The Effect of Cultural and Linguistic Background on the Relationships of Pupils in two Kindergartens in Greece

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Abstract. The purpose of the current paper is to examine the social framework of the kindergarten school environment, as far as the interpersonal relationships of preschool children that derive from diverse cultural environments and backgrounds is concerned. The fundamental aim is to investigate whether and how the cultural and linguistic background interferes in the relationships of kindergarten pupils. Thus, the observation of two different kindergartens in Greece has taken place, in order to identify those characteristics and attitudes that contribute to the healthy relationships between pupils of different backgrounds. The most vital result that was derived from the interviews with the students and teachers is the fact that racist attitudes usually leads to rejection and social isolation of children from cultural minorities, based mainly in racial and linguistic stereotypes that children have towards their peers. Moreover, in the notion of the "other" and especially in the concept of what is regarded as different, students tend to behave with stereotypes, with impressions and images of features of people, which simplify and generalize these characteristics.

Keywords: kindergarten; interpersonal relationships; interviews; intercultural education

Introduction

It is a common belief that the outbreak of the migrating wave has caused a vast expansion of the diversion of students in the school framework. Before the end of the 1980, a relatively small number of foreign students appeared in schools (Nikolaou, 2011: 29). Hence, the existence of these students did not cause a significant effect on the aims of the Greek educational policy system. In fact, in favor of this small number, the school environment functioned "within an inclusive logic, with the ultimate dominance of the Greek language" (ibid). Nonetheless, between the end of the 1980 and the beginning of the 1990, there was an outburst of the migrating wave, which gradually attributed to a multicultural dimension to the Greek society. Moreover, the development of the agricultural economy in Greece, as well as the collapse of the political system in Albania, are within some of the reasons that created a fertile environment for the severe expansion of the migrating phenomenon (Tsoleridou, 2009: 84).

Our survey deals with the issue of the foreign students in the school environment of the kindergarten. The kindergarten is considered to play a significant role in the process of the child's primary social cognition, since it is the environment in which the child comes in contact with its peers (Athanasiou & Gotovos, 2002; Von Suchodoletz et. al., 2009). Besides, according to the Gestalt theory, a group of peers is not only the sum up of its members, but more importantly, it is a group that differs not only in quantity but also in quality, whilst children tend to be open to the power of group atmospheres, group dynamics and leadership (Lewin, 1938; Lewin & Lippitt, 1938; Lippitt & White, 1943). When it comes to the school environment, what causes interest is the fact that students have randomly been found in the classroom, while they are in an interaction with each other, adopting certain roles and norms of behavior (Bikos, 2011:72). The school environment seems to have many resemblances to the social status, since it gives the opportunity for some students to outstand, having more power and status, while some other students have a lower position. That depends on the ways that the other members evaluate each member and tend to position him/ her into the complexity of the positions that have been created within the school environment (Pellegrini et al. 2007). It is the student that will be able to show the most powerful personality that will be finally in position to guide the group and become a source of interaction and influence (Bikos, 1990: 12). In this framework, it becomes apparent that we are dealing with certain notions of sociometry, that mainly enlighten the various types of behaviors and patterns that tend to develop in the classroom and determine who will be the leader, which members would be ignored, which members are more likely to be liked and which members may be in jeopardy of violence, physical or emotional. In any case, the most vital criterion in this case is the students' attitude towards the various norms and patterns of behaviors in the classroom. What is of great significance is the fact that the children that are more likely to be socially rejected are those with a foreign cultural and linguistic environment (Tsioumis, 2003; Bikos, 2011; Milonas & Manesis, 2002).

According to several surveys, the approach that is considered to be more appropriate to deal with the various issues that arise is that of the intercultural education, since it helps the teachers to deal with an environment that is multicultural and not homogenous (Vamvakidou, Kyridis & Dinas: 2002). In parallel, intercultural education offers the type of education that can readjust the existing social and financial inequalities (Kyridis, 1996). This approach also serves the compensatory nature of early childhood education, which role is to create equality on "opportunities of results", compensating for any deficiencies and possible inequities that may occur within the classroom, before the child enters the primary school (ibid).

According to F. Wardle (2011), teachers should be characterized by certain qualities, such as cognition, respect and sensitivity towards anything that is different, while the knowledge of another language is also required. In our case, the kindergarten teacher should also be aware of the innovative teaching methods that could plausibly escort his/ her effort in the framework of the intercultural education (Mpakas, Pantazis & Sakellaropoulou, 2014). On the contrary, despite the necessity for the existence of the above qualities, the vast majority of the surveys in this area indicate that most of the teachers do not feel secure of adequate enough to deal with the problems that arise in the multicultural classroom (Georgogiannis, 2004; Georgogiannis & Mpomparidou, 2006; Magos, 2014; Mpoutskou, 2011; Mpakas, Pantazis & Sakellariou, 2014). Teachers encounter difficulties that arise not only due to the language barrier, but from the different culture of the immigrant pupils, combined with practical issues, such as the large number of students in classrooms (Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2012, Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2007). Kindergarten teachers are called to deal with children of the dominant Greek language majority, as well as of the linguistic minority, for which the minority language is a key element in the process-making of their cultural identity (Pantazis & Sakellaropoulou, 2002; Spinthourakis, 2007)

Initially, the immigrants come from Albania, followed by Romans, Pollands, and Egyptians. The fact is that the vast majority of immigrants towards Greece come from Albania, mainly due to the development of the rural economy of Greece at that time, the collapse of the political system in Albania, the easy access to the "neighbouring" country and the relatively small cultural difference compared to Greece (Triandafyllidou & Kokkali, 2010).

In this framework, the Greek educational system had to alter its aims, goals and methods, in order to come in agreement with the needs and necessities of the migrating students (Christodoulou, 2009: 288). Until the 1983, the institution of the "welcoming classes" and the private classrooms have prevailed (Tzortzopoulou & Kotzamani, 2008: 29), which mainly regarded students that did not had any knowledge of the Greek language and students that had a partial knowledge respectively (Tsoleridou, 2009: 99). Since 1985, the establishment of the intercultural schools has taken place, which comes in agreement with the principles of the intercultural education. This mainly means that schools adapt to the

educational, social, cultural and cognitive necessities of the foreign students (Tzortzopoulou & Kotzamani, 2008: 32; Trouki, 2012). Nowadays, the above institutions are still valid, while, according to the law 3386/05, the minimum attendance of the under-aged foreign students is considered to be compulsory. The significant factor in the inclusion of these students is the procedure within the Greek society has gradually been linear to the principles of the differentiation, and more importantly to the respect of anything that is diverse to the norm of the educational system.

The notion of differentiation in kindergarten
As mentioned above, since 1980, there has been created a multicultural and multilingual reality in our country, with the sudden and large influx of expatriate-'repatriated ' and immigrants who lived in former E. P. D, the Balkans and Asia. Among those who are called as the repatriated, a large part is the Pontiac Greeks from the former Soviet Union. A significant number of students with Pontiac origin attends Greek school and displays difficulties in language but also in socializing, because it is likely that the Greek language is not used at home (Tsioumis, 2003). The Greeks of Northern Epirus are also considered as "Returnees". About 80.000 expatriates settled in our country in the period between 1991 and 1995 and their children attended Greek kindergarten facing particular linguistic problems, since in this case the Greek language may not be used at home. Another minority that contributes to the "colorful" character of the Greek kindergarten is the Muslim minority in Thrace, which is to be found in various urban, semi-urban and rural areas of our country. Children of Muslims who attend Greek kindergarten experience early educational exclusion, while the number of children attending kindergarten is quite limited, either due to reduced interest of parents towards education, either due to low economic and educational background of parents, either because of strong stereotypes on the part of the rest of the school community towards these children, but also because of the very limited knowledge of the Greek language, with which the Muslim children come into contact for the very first time in the kindergarten class. (Tsioumis, 2003). The majority of these children that attend Greek kindergarten, were born in our country or have spent a part of their lives in this, have, however, started their studies in preschool age without any knowledge of Greek (Tsioumis, 2003). A characteristic ethnic group that is often led outside the kindergarten is the Roma children, which seem to have a different cultural and social background, whilst the teachers', parents' and children's attitude towards them is a fundamental reason for their "leakage" (Triandafullidou, 2011).

