



Framework for cross-curricular cooperation in elementary and lower secondary schools as well as between schools and local NGOs and communities

Edited by: Kristof Fenyvesi, Takumi Yada

Authors: Dóra Vera Halász, Ioanna Papadopoulou, Despoina Kardogerou, Maria Angelidaki, Pavlina Charalampidou, Elisa Carboni, Valentina Ciarpaglini, Virág Suhajda

Cross-curricular cooperation between educators in elementary and lower-secondary schools

Goals and benefits

The goals of cooperation between the educators of different subjects are various. From the point of view of the educator, it can be the better relationship with the colleagues, gaining of new knowledge and perspectives, or the development of a more motivating and therefore more easily teachable curriculum for the students.

Cooperation between the educators of different subjects not only brings new perspectives to the teachers but also provides the opportunity to ask questions and find ways of solving problems that are much more difficult to solve alone. The continuous connection between teachers allows them to openly communicate about bottlenecks and enhance their relationship with each other. The better the relationship is, the better the cooperation will be. The cooperation also gives a sense of co-equality, which means that the subject of one teacher is not more important than the other; on the contrary: different subjects complement



each other and give a better and more holistic understanding for the educators and their students as well.

Moreover, the world is not compartmentalized into school subjects. Why should we force the thinking of the students into that division? Cross-curricular learning allows students to solve real-life problems and connect ideas of different areas of sciences and arts. This pedagogical approach allows students to implement what they have learned into everyday life and prepares them for future collaborations in their school life and later on in the field of their professional expertise.

As far as arts-integration goes, art is naturally integrated into everyday life and into every area of life. In fact, deducting arts from school subjects is unnatural and ineffective.

Ways of cooperation

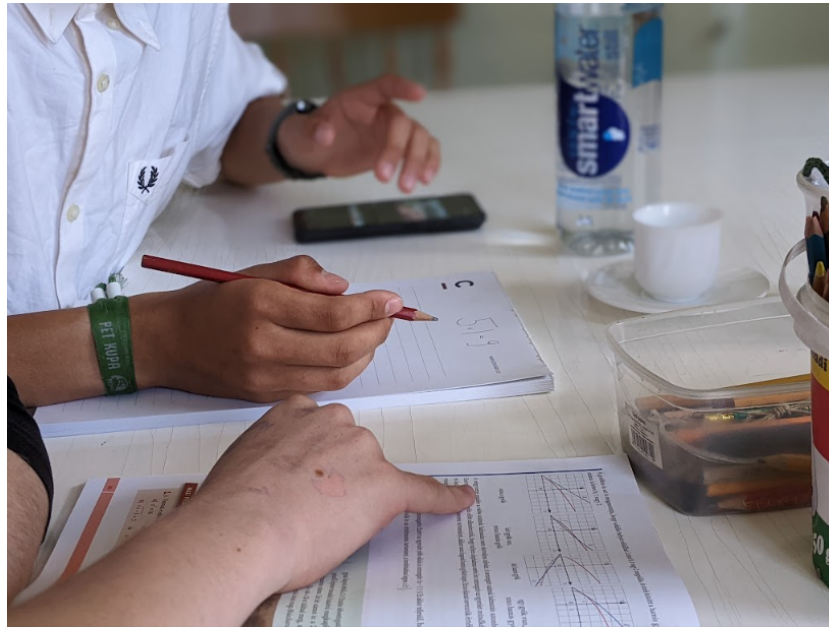
There are several ways educators can collaborate. Optimal collaborations are highly dependent upon several variables; The type of the school, the number of students, the number of teachers, among other many factors, are crucial elements for a successful collaboration. However, there are some general ways that apply in almost all contexts.

It is strikingly common to hear that teachers in schools do not very often have the chance to interact with each other and exchange opinions and ideas, rather they usually work individually and on many occasions they tend not to share their concerns with other colleagues. Moreover, there seems to be a prevalent assumption that admitting one's own difficulties is a sign of professional weakness, which in turn undermines trust-building among the school's teaching staff. Albeit regular staff meetings may offer ways for collaborations, yet they may not be enough to promote trust among educators and build a strong colleagues' network. Therefore, the school leadership could undertake initiatives targeted at confidence-building and trust-building through training, preferably with the involvement of external facilitators or by organizing after-school relevant events. Such facilitator-led training can help teachers discover their own and each other's strengths, accept weaknesses and work together to empower their professional roles, while building the relationships that will lay the foundations for future collaboration.

