



**“MANY LANGUAGES ONE WORLD –
ΠΟΛΛΕΣ ΓΛΩΣΣΕΣ ΕΝΑΣ ΚΟΣΜΟΣ”:
A DOUBLE AWARD-WINNING INTERCULTURAL /
MULTILINGUAL PRE-SCHOOL PROJECT**

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Abstract:

This paper describes the Intercultural-multilingual project "Many Languages One World! Πολλές Γλώσσες Ένας Κόσμος!" and the theoretical context on which it was based. It was designed and implemented in a public kindergarten, the Kindergarten of Parapotamos, in the region of Thesprotia, Greece by the Kindergarten teacher Mrs Eirini Papachristou and involved 16 pupils aged 4-6, with no prior knowledge of foreign languages. The main objective of the project was to know, understand and accept the diversity and similarity of people, despite their linguistic differences. The program was awarded (praise) by the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y.) - Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, for its participation in the initiative Erasmus+ "European Language Label 2016". Also received the Gold award at the competition "Education Leaders Awards 2018", a competition which highlights and rewards good practices in education.

Keywords: intercultural-multilingual education, Erasmus+, European Language Label, Education Leaders' Awards, pre-school, Greece

Περίληψη:

Το παρόν άρθρο περιγράφει το Διαπολιτισμικό-Πολυγλωσσικό πρόγραμμα «Many Languages One World-Πολλές Γλώσσες Ένας Κόσμος», καθώς και το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο στο οποίο στηρίχθηκε. Το πρόγραμμα σχεδιάστηκε και υλοποιήθηκε σε ένα δημόσιο Νηπιαγωγείο, το Νηπιαγωγείο Παραποτάμου, στην περιοχή της Θεσπρωτίας – Ελλάδα από τη Νηπιαγωγό κα Ειρήνη Παπαχρήστου και συμμετείχαν 16 παιδιά ηλικίας 4-6, χωρίς πρότερη γνώση ξένων γλωσσών. Ο κύριος σκοπός του προγράμματος ήταν οι μικροί μαθητές να γνωρίσουν, να καταλάβουν και να αποδεχθούν την διαφορετικότητα και τις ομοιότητες των ανθρώπων, παρά τις όποιες

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γλωσσικές διαφορές τους. Το πρόγραμμα έλαβε έπαινο για τη συμμετοχή του στη δράση Erasmus+ European Language Label – Ευρωπαϊκό Σήμα Γλωσσών 2016. Επίσης έλαβε το χρυσό Βραβείο στο διαγωνισμό “Education Leaders Awards 2018”, ένα διαγωνισμό που αναδεικνύει και επιβραβεύει τις βέλτιστες πρακτικές στο χώρο της εκπαίδευσης.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Διαπολιτισμική-Πολυγλωσσική εκπαίδευση, Erasmus+, Ευρωπαϊκό Σήμα Γλωσσών, Education Leaders awards, Νηπιαγωγείο, Ελλάδα

1. Introduction

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the development of a modern pedagogical practice which takes account of the heterogeneity of modern societies has also been expressed in the field of education (McCarthy, 1990, p. 55). The aim is to create citizens able to cope with modern multicultural societies. The education area is dominated by the requirement to implement a multicultural program. At the same time, in the various countries, not only the national curriculum is redefined, but also its monocultural and monolingual character (Gellner, 1983).

If one looks at the literature on the term “multicultural education” will find that there are many and conflicting definitions. And while in the United States the term “multiculturalism” is prevalent, in Europe there is talk of “intercultural education”. Several researchers consider that the term “multiculturalism” denotes the current situation, while the term “intercultural” refers to what should be done, the point. “Therefore, the term ‘intercultural’ refers to the need for cooperation and interaction between different cultural groups” (Damanakis, 1997). Being a vector of intercultural behavior means recognizing and fighting against intolerance and linguistic and ethnocentric resistance (Markou, 1996).

