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Research Paper

Greek and Finish teachers discuss integrated curricula in compulsory education

Florentia Antoniou
[1] *Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece*
[2] *Department of Philosophy and Pedagogy*

ABSTRACT:*This study examines the views of Greek and Finish teachers on integration of knowledge in teaching practice. Fourteen interviews with teachers in compulsory education were used as research material. I analyzed the transcribed interviews qualitatively with the method of "Content Analysis" and the research findings were interpreted in the light of the "historical-interpretive" approach. The analysis of the research material showed that both Greek and Finnish teachers practice integration, but to a different degree and in a dissimilar way, due to the diverse types of curricula and institutional framework in Greek and Finish school. Greek researchers could use the findings of this study for farther research to understand what makes the implementation of integration in finish teaching practice easier going and more effective.*
KEYWORDS: *Curriculum, compulsory education, Finland, integrated practices, Greece*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The definition of "integrated curriculum" has been the subject of debate since the beginning of the 20th century. Many theorists, in the field of Pedagogy, who dealt with the integrated curricula tried to delimit them, and that is why we find a multitude of definitions in literature. These definitions can be distinguished into two main categories based on the scholars' belief of the degree and form of integration:

a) Definitions that present integration primarily as a connection of different taught subjects to study a topic or theme.
b) Definitions, which describe the term "integrated curriculum" as a general term for those forms of the curriculum in which the learning activities of students are not organized based on the specific knowledge from the various taught subjects, but they give emphasis in helping students to recognize or create their own learning [1].

A closer look, however, shows that all definitions of integrated curriculum include:

- a connection of taught subjects
- emphasis on projects
- sources beyond textbooks
- correlation between concepts and ideas
- flexible schedules
- cooperative teaching.

So, for most authors, it is common ground that the term "integrated curriculum" is a general term for those types of curricula, in which the learning activities are organized with the criterion of easing self-activity and self-education of students, rather than setting strict limits on the types of knowledge. For that reason, we can arrive at two main types of integrated curricula based on the degree of integration that they promote: *Interdisciplinary Curricula* and *Them-based/Cross-thematic Curricula*. The most important, though, is that regardless of the type in an integrated curriculum both the teaching process and the role of teachers and students are significantly differentiated. Particularly:

a) Regarding the teaching process, the integrated curricula use the issues-problems and highlight fundamental scientific concepts with the aim of deep and multi-faceted knowledge. In addition, they strengthen inquiry-based approaches to teaching, utilize modern technologies and adopt student-centered activities, which help them discover knowledge and acquire skills, attitudes, and behaviors

*Corresponding Author: Florentia Antoniou
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

through personalized and participatory interaction. An integrated curriculum is developed with the Solving Problem method [2] and with the Project method [3].

b) Regarding the role of the teacher, he/she can function autonomously, to plan and evaluate the educational work and at the same time can research, test and be assessed on new concepts, pedagogical practices, and methods. Next, there is the possibility to supervise each group of students separately, trying to settle differences, help with some ineffective effort and at the same time to note any developments. This implies that the teacher cooperates with students and helps them in undertaking research tasks. In addition, he/she collaborates and plans lessons together with other teachers taking part in this way in activities related not only to his/her scientific training, but also to his/her personal interests [4].

c) Regarding the students, their role is upgraded, as they have greater options, engage in several ways of learning, and evaluate the learning process. Students participate in authentic situations, such as creating a newspaper or playing roles in a theater performance, experiment and propose solutions. In this way, they develop through each taught subject life skills, such as flexibility, self-presentation, the spirit of cooperation, planning and responsibility that are needed when someone undertakes specific tasks, as well as communication skills [5] and [6].

The last decade, integration of knowledge and integrative practices have been linked to the cultivation and development of the necessary knowledge, attitudes, abilities and skills in young men and women so that they can respond to the needs and challenges of 21st century society[7]. For this reason, several European countries have incorporated integrated approaches in various forms into their curricula. The most recent one case is that of Finland, which in 2014 gone ahead with the reform of curricula by which multi-disciplinary (transversal) competencies and themes were integrated into them [8].