Through such networks, the benefits of ventures like the integration of Social-Emotional Education (SEE) in the school curriculum can be better highlighted. Likewise, the goals of SEE can be more readily diffused to the whole school unit. Ensuring that all teachers understand, and the majority of them aligns with, this venture, is a pre- prerequisite for teachers' engagement and commitment to cross-curricular collaborations under the umbrella of SEE.



Team-building events/initiatives should be further elaborated by cross-curricular joint projects and be supported, not only by the school management, but also from educational authorities. A single well-done project can be a starting point, but only subsequent events and regular collaboration will build the habit of cooperation.



A possible path for consolidating cross-curricular collaboration:

The Hungarian national curriculum explicitly refers to interdisciplinary or cross-curricular links. It is a good idea for colleagues - preferably with the support of the school management - to discuss together at the beginning of the year or at the end of the previous school year which points of the basic curriculum they would like to work on together.

The above mentioned steps of building trust and common understanding are necessary to have a relaxed mode of engagement and creativity, which are the basis of a fruitful collaboration. Below a possible action plan is drafted to enhance cross-curricular cooperation among educators.

- 1) At the beginning of the year, for example during school excursions, or other gatherings, teachers dedicate a certain amount of time for discussions and planning in regards to cross-curricular collaborations. They develop a work plan for the school year and a curriculum map template in which they can work together. On this basis, they formulate cross subject tasks for their students to carry out, with the double objective to have teachers expand their



- views of teaching, and also students to cross thinking boundaries. Brainstorming co-facilitated with visual culture teachers can inspire the implementation of artistic methods as tools in this process.
- 2) Weekly or more frequent joint working lunches are organized, where they discuss the topic informally. The topic can be: “where we are in the curriculum now”, and “how we can relate to each other”. For this to work out it is necessary that the participating teachers feel committed and prioritize these working-lunches in their schedules.
 - 3) In regular staff meetings, colleagues express their concerns and discuss difficulties they are confronted with, which helps other colleagues in dealing with similar difficulties, thus making problems transparent to all. Subsequently, they can jointly refer to areas of concern in their lessons. It is necessary to hold these meetings on a regular basis so that the agenda of each meeting does not become overwhelming. Integrated lesson planning with the emphasis of social and emotional development will also help the teachers to include cross-curricular ways of teaching.
 - 4) A corkboard or a magnet board is situated in the teachers’ room to be used for cross-curricular planning (for example a teacher may write on it: “I’m about to start teaching XI. century poetry in English, who can connect to this so that we can make it more tangible and understandable for the children?”)
 - 5) Sharing results and lessons: it is also very important that teachers share how they are proceeding, what has gone well and what hasn’t and what they struggle with. It is equally important for teachers to occasionally reflect on previous planning, as well as on their actions, therefore it is strongly advised for teachers to establish proper reflection tools.

All these steps are feasible in any school, since they do not require extra resources, or special preparation. However, commitment, time and energy are necessary elements for success, along with various incentives from school management.

Country specification

In Greece, new teaching material is currently being developed for primary and secondary education, along with new curricula for each school subject. The theoretical framework of this project (held by the Institute of Educational Policy - IEP) is based on the network model, ensuring coherent links within and between subjects and between fields of knowledge, creating functional transitions from class to class and from grade to grade. The principles of interconnection of subjects and an



interdisciplinary approach contribute to this objective. In addition to the above project, another innovative educational project, developed by the IEP, called “Skills labs”, provides the opportunity of cooperation between teachers and schools, since it incorporates several programs with a focus on the so-called “21st century skills” which include, among other skills, life skills and soft skills, which in turn promote critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, collaboration, communication, empathy and social skills. Through the interdisciplinary perspective of the “Skills Labs” initiative, which is implemented in the normal schooling program of primary and lower secondary education, students’ experiences and knowledge are being enhanced, along with teachers’ opportunities for creative collaborations.