The "leakage" of students in the transition from primary to secondary education is evident. Many researches have shown that the performance of foreign students differs from that of indigenous, with the first being in a risk group for school exclusion and failure, due to the complex factors that interact with each other, such as the low social and economic environment for themselves and their families, the different cultural capital, as well as the lack of knowledge of the Greek language

(Athanasopoulos, 2003, from Tressou & Mitakidou, 2003; Bikos, 2011; Kompiadou & Lenakakis, 2014; Kyridis, 1996). Having to cope with the lack of linguistic communicative competence, social inclusion, prejudices and stereotypes regarding their origin, quickly create a negative relationship with school (Sakellaropoulou, 2007). Ignorance of the language of the host country but also the negligible value of their mother language in the school environment, may be responsible for many of the problems these students face, both as far as school and their emotional state is concerned (Nikolaou, 2011:53). Moreover, due to the linguistic and communicative difficulty, certain stereotypic characteristics are often attributed to the bilingual pupils, such as "philistine" and "less capable in literature" (Geraris, 2011). Within the school, a stereotype against a foreign student, an over-generalization of characteristics in the light of social representation of the "foreign" may lead him to social exclusion and school failure, owing to the fact that the expectations for his behavior due to the existing stereotype, the low incentives offered and the minimum positive feedback received leads to the phenomenon of "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Gkasdogka, 2013: 7, Hernandez & Fernandez 2005). Both teachers and the headmasters of schools should not have lower expectations of students coming from different cultural contents (Zachos & Matziouri, 2015).

As a prejudice we could define the attitude of the individual to a social class of people that predisposes him to think or act towards it with a positive or negative attitude (Bikos, 2007), through the activation of positive or negative emotions. According to a popular definition of Allport (Allport, 1954: 9), "Prejudice is an antipathy based on a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group or a whole or toward an individual because he is a group member "(Baumeister & Finkel, 2010). When negative feelings toward a social group are translated into respective practices, then we can talk about social discrimination -class, racial, cultural ... - (Tsioumis, 2003: 58). Prejudices, positive or negative, are born and are affected by the conditions of competition between the groups, ie where the "victory" or the superiority of any group requires the "defeat" or the deprivation of some privileges of the other, as well as the distance in the social status of people involved and the different social identities that have been configured (Doise, 2009: 32-37, Abrams, 2010). Although many surveys and studies have been conducted regarding the national bias of children, there are still disagreements among researchers on key issues such as the age that this appears and is developed, its relationship with the psychological mechanisms and procedures, its impact on language and social skills of children etc. (Nesdale, 1999). According to Skourtou, in the process of approaching the school experiences of bilingual students, we can say that "good" students are the bilinguals that develop both of their languages, while "bad" students are the bilinguals, which denied or has not been given the opportunity to do so (Skourtou, 1999). In fact, in case the child's language is devalued at school, then it is plausible that the child will reject it (Kourti- Kazouli, 1999), given the fact that we are

referring to a homogenous linguistic school environment. It is often the case that the minority family itself rejects the language of origin, which coincides with negative characteristics, and sees the other language as a ' lifeline ', in order to improve the poor conditions and the low life quality of its members. (Ogbu & Simons,1998). However, this does not enhance the self-image of the child, since the language in which he/she grew up and developed his ties with his family, is now rejected and forbidden. In fact, immigrant children that enter for the first time the pre-school education have been identified as being in a stage of "grieving" and loss of the life they had left behind in their country of origin (Giugni, 2007). Moreover, according to Meisel, if you approach the school bilingual students ' experiences, then we can say that "good" student becomes the bilingual that develops both of the two languages, while a "bad" student becomes the bilingual who denied or has not been given the opportunity to do so (Meisel, 2004). In any case, although the friendly relations between children of different nationalities reduce the homogeneity of the group, such friendships are rare in preschool age (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003). Moreover, the way the kindergarten children judges and handles relations with children of different nationality, seems to be influenced by the school environment, for example, whether the class is culturally homogeneous or not (McGothlin & Killen, 2010).

The purpose and hypotheses of the research
The purpose of the current research is to explore the interpersonal relationships among children with different backgrounds in two kindergartens in the city of Greece, and in particular to explore how the factor of cultural diversity of the pupils affects the interpersonal relationships, taking into account the parameter of the socio-economic background of the child, in comparison with the broader social and cultural background of the classroom. As indicated above, there have been several researches in Greece that highlight the unfavorable position of foreign children into the social fabric of the classroom of the school in general and of the kindergarten in particular, as well as the stereotypic attitudes of children towards foreign classmates. One of the prominent reasons that this phenomenon occurs is, initially, the influence of the family environment and family concepts in relation to various cultural minorities, specified by the cultural, social and economic status of parents themselves, causing positive or negative evaluation of the foreign classmates.

The main questions of this research regard the ways that form the relationships with the foreign children, whilst the main question that arises is how the overall culture of the order affects the relationship of foreign children with their classmates.
The assumptions of this investigation, in reference to the above questions are as follows:

• Foreign children who attend kindergarten in Greece face social exclusion or are in a disadvantaged position with regard to relations with their peers
• Foreign children who attend kindergarten in Greece face more unfavorable conditions in a class where the overall socio-economic level is high, compared to a classroom where the overall socio-economic level is low.

Research design

Forwarding to the methodological part, the current survey was contacted in a big city of Greece. The first kindergarten was evaluated as "good", regarding the social and financial status of its students, as well as the state of the buildings and the general materials. The methodological approach regarded an observation of each kindergarten for 3 days. Throughout the observation, certain data were recorded, on the premises of the kindergarten, the program that is followed and the practices of the teachers in the classroom, with respect to the general administration in various difficulties and problems, as well as the population of the children, in terms of number, gender, their relations with the rest of their classmates, the cliques and the sub-groups that are formed within the classroom and the socio-economic situation of their families. In order to collect information in connection with the friendship preferences and the detection of the phenomenon of exclusion derived from the friendly relations of specific children, certain socio-metric techniques were followed, where every child answered the above questions: • Who is your best friend? • How do you prefer to play during the school break? • With whom would you rather not play on the school break? • How do you prefer to work in the classroom? • With whom do you prefer not to join in the classroom? The children's responses were recorded and analyzed in graphs and socio-metric diagrams, each of which was separately commented.

The participants

The sample is consisted of 34 kindergarten students of two different kindergartens, 20 and 14 respectively. The basic criterions were the existence of foreign students, as well as the social and financial background of the pupils themselves and the prevailing background of each kindergarten. Children and the general composition and dynamics of each class in the two schools vary widely but also appear to have some similarities. The first kindergarten class is composed of 20 children, 16 toddlers and 4 preschoolers, 14 girls and 6 boys, 18 children from Greece, one from Russia and one from Albania. The kindergarten B consists of 14 children, 9 boys and 5 girls. Among these children are three boys who are from another country, one is Roma from Albania, one from Syria and one from Romania, and another child is from Bulgaria, adopted by Greek parents. In both classes no child has any mental or learning deficiencies diagnosed. Also, in both classes, children do not speak the Greek language efficiently. In kindergarten class A

Martin, from Russia, does not speak Greek very well, while there in kindergarten B, there are Janis from Syria and Mario from Romania, who are also bilingual and do not speak Greek very well.

