OPEN WINGS II: TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREATER SENSE OF SELF

Nancy Pyrini 1st Primary School of Rafina, Greece

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Abstract

This paper presents the "Open Wings II" project, which is the continuation of an effort started in 2012 to create a community of self-directed learners in elementary education and to enhance their homonomy, the meaning they derive in life by being and feeling part of a greater whole. Technology-enhanced international videoconference presentations resulted in both knowledge gains and attitude changes. These in turn inspired collaborative, creative interdisciplinary projects through which students demonstrated that they could embed themselves in contexts that contribute to homonomous identification and development.

Introduction

As in previous school-based projects since the year 2012, the main aim of the "Open Wings" project is to create a community of self-directed learners and to enhance their homonomy, the meaning derived in life by being and feeling part of a greater whole (Angyal, 1941, as credited by Boucouvalas). The idea lies in the introduction of the homonomous (connected) Self. As constructed by Boucouvalas, self with a lower case "s" refers to one's separate individual self, characterized by autonomy, while Self with a capital "S" refers to the expanded connected sense of Self, characterized by homonomy. Together, they constitute the complementary dimensions of selfhood, suggesting a conceptualization of s/Self that includes both autonomous and homonomous dimensions (Boucouvalas, 1988, 1999, 2009). Figure 1 by Boucouvalas depicts an open system of worlds within worlds, contextualizing an individual as part of greater wholes, each of which addresses part of one's homonomous identity. Figure 2 by Pyrini adapts the visualization to the needs of elementary school students (Pyrini, 2013).

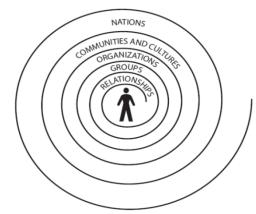


Figure 1. By Boucouvalas (2009).

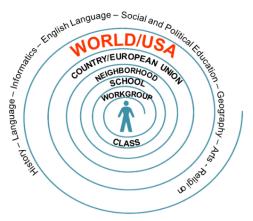


Figure 2. By Pyrini (2013).

The student is embedded in contexts that contribute to homonomous identification and development with an interdisciplinary approach. As individuals, students are first connected with the small working group of the class, then connected with students and teachers from other classes in the school, subsequently connected with the local community, and finally with the country and the European Union. The spiral may of course extend to other contexts and disciplines.

Project Description

Aims and Objectives

In the "Open Wings" project the students of Nancy Pyrini and several other elementary school teachers "open their wings" to connect with Deacon Orestes J. Varonis, Ph.D. and Ms. Evangeline (Litsa) Marlos Varonis in the state of Ohio of the United States of America via WebEx, a Cisco web-conferencing tool. Orestes narrated how he left Greece after high school in order to study in the United States and ended up making his life there. The narration offers opportunities for direct links with different subjects of the school curriculum such as: language, history, geography, physics and religion. Our hypothesis is that the story telling increases the students' engagement and attention and learning comes naturally. We also anticipate that Orestes will serve as a role model and will manage to influence students' beliefs, misconceptions and negative attitudes towards economic migrants and refugees. This specific aim proves especially timely now that a new wave of anti-refugee xenophobia has stricken the European Union member states and the globe. In such a fragile context, the need to support children to empower not only their personal homonomy but also the homonomy of the groups they participate in is imperative.

The students may very well engage their homonomous dimension by strong identification within their ethnic group and in turn manifest as an autonomous identity. Then, if the ethnic group fails to connect with even greater wholes, or feels threatened by other groups, centrisms may arise (Boucouvalas, 1999, 2009), and the refugees and asylum seekers as well as the economic migrants can easily become scapegoats.

The objectives of the project are consistent with the five fundamental types of learning to provide quality education and foster sustainable human development (Delors et al., 1996; UNESCO, 2011), specifically:

- To closely examine the narration of the story of Orestes' life, to address the content, the context as well as global issues and local priorities, to recognize that the society, now as then, is in the midst of a pervasive transformation and to reflect on the ever-growing needs of the local society (*Learning to know pillar*).
- To solidly balance the homonomous and the autonomous developmental trajectories, individually as well as collectively, and to deal with the well-being and the complete development (mind, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality) of all members of the project (*Learning to be pillar*).
- To build capacity for group-based decision making, crisis management, tolerance, flexibility and understanding of change as well as to raise awareness of diversity, equality and inclusion in the learning processes (*Learning to live together pillar*).

