DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION. A CASE STUDY IN A KINDERGARTEN CLASS WITH AN IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE BACKGROUND IN GREECE

Foti Paraskevi[1], Sidiropoulou Tryfaini[1], Sidiropoulou Maretta[2]

[1]University of West Attica, Greece

[2]Democritus University of Thrace, Greece

Abstract

Differentiated Teaching is an open pedagogical concept that is linked to the interdisciplinary approach of knowledge and active learning, and which recognizes, respects, and uses the diversity of each classroom. It is a pedagogy that emphasizes not only the knowledge and interests of children but also the different ways in which they communicate and learn to form a flexible framework that allows everyone to follow their own paths, their own rhythms. On the other hand, the conditions created by the movement of populations and the new educational data created by the immigration and school integration of foreign students, highlighted intercultural education as a way of exploiting differences and ensuring equal opportunities for all. Intercultural education aims at establishing a society with interaction and interdependence, with a spirit of reciprocity and equality among social members, with respect for the values and rights of all social beings, according to the Charter of Human Rights. In this paper we will present the "coupling" of differentiated teaching and intercultural education through an example of a host class for young children aged 4-5 with an immigrant and refugee background in Greece.

Keywords: *differentiated teaching, intercultural education, kindergarten at hospitality structure of Greece*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of differentiating instruction based on students' needs is not a new perspective in the field of pedagogy. It is part of the broader concept of 'universal design', whose goal is equal access to information for all without exception (McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006). The implementation of the concept of universal design in the learning process refers to the concept of "Universal Design for Learning" whereby the teacher uses a variety of educational materials and teaching methods in the learning process to ensure that all students have access to knowledge according to their different needs. Different ways of representing knowledge, the possibility of processing and reflecting knowledge in different ways and the possibility of different ways of involving students in the learning process are the three key elements of universal design for learning.

In the last decade Greece has been a host country for immigrants, while the education system has to manage a growing number of students from different cultural backgrounds. A country that is recognized as multicultural, should include different ethnic, racial, religious, and social groups of people living and interacting with each other, while each of them maintains its own unique characteristics, while in this kind of society intercultural education offers equal opportunities to all and makes use of linguistic and cultural differences.

The increased dissimilarity that is increasingly observed in classrooms at all levels of education (with perhaps the most common examples being differences in language, learning abilities, socio-economic environment) often creates concerns for teachers who perceive that traditional choices and teaching for 'average' do not meet the needs of the children in their classroom, as even seemingly homogeneous classes are in fact characterized by heterogeneity (Narvaez & Brimijoin 2010; Algozzine & Anderson 2007; Tomlinson, 1999). The learning needs of each child differ (Middendorf, 2008; Tomlinson, 2001), as they are influenced by characteristics such as origin, age, gender, family environment, language,

cultural habits, as well as by experiences, interests, values, dispositions towards specific issues and ways of communicating and learning (Sidriropoulou & Tsaoula, 2008).

1. DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING. CONCEPT AND DEFINITIONS.

Differentiated instruction is an interactive process between the student and the teacher, through which the teacher responds in advance to the student's particular and unique needs and the student can actively participate and learn continuously to the extent of his or her abilities (Tomlinson, 1995). The better we know our student's needs, the more appropriately and effectively we can differentiate our instruction and respond to them since research data from the fields of Neurosciences and Psychology during the 20th century, suggests that cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional development are largely shaped by the first six years of a child's life (Foti, Sidiropoulou 2020).Collaboration between teacher and student in assessing the needs of the latter is very important for both parties.

On the one hand, the student can become aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses, his/her aptitudes, and the way he/she learns best to be able to make more appropriate choices in the context of differentiated teaching, and on the other hand, the teacher can effectively adapt, for activities to ensure that all his pupils achieve the teaching objectives, for example objectives. In order to differentiate our teaching, therefore, we need to collect objective information from different sources (e.g., family, the student himself) student, other teachers) and by different means (e.g. observation, self-evaluation), weighted and informal tests, etc.) about the student's learning readiness, the interests and learning profile.

