

Attachment 12b

CASE STUDIES - GREECE

Case study 1

A School Network for the Roma Children and their Education: “Roma Children at School”

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1. Introduction

In Greece, a high percentage of school dropout is reported among children who come from Roma communities. It is important to note that school dropout is on the increase during the transition from Primary to Secondary education. Indicatively, during the school year 2011-2012 there were 13,734 Roma students who attended Elementary School throughout Greece, while 2,141 attended High School classes.

Dealing with the school dropout of Roma students presupposes the recognition of their different way of life, their constant moving, their habits and values according to which they have socialized. The clear knowledge and understanding of their special cultural identity is able to contribute not only to the smooth adjustment and integration of the children in the social community but also to the development of channels of communication and cooperation with the family and the local community for the benefit of the children.

The promotion of the teachers' knowledge and experience in Roma students and the support of actions for the enhancement of their regular attendance has been the major purpose of the creation of the Network of “Roma Children at School”.

2. The identity of the “Roma Children at School” Network

The “Roma Children at School” Network started operating unofficially on September 2013 on the initiative of a headmistress of an Elementary School who takes part in the STAYON program.

On the first level of the specific Network's development the schools which participate in it, belong to the Directorate of Primary Education of Western Thessaloniki and they are Elementary Schools and Kindergartens from areas where there is a high percentage of Roma children. However, it concerns schools all over the country which are attended by Roma children. Additionally, the expansion of the Network has been planned with the participation of schools of Secondary Education, thus enhancing the continuation of school attendance. Moreover, the promotion and development of the Network has been organized because of the recognition of the importance of highlighting international knowledge and experience for the education of Roma children. At the same time, the activation of relevant initiatives by teachers can help towards the better implementation of the program.

3. The targets of the Network

The main targets of the Network concern the feedback, enhancement and highlighting of the teachers and principals work at schools which Roma students attend.

Specifically, we aim at the following:

1. The interconnection and cooperation of schools of Primary and Secondary Education aiming at the smooth transition, adjustment and integration of Roma children into the school environment.
2. The dealing of school drop out which exhibits high percentages in Roma students in Primary and Secondary Education.
3. The promotion of good practices for the enhancement and encouragement of regular attendance and the handling of student dropout amongst the Roma students.
4. The recording of communication data of schools which Roma students attend in areas where the Roma communities live.
5. The exchange of information among the school principals during the search or transcription of Roma pupils who usually move to areas where Roma communities reside.
6. The exchange of experiences among the teachers who work at schools with Roma students.
7. The knowledge of the special educational legislation concerning Roma students.
8. Finding solutions to issues which have to do with attendance, such as the justification of absences during the school year, as well as the possibility of Roma children attending school beyond the age of sixteen until their adulthood.
9. The enrichment of curricula with elements of the special culture, history and language of Roma.
10. The teaching of their mother tongue, Romani, at school.

11. The development of cooperation with services and private entities for the solution of problems that relate to living conditions of the families of Roma children, which in turn can act preventatively to their regular attendance.
12. The protection of Roma Children's rights and the dealing of issues of social exclusion and racism against Roma children.
13. The briefing of the educational and broader community for international actions and projects that concern Roma children's education.
14. The support and organization of workshops and projects with topics that have to do with the education of Roma children.
15. The promotion of research into issues of Roma children's education.
16. The operation and function of a special website for the presentation and achievement of the goals of the Network.

