Religion and Religious Diversity within Education in a Social Pedagogical Context in Times of Crisis: Can Religious Education Contribute to Community Cohesion?

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THEORY

PRACTICE

RESEARCH

In this article the author argues that the teaching of religion(s) in education, in a social pedagogical context, can encourage community cohesion especially when, during the current harsh crisis, the need for cohesion seems to be of paramount importance in enabling seemingly insurmountable problems to be overcome. At the same time minorities become vulnerable and diversity, a matter of high priority, comes to the fore. The author reviews evidence of research on the effect of educational intervention within Religious Education on student attitudes toward religious diversity. He proposes that constructivist methodology, using theatre/drama as a means of Religious Education, could give people the choice to be critical religious believers and active members in a society applying the fundamental social pedagogical principle of tolerance to and respect for the 'other'.

Key words: *religious education, diversity, social pedagogical context, community cohesion, action research, applied theatre.*

Introduction

Have you ever wondered why, in the March of 2013, the news that Pope Francis, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, had been elected leader of the Catholic Church made the headlines all over the world? Huntington would probably have answered that this phenomenon merely illustrates his opinion that 'the late 20th century has seen the global resurgence of religions around the world' (Huntington, 2002, p.64). Berger, moreover, would have added that albeit that recent decades have 'provide[d] a massive falsification of the idea' that secularisation and modernism would lead to a decline in religion, the world is, in fact witnessing a massive upsurge in religion around the world (Berger, 1999, p.6). As religion is clearly on the agenda, it can be used in the analysis of current social transformations and to interpret the serious implications that are posed

for both societal and individual development in a world suffering from a deep financial and moral crisis. Subsequently, education is important for cohesion in the community and human development (Hämäläinen, 2012). To be specific, Religious Education, as has been illustrated by recent research, could aim to prevent social exclusion while providing social inclusion, which are basic priorities for social pedagogy as well.

Religions and Religious Education in the post-modern world

Religions since the Enlightenment

It is a truism that since the Enlightenment many individuals, especially science-centred intellectuals, academics and politicians, have expected that, as Western nations developed, the process labeled secularisation would mean that religion would decline in significance. Of course, political notions of rights and participatory government have inevitably impacted on two famous revolutions in America and France, which in turn led to further revolutionary and counter-revolutionary theorising. Since then a new debate has come to the fore. Firstly there is education, which has come to be seen both as one of the aforementioned rights and as a way of endorsing and pushing forward the Enlightenment zeitgeist itself to a wider group of people while covering a wider field of knowledge (Coulby, 2008, p. 306). And secondly there is religion.

Furthermore, there are two simultaneous realities. Consider, on the one hand, the predominance of the scientific method as the means to knowledge, the extinction of any form of religious cosmology, as well as the important impact of the theory of evolution and, on the other hand, the institutional influence of religion, manifested by the Pope's election, the re-election of the president of The United States in November of 2004 (whose victory was attributed to the strength of religious factors influencing the way Americans voted) and Islamic values, which seem to have influenced different political events from the 1979 Iranian revolution onwards (Cush, 2007, p. 217). Despite the situation and expectations religion has persisted and continues to influence the public sphere in Europe and to be an important factor in human affairs universally. Who hasn't heard about the fierce Muslim reaction to the Danish cartoons in 2005 or, more recently, the Muslim reaction to the American film about the Prophet Muhammad? Religion and faith appear to be gaining substantially more ground even in the secular part of the world. What one may observe about the current situation is that 'modernism is dominant but dead' (Habermas, 2001, p. 1748). Therefore, it may appear that religious faith is the only solution in terms of creating new norms in society and providing individuals with clearly defined identities and existential security. It is essential that a religious revival with all its ensuing positive or negative effects is brought about, even if religion is reckoned in a modern broader way to contain new religious modes (Bell, 1978, pp. 48-55).

Religious Education in the post-modern era

The debate between education and religion is still ongoing. Secularisation has apparently influenced Western educational systems which are implicitly secular and tend to imply atheism, in some cases more overtly so than in others. Since educational reform has underpinned a curriculum that is based on the sciences and teaching itself reconceptualised as a scientific activity, scientists are loath to allow theological speculation to interfere with empirical and sensory observation and, as a result, religion and Religious Education (hereafter referred to as RE) are seen as having no meaning for such an educational enterprise. The assumption that God does not exist and the positivist conviction that only scientific and empirical methods lead to knowledge govern the construction of the curriculum in schools and its priorities. What is natural is that people question why RE is still in the curriculum when science displaces religion and therefore challenges the very appropriateness of the activity of RE (Bausor & Poole, 2002, p. 18). At the same time, pedagogical

insufficiencies in the subject have given ammunition to opponents who reject theological ideas and are mechanistic and materialistic in condemning RE for indoctrination and instructional catechesis.

