

Research Article**Transforming the Identity of the Enemy in Pre-school Children: A Case Study in a Greek Kindergarten***Konstantinos MAGOS¹ **Abstract**

The formation of young children's national identity usually happens in early childhood. The family and social environment, the school and the national festivals play an important role and have a particular effect on the formation of a child's national identity and on the identity of the national 'other.' Research has shown that kindergarten students have already form a strong national identity, in favour of the dominant national identity. This is combined with stereotypes and prejudiced opinions against the non-dominant national identities. For the majority of Greek students, the national enemy is usually represented by the citizens of Turkey. In this article is presented an action research which took place in a Greek kindergarten; its aim was to transform the children's view of the neighbouring 'other.' The individual activities aimed to help the children to transcend the stereotypical image of the Turk as the enemy of Greece and to discover cultural similarities between the two peoples. The research showed that after the completion of the activities, the young students formulated significantly more positive views than their initial ones about this particular national 'other.'

Keywords: National identity, enemy, kindergarten, project

1. INTRODUCTION

The multicultural composition of modern societies, the development of nationalistic rhetoric and the various geopolitical twists and turns are reasons why the meaning and dimensions of national identity are regular international issues which are formally discussed and also the subject of conversations in everyday life. According to Woolf (2006) national identity is an abstract concept that highlights the collective expression of the individual's sense of self-determination as a member of a particular nation state. On the basis of this definition, it is clear that the national identity is signified through the classic duality of them and us, where the characteristics of the national self compare with those of the national 'other.' Among these features is knowing the official language of the nation state and accepting its official history, that is, the national historical narrative as presented by the dominant group. In this way the social, cultural, linguistic, religious and any other heterogeneity that exists between members of the same ethno-cultural group is often degraded, while, a sense of common identity is strengthened between those who constitute the population of the nation-state.

The family and social environment and the formal national education system play an important role in the reproduction of national identity. One of education's basic purposes is the cultivation of a nationalistic view, which in turn leads to a false image of a nationally homogeneous social body where the national other is often presented as a national enemy.

According to Eco, (2012) the existence of the enemy is decisive because it helps the dominant national group to define its identity and value system against the corresponding enemy's value system. The result of the comparison is a firm justification of the national self, that is, the members of the dominant ethnic group. According to Rosanis (1998: 15), "the enemy always is a foreigner who is

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supposedly to blame for our bad luck, our misery for our social and personal dead ends, is a Jew or someone else, but is someone who is not ours and on them we can load our fears and hence our dislike.” The emergence of the national and/or culturally different as the enemy is directly or indirectly linked to the phenomena of racism and xenophobia.

1.1. National identity in early childhood

According to Kirkine (2013), most of the surveys dealing with the formation of nationality and national identity in children concur with the view that it starts at a very young age. Levin (2003) notes that immediately after acquiring their gender identity, children acquire their racial and ethnic identity, while almost all children attending kindergarten have acquired all three of the above identities.

Although earlier research, such as that of Piaget and Weil (1952) and Jahoda (1964), highlights a range of interesting facts about the formation of national identity in children, Tajfel et al (1970) research, which focuses on the degree of children's preference for their country, established with certainty that children aged six to seven already have a clear preference for their national group, which they rank significantly higher than other national groups. This trend seems to decrease as the child gets older. Similarly, research conducted in two different countries, England and Argentina, by Cutts, Eisenhart and Webley (1992), confirmed that children have specific social representations in relation to national identity. Although they are different in each country, they are particularly strong and enduring. Also, Barrett's (2000) research showed children aged 5-11 have a strong preference for their own national group, for which they expressed more positive feelings than for other ethnic groups. The same survey pointed out that in some countries, as in the case of England and Spain, national identity seems to have higher value as the research subjects get older.

Although all the studies of the formation of national identity in children seem to agree that this process starts at a very young age, obviously there are parameters that influence the process of building the national identity. The degree of acceptance of a nationalistic identity in the child's environment is key. The family, social, local, cultural and educational environment obviously play a decisive role in the child's formation of a more closed or open national identity. Family and school are the most powerful agents in the development of young children's ethnic identity, while pre-school age is the best time to start raising awareness, enabling children to develop a national identity free of nationalist and intolerant views and behaviors. Thus, the role of kindergarten is particularly important in the formation of the national identity of young children. Kindergarten is a primary space for the social life of young children, while the kindergarten teacher is the powerful 'other' who, with their attitudes not only affects but often shapes the development of the personality of the young child. Negative attitudes towards society that a child brings from their family environment can thus be transformed into more positive ones. Therefore, whether a child attending kindergarten will move towards an intercultural or nationalist ideology depends to a great extent on the way the kindergarten teacher has formed their own national identity but also on how they manage issues about national identity and diversity. The reproduction of dominant nationalist beliefs by the kindergarten teacher, through pedagogical practices, their approach to historical events and the celebration of national holidays, obviously reinforces a nationalist and xenophobic ideology where every foreign nation is a potential national enemy. In contrast, the teacher's choice of principles and values of intercultural education as a guide in a kindergarten's day-to-day theory and practice, is a prerequisite for the development of future citizens with democratic responsibility and intercultural vision.