In Greek educational reality, integration was first developed during the 1920s with the "Uniform Central Teaching" (ESD), which was introduced and implemented by the "Democratic Educators, but also by Exarchopoulos [9]. Decades later - in 2001 - the introduction of integration into compulsory education was tried for the first time with the Integrated Curricula (DEPPS) [10]. Since then, integration of knowledge has not been a basic pursuit of political leadership, and no attempt was made to integrate it into the new curricula designed in the last decade. However, there is a tendency to integrate knowledge, primarily in school activities or experiential actions that are institutionalized from time to time in Greek educational system.

This article is part of my post-doctoral research that examines the design and implementation of integrated curricula in compulsory education by examining Greek and Finish curricula in use and teachers' views through interviews. Here, I present, only, the views of Greek and Finish teachers in compulsory education about the integrated curricula and integration of Knowledge in their teaching.

II. INTEGRATED CURRICULA IN GREECE AND FINLAND

A. INTEGRATED CURRICULA IN GREECE

In Greece, integration was first introduced in education during the 1920s with the "Uniform Central Teaching" (ESD). The essential characteristics of E.S.D. are two: «Unity" and "Central". The term "unity" denotes the correlation of teaching subjects, which are not offered as separate courses, but as a single whole. The term "central" refers to the structure of the material, as the taught subjects are organized around a center (a theme) in overlapping circles. In the center are people, things, ideas, phenomena, and problems of a child's reality, which attract its interest Examination of themes started from the immediate and close environment of the child and then it could be gradually extended to wider social environments and information could be drawn from all subjects. The E.S.D. was applied in Kindergarten and Primary School until the 1960s, because it was considered more suitable for the students of infancy and childhood [11].

Some decades later, in 2001 the government designed new curricula for compulsory education. New curricula consisted of an Integrated Curriculum (DEPPS) and a Subject-based Curriculum (APS) for each taught subject [12]. The Subject-based Curricula (A.P.S) were purely purposeful, in contrast to D.E.P.P.S. in which alternative interdisciplinary orientations appeared [13].

In D.E.P.P.S. integration was mainly conducted by:

a) The interdisciplinary correlations between the taught subjects. The interdisciplinary correlations are made through eight cross-disciplinary concepts [14] and are a consequence of the scientific assumptions found in each taught subject [15].

b) The thematic approach emphasizes the selection and study of themes that may derive either from the taught subjects or from the fundamental interdisciplinary concepts [16]. To study the themes the teacher can alternatively either calculate the number of hours corresponding to 10% of the total teaching time per subject or connect the subjects with the teaching time of the "Flexible Zone", which is the framework for the implementation of projects based on students' interests [17].

In 2010 new curricula were designed. These were purely target-oriented curricula, and they did not promote integration of knowledge. However, in new curricula the taught subjects were structured in such a way as to ease communication between them, so that the students could perceive and approach knowledge as a "whole." New curricula were supplied for the development of activities and the preparation of tasks by the school communities. These curricula would be connected to current themes of the wider social, cultural, environmental, or other versions of everyday life. In fact, during the development of the activities and the preparation of tasks by the students, the knowledge, which was connected to the different taught subjects, was synthesized to approach the themes that were examined each time. The school communities would publicize these works to the wider community and through them they would be evaluated [18]. However, the application of these curricula was never generalized to compulsory education because political upheavals and successive government changes followed. For that reason, Curricula of 2001 (DEPPS and APS) remained in use.

Later, in 2016, the new Greek government introduced "Thematic Week" in lower secondary school. During this week, each school could change their timetable lessons and choose from a series of specific themes, the one that most interests the students or the one that the teachers would judge to be most useful for them. Themes for investigation in "Thematic Week" aimed to "inform" and "raise awareness" of the members of the school community on issues related to Education for Sustainable Development and was focused on five key axes: *a) nutrition and quality of life, b) prevention of addiction and dependencies, c) gender identities, d) Traffic education and e) Democratic Coexistence and Human Rights* [19]. "Thematic Week" could be implemented in schools throughout the country during the second quarter of each school year. Teachers had the possibility to choose which of the themes of each axis to focus on, as well as the time would be devoted to each theme. Regarding integration, the choice of activities and actions was not necessarily linked to specific units from the taught subjects in each class. On the contrary, the approach to the topics was open and holistic, it took the form of a project, and teachers could choose from a multitude of pedagogical practices and techniques to investigate the chosen topic/theme [20].

