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The Socio-Pedagogical Dynamics of Religious Knowledge in Religious Education: A Participatory Action-Research in Greek Secondary Schools on Understanding Diversity

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Abstract: The study examines which type of religious knowledge acquired in Religious Education in Greek Secondary schools can initiate both personal and collective change in understanding and appreciation of different cultures. It is blended research using participatory action-research with ethnographic elements methodology. The research gathered qualitative and quantitative data through questionnaires, focus groups, journals, and the technique of the “Most Significant Change” from four resources/target groups (students, teachers, parents, researcher). It took place during the 2017–2018 school year in a High and an Upper Schools in which the researcher participated in the school communities as a teacher. Statistical analysis (SPSS), content analysis and thematic analysis of the data show that religious knowledge, developed in Education with the aim of religious literacy, as defined in the context of Greek/European context, can operate on a personal and collective level, in cultivation of respect and underacting of cultural diversity. This is achieved when the religious knowledge is understood as experience and is meaningful when applied to the concepts of understanding, reflection and action. The overall finding is that transformative dynamics of religious knowledge facilitate both minor and major changes in the mindset of young people. Concluding, in Religious Education without sacrificing the religious content of the subject, a high degree of cultural recognition and acceptance of religious diversity can be achieved, and to a certain extent enable a change in attitude towards immigrants and refugees, in other words the ‘other’ as well as in communication and acquaintance between team members, recognition of and a greater degree of acceptance of otherness, and the development of relationships which were non-existent before.

Keywords: religious education; knowledge; transformation; diversity



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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, there has been a substantial growth in research regarding the role of school in the promotion of social coexistence and understanding diversity, particularly in an era that has seen immense changes in traditional ways of life. There has subsequently been uncertainty over the role played by Religious Education interventions (hereafter RE) within the framework of the Curriculum in Secondary Education, namely (a) the acquaintance and dialogue between different cultures, religions and beliefs and (b) the development of mutual understanding and respect (see e.g., [ter Avest et al. 2009](#); [Stern 2006](#); [Jackson 2014](#); [Burns Coleman and White 2011](#); [Miller et al. 2013](#); [Robbins and Francis 2016](#); [Riegel et al. 2019](#)). RE defined here as a school subject of the Curriculum as well as a targeted socio-pedagogical school and curriculum-based intervention ([Úcar 2013](#); [Hämäläinen 2019](#); [Mylonakou-Keke 2015, 2018](#)), is considered to be a key factor in changes that can be engendered by school thereby influencing school communities at the level of individuals, and communities, in relation to development of understanding and appreciation of diversity in new living conditions in Europe (globalization, migration flows, refugee crisis, multiculturalism). Given the characteristics of a transformative RE based on experiential learning

methodology and evidence of its potential to offer meaningful education (Biesta 2021) the paper aims to obtain preliminary evidence of the socio-pedagogical dynamics of religious knowledge in RE in educating adolescents to understand cultural diversity, as well as challenging the school community (students, teachers and parents) to change accordingly. For that reason, will be presented firstly the conceptual framework of the research to clarify which knowledge (type and content) can result in RE in understanding of diversity. Secondly analysis of the data and findings will provide evidence to conclusions which open a discussion about the potential of RE as an educational and social factor that brings about change in acceptance of otherness, and the development of relationships which were non-existent before.

1.1. Impact of Globalization on Adolescents’ Wellbeing

Globalization as the process by which people, goods, information and ideas move easily across borders growing interdependence of the world’s population, economies and culture, and its positive and negative impacts, is a research topic broadly studied from different perspectives and disciplines (Giddens 1990; Robertson 1992; Tomlinson 1996; Bauman 1998; Featherstone 2000; Kenway and Bullen 2008; Rieger 2010; Friedman 2012). Due to its relations with technology, economy and communication, it influences young people and creates new identity processes and environments, in which the feelings and reactions of young people vary. A sense of uncertainty due to the global living conditions and, particularly due to the constant movement of people has been revealed by the research (Arnett 2002; Chuanchen et al. 2016; Berglund et al. 2016). In Greece and Europe immigration and refugeeism are viewed by young people as issues of concern or are seen as stressful situations (Kerr et al. 2010; Zick et al. 2011; Simonovits 2015). When this particular research was conducted, Greece was in the grips of a deep financial crisis which led to added stress for young people (Gropas and Triandafyllidou 2011; Hellenic Statistical Authority 2016). Of course, the difficulty concerns both immigrants/refugees and the young citizens who welcome them, a fact reflected at the World Economic Forum which regarded the phenomena as the biggest risk that the world had yet to face (World Economic Forum 2016).

Resentment and suspicion by members of the host population towards refugees and immigrants was often exacerbated by stereotypical expectations of behaviour, as well as cultural differences and linguistic diversity and were factors that made interactions between the groups difficult (Smith et al. 2013).

It is essential, therefore to highlight (Table 1) the response of Europeans when asked whether immigrants are a threat to the life and values of the country (column 1) and a threat to personal life and values. Zick et al. (2011, p. 146) reported that is a marked difference in eight countries between the social and the personal perception in relation to this issue (column 2). The percentages, when comparing the two responses, are reduced in the second column to 1/2 or even 1/3, with the exception of Hungary (Zick et al. 2011, p. 146).

Table 1. Research on immigrants and way of life and values.

%	Immigrants Living Here Threaten Our Way of Life and Our Values in [Country]	Immigrants Living Here Threaten My Personal Way of Life and My Values
Germany	28.2	9.9
Great Britain	40.9	18.6
France	27.3	14.7
The Netherlands	35.7	12.2
Italy	36.2	17.3
Portugal	26.2	15.4
Poland	16.3	5.8
Hungary	41.2	28.6

The average of those who are afraid of immigrants because they think that migration is out of control, or is a source of embarrassment, and has increased the prevalence of crime and disease, have been shown in further research to be in Hungary 47.8%, in the Czech Republic 49.5%, in Slovakia 39.8%, and in Poland 27.3% (Simonovits 2015, p. 23).

Research amongst students aged 13–14, which used two scales, one for students' attitudes toward equal rights for all ethnic or racial groups and one for immigrants, shows that they support equal rights for all nations and racial groups in Sweden and Luxembourg (mean scale scores of 52 and the average is 49), but not in the Czech Republic, Latvia and Malta (46/49). Moreover, adolescents support equal rights for immigrants in Bulgaria, Luxembourg and Sweden (52/49), but not in Belgium (Flemish) and Great Britain (46/52). In Greece, at both levels, students are above average (49 and 51/49) in the acceptance of equal rights (Kerr et al. 2010, pp. 89–90). After seven years the same survey (though without Greece) shows that in the European countries that participated in both ICCS 2009 and 2016 on average, the majority of the students endorse immigrants' rights. 88% in 2016 states that immigrants should have the same rights that everyone else in the country has. There is, moreover, no strong difference between the two surveys in students' attitudes toward equal rights for immigrants (Losito et al. 2018, p. xiv).

In a survey of 356 young people aged 15 to 24 in Greece 65% cite immigrants as the cause of an increase in crime, 45% are in favor of banning new immigrants and 45% are in favor of banning immigrants in general from the country. 30% recognise that there are prejudices that affect them and, 54%, that through an intercultural education and acquaintance-dialogue with other cultures it is possible to overcome such prejudices (Koukounaras Liagkis 2011, p. 190).

The relation of this data to the cultural diversity that increased in Greece during the decade beginning in 2010, is of the outmost importance in the Greek context. In 2011, 912,000 immigrants officially lived in Greece, but by 2015, 861,630 immigrants and refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Iraq had increased the number (94%). It is significant that 25% of the Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi immigrants/refugees were under 18 (Karkouli 2016, p. 7). In Table 2 the numbers demonstrate the change in Greek population. More than 10% of the population in 2020 were immigrants/refugees of the last decade (UNHCR 2021).

Table 2. Sea and land arrivals 2014–2020 according to UNHCR.

