

A Teaching Project: “Our World, This Marvelous World, the Little One...the Great !!!”

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Abstract: A teaching project follows which was taught in the third grade of Primary school with the title: “Our world, this marvelous world, the Little one...the Great”... our world an adornment, in the subject of Religious Education. The opportunity of its development was given by an environmental concern upon the broader region of Corinthian Gulf. The basic target of the project is the multimodal investigation of world acquisition, the human position within and our responsibility for its protection. The student-centered approach is cross-thematic/multidisciplinary, since it is conveyed in approximately all the subjects of the Curriculum of Studies. The activities were implemented through life experienced, student-centered and team-cooperative methods while New Technologies and any other offered means are used. From the direct involvement of the students in the various activities of the project, it is concluded that its implementation resulted in religious and multi-level literacy of the students and the creation of sociable, active and happy children with developed environmental consciousness.

Key words: world/home, creation, responsibility, multilevel literacy

1. Introduction

In the C2 class of the 1st Primary School of Nafpaktos city, in Greece, during the 2017–2018 school year, and for two months, a cross-thematic/multidisciplinary teaching scenario was developed, according to the New Curriculum of Studies of the Greek Ministry of Education (ΥΠ.Ε.Π.Θ. 2003; Ι.Ε.Π., 2014) within the subject of Religious Education. 12 students participated, divided into mixed teams of boys and girls. The scenario with the title: “Our world, this marvelous world, the Little one...the Great!!” had its cause in the environmental issue concerning the appearance of number of jellyfish in the Corinthian Gulf. In general, the specific thematic unit of Religious Education is related to the daily experiences of the students since they live in a semi-urban environment. These experiences from students’ personal, family and school life, are reported, described and are related to biblical narrations, religious stories, artistic approaches, musical hearings or pieces of art.

Therefore, the superposition between Orthodox tradition to a broader Christian one, the two monotheistic-Abrahamic traditions, Judaism and Islam or other religions, gains a personal meaning. In addition, religious literacy is transformed into a field of meetings and conversations towards the rest educational fields, encouraging children to approach Christian values (love, respect to World Creation) that help to the building and

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adopting of new attitudes and ways of life, which contribute to individual development and amelioration of the world. The new requirements that appeared in the beginning of the 21st century, as well as the general sociocultural and financial developments, both in the internal part of the country and in the international field, made apparent that religious education of all students, with no distinction, is recognized as a necessary term, and as a right for their multilateral and integrated education. In the field of education, as the Behavioral theory fades away and the Cognitive Theory along with Constructivism dominate, learning is not anymore considered as the passive intake of the offered knowledge, but in a great extent is considered as a construction, a personal and interpersonal at the same time effort, which develops and modifies through involvement in a perpetual procedure of bidirectional negotiation and conversation (Ματσαγγούρας, 2000; Ι.Ε.Π., 2016). The Curriculum of Studies goes along with the national legal frame, and the contemporary sociocultural realities, whilst it is “flexible and multilevel”¹. At the center, Orthodoxy remains as a tradition, without being converted into catechism or religion, maintaining the necessary balances between the familiar and the different. The request of religious literacy, as a necessary part of religious education, remains important because it contributes to the configuration of religious, self-conscious citizens who are amenable to conversation with opposite aspects (Ι.Ε.Π., 2014). In the subject of religious education, conversation is either guided or free and it depends on the topics (Ι.Ε.Π., 2016; Μητροπούλου, 2015). The teacher should, in any case, function as a learning leader with the minor involvement possible, control the procedure and encourage students to participate in the learning procedure (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2016; Illeris, 2009; Ματσαγγούρας, 2002). The teacher shall be the organizer and the coordinator of the project, the inspirator holding a supportive role, while some other times, he/she watches and helps in the task distribution and the team creation (Ματσαγγούρας, 2003; Ι.Ε.Π., 2016). A special interest is shown in the use of Computers, both by the educators and children (Ετεοκλέους & Παύλου, 2010), for the quick access to information and the cultivation of multiple skills of all students (Κόμης, 2004; Βακαλούδη 2012; Μητροπούλου, 2007, 2015).

