

## Freinet Pedagogy in Integration Class

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**Abstract:** Based on the data of educational research, the important role of students' interests and physical curiosity is recognized nowadays as a starting point for an efficient learning process. By making use of the Freinet pedagogy, which includes a set of techniques and tools we can proceed to the development of free expression, communication, multiple literacy and active citizenship. To achieve the teaching objectives of the Integration Class of our School, the “What’s New?” and the “Little Books” tools were selected.

The aim of this paper is to describe the application of the above two techniques in the Integration Class and to evaluate their effectiveness in developing cognitive, social and communication skills among students of different age and cognitive level who face learning disabilities.

**Key words:** Freinet pedagogy, techniques-tools, “What’s New?”, “Little Books”, integration class, learning disabilities

### 1. Introduction

The distinguished French educator and reformer of education Celestin Freinet (1896–1966) systematically introduced his pedagogical philosophy of education in the second quarter of the 20th century. His pedagogy is based on fundamental principles and consists of a set of techniques, ways of organization and working methods. We are referring to the principles of:

- cooperation and citizenship (using cooperative learning to give student practice in civic responsibility activities);
- community-cooperative organization of school life (cooperation to define the management of work, the separation of responsibilities and the application of rules of life and work);
- free expression and communication (cultivation of free opinion and expression regardless of restrictions);
- “natural” method of learning (students learn by emphasizing on their interests and sensitivities);
- research and experimental trial and error (students learn through experience);
- connection between school and community (effective interrelationship between school and with its associate communities) (Peyronie, 1999, pp. 95–106).

For their application in the context of education, appropriate techniques are followed and tools are applied with the ultimate goal of respecting the rhythm of each student and his final emancipation and autonomy. We note as such methods:

- the student board,

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- the school cooperative,
- field research and action research,
- research work plans (project method),
- the “what’s new?”,
- the printing press and the school newspaper,
- the little books,
- the school correspondence,
- the cinema,
- the school library,
- the digital narrative,
- the free text (Freinet, 1977, pp. 121–131; Badikian, 2017, pp. 11–13).

The above principles and techniques are kept alive in the name of Freinet Pedagogy or the Modern School Movement, which are applied in many countries around the world, creating an international network of teachers and schools — we refer to the International Federation of the Modern School Movement (FIMEM-Fédération Internationale des Mouvements de l'école Moderne - pédagogie Freinet) — and to the Cooperative Institute of the Modern School (ICEM - Institut Coopératif de l'École Moderne) which aims to create and disseminate educational material. In addition, Freinet’s pedagogical approach has permeated even more liberal approaches, paving the way for Institutional Pedagogy (Gatou, 2018) and the Teaching Techniques team (J. Oury, F. Oury, M. Lobrot). This group stressed the need to design a way of organizing the classroom, defining techniques and tools that enable students to decide on the rules of school community life, putting into operation internal social institutions that they establish based on the daily life they experience (e.g., classroom rules, responsibilities, services, student councils). By this way teachers and students can work critically to change, to a little or a great extent, the reality that surrounds them for the better.

It is the responsibility of each school to fulfill its pedagogical role, by serving the learning, social and emotional needs of the student’s majority avoiding exclusion and discrimination. In the context of the inclusive education of students in the classrooms of the regular education School, the Integration Class offers systematic pedagogical support to students with special and/or regular educational needs, with a long-term goal to alleviate their difficulties, mainly in the subjects of Language and Mathematics, to improve their learning readiness, and to acquire social skills for functional integration and autonomy within the limits of school life and society (Soulis, 2002).

During the planning of the educational process, the teacher is given the opportunity to properly modify his teaching practices for the most effective adaptation of the student’s ability to the events of the school. Students attending the Integration Class need a different teaching way in order to learn (Floratou, 2002), thus many supervisory tools and materials are used and alternative learning methods are employed, to enable each student to interact with the teaching methods provided. Some of the philosophical principles but also the techniques and tools of Freinet pedagogy align with the teaching objectives and their implementation in the educational context of the Integration Class.

For the achievement of the didactic objectives of the Integration Class of our School, the 7th Primary School of Metamorphosis, Athens, Greece, during the school year 2019–2020 the “What’s New?” and the “Little Books” methods were selected. In the former method, the student group takes into account their own experience and let the information enter the classroom. It is a time for oral speech that can lead to writing situations and group or

individual research. In the latter method, students act, research and collaborate to create a work that will be published, that is, a work to be addressed to a real audience. Students do not just do a homework, but talk and write so as to be heard and read. Learning by experience is an engaged learning process through which students “learn by doing” and by cogitating about the experience. It’s a great opportunity for them to develop intellectual, creative, emotional, social and physical skills.