Unfortunately, the new Greek government in 2019 abolished "Thematic Week" without obvious and convincing argumentation and in opposition with the latest positive evaluation report of the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) [21]. Moreover, the new government in 2020 began the pilot application of "Skill Workshops" which are organized in four thematic cycles (Life, Environment, Social Empathy and Responsibility, Creative Thinking, and Initiative) and includes various sub-themes (by age), such as e.g., volunteerism, ecological awareness, sexual education, entrepreneurship, prevention and protection from natural disasters, mutual respect and diversity, robotics, new technologies, etc. In these "Skill Workshops", innovative teaching methods and practices should be used in all types of Kindergartens, Elementary and lower secondary Schools in the country. Moreover, the educational material is adapted to each age according to pedagogical parameters. The implementation of these Workshops is obligatory, but it is not clearly or linked to integration and integrated practices [22].

Recently, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the IEP (Educational Policy Institute) started the preparation of 123 curricula. In this context, among other things, it is said that the basic principle of the new curricula will be coherence, ensuring coherent links within and between the taught subjects as well as between cognitive fields, creating functional transitions from grade to grade and between classes. The principles of integrated knowledge and interdisciplinary approach contribute to this pursuit [23].

Given that both the implementation of "Skill Workshops" is at an initial stage, and that the new curricula have not yet been implemented in teaching practice, the intention of the authorities regarding the form and way it will be integrated (or not) the knowledge, will be clear when the new curricula are implemented.

B. INTEGRATED CURRICULA IN FINLAND

In Finland in the 1990s, the autonomy of each school unit in making decisions about the formation of the curriculum was strengthened. In the context of this autonomy, interdisciplinary curricula were designed and implemented. These curricula focused on the examination of a topic-problem either through the different taught subjects or through broader thematic areas and scientific disciplines [24].

In 2004 and 2011 the national curricula of primary education were reformed, and integration was introduced as an examination of themes in the light of different taught subjects. The themes for research and examination that were proposed in the curriculum, were: *individual development, cultural and international identity, multimedia skills and communication, participation and entrepreneurship, ecology and ecological consciousness for a better future, traffic education, and technology* [25]. Similar themes for interdisciplinary approach were also proposed for lower and upper secondary education. [26].

More recently, in 2014, the Finnish Ministry of Education in cooperation with other relevant education agencies reformed the 2011 program and in the school year 2015-2016 it was piloted in primary and secondary education. The new national curriculum does not emphasize separate subjects in the first grades of primary education and at the same time introduces the mandatory study of themes or phenomena in the other grades of

compulsory education [27]. One of the main goals of this reform was to enable students to see the relationships and interdependencies between the taught subjects and the phenomena of life outside school, to connect knowledge and skills from different subjects, structure learning into meaningful entities, discover new questions as well as create new knowledge collaboratively [28] and [29].

In addition, one of the main goals of this reform is to enable students to see the relationships and interdependencies between the taught subjects and the phenomena of life outside the school, to connect the knowledge and skills from different disciplines, structure learning into meaningful entities, explore new questions, and create new knowledge collaboratively. The most important tools for this purpose are multi-disciplinary (transversal) competences and multi-disciplinary subjects [30].

The national curriculum describes seven (7) transversal competences:

- Thinking skills and competitive ability
- Cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression
- Managing daily life, taking care of yourself and others
- Multiliteracy
- Ability to use Information and Communication Technologies
- Professional skills and business acumen
- Participation, influence and building a sustainable future

The above abilities are often linked to each other. Their main mission is to support students' development as human beings, but also to provide them with the skills needed for: a) their integration into a democratic society and, b) the development of a sustainable lifestyle [31].

Regarding cultivation of transversal competences, it depends not only on the content in which the students work, but also on the way in which they work, the means they use, but also the context in which it takes place the interaction between students and learning environment. For this reason, curricula (national and local) emphasize both collaborative classroom practices and the study of multi-disciplinary issues (phenomena). Multidisciplinary issues are new and effective tools for the promotion and development of transversal competences and are introduced as study periods in the context of an integrated teaching based on the connection between subjects and the "holistic" approach to knowledge. Their aim is to promote students' ability to understand the relationships and interconnections between various phenomena. At the same time, they help students connect the knowledge and skills of different subjects and organize their knowledge into larger entities [32].