In spite of this tendency, RE remains a part of the schooling system in most countries. It is influenced not only by the idea of secularity, but also by the extent of the secularisation of the state which determines the type of RE wherever it exists (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2012, pp. 44-45). Thus, RE has been influenced by the historical context and experiences of each country and so is, in each situation, confessional or non-confessional, compulsory or optional. In some countries different curricula exist, and so the content of the subject is partly confessional, or in some cases there are different approaches or optional subjects according to the region of the country or the type of school. Furthermore, there are countries that are committed to a strict separation of religion and state, where RE does not feature as a subject in the curriculum (Lähnemann, 2009). RE, as well as religion, survives in schools and in many respects is flourishing, because it is mainly a powerful anti-indoctrinatory subject promoting thinking in depth (Watson, 2012, p. 20).

RE still plays a pivotal role in the West but remains a controversial issue in the post-secular modern era. Suffice it to say that it is referred to more than ever in international declarations. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 2 guarantees the right to those of all religions, article 18 demands freedom of thought, religious belief and practice and article 26 articulates the right to education), all youngsters have the right to an education that promotes understanding and tolerance between national, racial or religious groups. That means that RE's exclusion from education undermines children's rights to an education that provides knowledge and ideas to further students understanding of their societies and the role of religions in the contemporary world (Evans, 2008). Of course parents have to be responsible for the upbringing and development of a child (article 18.1), but it is still the state's responsibility to ensure that all citizens are educated. As far as RE is concerned, it is the state's responsibility again to promote RE that would be a help for all parents and not a cause of problems (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2012, p. 46).

Moreover, in the European area there has been a dialogue for intercultural education since 2001, and different declarations, recommendations and projects illustrate the growing interest in religion in education and RE. A project on teaching religions in schools was launched in 2002 with the premise that, regardless of the truth or the falsity of each religion, religion is an integral part of life and culture. Consequently, religion should be understood by all citizens as part of their education. The Committee of Ministers agreed to a policy recommendation (CM/Rec(2008)12) that all Council of Europe member states should include the impartial study of religions within the curricula of their school systems. This recommendation provides a compelling cultural argument for the study of religions and incorporates ideas from the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. This White Paper is an important product of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, which emphasizes the great importance and relevance of interreligious dialogue (Council of Europe, 2008). It should be mentioned that the recommendation's principles provide for intercultural dialogue and its dimension of religious and non-religious convictions as significant factors for the development of tolerance and cultural coexistence (Jackson, 2014, p. 115). Among its objectives are the nurturing of a sensitivity to the diversity of religious and non-religious convictions as an element contributing to the richness of Europe, ensuring that teaching about the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions is consistent with the aims of education for democratic citizenship, human rights and respect for equal dignity of all individuals and promoting communication and dialogue between people from different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds (Council of Europe, 2008). Moreover, in Europe, when speaking of RE one has to bear in mind: 1) the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (a result of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) which was produced in 2007 and is an essential tool for study and knowledge about religions and beliefs in schools, based on the rationale of religious freedom (OSCE, 2007), and 2) the recommendation 1720/2005 which was adopted by the

Committee of Ministers in 2006 that promotes RE and especially religious studies in primary and secondary education (Council of Europe, 2005).

Finally, the REDCo project essentially defines the interest in RE since 2001. REDCo was funded by the research department of the European Commission over a period of three years from March 2006. The REDCo project included nine projects from institutions of eight different European countries, and as a result of the complete work a series of books have been published. Wolfram Weisse, the coordinator of the project, emphasizes in one of the books that 'in spite of a wide range of societal and pedagogical backgrounds, the research group holds one common conviction: religion must be addressed in schools, as it is too important a factor in social life and for the coexistence of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds throughout Europe [to be ignored]' (Weisse, 2009, p. 10).

