

## Enhancing Peer Relationships in a Class of Refugee Children Through Drama in Education: An Action Research

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### Abstract

*This study examines the use of Drama in Education (DiE) techniques and activities of socio-emotional approach in improving peer relationships inside a class of refugee children learning Greek as a second language in a non-formal education context. The study tries to connect literature on peer relationships with theory on Drama in Education and socio-emotional activities. The action research included a three-circle educational intervention aiming at group bonding, conflict management and encouragement of empathy/acceptance/self-awareness. At the end of the intervention, collaboration was easier, students developed their critical thinking and empathy skills, and they bonded more as a group.*

## Bir Sınıf Mülteci Çocukta Eğitimde Drama ile Akran İlişkilerinin Geliştirilmesi: Bir Eylem Araştırması

### Makale Bilgisi

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### Öz

*Bu çalışmada, yaygın eğitim bağlamında ikinci dil olarak Yunanca öğrenen mülteci çocukların olduğu bir sınıfta, çocukların akran ilişkilerini geliştirmede sosyo-duygusal yaklaşımın eğitimde drama teknikleriyle kullanımı ve faaliyetleri incelenmektedir. Çalışma, akran ilişkileri üzerine literatürü eğitimde drama teorisi ve sosyo-duygusal aktivitelerle ilişkilendirmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu eylem araştırması, grup bağı, çatışma yönetimini ve empati / kabul / öz farkındalığı teşvik etmeyi amaçlayan üç aşamalı bir eğitim aktivitesini içermektedir. Aktivitenin sonunda, işbirliğinin daha kolay olduğu, öğrencilerin eleştirel düşünme ve empati becerilerini geliştirdiği ve grup olarak daha çok bağ kurdukları gözlenmiştir.*

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## **Introduction**

The massive arrival of populations with a refugee background during the last years in Greece made the modulation of policies for education and the immediate implementation of ‘education in emergencies’ strategies not only necessary but urgent (Vitsou & Papadopoulou, 2019). The current study was conducted in a refugee children non-formal education setting and it set a dual goal. Firstly, it attempts to examine the peer relationships developed in a classroom of refugee children learning Greek as a second language in a non-formal learning centre in Athens, Greece. Secondly, it tries to investigate, if a different educational approach borrowing elements from Drama in Education (DiE) and experiential activities with socio-emotional and other goals -cognitive goals aside in Second Language Learning (SLL)- would improve the peer relationships in the given class. Aim of the educational methods employed for this research was not merely the teaching of Greek as a second language per se, but rather trying to achieve better peer relationships and, subsequently, at a period after this study to better achieve the educational goals (including cognitive ones) set by the teachers of the class.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Social-emotional support through Drama in Education**

Currently, thousands of refugee children are out of schools (Arnellou, 2019). Some of those who are out of formal schools may participate in some non-formal educational setting; others do not enjoy any form of education at all. The fact that such a vast number of children is out of schools has a great impact to the individuals’ development (cognitive, social psychic etc.), to the families, to the community and to the host community.

Drama activities with a social-emotional approach in the context of second language learning can aim at combining in a creative way language and an empowering educational methodology, to introduce interesting and creative educational contexts, to support students during language learning and to showcase individual identities and the importance of pluralism (Alkistis, 2008, Ntelioglou, 2011). Such activities foster listening and expression of different views and emotions and empower students to develop not only communication skills but also life skills. Furthermore, they can broaden students’ intercultural perspective, and render the classroom a space, where democratic values will prevail. Students can be encouraged to think critically and be protagonists and modulators of the learning procedure (Aden, 2017). Finally, activities of a socio-emotional approach can cultivate resilience, school readiness and independent learning as well as inclusion of students of multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds (UNICEF, 2019).

During Drama Activities pupils, and especially those of migrant or refugee background, enter an inquiry mode in order to create something, and, thus they learn in an experiential way through procedures that take place always in interaction with the others (Frimberger, 2016). According to Vitsou et al., “*drama provides students with an opportunity to use a variety of modes to communicate, represent and interpret their worlds collectively and individually*” (2019, p. 45).

