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THE DISCLOSURE OF ROMA PUPILS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES VIA FUTURE LITERACY APPROACHES: THE CASE OF A SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM IN THE REGION OF THESSALY IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

The present study provides insight on Roma students' understandings and experiences during their participation in a learning program under the aegis of Future Literacy Approaches and reports on the range of cognitive and social skills which can be cultivated through such literacy experiences. A case study research design was applied with an after-school evening class attended by 12 Roma students in a region of Greece. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data indicates that Roma students' engagement in the Future Literacy tasks of the program strengthened the acquisition of skills that could be useful for their daily lives, including the capacity to construct their own representations of daily life, and finding creative solutions to real-life situations. Activities provided students with the space and time to express their aspirations for self-empowerment and changed life conditions in the future. Findings provide one way to address the urgent need for Roma to challenge marginalization through leveraging their own active roles as citizens.

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Keywords: Roma education; future literacy approach; inclusion; empowerment; daily life; leveraging citizenship

The Roma population are Europe's largest ethnic minority, with an estimated population of about 10–12 million. The umbrella-term "ROMA" encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, and Abdal, as well as Traveler populations (*gens du voyage*, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.). An estimated 6 million Roma are citizens or residents of the European Union. The majority of Roma experience serious discrimination in all areas of social life and lack opportunities for equal access to education, employment, housing, and health services. More particularly, the Roma community that is concentrated in Central and South-Eastern Europe is struggling with severe poverty and social exclusion (UNICEF, 2011). Discrimination and exclusion impact children and young people in this group the hardest (Stathopoulou, 2017). Relevant European Commission data (2020) show that 85% of ROMA children are at risk of poverty (compared with 20% of children in the rest of the population) and 62% are out of school, training, and work (compared to 10% of young people in the rest of the population). Bennett's (2014) research interviewing Roma students and parents, mainly from the former socialist countries of the Balkans and central Europe, highlights that many Roma students are placed in special education classes from a very early age, as they cannot successfully meet the assessment criteria that, in many cases, they are required to pass as early as the ages of five, six or seven. However, as he also points out, these criteria do not assess the strengths of the Roma child, but focus on weaknesses, as they are designed for children of the dominant ethnocultural group and are therefore culturally biased. At the same time, Roma students are assessed within a prescribed time frame in the official language of the country of residence, and not in their mother tongue. The aforementioned research (Bennett, 2014) is of particular interest as the findings highlight that the majority of Roma students who succeed in passing the assessment criteria and ultimately enrolling in mainstream education rather than special classes are those who share three characteristics. The first concerns enrollment and participation in preschool education classes prior to enrollment in primary school. Preschool education seems to play an important role in enabling Roma students to become familiar with both the school routine and the dominant language of the country of residence. The second characteristic relates to the origins declared by parents, the majority of whom do not wish to declare their Roma identity. Although this element is directly linked to the desire to assimilate, it seems to play a role in the way these families deal with issues related to their children's education. Finally, the third characteristic relates to the place of residence as well as the area of the school. The foreshadowed survey showed better school performance among Roma students who reside outside Roma settlements or attend schools located in an area different from that of the Roma settlements. The findings of this research advances our understanding of issues in the education of Roma students, but mainly it highlights the discrimination against this

population, which seems to be reduced when the Roma identity remains, in one way or another, a “hidden” identity. Therefore, it seems to be important to examine further Roma education in a meaningful context for children to understand better how to support them to integrate and flourish in the school system.

ROMA EDUCATION

Research on Roma education has reported that Roma students show low and inconsistent attendance in compulsory education, and that their dropout rates continue to be very high (UNESCO, 2013). Several demographic factors and mediators are considered as barriers to the development of Roma children’s integration and reading comprehension skills development, such as family income, parents’ education, parental occupation, school absence, parent-child relationship and non-verbal abilities (Pop, 2020), enrollment and dropout, and segregation (Dolean et al., 2019). Research on bilingualism and its effects on the development of reading skills are well-documented but contradictory. On one hand, bilingual children seem to have an advantage in phonological skills (Adesope et al., 2010). On the other hand, bilingual students sometimes have poorer decoding skills than their monolingual peers (Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg, 2014). Roma students typically fall into the second category due to environmental aspects which affect poor decoding skills such as family limited verbal and nonverbal abilities in the dominant language and parental occupation (see Pop, 2020).