The concept of diversity in education

Religious diversity

Different data gathered throughout the West show a significant increase in religious diversity. A variety of religions, an increasing diversity within religions and traditions and skepticism about religion in general or about some claims of religion articulate the reality. It is a post-modern phenomenon which reflects firstly pluralism not only among different religions but also in one religion and secondly an actual ethical, mutual and reversible relation between 'I' and the 'other' as Levinas (1991, pp. 35-36) notes. Diversity exists in order to define identity, and so identity has been constructed in relation to diversity (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2009, pp. 82-83). In view of this idea, religious diversity should be conceptualized in three different forms.

Traditional diversity

When a particular religion is dominant, a society is perceived as a religious society, where one religion enjoys cultural hegemony. The aim of education is to nurture students and inculcate in them particular religious beliefs and values. Greek society and education were like this up until the late 1990s.

Modern diversity

A society that is religiously and morally diverse is mainly the result of secularization and immigration. Globalization has gradually transformed societies and within them religious discrimination and intolerance have increased (Bayes & Tohidi, 2001; Kinnvall, 2014). Diversity is articulated not only among religions but also within one religion. The new situation challenges education to respond by cultivating positive attitudes to otherness. In Greek society the dawn of 2000 showed traditional diversity giving way to this kind of modern diversity.

Post-modern diversity

Post-modern diversity is the result of people structuring their identities by themselves, by choosing individually from a range of meanings. The process of individualization is a current phenomenon, and it is formed as a consequence of globalization and a post modern centralization of the individual and the 'other' (minorities). The latter is essentially a critical reaction to globalization. Within these conditions education provides students with a cognitive environment and skills to construct their identities from a variety of sources, sometimes diverse and contradictory (Barnes, 2012, p. 69). Of course researchers address that the expressed 'religious diversity' is ambiguous

and is used in various ways. Akkari (cited in Jackson 2014) indicates that religious diversity can refer to the internal diversity of a given religion, to the variety of relationships individuals might establish with an inherited religious tradition or to several religions being practised in the same space.

Greek society in the context of crisis

Greece became a favoured destination for immigrants after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In the Balkans all countries except for Greece and Turkey have a kind of communist regime. So the transition after 1989 was difficult and in cases painful and ruthless. More recently, Greece has become point of entry for hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees from all continents in transit to other European countries. Since Dublin II (Council of Europe, 2003) holds that asylum seekers to EU countries can only be evaluated and adjudicated in the country where they enter first, the geographical effect of this rule has been to allow Germany, France and other countries that are attractive destinations for migrants and refugees to offload onto Greece administrative, welfare and policing burdens. As a result, the country is now grappling with issues related to its highly porous land and sea borders, mounting asylum applications, an opaque immigrant detention system, allegations of human rights violations, the integration of the country's foreign-born permanent residents as well as continuous attempts to reform immigration policy. However, immigration policy has not been one of the priorities for the Greek government, especially since the financial crisis.

Greece is struggling under the weight of economic recession and austerity measures. Public debt and the government's decision to borrow from the IMF and the EU have changed the economic, political and social environment in Greece, while employment and income levels have shrunk for everyone, not only for immigrant populations. Moreover, competition within and between native-born Greeks and immigrants has increased, resulting in a dramatic rise of neo-fascism in Greece, particularly over the last decade, which has been noted worldwide. The Greek right-wing extremist party's campaign during the last national elections of 2012-2015 was based on concerns resulting from the Greek crisis, as well as virulent anti-immigration rhetoric. All the above have resulted in a harsh daily routine for all, lower wages, a contracting labour market and fewer regularized immigrants - drawing attention to immigration as a growing threat to the cohesion of the modern Greek community.

Education

Religious diversity in education is just as controversial an issue as all the migrant policy issues or others related to national identity and social cohesion. But it is also one of the marginalized matters of the State, especially during the present crisis.

The Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have a great interest in RE, albeit for different reasons: The former in order to preserve a sort of Orthodox RE in schools and the latter because the Ministry of Education and Religion Affairs is responsible for the curriculum and education policy (e.g. inter-cultural education) and both Ministries because they feel that they alone 'ought to handle' the religious/Muslim minority of Thrace. The native Muslims of Western Thrace (a region in the northern part of Greece bordering Turkey) are recognized as a religious minority according to the Lausanne Treaty (1923), and they comprise 50% of the population. According to the Treaty, in Thrace Muslims have the right to have their own educational system, which is organized in accordance with inter-state agreements between Greece and Turkey. Recently the Greek State amended a law from 2007, which was never implemented, and enacted a formal Muslim RE only for