The results
On the one hand, the first kindergarten is better equipped and has a generally more pleasant school environment, in terms of aesthetics. For instance, the external walls are painted with children's paintings on the theme of "flowers and nature". Apart from this, the shared space is also the main children's play area and has a large variety and quantity of material for the creative occupation of children. These four different "corners", that of the ' Salon ', that of ' practice ', that of ' shop ' and the ' theatrical ' corner, are all appropriate and fully equipped for symbolic game. The "theatrical corner" featuring fabrics, carnival outfits and various disguises and accessories, and other corners are equipped in accordance with their character: physician's robe, medical tools, plastic fruits and other products, such as hairdryers and brushes. The important aspect is the fact that this kindergarten is not only equipped in terms of materials, but it is also characterized by a general spirit of cooperation and coordination between the children and the two teachers. Both of the kindergarten teachers deal with the emotional education of children. The cooperation of the kindergarten teachers takes place on a daily basis. In case for some reason the two kindergarten teachers are not able to discuss, they always fill a daily diary which informs about the activities that took place during the breakfast hours. They also decide together on the project and the issues to be dealt with in the class, and how to administrate the various issues that arise along the way. As far as the foreign students is concerned, there occurs an attempt to enhance the feeling of friendship with the assistance of frequent activities for friendship, for example creating a song about friendship. In the classroom there is a child, Martin, who comes from Russia, and does not speak Greek whatsoever, since he came to Greece a few months ago. Martin encounters a difficulty in joining in the companionship of his classmates, and the kindergarten teachers operate in the following way: They say "good morning" in Russian as well, while in the "writing" corner, in addition to Greek, there is also the Russian alphabet. Occasionally, they ask him different words in his language, and several times they write words in Russian and stick them on the wall. For example, the period before Christmas, they had written wishes in Greek and in Russian. They have also made a separate lesson regarding Russia, presenting photos from the Internet.

Forwarding to the social relationships between the children, they seem to interact properly with each other. Nonetheless, there are certain discriminations in their companionships, as well as in their choices regarding whom to hang out with. The class consists of two large groups, with very different characteristics among themselves, by an even smaller company and by three children, each of which for different reasons do not belong to any company, nor are related to each other. The

two groups are very different from each other, and "rotate" each around two girls who are considered to be the most popular. In the first group, the "key" girl is Marilia, a girl whose friendship is desired by almost of all the girls of the class, and only two boys who prefer to interact with each other rather than with the other boys. In another central group of kids that are related to each other in the classroom, the company revolves around Maritina, whose companionship is chosen by almost all boys and a girl, who all together play intensely kinetic games at the school break. The third company consists of three girls who do not prefer nor are preferred by the two above groups. Moreover, there are three boys that do not fit into any company. These are a girl from Greece, a girl from Albania and a boy from Russia. The girl from Greece, Olympia, is not preferred by any child, since she seems to have a disruptive behavior. A characteristic incident is the fact that Marilia once organized a party and prepared invitations for all the children, except for Olympia. As described by the two teachers, she seems to be isolated and prefers to play on her own, she sometimes do not leave the classroom during the school break, while she rarely participates during the collective activities, even though her knowledge of Greek is satisfactory. She is considered to be rather shy and introvert, compared to the rest of the children, that are shown as talkative and more active. A rather prejudiced attitude is also shown towards Martin, although the students do not exactly know how to justify their negative feelings. The majority of children base their feelings on Martin's background and on the fact that he does not speak Greek, while he sometimes tends to translate everything he hears in Russian. Nevertheless, he participates in many ways in the life of the class and understands well enough Greek, while he has antiquated communication and kinetic skills. A pattern that also follows the case of Martin, as well as the above case of Marilia, is their rejection when it comes to birthdays and other festive treats. It is therefore evident that the requirement of adaptation to the norms of the new social environment, as well as the rejection of the "old" and "foreign" models and features for the more efficient integration in the host country may lead to feelings of "self-alienation" and "self-contempt "(Kyridis & Leontari, 1995; Dusi, Steinbach & Gonzales Falcon, 2014).

Forwarding to the second kindergarten, certain differences can be detected regarding the outdoor space and its aesthetic appearance, since it was not at first designed to be a kindergarten. On the contrary, the first kindergarten was created in order to work as a kindergarten, so it meets the respective specifications, while the second kindergarten has several shortcomings regarding the planned features of the building site. A key difference of the space that differentiates the experiences of children in the classroom, is the lack of computer and audiovisual media in the kindergarten class B, as well as the frequent and extensive use of computer and audiovisual media in class a, allowing them to search for songs, pictures, information, words. Ultimately, we would say that the kindergarten A responds to a greater extend in all respects to the specifications set for the preschool areas by international organizations

compared to kindergarten B. In terms of space, kindergarten A gives diverse, complex and qualitative opportunities for children to exercise their imagination, their curiosity, their need for movement, for social contacts and for contact with nature. It is a place created for children but also created by children, since children interfere with the layout and decoration. Nonetheless, kindergarten b limits the activity of children in many areas, such as the kinetic sector and the contact with nature. According to a relevant survey (Nalbantoglou, Kyridis & Tsioumis, 2015), kindergarten teachers believe that children are motivated through these activities because they contribute to their social, cognitive, emotional and moral development. "The majority of those teachers argues that children are encouraged via these activities as they later affect their social development (60,7%, N=17) (e.g. children learn to cooperate, accept differences, participate, share, reject, socialize etc.), cognitive development (21,4%, N=6) (development of critical thinking, experimentation, creation.), moral development (10,7%, N=3) (e.g. responsibility, respect etc.) and emotional development (7,1%, N=2) (awareness, expression)" (ibid:185).

The main difference between the two classes is that in kindergarten A social exclusion seems to be more apparent, since there certain "cliques" have been created "cliques", that compete with each other, while in kindergarten B such behaviors do not occur. The main reason for this, as mentioned above in the descriptions of schools, is that school A consists of two large groups of children who do not like each other. In parallel, children make negative comments about one another, and have a "common line" for what other kids around like or do not like. They have a common view and affect each other regarding their choices and feelings. A typical example is the words of a child who wondered why he was asked about which classmates he likes: "Why do you ask the same? Everyone will tell you that they do not like Olympia or Martin".

In kindergarten class B the situation is quite different. The only criterion that seems to apply in the choices of children with whom to hang out during breaks or in the classroom is sex. Boys make friendship with boys, and girls with girls. There is no issue of social exclusion, since any child is not constantly isolated nor is there a systematic exclusionary conduct by a clique against a particular "child- goal". In fact, there are no "cliques" in the sense of the restricted group, as there are in kindergarten A. The criteria used by the children of this school, when expressing their dislike for a classmate, have nothing to do with the fact that he/she may be from another country. This is the biggest difference among the two kindergartens. In fact, in kindergarten class B, all the girls have expressed strong dissatisfaction against Mario from Romania and Kostas who is Roma from Albania. They usually justify their opposition on Mario's habit to chase them, in order to kiss them on the mouth, whilst Kostas has disturbing habits, such as scratching his nose. The kindergarten teacher confirmed those facts, indicating that "they get very upset; they do not even want to see them!". The boys also showed resentment towards children from other countries, but they once again

do not mention at all the fact of the language or ethnicity. Specifically, several boys mentioned that they do not want to play with Marios, since "he does not play nicely." The kindergarten teacher justified her view, saying that "he is very kinetic, and do little tricks against the other children. He may hurt them, push them or grab their game, while looking at the same time rather innocent, smiling as if nothing had happened ... And the other children get confused with this behavior and get a bit more suspicious towards him". As presented in the bibliography, for children of preschool and primary-school age, a very important criterion is the criterion of physical violence, aggression and the disruptive behavior, such as obstruction of the lesson course (Lanvelotta & Vaughn, 1989). Another frequent reason for rejection can be both antisocial behaviors, while many complaints are caused by reactions of anxiety, since children tend to avoid any social interaction, in the fear of rejection (Bikos, 2007 Nesdale & Dalton, 2011). In contrast, children with high social status are prone to express their desire to make friends with another child, as they have no feelings of insecurity that may prevent them from doing so. That actually means that the children that feel confident in their interpersonal relationships, tend to feel the same emotional security among other issues and challenges of the everyday school life as well (Gainsley, 2013). An essential criterion for accepting a person in the community, is the behavior according to the social norms that apply in this context (Bikos, 2007), while equally important factors that contribute to the rejection of the individual are the entrenched prejudices against him/her by the rest of the team, as well as the existence of hierarchical relationships between the team members (Mikami, Lerner & Lun, 2010).

