

Promoting the Integration of a Student with Autism in the General School with Erasmus KA3 /e-twinning Actions

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Abstract

This paper investigates the dynamics of non-formal learning in the field of teacher preparation, for the acceptance and integration of people with autism in the General School. The main goal of the research is to identify appropriate practices for the formation of a fair attitude towards people with disabilities, with a focus on autism. The research questions posed were: (1) How can understanding autism be achieved i. by the group of teachers and students involved, and ii. by individuals in the environment in which they interact, and (2) How will understanding autism lead to the acceptance and integration of students with autism into the community? The research was carried out within the framework of the Erasmus KA3 / e-twinning program and was connected to the Curriculum through modules of the courses of Modern Greek Literature and Modern Greek Language. The pedagogical tool Targeted, Individual, Structured, Integrated Program for Special Educational Needs (TISIPfSEN) (Drossinou-Korea, 2017) played a primary role in the implementation of the program. The results reflected the reliability of the educational tool TISIPfSEN in enhancing the empathy of students of typical development and highlighted the potential which derives from the participation in non-formal education to form attitudes and behaviors with the ultimate goal of integrating students with autism in the General School.

Keywords: autism, TISIPfSENs, good practices.

1. Introduction

In Greece, in the framework of the inclusive education policy for students with disabilities, the Law was instituted (Ministry of Education and Religious affairs-L.4368-art. 82, 2016) which favors the education of students with disabilities in general education classes with their classmates without disabilities. The education that includes all students, without exclusions, regardless of their special characteristics and their possible disabilities, of any form, provides many benefits for all students. It reduces prejudice and discrimination while at the same time promotes understanding, strengthens social assimilation by ensuring a dignified educational future for children and adults with disabilities within their community (Drossinou-Korea, 2019).

1.1 The Disability of Autism

Neurodevelopmental disorders known as autism spectrum disorders (ASD) occur in the form of deficits (a) in social transaction, (b) in communication, and (c) in limited, repetitive behavior that highlights a deficit in creative thinking. These criteria for diagnosing autism are determined by the international classification systems DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and ICD-10 (World Health Organization, 2014). The correct understanding of autism is interrelated with the correct diagnosis and that with the reception of the student with autism from the general school and his integration in it.

1.2 Good educational practices that promote integration

According to the comparison and analysis of data from 18 surveys conducted in 15 countries (Mizunoya, Mitra & Yamasaki, 2016), the chances of excluding people with disabilities from education are much more than for children with disabilities with the remarkable observation that this fact is not affected by the individual, social or economic characteristics of people with disabilities. The research addresses inclusive education in developing countries and the impact of disability on school attendance. On the other hand, effective inclusive education presupposes that the host school provides the required building infrastructure and the appropriate and adequate teaching staff, and takes measures to create the appropriate educational conditions (UNICEF, 2017). The European Information Network on Education Systems and Policies in Europe EURYDICE provides information on the organization and operation of educational systems in Europe as well as reliable analyses of European Education policies. It has been operating since 1980, is coordinated by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), which is headquartered in Brussels and consists of 42 National Units, of 38 countries participating in the Erasmus + program. These include the EU Member States, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey (Eurydice, 2021).

Among these measures is the use of all the opportunities provided by formal or non-formal education, such as the European Erasmus programs, for which equality in education is a key objective. Given the distance education imposed by the covid-19 pandemic, we used these programs to promote accessibility for people with learning disabilities, as well as to raise community awareness on issues such as the equitable participation of students with disabilities in education with the ultimate goal of their fair integration into the community.

One of the most important advantages of the European Programs is that they offer expanded learning frameworks, through the creative engagement with the respective cognitive objects, a fact that is beneficial for all students. The term learning readiness is related to the formal but also to the non-formal general and special education and refers to the mental, emotional, social and physical integration, per stage of development, of the child. According to the Framework of Analytical Curriculum' Special Education (FACSE) this process leads to the development of skills required for school learning (Ministry of Education-Pedagogical Institute, 2009). Creative engagement with learning readiness activities is achieved thanks to the experiential participation of students, something that connects them directly to reality and leads them effortlessly to the search of themselves and of knowledge. They have the opportunity to create first, and then to acquire knowledge. In other words, they become active subjects by using their already existing abilities which are reinforced at all levels of development with the main driving force being the strengthening of self-awareness. (Drossinou-Korea, 2020: 154-161). For these reasons, we also involved a student with autism in the process of the European Program, with the ultimate goal of strengthening the means of communication with his classmates. After all, this informal education gives the opportunity to develop new social skills through contact with new people and situations as it provides the ideal conditions to provide provocative dynamic stimuli such as contact with new

places, new people and new lifestyles. Collaboration with classmates and students from schools from another country enhanced emotional and social skills by removing negative emotions from the student with autism (Synodinou, 2007: 9-32). The activities of the program, and especially the creation of fairy tales and painting, were the bridges for the realization and acceptance of the invisible disability and the acceptance of reality. In this way they participate in social stations and interact with parents, classmates, teachers and educators (Drossinou-Korea, 2020: 702-703).