the schools of Thrace and for students from the minority who attend Greek public schools and have the right to withdraw from RE due to reasons relating to their religious consciousness (Amendment of Law 3536/2007-16 January 2013). Although it seems fair and friendly to the minority, this movement is controversial because, at the same time, the State has radically transformed the RE curriculum for Greek compulsory education, aiming to have a non-confessional RE for all children regardless of their religion, tradition and worldviews (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2013). So instead of integrating all the students in the RE classroom, the amendment above marginalizes a number of students, emphasizing that they differ, and simultaneously constructs a new, strictly confessional type of RE, which has never existed in Greece and only for a particular region of the country.

As has been mentioned, the Greek Ministry of Education has constructed a new curriculum for RE (2011) while trying to reform the whole educational system. Until now the framework for RE in schools has been provided by the basic Law for Education (1566/1985), which requires that all students have to have been taught on a mandatory basis the *authentic* tradition of the Orthodox Church (article 1, paragraph 1). Besides article 13, paragraphs 1-2 of the constitution guarantee the basic right to freedom of religion and associate it with the development of religious consciousness. As a consequence, several interpretations exist in the pedagogical and theological area for the context of RE though the official organisation (Pedagogical Institute), which has had the responsibility for contributing to the curriculum since 1997, states that RE is an ordinary subject in the state education system, which tries to be faithful to the transmission of democratic values and critical openness (Ministry of Education & Pedagogical Institute, 2003, p. 174). Thus, until the recent Curriculum (2011), RE was considered an open-ended educational process that does fair justice to religious pluralism whilst providing religious literacy and supporting students in developing their cultural identity by teaching mainly Christian Orthodoxy, other Christian traditions, world religions and worldviews and in cultivating a spirit of solidarity, peace and justice, respect for religious diversity and coexistence with the 'other' (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015)

During the current conditions in the country, articulated above, Greek governments have been working on reconstructing the school programme and constructing a new curriculum. The new programme maintains RE as a subject within the national curriculum, conforming to its framework of targets, programmes of study, aims and attainments. RE starts in primary school and continues for 4 years for two hours per week. So it is in secondary schools (Gymnasium and Lyceum) that RE comprises six classes (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2015).

Within the new curriculum diversity has a central role. The basic aim of the curriculum remains religious literacy, but it is focused on educating citizens so as to develop religious consciousness, to be open to dialogue and tolerant of diversity. In the new curriculum RE is, according to its constructors, neither confessional nor catechetical. The curriculum frames the following statement aims:

- 'to construct a strong cognitive and comprehensive basis for learning about Christianity and Orthodoxy as a factor of spiritual reality, a living source of inspiration, faith, ethos, a key to the concept of the world, man, life and history and as a Greek and European cultural tradition;
- to provide students' with the knowledge of the phenomenon of religion in general and world religions in a sense of being a source of faith, culture and ethos;
- to support students in developing the skills, attainments, positions and attitudes of a religious literate person, cultivating at the same time moral and social awareness;
- to develop knowledge, critical understanding, respect and dialogue between students of differing religious backgrounds and moral orientations;
- to contribute to students' individual identity construction, holistic (religious, cognitive, spiritual, social, moral, aesthetic and creative) development through enquiry into the

concept and complexity of life' (Ministry of Education & Pedagogical Institute, 2011, pp. 18-19).

The contribution of social pedagogical interventions toward encouraging community cohesion among students

Religion and otherness in education

While the crisis illustrates the different problems related to it, basic social pedagogical principles, such as community cohesion and a society where there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities, have emerged and are inevitably appreciated more than ever. Of course, cohesion brings to the fore how schools promote community cohesion and RE considers issues of identity and diversity.

Within the school framework, in terms of the fundamental values and principles of social pedagogy[1] such as social justice, social criticism and reflection, social participation, social care, solidarity, inclusion, cohesion, personal and social empowerment, development, well-being and progress, these social pedagogical issues highlight the high priority given to the emergence of uniqueness, empathetic understanding and acceptance of the diversity of every human being (Mylonakou-Keke, 2013).