Another example is the case of Athena, in the kindergarten class B, for whom various complaints have been expressed, indicating that she scratches, pokes and bites them. This behavior and other similar behaviors seem to be fraud upon by the children of both kindergartens. Besides, the non-verbal communication is performed and interpreted, in a large part, unconsciously, spontaneously and in a split second, providing a wide source of information about the communicative situations involving the individual, implying that the participants are fully aware of the socially defined symbolic value of messages they receive and emit (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1998. Although a key factor in communication is the use of language, children are particularly susceptible to the interpretation of non-verbal messages, due to the fact that their language development is not yet fully completed, and are thus expressed within a deficient discourse (Agbagbla, 2012). Hence, children of four and five years old tend to create friendships with children that have the same interests with them, spending enough time together at school, in common activities, while older children make greater effort to commit in a friendship, playing more complicated games and for a greater extend of time (Manaster & Jobe, 2012).

On the whole, the two schools differ particularly in their external area, which is the feature that makes them have a "good" and "bad"

reputation, depending on their equipment, affecting decisively the quality of the regulated and free activities. The kindergarten teachers of both kindergartens use techniques that aim to the integration of children, but these methods have certain differences. In kindergarten A, the teachers use intercultural training techniques, while in kindergarten B they place great importance on consultation with parents and how they may affect or not affect their children in the way they think about their classmates. Children in both schools also differ not only in composition, but also in the way they treat their classmates. As mentioned above, in kindergarten A, there are closed groups, from which several peers are excluded, experiencing rejection. Their rejection is based not only on the behavior and character of the child but also on the linguistic and ethnic identity. Children in kindergarten A appear to negatively evaluate the different nationality of a classmate and his inability to clearly speak the Greek language. This has major consequences in the pupils' psychological state, since children that are rejected by their peers, tend to be subjected to feelings of alienation, participate less in the class activities and are usually more prone to abandon school (Buhs, Ladd & Herald, 2006).

Kindergarten A: Graphs of children's answers
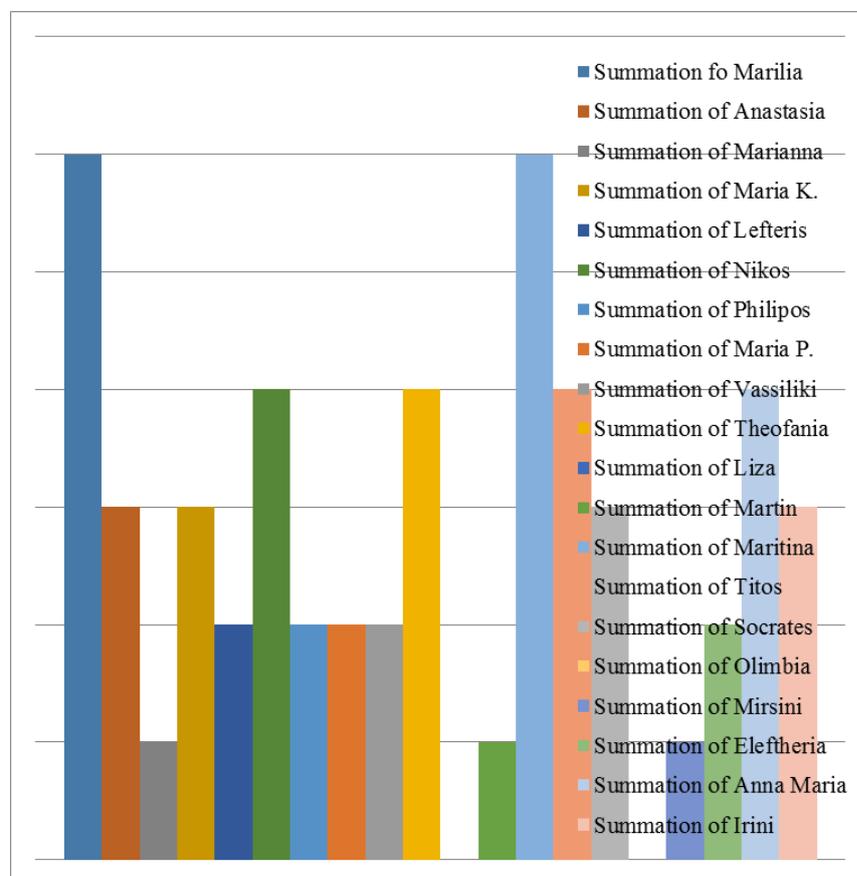

Graph 1: The children's best friend
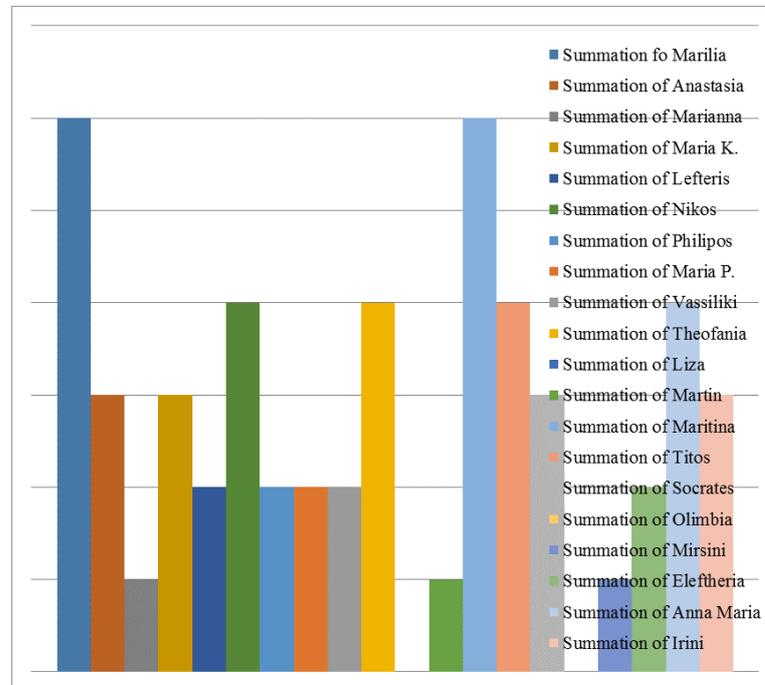
Graph 2a: With whom children prefer to spend time