4. The effectiveness of the Network

The "Roma Children at School" Network in the quite short time of its operation has yielded positive results in the following actions:

- The support of research, recording of student dropout and the seeking of causes at the schools where Roma children are enrolled and which belong to the Network.
- The exchange of special knowledge for the Roma, both of the studies for the education of Roma children, as well as of the good practices that have been materialized at schools which participate in the Network.
- The smooth adjustment and the incorporation of students who transferred from a school of a certain area to a school of another area that belonged to the Network.
- The joint search for solutions for the handling of problems which prevent the regular attendance of Roma children, such as their moving to and from school, inaccessibility to medical centers for medical examinations, incomplete vaccination, psychological support of their family, especially when it is a single parent family or when the parents serve prison sentences.
- The organization of workshops about educational guidance and the choice of High Schools according to their special talents and the tendencies, as well as their interests (e.g. music).
- The cooperation of parents and other members of the Roma community and the activation of their interest to participate in educational actions which take part in schools of the Network.
- The increasing awareness of the broader community with regard to illiteracy which affects mainly people who come from low social or financial walks of life and members of minority ethno-cultural groups, such as Roma people and Muslims of Western Thrace.
- The notification of the results of the overview for the students' dropout in Greece.

- The dissemination of STAYON program and its targets in the educational community at local, regional and national level.
- The collection of information material concerning Roma people in Greece as well as special studies and researches on their education so that an electronic library can be created through a website which is going to be created and serve the Network's purposes.

Photo1, 2: The cooperation of primary and secondary schools in order to prevent dropout during the transition. Roma pupils of 6th grade of Primary School are being informed of the Arts Secondary School and the Music Secondary School.



Case Study 2

A critical, transformative approach to the dealing with school drop-out

The case of 3rd Intercultural Primary School of Menemeni

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1. Introduction

The immense influx of economic immigrants and refugees from the Balkan Peninsula (Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia), from Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Poland) and Asia (Kurds, Pakistani, Palestinians) at the beginning of 1990 has contributed to the enhancement of the multicultural structure of Greek society. The interest of the educational research has turned towards the integration and the school attendance both of the children of newcomers-immigrants as well as of the children that come from the already existing ethno-cultural minorities, the “historic minorities” (Damanakis, 2002:89) such as Roma.

Although the research into school drop-out has not been done systematically, especially at Primary Education level, Roma pupils appear to have the highest percentages of school drop-out (Ministry of Education-Data for School Drop-out, 2013). The causes lie mainly to the weakness of official education to include elements of the Roma culture, when at the same time it hasn't succeeded in changing their firm beliefs about the usefulness of the educational process.

The school which is not directly related to their professional occupation constitutes for the Roma community loss of time from the contribution to the family and the activities for which the family itself trains its members (I.NE.DI.BI.M, 2011:32).

Recent research into the methods that Primary and Secondary School Principals in the area of Western Thessaloniki apply for the dealing of school drop-out has marked out first and foremost the circumstantial planning of activities for the utilization of the cultural otherness in the school environment and the seeking of temporary solutions for the enhancement of students with different ethno-cultural identity regular attendance. (Vlachaki, 2013). The cooperation of the school with the family, at schools where it is realized, is based on an “additive” approach, including fragmentary and circumstantial elements of the civilization of “other” students (Banks, 2004).

Further down we are going to present ways to deal with school drop-out at a Primary School, which is located in a Roma settlement, in West Thessaloniki (Northern Greece). School's

effectiveness in the solving of student drop-out problem is attributed to the critical view of the way school functions and its transformation to an “open” system, which is in a continuous interaction with the external environment. The school, the family, the community constitute environments, which on the one hand are constantly changing and on the other hand they interact among them, promoting the development of children who belong to them (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bidirectional communication and contact of the school with the family environment is able to promote the continuous renewal of the school institution, as far as its organizing is concerned as well as the activities which are included in their everyday schedule, the rules governing the children’s behavior. The development of cooperation networks both in the inside of the school as well as outside of it, in relation to other individuals and members of social groups, including different ethno-cultural groups, and even more the equal participation in the initiative undertaking and decision making can render a more effective and substantial change (Breiting et al, 2005). The approach that was followed in the school of the study case for the confronting of drop-out was based on the critical reflective thinking for the identity and the actions of the school, while at the same time on the transformative prospect which is connected to the change of attitude of all school community members. The issue of school dropout did not concern exclusively the teachers of the school but also the students, parents, members of the local community who can actively participate in its resolution.