Fremlova (2011) investigated the school performance of Roma students who migrated from the Czech Republic or Slovakia to England. Although most Roma children in their countries of origin attend special classes, those moving to England joined mainstream classes. The research showed that in a short time the children’s performance improved, reaching just below average, and they quickly learned to speak English well.

Schools and communities may have a key role in countering the challenges Roma children face in education and reversing the cycle of inequality that they suffer regarding the quality of their participation in education (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2019; IOM, 2018). Schools’ efforts should be focused on provision of suitable institutions, encouragement of regular school attendance, and ensuring access to education (Harris et al., 2017). Additionally, widening access to early education and reducing early school leaving and strongly encouraging participation in secondary and tertiary education are identified as strategies that can contribute to reversing the cycle of inequality in Roma students’ education (Arabadjieva, 2016).

In Greece, although Roma have been present since the fourteenth century in territories that later became part of the Greek state (Terzopoulou & Georgiou, 1998), they are marginalized in current-day society. Nowadays, the Roma population is reported to be at least 150,000 (Moraitou, 2013), although the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2015) suggests a

number closer to 265,000. In Greece the situation regarding discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion of the members of the Roma community is similar to the rest of Europe. Here too, groups of children and young people are confronted with strong, structural barriers of educational and social exclusion. Available data show that most (72%) preschool-aged Roma children do not attend kindergarten and an even higher percentage (92%) do not attend secondary education (EU-MIDIS II, 2016). The rate of attendance in primary education is higher (70%), but many children face a range of problems such as dropping out of school or attending schools threatened with ghettoization. The extremely unfavorable situation of ROMA children in education is due to a variety of factors, mostly of a structural nature. Many ROMA families are forced to move in search of seasonal work in the country to cope with the extreme poverty they are experiencing as a result of the successive crises since 2010. The children of the families who move are forced to stop attending school or attend school only occasionally. As there is no special care for a systematic and pedagogically sensitive approach to address the inconsistent attendance, it quickly leads to school dropout.

The children of nonmoving families also face significant obstacles to their school attendance, mainly due to the prevalence of a pedagogical and teaching culture in Greek schools that positions the cultural background of Roma students as deficient. This means that the responsibility for any problems and difficulties of their integration in a school rests solely with the Roma students themselves and their families (Parthenis & Fragoulis, 2020). This stigmatization of cultural background and, consequently, the devaluation of the knowledge and skills that these students bring to school, deprives them of the experiences of recognition that are fundamental to their school participation and school success (see Govaris et al., 2021). Both theoretically and empirically, we know that depriving minority students of school recognition experiences creates significant barriers to building school knowledge and skills (Vieluf & Sauerwein, 2018) as well as to building a positive self-image and identity.

Thus, cases of segregation and separate schooling infrastructures for Roma are common, and Greece has been condemned by the European Center for Human Rights (ECHR) for such structural segregation (Farkas, 2014). Local societies, local administration, and central state administration attitudes are frequently hostile to initiatives that seek to integrate Roma children into education (Desegregation and Action for Roma Education Network, 2019). Following the above, according to research findings, it seems that educational policy and school practices play a more decisive role in restricting the integration of Roma children into the school system, than do the students and their families themselves. In contrast to making explicit and addressing the real challenges, arguments that focus on the incompatibility of Roma culture with school culture serve as excuses that shift the responsibility from the school to the ROMA population alone.

Although the rhetoric of the state claims inclusion, this is not happening in practice which is attributed to two main reasons: (1) teachers do not seem to have the required training and (2) infrastructure and structural difficulties such as lack

of transport for students in some cases and/or lack of special education teachers to work individually with Roma students when needed. Consequently, mainstream educational policy can influence many teachers who have Roma students in their classrooms and who express views along the lines of “no matter how hard I try, they don’t learn.” Obviously, such perceptions are based on the theory of cultural deficit and, among other things, highlight the lack of interest on the part of teachers to deal with the education of these students in a meaningful way. The classroom teacher has the potential to ensure significant and effective interventions that could potentially meet the needs of Roma children. We argue that even in the context of an educational system that is not friendly to Roma, the institutionalization of an educational process that contributes to the effective education of Roma students, promoting both intercultural education and the strategies and tools of differentiated pedagogy, can help to achieve more and more significant results. One area that might offer some pathways to more inclusive education for Roma is to support the improvement of Roma children’s literacy skills. There is a need to conduct further research and more intervention studies that support the literacy development of Roma children in the short term could contribute to reduce their level of poverty in the long term.

