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Article

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Educational Scenarios: from the theoretical framework to their implementation in classroom reality

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is not only one, but triple. The first is to present how teachers who participated in the first two international symposiums, organized by EEPEK (Scientific Innovation for the Promotion of Educational Education), responded to the questionnaires we provided. The second is to prove that innovation in schools is feasible and has positive impact on both students and parents. And the third is to motivate educators to try a new educational scenario in the school and not be hesitant to take the risk to transform their classroom from conventional to modern and teachers can stay aligned to the demands of the 21st century schools.

Keywords: collegiality, feedback, innovation, education

Introduction

In the 21st century, we need to bear in mind that all students are smart according to the Multiple Intelligences theory introduced by Howard Gardner (1993) and all students can learn in both various and different ways. So, when a teacher is aware of her students' learning profiles then she can expect students not only to enjoy their time in class more, but also to perform considerably better. It is unlikely to expect students to learn when we ignore the concept of differentiation in teaching and learning, because "*Placing learners into a single learning style container ignores the reality of the whole person*". Student profile surveys and questionnaires can be useful tools in the hands of a teacher who wants to excite her students and offer a second-to-none learning experience that does not exclude any of the students. Teachers have to cross-train their students for this purpose(McCarthy, 2017).

So, if we want our students to learn, how ready are we to learn too? "Learning is not something like chicken pox, a childhood disease that makes you itch for a while and then leaves you immune for the rest of your life" (Barth, 1990). When the feedback coming from students is so positive, we have no reasons to question our teaching skills in case we have to make changes into our lesson plan.

Methodology

After two successful symposiums on innovation in education, we thought that it would be very useful to see what happened to all these educational scenarios after they were presented at the symposiums.

Were they stored in a drawer? Were they implemented even more than once in the classroom? What were the conditions teachers faced, when they tried to implement their innovative lesson plans at their classrooms? Was it easy for them to engage students into a radically different lesson plan? What was the feedback received by students and parents? These were some of the questions we wanted to answer and, we think that, the replies we received helped us to safely form an idea about the reality the teachers face after the symposiums. We tried to show that a presentation of an innovative plan at a symposium is not one step before it is stored at a bookcase with the rest of our books. It is the first firm step we take to replace the ways our students used to learn and invite them into a new learning experience where knowledge is being acquired in a meaningful and purposeful fashion.

We formed questionnaires made up of nine questions; two of them were open-ended questions which we sent, in March 2017, via e-mail to all educators who presented an innovative teaching scenario in one of the two previous symposiums. After the expiration of the first deadline, where educators were asked to send their responses to us, we resent the questionnaires. We finally received fifty-five replies from educators who had already tried to implement their teaching scenario in their classroom after the symposiums.

After receiving the replies, we studied the results and tried to make connections between them. We wanted to form conclusions by sticking strictly to the data provided by educators' replies. When we completed this step, we tried to explain our findings into full paragraphs and share them with the reader.

Open-ended questions

"Briefly mention the obstacles you faced up when you tried to implement your innovative lesson plan in the classroom".

The first open-ended question of the questionnaire asked teachers to briefly mention the obstacles they faced up when they tried to implement their innovative lesson plan in the classroom. We received fifty-five responses. Ten comments came from preschool teachers and half of them mentioned that their lesson plan was put into action absolutely smoothly. Factors that led to this positive outcome were the support of both the educational and local community to the teacher. Also, the activities designed by teachers were suitable for the particular age-group of students and the goals teachers had set were achieved gradually and not at once. This parameter of gradual acquisition gave to students the time to get used to the new learning procedures. Common interests between teachers, and also their willingness to co-operate successfully with their other colleagues, made the implementation of the innovative lesson plans an easy task for the educators. In addition, when there is long experience in working on multiple educational materials, helps teachers to invite students to learn new things in a different, more innovative way, according to the received comments.

In some cases, however, some preschool teachers had to solve particular problems in their effort to offer their students a new teaching experience. These difficulties had mainly to do with poor infrastructure facilities, like the lack of computers in schools. Nevertheless, that was not enough to discourage teachers from teaching their new scenario. They decided to bring along to the classroom their

own computers and work with their young students on the new material. It was also mentioned that at some cases teachers had to struggle with time which was not enough. Another educator found it quite demanding to introduce the new material to the students because they came from multiple national backgrounds and there was a lack of homogeneity in the classroom.