Learning readiness, a term based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), and the Zone of Acquired Development (ZDA), within which learning takes place in the sense that the difficulty of the skills being taught should be slightly above the child's current level and ability. This is based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) which refers to how close a student is to achieving the instructional goals prescribed by his/her grade level and curriculum in a particular field of knowledge and what steps he/she still needs to master to achieve these goals (Foti, 2015). The teacher's task is therefore to support the student through appropriate strategies such as learning centers, micro-teaching, flexible grouping, use of graded activities, so that he can master the prerequisite skills needed to achieve the teaching objectives.

Students' interests, such as the specific skill/talent, the specific subject matter and the specific type of activities, are an important motivation in the learning process and the teacher should integrate the interests of his/her students in his/her teaching in order to be able to create activities that will be meaningful for each student and to ensure their personal involvement and enthusiasm in learning. Identifying students' interests can be conducted in a variety of ways at the beginning of the year or before teaching a lesson and can help to guide them appropriately in an individual research or project on a topic.

Each individual has a unique way of processing the information received, emphasizing different characteristics each time depending on his/her personal experiences, knowledge and abilities, but also on the conditions of the environment and the task he/she has to process, as Gregorc characteristically states in the Model of Different Ways of Thinking (1982) about the ways in which we process and interpret new information as a continuum that concerns the way we perceive and process information and ranges from the specific way we conceive and process information to the way we interpret it. Different ways of thinking lead to different learning preferences, learning profiles which are shaped by learning styles, and the personal, environmental factors that facilitate learning (Dunn & Dunn, 1992,1993).

Another factor shaping the learning style is the different types of intelligence such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, naturalistic/existential, musical, somatomotor/kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal according to which people process different information to cope with new situations, as Gardener (1983) typically states in his theory. Focusing on emotional intelligence, on the other hand, which includes the ability of human beings to recognize, control and understand their emotions, to recognize and understand the emotions of people around them and to effectively manage their own

emotions and interpersonal relationships, Goleman (2000) emphasizes skills such as self-regulation, behavioral motivation, empathy, self-control, and social skills, which are very important in the learning process.

These theories of multiple types of intelligence do not cease to reflect the uniqueness and otherness of each child, forming the basis for differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001). These theories of multiple types of intelligence do not cease to reflect the uniqueness and otherness of each child and form the basis for differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001). An additional important factor that shapes the learning profile of the student/student is the culture of the culture that may influence the way of working - individual or group, the mode of expression - spontaneous or restrained - the content of knowledge, personalized or generalized, and which is a target for the teacher to understand the multiplicity of preferences of his/her learners and encourage them to work in ways that are most effective for them (Heacox, 2009; Tomlinson & Strickland, 2005).

Gender can also influence the way students learn, for example, some boys may be more competitive than girls, while some girls may prefer cooperative learning with corresponding learning patterns (Tomlinson, 2001).

Summarizing the characteristics of Differentiated Teaching according to Tomlinson, (1999, 2001) Differentiated teaching is proactive as it is pre-designed in such a way to meet the different needs of the students, differentiating it from individualized teaching where the teacher must design a different activity for each individual student but being a combination of whole-class, collaborative, and individualized teaching.

The qualitative rather than quantitative approach of learning is an additional characteristic of differentiated teaching, since the quality of the work assigned to the student is of great importance, and it is based on continuous assessment where the level of learning readiness, interests and learning styles are evaluated, which - as mentioned above - are important elements that the teacher must consider for effective teaching.

Differentiated teaching is essentially learner-centered, actively involving students in learning experiences relevant to their interests, taking into account the fact that new knowledge must be built on pre-existing knowledge (Piaget, 1978) and assuming a teacher working with groups or individuals at different times of the day (Tomlinson, et al., 2003).

Questions such as:

- What will the students learn?
- How will they work?
- How will they demonstrate what they have learned?

These are the three most important questions that differentiated instruction answers and are the base on which the teacher structures the lesson design to empower the meaningful development of all students in the classroom through an ongoing, feedback-focused collaboration.

