Opinions of Greek Pre-Service Teachers about Morning Prayer in Greek Schools

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Abstract. The current paper discusses the opinions of undergraduate students concerning the management of religious diversity in the classroom. The purpose of this research is to explore students' views on: The existence of prayer and churchgoing in school, the importance of religious education and celebration of religious festivals and the relations between teachers and parents of another religion and also with their community. The selection of measuring undergraduates' views was made based on the fact that they are future teachers on one hand and, on the other hand, that there are not any studies concerning religious diversity as seen by future teachers. As an overall conclusion, the participants appear to have a positive and active attitude concerning religious diversity in schools. The research findings regarding the individual questions point out interesting and radical views on behalf of the undergraduates.

Keywords: religious education; Greece; undergraduate students' opinions; religious diversity

Introduction

Nowadays Greece, because of changing demographics, has become a country where increasing cultural diversity challenges traditional politics of religion. As a consequence, teachers are likely to see an increase number of students of diverse religious backgrounds. It should be noted that Greece is a country where religion is considered fundamental to the constitution of the nation-state. Article 3 of the Constitution provides that "the prevailing religion in Greece is the religion of Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ" (Sotirelis, 1998; Efstathiou, Georgiadis, Zisimos, 2008; Zambeta, 2008). In this way, the development of religious consciousness is effected in the interpretative light of "prevailing religion". And the question is: "*How does a Christian 'civil religion' work in a society*

that gradually discovers itself to be a multicultural and multireligious nation?" (Skeie, 2006:19-32; Derman-Sparks, 2004).

Literature review

Despite this increased cultural diversity, little research is available on the challenges that teachers face every day in order to manage with this diversity and to resolve possible cultural conflicts (Huijbregts; Leseman, Tavecchio, 2008:233-244). It is an important indicator that *"children's religious faith is disregarded, is the fact that it seldom is the focus of empirical study. Despite its social relevance and considerable interest as a topic, religion has been neglected as a research topic"* (Renck; Peyton & Renck; Jalongo, 2008:301-303; Zambeta, 2000; Subedi, 2006:227-238) agrees mentioning that *"discussions about religious aspects of diversity are often absent from research. Topics such as religious forms of prejudice and religious dimensions of identities have not been fully explored in the context of teacher education"*. Moreover, she argues for the need to emphasize topics of religious diversity in teacher education programs, since teachers will undoubtedly teach those who come from diverse religious backgrounds. The author proposes that teacher educators include religion when teaching about social differences, particularly how religious dimensions of prejudice operate in schools.

It has been supported that understanding and respecting young children's religious background is an important way of respecting diversity. Many professionals tend to ignore the significant influence of religious belief and training during the early childhood years (Renck; Peyton & Renck; Jalongo, 2008:301-303; Keast, 2007; Zambeta, 2008; Zambeta 2000; Coulby, 2008). A fundamental point in the discussion about religious diversity is the fact that *"educating children together is not a guaranteed antidote to racism"*. And that is because *"racial integration just by being with others, has been found to be ineffective"* (McCreery, Jones, and Holmes, 2007: 203-219; Zambeta, 2003).

Prior research on marginalized groups has shown that teacher's limited experience or understanding of their student's cultures may lead to negative and psychological outcomes in children (Selcuk, Ryce and Mir, 2009: 463–473). It is obvious that teachers and, more specifically, students should be having knowledge on different religions' issues. As Wills mentions, to make meaningful changes in schools, *"teachers educators must develop practices that assist novice teachers in becoming more aware of the biases and prejudices they may have about the students are trained to teach"* (Subedi, 2006:227-238). It is certain that teachers bring their religious perspective into classrooms, and the subject areas they teach may reflect their viewpoints on religious issues. For this reason, Subedi argues that religious aspects of diversity ought to be an important topic of conversation within teacher education since teachers' experiences and prior knowledge shape the nature of curricula they incorporate in classrooms (Subedi, 2006:227-238).