From the 15 answers received from primary school teachers five of them mentioned that time was the main obstacle they had to deal with. Students were not familiar with the new activities because they did not have any previous knowledge or did not know how to use a computer. Students who had computers at home performed better at using the new material that the teacher introduced. What is more, the teacher had to work on the regular teaching material too and this added extra pressure on her especially when students were excited and wanted to spend more time on the new activities. In cases where students had learning difficulties, more time was needed for the new lesson plan to be implemented. Computers were not available in every classroom. However, in some cases, no obstacles were mentioned at all. Also, it was when a teacher knew the personal learning style of each student that the results were more positive and students were more engaged. Poor co-operation between teachers of different specializations was an extra obstacle and did not help the well-motivated teacher to try something more radical in their classroom. Peer to peer teaching and differentiated instruction were methods that helped teachers engage students and work on the new and innovative material in the classroom.

The same question was answered by thirty secondary school teachers. Time was a main problem for the 1/3 of them. Educators had not only to try something new with their students but also to follow the instructions given and cover the material described in the syllabus of the Ministry of Education. This fact added extra pressure on teachers. Also, students needed time to get used to the new steps required, according to the lesson plan, so as to complete a task. In classes where the number of student was high, teachers struggled more to have a positive result in the classroom. Interesting is the fact that, in one of the comments we read, students were not familiar with these innovative lesson plans and the alternative teaching methods and even though they found the process interesting, they did not consider it to be a real lesson. Lack of teamwork skills, like task allocation, on the part of the students, did not help much in the realization of the new lesson plan. Given this situation, teacher's facilitation was necessary in task distribution. Third high-school graders did not show much enthusiasm in the task, probably, because students' schedule in this grade is extremely demanding and they are mainly focused on the statewide (Pan-Hellenic) exams at the end of the school year. Internet connection seemed to be inadequate in some schools which made things worse for the teachers, and computers did not operate properly either. Teachers also tried to bring about changes to the daily schedule to free the computers lab and use it with their students. Interactive boards were used when computers were not available and the innovative lesson plan was carried out this way.

"Write down parents' comments on how the new teaching method made their children feel"

To this question, the second open-ended one, nine preschool educators shared the feedback received from the parents of students. According to parents, students were excited with the new teaching method. They

acquired new habits, even though in the comment we do not have a particular reference to what the new habit was, which they followed after school. This newly acquired habit did not go unnoticed by parents. Also, parents asked teachers to repeat the same project in the next school year. In one case, where the teacher asked students to create their own film, students were thrilled for a long time after the project was completed. Students who were hearing their voices in their own films, felt very proud of themselves. At one school, the new teaching scenario ran as part of the Erasmus+ project and for this two separate questionnaires were given to parents asking them to give their views on the project. Their replies made it clear that the new teaching scenario had developed children's skills.

In elementary school, teachers received positive feedback from parents, too. In their nine responses we read that students enjoyed the new teaching method because they tried something new and worked using alternatives ways. Excited were the students who collaborated with peers from other European schools. We read, also, about a case where because of this program, students learnt how to use computers at home in a creative way. This gave a boost to their self-esteem, decreased intrafamilial conflicts. This is another example of how a school activity can reshape students' attitude after school. Google forms were used by one teacher to ask feedback from the parents. The incoming comments showed that parents were absolutely in favor of the new educational practices followed at school. It seems that the use of art for introducing the new material appealed to students and gave them pleasure. Interesting is the fact that this particular question was not answered by all the educators who had sent us their questionnaires. Also, no educator shared a single negative reply or comment.

We received eighteen responses from secondary school educators. The comments of the parents were absolutely positive. New educational scenarios activated students. Educators welcomed the positive feedback and were not surprised by the students' enthusiasm during the implementation of the project in class. They knew that students would communicate their delight to their parents. Parents were deeply satisfied to notice that their children learnt new ways about how to use the internet creatively, in a way that promotes their learning, especially through electronic platforms. Another project motivated students to realize the importance of having breakfast, a skill that can be practiced outside school, too, and can have a positive and long-term impact on their lives. Parents asked teachers to design more new activities and students' overall interest in learning increased. Religious Education (RE), too, students seemed more motivated to participate and learn when the class was offered in a more innovative way.