- To develop an action plan to bring change in the school environment and the local community (*Learning to do pillar*).
- To integrate the values inherent in homonomy into all aspects of learning and to empower students to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying their own learning environment. To empower students' active citizenship (*Learning to change pillar*).

Participants

Two schools participate in the project: the 1st Primary School of Rafina and the Primary School of Agia Marina, Neas Makris, both located in East Attica, Greece. Four classrooms are involved at the 1st Primary School of Rafina: two first grade classes of 49 students and two sixth grade classes of 37 students with five teachers involved. One classroom is involved at the Primary School of Agia Marina, a sixth grade class of 16 students with one teacher involved. All five classes include some children with special educational needs.

Since our research interest includes the use of technology in this case study, we narrowed our focus here to the sixth grade, focusing on the 53 sixth graders: the 37 from Rafina and the 16 from Agia Marina. The schools do not have considerable technological infrastructures to support the project. For example, our colleague from Agia Marina may access the Internet only if she leaves her classroom, and another classroom is not always available. Our colleagues teaching the first graders do not have computers or video projectors or any other electronic device in their classrooms. Therefore, for most learning activities we need to rely on the technology the children have available at home and can bring to school when necessary.

Methodology

Spanning one school year (September 2015 – June 2016), the project embraced the e-Reflect methodological approach, developed within the framework of the "e-Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques" project (e-Reflect, 2016). This project falls under the Erasmus+ programme in the field of cooperation and innovation for good practices, which is consistent with our theoretical framework as it supports self-directed learning and the balanced development of both trajectories, the autonomous (separate, individual) and the homonomous (connected, collective). The "Reflect" acronym stands for "Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques". It was initiated in 1992 by Action Aid (2009), as an innovative approach to adult learning and social change that fuses the theories of Paulo Freire with participatory methodologies developed for Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). The method allows adjustments to meet the needs of specific groups of learners taking into account the conditions of their environment and, given its roots in adult learning, is designed to help them mature as learners.

The method includes six stations:

Station I: "We listen to the world around us." The objective of this station is to share and discuss a personal change experience.

Station II: "We spot an issue." The objective of this station is to brainstorm on local, community and global issues and decide upon a focus issue.

Station III: "We analyze an issue." The objective of this station is to analyze in depth the causes of an issue.

Station IV: "We plan for action." The objective of this station is to identify factors that encourage or inhibit change and to design action plans to tackle the issue.

Station V: "We act." The objective of this station is to implement the action plan developed in the previous station.

Station VI: "We reflect." The objective of this station is to reflect upon the whole learning experience and especially the learning process.

From a variety of tactics suggested during the professional development of teachers involved in the e-Reflect project, we selected those better serving the philosophy of our project:

Friendliness. We, teachers and students, are trying to become parts of meaningful groups to discuss our ideas.

Bargaining. We use integrative bargaining, an approach which concentrates on finding a win-win situation for all parties involved in case of a conflict. The basic rules we follow for a successful bargaining session are: (a) Have a common goal, (b) Respect each other's positions, (c) Ensure that all sides are motivated to make the situation work, (d) Safeguard that trust and good mutual communication form the basis of talks.

Reason & Education. We try to persuade each other using reasonable and logical arguments.

Forming Coalitions. We are building knowledge coalitions seeking for external support. Such is the basis of our cooperation with Orestes and Litsa as well as with the Vocational and Training Schools of Markopoulos-Oropos and Rafina when we needed expert support in engineering.

Empowering. We establish connections in order to develop our greater sense of Self while developing Core Values and a Sense of Mission. The core values that emerged during our work can be summarized as follows:

Develop positive attitudes towards: (a) immigration and the state of a refugee, (b) major changes that people need to make in their lives due to the rapid developments in their countries and the world, (c) mobility of individuals and groups in the European Union, (d) the safe use of ICT to seek for information and develop knowledge, (e) the respect of intellectual property and the protection of intellectual rights.

Our sense of mission is to "Open our Wings towards the development of the greater sense of Self," the title of this paper, in order to "become the change we wish to see in the world," quoting Mahatma Gandhi.

Project Activities

The project activities included student participation in specific stations, each of which was intended to take place or at least begin in a pre-determined order. However, based upon learning outcomes, that order changed during actual implementation.