## 2. Objectives: Aspirations

Our main goal was a. the achievement of the teaching objectives of the Intergration Class by employing alternative ways of learning that are more related to the experiences and interests of students and b. the differentiation of the desired goals and skills in a group of students with various age and cognitive level who face learning disabilities.

The objectives were also to get the students to accept each other with their special characteristics, to cooperate, to adopt research as a means of learning and to develop to a greater extent the skills of oral and written expression and reading.

## 3. Methodology

The realization of Freinet pedagogy in Greece in the last decade and its practical applications in the classrooms are expressed in the action of the pedagogical team “Skasiarchio”<sup>1</sup>.

This team supervises training courses in institutional pedagogy as well as the setting up of autonomous pedagogical reception and implementation in practice groups of Freinet pedagogy. I got acquainted with the Freinet school through the training carried out by the above group in a pilot educational program for the implementation of Freinet pedagogy. The main objectives of this program were for each teacher: i) to acquire education as a teacher with influences from Freinet pedagogy. ii) to acquire a theoretical and empirical background as well as ideas on how to integrate Freinet pedagogy into his teaching at school. iii) to learn to design, organize and apply the fundamental principles of Freinet Pedagogy in his teaching method at school.

### 3.1 Techniques-Tools

From the quiver of Freinet pedagogical tools, the techniques of “What’s New?” and “Little Books” were used. The students of the Class worked first in small groups of 3–4 people, as they were formed in the daily class timetable, and then every 15 days in the plenary of the 14 students.

#### 3.1.1 “What’s New” in Other Words How School Takes the Experience Into Account

It is a time for oral speech that allows information to enter the classroom with the aim of creating a meaningful framework of free speech, and at the same time, turning the ideas that are heard into work plans-project method (giving the opportunity for group or individual research, constructions, writing situations) (Badikian, 2017, pp. 38–39; Lachlou, 2015). In the interest of free expression, this speaking time is lived in authentic communication situations. It includes very different types of organization depending on the challenges that each student can express. The following points of the procedure are highlighted:

- Place of speaking: Children are given the floor, they convey to the class their everyday experiences; in this way they practice oral speaking, they prepare for writing, they learn the structural features of speech

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at: <https://skasiarxeio.wordpress.com>.

and textual elements. Also they have the opportunity to minimize their stress, to create group bonds and to develop a climate of mutual confidence.

- Layout of the space: the circular layout of the classroom is preferable for better communication and eye contact.
- Specific time and place: it is a morning listening that takes place once or twice a week and lasts around 15' to 30' minutes. Every morning the class gathers in a specific space for this purpose. Three or four children announce the subject of their presentation. The rest listen to them and ask questions. Thus begins discussion. The original, timid, anarchic or standardized speeches are slowly becoming more lively, interesting and structured. If there is not enough time for those who wish to speak, we extend the session a little or continue the discussion in the next meeting so that they will be the first to speak next time.
- Chair: initially chaired and coordinated by the teacher and then by a student selected to do that.
- Life album: is a notebook in which the names of the children and the topics of their presentation are recorded (the recording can also be done electronically).
- Laws, Ritual:

laws: there are laws with which we must comply: -We respect whoever takes the floor and we do not make fun! — What is heard in the discussion does not come out of the group! (should be kept confidential) — The topics for presentation are set freely!

ritual: we systematically follow the use of certain symbolic phrases, e.g., The chairman starts the meeting by saying: the “What’s new?” begins..., “the speech is given to” and we systematically use certain objects: [Each speaker takes the stick (wand) of speech — speaks at the time given to him by the hourglass]. The former helps to keep the children motivated and facilitates the flow of the conversation and also sometimes helps the children to get over a more personal or stressful moment. We can use various other objects (besides wand and hourglass) as ritual objects during the discussion as well (e.g., a pen, a toy, an alarm clock, a digital clock).



Figure 1 Preparing the Morning Session of “What’s New?”



Figure 2 Ritual Objects of the “What’s New?”

### 3.1.2 Little Books

It is a tool for free expression and communication, collaboration and creative work, cultivating writing and reading skills.