In addition, through DiE there is given space for the reexamination and resolution of behaviours and situations that cannot be easily achieved in real life. A certain moment or event in time can be isolated, examined and be given several solutions through DiE (Alkistis, 2008). Besides,

for proper problem and conflict resolution subjects should come through cognitive and emotional processes (Giannakoylē, 2016).

Most importantly, DiE prioritizes reflection and self-reflection of the drama experience by fueling the thought on the experience and by building awareness of our responsibility for the experience, so that we rebuild it cooperatively giving meaning to it (Lenakakis, 2015 & 2018; Tsiaras, 2016). This experiential interplay inside the participants' group is a primarily pedagogical procedure, since it illuminates the social, spiritual, emotional, moral and intercultural perspectives of reality (ibid).

Furthermore, DiE encourages self-expression, cooperation, self-control and the ability to concentrate. The active and creative language use sets a basis for students' expression, an exploration through their emotions, exchange of opinions, experiences and ideas and a better consciousness of their goals (Cummins, 2005, Ackerman, 2005 as cited in Vitsou, 2019, p. 112).

Talking about implications on language development, "as an approach that is strongly oral, while also providing rich and contextualized opportunities for language learners to use vocabulary and language structures within authentic contexts, process drama is slowly gaining a reputation as an effective pedagogical approach" (Dunn et al., 2012, p. 480). Based on that, Beatty (2009, as cited in Dunn et al., 2012, p. 481) encourages drama pedagogies to be applied more widely within work involving all second language learners, but especially for recently arrived refugee children (Desiatova, 2009; Maley & Duff, 2005; Phillips, 2003; Ntelioglou, 2014; Vitsou, 2016, Vitsou et al. 2019).

### ***Objective***

The objective of this research was:

- to investigate, if a different more socio-emotionally oriented Drama in Education intervention would a) enhance pupils' relationships among students in a non-formal educational setting and b) promote students' learning and holistic development at the same time.

The research question attempted to address into this research is the following:

- Can the use of DiE techniques, which focus on group-bonding and a better awareness of students' feelings, have any positive outcome as far as students' relationships are concerned?

## **Methodology**

The present research is an action research (or AR), included a three-circle educational intervention, aiming at group bonding, conflict management and encouragement of empathy/acceptance/self-awareness correspondingly; and it was comprised of DiE activities. Action research is a highly contextualized process (Carpenter & Cooper, 2009) aiming at improving educational materials and methods and students' emotional situation. The inclusion of the educator in the action research is of crucial importance for this research method. He/She aims at detecting and explaining the phenomena, which take place inside class and at finding ways to improve the examined practices, challenges etc. This procedure empowers the educator and engages her/him to a critical reflection of

her/his action (Carr & Kemmis, 2003). At the same time, action research gives the opportunity for collaborations among teachers and educational specialists (Vitsou, 2016).

The current study took place at an NGO school based on a building in urban Athens where the researchers were working as teachers of Greek as a second language during research period. As teachers in the specific entity, we have a high flexibility concerning what we can include in our lesson planning as long as it serves learning of Greek language and socio-emotional goals for students.

### ***Sample***

The students of the class are aged between 9-12/13 years old and they all have a refugee background coming mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq. Their mother tongues are Farsi/Dari and Sorani. All of them live in urban Athens and they are registered and attend normally morning school classes along with local students or in TY<sup>3</sup> (Reception classes). During afternoon they attend an educational program of non-formal education organized and implemented by a local NGO based in Athens, Greece with the support of UNICEF. In this school students have Greek, English and Maths classes (2 hours a day/10 hours a week). Most of the students have been attending lessons at the NGO school for more than a year and some up to 2+ years. Students' level in Greek language ranges across A1, according to Greek Language levels (Centre for the Greek Language, n.d.). Their oral skills in Greek are characterized, thus, by fluency and they have achieved good communication and writing skills in Greek. Students' number in the examined class reached up to 15 students.

### ***Ethical considerations***

Taking ethical issues in serious consideration, because we have to do with a vulnerable population (both minors and of refugee background), in order to avoid exposure of our students in any way, students in this study are not mentioned by their names, but they are given symbolic names S1, S2 etc. Furthermore, in all photos students' faces have been blurred in order not to be recognizable. Finally, for the same reason, we decided not to disclose the name of the NGO the study took place at in order to avoid students being identified in any way.