2. Aims of the specific study case

The main targets of the research that was carried out in the School of the study case had primarily to do with:

- a) Systematic recording of the drop-out at our school. Students who are up to 16 years of age or students who have been often absent from school. The non-regular attendance, as it has been highlighted by the interviews of the children who had left school, constitutes a “message” that those children will quit school.
- b) The designation of effective actions for the prevention of school drop-out and the support of regular attendance.
- c) The identification of students’ different needs, learning, psychosocial and material needs, which act preventatively towards the regular attendance of classes and the research into respective solutions within the framework of a “holistic” approach to school drop-out.

3. The methods that have been implemented

For the systematic recording of school drop-out at school at first has been a thorough research in the school archives/files, so that it could be determined who of the enrolled students up to 16 years of age, the upper age limit for the students of Elementary school, have interrupted their attendance.

Afterwards, there have been semi-structured interviews of 23 Roma children who had dropped out of school, ranging from 13 to 16 years of age and 12 Roma children aged 12 to 14 who had been absent quite often. The children's answers had been determinative in the planning of actions towards the direction of coping with school drop-out. There are also have been interviews which were conducted with the children's parents who had dropped out of school or who had not attended classes regularly. During the implementation of the actions the host headmistress of the school in question kept a research diary, recording the impact which specific initiatives had on the target students.

4. Effective ways for defending school drop-out

The record form for the school drop-out

At the end of each week the school teachers' filled in a special form with the names of pupils who were absent. Then the children's parents would be contacted over the telephone. When absences extended to a period longer than a week there would be a visit to the student's house by the teacher of the class or the School Principal. The continuation of the contact and the direct discussion with the parents or other relatives of the students has repeatedly contributed to the finding of solutions to issues which at first seemed intractable such as the possibility of parallel working or working at home. In the case of 5 students, three girls and two boys, the definite discontinuation of school has been averted.

The classes for students over 12 years of age

For the students over the age of 12 years who wanted to return to school but hesitated to attend a normal class with students of a younger age and higher pace of learning there has been a special class where special emphasis has been placed on the development of writing and reading skills. The connections with their everyday needs invigorated the children's interest for the learning process. Additionally, critical commentaries of current and familiar issues allowed the development of skills that promoted their way of thinking and provided the necessary feedback for their everyday actions (Wray, 2006).

The class for children with disabilities

Children of the Roma community who are physically disabled or mentally retarded had been for quite a long time excluded from school education in the local area. The "dual social stigma" (Goffman, 2001) influenced the attendance negatively. The family refused to allow their child to go to a different school from the one that was located within the boundaries of their community and where all the other children attended. The operation of a class for children with disabilities at the

study case school combined with social and psychological support of the family has contributed to the smooth adjustment and integration of the children in the school community.

The role of parents and students as mediators

Acknowledging the fact that the equal apportionment of responsibilities and the cooperation between parents and teachers contributes to the more effective operation of school. (Allen, 2007 :7), the issue of school drop-out was discussed with the parents at special meetings for each grade and was related to the sustainability of the school. One or two parents were designated in each grade who were willing to mediate so that students of the respective which their children attended would be encouraged to come to school. They assumed the responsibility to contact the parents or the person or persons who had custody of the children in question.

Respectively, children of the two higher grades decided to talk to their peers, who did not attend regularly, about the educational activities of the school. The children, as “interactive” subjects who are connected to and interact with other individuals in their social environments (Soueref & Mpimpou- Nakou, 2006) acted as social action agents (James & Prout, 1990; Mayall, 1994) undertaking to change the attitude of the other children towards school.