More specifically, regarding community cohesion, in a social pedagogical context this is related to cultures while at the same time depending on them. Cohesion exists where there are diverse values and all people regardless of backgrounds, nationality, race, religion and belief, gender or age are accepted. In a cohesive society all members feel that they belong, have similar opportunities and can achieve their potential. This society provides education and schooling for all, engaging students with controversial issues such as racism and diversity and ensuring they are equipped to identify and challenge extremist narratives. Cultures and traditions, moreover, play a central role. Cohesion seeks to reshape a deeply ingrained way of thinking, as all people have their own cultural heritage from previous generations. These social pedagogical ideas, values and beliefs enable them to cope with the present and overcome their problems. This is crucially important in the context of crisis. Community cohesion does takes into account the importance of culture, mostly seeking to ensure that the diversity found within society is counted as positive (Woodward, 2012, pp. 132-133).

Nowadays, the social pedagogical need of being educated to accept the diversity of 'others', to have a positive attitude towards them, realize their uniqueness, reinforce their dignity, empathetically understand how they feel and generally respect any difference is more essential than ever. This approach to diversity is highlighted as an important social pedagogical priority by many scholars (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011; Eriksson & Markström, 2003; Mylonakou–Keke, 2009, 2013; Petrie, 2011).

In a social pedagogical context, a RE that develops students' knowledge and understanding about the diversity and the need for mutual respect towards different religions and identities enables them to promote their self worth, embracing at the same time the value of inclusion and respect for all, builds national and global bridges and is what society demands regardless of the exceptions and some extreme views. However, the question still remains: How can religion or religions be a cohesive factor for the community?

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[1] These values and principles are, of course, encountered in different scientific fields, demonstrating the potential of interdisciplinary interconnections.

Tolerance is a post-modern dogma, and, as Pike (2012) has observed, even in the post-modern era schools lead children into certain doctrines or truths. For example, all the aforementioned aspects concerning respect and tolerance are what schools would rightly expect children to be 'indoctrinated' in. In this sense schools are not neutral, because they teach a belief in something (Pike, 2012, p. 114). Nevertheless, respect and tolerance are vitally important in our society and are needed to avoid ethno-centrism or a religion-centrism. In the context of social pedagogy and education, empathy is the skill to be cultivated in order to avoid the condemnation of paternalism (Martin, 2007, p. 56). The question extends to the school environment where believers, skeptics and non-believers are gathered together and their subject is religions. In other words, religions have to show that faith leaves room for dialogue and is not a strict form of static dogmatism.

However, for believers religion does not possess a certain epistemic answer to all issues, and faith does not claim to possess the truth nor the appropriation of truth, as Kierkegaard (1944) contends, attaching new learning since believers are driven by an existential and passionate need to understand truth (Kierkegaard, 1944, p. 203). In contrast, the monolithic view of truth brings up the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism. It is clear that the question of truth is at stake. But religion can't be summed up by a metaphysical system of thought, and this is a Christian view of religion and truth. Kierkegaard admits that Christianity is not the highest form of religion and rejects attempts to give it objective foundations (Kierkegaard, 1944, p. 18). Furthermore, the dynamism of pluralism is found in the unity of the Trinity where the otherness is 'absolute'. The 'other', the person is the ontological source of existence, and the person exists only in communion. Otherness is inconceivable apart from 'relationship', so no person can be different unless he is related. For that reason communion does not threaten otherness but generates it, as Zizioulas (2006, p. 5) states. Therefore the question of truth is inseparable from truthfulness in the person one becomes.

In education the relativism of the one truth as an alternative to a fundamentalist conception of truth is a subjectivist and constructivist conception, that is, the idea that all the claims of the human subject reveal nothing more than the thought world and the conceptualization of the subject itself (Lamb, 2011, pp. 92-93). Identities are formed continuously since, although remaining transcendent and unknown, is not an obstacle but the condition of love (Caputo, 1997, p. 14). That means that constructivism as a pedagogical method should be the basis of the RE curriculum as it offers a way of promoting tolerance and respect on the one hand and for individuals to re-read the religious texts and re-think for themselves on the other (Erricker, 2010. p. 34). Indeed, classrooms as active communities of enquiry could create inter-subjective spaces where otherness would be crucial for existence and for private objectivity while dialogue is to be encouraged among the members of the classroom-community.

