Marilena Karyolemou / Maria Magklara

Multilingualism at the periphery: Language centered activities in zones of educational priority

Abstract

The last few years an increasingly high number of pupils of different ethnic and linguistic background are attending Cypriot public schools, creating new demands regarding language education. Along the lines of intercultural education, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched, in 2003, an ambitious action plan aiming at building up language-friendly school communities. This action plan is targeted at areas or "zones of educational priority" (ZEP), in terms of high concentration of pupils of non-Cypriot origin with social integration problems and a high rate of school escape and dropout.

One of the schools eligible for inclusion in the programme is Faneromeni secondary school, an urban school situated in the centre of the capital city, Nicosia. The Faneromeni school offers an interesting and challenging educational profile for this project, since the number of local Cypriot children has been steadily decreasing, to the point that today, the majority of its pupils are of immigrant origin. During the last eight years, an array of activities has been developed aiming at reinforcing intercultural communication, language achievement and collaboration among pupils.

This paper analyses: (a) how immigrant pupils' participation in intercultural language activities is associated with their achieving better standards in Greek, (b) the positive effects that the introduction of immigrant languages and immigrant children's own voices in the classroom or in other extra-curricular activities has on the integration process and for the construction of a positive self image. More importantly, we will argue that what prompted better results in language learning was the use of *socially situated activities* through which the pupils – and often also their parents – acquired both linguistic as well as social skills.

Περίληψη

Στον ευρωπαϊκό χώρο, η πολιτική σε θέματα διδασκαλίας ξένων γλωσσών και στήριξης των γλωσσών των μεταναστών αποτελούν δύο διακριτούς τομείς με λίγα σημεία επαφής. Πολύ συχνά ξεχνούμε ότι το φαινόμενο της πολυγλωσσίας αφορά εν πολλοίς και άτομα που προέρχονται από μη Ευρωπαϊκές χώρες και είναι «πολίτες υπό διαμόρφωση». Για αυτά τα άτομα η πολυγλωσσία περνά μέσα από τη διατήρηση των μητρικών γλωσσών και ταυτόχρονα την ανάπτυξη της επάρκειάς τους στις εθνικές γλώσσες παρά μέσα από την εκμάθηση άλλων ευρωπαϊκών γλωσσών. Στην Κύπρο, τα παιδιά των μεταναστών που εντάσσονται στο δημόσιο εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα είναι και παραμένουν «άφωνα» για μεγάλο χρονικό διάστημα: δεν ενθαρρύνονται ούτε έχουν ευκαιρίες να χρησιμοποιήσουν τη δική τους φωνή, ενώ δεν γνωρίζουν ακόμη τη φωνή της εγκυρότητας, την ελληνική γλώσσα. Στο άρθρο που ακολουθεί καταγράφονται οι προσπάθειες μιας ομάδας δασκάλων που επιχειρούν να δώσουν φωνή στους μαθητές προτείνοντάς τους να χρησιμοποιήσουν δημιουργικά τις γλώσσες τους σε μια σειρά από κοινωνικά αγκιστρωμένες δραστηριότητες εντός και εκτός του σχολικού πλαισίου. Επιτυγχάνουν έτσι ταυτόχρονα καλύτερη εκμάθηση της ελληνικής, ενισχύουν την αυτοπεποίθησή τους και τους βοηθούν να αποκτήσουν δεξιότητες που τους επιτρέπουν να διαχειριστούν δυναμικά το νέο κοινωνικό χώρο.

1. Introduction

People who deal with issues of language and language policy, share a mutual understanding: multilingualism is a worldwide phenomenon. Most countries in the world may be officially monolingual, but the large majority of them are *de facto* multilingual in the