1.2. Greek vs. Turkish national identity

A significant number of researches carried out over the last decades show that the dominant national 'other' in the case of the dominant Greek national identity, is the Turk. According to Argyrou (2006), Turks are the stereotyped national, cultural and religious enemy for Greeks. Likewise, Spyrou (2006) argues that the Turk is the dominant hostile 'other' towards which most Greek Cypriots shape their identity, while children from an early age acquire a negative image in family and school narratives of the Turks and Turkey.

Research was designed to investigate the perceptions of Greek teachers in ethnocentrism and education issues. (Frangoudaki & Dragonas, 1997). Teachers were asked "To what extent do you

think we are like the folks below?" 75% of a sample of 1000 teachers stated that Greeks are very similar to Italians and 53% stated that they do not look like Turks at all. The majority's preference of similarity to Italians rather than Turks highlights the participants' image of the latter as enduring enemies. This image affects the educators who participated in the above research; they positioned the particular national other, polar opposite to the national self and probably identify each inhabitant of the neighboring country, irrespective of their views, as hostile. The same image also influences a number of teachers working in Thrace where schools are attended by students of a Muslim minority of Turkish descent (Magos, 2004). Often, the negative image towards the particular other is transferred to all others with a Muslim religious identity, creating strong feelings of intolerance.

Likewise, Rampton, Charalambous and Charalambous (2014) highlights the negative attitude of the dominant Greek Cypriot population towards its members deciding to learn Turkish as a foreign language. According to her research findings, by choosing "the language of the enemy" they become "Turks" or national "traitors." Interestingly, the same research shows that some of those who decide to learn Turkish, do not do so for reasons of intercultural awareness, but because they can better control the national enemy.

When pre-school children in Greece were asked to define the image of the enemy, Paidá (1998), most who participated in the research, defined and/or painted a Turk as the enemy. This was highly evident both in Chios and in Thessaloniki, the two Greek regions of the survey, but in Chios it was significantly higher. In contrast, in England, where the researcher also conducted the same research, most of the young children who participated in the research defined or painted enemies as mostly bad heroes of children's television series or people causing harm to fellow humans and/or the natural environment. According to Magos's project (2018) entitled the neighbour's folk tales, the initial prejudice of primary school pupils is revealed as they suggest that the teacher should not read Turkish stories to them, but stories from another country. Similar stereotypes concerning the Turks were found in the perceptions of candidate early childhood teachers (Magos, 2015).

Finally, strong nationalist approaches amongst Turkish Cypriot students are highlighted in the research of Metran (2011). They evaluated their own national identity as more positive, but assigned negative features to Greek and Greek Cypriot identity in relation to other identities such as Dutch or Irish.

The aim of the research was to investigate the perceptions of young children about the image of the enemy, as well as to investigate the possible transformations of the above perceptions following a teaching intervention, in the form of a project approach.

2. METHOD

Participants in the survey were 37 young children from two classes in a Greek kindergarten, located in the city of Volos, in the region of Thessaly in Greece..

The research is a case study because it focused on just one school class and studied the transformations of the views of the participating pupils. The purpose of a case study is to focus on and investigate a particular incident, situation, person or group of people, class, school, or community (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008; Robson, 2007). According to Yin (1994), the case study delves deeply into the phenomenon that it is examining within the context in which it is being conducted. Its features are examined and implications are analyzed. The researcher chooses to study a particular case, because they consider that they will gain a better understanding of it and have a more general picture of any other similar cases (Willig, 2015). In this way, a case study can be used to test theory or practice and to clarify or broaden their individual dimensions (Gerring, 2004). Therefore, carrying out an intervention in a classroom and investigating how it affects participants' opinions and attitudes is a form of case study.

Besides a case study, the research features action research, since the researcher was also the teacher who performed the intervention; a second teacher-researcher had the role of a critical friend. The contribution of the critical friend to the research action is particularly important as their experience helps support and integrate the research process. In a case study, the researcher can choose the research tools that they believe are the most appropriate for collecting their information (Yin, 1994). Similarly, Willig (2015) proposes the use of more than one research tool to achieve triangulation and ensure the validity of research findings. In the present study, the classic research

tools of action research was used. This involved the use of the researcher's and the critical friend's research diaries and focus interviews with the children, in order to explore their views on the national self and the national enemy.

The research followed the classic cycle of action research. After investigating the perceptions of the children and identifying the problem situation, a teaching intervention, in the form of a project approach, was planned and the activities of the project were carried out. At the same time, the two researchers observed the activities and then the reflection process followed, in relation to the initial research questions and the expected results of the intervention.