Years	Sea Arrivals	Land Arrivals	Total
2020	9714	5982	15,696
2019	59,726	14,887	74,613
2018	32,494	18,014	50,508
2017	29,718	6592	36,310
2016	173,450	3784	177,234
2015	856,723	4907	861,630
2014	41,038	2280	43,318
Total	1,202,863	56,446	1,259,309

Nowadays, cultural diversity and political pluralism is the reality that young people live with. It is not only concerned with natural and topical borders but the digital world of communication since 89.3% of 10–12 years old students use the internet while 50.4% of 15 years old use it at least 2 h every day while 24.3% use it for longer (Kokkevi et al. 2011; Elafros 2018). Furthermore, in our globalized world, cultures change continuously in time and place while personal and social positions of self and identity have, for Hermans, 'become increasingly dense, heterogeneous and even conflicting' (Hermans and Gieser 2012, p. 1) in a process of development which is "a possibility, a potentiality, or even a coincidence within an endless open space with fuzzy boundaries", according to Langeveld (as cited in ter Avest and Miedema 2013, p. 126).

1.2. Religious Education School-Based Interventions for Understanding Diversity and Religious Knowledge

Globalization, displacement of populations and cultural pluralism are of concern to students since these conditions directly affect their lives as well as influencing the contemporary curricula of school education and RE in European countries (Leganger-Krogstad 2013; Afdal 2010; Weisse 2019; Jackson 2014; Francis and Ziebertz 2011). A substantial amount of research and literature on religion and diversity in schools and classrooms has been published within the RE community (Skeie 2009; Klutz 2016; Schreiner 2018; Yafa 2016; Barnes 2012; Erricker 2010, pp. 94–121; Norman and Gallagher 2011; Arweck 2017; Ipgrave et al. 2018; Weisse et al. 2014; Franken 2017, 2021). The core of this research is the educational effectiveness of a dialogue which takes into consideration difference/s and dialogical approaches to RE since population diversity has changed radically in most European countries where religious traditions do not impact on young people's life as they used to. It is essential, furthermore, for there to be acquaintance with and respect for 'otherness' and, secondly a dialogue concerning life, experience, action and faith as being a positive element of plurality (Ipgrave 2001, 2004; O'Grady and Jackson 2020) are addressed as essential. The European REDCo study targeting 14- to 16-year age group stressed that '... most [young people] were convinced that respecting the religion of others is a way to cope with differences' (Valk 2009, p. 425) in a RE classroom that provides the 'safe space' to discuss such topics (Leganger-Krogstad 2003) even at the expense of understanding in some cases (Conroy et al. 2013, pp. 119–24) when religion is not presented by the teachers as multifarious, complex, and social phenomenon but more in an essential way when they teach e.g., bad religion (Smith et al. 2018). The project pointed out the potential of RE in the promotion of understanding diversity as well as the necessity of valuing religious diversity in school (Weisse 2011) by offering opportunities for dialogue and developing innovative approaches to RE. The relation of RE to Citizenship is a perspective prominent in numerous researches carried out since (Conroy et al. 2013, pp. 117–40; Østberg 2013; Kjeldsen 2016). Stern, in an analysis of researches on RE and human rights, values and citizenship, concluded that "RE needs all the researchers it can get in the classroom" (Stern 2006, p. 94). He opens up broadly, therefore, the discussion for research RE as a social practice understood as a collective activity system (Afdal 2010; Engeström 2005) while recognising at the same time the 'children and young people have the chance to consider and discern, with others, how to exist together in the world' (Hannam 2021, p. 135).

What is at stake is the educational value of RE as a relationship between research, theory and practice in the public sphere. Different pedagogical approaches (Jackson 2014; Berglund et al. 2016; Robbins and Francis 2016; Grimmitt 2000; Rothgangel et al. 2014) to the research and practice of RE have now entered everyday language and life related to religion in educational practices. The educational dynamics of school-based interventions which provide education using observations from the past and present (Skeie 2020) beyond cultivation have now been recognised. This is more about how to lead autonomously your life. It enables students to develop a sense of self and be a subject of their own lives (Biesta 2021, p. 15). Fostering citizenship with actions aimed at change and based on the principles of social pedagogy, through RE's curricular, cross-curricular or para-curricular interventions, has now become the epicenter of this contribution (Franken 2021). The management of change, in both theory and practice as a developmental process (Fullan 2007) is at its core. More importantly, the management of changes in Europe and a number of interventions mentioned above have been implemented and their experience has provided a concrete basis for this particular research. It is worth mentioning these researches were specifically used to design the research and its methodology. The social perspective and how to monitor social interventions has been derived from Mylonakou-Keke (2015, 2018); Dart and Davies (2003) and Davies and Dart (2005). The hermeneutical, ethnographic and action-research view of the research were based on AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society project 'Does RE work?' (Conroy et al. 2013; Lundie 2010); Nesbitt (2016); O'Grady (2016); Fancourt (2016); Klutz (2016); Erricker (2010), and Koukounaras Liagkis (2011) interven-

tions, the TRES-Network (PeTeR project) surveys (Ziebertz and Ulrich 2009) and faith and attitudes towards religion scales (Lewis et al. 2001; Dianni et al. 2014; Francis et al. 2009; Francis 1979, 1989), while a large number of micro or macro scale interventions that were implemented within big projects such as REDCo offered elements that formed the methodology as well as the research techniques.

Finally, it is of importance to identify what is religious knowledge in the school system and what is considered religious knowledge in socio-pedagogical school-based interventions of RE.

Learning and knowledge are considered through different approaches. Within transformative-experiential RE learning is not considered a process of storing a kind of memory trace. Knowledge, too, is not the result of processing information in the form of symbolic calculations of a reality that exists independently of person. It is considered a human creation that depends on the context of the person. It is produced in school education through experience and is an experience in itself, which becomes a useful asset for the interpretation of reality, of oneself, of others and of the world. It is an interactive, interpersonal and co-dialectical process. It involves thinking, reflection and, of course, action. It is, in essence, a transformational process. Within it, a collective negotiation of meanings takes place and the transformation of the student is realised in his/her specific context. He/she participates in activities that require specific actions while producing new actions and interactions, and by reflecting on the importance of the different actions contained in the activity. Thus, education becomes transformative on a personal and collective level (Koukounaras Liagkis 2020; Biesta 2014).

This school knowledge does not exist in advance in some form outside of individual's mind, nor does it take place at some point in space and time outside of him/her. It is produced in specific ecological situations and spatiotemporal contexts of the person, by the person him/herself, who produces it through learning and specific cognitive processes (experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying) (Kalantzis and Cope 2012, pp. 238–49).

In this sense, knowledge is, on the one hand subjective. On the other hand, since it is produced in a specific socio-cultural, spatiotemporal and pragmatistic context, it is not universal, and while it is directly related to its context, it does not cease to exist collectively at this level. Knowledge is not objective, but it is still an approach to the natural truth that really exists, according to Putnam (1994, pp. 516–17). If so, then there is no question of whether or not knowledge is true, but we care about what possibilities it has (Biesta and Hannam 2016). And it is important that it is determined by the ecological-experiential dimension of the human behavior and reality of each person, which is defined by the particular relationships with the world around him/her and the meanings (functional connections) that emerge.

Teaching that applies this learning process in practice has its basis in development of cognitive processes (experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying). Learning outcomes are the key indicators in the planning, implementation and assessment of teaching. These are actions and behaviors that students are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson and after it in different cognitive levels/processes (Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analysing, Evaluating and Creating) and in three learning domains, the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Krathwohl 2002, p. 215). Finally, the outcomes are categorised in different types and levels of knowledge—factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001, p. 38).

1.3. Religious Education in Greece

The history of RE in Greece dates from the founding of the Neo-Hellenic State, 190 years ago. The State, according to the Constitution, has complete responsibility for RE, while one of its basic aims is the 'development of religious consciousness' (article 16, para. 2). RE is not 'controlled/overseen' by any specific religion. After 2019/2020, however, and following four decisions made by the Hellenic Council of State, and the Supreme Administrative Court of Greece, RE has been designated for first time as a Greek Orthodox

RE although without a specific framework. For that reason, from the autumn of 2020 new national curricula—have been developed.

In Greece RE is taught as a compulsory subject, for a period of ten years, two hours per week from the third year of Primary school (age 9–12) through to the third year of High school/Gymnasium (age 13–15), two hours a week from the first to the final year of Upper High school/Lyceum (age 16–19), and one hour a week from the first to the third year of Vocational School (Koukounaras Liagkis 2020) with the option of non-attendance. According to Ministry of Education's data the 0.5–0.8% of the primary and secondary students opted out in 2015–2018 school years (Koukounaras Liagkis 2019, p. 32). For them there is no any alternative subject and they attend other subjects of the school curriculum. The curricula during the research were these that had been judged by the court, as mentioned above, and withdrawn which were non confessional, multi-religious with 70% Greek Orthodox and other Christian churches and denominations, and 30% world religions content. Nevertheless, the research assumes that the pedagogical approach (transformative/experiential learning) and the content (thematic and multi religious) of the curriculum offer the context within RE acquires social-pedagogical value (Koukounaras Liagkis 2015, 2018).