Station I: We Listen to the World around Us

During our work at the first station, the students discussed in focus groups what "change" means and which are the driving and restraining forces towards this process. What we perceived as amazing is how fast the students realized that change is a process which may sometimes be laborious. They also very quickly realized that change affords

opportunities for growth. But at this point they were quite puzzled about how our country, which has experienced a major transformation process during the last six years, not only is not growing but on the contrary is starting to lose basic social infrastructures and services. The session ended with a "contractual agreement" including our mission statement and our mutual goals. The contract has been signed by all members of the group and hangs on the wall. Quotes from the contract follow (the original text is in Greek and translated here by the primary author).

Open our Wings towards the development of the greater sense of Self and become the change we wish to see in the world.

Empower our active citizenship by first taking a small step forward and act within our school communities and then by leaping forward to act in the society so as to inspire others to follow our example.

Express our ideas and emotions through art.

The eight videoconferences with Orestes and Litsa are included under the activities of Station I, as the objective of this station is to share and discuss a personal change experience.

In the course of six 45-minute videoconferences, Orestes narrated the story of his life by talking through PowerPoint presentations that included many photographs and maps, from his humble beginning as a child in a Greek island, to the many obstacles he had to overcome as a foreign student in USA, and to his successful career and family life in USA. Also during an additional two 45-minute videoconferences, Litsa spoke first of her personal journey to health as she identified herself as a DES Daughter, as her mother was prescribed the synthetic estrogen DES during pregnancy, followed by a discussion of new internet-based academic challenges and the design and development of instructional materials on citation and plagiarism.

In the first videoconference, Orestes discussed his early childhood years on the Greek island of Chios, the challenges and the difficulties growing up without electricity or plumbing, and his disappointment and frustration at not having financial means to continue his education beyond high school. He also shared with the students how the hope for a better future changed unexpectedly during his last year in high school, after one of his teachers gave him the name and address of a small college in the USA and encouraged him to write to that college about admission and financial aid. He spoke of his decision to pursue this possibility for academic studies abroad and of his detailed planning and negotiating efforts in order to obtain from this American college foreign-student admission and a small amount of financial aid.

In the second videoconference, Orestes continued his narration by discussing the legal and financial obstacles he had to overcome, such as, permission from the Greek Government to study abroad, acquisition of a Greek passport, passing the required English language competency examinations, acquisition of a Visa to enter the USA as a foreign student, and the coverage of academic and travel expenses to USA. He also discussed the means by which every single obstacle was overcome due primarily to his renewed hope for a better future, diligent actions, a miraculous sequence of certain events, and assistance received from several kind individuals. At the end of each of the first two videoconferences, the students watched educational videos and became engaged in interactive on-line activities and games to better understand the refugee crisis Greece is suffering; these activities are freely available at the website of Amnesty International (Roch, 2016).

The third videoconference with Orestes was mainly focused on Geography as he presented the path he traveled by land, sea, and air from Chios to Olivet in Michigan. Included were the specifics of travel by air from Athens to Cairo in Egypt, by taxi from Cairo to Suez in Egypt, by freight-boat from Suez to Erie in Pennsylvania via the Canada/USA Great Lakes Seaway, by bus from Erie to Lansing in Michigan, and by taxi from Lansing to Olivet in Michigan. This difficult and ultimately successful geographic journey became a metaphor for his intellectual and personal journey as he attended college in a foreign country, studied in a foreign language, earned money to support his education, and eventually settled into a new existence in the United States.

The fourth videoconference was in Orestes' area of professional and academic specialization, focusing on his earned degrees in Physics, Mathematics and Electrical Engineering, and on his technical specialization in the research, development, and implementation of advanced electromagnetic sensors and systems for the inspection of industrial products and processes. This session was directed to only the older students, and they found it difficult to follow. The main aim was to demonstrate an example of a successful career in the field as motivation for their own future plans.

The fifth videoconference was on the Greek-Orthodox Church and Community in Ohio, the state in which Orestes and Litsa now live. A major focus was how members of the Greek immigrant community, now in the 4th and 5th generation, still maintain and promote to American society their Greek culture and religion through their identity with the Greek Orthodox church.