There is a need to incorporate discussions about religious diversity in the context of teacher education. The topic of religious differences has not been fully included in the larger conversation about diversity and multicultural education (Subedi, 2006:227-238). Especially in Greece, it remains an issue that is yet to be

fully researched in the area of teacher education. (Zambeta, 2000; Efstathiou, Georgiadis, Zisimos, 2008).

Even the quality of home-school interactions has significant impact on pupils, especially in the first years of schools. The researchers use the terms "*cultural discontinuity*", "*cultural congruence*" and "*cultural mismatch*" to describe cases where the culture of education has significant differences from that of parents and children. Teachers are likely to misinterpret children's behavior when they do not understand or have limited exposure to the cultural norms of their pupils. Besides, potential value differences between teachers and parents may also play a role in how teachers view children's behavioral problems. For example, teachers may misinterpret student's behavior, when teachers do not understand or have limited exposure to the cultural norms of their students (Selcuk, Ryce and Mir, 2009: 463–473).

Ignoring religious differences and allowing such behaviors, however, neither avoids controversy nor encourages the development of dispositions for tolerance among children. Perhaps the best way to deal with such teasing is to know the reasons for tradition and to share this information with children in a respectful, open environment (Hoot, Szecsi, & Moosa, 2003: 85-90).

Teachers' profession espouses that every child has the right to grow and develop in an environment of mutual respect and justice regardless of race, gender, ethnic, origin or religion (Hoot, Szecsi, & Moosa, 2003: 85-90). Pang (2005) points out that "*teachers can play a key role in helping all students learn about religious diversity and religious forms of identities so that students can become open-minded and respectful of differences*" (Subedi, 2006: 227-238).

A significant element of religious education in school is prayer. Especially the Morning Prayer in Greek schools is not only a custom, but also an obligation that is held every day. However, a remarkable percentage of kindergarten teachers mainly do not cope with this specific issue in a dogmatic way, but they try to exercise a multicultural pedagogic in their classrooms (Tsioumis, Kyridis & Konstantinidou, 2013:65-74; Romanovski, 2002).

 "The practice of offering prayers in public schools is as old as the public school itself, criticism of this practice has a long history as well" as Ethan Fishman points out referring to the American public school system (Ethan, M., Fishman, E., 2006:269-278). The same condition applies to the Greek educational system. Besides, prayer has been shown that is a valued aspect of life for children (Mountain, V., 2006:295-305). However, "*the empirical study of prayer remained an underdeveloped field of research, at least until the mid-1990. Since then there have been very few studies on prayer relating to school children. If we look for studies concentrating on the issue of prayer at an early school age we find that there are almost none*" *(*Kaščák & Gajňáková, 2012: 377-392).

In addition, a fundamental point in the discussion about religious education is the fact that "*the school calendar is based around the Christian calendar and that this have a negative impact on the curriculum, particularly in relation to activities that are*

provided around the times of Easter and Christmas" (McCreery, Jones, and Holmes, 2007: 203-219; Derman-Sparks, 2004; Skeie, 2006). This is indicative that such festivals have great dominance over the curriculum.

 Regarding curricula and social intervention programs it appears that they should begin in early childhood before children begin to use stereotypes in peer situations, particularly when children from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds play together (Brenick, Killeh, et al., 2010: 886-911).

Programs that approach the particularities of religions help in prevention of social exclusion phenomena in the classroom. More specifically, one of the best ways to address children's inquiries about religion is "*to provide developmentally appropriate literature experiences that extend children's knowledge base, cultivate their critical thinking skills, and develop their tolerance for religion based differences"* (Zeece, 1998: 243-246). Unfortunately, the lack of candid conversation about religions, particularly concerning multiple perspectives on beliefs and practices produces stereotypes (Subedi, 2006: 227-238; Kunzman, 2006).