2. Aims and Targets

The new Curriculum of Studies presents religious education through realistic teaching aims and targets, discreetly, with acceptance and sensitivity towards anything different. The basic aim is the initial approach of the external- symbolic expression of Christianity, and then its internal dimension concerning its quality function and its special features (Χριστοδούλου, 2017; Ι.Ε.Π., 2014). The basic topics of this project are not only the abstraction of the world as an adornment, as our home, and as God’s creation, but the responsibility we shall have to protect it. According to the expected learning results, at the end of the unit, students are expected to a) describe their personal experiences from the nature, b) analyze and detect in biblical or other holy texts the relation between Christians and nature, c) ascertain from the life of Saints the reconciliation of human and creation, d) cultivate a respectful attitude towards creation and creatures, e) highlight nature’s elements in the worship of Christianity and of other religions, f) participate in acts and interfering of ecological sensitivity. The expected proficiencies are related to: the knowledge and understanding of the religious world, the understanding of the cultural range of the religious phenomenon, the personal cultivation of values and attitudes, the development of moral consciousness (based on the scheme “me and others”), the cultivation of democratic consciousness and practice, the participation in teaching procedure (Ι.Ε.Π., 2014).

¹ <http://www.iep.edu.gr/>.

3. Methodology

The contemporary learning theories, suggesting cross-thematic/interdisciplinary and alternative teaching forms, gave the opportunity that the subject of Religious Education be related to other subjects such as Greek Language, History, Environmental Studies, Drama, Music, Art, Computers and Flexible Zone (Κάκκου, Ψαρομηλίγκος et al., 2012). Twelve hours were spent from the relevant unit of the Religious Education whereas additional hours were used from other subjects related to the project. The collaborative method was followed and the students took on roles and tasks according to their interests, needs, and tendencies (Barry, 2012; Ματσαγγούρας, 2007). Many experiential/communicative acts and investigating/discovering approaches took place as well. Furthermore, the Project methodology was applied. Concerning the teaching techniques the following activities were used: creative expression, art work (Κόκκος et al., 2011), brainstorming, narration, conversation, web searching, music tasks, TPS (think-pursue-share) approaches: “Doing Theology with students”, dramatization, worksheet filling, and self-assessment worksheet filling (I.E.Π., 2014). Moreover, social events, cooperation with public sectors and visits were done. Concerning the logistics material which was used: the Religious Education File (I.E.Π., 2017), the teacher’s guideline for Religious Education for Primary and high schools (I.E.Π., 2016), various supervisory material, the classroom, the assembly hall and the computer room. A contract was signed between students and teams defining the terms of completing the duties each time. The only disadvantage referred was the lack of time due to the number of tasks and the inadequate modern technological supply of the classroom. That’s why a laptop was used and transferred in the class.

In conclusion, should be supported that modern psycho-pedagogic theories are adopted for the promotion of religious learning, while a large variety of teaching approaches may be put into practice in the world of class, through the use of “Project” (Καρυδά, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978; Dewey, 1897). Modern multimodality and interdisciplinary teaching helps in order critical thinking, self-reflection, cooperation and acceptance, empathy, as well as the metacognitive abilities every student/and future citizen needs, be cultivated through the “Project”: “Our world, this marvelous world, the Little one...the Great !!!” (Χρυσάφιδης, 2011). Realizing all the above, through a pertinent theoretical and empirical context, this article aspires to shed light on the relevance of the use of “Project” to the accomplishment of the learning goals set for the subject of “Religious Education” in primary school, as they are indicated as “Expected Learning Outcomes” or “Expected Competences” in the New Analytical Syllabus. Furthermore, the project aims to create a relevant fertile contemplation on this matter of education, which could lead to more suggestions addressed to the educational community concerned, and to the subsequent implementation of ameliorative and feedback teaching strategies, in order the best learning results in that particular subject to be delivered (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; DuFour, 2004).