The psychological support of the students' families who have dropped out of School or do not attend regularly

The role models of the mother and the father who are successful, despite the fact that they have limited or no grammatical competence whatsoever, have emerged as strong counter-arguments for the non regular attendance at school. The constant cooperation of the School with the social worker and the psychologist has contributed to the encouragement of the children's regular attendance who offered help to their families either by looking after their brothers and sisters or by working in the family business.¹

The consulting support to the students in question and their families as it has been proved with children who belong to minority groups constitutes a major factor for the promotion of democratic education principles and contributes to the dealing of school drop-out.(Biseth, 2010:93)

Actions for the confrontation of verbal and physical violence in the school environment

One of the main reasons which was stated both by children and parents, members of the local Roma community as to why they do not come to school was their schoolmates' aggressive

¹ Social Workers and Psychologists worked together at School under the Education of Rom Children Program in the Region of Central Macedonia, Western Macedonia, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace and the Community Service Program with the co- financing of European Union.

behavior towards them. Quite often the conflicts between the families were brought through their younger members to the school environment. For the configuration of a positive psychological climate among the students and the cultivation of mutual respect, solidarity and friendship there have been actions during which the children were given the opportunity to self expression, energetic hearing and dialogue.

The discussion of the problem of the aggressive behavior was made within the framework of the operation of a School of Parents too.² However, the participation of parents was very poor.

The financial support of the students' family

Among the reasons that were quoted for which parents did not send their children to school was the fact that they did not have the necessary clothing and footwear articles. The wardrobe that was created and opened in our school during the school year provided basic clothing articles and footwear as well as necessary stationary which was offered by the teaching staff and by the Parent-Teacher Associations of other schools which we appealed to for sponsorships.

There has been a considerable aid to the family with the provision of free breakfast, under the program of feeding and promotion of a Healthy Diet.³

The psychological and material support of the family has contributed to the stronger connection of the family to the school and the immediate handling of school drop-out. It has also contributed to the development of a school culture that is governed by relationships of reciprocity, trust and caring for your fellow man (Hill & Celio ref. to Sergiovanni, 2001:79)

The enrichment of the curriculum with new cognitive subjects and actions

In the framework of the Unified Reformed Educational Program new cognitive subjects, such as visual arts, theatre education, computers were introduced and they attracted the children's interest. The implementation of school activities having to do with environmental education, health education and civilization have been encouraged and they were based mainly on participatory and exploratory teaching methods.

² The School of Parents during the first year of its operation was realized in cooperation with the School and the Program of Education of the Roma Children at the Regions of Central Macedonia, Western Macedonia, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, University of Aristotle, Ministry of Education and European Union.

³ The Program was realized in cooperation with the Preventive Medicine and Occupational Medicine Institute, Prolepsis, with the financial support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

The enrichment of the program with elements of the students' familiar culture

The school curriculum has been enriched with activities that responded to the children's needs and at the same time they acknowledged the special features of the parental and social environment. After all, as it was observed in the past, the more focused a school remains on academic knowledge, the less capable it is of essentially caring about its students and their parents (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998:14).

Unlike the stereotypical notion of "deficiency" which is caused by the non-knowledge of the dominant greek culture, elements of their mother tongue, their history and beliefs concerning the values of life have been taken full advantage of in the daily timetable. One of the actions that attracted the children's interest and enhanced their self-esteem was the creation of three-linguaged, illustrated dictionary in Romani, English and Greek language.

Additionally, in our effort to create an "integrative" environment (Coehlo, 2007), the school library was enriched with books and digital material which refer to the students' familiar culture. The reformation of school's culture presupposes the acknowledgement of all school community members and their own individual contribution. This particular parameter, of course, presupposes the formation of a community that is based on the cooperation, the acceptance and the acknowledgement, as well as, on the attraction of its members' special needs and interests (Booth and Ainscow, 2002).

Furthermore the website included passages and photos which the students themselves brought to school. Even the translation of the passages into Romani has been attempted with the use of sound files, acknowledging the fact that Romani is an oral language. Also, the school magazine hosting the views of parents and members of cultural associations acted as a communication bridge with the local community. It contributed to the formation of a positive "public image" (Pasidiaris, 2004 :128)

The school was connected through its enrichment actions and its education program to the community, intensifying the sense of belonging to it, both on the parents' and on the children's side alike (Hargreaves, 1982).