Free development of religious consciousness of children helps children "*develop a sense of identity and belonging, which in turn helps them to develop their confidence and self-esteem so that they can reach their full potential"* (McCreery, et al, 2007: 203-219). Besides, the convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 29 stated that the development of children's spirituality was a right (Mountain, 2006: 295-305). As concerns Greece, "*religious freedom in Greece is consolidated in Article 13 of the Constitution and relevant are the provisions of Articles 3 and 16 § 2 of the Constitution, and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which has been ratified (legislative degree 53/1974) and it prevails over any conflicting provision of law"* (Chrysogonos, 2010, Available on the website: http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=312788, Zambeta 2000).

As Alison Graham mentions "*the most important condition for achieving equal opportunities in education is the creation of an ethos in which self esteem and mutual respect are prominent shared values. Responsibility for children's affective development has always had a high priority in primary education* (Graham, 1993:28-33).

Research objectives-research questions
The current paper discusses the undergraduate students' opinions about the management of religious education in the classroom. The purpose of this research is to explore undergraduate's views on: a) the existence of prayer and churchgoing in school and the celebration of religious festivals, b) educational management of religious diversity and c) the relations between teachers and parents of another religion and also with their community. The selection of measuring undergraduates' views was made based on the fact that they are the future teachers on one hand and, on the other hand, that there are not any studies about religious diversity as seen by undergraduates in Greece.

Methodology-Sample

The methodology that was followed was that of a questionnaire, which was designed for the purpose of the research. Its questions cover all the aspects of the study. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured. Subsequently, it was tested at the 25% of the sample. The questionnaire was weighted by measuring its reliability. The indicator of internal validity of the tool demonstrated that Cronbach's *a* on the total of the questionnaire was 0.795, as it is described below.

The research was conducted in the winter of 2013-2014. The sample comprised 262 undergraduate students coming from 3 different departments of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki: the department of Faculty of Education (school of primary and school of early childhood education) and the department of Drama. It is obvious that the size and the kind of the sample do not allow a projection to either a more total population size or a population of more general characteristics.

The sample consisted of undergraduate students that were selected a) due to their young age, b) because they are not any courses relating to religious issues in universities, but mainly to general interest. Furthermore, religious issues preoccupy not only active teachers, but future teachers and the society as well. It is important to record future teachers' opinions about the management of religious diversity. The questionnaire, which was distributed and answered in written, was consisted of closed questions/statements, 22 in total. It consisted of the following categories of questions:

A) Questions pertaining to personal and demographic characteristics which were: gender, maternal and paternal occupation (freelance scientific occupations, public employees, private employees, freelancers/artisans, tradespersons, workers, farmers and housewives), maternal and paternal level of education (illiterate, primary school graduate, high school graduate, Technological Institute graduate, University graduate and Master's holder), institution of attendance (Higher Institution of Education or Higher Technological Institution of Education), degree of urbanity (Athens/Thessaloniki, capital of prefecture, semi-urban or rural area), field of studies (school of primary education, school of early childhood education and the department of Drama) and ideological integration (extreme right-wing, right, centre, left and extreme left-wing).

B) 22 closed questions/statements (Cronbach's alpha=0.795), regarding student's attitudes towards religious diversity. The level of the agreements to these statements is expressed by the using of a 5-grade Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

Results

The indicator of internal validity of the tool demonstrated that Cronbach's *a* on the total of the questionnaire was 0.795. Once the answers were processed by the Statistical Package for the Social sciences (SPSS), the following results were obtained.