### ***Data collection tools***

The data during the first research phase (Phase A) was collected through the pre-intervention sociometric test implemented (McMullen et al., 2014; Gifford Smith & Brownell, 2003), including students' thoughts and comments on that, and through observation of the class. During the main action research phase (Phase B), data was collected through the actual intervention, teacher-researcher's journal notes, and students' feedback during the activities. Finally, after the action research, some more data were collected through the implementation of the same sociometric test as in Phase A (Table 1).

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3 TY (Τάξεις Υποδοχής) stands for Reception Classes in Greek

**Table 1.** *Data Collection Tools per Research Phase*

Data collection			
Phase A	Phase B		Phase C
-Classroom Observation	-Action Research (Drama Educational Intervention)	-Teacher	-Sociometric Test (after Action Research)
-Sociometric Test (before Action Research)		-Researcher’s Journal  -Students’ Feedback	

Sociometric test analysis was made by collecting the friendship, neutral and exclusion nominations of all students regarding their peers (/themselves). The results appeared as a ratio of students nominated in each category mentioned above upon the overall number of students who completed the test and as a % percentage (quantitative analysis). The quantitative analysis (sociometric test) was applied in order to triangulate the rest of the data collected through qualitative methods. The sociometric test students completed for this study was based on the relevant test McMullen et al (2014, p. 627) conducted for her research to 748 students aged 7 to 8-year-old in Southern Finland.

Students were asked to indicate how much they like to play with each of their participating classmates on a three-point Likert scale. The three options were classified as a friendship rating, asked as ‘always like to play’, a neutral rating ‘sometimes like to play’, or an exclusion rating ‘never like to play’. After rating each of their classmates, students were asked to name the student in their class with whom they ‘most like to play’ and if they would like to nominate any further classmates as such. Students were also asked if there was a student in their class with whom they ‘least like to play’ (McMullen et al., 2014, p. 627). We chose not to ask directly students about behavioral characteristics, such as bullying, victimization and social withdrawal, that their classmates may demonstrate, as explicitly as in the above research. Instead, we let the characteristics that fall into these categories emerge through some students’ further explanations about some of their classmates.

Content analysis was applied, as a method of analysis, to the data emerging from the participatory observation, researcher’s diaries and student’s comments after the activities. Content analysis was used as it is a flexible, systematic and rigorous approach for synthesizing a wide range of data (White & Marsh, 2006). The analysis was inductive, from particular to general themes (Creswell, 2014), starting from an in-depth reading of texts in order to unveil the less obvious content.

More precisely, from the content analysis the relevant to students’ engagement themes that emerged were:

- Students’ Relationships,
- Conflict-Bullying Behaviors
- Inter-Gender Relationships
- Expression of emotions

### ***Description of the research procedure***

In the first pre-intervention phase, 15 students completed a sociometric test (McMullen et al., 2014) concerning their preferences about their classmates during about a two-week period time (Phase A)<sup>4</sup>.

Observation of the class and the results of the sociometric test provided by the students themselves helped us pay a closer attention to peer relationships and identify elements which we had not noticed before. There were noticed some problematic behaviors among students. Some students were at the foresight of their classmates and others, even though marked overwhelmingly, as excluded according to the sociometric test, could collaborate in the class and not be visibly bullied. As educators, we felt we needed to shed some light to the more obscure students, who either because of their personality or their self-confidence in the lesson taught every time participated less and occupied less space in the social group of the class. We needed to learn about those students better and provide them space to be showed up in the class. Furthermore, it is not that students were not interested in the lesson or motivated to learn, but it was more and more obvious to us that they needed to interact more with each other and know about each other -except in the context of the class- and probably in a guided way; to basically learn about each other and find healthy ways of interaction. The above need was obvious through the comments to each other, their attitude and interest for each other irrelevant to the lesson and closer to their concerns. We felt that the students -most of whom of pre-adolescent age- needed to express their tensions, communicate, have space to develop friendships, learn about each other. Furthermore, gender played a crucial role on students' choices about their peers, friendships, seating arrangement.