Skill labs also provide opportunities for cross school collaborations, both from Greece and abroad, since the Skills Labs platform is open to everyone (<http://iep.edu.gr/el/psifiako-apothetirio/skill-labs>). Research has shown that Skill Labs have been welcomed by the educational community as a teaching reform that enriches the school class with a multiplicity of programmes and interests.

In the context of after school educational programs for secondary schools in Greece, teachers and students can take part in several groups of interest like, for example, theater, robotics, painting, experiments, etc. In the context of such activities/groups, teachers and students are encouraged to undertake tasks that are based on the principles of communication/collaboration and often result in presenting their work to the whole school community or even the society.

Examples for successful collaboration

Examples from Hungary:

Usually, collaboration between the teachers of different subjects is more frequent in alternative schools, but not restricted to those institutions. One example for successful collaboration is the above-mentioned method of step by step built and continuous cooperation among teachers teaching different subjects. Collaboration is made intentionally regular and in this way all kinds of subjects can be incorporated into each other.

Another, more specific example is Kincskereső Iskola in Budapest, a small elementary school with 150 students. They put a certain emphasis on cooperation. A very specific example of cooperation between the science and the art teachers is the following:



The art teacher collaborates with the math teacher. They are bringing mathematical problems into art class, they teach geometry together, playing with the drawing compass, trying out different intersections of circles and other geometrical shapes. These kinds of activities pull down the pressure of compulsion that students may feel during the math class, but at the same time, they allow students to draw and learn about geometrical forms playfully. They color the different forms, which give an aesthetic experience and also help learn how to calculate area.

Examples in Greece:

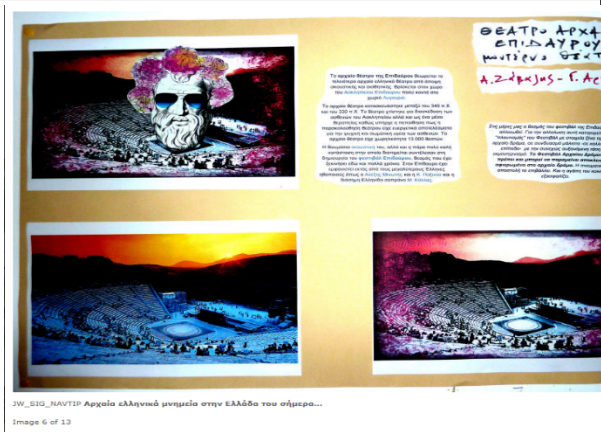
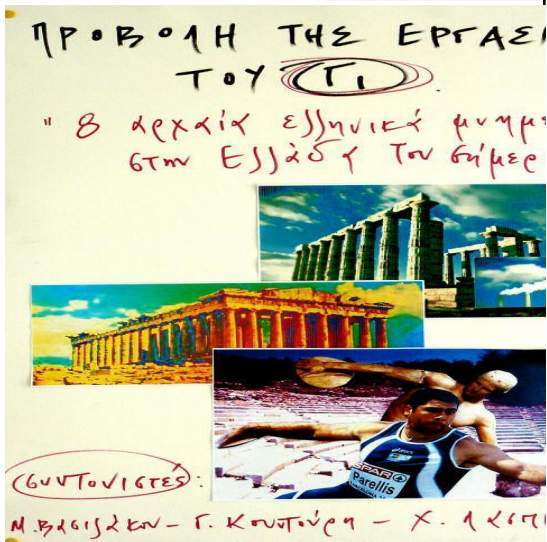
1. Ancient Greek museums today

Cross Curriculum: Ancient Greek language, Arts, ICT

In the Ancient Greek Language course, students were divided into 8 working groups. Each group was assigned to write about an important ancient monument in Greece. Their language teacher (philologist) guided them through the creative writing of the text.