sense that they have bilingual or multilingual speakers who use more than one language in their daily lives. Despite the homogenizing effects of globalization, it seems that the degree of individual bi-/multilingualism has risen during the last few decades, as a result of the increasing mobility of people around the world. In Europe, the enlargement of the European Union has gone together with a pronounced degree of linguistic diversification: not only many languages have split to become separate varieties, e.g. Serbian and Croatian, Czech and Slovak, but also people have become bi-/multilingual to a greater degree, especially so within urban centers (Calvet 2005): the Multilingual Cities project, conducted in six European towns – Göteborg (Sweden), Hamburg (Germany), The Hague (Netherlands), Brussels (Belgium), Lyon (France), Madrid (Spain) – has shown that, in addition to the official or/and national language(s), there are fifty to ninety languages spoken mostly by young people: among them we can find autochthonous minority languages, regional languages, immigrant minority languages, diaspora or homeless languages (Extra/Yağmur 2002, 2004, 2005). In a language census that took place in London more than a decade ago, in 1989, 25% of pupils said they were using 184 different languages on a daily basis; in the study of the *Étude de l'histoire familiale* (*History of families*) undertaken by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE)[1] in 1999 in France, four hundred languages were counted as spoken by 26% of the adult population of metropolitan France when they were children (Héran/Filhon/Deprez 2002); the Språkrådet (Language Council) enumerates two hundred languages spoken today in Sweden, most of which are non autochthonous. Thus, despite the international domination of English as a lingua franca and its overwhelming popularity as a learnt foreign language among young Europeans (*Eurobarometer*),[2] there has been an increase in the number of young people (aged 11-16) who use two or more languages in everyday conversation. Some of these languages appeared for the first time on the European continent during the 20th century.

Although, as we have seen, immigration becomes increasingly part of urban life even in countries where immigration was limited or non-existent some years ago, multilingualism is often considered as an internal European affair. In discussions about the multilingual future of Europe, we usually tend to forget that a part of the potentially bi-/multilingual people have recently arrived on the European continent and are engaged in an intense ongoing negotiation in order to become citizens of Europe: adult immigrants and immigrant children. Although many researchers have pointed to the fact that it is desirable for the EU to take into consideration the masses of immigrant people from within or outside Europe as important partners in contemporary societies, the EU still considers it essential to distinguish between autochthonous and immigrant languages. But, in fact all European languages – with the exception probably of the Basque language – are immigrant languages as well, carried over by the Indo-European settlers, a historical truth we disregard because the time of migration of the peoples and the process of indigenisation of their languages belong to a remote past.

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[1] INSEE (1999): *Étude de l'histoire familiale*. Paris: République française.
[2] *Special Eurobarometer* 237/63.4. "Europeans and languages", 2005. See also *Many languages, one family: Languages in the European Union*, 2004, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

This fact has also important consequences on the way we perceive language education and language educational matters. It is obvious that for most of the contributions to this volume, multilingualism through language education in the EU is synonymous to "multilingualism through the teaching of European languages as foreign languages". In this paper, however, we would like to focus on some of the issues that concern language education of immigrant children and report some good practices that could possibly be transposable to the area of foreign language teaching as well.

2.   Multilingualism at the periphery

The term *multilingualism at the periphery* in the title of this paper bears two different meanings. First of all, it refers to the geographically peripheral position of certain EU member states, like Cyprus. One of the specificities of these member states is that they have been providing, for many years, other European countries with immigrant workforce. During the past few decades, however, they have been transformed into hosting countries, currently receiving an important number of European and non European immigrants. The positive economic development of southern European countries since the 90s – a direct or indirect effect of their accession into the EU – has transformed them into attractive places for economic and political immigrants. As the number of immigrants increases, the status of a country changes from immigrant to host: in Cyprus, for instance, the number of immigrants rose gradually since the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century.

Multilingualism is not an unknown phenomenon for Cyprus, a purportedly multilingual and multi-religious country since the Middle Ages (Grivaud 2000; Konnari-Nikolaou 2000; Karyolemou 2001). Today, the island has two official languages, Greek and Turkish, two local varieties of Greek and Turkish, and three indigenous minority languages: Cypriot Arabic, Armenian (both recognized) and Kurbetcha (a Romani variety-non recognised) (Karyolemou 2009, 2012; Goutsos/Karyolemou 2004). But despite the country's multilingual past and present, external multilingualism, which has mainly resulted from the import of immigrant groups and their languages, is a relatively recent phenomenon. As a consequence, unlike other European countries with a long tradition in dealing with immigrant populations, Cyprus has little if any experience in this area and this has important consequences on the treatment of immigrant people, immigrant communities and immigrant languages.