Table 1. The Sample: Demographic and Social Characteristics

Gender	f	%			
Male	26	9,9			
Female	236	90,1			
Father's profession	**f**	**%**	**Mother's profession**	**f**	**%**
Freelance professional	33	12,6	Freelance professional	16	6,1
Civil servant	80	30,5	Civil servant	75	28,6
Private sector employee	66	26	Private sector employee	50	19,1
Freelance technician	44	16,8	Freelance technician	9	3,4
Trader	11	4,2	Trader	5	1,9
Blue collar worker	6	2,3	Blue collar worker	8	3,1
Farmer	18	6,9	Farmer	9	3,4
Domestic duties	2	,8	Domestic duties	90	34,4
Father's education	**f**	**%**	**Mother's education**	**f**	**%**
Illiterate	1	,4	Illiterate	4	1,5
Elementary School Graduate	22	8,4	Elementary School Graduate	15	5,7
Secondary School Graduate	98	37,4	Secondary School Graduate	115	43,9
Technological Institute Graduate	64	24,4	Technological Institute Graduate	56	21,4
University Graduate	66	25,2	University Graduate	64	24,4
Post Graduate Degree	11	4,2	Post Graduate Degree	8	3,1
Field of Studies	**f**	**%**	**Institution of attendance**	**f**	**%**
School of Primary Education	188	71,8	Higher Institution of Education	254	97
School of Early Childhood Education	54	20,6	Higher Technological Institution of Education	8	3,1
Department of Drama	20	7,6	**Ideological Integration**	**f**	**%**
Residence	**f**	**%**	Extreme Right-wing	4	1,5
Major urban area	169	64,5	Right	45	17,2
Urban area	41	15,6	Centre	111	42,4
Town	35	13,4	Left	53	20,2
Rural area	17	6,5	Extreme Left-wing	10	3,8
			Without answer	39	14,9

Gender

Out of the students that were asked, 236 were females (90,1%) and 26 were males (9,9%).

Field of Studies

Of the 3 university departments that participated in the research, 188 students came from the School of Primary Education (71,8%), 54 students were of the School of Early Childhood Education (20,6%) and 20 students came from the Department of Drama (7,6%).

Institution of attendance

254 students came from the Higher Institution of Education (97%) and 8 came from Higher Technological Institution of Education (3,1%).

Degree of urbanity
As to the urbanity of the students that comprised our sample, 169 students (64,5%) came from Athens or Thessaloniki, 41 (15,6%) came from the capital of a prefecture, 35 students (13,4%) were of a semi-rural area and 17 (6,5%) came from a rural area.

Paternal occupation
Regarding the occupation of the students' fathers in the sample, 12,6% are in freelance scientific professions, 30,5% are employees in the public sector, 26% are in the private sector, 16,8% are freelance technical professionals, 4,2% are tradespersons, 2,3% are workers, 6,9% are farmers and 0,8% do the housework.

Maternal occupation
Regarding the occupation of the students mothers in the research sample, 6,1% are freelance scientific professionals, 28,6% are employed in the public sector, 19,1% are in the private sector, 3,4% are freelance technical professionals, 1,9% are in trading, 3,1% are workers, 3,4% are farmers and the remaining 34,4% are evidently unemployed housewives.

Paternal education
In relation to the education of the students' fathers in the research sample, 0,4% are illiterate, 8,4% are primary school graduates, 37,4% are high school graduates, 24,4% have graduated from a higher technological institution, 25,2% are university graduates and 4,2% hold a graduate diploma.

Maternal education
In relation to the education of the students' mothers in the research sample, 1,5% are illiterate, 5,7% are primary school graduates, 43,9% are high school graduates, 21,4% have graduated from a higher technological institution, 24,4% are university graduates and 3,1% hold a graduate diploma.

Ideological integration
Where the ideological integration of the participating students is concerned, 1,5% belong to the extreme right integration, 17,2% are right-wingers, 42,4% of the students belong to the centrists, 20,2% are left-wingers, 3,8% are extreme left-wingers. It should be stressed, however, that a considerable number of students (14,9%) were neutral to this statement.