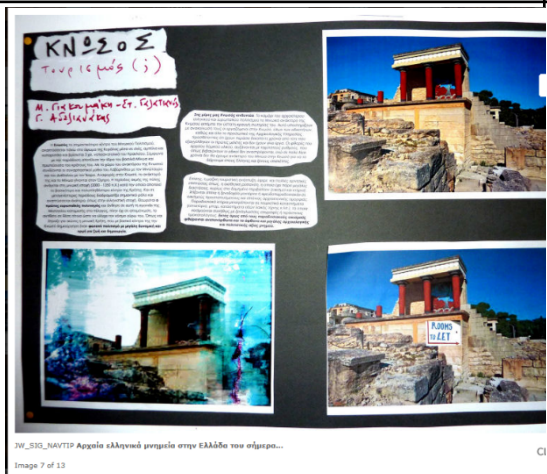
In the art class, the teacher brought up the idea of highlighting the deterioration of the monuments through the possibility of artistic re-creation provided by the computer. It was carried out through the selection of suitable photos and the processing of their digital format.

In the Informatics course, students internet searched for photos of the monuments they were studying. They processed these photos with online image editing applications, reconstructing them, manipulating their individual elements, changed colors and lighting. In this way, they created new images while through ready-made graphics or drawing their own, they aptly highlighted the topic of the work they had undertaken.



JW_S33_NAVTIP Αρχαία ελληνικά μνημεία στην Ελλάδα του σήμερα...

Image 6 of 13



JW_S33_NAVTIP Αρχαία ελληνικά μνημεία στην Ελλάδα του σήμερα...

Image 7 of 13



JW_S33_NAVTIP Αρχαία ελληνικά μνημεία στην Ελλάδα του σήμερα...

page 9 of 13

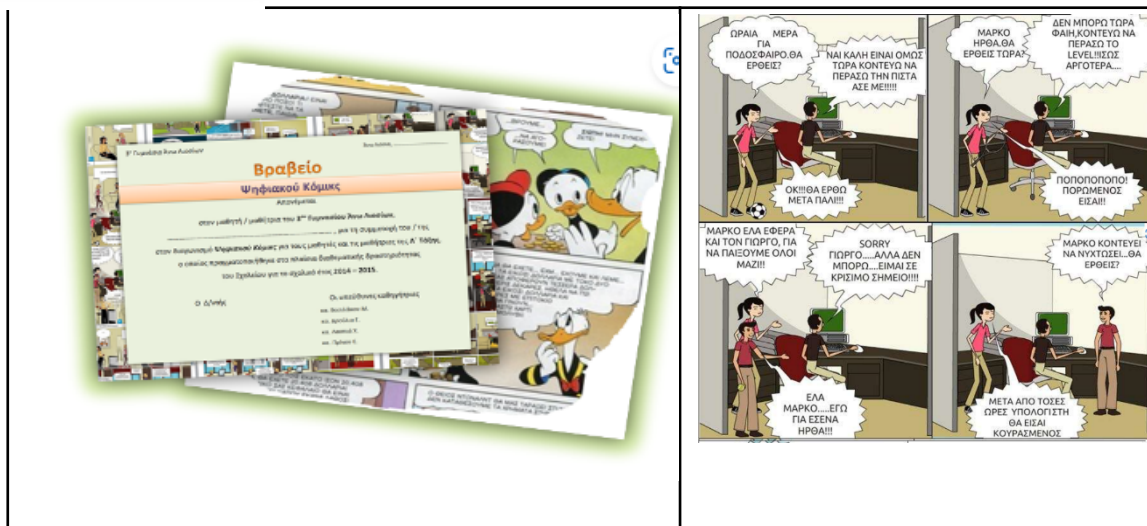
CLOSE X

Source: <http://3gymanoliosia.gr/arxaia-ellhnika-mnhmeia-sthn-ellada-shmera>

Subjects: Modern Greek, Arts, ICT

2. Digital comic

Students created comics with different subjects and their creations were awarded. The comic, in the picture below, comments the life in computer communication and the luck of human interaction