FUTURE LITERACY APPROACHES

In an attempt to understand and cope with the reality around us, our aspirations and the universe which appears to be complex, we, as humans, need to improve our ability to take advantage of any novel emergence that surrounds us and can lead us to new constructions of the world. This is the fundamental principle of Futures Literacy as an approach to embrace complexity and using the future for policymakers (Miller, 2010). Since we live in an anticipatory universe, characterized by time and motion, it is not surprising that many phenomena and organizations exhibit or contain anticipatory systems (Miller, 2010). Future Literacy is understanding the future from an anticipatory systems perspective which takes into account animate and inanimate, conscious and unconscious processes for integrating the nonexistent future into the present (Miller, 2018).

Roma students’ perspectives and lived experiences are ignored by the Greek educational system. We suggest that Future Literacy could be an appropriate tool to understand Roma students’ needs and thus be used as a basis to design purposeful learning experiences for Roma children. Borrowing the idea of Future Literacy Labs (FLL) as presented in Balcom Raleigh (2017), we seek to understand if FLL will provide conditions of change for Roma children. As suggested by Balcom Raleigh et al. (2017) FLLs are considered to be the microscopes of the twenty-first century, a clever tool that can make the invisible, visible, through codesigned collective intelligence knowledge creation processes. The invention of FLL, which is just one among many tools that can be used to try to understand our emergent universe better, is part of a broader change in why and how the future is being used (Miller, 2018). More specifically, in order to achieve this aim, three dimensions of “future literacy practices” (Miller, 2010) are utilized to collect data: narrative-developing sensemaking frameworks; collective intelligence tasks; and rigorous imagination tasks.

The present study contributes to advancing understanding of Roma students' needs and lived experiences through drawing on Future Literacy approaches to track Roma students' possible future aspirations. Future Literacy approaches can become a useful inspirational tool for this ethnic minority group to bring forward empowering and emancipating actions for changing their life conditions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FUTURE LITERACY PRACTICES WITHIN THE ROMA EDUCATION PROGRAM IN GREECE

The Operational Program "Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning" within the region of Thessaly is undertaken by the University of Thessaly and is cofinanced by the European Union (European Social Fund) and Greek national funds. This project (MIS 5049099) aims to support Roma children, teenagers, and adults through various educational, pedagogical, didactic, psychosocial, and animating activities, to facilitate access to education for Roma students as well as to support school communities, through promoting intercultural understanding, communication, and collaboration. The main objective is to reduce early school leaving and educational inequality associated with members of the Roma population.

Within this context, a multilevel intervention program promotes resilience and provides psychosocial support to students at the participating schools. More specifically, the components of the intervention program include: (1) conduct a needs assessment at an individual and system level; (2) facilitate the school adjustment of Roma and non-Roma students; (3) provide consultation to faculty members and teachers at a school level; (4) communicate with Roma families to support the enrollment of their children in school and provide pedagogical support for the students. The program involves focused academic interventions to support students who attend remediation courses. This chapter presents findings from a specific educational intervention that was implemented through the school year 2021–2022 as part of the larger intervention program. In these sessions we provided Roma students with: (1) school activities that help children make a positive connection to school, (2) remediation courses, and (3) project-based learning sessions. Here, we highlight findings from three learning activities which were designed and implemented to understand and give voice to participants' lived experience.

We designed and implemented three basic learning activities adapted to the theory of future literacy. (1) Students in groups were asked to design a woman's portrait inspired by Pablo Picasso. They had to construct an imaginary narrative for this woman and present their work to peers. Students were encouraged to give the woman the Roma identity and let her introduce herself, talk about her needs and interests. (2) Students in groups played a board game based on the circle of life of an endangered bird which is named Kirkinezi. They were divided into two groups and they pretended to be a family of this kind of bird. Each of the groups aimed to finish first by avoiding dangers (i.e., hunters) and benefiting from situations (for example, find the nest the ornithologist has made). Through the

game, they had to express thoughts and reasoning (critical thinking) for decisions made throughout the bird's journey. (3) In the third activity students were called to talk about school life to their future grandchildren. In their narration, they were encouraged to talk about their motivations for participating in this intervention program in after school evening classes.