Table 2.
1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Nr	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	I pray with children in the classroom	11,5	3,8	17,6	30,7	36,4
2	I think it is important the prayer to be neutral regarding religious content	6,9	7,3	21,5	38,3	26,1
3	I believe that religious education is an important part of education	5,3	10,3	26,3	32,4	25,6

4	Children's churchgoing is necessary for their religious education	12,3	16,5	25,7	29,9	15,7
5	I think that children's churchgoing contributes to the maintenance of Greco-Christian culture	10,7	12,6	29,8	30,5	16,4
6	I believe that children should be allowed to make their own prayer	3,1	2,7	24,5	43,3	26,4
7	I think that prayer has no place in school	47,3	26	15,3	6,1	5,3
8	I believe that different religion should be recognized at school	1,1	3,4	10,3	32,4	52,7
9	I think that religion is an important part of the identity of children	3,4	6,1	20,7	33,0	36,8
10	I think that the administration of education should take care of all the children to pray in their religion	6,1	5,7	24,4	38,5	25,2
11	I believe that it is important to keep alive the Orthodox part of our culture in the school premises	9,2	5,4	26,1	36,8	22,6
12	The reference of religious feasts of children of another religion in the classroom helps to enhance their self-esteem	2,7	5,3	22,5	33,6	35,9
13	I think that feasts which bring children together with Orthodox tradition are important	5,0	7,3	23,8	41,4	22,6
14	I think that children of another religion are led to social exclusion in the classroom	5,3	16,8	27,1	35,5	15,3
15	I think that collaborating with parents of another religion is a fundamental prerequisite empowerment/inclusion of their children	1,1	4,2	12,2	38,5	43,9
16	I believe that it is important the discussion with religious communities on issues relating to religious education of children of another religion	2,7	7,6	30,9	32,8	26
17	I think that it is important to collaborate with religious communities	4,6	12,6	38,5	28,6	15,6
18	I encourage the essential interaction between children of different religions	0,4	5,3	15,3	39,3	39,7
19	Free development of religious consciousness of children is necessary for free development of their personality	1,9	5,0	9,5	40,5	42,7
20	I think that programs that approach the particularities of religions help in prevention of social exclusion phenomena in the classroom	2,7	2,3	16,4	38,9	39,7
21	I discuss with parents of another religion their opinion for their children's	2,7	3,8	11,5	35,1	46,9

	participation in Christian Orthodox feasts					
22	I discuss with parents of another religion about issues of religious education of their children	2,3	1,5	13,4	38,2	44,3

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviation

Nr	Statement	Mean	S.D.
1	I pray with children in the classroom	3,7663	1,29606
2	I think it is important the prayer to be neutral regarding religious content	3,6935	1,13930
3	I believe that religious education is an important part of education	3,6260	1,13012
4	Children's churchgoing is necessary for their religious education	3,2031	1,24381
5	I think that children's churchgoing contributes to the maintenance of Greco-Christian culture	3,2939	1,19765
6	I believe that children should be allowed to make their own prayer	3,8736	,93814
7	I think that prayer has no place in school	1,9618	1,16398
8	I believe that different religion should be recognized at school	4,3206	,87771
9	I think that religion is an important part of the identity of children	3,9349	1,06318
10	I think that the administration of education should take care of all the children to pray in their religion	3,7099	1,09326
11	I believe that it is important to keep alive the Orthodox part of our culture in the school premises	3,5824	1,16599
12	The reference of religious feasts of children of another religion in the classroom helps to enhance their self-esteem	3,9466	1,01945
13	I think that feasts which bring children together with Orthodox tradition are important	3,6935	1,05517
14	I think that children of another religion are led to social exclusion in the classroom	3,3855	1,09696
15	I think that collaborating with parents of another religion is a fundamental prerequisite empowerment/inclusion of their children	4,1985	,89202
16	I believe that it is important the discussion with religious communities on issues relating to religious education of children of another religion	3,7176	1,01916
17	I think that it is important to collaborate with religious communities	3,3817	1,03914
18	I encourage the essential interaction between children of different religions	4,1260	,88591
19	Free development of religious consciousness of children is necessary for free development of their personality	4,2443	1,44154
20	I think that programs that approach the particularities of religions help in prevention of social exclusion	4,1069	,94079

	phenomena in the classroom		
21	I discuss with parents of another religion their opinion for their children's participation in Christian Orthodox feasts	4,1985	,97021
22	I discuss with parents of another religion about issues of religious education of their children	4,3550	2,50057