The sixth videoconference featured Litsa discussing a different kind of journey, a journey to health. She identified herself as a DES Daughter, as her mother was prescribed the synthetic estrogen DES during pregnancy. This drug was prescribed for over thirty years to pregnant women in an attempt to prevent miscarriage, despite the fact that it was never proven effective and in fact was known to cause cancer in laboratory animals. Although it was taken off the market for that purpose when it was linked to cancer in the children of the women who had taken it, it continued to be used in animal feed as it allowed farmers to bring animals to market faster and also increased milk production. Litsa integrated her discussion of DES with a discussion of endocrine disruptors that are still found in the food supply and in food packaging, as well as a more general discussion of how substances that women are exposed to during pregnancy can affect their own health, the health of their children, and even the health of their grandchildren. She also discussed the importance of avoiding toxins in order to remain healthy, including the toxins in cigarettes and narcotics. She finished by making an economic argument, showing a graph of the salaries of two young men drafted into the American National Basketball Association (NBA): one started with a high salary that fell year after year because he was abusing drugs and lost the trust of team owners and coaches; the other started with a much lower salary that rose year after year because he worked hard, behaved with integrity, and respected the rules of the team. At the end, the player experiencing success was identified as Kosta Koufos, a young man of Greek

descent whose mother had immigrated to the United States and who has played during the summer for the Greek National Team.

In the seventh videoconference, Litsa discussed her multiple-authored paper "Beyond Cut-And-Paste: Creating Interactive Online Resources to Introduce First Year Students to Academic Citation," presented at ICICTE 2015. She discussed how higher education students need to master the skills that will allow them to identify as members of an academic community, including the ability to cite the work of others and avoid the mistake of plagiarism. In order to address the high incidence of plagiarism among first year students, a team composed of staff and graduate students at The University of Akron collaborated to create interactive online training in citation and plagiarism, including multimedia, text presentations, and automatically-scored quizzes. She summarized the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the Spring 2015 pilot project, stressing the high degree of collaboration involved.

In the final videoconference, Orestes talked to the children about his family and social life in the U.S., and shared with them the experience gained during his 50-year high school reunion in Chios, his travel with Litsa to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty in New York, and their visit to "The Greeks" exhibit in Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History. Of particular interest was the comparison he made between: 1) his journey to the U.S. seeking educational opportunity, which eventually provided him the means to a better life; 2) the journey made by millions of European immigrants crossing the Atlantic Ocean on boats, passing through the non-dignified examination halls at the Ellis Island, seeking a better life in the U.S.; and 3) the current refugee crisis in Europe, with over a million individuals from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa migrating into Europe in 2015 alone. In closing, he shared a few pictures from Rafina taken in September 2015, when he met with some of the students of the prior year's "Open Wings I" project. It was serendipitous that during this last session some of those students visited the class, attended the session, and had the opportunity to once again thank Orestes and Litsa for their efforts and contributions.

Station II: We Spot an Issue

Students brainstormed on local, community and global issues inspired by the videoconferences and decided upon their focus issues: (a) Distinguished Living Personalities of the Greek Diaspora, (b) Intellectual Rights and Plagiarism, (c) Genetically Modified Food, and (d) Key Competencies for Academia and the Labour Market as Cultivated through Sports Education and Participation.

During our work in Station II, there was a great deal of brainstorming about possible actions to tackle the problems that the children had identified, and therefore Station III was postponed in order to come up with an Action Plan.

Station IV: We Plan for Action

The students decided: (a) to organize a "Students Symposium" simulating all the procedures followed in an academic conference in order to produce "scientific papers" on the themes that they chose in the previous Station, present their work to their parents and members of the local community, and publish their proceedings aiming at raising awareness on those issues; (b) to launch a website to announce all the news and steps taken to implement their action plan; (c) to organize a basketball game and (d) to give a

rock concert at the end of the school year including songs that convey a message about social and political themes covered during the Open Wings project.

Station III: We Analyze an Issue

Students studied in groups, investigated in depth their themes of interest by utilizing the Internet. They were especially cautious as regards to the evaluation of the resources they found concerning criteria such as credibility of the source, differences between resources and the possible reasons why this is the case, evidence of bias, references, quality badges, and other markers of trustworthy sites.

Station V: We Act

The students collaborated on implementing their action plan. A website was created and updated as the work progressed. The invitation and the programme of the Symposium were published on the website and circulated via social media by the teachers and parents. The teachers' guidance and support in this process was intense for the protection of the children's anonymity and privacy. The completed manuscripts of the students' papers were submitted and the teachers undertook the role of the reviewers and editors of the proceedings. The Symposium was held on June the 10th 2016 on the premises of the School of Agia Marina. Students carefully selected the repertoire of the concert so as to convey political messages relevant to the aims of the project and rehearsed diligently for their performance. They also prepared a video to display during the performance.