1.3 Targeted, Individual, Structured, Integrated Program for Special Educational Needs (TISIPfSENs)

This article uses differentiated teaching of multiple reading skills to a student with autism attending a general high school class using the pedagogical tool Targeted, Individual, Structured, Integrated Program for Special Educational Needs (TISIPfSENs) (Drossinou Korea, 2020). TISIPfSENs is analyzed in five phases as follows:

The first phase of TISIPfSENs includes the systematic empirical observation during which the special education teacher studies the case of the student with identity and according to his experience ends up with hetero-observations about the individual, family and school history of the student with autism. Thus, the special education teacher creates a first picture of the student's learning profile. In the second phase of TISIPfSENs, according to the observation methodology, the hetero-observations are recorded in excel tables with certain Basic Skills Control Lists, the potential of the student with autism. Informal Educational Assessment (IEA) is recorded in the table with Neurodevelopmental areas for learning readiness, in the table with special educational needs as they are represented in the philosophy and principles of the Framework of Analytical Curriculum' Special Education (FACSE) in the table of general learning difficulties as are reflected in the Curriculum of General Education (CGE) of General Education. In the third phase of TISIPfSENs the curriculum building plan is implemented, the drafting of which is determined by the teaching priorities and the didactic interaction with the student. In the fourth phase, the differentiated content is applied with adapted appropriate pedagogical materials utilizing the visual conceptual facilitators (VCF). In the fifth phase and in parallel with the didactic interventions, the effectiveness of the targeted individual didactic intervention with a certain goal and the implementation of the didactic steps are evaluated.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to highlight the good practices, which are offered by non-formal education, in the context of school life, for the integration of students with autism in the school community, in the general school, the Lyceum. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the most effective and equitable education of the student with autism. The understanding of autism by parents, teachers and classmates proves to be a prerequisite for this. For this purpose, as research questions were asked: (1) How the understanding of autism is achieved (i) by the school community and in particular teachers and students and (ii) by the wider community and the environment in which they interact in the context of non-formal education, and (2) How will understanding autism lead to the acceptance and integration of students with autism into the community?

3. Methodology

The methodology of this study is mixed as it is empirical, bibliographic consisting of quality and quantity data (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2006). The qualitative data of the research were

3.2 Methodological process of qualitative research

The study used the research tools regarding the methodology of participatory observation (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2006) and the intervention methodology of the person with autism (Kalyva, 2005) according to the pedagogical tool TISIPfSEnS: the Systematic Empirical Observation, the semi-structured interview (first phase), EXCELL tables with Basic Skills Control Lists (BSCL) (second phase TISIPfSEnS) and the Teaching Interaction Protocol (fifth phase).

3.2.1 First phase of TISIPfSEnS

Initially, the teacher and the student's parents met with the researcher-teacher coordinator of the program and discussed in a semi-structured interview issues related to individual, family and school history in order to understand their attitude to the problem of autism education.

Stavros is mentioned as a very quiet person, very introverted, who avoids the company of his classmates, does not look at his interlocutor and shows great shyness which he also manifests with his body. In terms of academic knowledge, he has a mediocre performance and is interested in fast cars.

In the family history, parents are recorded as negative towards their child's autism. In particular, the father was too late to accept his son's particularity and the mother said she was unable to deal with this refusal, resulting in severe problems in the family environment during the first years of his life. Stavros was also excluded from the beneficial effects of early intervention in the way described in the study on the effects of early intervention on students with autism (Noyes-Grosser et al., 2018). After all, with the questions that the mother addressed to the teacher-coordinator, during the program process, she asked for answers on the analysis of her child's behavior and expressed her anxiety due to the lack of understanding of autism.

The student in the school history is recorded to have attended the general Kindergarten, Elementary and Secondary School and did not accept to attend the integration class. His attendance at the General School, without the support of a teacher of the integration class or Parallel Support, with teachers who did not understand autism, gradually caused his isolation. In this case, the ecological perspective never worked as no agreement was reached on a common teaching goal with the necessary cooperation of the General and Special Teacher to support the work of the student's autonomy.