Multilingualism at the periphery also refers to the fact that though language teaching for immigrant children in the European context has mostly run through formal instruction, it becomes increasingly evident that some aspects of potential bi-/multilingualism can be better developed in an indirect or peripheral way, which involves language learning through everyday socially situated activities rather than through formal language instruction. In such a context, it is important for us to realise that, whatever our position on the issue of teaching European languages to enhance multilingualism within the European Union is, we have to take into consideration that, for many immigrant children, learning the national language of the host country is their only way to be multilingual and to participate in the European ideal. National language instruction is, thus, not only a national-local but also a European-global endeavour.

In this process of *building a European identity locally*, it is extremely important to be able: (a) to seek ways *to fully engage immigrant people in social practices in both languages,* that is in the language of the host country and in the immigrant language; (b) to help them acquire *multiple linguistic and social skills in order to equally negotiate their integration in the European social space;* the basic idea behind this is that becoming citizens of Europe does not only mean acquiring a new (national) language – the language of the host country – but also integrating its social practices in an active and collaborative way.

3.   Immigration statistics: increasing rates

In terms of migration, Cyprus has experienced a very crucial turning point in its recent history: from a country of emigrants it has become a country of immigrants. Up to the 90s of the previous century, large numbers of Cypriots left the island for Western European countries, especially the UK and Greece. The outflow of immigrants was unequal, depending on political events and social conditions. In the first decades of the 20th century, poverty and underdevelopment were the main reasons Cypriots left the island. In the years before and after the establishment of the Cypriot Republic and the clashes between the two main ethnic communities living on the island (Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots), approximately 37,800 people fled the country. The years following the Turkish invasion (1974), 39,800 people left the politically divided and economically devastated country.[3] According to unofficial estimations by the Home Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, there are currently approximately 300,000 Cypriot immigrants – both Greek and Turkish – living in the UK alone;[4] in Greece, the number of Cypriots is approximately 60,000, whereas in Australia, there are some 19,500 Cypriot born Australians.[5]

Year	Number	%
1997*	23,000	3.1%
1998*	24,100	3.2%
1999*	24,100	3.2%
2000*	24,200	3.2%
2001*	66,100	8.3%
2002*	72,500	9.0%
2003*	83,500	10.2%
2004*	98,100	11.7%
2005*	110,200	12.9%
2006*	118,100	13.7%

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[3]   Winder (2004, 360-362).
[4]   Home Affairs Committee (2011): *Implication for the Justice and Home Affairs area of the accession of Turkey to the European Union*. The Stationery Office. Internet: www.statewatch.org/news/2011/aug/eu-hasc-turkey-jha-report.pdf.
[5]   Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship: *Community Information Summary: Cypriot Born*. www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/_pdf/cyprus.pdf.

Year	Number	%
2007*	125,300	14.3%
2008*	128,200	14.5%
2009*	130,400	14.6%
2010**	196,348	21.9%
2011***	246,000	27.3%

Table 1: Immigrants in Cyprus
* *Cyprus demographic reports 2001/2011*
** Estimation based on the numbe of Immigrants 2009
*** According to the of Interior 120,000 E.E. immigrants
+ 68,000 political refugees + 58,000 third country
immigrants

Immigration into Cyprus has been very limited and concerned mostly Greek nationals and a limited number of foreign students studying in higher education institutions. At times of political unrest and social upheaval in the wider area, e.g. after the Lebanese war in 1973, there were also immigrants from Lebanon or other Middle East countries who fled to Cyprus on their way to mainland Europe; some of them settled on the island. In the mid 80s, as the island economy was recovering from the worst economic downturn of its history due to the Turkish invasion, repatriation of Cypriot immigrants, essentially from Australia, South Africa and the United Kingdom also became the order of the day.