Station VI: We Reflect

The students reflected on their learning experience and represented their course and progress, drawing their personal spirals. The picture of each student was placed in the center of the spiral and then the students continued either with the connections they built, or with learning subjects they researched deeply. Then, students were divided into groups and each group created "The Knowledge Tree" of the group. See Figure 3.



Figure 3. "The Knowledge Tree," artwork created by the students of Group 2 (ST'2) of the 1st Primary School of Rafina.

Learning Outcomes and Intellectual Outputs

Pre-test and Post-test Results

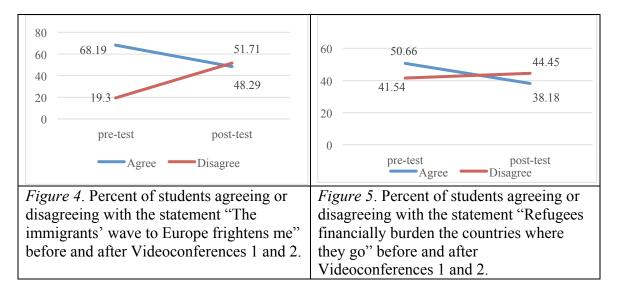
Two sessions of testing, identified as Session #1 and Session #2, were conducted by administering pre-test and post-test questions to three groups of sixth graders from two elementary schools. The tests evaluated changes in knowledge and attitudes towards immigration and refugees that resulted from the topics covered during the Open Wings II videoconferences, and data was collected through the use of handheld audience response system devices (clickers) utilizing Turning Point 5 software.

- In Session #1, focusing on the first two videoconferences delivered by Orestes, 20 questions were given to students, 17 multiple choice questions and three true/false questions. Eleven of the given questions had a single correct answer, and nine questions were designed to allow the students to express their opinion on a given topic.
- In Session #2, focusing on the geography included in the third videoconference delivered by Orestes, 15 questions were given to students, nine multiple choice questions and six true/false questions. All 15 questions had a single correct answer.

Data analysis summarizes (a) changes in *student knowledge* following participation in the videoconferences, as indicated by percent correctly responding and (b) changes in attitude, in particular *student views of the refugee crisis* in Europe, as indicated by percent agreeing or disagreeing with certain statements.

One key finding was the change in students' attitudes towards refugees. At a time when Greece is experiencing an economic crisis, it has also become a bridge between other countries and western Europe, and the millions of immigrants and refugees entering Greece have required significant resources and incited distrust in a population already responding to economic austerity measures. A question designed to address student concerns was phrased "The immigrants' wave to Europe frightens me" and gave students seven response options on a Likert scale: strongly agree; agree; somewhat agree; neutral; somewhat disagree; disagree; and strongly disagree. For the purpose of analysis, all the "agree" responses were summed and contrasted with the "disagree" responses. Before the sessions, over 68% of the students agreed that they feared the immigrants and just over 19% did not; the others were neutral. The students were significantly less fearful of the immigrants following the sessions ($X^2 = 5.44$; p < 0.05): a majority, albeit a slight majority, of 51.71%, were not afraid. However, despite their increased insight into the state of the refugees and economic migrants, xenophobic feelings remained, with 48.29% agreeing that they were frightened (see Figure 4). The students' cognitive conflict was quite clear, but we hypothesize as a result of hearing Orestes' story they realized that people leaving their countries to seek a better future elsewhere are people like their dear Orestes.

There was a similar but less pronounced change in attitude towards the statement "Refugees financially burden the countries where they go," with the majority agreeing at the time of the pre-test (50.66%, vs. 41.54% disagreeing) but more disagreeing at the time of the post-test (44.45%, vs. 38.18% agreeing), with the others being neutral; however, this difference was not significant (($X^2 = 1.17$; p = 0.28). See Figure 5.



A table representing additional results from the Session #1 pre- and post-tests is available on the <u>website of Open Wings</u>.