Source: <http://3gymanoliosia.gr/digital-comic-2014-2015>

Subjects: Mythology, History, Modern Greek, Arts, ICT

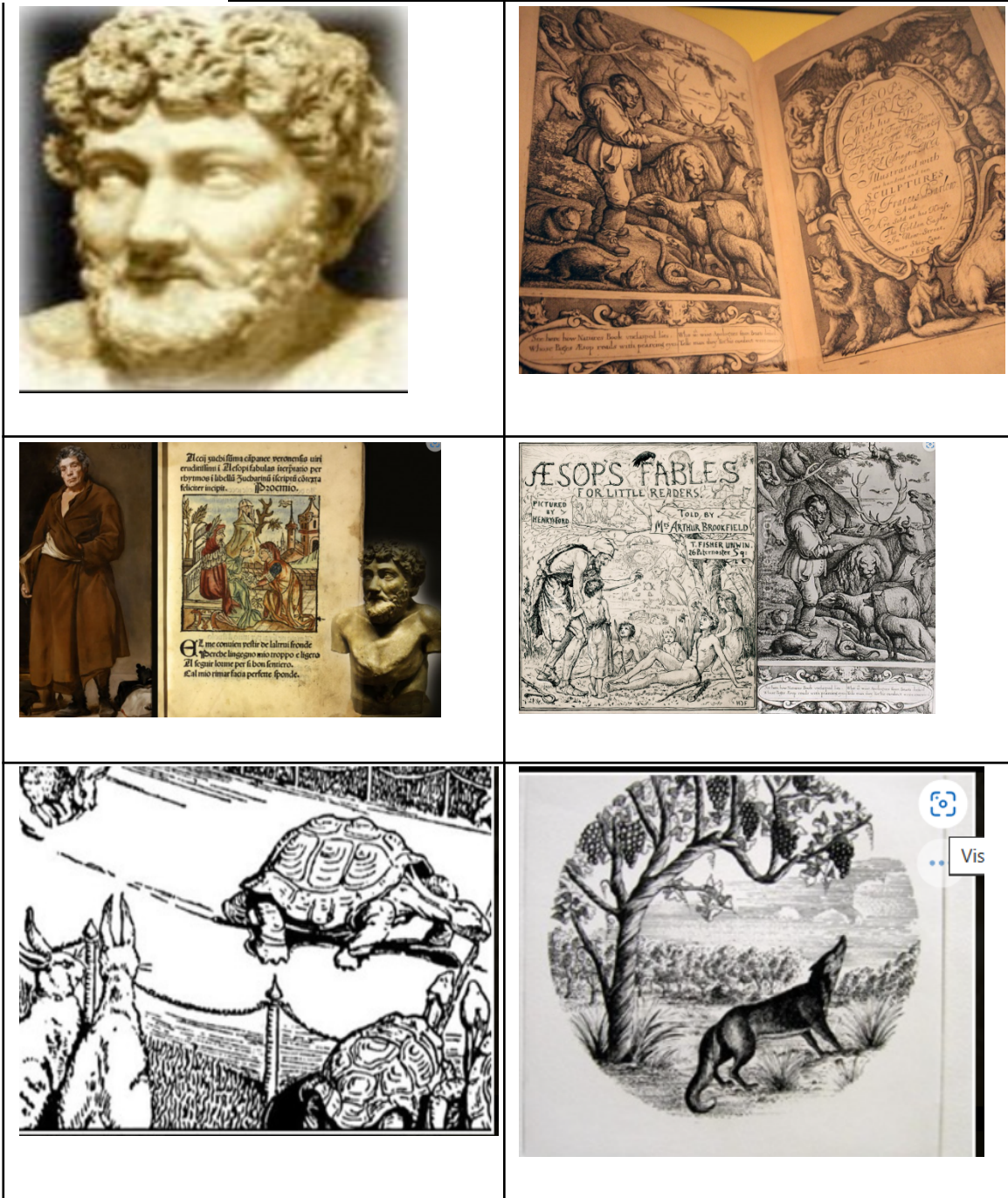
<https://aisopos-2pga.webnode.gr/>

3. Aesop, an unknown personality

The purpose of this project was children to be familiarized with an important figure from ancient Greek literature and his work, Aesop. (Ancient History and Mythology)

Also, another goal was to learn how to search for information in online and printed sources, organize them and create their own text that includes all the necessary information of their topic, practicing writing specific types of structured texts, CV, essay and anthology.

Moreover, considering that it is important for children to get acquainted with presentations of their projects, they were divided into groups and were assigned different projects either related to Aesop's Personality or his Fables.