The research of (Syriopoulou-Delli, Antoniou & Authinou, 2020) around the perceptions and knowledge of primary and secondary education teachers for the co-education of students with Autism Disorders Spectrum (ASD) showed the contradiction that exists in teachers today. Thus, the knowledge they have about autism and the ignorance of the strategies for the co-education of students with autism as well as the "laboratory" learning in the general school affect the quality of education provided by teachers. These include undergraduate students of special education, or holders of seminar certificates which were conducted in the context of distance learning. The search for ways to train teachers who already serve in the general school, on the subject of strategies for the co-education of students with autism in the General School is a serious issue. (Nanni & Kolokouri, 2020-2021), in their study, present the training program conducted on teachers on sustainable development in the context of enhancing the education of people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and point out how obvious is the current trend for the co-education of students with SEN with their classmates who do not have SEN in common schools of all levels. However, a precondition for this is the realization of teacher training, starting with the teachers of Primary Education.

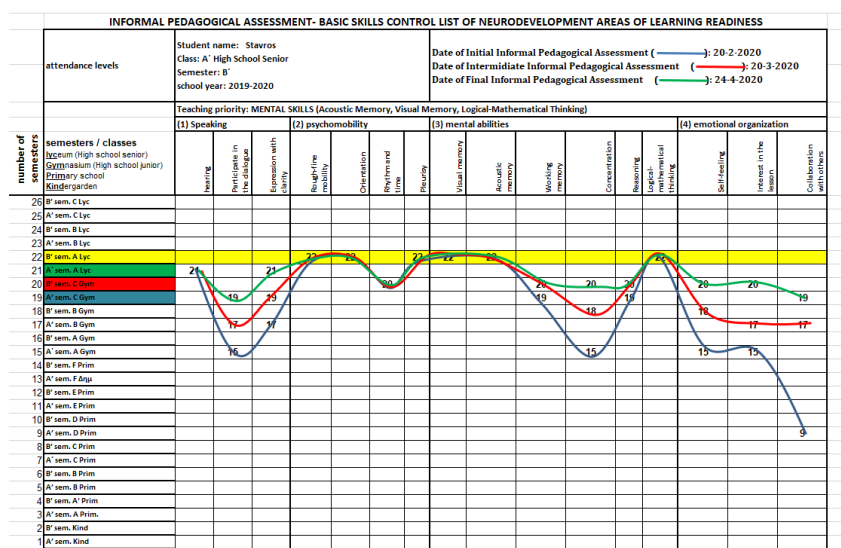
The consequences of Stavros' ineffective attendance were demonstrated when the student registered and had to attend the Lyceum. This emerges from the hetero-observation protocols of the teacher who notes that Stavros is in the 22nd semester of formal and compulsory education (yellow baseline, see Graph 1), and among other things she states:

During his transition to high school, Stavros's parents appeared before the school principal (and teacher-coordinator) on the first day of the school year, which was also the first year of implementation of the European Program, and pointed out the child's hesitation for his participation in school life. They expressed their frustration because they could not persuade their child to come to school. With the personal intervention of the teacher, the child was persuaded to follow her to class and sit at his desk. The duration of this success, however, was short. A coincidence, the shaking of a curtain from the air on the heads of the students, among whom was Stavros, was commented on by the laughter of certain students who averted the student in the earlier classes, resulting in him getting up from his desk and rushing out in panic. Then, the teacher, through the process of personal interview, found out the negative attitude of these students, due to their lack of understanding of autism. The parents failed to persuade their child to return to school. Eventually, they claimed and succeeded in his being described as "privately taught" so as not to miss the school year. When a little later, distance learning was imposed due to covid-19, despite the efforts of the school and the parents, the student refused to participate in it.

3.2.2 Second phase of TISIPfSENs

The preparation of the participation of the student with autism was done in an online meeting of the teachers with the six students in the context of the promotion of the integration of a student with autism in the General School with actions of Erasmus KA3 / e-twinning. The coordinator teacher informed the students about her intention to involve their classmate with autism in the program and asked for their opinion. The immediate consent of the students facilitated the next step which was to prepare the circle of friends to support their classmate. The circle of friends was formed by three volunteers of the group, who have demonstrated in practice, throughout their common course at school, positive feelings for this student. Our intention was, as reported by (Kalyva, 2005), to enhance social interaction, which (Newton Taylor & Wilson, 1996) include in promoting the integration of children with behavioral and emotional disorders at school.