Students with a simple A4 paper arranged in a specific way [(folding 3 times and cutting with scissors)] —

(there is a cover with the title of the Little Book and the name of the author or authors and a back cover with the name of the school)] create small 8-page booklets and illustrate them. They can be produced in multiple copies for reading by classmates, family, friends and other peer groups in other classes and/or schools. They can even type the texts on the computer in a special form, and scan the drawings-images (Lachlou, 2015).

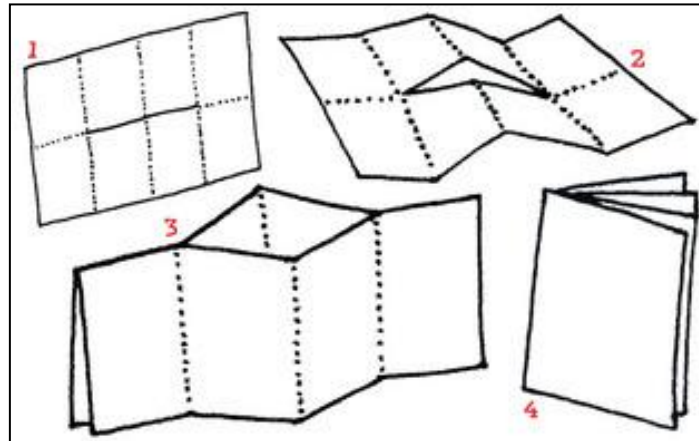


Figure 3 Making Little Books

The topics vary: issues that interest or concern the children from their family or social life (e.g., from favorite animals, toys, excursions and activities to the universal values of peace and ecological consciousness).

It is a driving force for students to create works in a real communication situation as they will have real readers. In addition to the “Your Own Little Book” website <http://mikra-vivlia.weebly.com> students can join a new student community<sup>2</sup>, the Little Books writing and reading community, by writing and publishing the Little Books that they create in the classroom with their classmates.

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<sup>2</sup> Created in 2015 by Sofia Lachlou, Dr. of language teaching, French language teacher in public education.



(a) My robot

(b) Birds of prey (eagle)

(c) New Years' Eve

Figure 4 Topics of Little Books



Figure 5 Writing Little Books

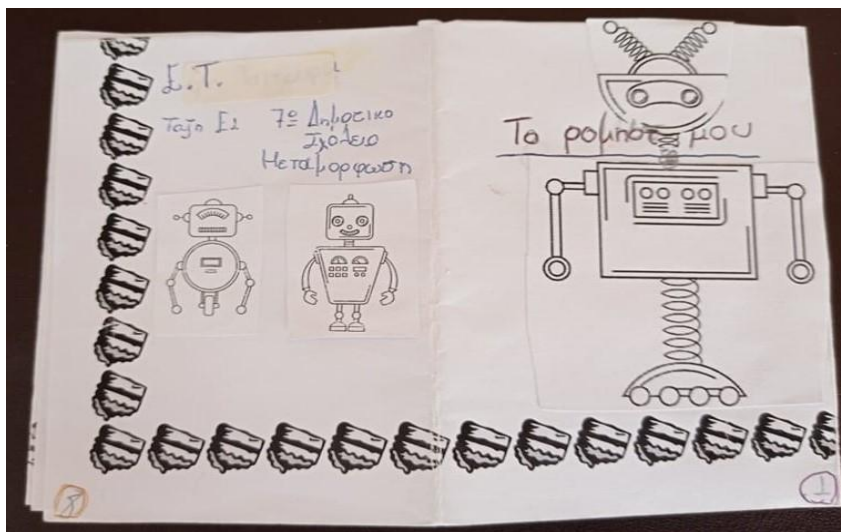


Figure 6 The Cover and the Back Cover (Page 1 and 8) of the Little Book (My Robot)