Drama/theatre and solidarity

Constructivist methodology (Vygotsky, 1978), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and social pedagogy (Petrie, 2011 ; Mylonakou-Keke, 2013) apply the theoretical basis of *applied theatre,* which draws upon both of them bringing students into direct engagement with their own learning experiences as well ideas, events and texts, which are open to re-readings by individuals and groups. *Applied theatre* provides a safe environment to 'connect with the corporal and the emotional in a way that understands at multiple levels' (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 3) and allows for a variety of viewpoints and reflection. As Somers (2004) says,

> *drama workshops can be seen as a kind of social laboratory in which we examine the attitudes, values and relationships of chosen people in selected situations. It adds to our personal and more general societal understanding of what it is to be human and, as such, is an essential ingredient in any society and its education systems'. In* applied theatre *a) drama involves the modelling of the reality of life and its complexities through the use of the dramatic medium, b) identity can be seen as a personal narrative which is constantly extended and modified by the many other narratives –*

global and local – and experiences to which we are exposed; The use of drama/theatre in education creates opportunities for participants to recognise how identity orientations (religion, nation, race, gender) shape their actions and positions and so irreversibly 'the other' has a central role in constructing the individual's identity and knowledge, c) by entering the fictional world created in the drama, a participant may gain greater understanding of his own, personal narrative. This is a major source of the claims that attitudes and behaviours can be changed; and d) providing a safe educational environment where the dramatic experience is not real so someone can release himself safely into it. This is also a dynamic key factor in attitude and behaviour change. (p.2)

Applied theatre's techniques actually consist of a method, which manages to creatively combine Brecht's politic/epic theatre and Boal's theatre of the oppressed (Boal, 1979) in a prolific application of pedagogy (Dewey, Bruner, Reid, Piaget, Vygotsky, Winnicot), drama in education and psychology (De Bono, Glasser, Caine and Caine, Kohlberg).

Furthermore, cohesion requires awareness of rights and responsibilities and support between members of a group. The nature of the communication process in the classroom is essential for strengthening bonds and for recognizing and accepting difference. Through the process of interaction, students can share, exchange and develop their ideas without the 'fear' of exposure. When drama/theatre works as a learning medium it may help develop empathy. The creative framework in which students participate through cooperation, playing roles, improvising, making theatrical pieces, as well as the support of the teacher as facilitator create the circumstances for the development of 'bonds of solidarity' in the group. Someone who can create immersive, distancing effects of the drama experience in this case can create conditions for reappraisal and change.

A social pedagogical research through a theatre-pedagogical programme for religious diversity

The research and the conclusion
The research was conducted on the basis of the application of a TiE (Theatre-in-Education) programme that empowers interactive communication between individuals with different cultural backgrounds. The interactive and participative character of these projects, especially in an environment that encloses dissimilar religions, motivates intercultural exchanges although diversity exists. These specific characteristics structure an educational means that utilizes theatre and drama techniques, its aim being the cohesion of society (Redington, 1983) and to negotiate sensitive personal and social issues and, through this form, to offer stimuli for discussion within and outside school.

TiE programmes are structured mainly into three parts; firstly there is a performance with a main subject that has been prepared to be presented to a limited audience, secondly some activities take place, which derive from *applied theatre*, and give an interactive character to the whole programme as the audience has time to incorporate their contribution, and finally the facilitator of the programme leaves but leaves behind compact material for 'follow-up' that encloses data and stimuli referred to in the central topic for further cooperation in the classroom (Jackson, 1993).

This research was applied to Greek secondary schools. Specifically for this study a TiE programme was used, structured in order to support the research of a PhD dissertation (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2009). The central question that runs through the whole paper is how and whether through a TiE programme students can restructure their perceptions and attitudes vis-à-vis people with different or no religious beliefs.

Research Facts
Time line: 10 months
Location: Thessaloniki and a city of Thrace
Approach method: Action research, included four case studies and application in ten schools.

Sample: 1. Phase one: Interventional research. Two groups of Lyceum level one (15-16 years old) in Thessaloniki and two in a city of Thrace.
Total number of participants, 90 students and four teachers

Sample: 2. Phase two: Ten classes of different types of schools and different levels of secondary education in a city of Thrace.
Total number, 212 students and 18 teachers.

Research methods
Observation of the TiE group during the entire process of research, application and evaluation; Anonymous written questionnaires were filed in two phases (the first was seven days prior to the application of TiE and the second three months following the performance); Recorded interviews were taken from the teachers; Throughout this research the teachers kept a diary; Students gave interviews in focus groups of five (the first was given prior to TiE programme and the other two after it, one per month); Observation of students' responses when the programme was running and after it through videos taken; Two of the written activities were assessed; The teachers of the 2nd phase delivered a written evaluation of the programme.