Of particular interest is the Mean value in the statements "*I discuss with parents of another religion about issues of religious education of their children*" (Mean= 4,3550) and *"I believe that different religion should be recognized at school"* (Mean=4,3206), which indicate that undergraduates show great consideration for parents' of another religion opinions and they also realize the importance of recognition of all the religions at school. An outstanding 82,5% and 85,1% respectively agree with these statements, while only 3,8% and 4,5% disagree. Furthermore, it is interesting the Mean value in the statements: "*Free development of religious consciousness of children is necessary for free development of their personality*" (Mean= 4,2443), "*I think that collaborating with parents of another religion is a fundamental prerequisite empowerment/inclusion of their children*" (Mean=4,1985), "*I discuss with parents of another religion their opinion for their children's participation in Christian Orthodox feasts*" (Mean=4,1985) , "*I encourage the essential interaction between children of different religions*" (Mean=4,1260) and "*I think that programs that approach the particularities of religions help in prevention of social exclusion phenomena in the classroom*" (Mean=4,1069), that demonstrate that undergraduate students perceive what children need in order to grow up and have a balanced personality. The majority of undergraduates agree with the statements above.

Undergraduates express the lowest degree of agreement in the question "*I think that prayer has no place in school*" (Mean=1,9618), which indicate that undergraduates have different opinions about the prayer in school, although an outstanding 73,3% of the students disagrees with this statement.

Correlation results
A ANOVAs test with one variable followed, so as to draw conclusions regarding how a factor affects a quantitative variable. In this research we used an independent variable: a series of factors from the demographic data. When the results appeared, the following factors were found to be of influence;
- The variable "Gender"
- The variable "Paternal occupation"
- The variable "Maternal occupation"
- The variable "Father's education"
- The variable "Mother's education"
- The variable "Residence"
- The variable "Institution of attendance"
- The variable "Field of studies"
- The variable "Ideological integration"

Regarding gender, women seem to have more open mind, as 66% of them (F=3,846, df=2, sig=0,023) believe that it is important the prayer to be neutral

regarding religious content and 71,9% (F=3,226, df=2, sig=0,041) believe that children should be allowed to make their own prayer. The corresponding percentages for men were 42,3% and 50% respectively. Moreover, 83,5% of women undergraduates and 73,1% of men undergraduates think that they should discuss with parents of another religion about issues of religious education of their children (F=98,571, df=2, sig=0,000) and they believe that, collaborating with parents, is a fundamental prerequisite empowerment/inclusion of their children with a percentage of 84,3% for women undergraduates and 65,4% for men undergraduates (F=4,817, df=2, sig=0,009). They also encourage the essential interaction between children of different religions (80,9% women and 61,6% men students, F=3,566 df=2, sig=0,030).

Undergraduate students whose fathers' occupation are farmer, freelancers/artisans, freelance scientific occupation, private employee or do the housework believe (F=2,984, df=7, sig=0,005) that different religions should be recognized at school, that free development of religious consciousness of children is necessary for free development of their personality (F=2,410, df=7, sig=0,021) and that children of another religion are led to social exclusion in the classroom (F=2,639, df=7, sig=0,012), excepting undergraduates whose fathers' occupation is farmer, that deny this phenomenon and also that programs that approach the particularities of religions help in prevention of social exclusion phenomena in the classroom (F=2,688, df=7, sig=0,011).