According to data provided by the statistical service of the Ministry of Finance, the number of immigrants in Cyprus has increased since the 90s, due to a relaxation of the legislation on immigration, which was deemed necessary in order to overcome labour shortages. There are two important peaks in the influx of immigrants: the first one in 2001 when their percentage increased by 5 points, from 3.3% to 8.3% and the second one in 2010, with a raise of about 7%. Official estimations bring the number of immigrants present on the island to 246,000, a number that represents 27.3% of the total population. Among them, 120,000 are free-movers, i.e. European citizens from other EU countries. The main countries of origin for immigrants are, within the European Union, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Poland, Latvia and Germany and within Europe, Russia and Ukraine. Outside Europe, most immigrants originate from southeast Asia, namely Vietnam, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. However, since Cyprus' accession to the EU, the number of immigrants from non European countries has decreased, mainly because of restrictions imposed on immigration by the EU.[6]

A phenomenon which is equally new for Cyprus is the presence of children among immigrants. Child immigration is the outcome of new forms of immigration that favour family reunion in the host country, such as social or political immigration (asylum seekers). Here also, the numbers speak for themselves: the percentage of immigrant pupils in primary education has climbed from 7.3% in 2006-2007 to 12% in 2010-2011, whereas in the secondary, both the general and the professional cycle, the average number of

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6   See also Trimikliniotis (2004a).

immigrant students is approaching 5%. More than 35 languages other than Greek have been reported to be spoken by bilingual pupils on a daily basis. Bulgarian, Romanian, Turkish, Russian, Arabic, Polish and Georgian represent the most frequently used among them.

| YEAR | PRIMARY EDUCATION | | SECONDARY EDUCATION | | | |
| | | | Gymnasium | | General & Professional Lyceum | |
	Number of immigrant pupils	Percentage (%)	Number of immigrant pupils	Percentage (%)	Number of immigrant pupils	Percentage (%)
2006-2007	3,951	7.3	–	–	–	–
2007-2008	4,040	7.7	–	–	–	–
2008-2009	4,605	9.0	–	–	–	–
2009-2010	5,281	10.5	1,651	–	963	–
2010-2011	6,047	12.0	1,500	6.11	980	3.61

Table 2: Immigrant children in public schools

Whereas the percentage of immigrant pupils enrolled in public schools in Cyprus is comparable to other southern European countries (Greece, Italy, Spain, etc.) and sometimes to western European countries (Denmark, Finland etc.), the growth of the immigrant population has not been as smooth as in other countries which have a long tradition as host countries: it almost doubled in less than five years. As a consequence, both the Cypriot society and the public sector have found themselves unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with the issues and problems that the new populations have generated, such as illiteracy or lack of formal education in the mother tongue, welfare, civic participation rights, etc. (Trimikliniotis/Demetriou 2005, 2011; Constantinou 2007).

4.   Language in education policies in Cyprus

A general appreciation of official language policies and language in education policies is that they have been largely monolingual (Karyolemou 2007). For instance, despite the fact that the Republic of Cyprus has two official languages, none of the constituent communities have ever had an educational policy promoting bilingualism by instituting either the teaching of the other constituent party's language as a second language or a bilingual instruction (Karyolemou 2001, 2007). Bilingualism has always been a private affair and, despite the fact that, for some time, the knowledge of Greek for Turkish Cypriots and of Turkish for Greek Cypriots was compulsory if someone wished to work in the public service, each community had its own educational system and formulated its own educational priorities promoting Turkish and Greek respectively (Karyolemou 2007; Karoulla-Vrikki 2007, 2010).

In the area of foreign language teaching, on the other hand, the policy remains quite conservative, giving precedence to the major European languages with the first and sec-

ond foreign language being mandatorily English and French. English is taught from the fourth grade of primary throughout the secondary (nine years in total),[7] while French is a compulsory subject from the first to the fourth grade of the secondary (four years in total). In the last two years of upper high secondary, the pupils have a choice either to continue learning French or to switch to another foreign language. This language is chosen out of a limited number of options: Italian, Spanish, German, Turkish since 2004 and Russian since 2006, the presence of the last two being linked to local conditions. Turkish, the other official language, is nevertheless a foreign language for Greek Cypriots, because of the physical separation of the two communities. Its introduction coincides with the moment of the "Annan plan", a proposal for the settlement of Cyprus' political question put together by the Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, a few months before Cyprus acceded to the EU. Russian, on the other hand, is not only the language of a large community of Russian immigrants, some of whom have important economic activities on the island, but also the mother tongue of Russian-born Greeks of Pontic ascendance, who form an important community with about 20,000 members.[8] Thus, at the opposite of countries like France where the range of foreign languages taught corresponds more closely to the mother tongues of the immigrant children, no such provision is found in foreign language teaching in Cyprus.