Close-ended questions

In the questionnaires offered, apart from the open-ended questions, we included a number of close-ended questions. The first of them was: how many times did you try to implement the new teaching scenario. We received ten replies from pre-school teachers. Seven of them implemented it only once while only three tried it for 2-3 times each. We received fifteen replies from elementary school teachers. Seven of them applied their teaching scenarios only once and eight teachers executed it 2-3 times. From secondary schools we received thirty replies. Twelve teachers applied their teaching scenarios only once,

nine teachers implemented it 2-3 times and nine teachers implemented it 4 or more times.

Another question teachers were asked to answer was if the teaching aims they had set for this class were fulfilled. We received ten replies from pre-school teachers. Three answered "a lot", and seven "very much." Fifteen replies came from elementary teachers and two were satisfied enough with the teaching aims, three were a lot of satisfied, eight were absolutely satisfied and two were extremely satisfied. From secondary schools we received thirty replies. Ten were satisfied enough, eight were a lot of satisfied, eight were absolutely satisfied, and four were extremely satisfied.

To the question: "did you find it necessary to redesign the activities of the teaching scenario when you tried to implement it in the classroom?" we received ten responses from pre-school teachers and six of them had to change the duration. From elementary schools we received fifteen replies. Positive were eight teachers and negative seven (PE05-06-07, PE70) did not need to change anything. Thirty secondary school teachers shared their feedback too. Fourteen replied that they had to bring about some changes and sixteen, kept the duration as it was planned in the beginning.

We were quite interested to know if time was enough for those teachers who tried to follow a different teaching scenario in their classroom. For this reason we asked them if they had to re-estimate the time needed for each activity when they tried to apply their scenario. We received ten responses from pre-school teachers; Six were positive and four negative. Fifteen from elementary school teachers where only five did not need no re-estimate the time and thirty from secondary teachers where twenty-one were positive and only nine teachers stayed within the time limits they had set from the beginning.

In a teacher's effort to try a new approach with their students it is essential to check if students welcome this new scenario. In this respect, we asked teachers how co-operative their students were during the implementation of the new teaching scenario. We had ten replies from pre-school teachers; eight replied that students were very co-operative and eight described the level of co-operation as perfect. From the fifteen replies coming from elementary school teachers, nine said that students were very co-operative and six argued that students were highly co-operative. Thirty secondary school teachers shared their replies, too. One teacher described it as poor, six teachers, described it as good, eighteen teachers, as very good and five as perfect.

The last close-ended question we decided to ask teachers was if an educator will be discouraged in case she finds herself in an environment where her initiative for an alternative teaching plan is not supported. We received ten replies from pre-school teachers and only four argued that the negative environment will not affect a teacher. From the fifteen elementary school teachers only two were negative and from the thirty secondary school teachers only six replied that the negative environment will not unmotivate a teacher to introduce a new teaching practice in his classroom.

Conclusions coming from the open-ended questions

The overall conclusion from this question that asked teachers to briefly mention the obstacles they faced up, when they tried to implement their innovative lesson plan, is that facilities are not enough in the classrooms. For that, teachers need to come up with their own solutions. They need to go the extra mile and be resourceful enough so as to answer to every difficulty with a new solution and never feel discouraged by any obstacles.

Regarding time it seems that it is not enough in some cases. However, lack of time was not a problem in every school and this is quite promising because for various reasons some teachers could stick to their plan and keep the time limits they had set from the beginning. It is interesting to note that in multinational classrooms, difficulties for the instructor are increased.

Deficiency in homogeneity is a common parameter in multinational classrooms. The different cultural background children are raised in is a parameter every teacher should take into serious consideration and plan the activities accordingly so as not to exclude any student.

Another factor that teachers should not ignore is that things get worse when the regular teaching material, determined by the Greek Ministry of Education, has to be taught at the same time she is trying to offer her students a new teaching experience. This task, of trying to introduce a new teaching method in the classroom and at the same time try to stick to the official curriculum, might leave to the teacher only limited room for innovation; this demanding task is intertwined with the need for successful time management. Time is not always enough and teachers need to know how to manage time effectively so as to have the desired results in the classroom.