METHOD

The underlying goal of our research is to understand and report Roma students' views, needs, and through their lived experience. Case study research allows researchers to highlight the experiences of the students who attend the afterschool evening program organized by the University of Thessaly. Case study design supports empirical investigation of an educational phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). Specifically, the present study aims to provide insight into the Roma children's experiences of the educational learning program and to identify the range of cognitive and social skills which are cultivated.

The following research questions guided the study:

- (1) What kind of meaningful connections and enriched descriptions about daily life can Roma children make through future literacy practices?
- (2) What are Roma students' views about their participation in learning processes that use future learning practices?

Participants included 12 Roma children in the 6 to 12 age group who attended afterschool lessons in classes as part of a supportive intervention. The children participated in a range of learning activities based on cross-curricular tasks and problem-based learning which offer creative ways to develop children's knowledge, skills, and understanding while motivating them to learn through interconnected topics. A cross-curricular problem-based learning was implemented incorporating environmental education, arts, math, and literature. They attended afterschool evening classes three times a week for a school year, and the specific learning activities used for this chapter were carried out across three months. The classes were offered in a kindergarten school in the region of Volos, a city in mainland Greece.

The research data consist of:

- a. documents and images (field notes, teachers' diaries, photos)
- b. audio recordings from students' engagement in three different kind of future literacy tasks/activities

Content analysis of documents and transcripts from the children's in-depth responses and discussions, provided insight into the complexity of defining students' beliefs about their own learning experiences and their aspirations, and

informs the design of learning activities that may produce positive results for Roma students.

FINDINGS

Thematic analysis generated three broad categories: (1) creation of meaningful connections between the school and students' lives and enriched description of students' anticipation; (2) cultivation of critical thinking skills through collective intelligence tasks; and (3) students' general beliefs about their participation in learning processes.

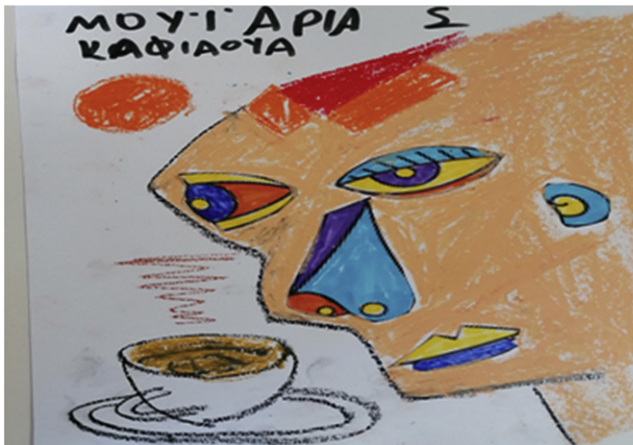
Creation of Meaningful Connections Between the School and students' Lives and Enriched Description of students' Anticipation

Task engagement is the manner and intensity with which students engage with learning materials in meaningful ways. It is strongly influenced by an individual's interest and motivation and includes practicing academic skills as well as presenting results of students' creative skills. To motivate children to present their views about the issue of women's roles in Roma communities, we used a craft-based project under the theme of meeting famous painters. Working in groups, students were asked to create an image of a woman inspired by Picasso, to name their artwork in Romani language and then to introduce/present "their woman" to the class with an imaginary narration. Their narration was about a woman from the Future who talks about her life and her role in the Roma community.

Thematic analysis of students' narrations and simple reality presentations in the present and future shows their ability to express themselves in a creative manner and reveals students' beliefs concerning women's role in the society. It further provides conditions that foster positive relationships between school and students' families since students' narrations were inspired by the women of their families. Four different patterns were identified in the children's presentations:

The woman who loves coffee: Participants created a self-reliant woman character who loves traveling and tasting coffee and flavors from all over the world. She wants to explore different parts of the world and to make new friends (see [Picture 1](#)). According to the students' explanation during their presentation, this is how they expect to see themselves as future women and how they view their mother. The students who created this figure claim that "usually women do not have the opportunity to travel abroad since they have a lot of family commitments and because of financial restrictions." It is also very interesting to underline the absence of the familiar long hairstyle. Students explain that "their woman" wants to be different and unique and this is why she does not look like other ROMA women.