The second tool of the observation methodology was the informal pedagogical evaluation according to the second phase of TISIPfSENs. Some protocols with EXCELL tables were used in which they were recorded, with Basic Skills Checklist (BSC) of Neurodevelopmental Areas for learning readiness, focusing on the characteristics of autistic spectrum disorders (graphs 1&2). During the first school year of the implementation of Erasmus KA3, 2019-2020, the results from APA from the participation of Stavros to dialogue, his concentration, self-esteem and interest in the course, show an improvement of 4-5 semesters of attendance (Graph 1). The most impressive improvement, though, was found in his cooperation with others. This was also highlighted by the mother who noticed the improvement in this field in person.



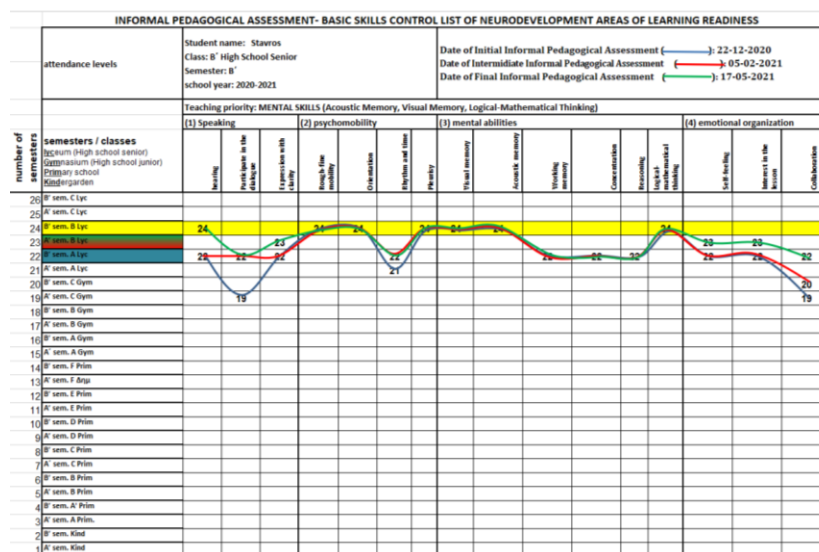
Graph 1. Informal pedagogical assessment with the basic skills control lists, School year: 2019-2020

Graph 1 records the student's potential with the Informal Pedagogical Assessment in the table with the Basic Skills Control Lists of neurodevelopmental areas of learning readiness, during the school year 2019-2020 over three different sequential periods, at the beginning, middle and end of Erasmus KA3 /e-twinning actions. More specifically, the average of the original hetero-observations was determined at 18.56 semesters of attendance (1st semester, 3rd Gymnasium) and it is marked with blue. Deviation of 7 semesters from the baseline of his formal and compulsory education (22 semesters: 2nd semester 1st Lyceum). The average of the final hetero-observations is 20.75 semesters of study (1st semester of the 1st Lyceum). The deviation decreases by recording an 11.80% change. In the field of emotional organization, in which the largest deviation was found, on average, in the 13th semester of study (1st semester, 6th grade of Primary school), the final deviation was limited to 19.67 semesters (2nd semester, 3rd Gymnasium) recording 51.30% change (Table 1).

Table 1. Informal pedagogical assessment of functional and adaptive behavior according to the FACSE's BSCLs, general and learning needs – School year: 2019-2020

age	Baseline of formal education	TOTAL DIFFERENCES			emotional organisation		
Year	Semester	Average of initial deviations	Average of final deviations	change %	Average of initial deviations	Average of final deviations	change %
15	22	18,56	20,75	11,80%	13	19,67	51,30%

In the second school year of the implementation of Erasmus KA3 on the e-twinning platform, 2020-2021, the results from the APA record the improvement of the conditions for Stavros' participation as the large deficits have been alleviated since the previous year. Participation in dialogue and cooperation with others continue to show the greatest deficits, yet the distance to be travelled now is less. In this second phase, he showed an even greater improvement, in the order of three semesters, in these two areas (Graph 2).