Furthermore, concerning the variable about mothers' occupation, it is indicative that only 66% of undergraduates whose mothers are farmers believe that different religion should be recognized at school (F=2,577, df=7, sig=0,014) and none student, whose mother occupation is trader, believe that the administration of education should take care of all the children to pray in their religion (F=2,131, df=7, sig=0,041). It is remarkable that 50% of undergraduates whose mothers are workers and 60% of undergraduates whose mothers are traders are neutral. Undergraduates whose mother occupation is worker or farmer believe that it is important to keep alive the Orthodox part of our culture in the school premises, but 11% of undergraduates whose mother is freelance scientific occupation do not agree and 66,7% of them are neutral.

ANOVAs analysis showed that undergraduates whose father is University graduate and master holder cannot decide whether prayer should be neutral regarding religious education (F=2,849, df=6, sig=0,011). Undergraduates whose father is illiterate or primary school graduate neither agree nor disagree whether they should encourage the essential interaction between children of different religions (F=2,424, df=6, sig=0,027) and whether is important the discussion with religious communities on issues relating to religious education of children of another religion (F=2,171, df=6, sig=0,046).

Undergraduates whose mother is illiterate demonstrate a conservatism in what concerns the prayer in the classroom (F=2,384, df=7, sig=0,022), the necessity of children's churchgoing for their religious education (F=2,326, df=7, sig=0,026) and the importance of feasts which bring children together with Orthodox tradition (F=2,102, df=7, sig=0,044). Nevertheless, they cannot decide whether is

important to collaborate with religious communities or not (F=2,064, df=7, sig=0,048). No matter what the maternal level of education, all undergraduate students think that they should discuss with parents of another religion about issues of religious education of their children (F=10,368 df=7, sig=0,000).

As to the "Residence" variable, it seems that undergraduates who live in semi-urban or rural area produce the highest value of agreement on the maintenance of the Orthodox part of our culture in the school premises (F=3,073, df=3, sig=0,028). The analysis showed that undergraduates of the Department of Drama are quite radical and they do not give great importance to religion and its presence in the school premises. Moreover, undergraduates of Drama do not believe that religion is an important part of children's identity (F=24,851, df=2, sig=0,000).

Finally, undergraduate students, whose ideological integration is extreme right and right-wing, defend their religion and the maintenance in school with all its aspects. Nevertheless, 50% of them neither agree nor disagree with the recognition of different religion in school (F=3,973, df=5, sig=0,002). Half of them agree and half of them disagree with the social exclusion of children of another religion (F=3,876, df=5, sig=0,002). Half of right-wing undergraduates also cannot decide whether children's churchgoing is important for their religion education or not (F=5,244, df=5, sig=0,000). On the other hand, extreme left undergraduates disagree with the presence of religion in school (F=9,153, df=5, sig=0,000) and they do not place a high value on religion. A great amount of them are indecisive about religion issues. However, extreme left and centre-wing undergraduates are convinced that different religions should be recognized at school (F=3,973, df=5, sig=0,002) and 90% of extreme left undergraduates believe that children of another religion are led to social exclusion in the classroom (F=3,876, df=5, sig=0,002).

Discussion
One field of the research concerned prayer in school. From the subjects' responses it appears that undergraduates are not against the existence of prayer in school. They believe that prayer should be neutral regarding religious content and that every pupil should be allowed to make its own prayer in school. "*Prayer is too important, too sacred, and too intimate to be scheduled by government*" *(*Ethan, M., Fishman, E., 2006:269-278; Romanowski M., 2002) However, we cannot abolish prayer from school because, as Fishman declares, "*public schools without prayer will serve to inculcate or establish what Senator Helms himself calls "the religion of secularism"*. This policy might "*construct an equal or even greater threat to traditional religion- a secular religion or 'religion of the State'*" (Ethan, M., Fishman, E., 2006:269-278; Coulby 2008). "*The fear is not unfounded. It is possible that, by consciously going out of their way to omit religion from their curricula, public schools begin to teach irreligion*" (Ethan, M., Fishman, E., 2006:269-278). This has as result in religious beliefs and values to be subtly but surely undermined in public education.