The woman who eats fruit: Another group of participants created "the woman who prefers fruit." This woman likes gathering fruits and vegetables or buying healthy food from open markets. She also tries to make people conscious about



Picture 1. The Woman Who Loves Coffee.

environmental issues. One of her eyes is painted with dark colors because she reflects her thoughts about the earth's future if people continue living in an unsustainable way: "She has one black eye and she fortunes (forecasts?) bad things for the future... People may not have enough food in a few years" (see [Picture 2](#)).

The woman who fights the bear: this piece of art represents, according to the participants, their mothers' struggle to face severe difficulties related to poverty issues. According to students, this woman has many eyes since she has many



Picture 2. The Woman Who Eats Fruit.

children, and she needs more eyes to be ready to meet their needs all the time. One of the students of this group said: “I see that my mother is struggling with a lot of difficulties, sometimes she has to take care for our meals and she has only 10 euros for one week... I don’t know how she manages” (see [Picture 3](#))

The woman who has the key: this drawing represents a woman who is responsible for carrying out household chores from a very early age. She also has housekeeping duties like caring for younger siblings. According to the students, she is training herself for the future duties as a mother and a housekeeper during marriage, but she has a key that may open another, secret door for her life. As participants mention this woman knows how to “unlock hearts and she will figure out how to unlock her heart” (see [Picture 4](#)).

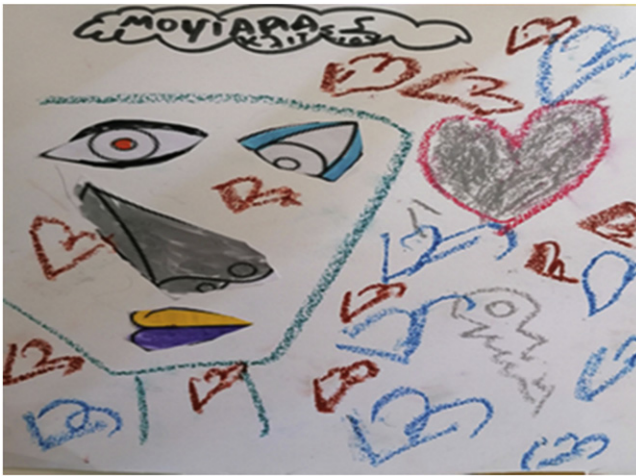
Through this learning activity, the students had the opportunity to present the reality of their daily life. Participants’ drawings and explanation through the presentation process reveal that they marvel at women’s capacities and skills since they have a lot of responsibilities in their community. On the other hand, they also are considering ways that women might assert their rights and establish a different lifestyle for women, including chances to travel, adopt healthy and sustainable lifestyle, and the opportunity to decide if making family is the right choice for them.

Critical Thinking Skills Cultivation Through Collective Intelligence Tasks

Collective intelligence within the teaching-learning framework refers to the capacity of a group of teachers and students to apply their intelligence to content, assessments, and educational materials. In relation to our research a collective intelligence task was designed and utilized to capture how critical thinking skills



Picture 3. The Woman Who Fights the Bear.



Picture 4. The Woman Who Has the Key.

are cultivated when a learning community works on an environmental issue. Participants play a board game which is about the life of Kirkinezi, an endangered bird of the Mediterranean. Each player pretends being a Kirkinezi that must travel from Africa to Greece avoiding dangers along the journey. Students taking up the role of this endangered bird had to take decisions through a collaborative decision-making process with their peers (family of birds) (see [Picture 5](#)).

The thematic analysis of students' responses in this task reveals three different patterns of critical thinking being shared and developed during the implementation of the learning activity:

Challenging assumptions with critical examination: through this board game one participant of each group had to define the area of general interest (Example: eating habits/food sources) as a challenge being faced by the birds. Then the rest in the group suggested solutions to each of the challenges along the journey. Thematic analysis indicates that through this process participants utilize their critical thinking skills since they tried to suggest "safe solutions." Specifically, it was said: "Maybe we should prefer eating insects... Farmers will love us, and we will avoid being poisoned by rat poison." During this approach critical thinking has been showed by expressing the emotion related to each situation. For example, the possibility of poisoning made the children who pretend to be Kirkinezia to quickly find a capable source of food. In this context challenging assumptions presented a great potential in develop students' critical according to their emotions and their distancing from themselves. In this sense, we point out that the inseparable link between body, mind,



Picture 5. Family of Birds Game.

and spirit would help in the formation of a whole human being, using emotional intelligence strategies and collaborative work.