Cooperation between schools and NGOs at the community level

Goals and benefits

Schools frequently cooperate with other institutions and organizations such as NGOs to provide enriched experiences to students.



There are multiple benefits that can come from cooperation between NGOs and schools. Third sector organizations are usually committed to ensuring quality, inclusive and equitable education in general and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all which guarantees their motivation for work and cooperation.

Cooperation with NGOs is complementary to the school curriculum and often covers thematic topics that are not adequately addressed in the curriculum, due to time restrictions. Moreover, the expertise of NGOs on issues such as active citizenship, human rights and other social-educational topics reinforce the preparation of students for real life, whilst open schools and interactions with the community offer first hand opportunities for real-world experiences. Furthermore, extracurricular activities and cooperation between organizations and schools enhances the role school can play in the community in identifying or meeting current needs of the society, as well as in participating in societal networks and cooperating in undertaking initiatives that would have a positive impact for the community. However, it goes without saying that cooperation between schools and NGOs should be granted on a continuous basis, and all parties need to invest time and effort in it. Below we propose a number of steps towards a successful cooperation between NGOs and schools.

Ways of cooperation:

We defined the following steps for a successful cooperation between NGOs and schools:

1. Identifying the organizations working in the neighborhood of each school and research on potential suitable and specialized stakeholders and partners.
2. Communications: The most effective way to start a cooperation is the arrangement of an in person meeting with the director of the school and the representative of the NGO where the NGO can present the work they are doing in the neighborhood, the expertise they have and the possible ways of cooperation. On the other hand, school directors may present the needs they detect in their school and communicate their concerns regarding educators or/and students' further development. Follow-up meetings are necessary in order for the personal connection to be developed.
3. In the initial communication set an agreement on common goals /common ground. Then the NGO can;
4. Design proposals of cooperation which address the school needs better.
5. Define the terms of the partnership with regards to content - action plan (activities, tasks), members involved, objectives
6. An important step refers to the communication strategy which will be established between the school and the NGO - Define the ways and frequency of meetings.
7. NGOs align the activities with the curriculum to ensure that they support the learning goals and objectives. The educators together with the staff of the NGO are cooperating in designing the format of the activities, as well as in arranging the logistics and time related details. All members involved review the curriculum and identify potential opportunities to link academic subjects with extracurricular activities.
8. Talking with the students and involving them in the design process is an indicator of a more successful intervention.



9. Additionally, if needed, partnerships with the community are encouraged in order to support the extra-curricular and cross-curricular activities. This can involve working with local organizations or community groups that share an interest in the theme. Very frequently and if available, communication takes place with parent associations in order for their collaboration and engagement to be achieved.
10. Promoting the project to parents and the rest of the school and inviting the community to participate in the activities is the following step in order for the engagement of all involved stakeholders to be established. Lastly, the review and evaluation of the cooperation should be considered, planned ahead and taken place at the end of every intervention.

Examples of successful cooperation in Greece and Italy

Greece

1. Educational Kit (suitcase) 2P

ActionAid's education sector in its effort to connect with kindergartens and primary schools all over Greece created in 2013 the 2P educational suitcase in 2 copies for kindergarten and primary schools respectively. The educational suitcase 2P is a suitcase that schools can borrow for 1 month and use its material. The suitcase includes a doll, the active traveler Mr 2P (kindergarten child size), an educational guide for the teacher, a video animation, and tactile material used by the children, such as postcards, photos, puzzles, and other objects. The suitcase aims to approach the concept of Active Citizenship, moving thematically along the pillars of human rights, overconsumption, inclusion, inequality - poverty, sustainability, and migration - refugees, while methodologically utilizing experiential learning methods. At the beginning of the school year, schools, upon request, receive the suitcase and keep it for a specified period, during which they use the material in the suitcase.