All the above considered, we regarded that this classroom needed to learn to be together and work together in different sub-groups, to learn how to collaborate, to discover some of the qualities of the students who are less known to them or are not their friends, to learn to accept the different despite gender, character and other factors. This is why, we decided to leave behind the more traditional way of language teaching and to switch to a more experiential way of learning where students would be the subjects, the actors and the agents of the activities.

### ***Description of the DiE program***

After the above data was collected, we designed a DiE program in a form of Action Research consisting of three circles (Table 2). The aims of each circle were to develop/address the following: 1) group bonding 2) conflict management techniques and 3) empathy, acceptance, self-awareness, better awareness as far as their feelings are concerned. After the completion of the 3-circle intervention, students took the same sociometric test again.

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4 A detailed description about the results of sociometric tests (before and after the action research) can be found in: [https://apothesis.eap.gr/bitstream/repo/45579/1/HOU\\_Thesis%20Dissertation\\_064\\_500257\\_Kamaretsou%20Alexandra.pdf](https://apothesis.eap.gr/bitstream/repo/45579/1/HOU_Thesis%20Dissertation_064_500257_Kamaretsou%20Alexandra.pdf) , (pre A.R p.p.31-35) and (post A.R. p.p.51-55)

**Table 2.** *Aims and Drama Techniques – Activities per Action Research Circle*

Action Research Circles	Aims	Drama Techniques -Activities
<b>Circle A: Team bonding activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to bond as a team</li> <li>• to learn to collaborate (among non-friends and across genders)</li> <li>• to express emotions</li> <li>• to find solutions as a group</li> <li>• learners’ activation</li> <li>• &amp; self-awareness</li> </ul>	Warm up games-getting to know each other-trust games such as: ‘Mirror activity’, ‘Do you fight?’, ‘Guide the blind’, ‘Falling inside the circle’, ‘Circle of emotions’
<b>Circle B: Conflict techniques’ activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to be exposed in different conflict/ violent scenarios</li> <li>• to find non-violence solutions</li> <li>• to discuss about violence</li> <li>• to develop critical thinking</li> </ul>	Role play, Dramatization, Freeze frames, ‘Picturing Ways Out of Violence’, ‘Living with the others’, ‘Words that wound’, ‘The battle for the orange’, ‘Violence is...’, ‘Corridor of consciousness’
<b>Circle C: Empathy, Acceptance, Self-awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to cultivate empathy</li> <li>• to promote self-awareness</li> <li>• to promote critical thinking</li> </ul>	Role play, Improvisation, Teacher in role, Pantomime, Freeze frames, Tableau vivant, Action clip, Thought tracking, ‘Zabderfilio’, ‘Different in couples’, ‘Two Seats’, ‘Experiencing one’s feelings’, ‘I am, I have, I want’ ‘I pay attention to what I say’, ‘What I wish to have/acquire the new year and what I wish to leave back for the past year’

During and at the end of each circle, we engaged in self-reflection and self-assessment of our work, re-designed and implemented the next steps.

## Results

### Circle A

Students during Circle A were exposed to educational drama activities for the first time as far as Greek lessons in our class were concerned. They enjoyed the experiential and active nature of the activities and that they had fun. Nevertheless, it was difficult for them to follow our instructions during some of the walking activities. We had to repeat this instruction many times,

which was creating a more intense atmosphere rather than the relaxed and concentrated one we wanted to achieve. Concerning students' relationships, it was noticed that they had several conflicts and bullying behaviors towards each other. During walking activities when they had to create small teams, students were only picking up their male or female friends respectively. Generally, boys were more intense and assertive about forming the groups they desired (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *Walking activities*

It was positive that during 'Mirror activity' (figure 2) -which did not involve touching- since we decided to use lottery<sup>5</sup>, boys and girls actually collaborated together to manage the goal instructed, e.g. S3 – S7, S12– S6, and S11- S14. For S3 and S7, it was the first time they worked together doing an activity.



**Figure 2.** *'Mirror' activity*

The same applied for the similar 'Do you fight?' activity. It was very positive that students across genders collaborated very well and had fun. Plus, for some gender pairs, it was a nice opportunity to work with a person they had not worked before. In the 'Guide the blind' (figure 3) (activity a girl, S4, said '*I have never touched a boy before. Will I do it now?*') S5 and S12 also mutually reacted negatively about working together in that activity, but they finally did it.

