HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY

20 YEARS

Children's Voice and School Improvement: The Role of Technology in the Inclusive School of the Future

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RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES

HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY — 20 (YEARS)

AIMS

Emphasize the children´s voice (whether referring to the absence or presence of voice):

✓as a principal way to spot children being marginalized socially and academically

✓as an important tactic of inclusion, which can ease the improvement of the school unit

OBJECTIVES

1. How can listening to the voice of all children help give prominence to children who are marginalized socially and academically in the school environment?

2. How can children´s voice contribute to a design of an iclusive, pluralistic and democratically functioning school unit (school improvement)?

3. How can technology arise as a medium to enhance children's voice and gradually create a more inclusive culture?

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The <u>constant effort </u>via the transformation of the educational tactics (Σούρτζη κ.α., 2013):

1. To take into consideration subjects relevant to the needs of all students.

2. Enhance solutions, engaging all parties of school environment (parents, community, other schools) in a cooperative way to the procedure.

3. Distribute leadership beginning from the student (bottom- up).

4. Include all students in its system, placing all students in general education, even those who face severe difficulties to learn and communicate.

CHILDREN'S VOICE

With the term "children's voice" we refer to the listening of the point of view of each student in particular, aiming to create an inclusive school culture, where students are the starting point. (Messiou, 2006).

Consequently,

✓ Their absence reveals the marginalization of some children, socially (difficulty of integration in a group of same age) and academically (difficulty to access the learning program) (Messiou, 2006)

✓ Their presence emphasizes the experiences of the children, their personal assumptions, their emotions while they contribute to developing the functioning of the school and the school (Μέσσιου, 2004)

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative analysis of data

✓ Visits to two nursery schools:

- **Private school:**
    1. Semi structured recorded interviews to 22 children and 2 of all 4 educators (nursery teacher and supervisor).
    2. Purposeful random sampling.

- **Public school:**
    1. Visible, Non-Participant Observation method (one-month duaration, 2 hours daily) to the 5 children of the integration class.
    2. Semistructured recorded interviews to 2 educators (nursery teacher and supervisor).
    3. Confirming cases Method.

✓ For the needs of the research, aliases are used for teachers and students.

The case of the private nursery school according to interviews of supervisor, teacher & students:

- ✓ It is a school where some inclusive tactics are being used.
- ✓ The points of view of the students are taken into account during the educational procedure – to a certain degree.
- ✓ The majority is not the one to choose for the whole, as an attempt is made for all the children to be satisfied.
- ✓ Open to diversity, as children with not-typical abilities attend the school.

However:

- ✓ The relationships among supervisor and personnel are strictly professional.
- ✓ There is limitation, as far as personnel is concerned, in leadership issues.
- ✓ Classes have numerous students, and there is only one teacher per classroom.
- ✓ Learning is not cooperative between the teachers of the two classes.
- ✓ Technology is rarely being used.
- ✓ As far as marginalization of some students is concerned, the intervention is not really direct, because of the fear of some parents or students being dissatisfied.

The case of Peter

Peter

- Student with general abilities

- Little and rather shy

- He answers almost all questions in one word during the interview

- Obvious reliance on Marios, his favorite friend

- Marios, he told us, is his best friend.

- He draws what Marios tells him to, funny things

- He is shy to describe what he draws.

The nursery teacher about Peter:

-He is constantly seeking for Marios' attention

- He is hesitant to take initiatives

- Marios is taking advantage of him often..

- He is not really popular to the other children.

-There have been one-two incidents of verbal abuse against him.

Conclusion

- Peter is a child with low self-esteem and it is getting worse because of the others students' behavior toward him.

- Difficulty in inclusion of Peter could be thought to be a result of lack of decisive intervention both from the management of the school and the nursery teacher.

- His need to be thought of as important is not being heard and not taken into account.

The case of the public Nursery school

The 5 children of the integration class: Data from the interview of supervisor, teacher & student observation

- ✓ **Alice** Little girl with speaking difficulties - psychological problems because of the absence of her mother (abandoned as a baby). She is pretending her mother is close to her- suffering from hair loss- often in conflict with a certain group of girls.

- ✓ **Agelos** Autism spectrum disorder, High-functioning autism- difficulties in the social level- isolation- absense of eye-contact.

- ✓ **Zoe** Immigrant child, speaking difficulties (maybe because of underprivileged environment)- Hyperactivity- intense loneliness but shows signs of protectionism (motherly behavior) towards Agelos.

- ✓ **Dionysis** SOTOS syndrome- incapable of playing because of the disfigurement of his spine- tendency to isolation in class but also during breaks. He is aggressive with other children, constantly asking for their attention- emotional outbursts.

- ✓ **Peter** Psychomotor problems – intense hyperactivity- not cooperative at all- anger outbursts- incapable of cooperating with other students and teachers- extreme expressions of feelings to classmates (either sending them away with anger or hugging them intensely).

In conclusion (integration class)

The supervisor of the school is rather cooperative with the personnel and tries to distribute leadership to students and teachers, but....

