

Interview Stefanos Katsoulis (Pixel – Associazione Culturale, IT)

<p>Self- presentation of the interviewee</p>	<p>I am Stefanos Katsoulis. I am a PhD student in the field of international institutions. My main research fields and work experience are about human rights protection, social inclusion, non-formal education activities, vocational training, youth empowerment and youth participation.</p> <p>Currently I serve as the director of UNESCO Youth Club of Thessaloniki. Previously I was the president of the organization (2010-2018). All These years I have been involved in many initiatives and projects dealing with non-formal education methodologies in the context of promoting youth engagement, participation and social inclusion. Among others I should mention the EU project “I Have Rights” with the aim of providing secondary school teachers with the skills to deal with multicultural classrooms through the acquisition of intercultural competences based on the understanding of human rights and non-discrimination values.</p> <p>In the past I was employed at the organization "Symβiosis-Civic School of Political Studies of the Council of Europe", where I dealt with projects promoting social inclusion, diversity, equality, human rights protection focusing on marginalized people, migrants and refugees (November 2017 - August 2018). I was also employed as a Field Coordinator of the project "Quality play-based learning and non-formal education; enhanced psychosocial wellbeing and positive integration for refugee children in Greece" that was implemented by ELIX Conservation Volunteers Greece and was funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid with the support of UNICEF (November 2016 - September 2017).</p> <p>Regarding myself I have experience working with groups of people mostly: teenagers, young adults, young refugees and migrants. I also have theoretical and research experience in the fields of diversity, multiculturalism and social inclusion, being a research associate at the Postgraduate Programme (MA) in Human Rights and Migration Studies of the University of Macedonia. A dedicative promoter of intercultural dialogue.</p>
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<p>The core interview</p>	<p>Memories, experiences, lessons learned in dealing with multicultural learners.</p> <p>The most notable memory brings me back to the period when I was working providing education to refugee unaccompanied minors. They were living in a shelter that was far from the city centre and they were using public transport to reach the venue where we provided educational and language support. Within the group there was a quite naughty girl who took markers and painted the walls of the building we were in. As soon as she realized that I should inform her guardian about what she has done, she came and asked me not to do so, as afterwards they would be punished and restricted not to exit their shelter, and consequently they would not be able to attend the provided courses. It was an incident that made me and all my partners in the educational programme, to reshape our way of thinking. These unaccompanied minors have travelled alone from far away, some of them were victims of and have witnessed various incidents. What is very important in a multicultural environment is to be able to understand and respect the different cultural background and experiences of each one of the learners.</p> <p>How well has education and society prepared you for teaching to multicultural learners? The responsibility of educators to support the multicultural learners.</p> <p>The Greek educational system and society in general are neither well aware of multicultural education nor have it as a priority. For this reason it is of high importance that the educators are well qualified and informed on multicultural education methodologies that are applicable to their specific multicultural learners. Education authorities should try to address teachers' unpreparedness to work in culturally diverse classrooms through teacher education and training.</p> <p>What have you done to further your knowledge about ICC?</p> <p>My engagement as a research associate in the UNESCO Chair of Intercultural Policy of the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki was of high importance for my further development and for deepening my knowledge and skills about ICC. I have followed seminars and online courses on multicultural education from international organizations (UNESCO, Council of Europe), as well as from various NGOs dealing with multicultural education and ICC.</p> <p>What kinds of multicultural activities do you use in your teaching/training activities?</p> <p>Intercultural communicative competence, (ICC), refers to the ability to understand cultures, including your own, and use this understanding to communicate with people from other cultures successfully. Ways to develop this competence include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learners producing material about their own country and culture, presenting it to the other learners and discussing it with them. ● Multicultural learners should be motivated to develop a sense of identity.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respect for languages and cultures diversity should also be taught. ● Getting advice on working with children and families from different cultures, fostering bilingualism, and encouraging tolerance and self-esteem in a classroom. ● Learn how to successfully reach out to refugee and migrant parents in just a few simple steps. ● Connect with Kids and Parents of Different Cultures and build good relationships with the students' diverse families. <p>The educational material provided by the Council of Europe, such as the COMPASS and COMPASITO are highly recommended, as they include a wide range of multicultural educational activities for various age groups.</p> <p>Problems/difficulties faced, successful experiences.</p> <p>Definitely the biggest difficulty within a multicultural class is the language and communication issue. The Greek educational system does not allow for the presence of intercultural mediators or translators. Therefore it is the biggest challenge and at the same time a burden that the educator has to overcome.</p> <p>Another challenge is the different, often competitive, cultural backgrounds of the learners. It is possible that in the same classroom should coexist learners from different ethnic or national origin that may be competitive due to historical and political factors. The best way to try to overcome these difficulties should be the development of a common shared vision that despite their past, they are now in a different cultural environment and they should focus on the efforts they need to make in order to successfully become part of the host country.</p>
<p>Reflections</p>	<p>Multicultural educational methods clearly have a beneficial effect in a classroom. Regardless of the educational context and the specific school environment, students can derive specific benefits resulting from this type of instruction. The obvious advantage of using these instructional methods is that students learn some basic information about diverse cultures and how groups of individuals differ from one another on the basis of culture, race, or both.</p> <p>By engaging in multicultural education, students also begin to accept their own cultures, which help to enhance self-knowledge and self-development. In order to understand oneself better, one needs to understand others as well as the cultural environment in which one lives. By equipping children with cultural knowledge, teachers are able to establish a solid foundation for the process of self-discovery and self-development. This, in turn, facilitates the process of self-acceptance, as children are able to grasp their racial, cultural, and ethnic identities, and fully embrace their cultural background.</p>

	<p>To this end, the main objectives of the INCrEAsE project are very important, as they foster and promote the core principles of multicultural education and ICC. In addition, within the context of the project a pool of potential educators will be developed. These educators have a wide experience in the field and are ready to get involved in further disseminating the project's goals, providing for its sustainability and future impact.</p>
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