The above graph represents the popularity rates of each child within the context of the classroom. It is observed that the largest percentage is cumulated by two girls, chosen from six different children, each one characterized as "their best girlfriends". These two girls are very different from each other and their relationship is not very close. Indeed, one does not rank the other on preferences for spending time in the classroom. One girl, Marilia, was chosen only by girls, while the other girl, Maritina was chosen mostly by boys. According to the teacher, the first is a "Princess", since she likes to paint, and plays symbolic games, such as the ' home ' or ' the Salon ', wearing various outfits available for the theatrical game, along with the other girls, while the second is more "tomboy" and plays mainly kinetic games with boys, such as football at almost every school break. Both of the girls are very energetic within the classroom and have a very developed, dynamic speech, whilst they take initiatives.
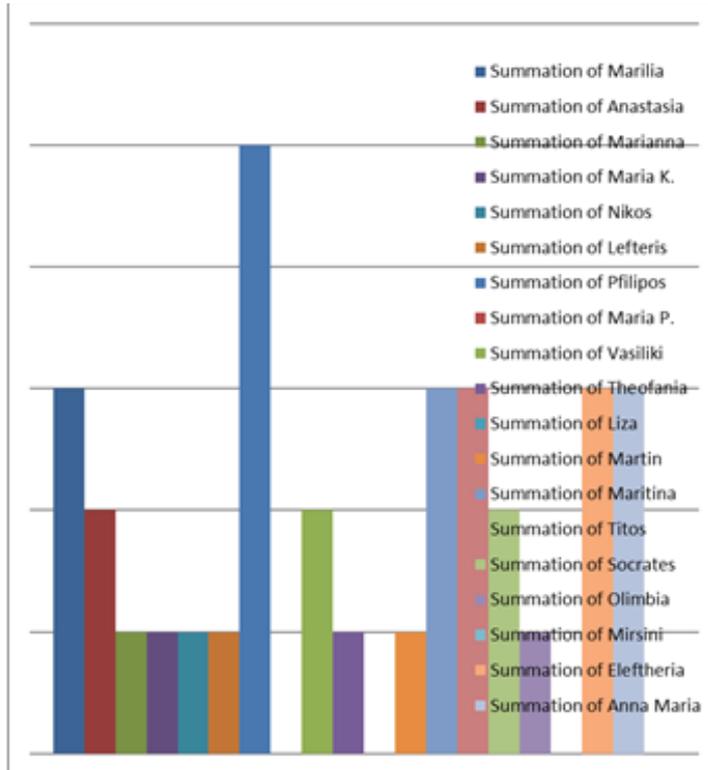
Graph 3: With whom children would rather not spend time during the school break

The graph above depicts the preferences of children regarding with whom they would rather hang out during the school recession. As it seems, the greater preference is gathered by Philip, chosen by 5 children. Philip was selected from across the company of Maritina, i.e. from Socrates, Titus, Anna Maria and Maritina.
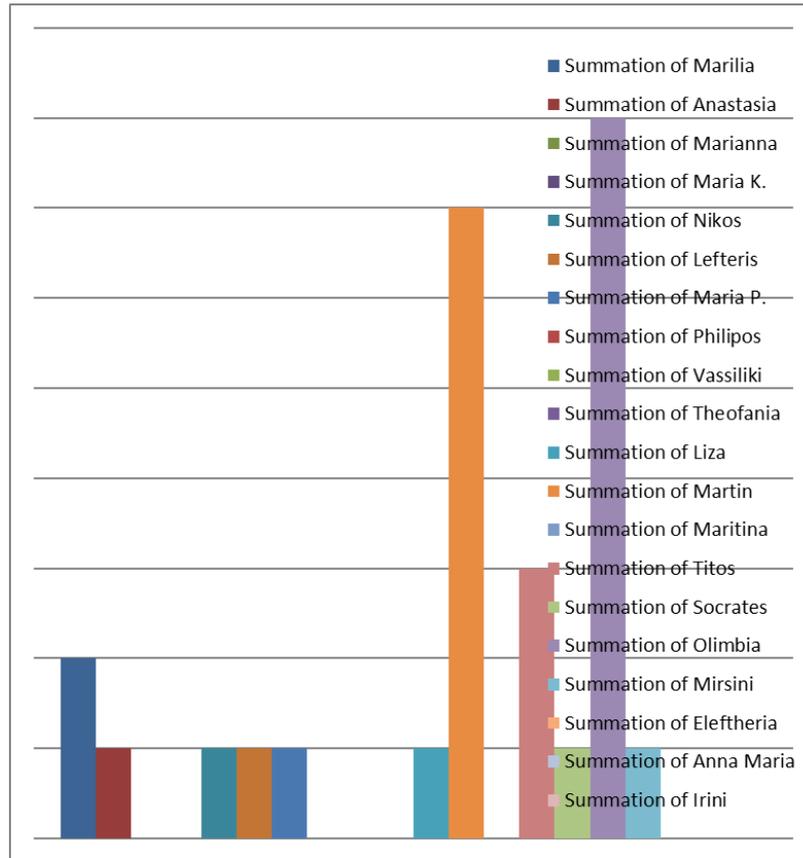
Graph 4: With whom children would rather not spend time during the school break

The above graph presents which children are less desirable during the school breaks. The answers respond to the question "Children with whom you don't like to hang out at the break". We observe that Olympia and Martin are by far the less desirable "companionship". Among the 19 children, 8 do not want to associate with Olympia and 7 do not want to be friends with Martin. The answers and explanations given are related both to the character of the children, as well as to other elements of their identity, such as language and nationality. This finding agrees with the findings of previous surveys conducted in the Greek area, which also confirmed that children with certain cultural characteristics in relation to the dominant culture of the school team are ranked in unfavorable categories of popularity (Bikos, 2011: 213), while international surveys suggest that the children of immigrants are often subjected to bullying from their peers due to cultural, linguistic and religious differences (Cocker et. all, 2009, BRYCS, 2015).

With regard to Olympia, the children focused on that she is a rather steep and aggressive girl, which often beats the other children, tugging their blouses, pushing them, grabbing their toys and pushing them to include her in their games. The other children do not accept her behavior and exclude her from the groups. Also, during the symbolic games, they hardly interact with her. She usually imposes her presence

or complains, in order to achieve what she wants. Martin also collects negative comments from the other children, for two main reasons. Two children reported that Martin teases them. According to the kindergarten teacher, "Martin is highly kinetic and can become careless, and fall on a child as he is running. Especially with the boys, he may be playing a bit "hard", i.e. he can cause damage, physically and verbally". Nonetheless, the other children focus on the fact that Martin does not speak well Greek, and that he speaks Russian and has a different nationality. It is obvious that his nationality interferes in the ways his behavior is evaluated as well. According to Steele & Aronson a common sociological phenomenon is the "threat of stereotypes" (stereotype threat), in which a person is at risk of developing a personal characteristic that is considered as a negative stereotype of the group to which he belongs (Steele & Aronson, 1995)