A second key finding is the students' gains in factual knowledge following the videoconferences. For Session #1, across all groups, the average correct on the pre-test was 35.37% while the average correct on the post-test was 60.64%. The class taught by Nancy Pyrini averaged 35.46% correct on the pre-test and 81.82% correct on the post-test. For Session #2, which focused on geography, across all groups, the average score on the pre-test was 47.55% while the average score on the post-test was 73.10%. The class taught by Nancy Pyrini averaged 42.10% correct on the pre-test and 89.89% correct on the post-test. While all three groups evidenced gains in knowledge between pre- and post-tests for both sessions, the largest gain was that of the 6th graders taught by co-author Nancy Pyrini. We hypothesize that this is due to the additional collaborative enrichment activities she embedded into her curriculum related to topic; this interpretation is supported by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) who note that "collaborative learning approaches can significantly enhance learning" (p. 103).

Due to the nature of the content of the fourth through the eighth videoconferences, testing was not administered. However, the sixth and seventh videoconferences became part of the students' research on "Intellectual Rights and Plagiarism" and "Genetically Modified Food" themes.

Students successfully identified their focus issues and came up with their action plans. What we found interesting is that aside from actions of an academic nature, the students embedded both sports and art into their action plans.

The students developed their research methods to include primary research that went beyond an internet search. They decided that their papers should include interviews of distinguished living personalities of the Greek diaspora as well as key competencies for academia and the labour market and how the development of these competencies can be enhanced by sports education. They set certain criteria for their search and came up with Dr. Leo Irakliotis, a researcher and administrator in higher education, and NBA player Kostas Koufos. They extended invitations to both of them and received positive responses, arranged for interviews via Skype and WebEx respectively, and developed questions relevant to their research on the papers, taking into account time constraints. They successfully participated in the first interview, which was recorded so it could be accessed again. Due to unforeseen circumstances at the 1st Primary School of Rafina, the second videoconference could not take place at that site, although Kostas and the students at Agia Marina connected. It was not possible to reschedule that interview session.

As a result of this authentic research experience, the students learned how to seek information from experts in various fields. For example, in one instance help in engineering was needed, and the students reached out to vocational schools in the Athens area and asked the students there to help them. The vocational schools responded immediately and positively and even prepared experiments and a simulation to demonstrate. All these actions took place within the school-day and were another example of the collaborative problem-solving that this project had hoped to inspire.

As mentioned above, the website went live and was regularly updated, including the addition of student-created invitations to and the programme of the Symposium, which were also circulated via social media by the teachers and parents. The students' completed manuscripts were accepted by the teachers/reviewers with minor edits. The students also handled organizational issues such as transportation from Rafina to Agia Marina, catering for the breaks during the Symposium, which they prepared themselves, and washing and making available jumpers at the Schools in preparation for the basketball game.

In collaboration with music teacher Mr. George Ververidis, the students selected the following songs for their rock concert (additional information is available on the <u>Open</u> <u>Wings website</u>): "It's My Life" by Bon Jovi; "Eye of the Tiger" by Survivor; "Beat It" by Michael Jackson; "Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2 Education" by Pink Floyd; and "We Are the World" by USA for Africa. The sociopolitical messages of the songs reflected the students' engagement with and reflection upon the project. The students also created a video to display during their performance, including both political messages and moments from their school life. Along with "The Tree of Knowledge," these opportunities to select messages and creatively represent them contributed to achievement of the Station VI reflection process. In addition, there were opportunities for discussion and reflection during the Symposium itself. The relevant outcomes were scheduled to be made available on the website of the project, in Greek, after the event took place.

Conclusion

Technology-enhanced international videoconference presentations resulted in both knowledge gains and attitude changes in elementary school children. These in turn inspired collaborative, creative interdisciplinary projects through which students demonstrated that they could embed themselves in contexts that contribute to homonomous identification and development, creating a stronger sense of both self and Self. Emerging from the 2008 economic crisis, Greece is going through a major transformative process which affords opportunities for growth of humanitarian principles towards sustainable development, as well as of inhuman behaviors, such as lack of mercy and compassion, which are destructive for the social tissue. Educators can help prepare the youth for the crises ahead, which will demand collective action and unity by informed active citizens, and the pedagogical framework behind this case study serves this goal.

On a more personal note, the emotional experience of this project was profound and difficult to convey in words. In an e-mail (personal communication, June 16, 2016) following the student presentations, Nancy Pyrini commented "All I could think of was how magnificent it is to keep the students happy and motivated and how my kids did not want to leave school, during the day and at the end of the school year, how emotional we got the last few days and how they burst into tears before, during and after the graduation ceremony because they just could not let go of what we built, and then how they regained their strengths, stating "it's time to open our wings and fly...".

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