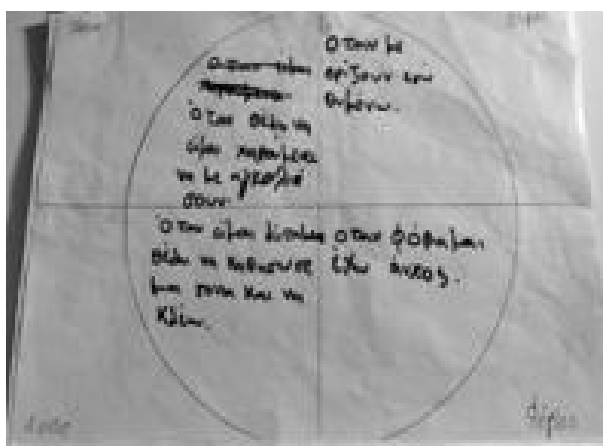
<sup>5</sup> Choosing their pair from a purse where there were small papers with their names upon.





**Figure 3.** *'Guide the blind' activity*

In addition, in 'Falling inside the circle' trust activity boys were falling at boys' side and girls at girls' side. The 'Circle of emotions' (figure 4) activity gave the students the opportunity and space to look into their emotions, write them down and express them to their peers. The easiness or not with which students wrote about their feelings and shared at small pairs or to the whole group provided us with important information about students' emotional status. We were very surprised by the number of students who wanted to share their 'circle of emotions' in the whole group and the whole-group involvement.



**Figure 4.** *'Circle of emotions' activity*

Overall, considering the above factors, in combination with the fact that there was not actually a type of preparatory stage before we started implementing those activities, we felt like the first circle of intervention was a probe phase for activities that would follow. In addition, students had the chance to collaborate with different people -apart from their friends- in different pairs every time and in different types of activities from the ones they were used to. They had the opportunity to express emotions and to assess the educational procedure by being agents and influencing the lesson planning. During the activities, we had the chance to observe more closely peer relationships and interactions as well as individual characteristics of students and delve into the dynamics that were created in different combinations and through different activities.

Taking in account, though, that there were noticed quite a lot of confrontational behaviors among students both of same and different genders, some bullying behaviors and inability in some cases to collaborate with each other, we considered crucial to continue our intervention with the aim to cultivate and focus more on conflict-resolution techniques, problem solving strategies and social skills.

### **Circle B**

During Circle B students were very actively involved in the activities; they drew from their experiences and they shared their opinions and their ideas about the pictures we discussed with the whole group (figure 5).



**Figure 5.** *'Living with the others' activity*

The dialogue developed demonstrated further cognitive mechanisms drafted by the students. Their input was very valuable and imaginative. The questions that we were posing to students during the activities and after the activities in the form of discussion were encouraging them to think in a critical way and the answers. Overall, during this circle, students had the chance to critically think about notions, such as violence, exclusion, bullying, bad language.

About students' individual differences, on the other hand, while there was an extensive discussion on the given pictures, S10, S1 and S9 participated in the dialogue, but much less than the rest of their classmates. The fact that these students -along with S5 and S6 who in this discussion at least participated more actively in- hardly ever expressed their opinions demonstrated to me a more introverted attitude generally; regardless of more extrovert students' influence or space-taking. Even though the class as a whole group was very motivated to talk about the conflict-related pictures chosen, the students mentioned above spoke very few times during the one-hour discussion we had. Students through the activities 'Words that wound' (figure 6) and 'The battle for the orange', 'Picturing Ways Out of Violence', 'Violence is...' and the 'Corridor of consciousness' among others had the opportunity to write, express and share their thoughts or some of the bad words they know and consider the effect those may have to other people.



**Figure 6.** *'Words that wound' activity*

Later, they had the chance to repeat the activity 'Corridor of consciousness' after having watched the short film 'The birds' and written down birds' emotions in two teams; they then spoke in the two teams created, as if they were the heroes (big bird and small birds) of the story. Through drama the two teams expressed their ideas and their feelings based on the character they adopted.

Circle B, through the number and the variety of activities it offered had an important impact educationally and emotionally on students. Despite conflicts noticed, we felt there were planted seeds of thought and of emotions' processing, which was a crucial event for these students.