3.1 Task Description

3.1.1 Phase A: (Starting Point- Orientation- See Annex for Details)

The actualization of the project had its cause in an environmental problem, located in the broader area of Corinthian Gulf, during the summer and has to do with the appearance of number of jellyfish. Children at first refer their personal experiences. Then, they locate the problem in the web extrapolating their concern. After a conversation, the students jump to the conclusion that humans are responsible for such problems. The children’s conscious raising was made obvious by accepting to perform a theatrical play in order to spread ecological messages to the public. In this phase, after a conversation the teams are created and the targets of the scenario are

defined.

3.1.2 Phase B (Actualization of the Activities of the Project, See Annex for Details)

- 1) Experiential activities
- 2) Collaborative/ investigating activities
- 3) Activities of creative expression
- 4) Several visits, events and cooperation with public sectors
- 5) Web searching (for each activity precise reference to the annex), activities, games and exercises from computer software²

3.1.3 Phase C (see annex for details)

The reflection of the activities included artistic creations, publishing in the local press, uploading in the web (F.B.), poster making, and creation of POWER POINT software which was presented by the students at the end of the school year. In collaboration with the I.T. teacher, the tasks were posted through software in the school's website³.

3.2 Assessment

The assessment at the beginning (diagnostic: in the form of questions and conversation), has to do with the required knowledge and attitudes of the children. During the process (configurative) the teacher checks the projects of the teams and controls and encourages the participation of the children in each activity. Any “mistakes” or omissions consist of indicator of accomplishment of the teaching goals and targets. The assessment here has a reflective character and its aim is to overhaul and continually improve the teaching process (Καραμηνάς, 2010; Tripp & Peter, 2012). The final assessment focuses on the quality of the work produced. Each student's performance during the worksheet filling is taken under consideration and the teacher also checks if the students gained the desired knowledge and skill (see above). Mainly the teacher assesses the effort of the student upon the tasks taken, the concern which has been expressed, the initiative and the creativity of the student, the willingness for cooperation with the other school members, the respect and maintenance of the rules of schooling environment (I.E.Π., 2014, 2016) In the case of the above given project, the performance of the student is neither assessed in total nor his memory performance in several tests.

4. Conclusion

The actualization of the above cross-thematic/ interdisciplinary project, it is considered that it had been a pleasant teaching experience for the children and that contributed to their personal happiness and development since it is critical that the students participate willingly to the implementation of the project's activities. In addition, it is estimated that the experiences and the knowledge of the students became meaningful and were conscientiously related to activities (metacognition). In action the students created teams and in cooperation with associations and public sectors participated in intervening acts having to do with nature and environment's protection (theatrical play, regional coast cleaning, flower planting). As a result, religious literacy was cultivated, since the children identified the world as God's creation (according to biblical narrations). The ecological sensitivity of the students was expressed as well as the considering attitude of required respect towards creation, creatures and elements of nature in general. It could also be supported that the hearing ability through

² <https://iep.edu.gr/thriskoftika/υλικόεικόνωνκαιμουσικήςσταθρησκευτικά>.

³ <http://1dim-nafpakt.ait.sch.gr.index.php/γ-τάξη>.

conversations, the writing skill through expressive activities and the sense of responsibility are enhanced. Moreover, the acts of the project and their reflection on a local level allowed the school to open its gates and relate to the society. A possible extension of the scenario, as the children suggested in the self-assessment worksheet, could include more visits, watching relevant films or documentaries or artistic interventions in the town.

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Annex

A Project: “Our World, This Marvelous World, the Little One...the Great !!!”

