,
- b) a discontinuity in the Program implementation was identified. This was an outcome of the bureaucratic gap developed between Program re-approval and refunding. As a consequence, a decrease in the Program’s long term effectiveness was noted, and integrity in the eyes of the key participants of the Program.
- c) the long process of materials development and dissemination resulted in the delay of students and teachers promptly receiving the teaching/ learning material.
- d) Although the geographical distribution of the Program covered all regions of Greece, including remote and isolated areas, the teacher training and professional development programs were centrally organised, whereby teachers from remote islands for example, were not able to receive the full training and support compared to teachers in the region of Attica,
- e) the psycho-social support functioned in a totally different way in Attica compared to other Regions, due to the shortage of psychologists in many intervention prefectures,
- f) the educational support materials could not cover the full spectrum of all changing teaching and learning needs.

Conclusion

Despite certain difficulties that surfaced from the Program, one may conclude that the “Inclusion of Repatriated Greek and Foreign Migrant Students in School Education” Program promotes the issues of inclusion in school education the respect of linguistic and cultural differences and acknowledges the right of all students to equal opportunities in education and social inclusion. Based on the experience gained from the Program’s implementation, it is of at most importance to promote, a substantial co-operation of all institutions participating in the operation of the Program, i.e. the Ministry of Education and its officials, the University’s scientific personnel, the Educational authorities (School Advisors, Scientific – Pedagogic Guidance Personnel), the Program’s administrative authority partners, the teachers and members

of the participating schools as well as all participants in the interventions in general.

The evaluation of all domains of the Program have pointed out that the way the Greek language is taught, as a second language to migrant and repatriated Greek students who need language support, the production of well designed educational materials which address the above target-group, the psycho-social support to students and the link between school, family and local community constitute actions which serve well not only the needs of foreign and repatriated students learning process and contribute to the promotion intercultural education (Banks & Banks, 1993:12; Damanakis, 1997). Furthermore, it has been ascertained that training a large number of teachers throughout Greece in issues of intercultural education, both at a theoretical and practical level, contributes to eliminating racist practices and stereotypes and promptly deals with insuring problems which may arise in the school units of all education levels in Greece due to the presence of foreign and repatriated students.

The Program's presentation aims at becoming a source of information and ideas for other countries with a high migration population facing similar challenges in their school education.

In all, the Program contributed significantly to acquiring the necessary experience in order to apply intercultural education in the Greek school practice, creating, thus, more permanent structures in the future, in the Greek education system. The existence of such permanent and appropriate system support structures provide measures and solutions to acute problems which emerge for the full spectrum of student needs who came from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.