The religious literacy that the RE promotes and aims, has been defined in the latest RE curricula 2016/2017 as (a) learning religion/s acquiring skills and competences (cognitive, creative, moral, religious, linguistic, etc.) (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs & Institute of Educational Policy 2014, p. 57), (b) acquiring knowledge of the cultural context, which give meaning and shapes the concepts and also competence to “construct meaning in different cultural, social or special contexts, as well as the ability to use” as many religious languages as the religions that are taught in schools (Greek Government Gazette 2017) and in 2020 as (a) cultivating the religious consciousness of Orthodox Christian students, and at the same time contributing to their development (religious, cognitive, spiritual, social, moral, psychological, aesthetic, and creative), (b) learning about and from the Bible, the Doctrines of the Orthodox Church, its Ethics, Orthodox tradition and culture and (c) acquiring knowledge on the world's religions (Greek Government Gazette 2020).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Methodology

The research used mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative participatory action-research and naturalistic research with ethnographic elements (Cohen et al. 2018, pp. 292–93, 444–45) which situated the research work as Mertens's transformative paradigm (Mertens 2010, pp. 21–34). The researcher took on the role of the RE teacher during one school year (2017–2018) and thus joined becoming part of the school communities, which he studied at the same time. He intervened by planning and application of weekly two-hour teaching based on the RE curriculum where the expected learning outcomes and the content of the curriculum were related to the research aim of cultivation of mutual respect and understanding of different cultures. The research seeks to create conditions for students and other member of the school community to ‘work together collaboratively in the search for valid, authentic and morally correct and appropriate ways of understanding the world and participating in it’ (Cohen et al. 2018, p. 444; Kemmis and McTaggar 2005, p. 578). Two case studies are compared on the basis of the particular key areas of interest, RE and understanding diversity; in the epicenter of the research is the world view of the participants which is enquired through observation, interviews and conversations, notes and reports. In Mertens' definition of transformative paradigm, the research placed central importance on the students' experiences and attitudes provided that adolescent-students are usually ‘oppressed’ in schools by the adults as well as the educational system. Axiologically, the research respected the cultural norms and religious beliefs of the participants while the implementation (RE teaching) promoted human rights and social justice; ontologically, the used methods recognised that various versions of reality exist; epistemologically, researcher's participation as a teacher addressed at the parallel issues of power and trust while with different methods and sam-

ples (students, teachers, parents) the interactive link between researcher and participants limited the possibility of researcher-effect (Mertens 2010, pp. 21–34).

2.2. Aim and Research Question

The aim was to research/monitor school-based interventions through RE in relation to the possibilities of education for developing an acquaintance with, and dialogue between, different cultures, religions and beliefs and the cultivation of mutual understanding and mutual respect. The research is fundamentally an attempt to answer the following:

How young people's attitudes toward accepting and embracing cultural diversity can be impacted through RE and which religious knowledge is useful/beneficial in this and can RE initiate both personal and collective change in school communities (students, teachers, parents)?

2.3. Research Tools

The data collection was carried out using quantitative and interpretive techniques (Mertens 2010, p. 33) during the period 1 September 2017 to 20 June 2018. Students answered a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the school year which was divided into three main parts. Each part was based on reliable questionnaires: (a) School ethos and multiculturalism (Q1–Q19) and (b) Pedagogy and Religious Education (Q20–Q33) were based on used in Conroy et al. questionnaires (Conroy et al. 2013), (c) Attitudes towards immigrants. Jews and Muslims (Q34–Q57) was based on ICCS questionnaire (Q34–Q38) (Kerr et al. 2010), on TARKI Social Research Institute's questionnaire (Simonovits 2015) measuring 'Attitudes towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants' (Q39–Q50) and on Zick et al. (2011) questionnaire which records prejudices against various target groups (Q51–Q57). The three parts were tested separately for its validity by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient indicating the satisfactory level of construct validity and internal consistency of the questionnaire, since Cronbach's alpha values were (a) 0.803 (b) 0.723 and (c) 0.713 (>0.7). At the end of the school year parents answered a structured questionnaire to evaluate the potential socio-pedagogical impact of the RE teachings/interventions on students' and family's life at home. It was divided in (a) Evaluation of RE's results, (b) Impact of RE on parents with an open question 'tell us something that happened during the year because of your child and RE and made you think or do something. Mention people, events, behaviors, thoughts, actions, details, without mentioning names'. The alpha coefficient was acceptable (0.74). Student journal at the end of each lesson and focus groups of students/three (3 meetings with 2 groups each time after random selection), with structured interviews and recording were used in order to fully understand students' experiences, learn more about their answers to questionnaires and the results of the teaching intervention, and to explore in depth their attitudes and the potential change. Specifically, to measure the change of students understanding and attitudes towards cultural diversity, the technique of the "Most Significant Change" (Davies and Dart 2005) was applied twice, at the end of the third month of the research (November) and at the end of the sixth month (February). The aim was to monitor the changes reported by the individuals themselves and to provide feedback on the research. Rich data were also gathered from (a) teachers' journal on a weekly basis, with a structured questionnaire and (b) researcher journal with daily and weekly reports. It is obvious that the research ensures the credibility (Guba and Lincoln 1989) and the strength of interpretations and conclusions by multiple methods and multiple data sources (triangulation).

The analysis of the findings was done mainly with content analysis and thematic analysis to cut across data and search for patterns and themes. The first was used to identify and quantify of data measuring the frequency of different themes and the latter understand different aspects that participants talk about in depth. Both were applied with the participation of two independent judges who were University mentors-associates. Finally, statistical analysis with SPSS helped to indicate several common characteristics to the entire sample (descriptive statistics), to determine whether the two age groups or

each group pre and after the intervention differ significantly parametric *t* tests were used, and when the assumption of normality cannot be met due to small samples sizes, and with ordinal (rank) or nominal (categorical) data, Chi-Square were used.

2.4. The Sample

The research took place in two school communities and with two groups, one of 27 students aged 13 years old attending the first year of Gymnasium (N1) and, one of 18 students aged 16 years old of the first class of Lyceum (N2). The sample of the research consists of the researcher (1), the teachers (2), the students, their parents (N1 = 23, N2 = 12) and members of the school communities (head teachers and teachers). Researcher as a teacher and teachers were involved in to provide data that helped the researcher to monitor the progress and evaluate the results so that they are fully comprehensible. Besides, as an action-research the whole research is conducted into teachers own practice (Cohen et al. 2018, pp. 444–45). The first community was an Experimental Gymnasium in the western district of Athens—a typical urban environment. The second was a public Catholic School in the north-central district of Athens. Both accept students from wider areas. Moreover 100% declared themselves to be Christian Orthodox. Out of the total number of students (N = 45) only one had two immigrant parents (Albanian) and one had an immigrant mother (Poland).

The rationale behind selecting these schools was that they would provide a rich source of information thereby allowing an in-depth study. Sampling was based on convenience sampling (Mertens 2010, p. 325). The research was carried out with the highest ethical standards according to the criteria of the NKUA's policy. There were any risks to students and the teaching methods as well as the research methods already being performed on other subjects. Confidentiality and anonymity were followed in gathering and analysis the data by using substituting codes for participant identifiers and storing data.

2.5. Results

The study of the interventional effectiveness of religious knowledge is interconnected to which religious knowledge (a) can inculcate pro-social and anti-prejudicial thinking in learning in the school system, (b) can be useful/beneficial in helping young people in embracing diversity.

2.5.1. Students' Religious Background

The family background of the students show that 19 out of 20 of the members of the focus groups greatly value religion (19/20 are Orthodox Christians and one mother is a Catholic Christian). The question "If so, and if so, how important is religion to you and your family?" took place at the beginning of the first meeting of the four focus groups. 19 out of 20 said that for their family, religion ranged from important to very important. 14/19 declared "very important", 3/19 "important", 1/19 "quite important" and 1/19 "not important". The justifications show that (a) their family does not have a regular relationship with the liturgical life of the Church (15/20), e.g., do not go to church on Sunday, but many (6/10) and the majority in high school (8/10) said that their family tries to adhere to what their religion dictates and (b) the importance of religion in life is not justified by the majority (8/10) in Gymnasium, while in Lyceum it is related to 9/10 with the "help" from God and the "power" that a person acquires. It is important that of those who refer to "power" (4/10), when they speak of them personally they disconnect it from God, in contrast to their family, and refer (3/10) to the power every human has and can activate it with faith.