Finally, in the study of the selected phenomena the taught subjects can be used as a source, to derive their specific views, definitions, concepts and methods for the design and implementation of theme projects. Each multi-disciplinary subject includes skills and knowledge related to several other subjects, for example history, arts, mathematics, physics, and Finnish language, but in terms of subjects the boundaries will disappear [33].

II. THE STUDY

In this article, I present the views of Greek and Finish teachers in compulsory education. I interviewed fourteen (14) teachers, seven Greeks and seven Finishes that they were teaching in different public schools and in different areas. I analyzed the interviews using the following qualitative methods:

a) first, I analyzed the research material with *qualitative content analysis* and specifically using the techniques of "building" and "model construction" [34].

b) I approached the data obtained with the "**historical-interpretive method**" [35] and [36]. After repeated readings of the texts of the analyses, I tried to understand them within their context, i.e., in the surrounding scientific-pedagogical, educational-didactic, political, atmosphere.

At first, I transcribed the material of the interviews with Greek and Finish teachers, and then I recorded and analyzed the "references" (teachers' speech) related to: a) the application of integrated curricula and integrated practices in teaching, b) the consequences of integration in teaching and in school climate, c) students' and parents' acceptance of integrated practices and d) the perspective of integration in education and teachers' proposals.

IV. RESEARCH ANALYSES

A. Greek teachers' views about integrated curricula

1. The application of integrated curricula and integrated practices in teaching

All Greek teachers who participated in the research have applied integrative practices both into their teaching and in the framework of the educational programs, such as European Programs or "thematic week": a) *"-Participating in the **Teachers for Europe program** that was about the European Union, in order not to... nor lose time from the other courses I teach… b) "-**Thematic week**. Recently, that is, where various subjects, various knowledge objects or problems of everyday life were dealt with through such a perspective and required the cooperation of professors of different disciplines. **So… I had a related experience… from thematic week**".*

The chosen **themes** derive either from a taught subject or from the general thematic of the educational program. Usually, teacher proposes the theme to the students which they do not usually participate in its selection: a*)"-We did about water **in Physics**. one team had "Water and religion", the other had "Water and man", our body contains water. Another had "Water and environment". That is, we had divided into individual units, and they were with groups…", b) "-More in the context of **environmental programs, health education, cultural programs.**"*

Themes are often examined from different taught subjects: "*-I tried to do all **this cross-curricular**. That is, to **use the language** as a production of written speech, vocabulary, uh... **to combine geography, social, political education, and history**. To teach this unit once…",* or in the framework of an Educational Program: *"-another year we had started researching a topic, I think it was of **an environmental theme**, to make a collage in the classroom, which eventually ended up in a wider investigation, in a project, which also brought elements from others, brought elements, **let's say about the environment, about the ecology, about the history and geography of the area**".*

The most common **teaching practices** used in integrated project or activities is teamwork, experiential learning and educational visits: a) - *Uh… **some groups** for example uh... they were saying the... **they did a theatrical reading of a book,** and **another group of children was shooting the video.**.. (short pause) So the children had a role. Okay, of course we were shooting, but **it was the children who were the camera operator**, the **sound engineer**.*", b) "*-Yes, we had been to environmental education centers. We had visited the center in ZIRO, they had also taken us to the… power plant, which works with water from the Louro River…".*

As far as it concerns **teachers' cooperation,** secondary teachers cooperate less often with other colleagues in comparison to primary teachers who collaborate more often. When collaboration is achieved in secondary education at least two teachers of different disciplines participate in the project: a) *"A **geologist professor** and **I collaborated on a project**; Er... it was about earthquakes. I, as a **philologist**, studied with the children what is said in Plato's Politeia, in the text "Kritias" about earthquakes with Atlantis and all that...", b) "- I have collaborated in a program with **music and arts colleagues**".* However, cooperation is not something quite common: *"-In other words, **there is no culture of cooperation in general in the Greek school** and **this does not help neither the interdisciplinary approaches**, thus the more comprehensive ones, nor even the interdisciplinary ones".*