Maria Maragkou

1. **Title of the teaching project:**
“Our world, this marvelous world, the Little one...the Great!!!”
2. **Description of the teaching project/detailed elaboration**

Phase A (Starting point)

The actualization of the project had its cause in an environmental problem, located in the broader area of Corinthian Gulf, during the summer and has to do with the appearance of number of jellyfish. This made it difficult, even impossible, for people to swim there. It also resulted in serious problems for the economy of the coastal regions. Children at first refer their personal experiences from the previous summer. Then, they locate the problem in the webs (<https://iskra.gr/κορινθιακός>; <https://www.lifo.gr/now/greece/18673/>; <http://www.kathimerini.gr/959924/article/epikairothta/ellada/ane3hght>). The pollution of air, surface, sea, rivers and lakes is a fact. Then, the students are invited to corporately write on board what impressed them from the conversation and the web searching. After the discussion and the argument that followed, the students jumped to the conclusion that humans are responsible for such problems to the detriment of nature’s balance. The realization and the consciousness of the children upon these issues was expressed with the form of a theatrical play (the class accepted the invitation offered) and participated in an ecological play in “Papaharalampeios Hall” of the town. The play was performed in cooperation with the school’s drama teacher, the non-governmental organization “PRASSINO-MPLE” and the Municipality of Nafpaktos city.



Figure 1 Snapshot of the Performance



Figure 2 The DVD of the Performance

Phase B (Actualization of the activities of the project)

1st Activity

As summer approaches, several articles on the local press turn up referring to the topic of “Jellyfish...” Relevant newspapers are processed in the class (collaborative/exploratory activity) and the “Jellyfish phenomenon” is located again. Our concern for the human attitude towards nature-our common home comes up in the frame of the 8th unit of the subject of Religious Studies. An experiential activity takes place: brainstorming with the word “world”. Children refer what the world means to them and write it on the board. They also do the same in teams and with several-shaped labels.

2nd Activity

In connection with the previous activity the students are called to “peg” their opinions for the world in the “clothes line”. In web sites (<http://iep.edu.gr/thrisketika/>, <https://www.aggouria.net/ta-10-megalitera-zoa-tou-planiti/>, <https://www.google.gr/search>), the splendor and uniqueness of our planet is emerged. Our world, from the smallest to the biggest or strangest plant or animal, unfolds in front of our eyes. “The earth looks like a painting.....when you look it from above...” (<https://www.google.gr/search>, <https://youtu.be/pR240P9z5Zw>) and for a reason children sing along: “You should love mountains and the sea.....familiar and unfamiliar lands...” (<https://www.eros-erotas.gr/%CCF%82->). A discussion follows upon the meaning of “world-ornament”. In the end, students are asked to draw in canon paper what they liked from the songs they listened.



Figure 3 Team Collage

3rd Activity

A discussion takes place on the subject: “Are there useless animals?” and we end up that each creature, owes its own distinct place in creation’s balance. Collaboratively analyzing and making use of teaching units from History and Environmental Studies we come to the conclusion: “that animals help humans”. The result of the work is displayed in class.



Figure 4 Displaying the Result of the Work

4th Activity

Expanding the previous the children recall their knowledge from the History subject, since they have been taught that humans have been living in nature since Stone Age and prehistory. They had been using stones as tools their food was assured from the direct

natural environment. The land ensured the sources for their survival. Thus, it was reasonable for them to adore land as a Goddess and give her an outstanding position in their worship as well as several names occasionally. Concerning this issue, the direct relation between human beings and nature and animals, a teaching program presentation was held by an archeologist-researcher of the Aitolokarnania and Lefkada Antiquities Authority. The presentation was done with the use of PowerPoint logistic in the school's assembly Hall. Both team games for comprehension consolidation and worksheet exercises followed (Στάικου, 2016).

5th Activity

In this phase students in teams play the experiential activity “alphabet game”, finding an animal and a plant for each letter of the alphabet. In some cases, finding a name was hard so a web research was done (<https://www.youtube.com/>, and <https://atticapark.com/el/animals/by-letter/>). A discussion follows about domestic animals that children may have at home as pets. This activity gains an experiential character since the students live in a semi-urban environment and have many relevant experiences and pets at home. Also, we had an interesting visit... of a turtle and a rabbit in class. The opinions of the students related to the animals are written on the whiteboard. Observation and discussion followed due to the visit and then in connection with the subject of language, a production of written speech with the title: “My favorite animal....description, how I feel about it, what I share with it, how I take care of it...”