The written and oral material (texts of questionnaires, interviews, activities, communications, reports of diaries, etc.) were analyzed using critical and qualitative content analysis and especially the observation's reports were analyzed using the interaction process analysis of Bales R.F. The available data were analyzed using SPSS due to the need for simultaneous processing and depiction both of qualitative and quantitative variables. This method constitutes a suitable choice for educational research and especially action-research with empirical content.

Research fields
The assumptions and objectives of the study prescribe two fields for this research. The sample was categorized based on the questionnaires' data. The criteria were the impression, the opinion, the acquaintance and the degree of separation according to the 'other'. In addition to these, more specific variables were taken into consideration; family data, the degree of faith not only of the participant but also of their parents, and sources of information about their religions. During the interviews of the focus groups photos and open questions were used as a tool to collect all possible answers based on their personal beliefs. Furthermore, the findings from the teachers' interviews, the observation and the documents conclude to encompass all aspects of social and educational mediation of TiE programme. This was the socio-educational field of the research.

The TiE programme and its objectives
The TiE programme *Five smudged afternoons* was designed by a team of specialists after thorough research. The programme is designed for young people aged between 15 and 20. It is divided into two parts, a short performance and a combination of drama in education activities (compound stimulus, role on the wall, characters in a role, Forum Theatre, still images, group discussions/cards), and it lasts 2 school hours (1:30h).

The objectives of the programme were:
- To empower the acceptance of difference in our society and to respect the 'other' with his/her individual features.
- To contribute to the sensitization and the questioning of the young in relation to the position that a community concedes to the 'others' and how this affects their psychology. In addition, to

motivate them into questioning their own attitudes and typical behavior on diversity in everyday life.

- To clarify that each and every person has the right to choose a religion and accept it as the one and 'true belief'. No one has the right, to any extent, to confront people with a different or no religion as less equal members of the community.
- To enhance multiple social and critical faculties; to stimulate imagination, creativity and also to develop elaborate thinking on any issue. (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2011)

Conclusion

The Theatre in Education programmes offer the 'scaffolding', as Wood, Bruner and Ross mention (1976), so as to reinforce positive changes in students' attitudes towards religious differences, whether the students personally know people who belong to a different religion or not and to develop socio-ethical virtues and attitudes that are inspired by respect for difference. Generally speaking, they can contribute to the moral and political education of the young in sensitive social pedagogical issues, such as the one of religious diversity and differences in general. This is of great value as it happens in a democratic framework without guidance or ethical preaching. Under these circumstances any assessment concerning the attitudes and any change are of value, because it gives the modulator the opportunity to modulate the ethics and culture in a mutual relationship with the society students live in. Furthermore, this can take place in an educational framework that can function with democratic conditions shared on an equal level between teachers and students.

Concerning community cohesion and education it seems the relevant social pedagogical goals can be achieved. Simultaneously the study showed that the students in the framework of their education should learn about religion within a compulsory RE set up by the government, so as to learn about other religions and develop a relevant sense of respect for those who adhere to them; and secondly it seems that school is their main source of learning about religion.

The study showed that children, although they presented different attitudes towards difference, seemed to have been positively influenced during the month's duration of the programme and developed a relevant thought process causing change in attitudes. Relevant research projects carried out in Greece have had similar results. They have demonstrated that in actual fact – through awareness, re-examination and critical reflection on perceptions, experiences, attitudes and the stereotypification of participants in the research studies – the value of and respect for many forms of diversity and the uniqueness of every human being can be enhanced and actually thrive. Aiding people to alter their perceptions would lead to a gradual change that enables them to learn to live with others in an environment that ensures diversity can be achieved through unity (Mylonakou-Keke, 2009).

The current programme created the appropriate social framework for a procedure of transformation to take place (Bourdieu, 1977). Those small changes are invaluable for the whole, as, starting from small personal changes, the modulator can engender much bigger changes. This is the increasing power of culture in social criticism and intrusion, and in such changes education can play a crucial role if it is open to contemporary ideas. Then, as happened within the current study, the different can become familiar and respectable. Furthermore, the personal becomes general, according to Augusto Boal (1979), and social consciousness can be alerted, as Gramci (1992) hoped. However, in Greek education the equality of social and educational difference is still wishful thinking, especially in this period of financial and moral crisis (Koukounaras-Liagkis, 2011).