Recognizing perspective and communicating ideas: thematic analysis indicated that the collective intelligence task is an effective communication solution in groups of individuals, especially for learners who struggle to write and prefer sharing their ideas through dialogue. In this process of communicating ideas, participants' perspectives passed through multiple cycles that led to the selection of the best solution. Through taking on responsibility for the Kirkinezi, and the importance of keeping the endangered bird alive and coming to know the threats to its survival, participants gain insight into new fields of knowledge, such as being environmentalists. Through multiple cycles of communication, some of the better ideas that were expressed were related to "tips for survival." For example, it is argued: "Church is a good idea to build our nest, there are big bricks to hide in."

Drawing on creative action to solve complex problems: Finally, critical thinking skills were evident through the children developing creative solutions to a real and meaningful problem. In this study we identified creativity in the nature of

the task performed by the participants and the nature of the output of the collective activity. Within the framework of the abovementioned board game creative action was demonstrated through accomplished decision-making and the nonroutine tasks out of which new ideas emerge: “we need to be always in bevy and find the nests ornithologists made for us.” This quote exemplifies how participants bring their thinking skills and their knowledge about environmental issues together, to arrive at capable solutions to a complex problem/situation.

Students' Views About Their Participation in the Learning Process

Students highlighted issues which were influential in their lived experience regarding school life. First, it was recognized by the children that there were differences in the typical school class and the class of the supportive intervention. Learners participate in the class of the intervention in more personalized and equitable learning opportunities, through collaboration with members of their own communities, and as part of teams of learners. The cultural competence and extent of support offered by teachers was identified as an influential factor in students' sense of inclusiveness in the school environment and lived self-efficacy. Some described positive experiences with teachers and peers that helped to increase their confidence and foster belonging. One student says (pretending he is talking to his grandchildren):

You will like so much my evening school. I had always something to do... we had a lot of board games and we were making crafts. I was in love with our little garden. I was the one who was keeping notes about plant development. This was making me feel happy and important.

Additionally, students claimed that the specific activities offered them learning opportunities which engaged them not only in written tasks but also in oral presentation processes which demand skills like cooperation, self-expression, and playing games. Thus, students saw their participation in the program as a forum that fosters their ability to express a view on school placements, and have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and previous experiences.

The children recognize that they have cultivated skills related to thinking and “habits of mind” (analysis, problem solving, reasoning), sensemaking, and decision-making. The learning environment is identified by the children as a child-friendly and safe space that enables them to reach their full potential. According to some of the children, their participation in the intervention class allowed for learning outcomes, that they did not have the opportunity to demonstrate during their participation in the daytime school. In the evening intervention classes they felt seen and heard. One student shared:

In typical school, sometimes I was feeling that nobody sees me, I was not good at math and I didn't like grammar. I was feeling bored writing down sentences that I didn't understand. In evening school, I had a lot of things to do. Maybe I couldn't write but I could participate in discussions and express myself in different way.

Specifically, citizenship, creativity, innovativeness, and ethical agency were cultivated within given contexts of children's personal lives through their participation in the evening leaning intervention. The focus of "habits of mind" is not only recognized as the implementation of critical thinking in separated tasks on the educational experience but also the broader society and the connection between student learning and development, and broader societal development.

The children consider themselves to be creative thinkers since they have been engaged in tasks that demand generating ideas, exploring possibilities, asking questions to extend their thinking, and connecting their own and others' ideas and experiences in inventive ways. These processes are important for building collective intelligence culture within the school framework. One student describes how their community worked to find out a way to present the effects of water pollution in birds' lives. Participants try to show the consequences by using one bowl with water and one bowl with water and oil. Then they were submerging feathers in both of this bowls to show that feathers which were submerged in the second bowl were destroyed like birds' feathers when they rest on or dive into polluted water. In the design of this presentation no writing or other academical skill was demanded apart from environmental consciousness skills. One student said:

Some of us were good students but others faced difficulties. All of us felt it was very important to complete the task because all of us had something to do. When we were doing the experiment with water pollution, all of us were noticing the negative impact on birds and we were very good at picking it up and showing it (see [Picture 6](#)).