6th Activity

“Our world.... the Little one the Great...” fits in a handful, in a hug and because it is so sensitive we shall protect it. The team construction of a sculpture depicting the planet Earth under the surveillance of the Art teacher, expressed the feelings of love and the thoughts of the children for responsibility, something that every man should show towards our common home!

7th Activity

In our school and in the framework of our project we attended a briefing speech made by a representative of a non-governmental Organization on the issue of the usage limitation of plastic bags. The children, being already conscious, made placards bearing slogans in favor of nature's protection.

8th Activity

The uniqueness of the creation, as the highest godly creation, makes it important that we locate and confront any problems that may occur. Thus, for instance we discuss and bring to surface the problem of extinction of some animals and plants. In websites (<https://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/ta-zoa-tis-elladas-se-kindyno>, <https://www.wwf.gr/endangered-species>) and leaflets we locate regions protected by international Treaties or regions that protect wildlife (e.g., Arktouros center). We find relative books in the school library and list some species. Then, likewise Noah we construct an ark (from the schoolbook: Old Testament, Gen.7–8) and we put inside effigies or pictures of rare plants and animals, because “all creatures worth being saved”. Expending the activity further, we visited websites from the C' and D' class logistic (<https://ts.sch.gr/repo/online-packages/dim-thriskeftika-c-d>) related to “Noah's Ark” and played games, puzzles, exercises: find the correct, find the word.



Figure 5 Working in the Computers Lab

9th Activity

A visit from a vet in our school, founding member of the animal welfare company of Nafpaktos, expressed the responsibility and care we should all have towards the world. A Power Point logistic view with related hyperlinks in the assembly Hall of our school, as well as a conversational discussion, puzzled and raised awareness of the children, concerning the behavior of humans towards

animals and especially stray animals. Through the speech there has been a reference to the relation of ancient people with animals and nature. In a worksheet, it was highlighted that all creatures worth being saved.

10th Activity

The world, as God’s creation, according to our ecclesiastical tradition, holds a dominant position and is being praised in religious narrations, stories and hymnologies. This is profound from related texts and gospels, found in the File of Religious Studies, pages 125-126, which are read aloud from the teacher to the students. A discussion and an assignment follow upon the hymn’s content in order to approach their religious meaning.

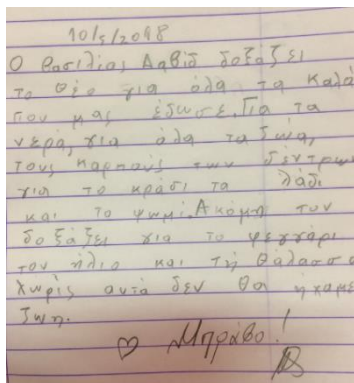


Figure 6 Written Assignment

11th Activity

Using the software of high school Class A’, we visited the website Creation (<http://www.ts.sch.gr/repo/online-packages/dim-thriskeftika-e-st/d11-web/htms/Thriskeytika.htm>) as we wanted to approach the Book of Religious Studies that the whole world is God’s Creation, and God cares for it. We also analyzed the text of the New Testament from the page 127 of the File of Religious Studies. (In Matthew, chapter 6, 26–29). Finally, the students completed a worksheet.

12th Activity

In connection with the previous activity we investigate and locate through biblical and other holy texts, the relation of the Christians with the nature and the environment. Children are called to narrate stories from ecclesiastical tradition. The relation of Saints and their reconciliation with the creation and its beauty is accredited through a team completion of a worksheet. This activity involves children’s drawings.

13th Activity

In the framework of our activities and visits during the utilization of our project, we availed ourselves of the possibility to visit a Christian Orthodox church in order to point out the hagiographic topics in the presence of natural environment, as it is depicted in orthodox areas as an ornament and as it was presented to us by the priest of the church in a relevant conversational discussion we had. Moreover, a web searching was done (<https://www.pemptousia.gr/2017/10/i-thesi-ton-zoon-stin-orthodoxia/>) to evaluate the knowledge gained a completion of a worksheet followed.