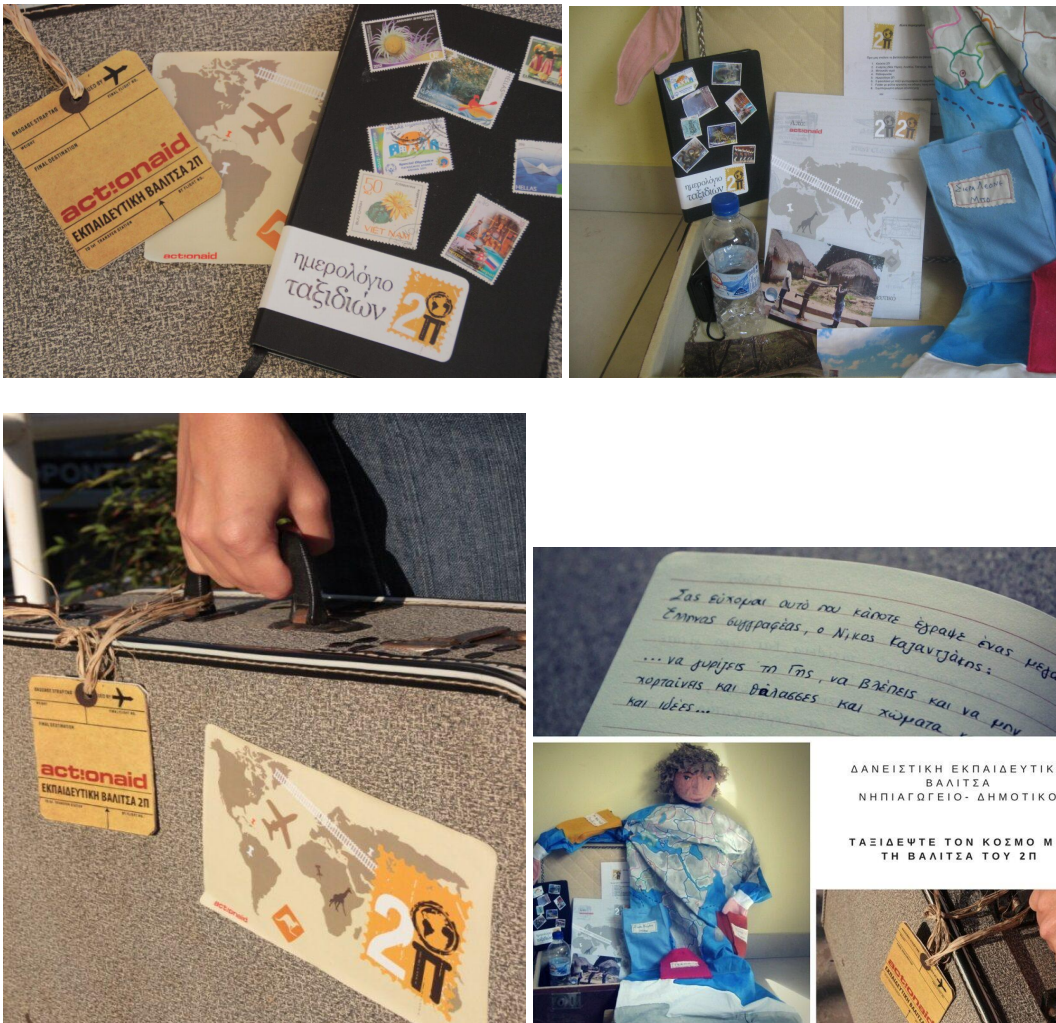
So far, the response of the schools in terms of material requests is great. The educational suitcase is fully booked for the whole year and the children's words are moving, as they treat Mr 2P, as a real person. The teachers' evaluations are also very good and indicative of how much the material helps them to approach abstract concepts such as poverty inequality, active citizenship and also how much it helps them to enrich the school's daily curriculum. The material also gives teachers the opportunity to use it in their own way, e.g. according to the needs and the dynamics of the group and to share this approach with the rest of the educational community, as the new activities they create are uploaded on the project's site. In addition, many schools on the occasion of the 2P's visit to their school:

- Create paintings, videos, talismans, etc. and send them to the project managers
- Create new friends, dolls, for 2P to travel together
- Continue their work on Active Citizenship



It is worth noting that many of the teachers borrow the educational kit every year as they have integrated it organically into the school curriculum. It should also be mentioned that the material is approved by the Ministry of Education.