SG1: Yes, religion is important because it liberates us in some way. That is, we have someone who takes us out of our sins . . .

SG2: It is very important for my whole family and we feel protection and help.

SL1: . . . religion for me and my family is quite important, because it generally gives us a ... I do not want to say it is a reason to live, because it is not exactly a reason to live, but that we have something to believe in and that there is something to help us.

SL2: . . . and I believe that religion in a family is very important, because every day, when we believe in something, it generally gives us the strength to do what we want and through religion God somehow protects us . . . whatever difficulty we confront we can meet God. God listen to us and help us. So it is important that we all believe in something.

SL3: Religion plays a very important role in the family in general, regardless of whether one is a Christian ... I just believe that this power that is given to us is more within us. When we have a problem and we say "My God, help me", I think we say that, just because we want to believe that there is some higher than us, a metaphysic power that will help us, but in fact the power is from within us.

Although students and their families seem to value religion their relationship with the Christian life and Church community is mostly non strong. The sample is not more religious than the general population, as mentioned above.

2.5.2. Religious Knowledge and Learning Processes in RE Lessons

The analysis was based on religious learning and knowledge definitions as were analysed above. The intervention was based on teaching five in Gymnasium and ten in Lyceum Units of two-hours lessons that applied the cognitive processes (experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying) in each two-hours lesson and in each Unit of lessons. Learning outcomes were the key indicators in the planning, implementation and assessment of teaching. These were actions and behaviors that students are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson and after it in different cognitive levels/processes (Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analysing, Evaluating and Creating). The learning expected outcomes were also divided in three learning domains, the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Krathwohl 2002, p. 215). Furthermore, the outcomes were categorised in different types and levels of knowledge—factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001, p. 38). Of course, the cognitive processes that emerged through teaching RE were according to the students age and cognitive development level.

Students were asked regularly in their journals and focus groups' interviews to identify what they learnt in the lessons to ascertain which (learning level, domain, and type) religious knowledge contributes towards a change in attitudes towards cultural diversity. The expected learning outcomes and the content (basic topics) of the lessons, firstly, indicate the covered topics and the expected attitude which support students to change towards the other. In Table 3 the verbs and their objectives in column three in relationship with the basic topics in column four make this clear, e.g., the topic of Church (Ecclesiology) helped students to 'recognise the unity of different peoples'.

To a great extent, students perceive the knowledge they acquire in school as factual knowledge; that is, they learn the basics needed to know about a scientific field or to solve a problem that concerns this field (terminology, specific and detailed information). In fact, in RE they identify it as knowledge about faith/religion, in the case of high school students, and knowledge about faith/religion or no knowledge, in the case of upper high school students. In fact, of the total number of students (N = 44), 64.4% (m = 3.9, s.d. = 0.9) believe that the RE strengthens faith in God.

The interviews in focus groups reveal that the experience of the RE of the previous years determined at least during the first two months of the research what they perceive as new religious knowledge. In Gymnasium the answer 'nothing' was common in the journals and focus groups justified it because in Primary school they didn't have a regular RE:

Four years in primary school we did not do RE, because our teachers thought it was not a compulsory subject and because we did not have enough time for the other subjects (SG).

In Lyceum students reported that in RE in Gymnasium they had been learning about (a) their faith/religion, (b) the history of their religion, (c) for Jesus and the Apostles, (d) New and Old Testament. Seven out of ten of the focus groups repeated that in High School they were just memorising the texts of the school book, and they were evaluated by oral examination and written exams and tests.

Table 3. Expected learning outcomes and basic topics of the RE lessons.

School	Unit	Expected Learning Outcomes	Basic Topics
Gymnasium	‘Growing and Changing’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - determine the meaning of the Church and its relation to human history - recognise in the Church the unity of different people - express feelings and questions about the challenges and decisions that every person is called to face as they grow up, as the Church did - evaluate the difficulties and problems of the first Church - assess the needs of Christians at the time they were persecuted - recognise the importance of the change brought about by the decision to give one the freedom to follow one’s religion - distinguish the relationship between the need and freedom of religion (secularism), which is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - analyse in their environment issues of religious freedom based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The establishment and development of the church - Church as ‘Body’ of different people (Ecclesiology) - Church open to the nations and its universal spread in the world - Difficulties (persecutions and martyrs) and changes (Edict of Milan) - Freedom of religion (Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
	‘The encounter between Christianity and Hellenism’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognise the dynamics of the encounters - describe the meeting ‘places’ of Christianity-Hellenism - develop a positive attitude towards the encounters of different cultures - recognise the composition of Hellenism-Christianity <p>To develop a positive attitude towards the religion-culture dialogue and the wealth that is produced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - evaluate the composition of Hellenism-Christianity in the life of persons of the Church - recognise St. Basil the Great as a person who expresses the meeting of Christianity and Hellenism - contemplate the skepticism caused by the encounter of different cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apostle Paul in Greece and Athens encounters Greek philosophers - Jesus Christ as Logos (Λόγος) and Son of the God - Ancient Greek architecture (temples and churches) - St. Basil the Great life
	‘How do Christians live?’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ask questions about life and its meaning - recognise critically key elements of the Christian life - interpret the main elements of the worship of the Divine Eucharist, of the Baptism and Anointing - to consider the changes that integration into a religious community brings - analyse the dimensions (personal and social) of the thankful life attitude using examples - approach love as a Christian value and proposition of life - recognise the views of other religions on matter and religious life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ‘bread of life’ in Holy Communion (Eucharist) - Entering the ecclesiastical community with Baptism - Life of Eucharist in the ecclesial community in Bible and other sources (1st–3rd cent.) - The communal meals (agape) - Materials and objects used in worship, pray, religious life (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism)

Table 3. Cont.

School	Unit	Expected Learning Outcomes	Basic Topics
	'How are decisions taken?'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - evaluate the way decisions are made by the first Church - clarify the factors that led to the formation of the doctrines and their relation to the life of the believers - define the concepts of synod, doctrine and heresy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first Ecumenical synod - The Creed
	'Monotheistic religions: Judaism and Islam'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - present the basic beliefs of Judaism and Islam - explain the meaning of religious practices, celebrations and symbols - describe the relationship of the faithful with their scriptures - recognise the common roots of Christianity and Judaism - evaluate humanitarian values and attitudes of life in two religions - examine any prejudices and stereotypes about the two religions - cultivate respect and appreciation of different religions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Judaism: religious texts, life and observances - Judaism and Christianity - Greek Jews and Jews communities in Greece - Islam acts of worship/Five Pillars/The Quran - Islam and Muslim communities in Greece - Mosques and Islamic art
Lyceum	'The search of God'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - determine the motives for seeking God, - explore the universality of religiosity in human history - consider the connection between the search of God and religion. - discover the existence of different ways of seeking God and developing religiosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The universality of the phenomenon of religion and the reality of the religious experience - Jesus Christ encounter with the Samaritan woman - Religious community and life and religious pluralism
	'Communication'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify ways of communicating with God in Christian and other religious traditions - evaluate the positions of the Christian tradition for communication with the "other" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ways of communicating with God <p>Orthodox Christian teaching on communication with the "other"</p>
	'Ethos'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - outline the basic characteristics of the Christian morality (person—love—freedom) - consider the connection between teaching and morality in Christianity - define ethos/ethics, moralism with morality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethos/ethics, moralism with morality - Jesus challenges the Pharisees - Love and the value of the person in Orthodox Christian Theology
	'Faith'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consider faith in God as a relationship of trust - associate hope and love with relationship between the persons of the Holy Trinity - approach the concept of trust in personal relationships and relationships with the 'other' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee - Faith in God with religious and psychological lens - The Creed - Holy Trinity

Table 3. *Cont.*

School	Unit	Expected Learning Outcomes	Basic Topics
	'Feast'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - approach the meaning of the celebration in the Orthodox Church - evaluate the impact of religious holidays on life. - realise the value of change in their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious feasts - Jesus Christ birth-Christmas
	'Church'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - evaluate the Christian life within the Church - identify community elements in the ways of operation of the Church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Church as a community - Church in the 1st century-Acts (agape, common property, Divine Liturgy etc.)
	'Eucharist'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - examine the relationship between Eucharist and the modern world - plan actions with the aim of change on a personal and collective level - take personal and collective responsibility for carrying out actions of a collective activity - evaluate personal responsibility in the context of collective action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Church, sacraments, worship, Eucharist - The Epistle to Diognetus - Project: Research on youth's religiosity
	'Rules/Law'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognise rules as an element of the functioning and life of the Christian community - reflect on their views on the rules/boundaries of the Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jesus' Sermon on the Mount - Ten commandments
	'Freedom'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognise the importance of human freedom in Christian anthropology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human creation/Genders/Sexuality
	'Life and Death'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interpret death and the Resurrection in the Orthodox Christian tradition - analyse the proposals for dealing with death in the context of religion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Death and Resurrection in Bible and Fathers' texts - Existential questions, modern life and proposals of different religions

In students' answers about what they learn: the learning processes were mainly high (Table 4) and in affective, and psychomotor domains (Table 5).