The choice of the project method for the teaching intervention was decided on the basis of the main features that this method has: the development of co-operation among students, the participation in research activities, the utilization of the experiences of the children, the interdisciplinary approach and the link between school and the wider community. The realization of a project follows a series of stages, the boundaries of which are not necessarily distinct: the stage of reflection, planning of activities, carrying out activities and evaluation. As Katz and Chard (2014) contend, the main purpose of a project is to encourage children to use their knowledge and skills through open activities aimed at better understanding the world they live in.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Researching children's perceptions of the concept of the enemy

As it emerged from the content analysis of focus group interviews, the concept of enemy for the children in the research is related to the concept of evil, thief and someone who attacks. Likening the enemy to a shark or wild animal obviously translates as the image of someone who attacks. The following are typical children's answers to the question of what an enemy is.

"Someone who goes to attack us" / "Somebody bad because they're going to kill us." "Someone bad because the baddies beat the goodies" / "An evil person who steals things, gold coins" / "An enemy tried to get my mum's mobile phone. I was a baby; they almost opened her belly and got me. Dad got him and hit him" / "They're like a shark" / "They're like a wild animal."

42

When asked whether Greece has an enemy and if so, who it was, the majority of children in the focus groups referred to the Turks.

"The Turks because they wanted to steal Greece from us." / "The Turks and we said no to them" / "The Turks because they wanted to make Greece their own."

The Turk as an enemy was the direct and spontaneous reply of the children to this question. However, after the kindergarten teacher's question of whether there were other enemies besides the Turks, the children referred to the Italians, the Germans, but also to wars. It is obvious that the answers of the children are influenced by the content of the discussions that take place at school or at home, during the important Greek national holidays.

3.2. The Project: 'Getting to Know Your Neighbour'

The main activities that were designed and carried out within the project were the following:

3.2.1. Distinction between 'now' and 'then' using the time line

A time line was designed on a wall of the kindergarten classrooms so as to give the children the best possible understanding of the present and the past. With images and drawings on the time line and with reference to grandparents and ancestors, an attempt was made to understand the historicity of time and the passing of the centuries from the period of the Ottoman Empire to the present day.

3.2.2. *Narration of the historical context using a map*

Using a map of Europe, an attempt was made to understand the concept of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the nation states created after its dissolution. The children were presented with images of etchings that showed multicultural coexistence in Greek spaces during the period of the Ottoman Empire, in order to understand that, aside from the war periods, people of different ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural identities were involved in everyday interaction.

3.2.3. *Focusing on the duality of dependence/captivity and independence/freedom, war and peace and not on Greeks and Turks. Examples of independence struggles from international history.*

In order for children to disentangle themselves from the image of the Turks as the enduring enemy, there was a series of repeated discussions with the aim of approaching the meaning of independence and freedom in relation to dependence and captivity. Examples were given where other nationalities, other than just Greeks, were involved in wars of independence.

3.2.4. *The consequences of (every) war*

Accordingly, using the appropriate teaching material, the consequences of all wars were discussed with the children, regardless of the countries involved. The purpose of this activity was the deconstruction of the Greek-Turkish duality as the corresponding peaceful-warring peoples. This is repeatedly passed on to children, through the dominant historical narrative and representations of historical incidents, in the context of national holidays.

3.2.5. *"Karagiozis" as narrator*

Karagiozis is a hero of children folk stories and shadow theater, very well-known both in Greece and Turkey. In many of the above activities, Karagiozis was used as a narrator and as an incentive for discussion. Karagiozis, having the role of a cultural bridge between the two peoples, can help to promote the similarities between the cultures of the two countries. The children knew Karagiozis from other activities in the kindergarten and its use within this project, worked as a means of familiarizing children with the cultural other.

The activities so far have focused on the children's understanding of the chronological, geographical and historical context of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish population. The following activities focus on modern Turkey and the identification of similarities and differences between the two neighbouring states.

3.2.6. *Images from today's Turkey*

The children were shown a multitude of different images from life in today's Turkey. The purpose of the presentation was to understand the differences between the modern Turkish state and the Ottoman Empire and to identify similarities and differences between the everyday life of Greek and Turkish people. Images concerned different dimensions of everyday life, such as education, religion, market, food and entertainment and gave children the opportunity to see the multitude of crossovers between the two cultures.

3.2.7. *The grandfather storyteller*

The invitation to the kindergarten of a grandfather who had been born and lived for many years in Turkey, was one of the activities of the project which contributed significantly to overcoming the stereotypes and prejudices of the young pupils to the specific national other. The grandfather, using the dynamics and effectiveness of oral narrative, shared experiences and stories from the daily coexistence of Greeks and Turks in Constantinople, with the children. He responded to many spontaneous questions from the children who stated that they thought they were going to hear war stories. The children's interest in identifying common words between Greek and Turkish was particularly interesting, which was the motivation for a second encounter between the grandfather and the students, in order to create a small Greek-Turkish dictionary.