Teamwork skills are essential for students. When they do not know how to cooperate with each other and are confused about what they are asked to do, they need more time to execute a task and they might even not work at all on it. Knowing how to manage time will be a valuable tool to every educator.

Taking a look at the positive factors that helped into the realization innovative teaching scenarios in the classroom one of them was the teachers' support to each other, that is collegiality. With this term we refer to the communication of ideas and various practices among teachers, and the condition that allows teachers to teach each other and learn from each other. This practice of collegiality is needed at schools today, as our findings show, and should not be confused with "congeniality" which has to do with the getting along successfully with our colleagues but does not necessarily entail mutual support to each other's educational incentives (Barth, 1990). Our findings support the need for authentic collegiality because they showed that common interests between teachers and their positive spirit for co-operation made the trick and innovative lesson plans were successfully taught. Collegiality can motivate an English teacher and a history teacher to co-operate, learn from each other, feel less alone, and more daring to try out new things and this can strengthen the collegial spirit between them (Barth, 1990). It is good to remember that any sense of rivalry between teachers will backfire sooner or later. As a result, the entire school will suffer from teachers' weakness and reluctance to share their findings with others (Ur,

2010). Local communities can have positive impact on teachers' efforts to alter the conventional teaching methods and lead to meaningful learning, as our findings show.

From the answers received to the second open question that asked parents to mention how their children felt about the new teaching method at school, we arrived to the following conclusions. Parents were excited about the new teaching reality at school. They saw that their children acquired new habits they could practice outside school; this made kids more cooperative with their parents, and students felt proud of themselves. So positive was the impact of the new teaching scenarios on students that parents asked teachers to repeat these scenarios during the next school-year. Students felt proud when they collaborated with students from other countries. This depicts the impact programs like E-twinning between schools (Sayer and Erler, 2012)can have on students. Partaking into programs of this kind can cultivate global perspective to students, excite them, making them more receptive to more innovative methods of learning and eliminate stereotypes and realize more about their own national identity (Camilleri and Gritter, 2016). Students learnt new ways to use the internet creatively and this aligns with the global trend that wants school to try to promote the necessity of Computer Science skills and teach students how to use digital media effectively for their own benefit. Actually, we cannot really think about innovation in education away from the acquisition of digital skills at schools and this is shown in the reports of global summits like OECD (Center for Educational Research, 2016). It is obvious that in some schools we cannot even find computers to work with, but if we are creative enough and we tend to cultivate collegiality with other teachers it is impossible that we come up with solutions we had never thought before.

In other cases, what helped teachers to implement a scenario, was the use of another subject like art. Students were more eager to learn something new offered through another subject. If art can be used, then other innovative and alternative methods of teaching like Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) could be used too to help students learn more about a subject and simultaneously practice their second language skills (Sayer, 2012). Teachers who decided to teach their activities as part of the Erasmus+ program seemed to have extra tools that helped them more in tracing parents' feedback on the activities teachers had designed. This can safely make us think that it will be for the benefit of the teacher to check how many and what tools the European Union can offer to innovative teachers before they design a new lesson experience. Quite often we might notice that we have options that we hadn't realized before and using them can make the difference in our teaching practice. It is important to note that no teacher mentioned a negative comment coming from a parent. This is a finding that could potentially inspire more teachers to try out something new in their classroom. We cannot think of innovation at schools without daring to teach in a different way. On the contrary, we have to wonder how much we are prepared to risk and leave behind us what works well for us in order to try a new method that will work better for our students (Barth, 20014). It is necessary to go the extra mile, put extra work and be ready for the positive results which as our findings show will not take long to come.

Conclusions coming from the close-ended questions

To the question how many times you tried to implement your new teaching scenario it seems that pre-school teachers did not have the

chance to use the scenario more than once in the classroom while in elementary and secondary schools most teachers executed the scenario for more than one time and in some cases 4 or more times. So, educators who might be reluctant to use a scenario because they might feel that teenagers will not embrace the innovative teaching method can be less afraid once data show that 1/3 of secondary school teachers who sent us their replies carried out their scenario more than 4 times and these teachers taught Computer skills, Language skills, Religion, Maths, Finances, etc).