Graph 2. Informal pedagogical assessment with basic skills control lists, School year: 2020-2021

Graph 2 lists the student's potential with the Informal Pedagogical Assessment in the table with the Basic Skills Control Lists of neurodevelopmental areas of learning readiness, during the school year 2020-2021 over three different sequential periods, at the beginning, middle and end of Erasmus KA3/e-twinning actions. More analytically, the average of the initial hetero-observations was determined at 22.31 semesters of attendance (2nd semester, 1st Lyceum), and marked in blue. Deviation of 2 semesters from the baseline of his formal and compulsory education (24 semester: 2nd semester, 2nd Lyceum). The average of the final hetero-observations is at 23.06 semesters of attendance (1st semester of the 2nd Lyceum). The deviation decreases by recording an 11.80% change. Analyzing the data, the average of the initial deviations from the baseline of his formal and compulsory education was set at 3.36%. In the field of emotional organization, in which the largest deviation was found, on average, in the 21st semester of study (1st semester, 1st lyceum), the final deviation was limited to 22.67 semesters (1st semester, 2nd lyceum) recording 7.95% change (Table 2).

Table 2. Informal pedagogical assessment of functional and adaptive behavior in accordance with FACSE's BSCLs, general and learning needs – School year: 2020-2021

age	Baseline of formal education	TOTAL DIFFERENCES			emotional organisation		
Year	Semester	Average of initial deviations	Average of final deviations	change %	Average of initial deviations	Average of final deviations	change %
16	24	22,31	23,06	3,36%	21	22,67	7,95%

The findings confirm that the student, by strengthening the circle of friends and adapting the teaching objectives to his learning readiness, participated effectively in a process that requires and at the same time enhances social and communication skills.

The data of the APA set as a short-term goal of Stavros' participation, to highlight and enhance his existing skills, focusing mainly on his ability and desire for the sketch. A long-term goal was to alleviate the deficit recorded in the emotional organization and in his cooperation with others.

That is why the teacher who was responsible for the implementation of the European Program used his close circle of friends as a means of communication of the student both with her and with the other participating students.

Due to the various deficits that children with autism have in communication and social interaction skills, the “circle of friends” particularly benefits these children, systematically using the social networks that operate within a classroom. Through the “circle of friends” children with autism are provided with the appropriate supportive environment to deal with social deficiencies, which are undoubtedly an obstacle in the effort to integrate into the general school (Whitaker, Barratt, Joy, Potter & Thomas, 1998). According to the learning readiness activities, the experiences of students with autism in school life are promoted (Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs – Pedagogical Institute, 2009), which favor the Emotional Organization in cooperation with peers. The presence of “friends” presupposes the collaborative process and offers the conditions for peer-to-peer teaching. It also provides the opportunity for students to express and highlight talents for which curricula are indifferent.

The group of friends, therefore, became a necessary condition in order to convince Stavros to participate in school activities among his classmates. Also, the consent of his parents who finally accepted the proposal, although they expressed reservations about whether their son would accept it, was necessary. They also agreed to create the circle of friends. This attitude of the parents was not given, when in fact the research of (Lawrence Scahill, Lecavalier, Schultz, Evans, Maddox, Pritchett, Herrington, Gillespie, Miller, Amoss, Aman, Bearss, Gadow & Edwards, 2019) reflects the stress factors by analyzing the theory in 990 young people with autistic spectrum disorder and their parents. In the same study, they identified mild anxiety (n=116, aged 5-17 years, 79.3% men) of the stress scale of 25 items in each parent of a child with autism. Consequences of children’s stress lead parents to aim at the orality of words and less at the activation of transactional elements that are a prerequisite for communication. Aspirations such as eye contact, voice response, imitation, simplification of speech in terms of type and structure, style and volume of the voice are neglected due to the non-response of the child while they should be pursued even more intensely and adapted to the child’s abilities and interests, just as in formal development. So in our case, the deficits in the student’s communication had created the belief in the parents that it would not be of any use to him or to the school. The main argument of the parents was the excessive stress of the student that does not allow him to concentrate and communicate properly in every situation. The contribution of his circle of friends was important for the reversal of the initial negative attitude of the student and his parents, as they relied on them to negotiate the manner and conditions of the participation of the student with autism and problems in speech and social interactions. The teachers of the school collaborated with the participating students but also with the parents and contributed to the successful participation of the student. The textbook (Vogindroukas & Sherratt, 2020) supports the development of children with autism and analyzes the areas of development of sociability, communication, playful behavior and language development. These are differentiated in people with autism and ways of intervention in these areas are recommended. Particular emphasis is placed on teaching techniques at school and on working with the family, factors that are interrelated with teachers’ understanding of autism.