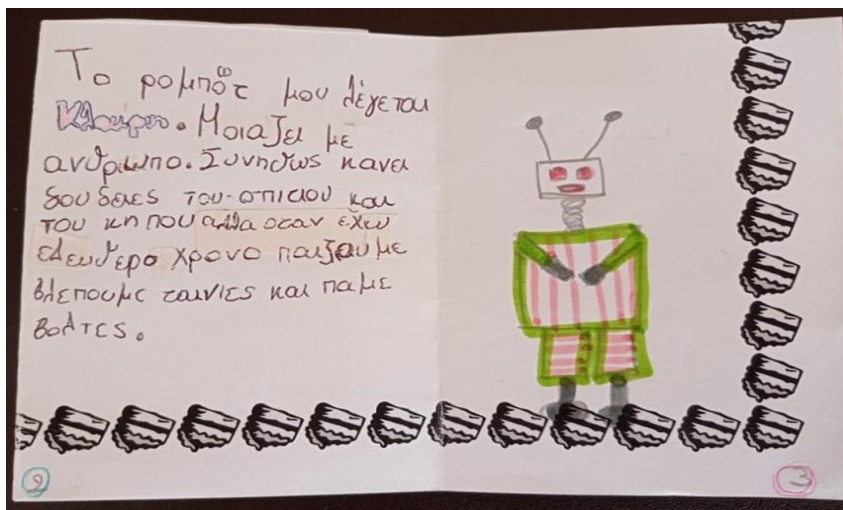


Figure 7 Page 2 and 3 of the Little Book (My Robot)

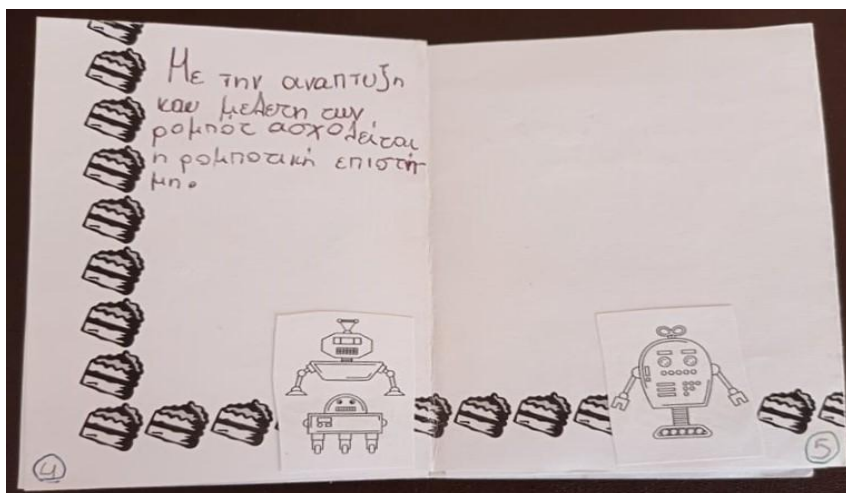


Figure 8 Page 4 and 5 of the LITTLE BOOK (My Robot)