Table 4. Taxonomy of the expected learning outcomes in learning processes.

Learning Processes	Gymnasium	Lyceum
Remembering	6	1
Understanding	9	3
Applying	13	13
Analysing	8	12
Evaluating	5	7
Creating	11	11
Total	52	47

Table 5. Taxonomy of the expected learning outcomes in learning domains.

Learning Domains	Gymnasium	Lyceum
Cognitive	22	18
Affective	20	17
Psychomotor	10	12

After two months students in both age groups were, to a certain degree, able to identify school knowledge as experience. They also identified in their journals what they were learning, and the lessons' expected learning outcomes without knowing them in advance.

90% of the expected learning outcomes seem to be recognised as acquired knowledge by 100% of the participants in the Lyceum focus groups (N = 18). Indicatively, some students' statements are mentioned below. The outcomes of the lessons were more clearly stated with expressions that reveal that the students both in Gymnasium and Lyceum in those two months acquired meta-cognitive skill to identify what knowledge is.

Gymnasium:

... we learn by doing various activities. (StG1)

It seems to me that we learn more in high school than in elementary school. We learn them in more detail, the behavior of individuals is different and you can communicate more easily with classmates. Yes and there are other people you can exchange views on religion and you can get along. (StG2)

SG3: ... we do more activities and learn the praxis, not theories and texts. (StG3)

Lyceum:

... now the main criterion is for the students to express their opinion and to express, their point of view on issues not only of the Religions, but also on issues that concern them in general. (SL1)

SL2: ... in general through experiential activities we learned to help other people and to be open to diversity. And this year, these two months, what I have learned is that generally I should not be so superficial in things and try, not be so superficial in RE basically, and try to look for the answer by looking and trying to understand some things. (StL2)

ML3: ... this year in RE we learn things that will help us in general and later in our lives ... While this year I think I have kept some important things, which will be useful to me in general as a person. And especially, to get better as humans every day. (StL3)

In the Lyceum, nine out of ten in focus groups recognised the goals of the RE and what they have been intended to achieve in the lesson:

I believe its purpose is to help people learn about their own religion as well as other religions. (SL4)

I think equality between people, that all people are different and that this is nice. And we are all equal and we all have the same rights and we learn to express our opinion freely without being criticized by others. (SL5)

There are many goals. That we understand ... human rights, that we are all equal, we do not judge diversity, but also to understand other religions and to be active in society and to be able to help as much as we can. (SL2)

ML5: ... to help the other regardless of what religion he has. (SL6)

Finally, 85% of the teachers' reports indicated that over the course of the year students, according to the four types of knowledge, acquired the target knowledge intended by the learning outcomes. In 94.1% of the two teachers' journals there is at least a reference to one change. In 76.3% there are more than three (46.4% concern the whole class and 51.7% individual changes). Specifically, the reports of the teacher in the Lyceum focused more on the behaviors of individuals and, in particular on four students who did not seem from the very beginning to be willing to contribute to the teaching process, for several reasons. She did, however, find in three of the four individuals, small changes in their responses. In contrast, the reports of the Gymnasium teacher were not specific and contained no justifications for the changes she detected. This was deemed a weakness for the research.

2.5.3. Religious Education and Change in Attitudes toward Diversity

Data of the pre and post student questionnaires were compared, students' and teachers' reports and answers in journals and focus groups' interviews were analysed and, stories from the "Most Significant Change" technique were categorised and evaluated to trace (a) possible changes in students' attitudes toward diversity and (b) relevant change in parents attitudes toward RE and diversity.

(a) Students' attitudes toward diversity

On average, more students (86.4%, Mdn = 4.5) acknowledged that RE helps "encourage people to understand those who differ from them" than after the intervention (65.9%, Mdn = 4.0). A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $T = 354.5$, $z = -3.114$, $p < 0.002$. To a large extent, the students appeared to realize the potential of RE for coexistence. It is useful to relate this to their answers to the question of whether RE "encourages people to be continuously with those who share their beliefs." At the end of the year, 61% answered negatively and 28.9% neither negatively nor positively. It is apparent that students recognise that openness to other can be both the aim and outcome of the learning processes in RE.

The narratives of the "Most Significant Change" technique about "Learning processes of transformative RE" (N = 30, Gymnasium 16, Lyceum 14) provide more information about what caused the change. They have been assessed by 11 independent judges (MA and PhD students, and teachers) and according to them the stories refer in detail to teaching methods as a factor of change, as well as to the religious content (Table 3) that caused the change. It is important to identify the most significant knowledge that caused the most significant change. According to [Vygotsky \(1978\)](#) this has emerged from the cognitive conflict between what they knew already and the new knowledge to which now confronted them, as well as from what is useful/beneficial for their lives according to [von Glasersfeld \(1991\)](#). This is procedural knowledge and concerns: (1) Developing relationships with others, (2) Teamwork, (3) Activity, (4) Interest in religious issues and (5) Critical thinking. It is noteworthy that the content that causes these changes, concerns as students say the religion they follow and "did not know so much about it" or "knew wrong things about it". In Gymnasium, in the 16 narratives 22 topics are mentioned that caused the change:

1. Relationships-communication with the "other"—8
2. How Christians live (Church Sacraments)—6
3. What is the Church—5
4. Diversity-Multiculturalism—3

There are 11 topics mentioned in the Lyceum:

1. Diversity 6
2. Christianity 4
3. Values-Ethics 3
4. Spirituality 2

100% of the narratives about "Learning processes of transformative RE" refer to the fact that the teaching methods have a significant impact on their learning and especially on understanding the topics mentioned above. Thus, it seems that RE is, to a large extent, effective in teaching topics related to the appreciation and embracement of the 'other', coupled with a high level of knowledge, seems to be metacognitively considered very important by the students. This, after all, is the scope of transformative RE. The religious conceptualization of reality, which for a religious adolescent acts on multiple levels in relation to his/herself and in relation to "others".

The students' answers in journals given to the question "What are the three basic things I learned during the lesson (from what we did and said)?" were distributed among the four types of knowledge (Table 6), analysed by two independent judges (teachers) who gradually proceeded to the analysis of content and speech. A percentage of (11%) in a total of 432 reports from students in the Gymnasium and 252 from the Lyceum

did not give any answer to this question. The total number of basic things that they learned were 1670 (967 in Gymnasium and 703 in Lyceum). Comparing these sets of factual knowledge with procedural knowledge, it is apparent experience is seen as the recognition of knowledge. In comparison with the expected learning outcomes it has been found that this knowledge is concerned with acquaintance with, and dialogue between different cultures, religions and beliefs and the cultivation of mutual understanding and mutual respect.

Table 6. The basic knowledge that students acquired in types of knowledge.