Interesting are the findings to the question that asked teachers to mention if the teaching aims of their class were fulfilled. All fifty-five replies were positive and some of the teachers were extremely satisfied with the results. Not receiving a single negative comment make us feel great optimism; even though, teachers at schools do not have all the tools they need to utilize their new scenarios, this does not stop them from being successful and feeling extremely satisfied with the results of the lesson. It is another element that innovation at schools is not a thing that should scare us. We can do it and feel satisfied with both the results and ourselves.

The majority of teachers mentioned that they had to redesign their activities when they tried to put their scenarios into action. The exact reasons that made them change a few things are not known. However, if we keep in mind that there were the same teachers who replied, through our questionnaires, that they were satisfied with the results their teaching scenario had on students, then we have no reasons to argue that a new teaching method is successful only when we stick to our lesson plan. On the contrary, flexibility is required when we try something new and needed alterations of our first plans should not considered to be a drawback; adaptability is a necessary personality trait and professional skill of the teacher who longs for the most positive results in her classroom. Changes are very good for a professional who wants to reflect and think over what has to be avoided or should be implemented next time. It is the opportunity teachers have to learn from themselves and also by observing other professionals.

Also as we mentioned before, time was a common obstacle for the majority of the teachers who sent us their replies. Again, what we notice is that lack of time was not a reason for them not to run their scenario. They were successful and neither students nor parents seemed to have any problem with this at all. In case, we are afraid that time will never be enough and our effort to try something new will just fail, we can definitely give it a second thought. The findings we have are from the teachers themselves and show that the way is open for more teachers to dare an alternative teaching method in their classroom. Sometimes an obstacle might seem huge and impossible for us to go beyond this, but teachers' replies confirm that risk taking will be for the benefit of both our students and us, as professionals.

In another question we tried to trace students' cooperation when their teachers took the initiative to try something new with them. Here, from the 55 replies we received only one teacher described students' cooperation as poor while all the rest gave us very positive answers. 5 secondary teachers who taught Religion, Language, Maths, Physics, and Computer skills described students' cooperation as perfect. We might have expected teenagers to be reluctant to work with the teacher

but we do not have any evidence to support this view. Students were positive and ready to try something new.

Our last close-ended question was about how much a less supportive environment can negatively affect a teacher who wants to introduce to her class a new teaching scenario. The majority of the answers clearly indicated that the negative environment has an impact on teachers. If principals or other teachers are against innovation, this will dishearten a teacher and will probably step back from her initial plans to transform her conventional classroom to the modern classroom of the 21st century. This takes back to the previous paragraph where we discussed the importance of collegiality. When a teacher wants to work on a new approach at school, this will have a positive result to the entire school and even the local community especially when we have seen the positive comments coming from both students and parents. A teacher, on the other hand, who is afraid to try something new and feels that cannot make good use of the technology, has the chance now to learn from the colleague who is ready to implement a new scenario. The result will be both of them to become better professionals. Especially the second one will learn where to pay more attention to, plan a more effective lesson and avoid the pitfalls and inefficiencies, the first teacher might have encountered. In other words, innovation generates more innovation and it is hard for us to believe that there are professionals who would not like to work for a school with a very good name where students love to go to and are proud of their teachers.

Suggestions

From what we tried to show innovation in education is not only feasible but also needed. Even though it seems difficult to take place, good planning, flexibility and open-mindedness can offer valuable experiences to students, teachers and parents and can help students acquire habits that will follow them for good. When a teacher wants to try out something new in the classroom, should remember that learning never stops and being a teacher means that we should continuously upgrade our skills, study, and communicate with other educators both inside and outside school. It also seems that students are satisfied when they see that their teacher cares for them and do not ignore their learning needs. Webinars are offered for free for every professional interested in learning more teaching techniques. In addition, online platforms like Google Drive offer innumerable options to every educator for free. What is more, when we embrace parents into their children's learning procedure and explain to them more about their scenarios, we can expect parents to love it and feel even more excited about the innovative activities that are taking place in their kid's school. Above all, innovation is like fresh air in a stuffy room and we need this oxygen to cultivate in our students the necessary skills that can make them not only successful, but also creative, adults that will make world a better place for everyone.

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