Please, visit: <https://www.actionaid.gr/i-drasi-mas/stin-ekpaideysi/ekpaideytiki-balitsa-2p>



2. School Action Week

ActionAid has been implementing the Student Week of Action for 19 years. School Action Week is a mobilization of schools that each year serves a different cause. Similar to an adult campaign, where people's signatures are asked for, School Action Week asks children to send back one of their projects, related to the theme of each year. At the beginning of each school year, the educational sector decides on the theme and prepares a short educational material, which includes information about the theme, suggested actions and activities for the whole class and a specific call to action. Methodologically, it moves towards the pedagogical principles embraced by the ActionAid educational sector, with a particular emphasis on the call to action, and can potentially be implemented in all educational levels. The material is posted and/or sent to the schools that have registered and started implementing the actions, culminating in the sending of the projects by a specific date. For many years, human rights and especially the right of every child to go to school, has been the focus of the project. Recently, the themes have been around the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals.



Every year the participation of schools is high. Especially before the coronavirus pandemic period, more than 300 schools of all levels all over Greece registered their participation and more than 5000 children and teenagers participated. During the coronavirus period the activities were carried out with a much lower participation, but for the school year 2022-2023, the participation was again quite high. This year, the student action asked children and adolescents to reflect on and implement activities on the themes of Goals 3, 11, 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Both the students' projects and the teachers' evaluations speak of an action that manages to motivate, raise awareness and encourage children to take action.

In the link below you can find this year's action with the respective works of the students as well as the material of previous years:
<https://www.actionaid.gr/mathitiki-ebdomada-drasis-2023>





Italy

1) Musicando si vola (some elementary schools of Palermo and local associations)

It is about a creative, interactive practice, focused, like other aforementioned practices, on activities related to intercultural mediation services which are addressed to NAMS of primary and secondary level. The core idea is to develop foreign students' listening and musical skills, empowering them to express and communicate their feelings directly and smoothly. Furthermore, the activities undertaken aim to stimulate the students' contact and close relationship with their culture through the revival of traditional music and rhythms, promoting in this way an intercultural exchange among students and teachers. The participation of various and important stakeholders (teachers, cultural mediators, cross-cultural psychologists, and students) in the performance of musical and cross-cultural activities is undoubtedly an essential asset of this promising initiative. "L'educazione socio-affettiva a scuola" (Pestalozzi School and local associations)

This ongoing practice, carried out through different types of formats (interactive, video, audio) and addressed to students of primary and middle-high school level, aims at organizing pedagogical activities with a social inclusion character into the school classroom. It comes as a response to enhance the promotion of all students' well-being at school and the improvement of their soft skills, a core element for the achievement of inclusive education. The planned activities are also useful for the prevention of school problems such as bullying and school dropout cases. As not many resources are required for implementing such a socio-educational practice, it gives many potentials for interested actors of other European countries to replicate the activities of the initiative.

2) Summer Campus on Social Inclusion and Fighting the social unrest (Middle school San Giovanni Valdarno and local associations)

This summer camp promotes activities that strengthen the student-student relationship and the student-teacher relationship. In particular it facilitates access to educational and cultural opportunities for the most disadvantaged students. The process built with the support of various teachers adopts an informal teaching approach, where the teachers are facilitators and do not judge or evaluate activities. The course includes 8 modules on: Physical Activity and Sports, Applied Mathematics to new technologies, Theatre Workshops, Outdoor Activities, Photo Art (photography workshop, Video Production, Photo Education), Music (Instrumental and Orchestral Activity).

The process ended on June 22nd with a final event (show and photos) with the participation of all parents.

During the activities students collaborated with the partners such as CAI, Balze and various Sports Clubs. It was useful for the pupils and especially for their families who enjoyed a period in an inclusive environment that offered them a cultural opportunity. The feedback was very positive both from the students and teachers.



We had several children with disabilities and they were able to integrate perfectly in a different context. Students managed to establish peer-to-peer relationships, as, for example, a child took care of a 4 year smaller child. This is an important exchange.

The students had the unusual opportunity to access cultural courses and activities in which they generally cannot take part in for a variety of reasons during the year. The teachers were helpful by providing skills, competences, professionalism and support: in fact, everything was realized by the internal teacher who had specific skills on the subjects.

Seeing teachers from another point of view, under a more ludic, laborious and informal dimension, strengthened the connection between students and teachers.