Picture 6. Discovering Knowledge During Experimenting.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigates Roma children's views, needs, and their lived experiences of attending afternoon classes which focused mainly on empowering their voices about future aspirations and literacy. It employed a case study research design to get deeper understanding of the processes and the outcomes of the Roma supportive education program with respect to the development of students' cognitive and social skills. One Roma students' afterschool evening class organized by the University of Thessaly in Greece over the school year was used and qualitative data were collected. The learning activities were designed under the principles of Future Literacy approach. This study contributes to further understanding of Roma education in the sense that it uses the Future Literacy approach with this ethnic minority population which has not been explored before.

The main findings of the study indicate that Roma students' engagement in the Future Literacy tasks of the program strengthened the acquisition of skills that could be useful for their daily lives, like the capacity to construct their own representations of daily life and find creative solutions in real-life situations.

The main educational benefits of the intervention are related to the orientation of the learning, which is a task-based pedagogical framework that creates spaces in the classroom that enable Roma student voices to be heard, legitimized, and honored (Gana et al., 2020). It appears that cross-curricular content through problem-based approaches can be an appropriate learning context to support cognitive and social development with Roma children.

The Roma children in this study recognized the value of the learning experiences. They embraced opportunities for creative and critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and the sharing of ideas. They cherished the learning environment which gave them space to express their voices in comparison to their experiences of the morning school, where they often felt unseen and not heard. By using the Future Literacy practices Roma students invented imaginary futures that promised changes in the conditions of Roma women's lives. Through imagining the future, the Roma students brought their present-day assumptions to the surface, using the future to unpack what is going on now and what might be possible. The children were free to go beyond the predictable and taken-for-granted, to embrace complexity. Similar to this study, previous research has shown that introducing Future Literacy Lab in summer schools serves as learning simulation for students (Balcom Raleigh et al., 2018) as they are called upon to imaging how future people could more consciously make choices about the environment in which they live. Applying "active skills" which promote an internal shift in focus from meeting individual needs toward engaging in the needs of others, as proposed by Pouru and Wilenius (2018), appears to be important in order to participate in building a more suitable future for humanity. For Roma students these active skills can be utilized to unlock the imagination as a malleable tool for making sense of what is emerging in the present and reflecting on the potential for the close future.

Also demonstrated in this study was the ways in which the voices of Roma children reflected enhanced empowerment and emancipation. According to Nieto (2004), the empowerment of minority students' voices can positively affect their whole relation with the official school system and limit school dropout. The Roma children in this study felt free to express negative feelings and experiences about the day school program compared to what they experienced in the after-school evening classes. They valued group work and through collective intelligence tasks they became sensitive about environmental issues and ethical agents for their own lives. Roma empowerment is often associated with the reserved representational rights for Roma in a political sense (i.e., in the case of Slovenia). It is suggested that reversing socioeconomic marginalization so Roma as a minority could constitute an equal political actor and could happen only after extending reserved representational rights at the national level thus creating an opportunity for political empowerment of the Roma community (see Zevnik & Russell, 2020). However, from the present study it is evident that there are positive aspects for building empowering experiences for Roma children to exhibit social, environmental, and cultural active agency, which can play a crucial role for their inclusion in the official school system and strengthen their self-esteem and self-image.

The findings of this study cannot be subject to generalization as they have limitations such as the small number of the Roma students involved in the research, the limited time of the learning activities as further teaching and learning time could provide the study with richer data. Therefore, the study contributes to possibly utilize Future Literacy approach in future studies to empower Roma population and more specifically Roma students for building change conditions in their future lives.

Education is a crucial area for immediate action, given the need to ensure that Roma can compete in the terms of qualifications and skills with the majority population, and given the importance of empowering the Roma population to play an active role in determining their own future (Council of Europe, 2006). Although small in scope, this study demonstrates that working with Roma children on cross-curricular activities that support literacy development, critical thinking, and creativity may offer one way of practicing inclusion and that teachers, schools, and education systems are spaces where Roma children can be supported to become active agents within their communities.

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