The European priorities of recent years in the field of education concern the cultivation of values such as freedom, tolerance, non-discrimination, promotion of social cohesion and the creation of an inclusive society in general.

At the same time, multilingual classes are now a reality, which is becoming increasingly pronounced, in the countries of the European Union. The migration flows of recent years in many regions of Europe have created the need for various ways of supporting language learning. Coummins (2000) sees all languages as a source of wealth for society.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the intercultural-multilingual project “Many Languages One World-Πολλές Γλώσσες Ένας Κόσμος”, which was implemented in a Greek public kindergarten in the 2015-2016 school year. The project received praise from the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y.)-Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs for its participation in the initiative Erasmus+ “European Language Label 2016”, while receiving the Gold award at the 2018 “Education Leaders Awards” competition in Greece.

2. The Intercultural Education Model

Education based on the Intercultural model aims to form positive perceptions and attitudes towards other cultures. There are no good or bad cultures, no strong or weak, but only equal ones. This approach, which emerged in the 1980s in Europe, aims to create open societies with mutual acceptance and mutual understanding. According to Damanakis (2007, p. 8) Interculturalism is the interaction and equal treatment of people from different cultural backgrounds with the aim of establishing and fostering solidarity with each other.

Intercultural education extends to two levels. The first concerns the education system, the technical infrastructure and the educational services in general. While the second level concerns the process and the results of the education within the school. The main objective of intercultural education is to accept and respect for the different, and to try to dialog and cooperation between people with different cultural identities, resulting in a constructive coexistence within the multicultural sphere (Papas, 1998).

To achieve this goal the following pedagogical approaches are required:

- Respect for cultures.
- Recognition and understanding of the difference.
- Promoting solidarity, peace and social justice.
- Awareness of human rights.
- A positive perception and attitude towards differences in cultures, diversity and neutrality.
- Emphasis on the commonalities of the different groups.
- Equal opportunities (Bezati & Theodosopoulou).

The role of teachers is multidimensional and catalytic, as they should help their students develop a positive attitude towards issues of heterogeneity. In order to achieve intercultural objectives, the teacher should also associate the different cultures in the classroom, foster mutual respect and use alternative teaching models (Kossyvaki, 2002).

According to Fennes and Hapgoog (1997), teaching techniques used in intercultural education should focus on pupils' experiences and needs, promote cooperation and group activities, support interdisciplinary approach and foster research and reflection. It is also important in nursery school to approach other languages and cultures with a view to raising children's awareness of linguistic diversity and cultural wealth.

3. Erasmus+ European Language Label

In 2016, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs through the State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y.), as the National Coordination Unit for the implementation of the European Program **Erasmus+**, launched an open call for proposals for the “**European Language Label 2016**” action. The call concerned innovative foreign

language teaching and learning programs implemented in Greece between 1/9/2015 and 30/6/2016.

The *European Language Label* is a European Commission initiative in the field of multilingualism and aims to highlight innovative methods of language teaching and learning, with the aim of arousing interest in foreign language learning and of improving the educational process in the field of languages in Europe as a whole. The European Language Label covers all levels of education and training, regardless of the methods used and aims to promote innovation in the teaching of languages.

The following may participate in the European Label Competition: All-level School Units, Higher Education Institutions, Vocational Training Institutes, Language Centers, Lifelong Learning Centers, regional and local authorities, hospitals, museums or other public or private bodies, as well as individuals, applying innovative teaching methods for language learning.

For the year 2016 the *European thematic priorities* of the European Language Label Competition, according to the National call for proposals 2016, were as follows:

- Multilingual Schools and Classrooms: Acceptance of multiculturalism in the school environment.
- Language-friendly society: Informal learning of foreign languages.

While *National-Greek thematic priorities* were as follows:

- Language learning by refugees and migrants.
- Multilingual schools for better integration into Greek education system of pupils whose mother tongue is different and recognition of the languages of these pupils.
- Language learning to promote employment.
- European Certification of Language Learning (Erasmus+ European Language Label, National call for proposals 2016).