Journal’s Question: “What Are the 3 Basic Things I Learned during the Lesson (from What We Did and Said)?”	Total of the Reports	Total of the Referred Basic Things That They Learned	Factual Knowledge	Conceptual Knowledge	Procedural Knowledge	Metacognitive Knowledge
Gymnasium	432	967	234 24.1%	274 28.3%	446 46%	13 1.3%
Lyceum	252	703	88 12.5%	203 28.8%	398 56.6%	14 2%

Students at the end of the school year were asked in their journals to remember, think and reflect on what they had learned in order to confirm the findings from their journals, which show a high percentage (>75%) of identification between those who learned the expected learning outcomes of the RE lessons (Table 7). Their answers were analysed by two independent judges (teachers) and reveal (a) the high degree of sustainability of knowledge, since it took time from the achievement of learning outcomes and the answers and (b) the effectiveness to a sufficient degree of the RE in prevention and intervention, since students state that they learned e.g., positive attitudes towards the other/solidarity (in the classroom and society) and respect for diversity, but also personal improvement/self-confidence or development/cultivation of relationships.

It is worth noting the reference to the knowledge acquired during the year of research-related topics and especially to the reference to procedural knowledge and meta-cognitive knowledge contained action, e.g., openness to diversity, cultivating relationships, cooperation, action and communication. In the Lyceum, adolescents seem to be more concerned with their own relationships and their development, since they showed, according to the findings from the focus groups and the teacher’s journal, a very low relationships and acquaintance between them at the beginning of the school year.

2.5.4. Students’ Change towards Other and Diversity

After the intervention the students seemed to change their attitude towards immigrants, according to 6 of the 9 indicators in the questionnaire (Table 8).

Differences in attitudes towards immigrants and their rights by the end of the school year are illustrated in Table 8. There has been a large increase in those who absolutely agree that “Immigrants should all have the same rights that everyone else in the country has”, rose from 40.5% (Mdn = 3.0) to 65.9% (Mdn = 4.0) ($T = 119, z = -3.00, p < 0.03$). A big difference is clear in the indicator: “Immigrants who have lived in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections”, since 88.6% (Mdn = 4.0) agree and absolutely agree that they should have the right to vote in elections whereas before this the percentage was 58.9% (Mdn = 3.0). Respectively, the 41.7% (Mdn = 3.0) who denied this right before hereafter dramatically declined to 11.3% (Mdn = 3.0) ($T = 277.5, z = -3.249, p < 0.001$).

Table 7. What students stated in their journals at the end of the school year that they have learned to say and do.

What the Students Reported in the Journals at the End of the Year That They Learned		To Say	To Do
Gymnasium	1	Religious concepts and terms	Positive attitude towards the other/solidarity (in the classroom and society)
	2	Facts and persons of the Church Phenomena concerning religion and the modern world	Development/cultivation of relationships (cooperation-communication-action)
	3	Religions-acquaintance with believers to other religions	Respect/openness to diversity
	4		Personal improvement/self-confidence
Lyceum	1	Ethics-Moral reflection	Knowing each other and communication in the classroom
	2	Life of the Church	Respect/openness to diversity
	3	Church in society	Development/cultivation of relationships (cooperation-communication-action)
	4	God	Personal improvement/self-confidence
	5	Refugees-Immigrants	

Table 8. What students stated in their journals at the end of the school year that they have learned to say and do.

Attitudes towards Migration in Gymnasium and Lyceum (N = 45) 1—Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Agree, 4—Strongly Agree									
Question	Before %				After %				t-Test (Wilcoxon)
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
1. Immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections	11.4	29.7	31.6	27.3	4.5	6.8	40.9	47.7	0.01
2. Immigrants should have all the same rights that everyone else in the country has	4.8	9.5	45.2	40.5	4.5	6.8	22.7	65.9	0.03
3. Immigrants enrich our culture	15.6	25.0	45.7	13.6	4.5	20.5	45.5	29.5	0.02

In terms of cultural recognition and acceptance of otherness, it seems that the transformative RE has contributed to an increase in more positive attitudes. In indicator “immigrants enrich our culture” the ratio of those who completely disagree to those who completely agree shows a marked difference, before and after the RE. Those who disagree from 15.6% (Mdn = 3.0) become 4.5% (Mdn = 3.0) and those who completely agree from 13.6% (Mdn = 3.0) become 29.5% (Mdn = 3.0) (T = 9.5, z = -3.082, p = 0.002).

The comparison of the results and the non-parametric statistical test (Wilcoxon) show significant change in the students’ views to more positive views about the RE and its dynamic in encouraging people to understand diversity, since in Gymnasium twelve moved to positive attitudes (positive ranks) at the end of the school year, ten remained stable (ties) and four moved negatively (negative ranks) (p = 0.04, <0.05). Respectively in Lyceum eleven moved to positive views (positive ranks) at the end of the school year, five remained stable (ties) and two moved to negative positions (negative ranks) (p = 0.001, <0.05) (Table 9).

Table 9. Changing students’ attitudes towards RE in relation to encourage people to understand the diversity.

		Gymnasium	Lyceum
RE encourage people to understand other people different from them	Negative Ranks	4	2
	Positive Ranks	12	11
Ties		10	5
Affective	Sig.	0.042	0.12

Moreover, the “Most Significant Change” technique was applied for the in-depth study of the effects and changes of the RE lessons in the classroom, but also for internal evaluation, monitoring and feedback of the research. The domains of change (Table 10) emerged from the research itself and its aim. Here we are concerned not only with the most significant changes of the two periods, but also with the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of all the stories analysed by thematic and content analysis-a secondary analysis and meta-monitoring.

Table 10. Domain of change emerged from the students’ most significant stories and their frequency.

Students’ Domains of Change				
	Young People’s Attitudes toward Accepting and Embracing Cultural Diversity (1)	Learning Processes of Transformative Religious Education (2)	Personal Perception and Attitudes towards Religion (3)	Action on a Personal or Collective Level (4)
Gymnasium				
November 2016	4	8	3	9
February 2017	8	8	3	8
Lyceum				
November 2016	2	10	1	5
February 2017	6	4	2	6

Diversity is the main issue in the most narratives even in the 2nd or 3rd domains. The meta-analysis of all the narratives presents even more elements that contribute to the possibility that a school subject has, and in this case RE, to function as an intervention, since in all applications during the research year the changes in the domain of education have been more in relation to RE than other subjects in both the Gymnasium and the Lyceum. However, during the year there was an increase in the changes of domain 2, the management of modern conditions since they doubled in the Gymnasium and tripled in the Lyceum. The content analysis highlights that most of the narratives (73%) concerned changes which refer to all three domains 1 to 3, while 76% of the narratives refer young people’s attitudes toward accepting and embracing cultural diversity. These are essentially references and findings that are related to all four types of knowledge (factual, conceptual, procedural, metacognitive) and prove the effectiveness of RE in learning in relation to the topics of our research.

2.5.5. Stories of Gymnasium about Attitudes towards Diversity

The Gymnasium’s most significant change (MSC) that concerns the domain 4 (Application 1) is worth mentioning:

MSC 1.4 (Gymnasium): Having completed two months in High School and having learned about the first centuries of the history of the Church, the persecutions and human rights, I have changed my way of thinking and this has affected my life.

For example, a foreigner from Pakistan lives in my neighborhood. At first I was wary of him. I did not want to be near him. But now that I have learned about human rights, I think that this person has the right to live here and we need to like him and not be

afraid of him. I'm still cautious, but I know his rights. No person should be persecuted or discriminated against on the basis of gender, color, nationality or religion.

I like the lesson of RE and I think with what we learn about people, religion and God my mentality/culture will change for the better.

The student mentions his/her change, which concerns what he/she knows, has learned and thinks. He/She narrates both an external and an internal action and, more significantly with the honest statement that "I am still cautious" and the hopeful wording that with the RE "my mentality will change".

The most important changes in domains 1, and 3 during the same period show how learning in RE can cause changes in attitudes towards the 'other':

MSC 1.1 (Gymnasium): A new student had come to the coaching center (frontistirio). Because she was strangely dressed and of a different religion, some made fun of her and she did not feel comfortable. Now recently at school we learned about people with different religion, language, nationality and more. We said that all people, regardless of diversity, are equal to everyone. Ever since we did the lesson I have been thinking of behaving even better towards different people and people in general because it is not nice to distinguish some from others. So I was the first to go and talk to her and ask her to become friends. We keep hanging out. They make fun of us both now but we do not care why we had each other. She kind of taught me her language. The bad thing is that we are not in the same school.

MSC 1.2 (Gymnasium): The biggest and most significant change I have noticed in myself in the last two months is the deeper and better understanding of my religion. I talk about the basic beliefs, such as the martyrdoms of the Saints during the persecution, the history of the Church, the obstacles it encountered but also what it really is and what teaches us. I owe this to my school, to my teachers and to my classmates. I feel very happy and happy for this change. I am slowly realising that all this affects not only my daily life, but also my treatment for lot of things. The Church is not a building, they are people who believe in God. And that's why we as humans need to think about other people. Now I avoid things that are not right. I treat better people from other countries or different religions. We are all human.