Furthermore, none of the indigenous minority languages such as Armenian or Cypriot Arabic appear in foreign language instruction; nor are there any regional languages, heritage languages (other than Russian)[9] or languages of interest for the wider region of Middle East, such as Arabic or Hebrew, included among the options offered. The degree of awareness as regards the existence of minority languages is very low both among the general population and also among officials. In the 2001 Eurydice *Report on foreign language teaching in European Schools* conducted among 29 European countries, Cyprus was one of five countries to declare no minority/regional language present on their territory.[10] Note that one year later, in August 2002, Cyprus ratified the Council of Europe's *Charter on regional and minority languages* that it had already signed in December 1992, and recognized Armenian as its sole minority language.[11]

With these facts in mind, the new role that Cyprus was asked to play as a host country would, predictably, entail many difficulties. The legislation in place could not regulate and ensure the rights and obligations of non citizens. Administrative infrastructure was insufficient and public services under-equipped to deal with high numbers of non citizens. The society itself was ill prepared to welcome foreigners. All these problems are succinctly evoked in the first Report of the European commission on racism and intoler-

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[7] Since the educational reform of this year English will be taught from the third grade of the primary.

[8] According to estimations, in 2011 recession caused many Russian born Pontics to leave the island for Greece, where they possess properties.

[9] *Ελληνογενείς* is the term used to refer to populations of Greek ascendance – like Russian born Pontics – who have ceased speaking Greek as their first language.

[10] Ireland, Luxembourg, Iceland and Liechtenstein are the other four. See Eurydice/Directorate-General for Education and Culture (2000): *Foreign language teaching in schools in Europe*. Strasbourg: European Commission. Internet: http://www.mp.gov.rs/resursi/dokumenti/dok11-eng-Foreign_language.pdf.

[11] As from November 5, 2008, Cyprus also recognizes Cypriot Maronite Arabic as a minority language within the meaning of the Charter.

ance (ECRI 1999)[12] on Cyprus, which urges the Cypriot government to take measures to ensure the rights of foreign citizens.

In the public educational system where the presence of immigrant children was kept to a relatively low level until 2006, educational difficulties were (thought to be) managed through support measures that already applied for Cypriot children. In the primary education for instance, these measures took the form of supporting courses offered occasionally and individually to children who would have difficulties in mathematics or Greek language, and used to run parallel to regular classes. In its second report in 2000,[13] ECRI already tackles the question of the presence of immigrant children in public schools and underlines the need for the educational system to adjust its curricula, methodologies and philosophy. More specifically, in the area of language teaching, it notes:

> Given the increasing numbers of immigrant children in Cypriot schools, ECRI encourages the authorities to ensure that the provision of Greek as a second language meets the demands of the immigrant community and that teachers are properly trained in this respect. Consideration may also be given to introducing, as necessary, teaching in languages other than Greek for students of non-Greek mother tongue in parallel with education in Greek to facilitate the process of learning for these students. (ECRI 2000, 10)

As the number of immigrant children increased, it became obvious that individual measures were ill-adapted to meet the needs of the new population, especially so in the area of teaching the Greek language, the knowledge of which was absolutely essential for the children's successful integration into school. On the other hand, supporting immigrant languages – as it was also asked in all subsequent reports – was completely outside the scope of the national education system altogether, where the concept and philosophy of multicultural education has only being introduced with the education reform of 2011, and is still not properly implemented. At the same time, the main scope of the educational system – namely to transmit Greek orthodox values and ideals – hardly copes with the values and precepts of multicultural education (Trimikliniotis 2004b).

In this context, there is barely any room left for any culture or language other than the Greek language and culture: the educational system and teachers themselves fail to recognize linguistic diversity as an asset for the children and for the society as a whole and consider bilingualism or the use of a language other than Greek as a disadvantage and a burden. Institutional support for immigrant languages has been practically non-existent, and the question of adjusting teaching and offering support to immigrant students was almost entirely locally treated and relied on the sensitivity and engagement of individual teachers. Thus, according to data provided by Eurydice, Cyprus is among those few European countries (together with UK, Portugal, Latvia, Netherlands and Malta) where educational measures for teaching immigrant languages depend upon voluntary and private initiatives.[14]

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[12] *First ECRI Report on Cyprus, 1999. CRI 99(50)*. Strasbourg: European Commission. Internet: http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/XMLEcri/ENGLISH/Cycle_01/01_CbC_eng/01-cbc-cyprus-eng.pdf.