Besides, prayer is found to be a strong formal and symbolic element in school socialization. Prayer sometimes even emerges as a specific part of the learning process, which means that it is part of the school work itself (Kaščák & Gajňáková, 2012: 377-392; Romanovski, 2002).

At this point, it is useful to mention the "*interreligious prayer*", which means praying together using the same words, instead of "*multireligious prayer*". After all, there is only one God, and our differing concepts about the one God shouldn't prevent us from praying together (D' Costa, 2013:1-14).

Regarding children's churchgoing, 45,6% of undergraduates believe that it is necessary for their religious education and 46,7% of them that it contributes to the maintenance of Greco-Christian culture. It is indicative that 29,8% cannot decide whether they agree or disagree with the last statement. Subjects' responses illustrate a positive attitude to Christian feasts as they bring children together with Orthodox tradition. However, 82% discuss with parents of another religion their opinion for their children's participation in Christian Orthodox feasts. It should be noted also that a percentage of 69,5% believe that reference of religious feasts of children of another religion in the classroom helps to enhance their self-esteem.

However, a fundamental point in the discussion about religious education is that public schoolchildren are "*a captive audience*", which means that "*their right to free exercise of religion…should be in force at all times and in all places*" (Fishman, 2006:269-278; Gundara, 2014). The majority (85,1%) reports that different religions should be recognized at school, as they support that religion is an important part of children's identity (69,8%). In addition, 83,2% of undergraduates believe that free development of children's religious consciousness is necessary for free development of their personality. This shows that pre service teachers are interculturally sensitive, but without being in a real school.

Another characteristic that should be highlighted is that 78,6% believe that programs that approach the particularities of religions help in prevention of social exclusion phenomena in the classroom. On the contrary, half of them deny that children of another religion are led to social exclusion in the classroom and 79% of them encourage the essential interaction between children of different religions.

It is indicative that they give great importance to the collaboration with parents of another religion as a fundamental prerequisite empowerment and inclusion of their children. Moreover, they discuss with them about issues of religious education of their children. Despite the fact that undergraduates are co-operative with parents, they do not feel like collaborating with religious communities as well. Moreover, they rather feel embarrassment and they cannot decide whether they agree or not.

Conclusions

Nowadays, it is obvious that the most serious current challenge is the preparation of teachers to educate children of different religions more effectively. Teacher preparation should go beyond content knowledge and focus on effective ways to work with diverse students and families. Effective multicultural teacher preparation programs would involve fostering an openness to learn about different cultural groups, developing an awareness of one's own biases, and adhering to professional ethics (Selcuk, Ryce and Mir, 2009: 463–473; Gundara, 2014). Banks (2004) argues that the infusion of diverse perspectives opens up ways to make visible and also to legitimize cultural knowledge that has been omitted in the past (Subedi, 2006: 227-238). Fullan claims that school improvement process involves three phases: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. The entry refers to the process that leads to the decision to approve the school or to make changes. The application relates to attempts to put an idea or reform into practice and the institutionalization refers to building innovation into everyday practice (Choi Ho Wa, 2010: 263-284). As to the undergraduates' views, it is without a doubt that they acknowledge the value of respecting religious diversity in school. It should be stressed, however, that two fundamental questions remain. The first is whether public school could provide for all groups' needs and the second is to what extent can the administration of public school to fund a curriculum with aims and values very different from the majority view. How can public school give "voice" to all religions and how do we prepare our students teachers to consider the perspectives of parents and children of different religion? (McCreery, Jones, and Holmes, 2007: 203-219). Besides, the cultural aspects of society cannot be fully managed by the state even if there are many basic questions of rights and power that have to find political solutions. Cultural differences are boundaries that can be contested, negotiated and changed, and we can hope for them to be respected, recognized and discussed (Skeie, 2006).

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