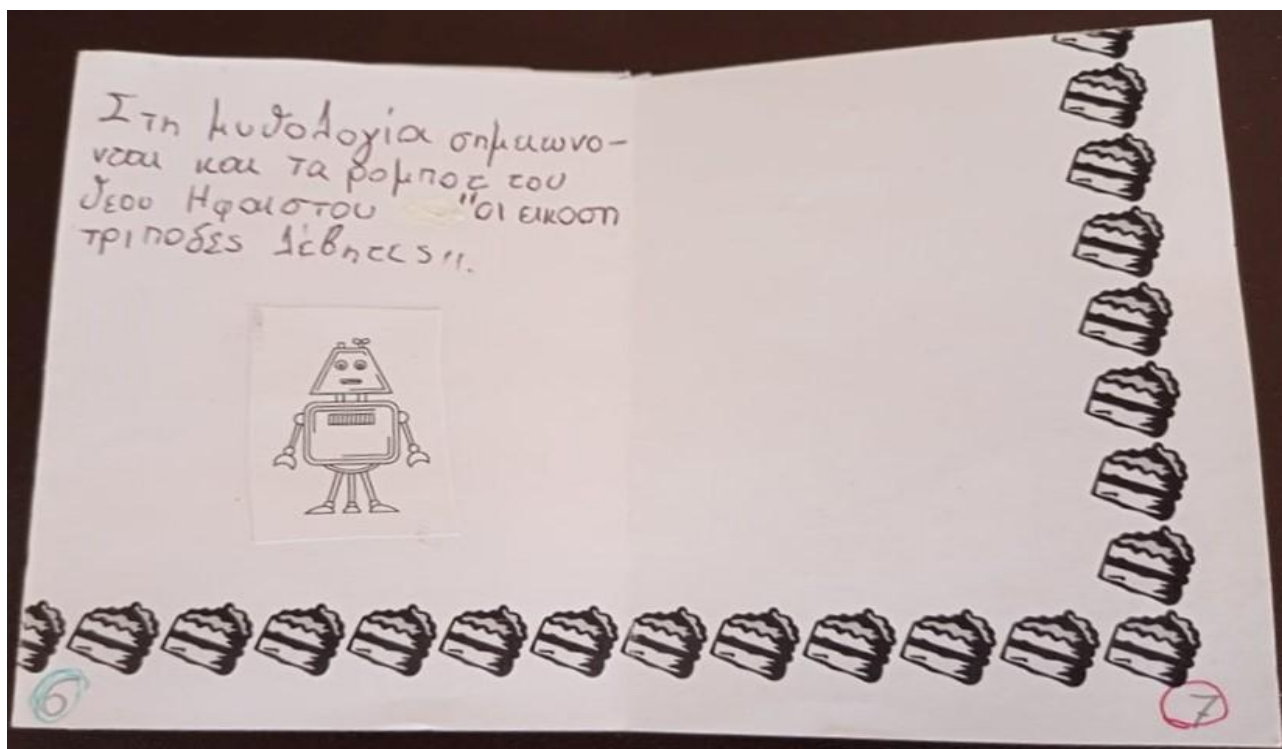


Figure 9 Page 6 and 7 of the Little Book (My Robot)

#### 4. Activities

During the school year 2019–2020 we make use of the above two techniques [the “What’s New?” and the “Little Books”] in the Integration Class of our School.

The “What’s New?” was initially applied to the small groups of 3–4 students, as they were formed in the daily class timetable, and then every 15 days in the plenary of 14 students. During the morning sessions the children's lives entered the classroom and they had the opportunity to share with the group their experiences, interests and discoveries out of school: they told their classmates what they had experienced, seen, heard; they showed objects and/or toys they liked; they presented their favorite hobbies or their own constructions; they read texts or poems they liked.

From these discussions, further work directions emerged. Research work plans, were developed around group work over a given period of time and around a common theme. These group assignments allowed us to progress toward the essential learning.

- we dealt with robots (gathered information, built brick machines, wrote LITTLE BOOKS about robots)
- we did research on birds of prey (we collected information, we watched documentaries, we constructed an eagle from wooden pieces, we wrote LITTLE BOOKS about the eagle)

The “LITTLE BOOKS” as a creative writing proposal were composed in the small groups of 3–4 students as they were formed in the daily class timetable of the Integration Class. The issues that concerned us were: i) the celebration of the New Year’s Eve, ii) our favorite pets as well as iii. the robots and the eagle as mentioned above in the activities of “WHAT’S NEW?”.



Figure 10 Project Work Constructions: Eagle



Figure 11 Project Work Constructions: Robots



Figure 12 Searching for Information

## 5. Evaluation

Taking into account the above activities we noted that by applying Freinet's pedagogy methods the students were given the opportunity:

- to bring into class moments from their own lives and interests - to be actors in the learning process, which gave an extra meaning to the activities, motivation for learning and avoidance of routine.
- to express themselves freely and to communicate their ideas with respect to the linguistic level of everyone.
- to practice oral speech and cultivate the written word.
- to improve writing and reading skills through activities based on personal experience and action (experiential learning - learn by doing and by reflecting on the experience).
- to develop self-action, imagination and creativity.
- to create an atmosphere of trust and tightening of team bonds (rules: respect for each other, confidentiality).
- to release some of their stress by sharing facts and feelings within the group.
- to strengthen self-esteem as, even the most timid students, took the floor in front of the team and achieved goals through cooperation and the roles they took on.

In conclusion, the above actions inspired by Freinet's pedagogy contributed to the achievement of some of the pedagogical and didactic goals set within the Integration Class of our school mainly because they allowed the individualization of the desired goals and skills, the variety of activities, the alternation of learning tools and materials and the differentiation of working methods.

## 6. Summarizing

Freinet Pedagogy is in fact a pedagogical philosophy with a broader political educational vision. It is, therefore, an alternative method of education that develops freedom, democracy, cooperation, solidarity, equality and respect for diversity in everyday school life, not as simple knowledge but as a real life experience. In addition provides the students with the opportunity to work cooperatively in small or larger groups or even individually, respecting the rhythms and capacities of each one and give them the chance to be involved in their own learning.

By applying the above two methods in our integration class, we chose as the starting point of the teaching the experiences, the needs and the interests of the students, and we acted as facilitators of learning and not merely as distributors of information. Thus competition reduced and individualism gave way to mutual aid, cooperation, the pooling of knowledge and human relationships. Activities that respected the rhythms and abilities of every individual student contributed both to the improvement of language skills (oral and written expression and reading) as well as the improvement of social skills that made smooth the integration into the group.

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