Finally, an appropriate learning environment that, in addition to the physical space, fosters relationships between teacher and students as well as between students themselves, creating the psycho-emotional environment of the classroom, is key to effective differentiated teaching. Characteristics such as trust among class members and the belief that each student can learn and achieve learning goals, respecting students' needs and expectations, providing opportunities for students to do meaningful activities and work in different ways, perseverance and a reflective attitude are prerequisites for fostering a learning environment that transforms the classroom into a 'learning community' where everyone is committed to effective learning, respects, concerns and cares for each other (Hattie, 2012. Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

2. INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE GREEK REALITY

Children on the move covers all children who migrate from their country of origin to the territory of a European country in search of survival, safety, improved living standards, economic opportunities, protection from exploitation and abuse, family reunification, or a combination of these factors. They may be travelling with their family, or independently, or with non-family members. They may be seeking asylum, or be victims of trafficking, or be undocumented migrants. The situation of children on the move may vary at different stages of their journey and these children may face many different vulnerabilities (ENOC, 2013).

In the Greek territory where we have been witnessing this situation in the last seven years, new events have brought new developments, both in society and in educational matters with the Greek state, respecting Articles 28 and 29 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, creating Priority Education Zones (ΖΕΠ), establishing ΖΕΠ Reception Classes, (ΖΕΠ) Δ.Υ.Ε.Π. ΖΕΠ for the Education of Refugees (Δ.Υ.Ε.Π. ΖΕΠ) in primary education schools (Υ.Α.:131024/Δ1, ΦΕΚ 2687 Β΄/29-8-2016), Government Gazette (2687 Β΄/29-8-2016) and for secondary education to establish Reception Classes I and II (M.A.: 152661/D2, Government Gazette 3736 Β΄/08-10-19 and M.A.: 131701/D2, Government Gazette 4404 Β΄/06-10-20).

The field of intercultural education stands out as one of the most important approaches, among a range of educational initiatives, which can potentially address the issue of educational inequality around the world. Since many communities have different ways of learning and expectations about the learning process and learning outcomes, intercultural learning and teaching processes need to consider all these factors.

In developing multilingual measures, the provision of educational programs should be made more accessible to a greater number of learners and lead to greater levels of equity in educational terms.

The field of intercultural education requires that we listen to voices that are traditionally silenced. So, when we talk about education, the best way to prepare students for the future is to equip them to invent it (Foti, 2016; Reimers, 2006). A future in which students can manage multiculturalism and have intercultural competence.

3. INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Intercultural competence is the knowledge and skills that a person must have in order to understand the world in which he/she lives, to understand international affairs and events and to create the conditions to be able to settle them (Reimers, 2013, Fotis 2016).

Three dimensions are necessary to have intercultural competence:

The first is the affective dimension (affective) which serves as the basis for global education and the most important purpose of education. As humanity is complex and emotions are unique to people, people from different parts of the world can work, live, communicate and even join because of our fundamental similarities.

The second dimension is Action, the ability to speak different languages which is increasingly important in a 'global' economy and is the driving force in this dimension.

And finally, the third dimension is the Academic dimension, which includes an understanding of comparative subjects such as world history, geography, religion, politics, and other related studies of society. This knowledge will help students become better at communicating with people, the system that governs their society and the context of the "why" of things that may happen in a country (Foti 2016; Khan, 2012; Reimers, 2006). For teachers who manage this diversity and, as Cummins (2003) states, are committed to helping children learn, the integration of all students regardless of cultural capital and culture into the country that welcomes them and in which they will now live, is important that it is done smoothly so that in the future they will consider it their home.

The key elements of intercultural education are empathy, encouraging individuals to care about others, their problems and their diversity, solidarity that transcends the boundaries of groups and races and calls for the cultivation of a collective consciousness, respect for cultural diversity, which can only be achieved by opening up to other cultures, and finally the elimination of nationalistic thinking and freedom from stereotypes and prejudices (Helmut Essinger , 1991) intercultural education is above all a call for the cultivation of a dialectical relationship , a dynamic process of interaction, mutual recognition and cooperation between different multicultural groups.