Inclusive tactics have not been used, based on the following:

- The nursery teachers isolate, not deliberately of course, the integration class children.
- The way in which crises are dealt with at school is not effective and many times it is wrong- it isolates and segregates.
- Their teaching approach is not inclusive, they are indifferent and do not take part in learning.
- Aggressive incidents are observed, coming from two of the children of the integration class, because of their social isolation from their classmates.
- In the general education class, where the integration class students are most of the time, there are two teachers, who do not cooperate with each other, do not differentiate their teaching, and one of whom is not really active.
- The voice of all children is not being heard and not taken into account in the learning procedure as there is no differentiation of the teaching approach in a personalized or general character.
- Leadership is not distributed to the children.

THE DIGITAL STORY

AIM: Via the children's voice: The uniqueness of each child to be enhanced, the development of empathy among children, parents and teachers in issues of diversity and mental independence.

It consists of three parts:

Part A΄

- ✓ Part B of the questions of the recorded interviews of children, wishes to collect data with reference to their preferences on simple issues (favorite season, color, plans for the future)
  - ▪ We chose a digital figure for each child based on their appearances, so that it is representative.
  - ▪ **We visualized their words via the use of a programming and animation software «scratch»**
    - ▪ **What the children says, appears at the background of the picture**
    - ▪ **Music: Manos Hatzidakis, «Αγάπη μέσα στην καρδιά»**
- ✓ The children watched their digital story at school, together with their parents and the supervisor informed us about their emotions and their thoughts.

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Maria talks about the color she would offer to her friend.
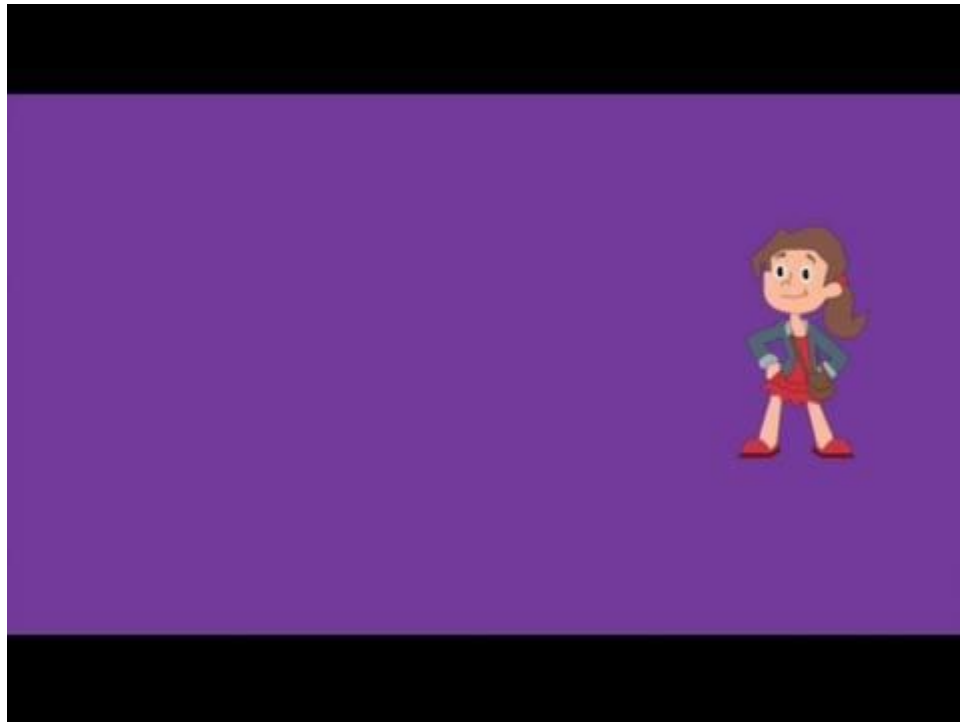
Maria tells us that she enjoys drawing forests.
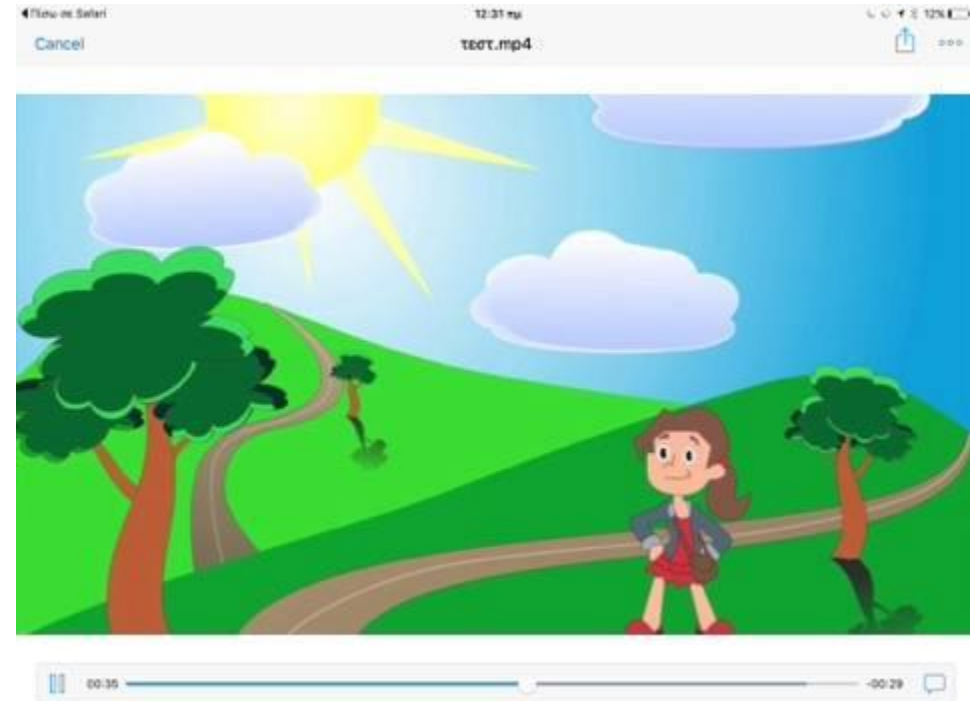
Maria's favorite season.