[13] *Second ECRI Report on Cyprus, 2000. CRI 2001(35)*. Strasbourg: European Commission. http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/XMLEcri/ENGLISH/Cycle_02/02_CbC_eng/02-cbc-cyprus-eng.pdf.

[14] *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe*. Strasbourg: European Commission, Eurydice, April 2009. Internet: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/101EN.pdf.

## 5.	Projects in education: zones of educational priority

From all the above, it becomes obvious that the increasing concentration of immigrant children in public schools is a new phenomenon for Cyprus, creating new demands regarding education in general and language education in particular. Schools have become more than ever heterogeneous sites where people with diverse language backgrounds are engaged in an ongoing negotiation of their integration at school. This process is even harsher for pupils who come from non-European countries and speak languages much less appreciated and respected. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the non-Cypriot pupils are particularly keen to achieve good standards in their command of the Greek language, regarding it as a necessary means for integrating into the Cypriot community. Both the parents and the children consider that learning Greek is a catalyst for constructing their new identity. Following the recommendations by European Institutions like the ECRI committee, and the example of countries like France and the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus decided to address the issue of non-Cypriot children enrolled in the public schools and to seek effective ways to successfully integrate them. In 2003, it launched an ambitious action plan for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools located in what were considered to be zones of educational priority (onwards ZEP). ZEPs are defined as downgraded areas with a high concentration of non-Cypriot pupils facing serious integration problems, with frequently reported incidents of violent behavior among youngsters, high numbers of functionally illiterate pupils and drop outs. The main aim of the policy-makers concerned tackling school failure and early abandonment, preventing adolescent criminality and reinforcing the degree of social integration of the bi-/multilingual pupils (Giannaka et al. 2007).

Initially, the actions involved in the programme were only implemented in two schools (2003-2004), one in the capital Nicosia (Faneromeni), the other one in Limassol (Agiou Antoniou), then in a third one, Theoskepasti, in Paphos (2004-2005). The programme continued to extend in the following few years and, in 2011, it covered 27 schools. One of its specificities was its network-like nature: it concerned not single schools but school complexes comprising of a secondary school and its "satellites", that is the primary and pre-primary schools wherefrom came the main bulk of the pupils.

Although at first the programme was not clearly addressed to immigrant school populations – in Limassol for instance the target population were Turkish Cypriot children (that is Cypriot citizens with a mother tongue other than Greek), whereas in Nicosia and Paphos children of Pontic Greeks (that is Greek citizens with a mother tongue other than Greek) – as the number of immigrant children increased in subsequent years, they became the main beneficiaries of such actions. Because of its network-like nature, the programme would be carried on over a number of years – from pre-primary to primary and then into the secondary – thus allowing for a control of the results in the long term. These results confirmed the positive effects of the measures implemented by showing a decrease in the number of dropouts among the immigrant population specifically (Giannaka et al. 2007).

5.1   The case of Faneromeni

In the current paper, we will concentrate our attention on the school of Faneromeni in Nicosia. We have decided to focus on the specific school not only because of its long tradition as a ZEP, but also because it presents an interesting profile: it is among the oldest schools in Cyprus, operating as a pre-primary, primary and secondary school since 1924, as a school of boys initially and as a mixed gender school from 1976 onwards. Furthermore, it is situated at the centre of the capital city, Nicosia, and is adjacent to the partition (Green) line that separates the southern free part of the city from its northern side which is occupied by Turkish troops.

Despite the fact that the school is located in the historical centre of the city, where lie some of the most important historical places to be found inside the medieval walls, it has also been a downgraded area because of its vicinity to occupied territory. It has for many years remained inactive and is considered a sinister place to live, therefore most of its Cypriot residents have fled. The area was soon repopulated by immigrants who moved in, renting out its cheap, dilapidated and ruined houses. This internal mobility has resulted in decreasing numbers of Cypriot pupils enrolled in the Faneromeni school, hence reducing substantially the overall number of the pupil population. Immigrant children stepped in to take the places left by the Cypriot pupils, but the overall number of pupils still dropped over the years. During the school year 2011/2012, 48 out of 63 pupils or 76,2% were immigrants.