The cooperation with the parents was not restricted only to the narrow terms of scheduled information meetings, but it entailed their active involvement in so much the decision making on

educational matters, as in the realization of relevant actions, working efficiently towards the direction of dealing with the problem of school drop-out. After all, the cooperation with the parental environment constitutes one of the most important factors for the efficient operation of the school organization (Leeman, 2003).

As a conclusion

Solving the school drop-out problem in the study case school was attempted by following a holistic approach to the matter. This was done by both the reformation of the school's curriculum and its enrichment with elements of the children's familiar culture as well as the implementation of actions which aimed at psychological, social and material needs of the Roma children and their families.

The development of communication and interaction on equal terms between the school and the family environment has contributed to the recognition and making the best use of the students' familiar culture (Bell & Stevenson, 2006:148) and the encouragement of their regular attendance and school success (Hidalgo et al, 2004:633).

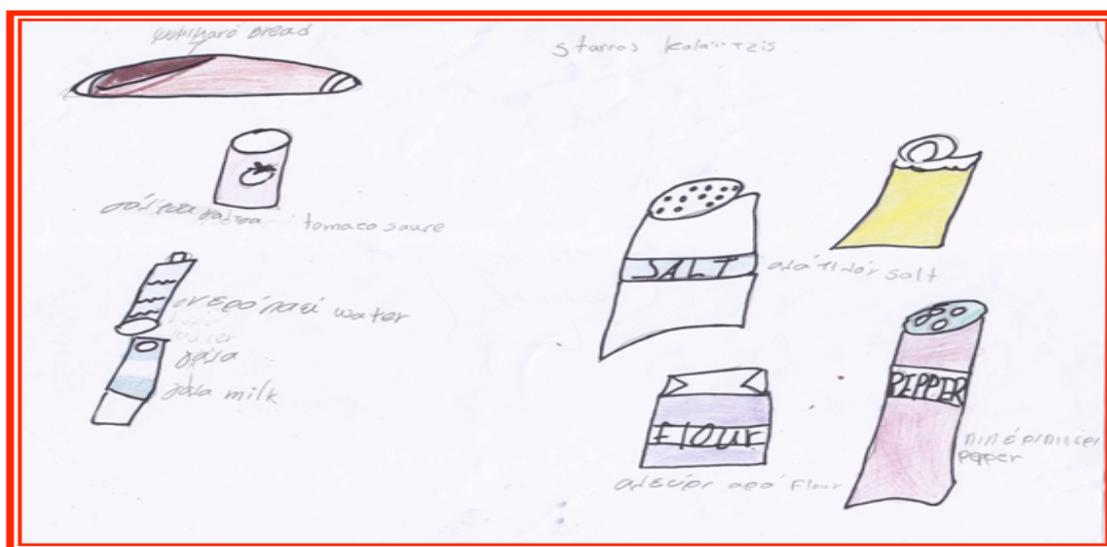
School drop-out has been a matter of equal dialogue, participatory responsibility, action and reflection for each member of the school community. Unlike the "assimilative" approach of otherness (Goddard & Hart, 2007) but in the framework of differential efficiency of the school unit (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997), all the voices have been heard and the special needs have been acknowledged.

The confrontation of school dropout has become a matter of corporate responsibility at a school community, whose members have changed their attitudes and have started participating actively.

Photo 1: Cooperation with parents



Photo 2: The enrichment of school curricula with elements of their own culture- The Romani-Greek-English Lexicon



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|---------------------|----------|----------|--------|
| • ψωμί | • σάλτσα | • νερό | • γάλα |
| ■ μαρνό /
μαντρό | ■ σάλτσα | ■ παΐ | ■ γάλα |
| ◆ bread | ◆ sauce | ◆ water | ◆ milk |
| • αλάτι | • πιπέρι | • αλεύρι | |
| ■ λον | ■ πιπέρι | ■ αρό | |

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