14th Activity

In connection to the above visit we saw through the net (<https://urantiacenter.gr/>, <https://www.pemptousia.gr>) holy symbols, holy plants and animals of other religions. A further web searching was done to locate the presence of natural environment in the worship of other religions in the world, referring to the common elements of the religions. Also, material of the Religious Studies File was applied. The research how nature is depicted in religion was accompanied with the completion of a relevant worksheet (an approach with the method Artful Thinking- “action game”).

15th Activity

In this phase a folk Indian tale (narration from the teacher) is read: « Nothing is useless in nature», page 132-4, from Religious Studies File. The concept of recycling is «tied» in this phase. In the web (https://youtube.com/watch?v=vlpur_A2064) we hear recycling songs and then the students construct recycling posters, jumping to the conclusion that “...nothing is useless in nature...”

16th Activity

In a visit to the town Hall after a discussion with the Mayor upon several topics, the students decide to write a letter — production of written speech concerning the adoption of an area in their town. They complete a worksheet with their relevant proposals. A virtual garden construction in a corner of our class offers the possibility to the students to “remake” a piece of the world. By watering our plants we express our love for greenery and our ecological sensitivity as well.

17th Activity

In connection to the previous activity, some students of the class who participate in a program of Creative Activities Center (K.Δ.A.Π) express their ecological awareness and take part in a flower planting in the area of Grimpovo in our town.

18th Activity

Among our visits, we organized an excursion in the Center of environmental activities “DRW” in Nafpaktos. There, the students had the opportunity to get in touch with the nature and play blithely in the fresh air. We also visited river Evinos and enjoyed the marvelous view, remembering the Greek mythology when Hercules crossed the river along with his wife Deianira. We also visited with other classes as well, the Center of Environmental Education in Thermo, Aitoloakarnania. There, the students walked in the nature, observed several plants and animals and learned about the function of watermills and water jets. This way, the children got to know how humans used the knowledge which was gained from the environment. Walking up, we visited waterfalls and admired both the beauty and the power of the water. In class, we completed worksheets given from the relevant program, and the students had the opportunity to describe their experience with the nature.



Figure 7 Working in Teams

19th Activity

In the website <https://ts.sch.gr/repo/online-packages/dim-thriskeftika-c-d/> we located “Human’s responsibility towards environment”. In the website <https://ts.sch.gr/repo/online-packages/dim-thriskeftika-> we surfed in the E’ class logistic and “participated in the battle for a more humane world”. On page 132, in the File of Religious Studies, a reference is done on the fest days concerning the environment as well as activities 2,3, on page 136. In class, a worksheet is completed. Finally, the students of the class, turning the gained knowledge into right values and attitudes, they took part in the scheduled act of coastal cleaning of our town.

PHASE C (Project’s activities Reflection)

At first, the reflection of the activities included a performance of a theatrical play. For its promotion, the students made a poster which was distributed in all the schools of the town. The performance was announced in the local press, it was also posted on the net (FB) while it was presented in a digital form (DVD). During the activities, all photographic material and videos were saved in the class’ computer. At the end, in cooperation with the children and the teacher a Power Point logistic was created. “The world — our

common home”, has been recognized as unique and admirable ornament demanding our respect and protection. The activities made, were presented from the students to their parents in a Power Point form in an event which was held at school in the end of the year (Ετεοκλέους-Γρηγορίου & Φωτίου, 2012; Τοκμακίδου, Καλογιαννίδου et al., 2010). After the presentation, a party followed. In cooperation with the I.T. teacher, a post in a Power Point logistic has been made on the school’s official website (<https://1dim-nafpakt.ait.sch.gr/index.php/γ-τάξη>).



Figure 8 The Poster of the Performance



Figure 9 Presentation of the Activities Through Computers