3.2.8. *The Greek-Turkish dictionary*

The Greek-Turkish dictionary started out as a catalogue of common words from the Greek and Turkish languages, such as names of objects, food, etc. Then a series of Greek words and their

translation into Turkish were added, with which students wished to add to the original list. Most of these words were greetings (hello, good afternoon, good evening), but also simple daily phrases they would say to a child from Turkey (how do they say...? How are you? How old are you? What is your favorite game?) The words were written on large pieces of cardboard in both Greek and Turkish, while the students made an explanatory drawing next to each word or phrase.

3.2.9. Communication with a Turkish kindergarten

As a last activity of the project, communication through the Greek kindergarten internet network was planned with a Turkish kindergarten. Through this communication, Greek students had the opportunity to personally get acquainted and engage in cultural exchange with their Turkish peers, which helps to overcome prejudices against this specific national other. Moreover, as previous studies have shown (Magos, Tsilimeni & Spanopoulou, 2013), preschool children can successfully develop effective digital communication with their students from other countries, which promotes intercultural exchange and the development of empathy.

After the completion of the project, a second round of interviews, with the young pupils in focus groups, followed. When asked if Greece has enemies and who they think they are, the children's answers were significantly different from those they had given in the interviews before the teaching intervention. In their responses, it is clear that the children have understood the chronological distance between the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire and the common cultural elements between the two peoples. The following were the views expressed by the children during the interviews after the completion of the project.

"In the olden days, our enemies were the Turks, but it was so long ago that even our grandparents were not alive", "We see the children from Turkey, as we see our friends here", "When I meet a child from Turkey I will say 'merhaba' and invite them home." "When I grow up, I want to make a trip to Turkey."

It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of the project, the teacher-researcher told the children that he was going to visit Turkey in the summer. One of his students spontaneously asked the question: *"Aren't you afraid of going to Turkey?"* The distance between such a question and the later expression of a desire to visit Turkey by the pupils themselves, also highlights the transformations created by this teaching intervention in the children's previously stereotypical perceptions about the neighbouring other.

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The purpose of the research presented in this article was to explore children's perceptions about the Turkish as national enemy, but also whether these perceptions can be transformed after an appropriate teaching intervention. The interview with focus groups of young pupils at the beginning of the research showed that for the majority of students, the residents of the neighboring country reflect the image of the national enemy. The teaching intervention that took place in the form of a project was designed to help children understand that the image of the Turk as an enemy represented an earlier historical period. It was designed to help them understand that identifying the similarities and differences that exist between today's Greece and Turkey transforms the image of the enemy to reflect the desire for intercultural communication and exchange. According to Mezirow (2003) who is one of the key representatives of transformative learning theory, transformation is the result of critical thinking developed by learners while processing a subject. Given that pre-school children have not yet developed critical thinking, one cannot assert with certainty that in the context of this intervention there has been a transformation of pupils' views. But we can argue that the stimuli given to children through their participation in the project and the related discussion that developed, helped them to see a different image of the neighbouring other, compared to what they had accepted up to that moment. The new view of the Turk as other is also reflected in the paintings made by the children during the project. Thus, in the paintings made in the context of the project's actions and with the directive "paint a picture of people from Turkey", Greek students painted ordinary pictures with children playing or

going to school, families going to the market or celebrating in general images of everyday life that in no way refer to images of the enemy. Also, the children's desire to learn Turkish words and phrases as recorded in the Greek-Turkish dictionary created in the classroom, as well as the enthusiasm they showed after the teacher's suggestion to communicate with a Turkish kindergarten, shows that at least in the context of this intervention, the view that children have created of the neighboring country is friendly and contradicts the original hostile view, as expressed in the focus group interviews.

After the project, the children had a new perspective of the national self and the national other. The extent to which this could overturn previous conceptual perspectives (Mezirow, 2000) and become a new frame of reference and view of the national self and the national other, depends on a number of factors. One of these is how systematically the children are given appropriate stimuli both in their formal as well as informal education, as well as the relationship between the stimuli they receive on this subject from school and the family. As relevant research have shown (Vanderbroek, 2004), the more commonalities there are between the culture and ideology of the school and the family, the more effective and permanent is young children's learning.

National identity is already being formed at pre-school age and both school and family play a decisive role in the formation of this identity. Therefore, it is necessary for the school and the family to cooperate, so that today's kindergarten pupils and tomorrow's active citizens acquire an open national identity. In this way, the neighbouring country's inhabitant will not automatically be perceived as the national enemy, but will be seen as an incentive for intercultural acquaintance and culture exchange.

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