The students themselves recognise what they learn and detect the change in how they think. In fact, in the case of change 1.1, knowledge is completed by the transformation of thought and action. It is important that in the first three months of the research the students of the Gymnasium were able to "know what they know" and to evaluate and distinguish how type B knowledge of "what the Church is" becomes type C knowledge "we are all human"—"I treat people from other countries or with different religions differently".

The same student in the fifth month of the research has no difference in his/her level of learning, but it can be seen in his/her narrative how teaching affects and religious knowledge works in enacting change in attitudes to 'other'. In the domain 2.1 he/she states:

MSC 2.1 (Gymnasium): I began to love my fellow human beings more and not to divide them into "social and color classes". I learned that we are all equal and despite the differences in nationality, culture, religion and color we can all hang out together and be friends . . .

Change takes place on an emotional and mental level, but it is built on prior knowledge, which is reflected and does not need to be reflected further. However, he/she learns something new and notes the result in practice "I started to love more".

Finally, the most significant finding in domain 4 is clear proof for the transformative function of the RE in the management of the modern conditions that concern diversity, and the movements of the populations and the multiculturalism:

MSC 2.4 (Gymnasium): Today at school I was asked to describe the most significant change in the RE course. I did not know where to start because there were so many changes that I was able to see the world from a different angle. I think I was a racist before our lessons. That is, many times when I was walking on the street and there was a foreigner next to me, in front of me or behind me, I was afraid and I was thinking that he might hurt

me just because he had a different color and spoke a different language. During the lesson we talked about love and practiced it with the communal feast (agape). Christ said “love one another”. This eventually includes people from different religions and countries than mine. That’s how it all started, that’s how I saw the world from another angle. That is why I try harder to love all the people more, whether they are from another country or believe in another religion or any.

The student chooses to say harsh words about his/her previous behaviour which he/she changed (“I was a racist”), not something that is easy, as he/she finds out what he/she learned in the RE and lived as an experience (“we talked about and practiced it”). Moreover, this student now tries “harder to love all the people”. This is another honest assessment of the degree of change. The learning result is obvious and also the high level of knowledge that a 12-year-old student acquires: “Christ said ‘love one another’. This eventually includes people from different religions and countries other than mine”.

2.5.6. Stories of Lyceum about Attitudes towards Diversity

The most significant changes for those in the Lyceum are borne out by evidence that RE can achieve a high level of knowledge that is directly related to the life of adolescents and causes changes that affect not only themselves but also their environment. In the first application of the technique in November, a student narrates his/her change, highlighting what [Anderson and Krathwohl \(2001\)](#) analyse as knowledge. The student reaches the point of describing in detail how he/she learns in the classroom and how he/she applies the new knowledge appropriately and creatively ([Kalantzis and Cope 2012](#)). The student explains that with the text of the Bible (Encounter with the Samaritan woman), he/she “discussed”, “compared”, “explained”, “analysed”, “thought”, “collaborated”, “communicated”, “understood” and “reviewed”. He/she essentially analyses what Dewey considers knowledge, an experience of thinking, reflection, and action.

MSC 1.1. (Lyceum): One of the most important lessons we have done is the parable of Christ and the Samaritan woman. Through this encounter I believe we have all revisited diversity and thought that we should accept different people to a greater degree than we did. Or to understand how and why someone is different from us in their beliefs and appearance. In my opinion it is a very important change because in our daily lives we associate with different people than us. It facilitates cooperation and communication with them. A relationship of mutual respect is created.

I think that this way the RE is better conducted as we discuss and compare our views on the topics of the course. Everyone is free to express their opinion and others respect and listen to it. Anyone who disagrees explains why we all analyse it together. This is how we expand our thinking.

Personally, I have always respected diversity in all areas, but trying to understand how we think and analyse their behaviors is a significant change because everyone in the class is in the process of doing so. So doing it in class we do it in our daily lives. This way everyone will try to understand the diversity and that is very important in my opinion.

It should of course be emphasised that these impressive results appear when there is previous experience (“I personally always respected diversity”) while it is obvious that the implemented pedagogical framework and the teaching methodology according to all the narratives of the students played the most important role in the transformative process of the knowledge and an essential change in their behaviour towards diversity.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the dynamics of the experiential approach to knowledge in community development is distinguished by its effectiveness on the members themselves and in what they have learnt. The connection between religious knowledge and the life of adolescents is important here (“we discuss and analyse social and current issues”) and this should be assessed based on the relationship that he/she narrates with the change in his/her attitudes towards religion.

However, finding from all the narratives is that the prior experience of the topics of the RE, primarily the local religious tradition and its impact on individuals, communities

and society in general, is important for the produced religious knowledge. In the story of the 2nd domain below it is obvious that the subjective approach to knowledge leads each person in school to build his/her knowledge, and this knowledge is worth and sustain since it is beneficial and useful for himself/herself. The transformative dynamics of RE towards acceptance and appreciation diversity can best be observed in the significant change that took place in relation to the religious outlook of a Lyceum student:

MSC 2.3 (Lyceum): The main change caused by the RE as we teach it is the change of my personal attitude towards the Church. Although my religion and beliefs have not changed radically for me, some things I believed in about the Church and its attitude toward matters have changed. In the past we taught religion as a subject where we simply stored some facts or information, as in History. In the way the RE is taught today we discuss and we are given the opportunity to express our views or concerns. Through this discussion I learned things about the Church mainly that I had not thought about. I believed that on certain issues the Church was absolute, not because it was dictated by religion, but because of the views of the clergy who gradually formulated unwritten laws. This absolute attitude troubled me, and although I did not reject my religion and faith, I was critical of certain elements of the Church. On the contrary, today, through our discussions, I have learned that these views, although popular, are not universally accepted by all who have a role in the Church. This was very important, because as soon as the austerity of the Church seemed to lighten, my attitude towards it became more receptive to what the Church really is. I realised that during these years, as society changes, things change with it, which in the past would have been taboo for the Church and would have been rejected. This is how I realised that the Church is consisted of people and they, like all people, can have different views on an issue.

I chose this change, because unlike others, it also affected my life in general, apart from my school life.

The finding of this change in the student's own life and attitude towards the Church, to which he/she "belongs", emphasises another aspect of the issue, diversity within the community itself.

Many narratives (24) concern the diversity and pluralism of the community itself. And for students, this is mainly the classroom. Especially in the Lyceum, as already mentioned, (a) relationships, (b) communication and (c) a first level of acceptance by others are the main issues in all domains, more or less, which they deal with and in which they find the most significant change due to the RE lesson.

The findings, furthermore were reported by the thematic analysis of the teachers journals. It was applied by the researcher and two independent coders (Table 11) and the findings reveal that (a) the changes in behaviors towards diversity are observable and (b) the RE teaching process and its content to a large extent intervenes in relation to the management of acquaintance and communication with the other.

Finally, parents' questionnaires were analysed to clarify their perceptions of the possible changes in their children due to RE.

It has been mentioned that most parents (59.9%) relate the aim of RE to the strengthening of faith. On the other hand it is known from the students' focus groups that (a) 73.6% talked about the topics of RE to the parents, (b) 30.3% asked their parents more or less about the topics discussed in the RE, (c) 54.6% discussed these issues more or less with their parents and (d) 48.3% trust their parents with religious issues. We could say that parents are, to some extent, a reliable source for the evaluation of learning in RE and its results, but also that it is another source of learning for religion and faith issues. The extent of their effect, however, can be based on the present data although it seems to exist, as previously mentioned, mainly in the Lyceum.

Table 11. Categories of changes observed in students by teachers during the school year (listed in order, depending on the number of entries in a total of 26 Gymnasium's and 24 Lyceum's journals).

Categories of Changes	
1	Relationships between students-openness to 'other'
2	Attitudes towards the subject of RE
3	Attitudes towards the other-the different
4	Participation in teaching activities
5	Communication-Collaboration between students
6	Recognition of the relationship between the knowledge of the RE and their life

In their journals, however, records show that 51.2% of students in the Gymnasium (N = 382) and 33.7% (N = 167) of students in the Lyceum in answer to question 8 "What do I intend to do with what I learned in class?" reported that they will "talk" or "talk to" their parents about what they learned. It appears that the parents are aware of the learning outcomes and the issues that their children deal with in the RE since they state that the students talked, asked questions, discussed and reflected on the topics of the subject (Table 12).