4. Education Leaders Awards

The competition *Education Leaders Awards*, powered by RDC Informatics, was first organized in Greece in 2016. The purpose of the competition is to highlight and reward best practice in the field of education. The chairman of the jury is Mrs Anna Diamantopoulou, former Minister of Education. According to Mrs. Diamantopoulou, the institution of the Education Leaders Awards has two aims: The first is participation and the testimony of the effort to learn and inspire the education community as a whole. The second objective is to distinguish between the best and the most particular efforts,

In 2018, participation was broad with more than 400 representatives of the educational community from each level of education and from every corner of Greece from both the private and the public sector. The winners were announced on Friday, May 18, 2018 during the award ceremony at the conference center of the University of Western Attica. The winners received Gold, Silver and Bronze medals (www.educationleadersawards.gr). The Kindergarten of Parapotamos with the

Intercultural-multilingual project "Many Languages One World- Πολλές Γλώσσες ένας Κόσμος" won the Gold award.

5. Description of the Program

a. Program Title

"Many Languages One World! Πολλές Γλώσσες Ένας Κόσμος"

b. Project Purpose

Knowledge, understanding and acceptance of people's diversity and similarity despite any linguistic differences.

c. Specific Objectives of the Project:

- The awakening of students' interest and love for learning foreign languages.
- Upgrading the educational process and methodology in the pre-school for foreign language learning.
- Understanding the importance of multilingualism.
- Acceptance of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the school class.
- The development of feelings of love and brotherhood for all the children of the world.
- Develop the values of freedom, non-discrimination, tolerance with a view to educating citizens who contribute to social cohesion and the creation of an inclusive society.

d. Project Duration

December 2015 - June 2016.

e. Participants - Partnerships

Parents of students, local community, ninety-one (91) schools from all over Europe participated in the E-Twinning project "Handmade Xmas Cards and Xmas tree balls".

f. Languages Taught

Greek, English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Albanian.

g. Characteristics of the Pupil Group

In the intercultural/multilingual project: "Many Languages, One World - Πολλές Γλώσσες Ένας Κόσμος" participated sixteen (16) Kindergarten school pupils aged 4-6, ten (10) boys and six (6) girls, with no prior knowledge of foreign languages.

h. Methodology-Implementation Process

The main stimulus for the start of the project was essentially the participation of our school in the E-twinning project: "Handmade Xmas Cards and Xmas tree balls", in which

students had to create handmade Christmas cards-tree balls, write wishes in different languages and then send them to the participating schools. After searching the internet for information about the various countries and finding them on the map-globe, we decided to learn words and wishes in different languages to wish our new friends.

Phase I - Before Activities

We split into groups (3-5 people) and set the goals of the project. We informed the parents and requested their cooperation and assistance. We agreed on every Christmas card we receive from schools abroad, to look for information about the country and learn different words and phrases, so that we can also wish them in Greek, English and in their own language. We've captured on a mind map (Figure 1) the children's suggestions about what we can do and what we want to learn in this intercultural-multilingual project. We called it "Many Languages One World – Πολλές Γλώσσες Ένας Κόσμος".



Figure 1: Mind map – Children's ideas for the project

Phase II - Indicative Activities: Four Language Skills Activities

a. Receptive Skills: Reading and Listening

o Reading

- We read the wishes on the Christmas cards we received.
- We invited to our classroom the mother of a native English-language student to read a fairy tale from their country. In the end, the little student and his mother dramatized the story they read us.

- We read books both in Greek and in other languages about the value of diversity and the need for different people and cultures to coexist, but also about the need to preserve each other's identity.
- **Listening**
 - We searched the internet for songs, fairy tales, words and phrases from different countries.
 - We invited to our classroom a German and a French language teacher. We were trying to understand what they were telling us!

b. Productive Skills: Speaking and Writing

- **Speaking**
 - We connected through Skype with two schools - our European E-twinning project partners.
 - We used Audacity software on the computer to record our pronunciation in the foreign words we were learning.
- **Writing**
 - Together with the parents, we made Christmas cards and wrote wishes in Greek, English and in the language of the school we were going to send (Figure 2).
 - We wrote the word “Friendship” in different languages.
 - Also, we used Taxedo software to make word clouds (Figure 3).