Combining elements of intercultural education and differentiated teaching, a two-week educational intervention was carried out in the Kindergarten at the Hospitality Structure **"SKARAMANGA"**, at the location "PROVLITA 4" of the Municipality of Chaidari of the Regional Unit of the Western Sector of Athens of the Attica Region, during the school year 2018-2019.

4. TARGET GROUP - CHARACTERISTICS

Refugee children and adolescents have in many cases experienced abandonment or separation from their families, have witnessed atrocities or, worse still, have themselves been victims of abuse. Such experiences stigmatize the young person and determine their cognitive, emotional, social and even physical development. Although each student's experiences differ and the reaction to 'trauma' varies from person to person, however, feelings of fear, lack of self-confidence and difficulty in showing trust in their surroundings in most cases are a common emotional basis for students who carry 'trauma'.

Thus, the first thing that the school should have taken care of with refugee students is to recognize the extra burden added to the children's psychology by their entry into a completely new and alien environment for them and to take care to reduce or even eliminate this psychological burden. The target group where differentiated teaching actions were carried out was the Kindergarten at the Hospitality Structure **"SKARAMANGA"**, at the location "PROVLITA 4" of the Municipality of Chaidari of the Regional Unit of the Western Sector of Athens of the Attica Region during the school year 2018-2019.

This kindergarten has two sections with 50 children enrolled, of which 27 are boys and 23 girls, while 28 are toddlers and 22 are preschoolers and each section is attended by approximately 10 to 15 children. In one of the two sections where differentiated teaching activities were carried out, 7 girls and 6 boys participated, who were toddlers and preschoolers and spoke Arabic and Farsi and in the second section 4 girls and 5 boys participated, toddlers and preschoolers who also spoke Arabic and Farsi.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology followed was action research in which the researcher acted and observed simultaneously, recording the children's reactions afterwards and modifying the action when she deemed it desirable and necessary.

Action research is essentially an empirical method in which during the research project information is collected which is recorded, discussed and exchanged with the participants then evaluated and followed up by relevant experiences giving the teacher-researcher the opportunity to test specific hypotheses and subsequently more generalised knowledge can emerge (Cohen & Manion, 1994) giving this action research a self-evaluative character because the modifications are continuously evaluated within the research project.

6. DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING STRATEGY OF THE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

The teacher is the core of differentiated instruction as he/she is required to make many important decisions and adapt important elements of his/her daily teaching (Sidiropoulou, Schiza, 2014). These decisions are made not only based on external factors and circumstances but also by the teacher himself/herself, who initially, in order to engage in differentiated instruction, will need to reflect on both the criteria of his/her classroom and the specific learning identities and preferences of students in order

to enhance students' motivation and additionally because differentiated instruction is a challenging pedagogical approach, it requires systematic planning as well as multiple means and strategies.

Therefore, based on the data of the target group and its characteristics, the strategy of differentiated instruction was chosen as a strategy for differentiated instruction to utilize the different learning preferences according to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory for the students to self-select, through the Think-Tac-Toe trilogy technique with a variety of activities, how to engage in the activities and show what they knew, understood, and can do. The Think- Tac-Toe is a table of six or nine cells on which the teacher places different activities focusing on a section where students choose a triad of activities to tic-tac-toe (Tomlinson, 2001).

7. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES COMBINING INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING

A) Activity: Getting to know the ball - Motor-linguistic

The particular educational and linguistic needs of learners with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds include the need for more opportunities for repetition and practice, clearer analysis and explanation of concepts, careful paraphrasing of the vocabulary used by the teacher, more frequent use of supervisory material, greater provision of language models, structured and 'sensitive' exploration of the knowledge they have at any given time, more opportunities for controlled interaction between teacher and learner and more opportunities for the teacher to use the language in the classroom.