They were aware (Table 12) that their children in RE dealt with issues of diversity, multiculturalism and population movements (55.9%). They were concerned with these issues to a great extent (64.7%) and learned more about these issues 70.6%. Although they do not have the ability to evaluate the learning outcomes of the taught RE, they found that there were changes in their children's attitudes due to RE (41.1%) and changes in their attitudes towards other people (44.0%). These percentages are considered particularly important because they are related to changes (learning and knowledge) related to RE, according to parents, which is certainly not considered a key school subject for them and, which does not usually have a visible effect on school life which is echoed in their children's performance.

(b) Change in parents attitudes toward RE and diversity

Analysis of the parents questionnaire helped to investigate whether transformative RE has had in the students' immediate environment, an effect on the attitudes towards different cultures.

A great effect of RE can be seen in the parents themselves who, due to the effect of RE on their children and the transformation of that knowledge into action in their family environment, state that (a) they asked themselves about their own knowledge/views/attitudes about the issues that their children dealt with in RE (58.9%) and (b) reflected on what they knew about these issues (38.2%). Obviously these issues concerned them because of the discussions they had had with their children. Specifically on the issues of multiculturalism and population movements, they stated that because of their child and the RE (a) they were moderately or greatly concerned with these issues (32.3%), (b) they were moderately and much concerned (44.1%) and (c) had learned more (41.2%). Thus it can be emphasised that these numbers consequently highlight the effect that transformational learning has on individuals and their environment. Many parents, in some cases almost half, admit that a school subject, which for them is usually related to the strengthening of faith (a traditional approach), has made them deal with the issues of the modern world, to reflect on them and to learn more about them. There is also a 20.5% ($m = 1.73$, $s.d. = 0.86$) which states that they changed their mind on these issues due to RE and the effect on their child while 14.7% ($m = 1.41$, $s.d. = 0.92$) indicated that they were annoyed with the issues being discussed this year in RE.

The Spearman test between the parents' statement that they were annoyed and their views on RE showed that those who believe that the RE helps people to understand the 'others' are not bothered by the topics discussed in the class ($r = -4.32$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 12. Evaluation of the interventional function of the knowledge of RE in the students’ family.

	Parents’ Evaluation Statements	None	Minimal	Mild	Much	Very Much	M/s.d.
		%	%	%	%	%	
1	I noticed changes in his/her views because of the RE	23.5	35.3	23.5	14.7	2.9	2.38/1.1
2	I noticed changes in his/her behaviors because of the RE	36.5	39.4	12.1	12.1	0.00	2.0/1.0
3	I noticed changes in his/her attitudes towards other people because of the RE	23.5	32.4	23.5	17.6	2.9	2.42/1.13
4	I noticed him/her acting (doing something) because of the RE	23.5	35.3	29.4	11.8	0.00	2.29/0.97
5	I noticed that he/she deals with issues of multiculturalism and population movements at RE	14.7	29.4	29.4	20.6	5.9	2.73/1.13
6	I noticed that he/she is concerned about multiculturalism and population movements because of the RE	8.8	26.5	35.3	20.6	8.8	2.94/1.09
7	I noticed that he/she learns more at RE about issues of multiculturalism and population movements	8.8	20.6	35.3	23.5	11.8	3.08/1.13
8	I showed interest in issues that were discussed at RE at the school where my child attends	8.8	11.8	50.0	17.6	11.8	3.1/1.06
9	I asked myself about my knowledge/views/attitudes about issues that were dealt with at RE at the school that my child attends	11.8	29.4	47.1	11.8	0.00	2.58/0.85
10	I talked to others (besides my child) about the issues that were discussed at the RE at the school that my child attends	23.5	41.2	23.5	5.9	5.9	2.29/1.08
11	I reflected on my knowledge/views/attitudes about the issues that were dealt with at RE at the school that my child attends	26.5	35.3	32.4	2.9	2.9	2.20/0.97
12	I acted (I did something) on the issues that were dealt with at RE at the school where my child attends	35.3	50.0	14.7	0.00	0.00	1.79/0.68
13	Because of my child and the RE, I was more concerned with issues of multiculturalism and population movements	29.4	38.2	29.4	2.9	0.00	2.05/0.85
14	I was concerned, because of my child and the RE, about the issues of multiculturalism and population movements	35.3	20.6	35.3	8.8	0.00	2.17/1.02
15	I learned more, because of my child and the RE, about issues of multiculturalism and population movements	41.2	17.6	32.4	5.9	2.9	2.11/1.12
16	I changed my mind, because of my child and the RE, on issues of multiculturalism and population movements	50.0	29.4	17.6	2.9	0.00	1.73/0.86
17	I was annoyed with the issues that were being discussed this year at RE, at the school that my child attends	79.4	5.9	11.8	0.00	2.9	1.41/0.92

3. Discussion-Conclusions

The analysis resulted that (a) school causes changes in the students’ attitudes to diversity, (b) RE has a high learning efficiency in accepting and embracing cultural diversity and (c) religious knowledge is valued by the students themselves that impacts on young people’s attitudes toward accepting and embracing cultural diversity.

Although the school community and especially the students and their parents believe that the RE lesson strengthens faith at the same time, the research reveals that RE produces knowledge that according to their assessment enables them to learn at a higher level, and to accept and embrace cultural diversity. The analysis confirms that this knowledge is developed in each person according to his/her context, i.e., it is subjective and intersubjective production that occurs in a specific environment and affects the person and the world around him/her, which changes his/her actions and interaction. This knowledge according to the findings above, is mainly procedural and relates, as recorded, to the ability

of students to understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, create/produce/compose. In other words, it concerns the highest levels of learning and certainly the fields of knowledge of principles and ideas, especially of procedural knowledge and metacognition, according to [Anderson and Krathwohl \(2001\)](#). It is actual knowledge when it is beneficial/useful in human life and helps individuals to know and understand themselves, others, the world and God, if they believe in God. In practice this knowledge is produced when RE is based on the religious, the theological content, and taught in RE lessons by experiential and transformative pedagogies. Then it has valuable results for education and its general scopes, especially in terms of (a) human relationships, (b) respect for diversity, and (c) communication with others. A prerequisite is to offer experiences ([Dewey \[1916\] 2002](#)) and education ([Biesta 2013, 2014](#)), namely to be a transformative education. The analysis of the data provides clear indications that this knowledge itself works effectively to change attitudes towards diversity and otherness. In fact, as it is mentioned, this is done without sacrificing the content of RE, which is not offered by another subject at school. RE, according to the research findings, is or can be an educational practice derived from the school curriculum, practiced in school life and in the individual's personal and social environments provided that meets the conditions of the pedagogical approach that articulated above. This is issued not only to non-confessional RE as the studies that mentioned in the introduction evidenced but also to confessional RE, open to 'otherness' and world religions.

In particular, Greek Orthodox RE can achieve, to a high degree, the cultural recognition and acceptance of religious diversity and, to a certain extent, a change in attitudes towards the other, the immigrant, and the refugee. It is also found that RE contributed to the increase in more positive attitudes towards diversity. Above all, however, it turns out that it contributes significantly to the development of acquaintance and communication of team members, recognition and to a degree of acceptance of otherness and certainly to the development of relationships, in cases that did not exist before, as happened in both student groups.

Of course, the generalisability of the results is limited in terms of positivism. Nevertheless, the deep and close involvement of the researcher in the community of interest, combined with sufficient distance from the phenomenon under study to accurately record observed actions as well as triangulation in collecting data according to [Mertens \(2010, pp. 256–58\)](#) can ensure credibility. Also, the research seems to enable researchers to make judgments based on similarities and differences when comparing another research situation to their own. That means that the research has transferability ([Guba and Lincoln 1989](#)) which is the parallel to external validity in constructivist research approaches ([Mertens 2010, p. 259](#)). Of course, further research is needed to establish the impact of RE on attitudes towards diversity, especially in multireligious school communities, different national educational systems and types of RE. Future studies should take into account the number of the school communities to be more than two and the population to be more diverse. Finally, should be considered whether there are other social circumstances and curricular subjects that may contribute to change.

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