Below the sociogram of the kindergarten is represented, which depicts the positive and negative relationships. It should be noted that in the first sociogram, which analyzes the acceptance of children, less darts of acceptance are assembled by Liza, Martin and Olympia, something which is confirmed in the second sociogram of the negative relations between children, where Martin and Olympia collect the majority of the darts.
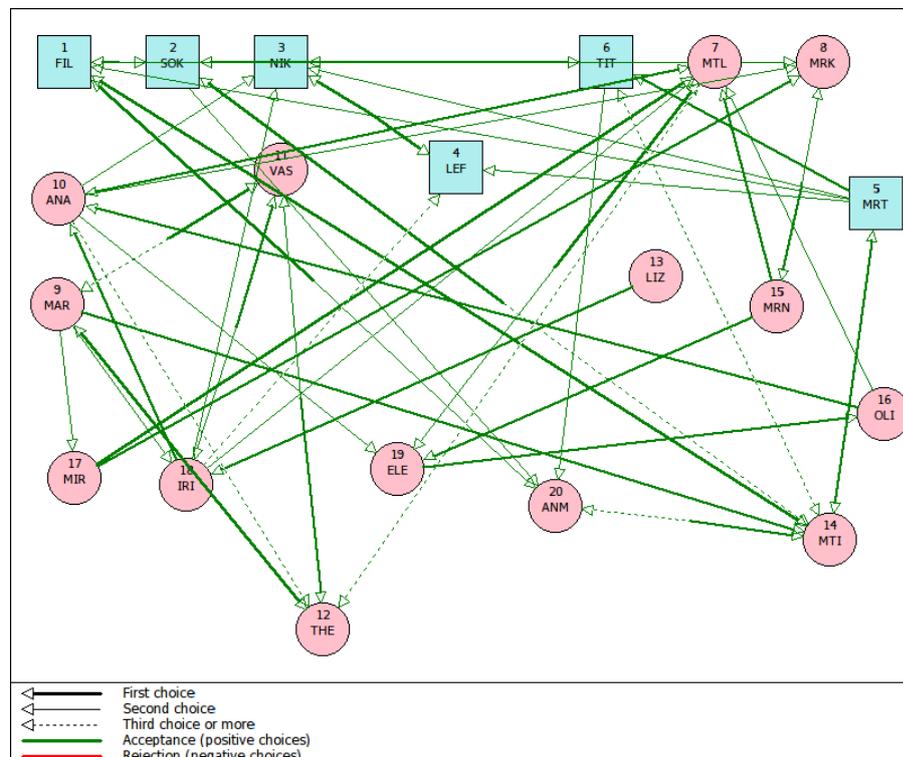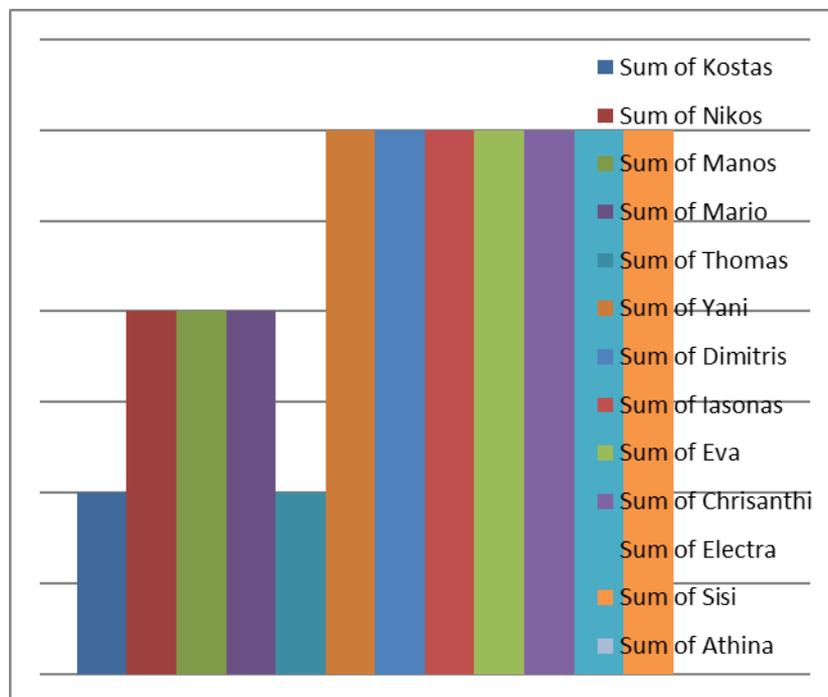


Sociogram of the 1st kindergarten: Positive relations
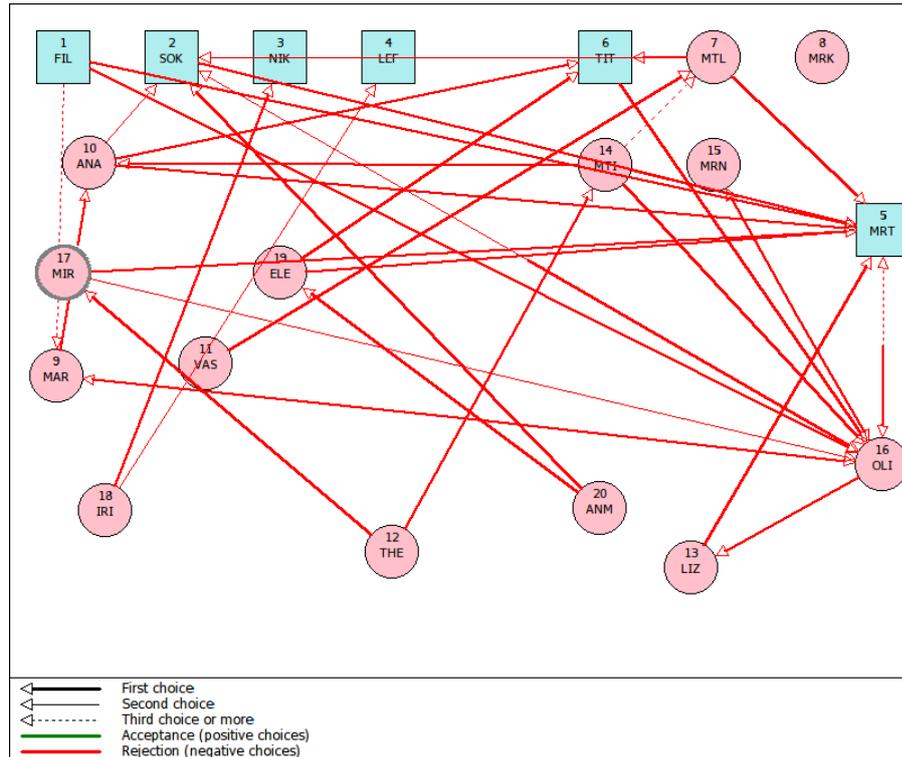
Sociogram of the 1st kindergarten: Negative relations

Kindergarten B: Graphs of children's answers

Graph 5: The children's best friend of the 2nd kindergarten

The above graph depicts the friendships of children in the class, namely, who is everyone's best friend and which children in the classroom are more popular. We observe that there is not a large diversion between the numbers. According to the graph, girls are the most popular in the class. This is easily explained by the fact that 4 girls of this class chose each other as their best friend, and seem to have each other pretty close. According to the relative research, children at the age of 3 years old show strong preference for friendly relations for children of the same sex (Powlishta et. al., 1993) and present powerful and observable differences in the ways of the game among themselves (Bandura & Bussey, 1999). Specifically, the boys seem to prefer the competitive games, in groups with expanded number of people, they are more aggressive, active, and independent in their play than adults, while girls prefer smaller groups, emphasize discussion, collaboration, and the relationships between them, and often reach adults during their own game (Maccoby, 2002). In addition, it seems that the boys compare the situation and circumstances of the group belonging to those of other groups (Yee & Brown, 1992), prefer members more "popular", in relation to members more "marginal" within the classroom (Nesdade et.al. 2005) and, in addition, form a part of the picture of themselves and of their self-esteem depending on their position within the group (Bennet & Sani, 2008).
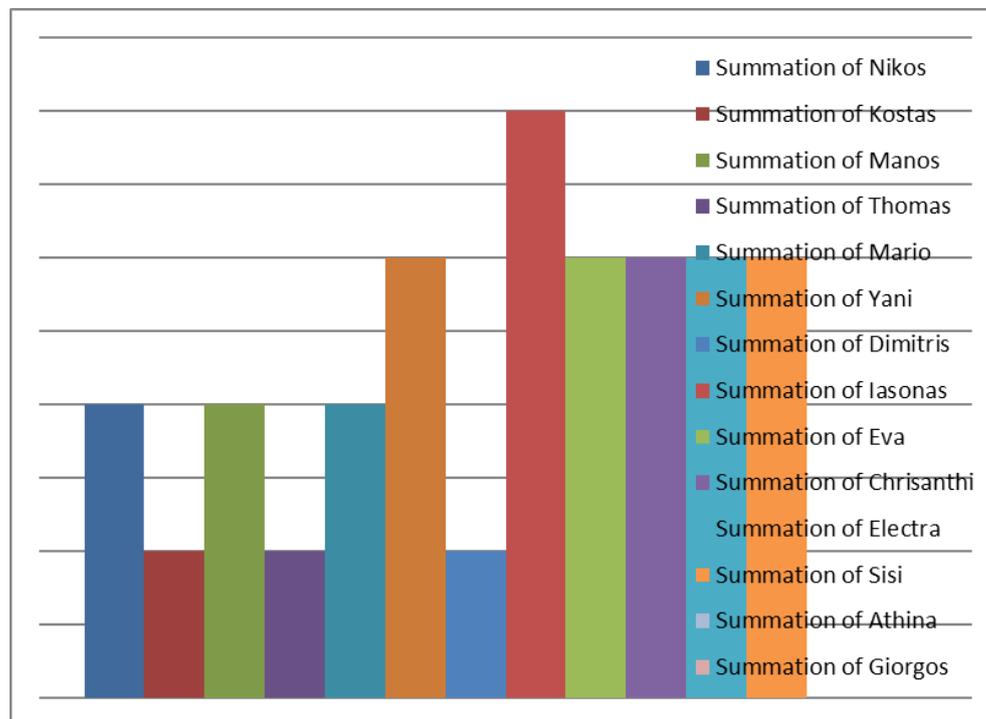