Nevertheless, bullying, teasing and aggressive behaviors (mostly verbal exchanges) among some of the students did not stop, so we considered important to further extend this educational plan at a new series of intervention. We decided to now focus more on developing empathy and understanding better ourselves and the emotions of other people.

### **Circle C**

During this phase, collaboration among students was generally easier. Less conflicts were noticed. We felt that students had now acquired a certain extent of familiarity with group work, with accepting each other's presence and with sharing emotions even on a group level. Moreover, through this circle, we had the chance to dive more into students' personal characteristics and qualities. We need to consider, though, that the number of students who attended the lessons overall was lower than the previous circles.

Inter-gender relationships were quite smooth during this intervention circle and students of different genders collaborated well. During the 'Two Seats' activity (figure 7) all 5 present students S14, S3, S4, S5 and S6 dramatized the two characters of the story through improvising speech. Students were involved at a very creative and imaginative process with this activity. They spoke as the "Giant" and/or the "kids" in the story (some passed from both seats) and expressed their thoughts and emotions during the improvisation and later during the follow-up discussion. S14 was particularly figurative and theatrical putting herself totally into the role.



**Figure 7.** *'The two seats' activity*

We noticed that during 'Experiencing one's feelings' activity where one student (unaware of the agreed expression by the group) had to detect what the others were feeling, S5 had a special difficulty in detecting her classmates' feelings.

Through 'I am, I have, I want' activity students expressed themselves anonymously or in an eponymous manner. They were given freedom to write anything they wished, and they later shared (or not) with the whole group. During 'I am, I have, I want' (figure 8) activity S6 wrote in the 'I am' box 'I am ugly'. Since she did not share this statement openly in the group, we all wondered who thought that of himself/herself. S13 -who has a very good self-image- wondered particularly about it.



**Figure 8.** *'I am, I have, I want' activity*

In addition, students' had the chance to discuss and express themselves in the activities 'I pay attention to what I say' (figure 9) and 'What I wish to have/acquire the new year and what I wish to leave back for the past year' (figure 10).



**Figure 9.** *'I pay attention to what I say' activity*



**Figure 10.** *'What I wish to have/acquire the new year and what I wish to leave back for the past year' activity*

Generally, across all activities and lessons students were highly involved. This was a very positive outcome noticed in this circle. After the completion of the third circle students completed the sociometric test they had taken before the DiE intervention. According to students' nominations<sup>6</sup>, there has been a rise for both most of the friendship and neutral ratings. And the important information is that even for students who did not have both prices increased, either the friendship or neutral price noted indeed a raise. The most remarkable result, is the prices noticed for exclusion rating ('Never like to play with'), which noted a decrease for all students apart from one who was picked up once in both tests. In general, there changes in nominations/percentages: a rise for a friendship rating and a decrease for an exclusion rating (10 in total) versus a decrease for a friendship rating and a rise for an exclusion rating (8 in total). In both cases, nominations of chosen students do not vary importantly; and there is noted a slight difference that varies only by one person. The most remarkable comment here is S6 who having zero nominations in the pre-AR test collected three nominations in post-AR test.

<sup>6</sup> A detailed description about the results of sociometric tests (post A.R. p.p.51-55) can be found in: [https://apothesis.eap.gr/bitstream/repo/45579/1/HOU\\_Thesis%20Dissertation\\_064\\_500257\\_Kamaretsou%20Alexandra.pdf](https://apothesis.eap.gr/bitstream/repo/45579/1/HOU_Thesis%20Dissertation_064_500257_Kamaretsou%20Alexandra.pdf)

## Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the action research process itself, the teacher's journal, the feedback that was drawn from students and the results of the post-AR sociometric test compared to the pre-AR test, we noticed that there was in general terms a positive change in peer relationships or at least there were fed some important seeds for future healthier peer relationships.