3.2.3 Third phase of TISIPfSEns – Designing the program

Specifically, in the context of the implementation of a policy of special inclusive education and training for students with disabilities, with a focus on autism, the school which Stavros attends, in the school year 2019-2020 participated in the European Program Erasmus KA3 “Teachers4Europe: setting an Agora for Democratic Culture”, in the section on European democratic values, the status of Active Democratic European Citizen, and human rights. Aiming primarily to raise awareness of the school community on autism, students approached disability as a cause of social stigma and marginalization, focusing on the stigmatization of students with developmental disorders attending general school. Initially, it was sought whether and to what extent European institutions and legislation provide and seek the registration and protection of the human rights of these individuals. As literature contributes to an approach which is deprived

of guilt and safe, Agrimis, the hero of the short story “Eros – Theros” by Al. Papadiamantis, was considered ideal for the leading role of our program. The students, through their work, were led to the conclusion that the community of Papadiamantis’ era, at the beginning of the 20th century, has not been definitively left in the past. With other procedures, adapted to the new conditions, it continues to “expel” these members, always providing excuses for its aversion. That is why, after researching websites that contain the relevant European legislation, the students wrote a defensive text about Agrimis, with the ultimate goal of awakening any community that tries to expel him. In addition, the students, inspired by the specific approach of Papadiamantis’ work, painted, wrote poetry, analyzed the hero on a concept map and created a presentation (ppt), video and audio file with a theatrical performance of an adapted excerpt of the short story starring Agrimis. Also, in the context of diffusion of results, this project was presented at an online event of the Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Western Greece with the theme: Erasmus + Days 2020.

Regarding the student’s involvement with the project, the remote implementation process of the program allowed him to participate without the obligatory contact with all his classmates, which made him feel safe. The activities were structured in collaborative documents or presentations and the student’s participation became completely voluntary both in terms of the time of his involvement in the tasks and of the people he collaborated with. In addition, the teacher-coordinator, together with the volunteer students of the “circle of friends”, created the rules according to which they would approach their classmate who has difficulties in communication with them, according to what Drossinou-Korea (2020) reports.

Rule 1: respect for the other’s opinion.

Rule 2: the “circle of friends” volunteers apply a “group data protection policy”.

Rule 3: Parents and teachers are bound by the same “group data protection” policy.

Rule 4: every discussion about Stavros begins and ends by describing his positive characteristics.

Rule 5: The contribution of each member of the team of the "circle of friends" for the participation of Stavros in the Program is recorded in a diagram.

Rule 6: The difficulties of Stavros for his participation in the Program were recorded in a list.

This recording helped the educational integration process by highlighting the school culture that utilized the “circle of friends” to improve the social skills of the student with autism. Specifically, in compiling the list of difficulties, Stavros’ classmates demonstrated both their high ethics and the skill of insight as they recognized key autistic characteristics and improved the acceptance and understanding they had already shown for their classmate. The process of the “circle of friends” is associated with the “friendly school” that supports and enhances positive emotions among classmates (Drossinou-Korea, 2020: 730-731).

In order to make the participation of the student possible and effective, some of the requirements of the program were adapted to the abilities of Stavros. One of his favorite activities, known to his classmates, is drawing sketches, mainly with the theme of cars. The activities assigned to him were mainly related to this skill.

With sketches inspired by the literary text of Papadiamantis. He was also persuaded to participate in a collaborative presentation where he and the three students in the circle of friends would create a poem for which Stavros would choose the background (Fig. 2) and a collage (Fig. 3) with the students’ creations.