The Ministry of Education, taking into account the distinct profile of the school, chose Faneromeni as one of the first schools to benefit from the ZEP action plan. For the local implementation of the program, an organizing team comprising teachers of the primary and the secondary school as well as representatives of the parents' association were charged to decide and supervise the development of activities that would appropriately respond to all pupils' educational needs, irrespective of their ethnic, cultural or socio-economic background.

For the collection of the data, we have audio-recorded semi-structured interviews of five primary and six secondary school pupils during two school days. We have further talked with five more children regarding their experience in participating in the ZEP activities. We have also interviewed three teachers – two of them were in charge of the program for the primary and the secondary school respectively – and, in addition, the trilingual teaching assistant who was employed to support the children. In order to collect data about the participants' experience of the program, we were involved in open-ended interviews. We have also drawn on the official documents of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus which contain the general guidelines and scope of the policy for the ZEP schools. Finally, we have collected data with the specific targets, the schedule and the content of the activities of the ZEP school of Faneromeni.

5.2   Language and social learning

Celebration of diversity was one of the common commitments taken by the participants in the program. In particular, one of the top targets of the organizing team was to get both mainstream and bi-/multilingual pupils appreciate multilingualism through their

joint participation in multilingual and multicultural practices. With specific reference to the pupils of non-Cypriot origin, much importance was placed upon the enhancement of their competence in the official language of the country, Greek; attaining better standards of achievement in their oral and written performance of Greek was considered as a crucial point in their school success and their overall social integration. However, language teaching was not planned as a regular in-class activity but as an array of task-based practices which would help them acquire both language *and* social skills.

The empowerment of the pupils through their participation in a variety of social practices is closely related to the main target set off by the programme: to offer pupils the necessary support to help them become social beings with competent skills so as to be able to successfully negotiate their social status. In addition to that, the program targeted also the active involvement of their parents in the children's everyday activities; some actions such as learning how to use a computer were designed for both the pupils and their parents.

The organizing team designed the participation of primary and secondary school pupils both in curricular and extra-curricular activities. As far as the curricular activities are concerned, bi-/multilingual pupils with no command or limited command of the Greek language were allowed to use their mother tongues throughout the program, without, however, their mother tongue ever becoming means for official communication between them and the teacher. A trilingual teaching assistant, fluent in Georgian and Russian (two of the most frequently reported mother-tongues at the school) and graduate of the Greek language, was employed to provide support to both the primary and the secondary school pupils. Grade 1 pupils with no command of the Greek language were supported locally in class by an assistant teacher who was translating to them the rules and the content of the lesson. They were then encouraged to gradually integrate into regular class activities through the use of the Greek language. Intermediate pupils were systematically supported in the acquisition of the Greek language in separate classes in groups of 3-4 pupils, whereas advanced pupils were only supported occasionally.

All the pupils we discussed with agree to have enormously benefited from the systematic training they received. According to the assistant teacher, they were able to acquire the reading skill within the first two lessons (but without yet understanding the content of what they were reading). They were then provided with support in the acquisition of the vocabulary and grammar. After having had extensive discussions with primary and secondary pupils, we realized that they recognized that these supportive measures had greatly contributed to their achieving better standards in the Greek language.

The attainment of better standards of the Greek language was further reinforced by their participation in an array of extra-curricular activities during the afternoon. The vast majority of the activities took place either in the school yard or at a nearby multiplex venue, called "Yfantourgeio" which was rented especially for hosting the Faneromeni pupils' literacy practices. In the specific venue, teachers of the school volunteered to help pupils do their daily homework and learn foreign languages in addition to the languages taught at school. This systematic support was much appreciated especially by the bi-/multilingual pupils, whose parents were in the majority and who were ordinary hard-working people with limited time to spend supervising or taking care of their children but also in-

sufficiently competent in Greek to the point that would enable them to follow up or provide their children with support. Apart from the official literacy practices, pupils could also take up their favorite pastimes such as playing videogames, chess, ping-pong etc.