The activities employed were considered a useful educational tool to address the challenges we faced during teaching the class. DiE facilitated non-verbal communication which is a considerable mode of expression and especially when speaking about refugees and refugee education (Alkistis, 2008, Vitsou et al., 2019). Additionally, through drama conventions children had the chance to make use of various semiotic resources so as to create identities for themselves and others and to generate spaces for peer culture (Bengochea, Sembiente and Gort, 2018, as cited in Vitsou et al., 2019, p. 45). DiE activities became a scene where they could reshape and extend their initial understandings in order to create new meanings and representations as a result of social diffusion drama provides (Triliva et al., 2012, p. 191). Children's voices were taken in consideration and everyone knew they could be heard. They were made a lot of discussions where students were asked questions and were encouraged to think in a critical way. In addition, sociometric tests engaged students in a fertile reflection about their preferences and even about themselves.

During many of the activities, students' emotions emerged and were expressed. In social-emotional terms, taking as an example, the experiential nature of e.g. 'Circle of emotions', and other activities, and the way they were conducted, one could claim that there could be some sort of psychotherapeutic effect on students, since there was provided a safe space for introspection. Students through DiE activities had the chance to come closer to each other, to collaborate and learn about each other. According to Thornton (1995 as cited in Kondoyianni, 2006, p. 27), "problem solving involves psychological processes related to the information a child has about the world and as children gain new experiences, they invent new strategies, develop deeper understanding of concepts, draw inferences and learn to combine problems". We bear the opinion that through all activities in which students were involved, especially in Circle B, their conflict strategies toolkit was equipped, if not for the period we applied this intervention, at least for a later use. For Kondoyianni, thereafter, "the child's increasing success in problem solving is also a social process, much more bound up with feelings than we used to think" (ibid). Thus, the social bond is where students can find solutions, and DiE/socio-emotional activities could facilitate this bond, particularly through teamwork.

Especially occasioned by our students' refugee background, in some of our discussions several students mentioned examples of bullying that themselves have taken in in formal schools and how they reacted to those (most times in an aggressive way verbally and physically). It is possible, therefore, that host society and morning school behaviours have had their share on students' behaviours among same origin peers or peers with similar characteristics with them, even when they were found in the safe environment of the afternoon school. Racism and alienation that is often met in formal schools could, thus, be possibly transferred outside school premises with peers with similar cultural capitals.

The undertaken research had also various benefits for the researchers on a professional development level. First of all, the nature of the research strengthened them as practionioners and researchers, empowered them and engaged them to a critical reflection of their action. In retrospect,

they realized that building an individual relationship with students who showed some problematic attitudes was deemed important.

In this study by using DiE and, secondly, observation and a sociometric test to dive into peer preferences in order to answer the research questions, we tried to combine theory from peer relationships' literature as well as existing pedagogical methodologies (DiE, socio-emotional activities) in intercultural education toolkits of teachers for many years now - minus revised through the prism of new refugee populations and challenges this educational branch brings.

Through AR, students' conflicts and problematic behaviours, which were the initial motivation for this study, were designated as the focal point of the educational process. The activities we did, included several modes and encompassed several educational goals with emphasis on social-emotional skills apart from cognitive ones. Students were put at the centre of educational process and were actively involved in the activities and the discussions that took place. They practiced reflective thinking, empathy, and understanding the emotions of the whole group. They bonded more as a group, they were empowered and they better grasped the meaning of collaboration and cooperation.

In terms of language acquisition, the supporters of the theory of social interaction point out the importance of developing a language through interaction with other people. Besides, language development should take place in the context of important social interaction (Harley, 2008, p. 97). From that point of view, through all the activities implemented students did practice language in various communication circumstances and through free expression (DiE) as well. Besides, for Cummins "language must be used to amplify students' intellectual, esthetic, and social identities if it is to contribute to student empowerment, understood as the collaborative creation of power" (2000, p. 6).

### **Suggestion for Future Research**

This research could function as a pilot study in the particular subject, which could be continued and expanded in a larger scale - not only in the field of not-typical education but in typical forms, as in public schools. Extending this research, it would be valuable to further examine how the implementation of DiE program would improve the dynamics and relations between bilingual -with refugee or migrant background- and monolingual peers, namely the students of the host country, in a mainstream class. Additionally, it would be interesting for further research to examine how socio-emotional/linguistic and drama educational tools that include several forms of art and playful activities can have a positive impact in peer relationships and learning. Furthermore, it would be thought-inspiring to see the prospects of developing a more holistic approach in second language learning and learning in general, where a variety of educational goals and skills would be put at the forefront both for refugee and local students.

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