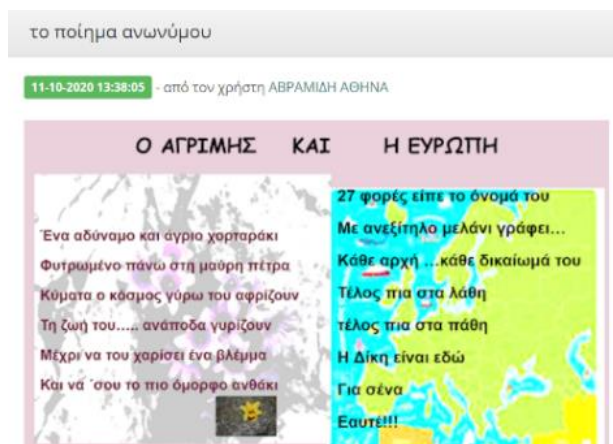


Figure 2. The “cooperative” poem

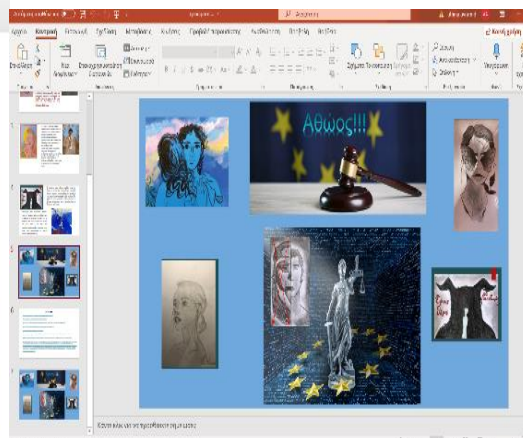


Figure 3. The collage

3.2.4 Fourth phase of TISIPfSEns - Differentiated Material and applications

In the second phase, the program was extended, the following school year, to the e-twinning platform. The whole second phase was based on the cooperation with schools abroad and specifically with three schools in Turkey: a Special School, a General High School and a School for gifted students. Stavros participated in three of the meetings with the Turkish schools, as a guest of the three participants who were the circle of friends.

Two meetings were held with the Special School. In the first, the students were very timid and were predominantly represented by their teachers. In the second meeting the students of the Special School had prepared a presentation with games and dances and songs. Stavros watched the event online, like everyone else. Our school presented the two fairy tales created by our students.

The 1st fairy tale (Fig. 4) was written and painted exclusively for the students of this school. We used the elements of nature to convey the message of how important any existence is, in relation to humans. Regardless of the powers they possess, their appearance or their role within a whole, every existence is transformed by the power of co-existence into a necessary element of existence of a community. A human role was that of the child with autism who found himself in the vortex of a severe weather phenomenon and was associated with the awareness by his father of the need for his son education to deal independently with such phenomena for his survival.

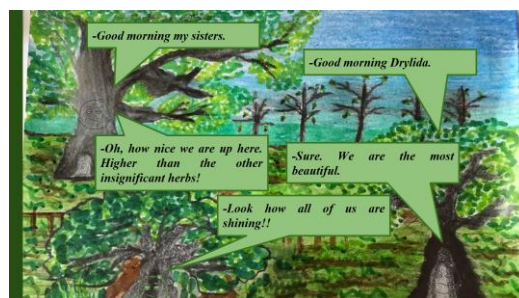


Figure 4. The 1st fairy tale

The 2nd fairy tale is an adaptation of the story of Papadiamantis's short story in terms familiar from children's fairy tales, for easier reception of the story and its message (Fig. 5). The students here had to think about how to convey the message of the story to young children but also to children with autism. They used terminology, and familiar motifs found in classic fairy tales to

feel familiar with the content. The students, by creating this fairy tale and presenting it, undertook the task of teaching their peers.



Figure 5. The 2nd fairy tale

The creation of their own text, that from the realm of imagination would end up in the form of a book with text and paintings of their own creations which would be dedicated to the students of a Special School in another country, excited the participants in the program. Their task was difficult as, in both cases of the fairy tales, they had to adapt the purpose and the way of conveying the message of their book to the skills and needs of its recipients. They were faced with the need to create differentiated material. Teachers need to understand deficits such as those in sociability not as a weakness but as a reason to seek alternative ways of communication and interaction of the student with autism in the context of school education. The main concern of the school, according to Drossinou-Korea (2020), is the teaching of how to learn through learning strategies suitable for children with special learning difficulties resulting from autistic spectrum disorders. The teachers involved chose the strategy of creative writing considering it appropriate for their pedagogical goals. The main aim of this strategy was the creativity, self-control and possible autonomy of the students as it included techniques such as peer teaching, group teaching, collaborative learning. In his book *Why does Chris do this?* Attwood (2001) suggests flexible learning strategies for dealing with unusual behavior of children and adults with autism and Asperger syndrome (Attwood & Atkinson, 2021). The proposals focus on the possibility of adapting the course to the particularities of the students with the targeted, structured didactic differences.

Three meetings were held with the General School. The first was an acquaintance meeting. In the second meeting, in which Stavros also participated, our group presented two fairy tales to the students of the school: the 1st fairy tale that was made for the Special School. They also presented a story inspired by the novel by Angeliki Darlasi *When the Statues Left* (Fig. 6). The students created the story of a girl without a hand and connected it with the myth of Odysseus and the sirens.



Figure 5. The adaptation

There were five meetings with the school for gifted students. In the first, there was a tour of their school with the many labs, the special rooms for each subject and the many displayed

works, either of scientific or artistic interest, of the students. The teachers of this school and the coordinator of the Erasmus programs explained what applies to the school for gifted students.