Graph 6: With whom children prefer to spend time with during school breaks (2nd kindergarten)

The above graph depicts with whom children of kindergarten b prefer to hang out during the breaks, which reveals the personal preferences of each child. This graph is no different compared to the previous one. The

highest "score" is collected by Jason, who was chosen by 4 kids. Jason often participates in the games and organizes the rest of the class or determines a place to play all together. Moreover, Giannis is quite popular, coming from Syria. He speaks Greek very well, though he speaks much better compared to the beginning of the year. During breaks and free activities, at least for the period of observation, he was very talkative and energetic.

Below the sociogram of the second kindergarten is presented, depicting the positive and negative relationships. In the first sociogram, it seems that all girls have two-way darts, except for Athena, who is being evaluated negatively because of her aggressive behavior. Among the boys, only Costas has no darts toward him, as well as George who rarely comes at school. In the second sociogram, describing the negative relations between children, it is observed that the majority of the darts are referring to Costas and Marios, given the fact that they have been selected by all of the girls, due to some habits that make them disruptive. Marios, in particular, has a relatively abrupt behavior, which sometimes makes him annoying. In general, the relationships of young children are changing constantly as long as both their personality and identity, as well as their relationships with their peers is in a continuous development and evolution, and therefore are subjected to alteration (Parker, et. al., 2006).
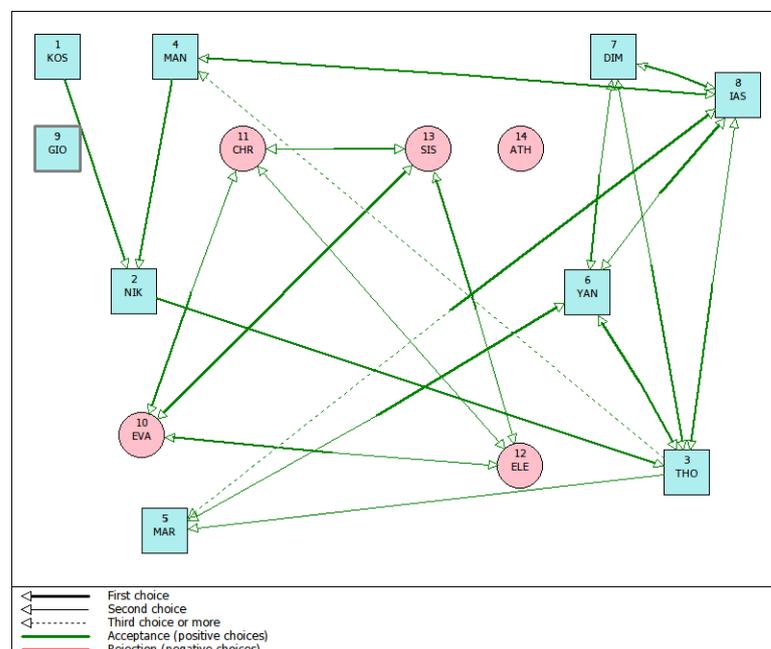
Sociogram of the 2nd kindergarten: Positive relations
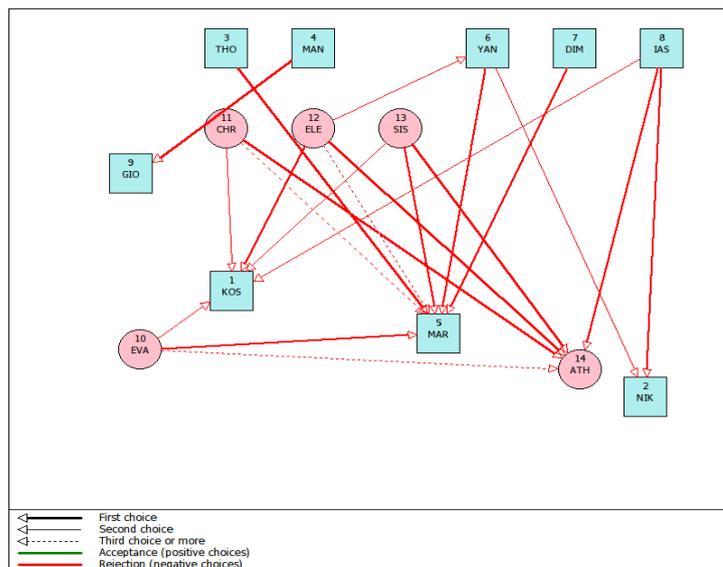
Sociogram of the 2nd kindergarten: Negative relations

Discussion

According to the observation of the two kindergartens and the analysis of the children's interviews, certain conclusions can be arisen. Especially the comparison between them allows us to identify those qualities and characteristics that may lead to the popularity of a certain pupil and the opposite. One of our first hypothesis has been confirmed, that the less popular children in each class are both children who were not born in Greece and who do not have Greek as their native language, whether they can speak Greek adequately or not. This finding comes in agreement with the findings of previous surveys conducted in Greece, which also confirmed that children with certain cultural particularities, in relation to the dominant culture of the school group, fall into "bad" categories regarding to their popularity (Bikos, 2011:213). Regarding the concept of racial identity and racial differences, children form an initial view as early as about 4 years old, which can remain stable up to the preadolescent years (Parker et. al. 2011). Children of 4 years old have developed a form of "racial consciousness", thus placing themselves in a group, and excluding the other groups (Stergiou, 2006: 61). Various surveys have shown that the separation of groups in "other" and "us" is associated with some value-judgment features. Specifically, once students have diversified group belonging and "out" groups, tend to be positive towards their own group and negative towards the other groups, as an augmentation mechanism of self-esteem (Athanasopoulos, 2003, from Tressou & Mitakidou, 2003). According to a relevant survey, white four year olds generally have a more positive image of the other white children than of children with different skin color (Vandenbroeck, 2004). The various "groups" are therefore determined according to the social value-configured system.

Moreover, our second hypothesis was that foreign children who attend kindergarten in Greece face social exclusion or are in a disadvantaged position. It became apparent that racist attitudes

presented in the first kindergarten, and thus rejection and social isolation of children from cultural minorities, are based mainly on racial and linguistic stereotypes that children have towards their peers. Although this phenomenon has been observed in both schools, it was much more intense in kindergarten a, rather than in kindergarten b, since in kindergarten the rejection of children from their peers was evident, as well as accompanied with racist connotations, while in kindergarten b racist attitudes from the peer group was not present. According to previous surveys, in classes where these children are a very small minority, such as in the first kindergarten class, the likelihood of social isolation of these children was much higher compared to classes where these children constituted a greater proportion (Bikos, 2011:213).