The bi-/multilingual pupils' linguistic and social competence was substantially upgraded by their participation in the various workshops that were running simultaneously during the afternoon, such as learning how to use computers, how to play the guitar, painting etc. Due to the limited space of this paper, we will focus on two of the workshops, the video editing and the drama workshops. Both activities will help us get a better idea of the range and variety of literacy practices the pupils have had the chance to engage in.

5.2.1   Workshop 1: video-editing

As far as the video editing workshop is concerned, the pupils were trained to acquire basic skills in using a camera and producing short documentaries having as a topic the architectural structure of the old town. They were also taught how to transcribe the digital material to a computer in order to edit it. What is particularly interesting about this activity is that besides the training they received in improving their digital skills, they were also engaged in different literacy and social practices. For example, they had to put together a questionnaire in order to investigate the architectural style of the old buildings and their historical background. They also had to interview officers of the urban planning bureau on the basis of the questionnaire they had prepared. They subsequently used this material to compose the text to verbally invest the visual material. It is worth noting, that the teachers emphasized the development of the children's social skills, as they had to deal with government officers. It was also one of the rare occasions they had access to public offices such as the urban planning bureau.

5.2.2   Workshop 2: acting, drama

By giving the pupils the chance to participate in a multiplicity of social practices, the drama workshops were among the most highly engaging and stimulating activities. In particular, the first meetings of the team served for establishing a sense of mutual understanding and respect between the participants. The bi-/multilingual pupils managed to deal with their initial hesitation, when they realized that the use of their mother tongue was much appreciated; they were frequently encouraged to participate in multilingual activities by articulating utterances in their first language. As the time went by, a play was composed on the basis of the verbal and other semiotic interaction of the pupils during the workshops. The two teachers who were responsible for the drama workshops reported children's preoccupations and ideas during the workshops and put together a coherent and flowing text. The play content revolved around the pupil's thoughts on what it means to be an adolescent raised and socialized in a multilingual and multicultural environment in the capital of Cyprus. What is particularly interesting about this activity is that the pupils were invited to put their own voice to the play by communicating their thoughts in their mother tongue.

6.   Conclusion

What becomes obvious from the above is that language teaching must never be treated as a language activity alone but as a socially situated act. Even when we deal with young pupils, we have to keep in mind that they are not *just that*. They are also social beings who engage in multiple processes of socialization.

The Faneromeni school is a good example of such a stance. First of all, it proves that even within an educational system which is overwhelmingly promoting only one language, immigrant mother tongues can be introduced in an active, creative and not stereotypical way. This is beneficial not only to the bi-/multilingual but also to the monolingual mainstream children who become increasingly aware of the linguistic and cultural diversity and they learn to show respect to bilingual/multilingual pupils' mother tongue and culture. Second, it shows that school is not about teachers and pupils but about individuals who engage in intense multilateral language and social activities that empower not only immigrant children but also their families. Here, everybody has a place to be and a role to play: teachers, pupils, professionals, parents and social actors. Third, it provides evidence that language command can be better achieved through a situated learning. Acquiring better standards in a language cannot be attained through formal teaching alone; it necessitates pupils' participation in multilateral activities which offer them different kinds of input and lots of hours of exposition to the target language, as well as an array of social practices which help them acquire social skills – at the same time as language skills – necessary to integrate the Cypriot society and, subsequently, the European universe which is their new home. Moreover, it helps them create a positive image of themselves as active actors in social processes, which also give them the opportunity to understand what it means to be a citizen in a European country.

If now we move away from the context of immigrant languages, we could ask ourselves: is there anything we can learn from our example of good practice that could be useful for language education in general or for foreign language education in particular?

Piet Van de Craen reminded us during the EFNIL conference that a part of the process of language learning is implicit, and as such it is taking place outside the classroom. What we have discussed above is an example of making implicit learning part of the process of acquiring a language at school. There is no reason to think that such a practice could not apply to foreign language teaching as well: language is a social construct and unless language teaching in general and foreign language teaching in particular takes into consideration this fact and re-places language in its social context, it will remain ineffective and will continue to produce poor results. In what ways this can be done, is something we should further investigate.

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