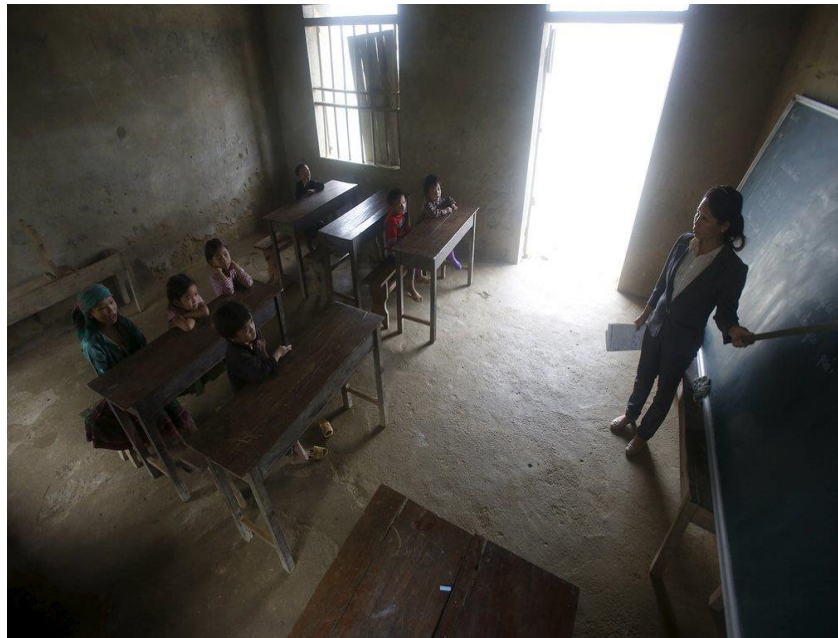**When she grows up she wants to be a teacher.**

THE DIGITAL STORY: Part B

✓ **Projection of images of classrooms from all over the world.**
  - Images from developed and developing countries are showed in rotation.
  - 10 different classrooms are shown.

✓ **Projection of images of children at play.**
  - 7 photos are shown.

✓ **Music: Bob Dylan, «Hey mister tambourine man».**

EXAMPLE no. 2

Students in Vietnam.

Students in Sweden.

EXAMPLE no. 3

Children at play, all over the world.

69th OMEP World Assembly and International Conference, Croatia, Opatija, 19 – 24 June 2017

THE DIGITAL STORY: Part C

✓ Projection of photos of children from all over the world.

✓ The country where they are from is mentioned.

✓ Last photo shown is a child with Down syndrome.

✓ 34 photos are shown in total.

✓ Music: Simon & Garfunkel, «The sound of silence».

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Iran

India

Rumania

EXAMPLE no. 4

Roma child **Alaska** **Down syndrome**

69th OMEP World Assembly and International Conference, Croatia, Opatija, 19 – 24 June 2017

Comments of parents and children, as described to us by teachers:

✓ All children who participated in the story enhanced their uniqueness through their special preferences.

✓ The voice of all children, even of the less social ones, was heard.

- Improvement of self-confidence.
- Creation of an environment of empathy among children, teachers and parents.

✓ Understanding of the pedagogic and educational possibilities of computers from teachers, as learning can become student-centered and experiential.

CONCLUSIONS

✓ What the children tell us, are important for dealing with crises at school.

✓ The children's voice must function as a basis for the inclusive school of the future.

✓ Technology can be used as a medium of inclusive tactics.

✓ The development of digital stories can create an empathy environment in the classroom and strengthens the confidence of all children, while there is the possibility (even with the use of subtitles) to give power to speak to a child with speech problems or to students with different languages (for example refugee children).

✓ Inclusive education distributes leadership bottom up (starting from the student), caring for the students, as future citizens.

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