The second meeting was held so as the students of the two schools to decide to present a topic together. The Turkish students disagreed to address an issue related to children with special educational needs because it was something for which, as they said, they were not responsible.

The topic they finally decided and presented in the third meeting was “animals and humans”. Our students’ presentation gave us the opportunity – with the presentation of dogs that are guides for blind people – to talk about children with disabilities, about how important animals are to them and how important and necessary education is for their autonomous living.

In the fourth meeting they decided to present (traditional) music from the point of view of the meeting of peoples, as this is a global code of communication. Also in this case, at the end, we talked about music and its importance for the education of people with disabilities but also about music as a powerful code for conveying messages to raise public awareness.

3.2.5 Fifth phase of TISIPfSEns - Evaluation / Self-evaluation

For all the participants, the desired goal was the participation and creative activity itself, which required the use of their talents. For Stavros the goal was very specific and took the form of acquiring a favorite object (collectible miniature vehicle). Drossinou-Korea (2017), referring to learning readiness activities for the neurodevelopmental area of emotional organization, describes the technique referred to as the “behavioral contract”, which is an “agreement” between teacher and student to motivate the student to complete the activity expecting a reward at the end (Drossinou-Korea, 2017).

3.3 Methodology of quantitative research methodology

The process of extracting the quantitative research lasted 9 months and was as follows: First a bibliographic review was done, then the objectives were formulated, the research questions were written and then the research tool was designed. The questions aimed to investigate whether the participants had opportunities to understand autism through the new conditions created by the process of completing the program, i.e., cooperation, either between classmates, or between students and teachers, or between teachers and parents so that to make it possible for the student to join the General School in a context that is substantial and without the risk of negative emotions of the student that make communication difficult and remove him from school (Drossinou-Korea, 2020: 702-703). The remote implementation of the programs and the discontinuity of the activities were the main limitations of the present study.

4. Results

In this program, students came into contact with European legislation and institutions related to the subject of Special Education and the protection of the rights of people with disabilities. They learned more about autism as well as about the bodies and institutions, in Greece and in Europe, that are related to this disability. They realized the experiential basis of Literature, its value as a code of communication of messages that can raise awareness on human issues. They appreciated the connection of art forms (literature, painting, music, theater, etc.) and the dynamic relationship between them by making the conscious choice of one work to give birth to another work. They were taught but also called to teach. They met with peers from another country. They

got to know their educational system, their habits, their language, their culture, their mentality. They were educated and had fun.

Regarding the participation of the student with autism and social deficits, the skills required for “participation” and cooperation through more interaction opportunities were strengthened, focusing on areas of his interest. The biggest gain for the student was recorded at the end of the school year, when the student took the oral exams “in person”, as required by law, and when asked, he unreservedly answered that the next school year he would participate in school life “in person”. His classmates who belonged to the circle of friends, but also their other classmates, whether they participated in the program or not, acquired a different image of the student, through their creative collaboration, as it was shown from the questionnaires. Paraskevopoulou, Paraskevopoulos, Bilia and Paraskevopoulou (2020) in their research point out that the coexistence of students with diffuse developmental disorders in the autistic spectrum with those of normal development causes mutual benefit. The teachers recognized the importance of working with the parents, which highlighted the fact that all the procedures of the program were carried out remotely. The role of the parents was catalytic and, eventually, very positive. Merry (2020) in his article, which discusses whether inclusion is an educational justice for children with autism, points out the difference between the cases of both schools and students with autism to conclude that there is no definitive answer for the most appropriate choice of school structure. He considers the only criterion to be the acquisition of skills by the student, in order to achieve his well-being. He emphasizes that the parent may not have an infallible judgment, but they are the ones who understand the needs of their child and the decision for the minor child with a disability will aim exactly at the child’s prosperity and not at the realization of a political ideal, which is usually the goal of institutionalized services.

In a thorough literature review (Bailey & Baker, 2020) on the barriers to the inclusion of students with autism in the General School, the lack of focus on all aspects of student experience by the literature was highlighted.

That is, the research, focusing on specific areas of integration each time, did not include the complex and intricate context of the school. Gaps have been identified that may prevent schools from developing non-exclusionary practices and strategies for students with autism. Stavros was excluded from his right to school life due to his classmates’ aversion for autism. If the school does not mediate to remove this aversion, Stavros will be excluded in the future from any process in life that requires social skills and transaction. Drossinou-Korea (2017, 2019, 2020) refers to education, vocational training and the narrative for future work of young people with autism, pointing out the society’s negative emotions, conscious or not, about the person with a disability.

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