It is established that in the topic of dealing with the "other" and especially with the different, people tend to behave with stereotypes, with impressions and images of features of people, which simplify and generalize these characteristics (Bikos: 2007). In the framework of the stereotypic thought, children simplify information that have a certain social content, addressing the people around them not individually, but as members of a class, which is defined by specific characteristics (Blum, 2004). Usually, there occurs a very simplified image that emphasizes and exaggerates defamatory characteristics. This kind of perspective is acquired at a very young age, unfortunately before the child acquires any knowledge for this specific social group (Bikos, 2007). Kindergarten children, despite the popular belief that they are at that age" uncontaminated" by stereotypes and social perceptions, seem, however, to be very well informed in respect of racial hierarchy and prejudices of adults, through their own experiences and by observing various behaviors that surround them (Siraj-Blatchford, 2012:25).

In our case, beyond national stereotypes in the kindergarten, a key role was the fact that Martin, one of the two children who received the rejection and the negative comments from his classmates, was bilingual and spoke in the class both Russian and Greek. Perceptions that linguistic community preserves regarding a language or a language variety affect the reactions towards the speakers of that language and triggers certain social and cultural stereotypes (Kompiadou & Lenakakis, 2014:283). The way of dealing with a person's language is directly and permanently connected to the way we all behave towards this person, as well as with the image that this person forms in this regard (Tsokalidou, 2007). In Martin's case, the other children react strongly towards the native language of Martin, and consider that he allegedly speaks "English", generalizing and simplifying the particular culture of their classmate, but also showing that they do not accept it. A few times some kids justified their negative attitude towards their classmate, indicating that "he is Russian and speaks English" ... This behavior of the entire class seems to affect Martin on the sense of self-efficacy. According to the theory of performance, it is possible to depend our success or failure on internal and external causes (Slavin, 2007:403).

Martin himself has often placed his failure in the classroom activities, saying that "I am dumb, I don't know Greek and do not understand". It seems, moreover, that the dynamics of the class has created a "prophecy" of stereotypic perception that can cause a similar behavior, which in turn validates a belief or a perception (Hogg & Vaughan, 1998:331). These stereotypic perceptions prevent children from participating not only in the formal structure of the classroom, but more importantly in the informal structure. In this framework, it becomes evident that it is vital for pre-school children to create friendly relations, in order to develop certain social skills in the future (Newcomb & Bukowski, 1984).

In the same class, there was also a girl from Albania, Lisa that was isolated from any kind of relationship in the classroom. Lisa's parents are both from Albania and do not speak Greek as good as their daughter does. Her father works as a builder and is seasonally unemployed, and her mother is at home. They are the only parents in the classroom that have no stable job and have a manual work. Lisa can speak Greek, but she has to deal with the socio-economic and cultural gap between her and all the rest of her classmates. It is the cultural lag, whose meaning is twofold, involving material but also spiritual factors. It is gap that refers to the material living conditions of children and their families, but also regards the cultural goods, as well as the intellectual and expressive infrastructure (Kyridis, 1996:191). In fact, culturally deprived children lack of certain skills and experiences, with which the children of the middle class are already familiar (Riessman, 1963). This deficiency leads to their cultural difference from the rest, but at the same time is perceived as a disadvantage. Some of the characteristics of such children, which are attributed to Lisa, are the lower quality of the expressive and verbal ability, in relation to other children in the class, poor self-image, the minimum of social skills and the cultural differences, compared to the other children in the class (Larson & Oslon, 1965). It is these children who, according to Zacharenakis, have "very little energy, too little information for themselves and for their environment, very little curiosity, very few successes, very little money and clothes, very few games and very little reading, very little luck (Zacharenakis, 1985: 70). The democratization of education is presented as a process where the progress and performance of students will be determined only by their abilities and by "nothing else": "What is meant by" nothing else" is expressed by relevant definitions as "working classes", "surrounding", "social situation", "geographical origin" etc. The above can be identified as the factors most detrimental to the democratization of school (Milonas, 2004: 113). From a sociological perspective, the issue of equal opportunities and social mobility is complicated, because it creates the false impression that the educational choices can exempt the student from the "curse" of low social class. This is what is described as the "myth of the great equalizer" as the vision that school will eliminate social inequality (Katsikas & Kavadias, 2000: 26-27). According to this myth, the school may offer equal learning

opportunities, because even when choosing their students through the evaluation, this is done in a spirit of equality and fairness. According to Apple "there is no doubt that schools do provide institution to promote economic and cultural reproduction. However, the way in which this occurs is complex. Theories that seek for the relationship between education and the outside society fail to include essential aspects of this complexity" (Apple, 1982: 1). Bourdieu, on the other hand, sees a more regulatory aspect of this reproductive function and summarizes the process of the connection between school performance and family background as follows: "The culture of the elite is so close to that of the school, so that children from lower middle class and working class can acquire only with great effort what is given to children of the cultured classes: style, preferences, spirit" (Bourdieu, 1974: 39). According to the theory of cultural capital, the difference in school performance of students is due to the fact that the school culture is much closer to the habitus, ie the linguistic, cultural and social practices of the middle and upper social strata. Essentially the cultural capital could be defined as a set of features and capabilities, which cultivate not only knowledge, but also ways of expression and social practice (Milonas, 1996: 211). As Bourdieu indicates: "The school requires from all to perform in the same way. This includes mainly linguistic and cultural capacity and the relationship between family and culture, a relationship that can be produced only when the family transmits the dominant ideology" (Bourdieu, 1973: 80). Of course, the acquisition of this cultural heritage requires the right environment and accordingly the ability of the student to internalize all those standards and norms that will contribute to the better integration in the school norm (Dumais, 2002: 44). The educational system has an important role in maintaining the status quo: «... That (education) is actually one of the most effective means to perpetuate the existing social affairs, since they both provide a clear justification for the social inequalities, as well as the acknowledgment of the cultural heritage, that is perceived as a social gift and thus is treated as "natural" (Bourdieu, 1974: 32).

The social relations of children with each other and the reasons that children include or exclude a classmate in their social circle can witness the cause of various phenomena in the classroom, such as that of marginalization. It is very important that the teacher be aware of the mechanisms by which the team operates, in order to have a more complete picture not only of the whole class, but also the specificity of each student or trouble that each student presents, so that he/she can confront and intervene better and more effectively (Bikos, 2007). For instance, teacher can organize the classroom into working groups, so as to prevent the formation of divert subgroups against children who have little or no social contacts, and contribute to the cultivation of empathy and students' learning and solving skills problems (Australian Primary School Mental Health Initiative, 2013). Through organized activities of kindergartens, such as "the hour of cycle" and the storytelling, children can learn to listen to each other, share ideas and materials, to be

involved in various situations in game, help one another, to observe the skills of their classmates, and all of the above through the encouragement and contribution of teachers, in order to achieve the desirable possible positive interaction between children (Bovey & Strain, 2003). Beyond the educational dimension, parents can assist in the establishment of friendly relations of their children but also to the overall positive interactions among students of a class. The positive safe bond of children with their parents seems to enhance the positive relationship with their peers (Schneider, Tardif & Atkinson, 2001). Moreover, parents sometimes use a number of strategies to enhance their children's social relations, to encourage integration of their child in various situations, eg children's parties, and its involvement in various "social networks", ie playing with children of the neighborhood, and other methods such as the involvement in the game and in conflict resolution, etc. (Yu, Ostrosky & Fowler, 2011).

The social relations of children with each other, and the reasons that children tend to include or exclude a classmate in their social circle can witness the cause of various phenomena in the classroom, such as that of marginalization. It is very essential that the teacher be aware of the mechanisms by which each group of students functions, to have a more complete vision not only of the whole class, but also of the specificity of each student or the difficulties that each students may have, in order to confront and intervene better and more effectively (ibid). According to Teresa Vasconcelos (2007 in Cordona et al., 2013: 45), the kindergarten is a fundamental territory, where children can be fully socially and ethically educated (Nichols, 2007: 120-121).

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