The initial activity in the kindergarten involves a first introductory game using the language formula "My name is..." "What's your name?" and a ball which is passed from child to child constituting a motor game of getting to know each other for the children who wished to participate.

B) Activity: I'm going to kindergarten - theatrical game - pantomime

Within Cummins' model (1999: 124-6, 2003: 175-6) we can ensure the necessary support of "a context" through a range of techniques and strategies such as the use of, appropriate facial expressions and gestures, dramatisation, role play, appropriate emphasis, intonation and change of pace when speaking, etc, visual aids and graphical representations, with the aim of visualizing the relationships between terms, concepts or phases, in order to better grasp the basic concepts of the course.

Without talking to the children and using only body movements and facial expressions, we encourage the children who have chosen the action to "dramatize" the story: "I am going to kindergarten", which includes, waking up in the morning and preparing for coming to kindergarten. In the "dramatization without words" of the daily morning story, those who chose this action participated.

C) Activity: Reading the story - Reading

It is divided into small groups of 4-5 children and each group is assigned to draw an element from the daily story I go to kindergarten. Then in the whole class the teacher, with the help of the children, puts together the "puzzle" of the story through the pupils' drawings and tells the story with them.

D) Activity: I am here too - Painting - Visual arts - Drawing

This action is about distinguishing and identifying with the gender to which each student belongs through the creation of a real "condition". Given the prior knowledge of the children in the class, plastic cups were given to the students who chose the activity to paint facial features and glue hair from gaffer paper in their preferred color in order to create their own "little man" on which they could write his/her name if they wished.

E) Activity: I am going to kindergarten...Creating a 3D model - artefact (computational thinking and expression)

This action is about discrimination and identification with the gender to which we belong through the creation of a real "condition". A paper box is created with the pupils participating in this activity: "the school", which is a model with elements of the space and then the children, with materials at their

disposal (cardboard, markers, scissors), create their own little man where they can "enter" inside, thus representing a real "condition".

F) Activity. Mathematics and Music - Kinetic play.

In the outside area of the kindergarten, 3 schools are drawn with chalk where a number from 1 to 3 is placed in each one. The students who participated in the opening tambourine sound walked around the courtyard while in the bell sound they had to enter the house with the number 1, in the chopsticks sound with the number 2, and in the glockenspiel sound they had to enter the school with the number 3. Music - Movement and Mathematics in one game.

Through the Think-Tac-Toe differentiated instruction strategy where a task or student product was identified that was linked to one of Gardner's intelligences, all activities addressed the same topic from a different perspective: A school for all. to give students a choice according to the intelligences in which they can perform best. The task was for each student to choose three blocks - three actions and to commit to participate to make a trilogy.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the educational activities in the Kindergarten of the Hospitality Structure **"SKARAMANGA"**, at the location "PROVLITA 4" of the Municipality of Chaidari of the Regional Unit of the Western Sector of Athens of the Attica Region , we realize that the country, which is now recognized as multicultural, as it includes different national, racial, religious, and social groups of people living and interacting with each other, through the principles of equal education is called upon to preserve each of these distinct characteristics.

In such a society, in a school, intercultural education is called upon to provide equal opportunities for all and to make use of linguistic and cultural differences for the benefit of all. The proposed activities in the differentiated teaching strategy through expressive movement, drama, visual art, music, and emergent writing and reading were designed to introduce and familiarize both children to each other and to teachers, and to raise awareness that school is open to all, offering a "normalcy" and a security that both children and their families need.

Besides, according to Tomlinson (2003), Differentiated Instruction should be adapted to socio-political, historical, and educational needs, especially those related to intercultural education, and it is important to mention that such educational interventions, it is important to do so in a systematic way.

The implementation of school inclusion of refugee students, utilizing their different abilities, creates a "school for all", which accepts and respects diversity, contributes to the elimination of prejudice and racist attitudes, while the principles and procedures followed focus on each student individually.

The application of the principles of Intercultural Education contribute to the quality of the provided inclusive education, ensuring both the educational and human rights of these students with a teacher who plays a key and multifaceted role in the implementation of the inclusive education process.

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