Figure 2: The Christmas Cards we sent



Figure 3: Word cloud – Good morning

Phase III: Evaluation

The evaluation of the project has taken the following steps:

- A. Initial evaluation (investigation).
- B. Formative evaluation.
- C. Final evaluation.

A. Initial evaluation (investigation)

It includes the designing and organizing of our project. That is, the design of a mind map where, through interactive discussion, the pre-existing knowledge and suggestions of the children were recorded (Figure 1).

B. Formative Evaluation

It is the implementation phase of the activities. We have followed three steps:

- a) Collection of information (from books, internet, educational materials, parents, educational games, etc.) for the following languages and countries in which these languages are spoken: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Albanian.
- b) Evaluation of information (we emphasized that information from the internet may not be so reliable).



Figure 4: Flags of the World Tree



Figure 5: The Friendship Train

- c) Application of the information we collected (e.g. we made flags, we wrote words that promote intercultural dialog (friendship, respect, peace), we did teamwork, we collaborated with parents and other professionals etc, Figure 4, 5, 6).

C. Final Evaluation

The final evaluation was carried out:

- a) Of the children themselves in the kindergarten class: After the project was completed, its evaluation followed. In the corner of the conversation we recapitalized all the activities to see what we learned and what we gained from participating in the project. The kids described what they liked most and what impressed them.
- b) From the teacher who coordinated and implemented the project (have the main and the specific objectives set been achieved)?
- c) Final presentation of the children's work to the parents, in the co-located Primary school and in the local community. The program presentation included:
 - o Theatrical events and songs by children.
 - o Present children's works during and at the end of the project:
 - Flash cards with words like friendship, love, peace, respect, solidarity in different languages.
 - Team work (e.g. the Friendship train, Figure 5).
 - Country flags.
 - Handmade Christmas cards with wishes (Figure 2).
 - Word clouds (Figure 3).
 - Mp3 records with our pronunciation and much more.

6. Conclusion

Intercultural education is the pedagogical process aimed at critically recognizing cultural differences. It also aims to prepare independent people, open to dialogue, able to integrate into a democratic, multicultural society.

Working with different languages in the classroom can contribute to a more general linguistic awareness, while at the same time, helps pupils to learn other languages and to develop a positive attitude towards multiculturalism. The role of the teacher in this process is very important. Undoubtedly should possess the theory of intercultural education and promote the intercultural dialogue and interaction with the respect always required.

Proper planning of the project is also essential, as well as the selection of playful activities (especially in pre-school education), based on the interests and experiences of the students. However, the active involvement of parents, other professionals and local community is very important in such projects.

In this paper the double award winning Intercultural-multilingual pre-school project "Many Languages One World! Πολλές Γλώσσες Ένας Κόσμος!" is described in

detail. Its theoretical frame, the selection of activities suitable for children of this age, the involvement of various individuals and organizations, the work produced, the intercultural dialogue that developed and above all the joy and pleasure of the children, contributed to the project being awarded by both the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (I.K.Y.) - Greek Ministry of Education and the Competition "Education Leaders Awards 2018".

About the Author

Mrs Eirini Papachristou has studied Pedagogical Sciences at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece and Applied Foreign Languages in Management and Commerce. She holds two master's degrees: "Studies in Education", Hellenic Open University and "Cognitive and Motor Development", Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She also has an annually specialization in Special Education, University of Macedonia, Greece. She has a professional experience as a Head of the Department of Environmental, Health and Cultural Education of Primary Education of Thesprotia, Greece. Except her mother tongue, Greek, she also speaks English, German and Italian. She is currently working as a School Head in Pre-school Education.

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