Concluding reflections

This current case study answers the question as to how RE, in a social pedagogical context, could contribute to societal and communal cohesion. Moreover, it allows for the necessary reflection on questions that continue to intrigue.

During the academic year 2012-13 the aforementioned TiE programme was put into practice by a Greek Foundation named 'Aikaterini Laskaridi'. A weekly programme was organized for schools in Thrace in the county of Evros, the northernmost part of Greece bordering Turkey and the main entry point for undocumented immigrants. It should also be mentioned that in 2013 unemployment was estimated at the rate of 29% in this region. The implementation included 10 applications in different types of schools of compulsory, high and vocational education.

In the story of the TiE programme the topic of suicide was one that was offered for negotiation albeit not as the main topic or aim. During the week of the programme a boy aged 18 had committed suicide the day after the TiE programme had been introduced into the school he had attended when he was in compulsory education. The researcher had not been informed that this student had been a former student of the school nor that the students who participated in the programme on that particular day had had to confront such a problem while they were totally emotionally stressed although the researcher had heard of the incident on the local news.

Of course, the case study does not have an epistemological basis as research but it is mentioned because it has great significance for what is assessed in the article, how an educational process in the classroom could be essential for supporting and strengthening bonds. Texts of the research diary where a written record of the activities has been kept of thoughts and feelings throughout the research process reveal the points of the case study.

> I had a feeling that students empathized with the protagonist referring again and again to the choice of suicide. The group persistently asked questions in order to explain it to themselves although we didn't seem to be able to get right to the heart of the matter which was the TiE … The suicide and the parents' attitudes towards the protagonist came to the fore again. This group appeared to have a problem to confront. And in this case they were all concerned with it and they were all together in this process. A unique group … In the assessment cycle the words that the students said were: great experience, relief, why, solution, life, options … they seemed during the last activity and at the end that something had changed in them. I don't know if that can be demonstrated but this group surely had been alerted at least to what bothered them … Their faces were different at the end, not happy, maybe but calmer.

This application showed that when teachers creates a safe environment for their students in the context of school as a learning environment, a structure for supporting and changing could function effectively as long as the members of the group have a common problem/aim and know each other by having a sort of relationship. To speak of bonds in that case study is not reliable, therefore the point rests on the immediate effect of educational intervention.

Furthermore, all the elements of the theoretical and practical presentation above allow for a reflection on the role of RE in schools and its potential. The current world situation reveals that religions and their issues can't be ignored. On the contrary, education should offer an environment for providing all students with religious literacy regardless of their religious affiliation and for fostering dialogue between cultures and religions aimed at bridging the gaps, dealing with religious conflict and manifesting values and commitment to equality and tolerance. Research studies around the world show that there are identifiable effective social pedagogical approaches and ways of teaching tolerance to diversity in educational settings. Our research pointed out that constructivism provides the social pedagogical methodology to engage students in the educational environment by using their experiences with 'otherness'/diversity. Findings of the research in a Greek context that has been presented can justify the claim that sensitive issues can be negotiated

and confronted in some cases by social pedagogical interventions, especially when a difficult situation exists. RE can apply knowledge and a safe educational environment for fostering attitudes and engendering change. As a first step to changing or making interventions in RE firstly in Europe and secondly on the international stage, it is useful to construct a European consensus regarding RE based on a platform of previous European experience, rationales for studying, particular policies and standard-setting policy recommendations. However, these essential questions should be posed:

- Are nations and countries ready to change their curricula of RE in order to achieve tolerance towards the 'other', in a social pedagogical perspective, and is this an aim that all countries really want to include in RE curricula?
- Are educators, in developing their social pedagogical role further, ready to step forward and realize that in the post-modern era a critique of positivism exists and the confession of science is debatable?
- Are religious people and, in some cases, RE teachers ready to accept positively within the classroom issues about religions' negative impact on society and human life?
- Is it possible for students to learn about and from both the positive and negative aspects of religions while at the same time constructing their own identities, which is the main social pedagogical goal for many countries?

The crisis is a harsh reality, but countries haven't lost their memory. The future cannot be ignored, hence it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to its inter-formation. Post-modern, future citizens have to acquire religious literacy for their own welfare. They will be able to be critical religious believers if they want to and active members in a society respecting and tolerating 'others'. RE may be a communicating factor in society and a guiding metaphor for students' lives in this ferocious post-modern era in which 'we' is the guide.

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