Regarding **students' evaluation** during integrated activities, both subject and class teachers explicitly state that during integrated practices examine various aspects of students' performance like abilities and skills in construction, acting, coaching, leadership that cannot be evaluated in traditional teaching. *"-when you do these kinds of activities, **you necessarily evaluate other things**, that is, which you do not see in, let's say, traditional forms of teaching. That is, you see a little **how the children work in the groups, how willing they are to cooperate, what each one offers, how much they take initiatives, how much they offer to their team**".* The techniques or methods which are used to assess students in integrated activities are mostly teacher's observation: "*- When you did these kinds of activities, did you do some kind of alternative assessment? File, self-assessment, peer assessment, observation? - Err… plus… **mostly observation**".* Unfortunately, assessment of those activities is not official. In fact, the official assessment is exclusively quantitative: "*-Eh... I cannot... what do they say, be too arbitrary **when at the end of the year there will be a specific way of evaluation and I am accountable to my students and their parents for what I did throughout the year and for what kind of evaluation is there at the end**.".*

2. The consequences of integration in teaching and in school climate

Some teachers point out that the implementation of integrated practices has positive consequences both in teaching and in the role of student, as well as in learning results. More specifically, the following are mentioned as positive:

a) As the application of such practices implies research activity, use of ICT, cooperative teaching, and work plans, students show more interest, participate more actively, take initiatives, and show more positive results in their performance: *"- And they **went out in groups**, because **they had to take pictures, they had to do interviews** and ... each one could work alone, because they had to write their opinion on something. And the opinion was not something that involved four or five people together. Eh... and we evaluated all of this in class. That is, **we read each other's texts and made observations.** And the main thing was, I remember, an interview we had here with the mayor of our area, where we took out the questions, first took out the topics on the board, then we associated them with questions and the questions were drawn".*

b) At the same time, students show more interest in integrated themes and activities cause it is something new, out of the ordinary that gives them more freedom to be creative, to work together and to learn autonomous: a)"- *Students **seem to prefer working on integrated themes because they like to do something then the ordinary,** they have the chance to discuss, cooperate and act more*

freely and autonomous: b)"-Er... on the other hand, the fact that it is something different from what children face in their daily life, seven hours a day. The fact that they are not fixed at a desk watching the one who is speaking but ***they can discuss with their classmates****, more,* ***do something different, draw, sing, dance, ... do, dramatize something****".*

c) Subsequently, the role of the students in the classroom changes. The increase in students' interest and active participation are cited as the most important results. *"- and t****he students' interest attracts and activates students who in teacher-centered teaching usually do not respond and... it favors the interpersonal relationships****…in all these levels works positively".*

In addition to the positive consequences of integrated practices in teaching, teachers also point out the positive consequences they have on the **school climate**. Particularly, teachers underline that working in groups in an integrated theme students can get to know each other better, to communicate, to collaborate, to make friendships: *"-****The children acquire friendships****, they are friendships and first of all they become a team,* ***they work as a team****, they acquire the psychology of the team and let me tell you... one reason is, if I can, why I try and manage to instill in them this idea that we are all together, I start from a different point but we are all together and we all fight together each from a different point to get somewhere but.. And do you know what happens?* ***They recognize the value of everyone****."*

Children who are lonely and introverted benefit because they have the opportunity to come into contact, work in groups and communicate: *"- To develop interest. They found each other... mutual respect developed,* ***there were in the group children who might have been isolated****".*

Analogous, teachers' relationship with their students changes as well, because they become part of the team and at the same time, they come closer to their students and have a fun time through the work: *"- And of course, with me yes because. What can I tell you now?* ***I am also a part of the team****, I'm becoming a part of the team, that's* ***how I feel, and I think that's how she feels about me too****...hum...too.* ***I am a part of the group*** *that searches, that investigates, that tries to improve. That discovers how beautiful it is to say it like that, how beautiful it is to write it like* ***that, that we can derive satisfaction from it, that we can have fun with all these things inside the classroom and outside the classroom****…"*

3. Students' and parents' acceptance of integrated practices

Most of the teachers consider the attitude of students towards applied integration to be positive. Characteristically, they state that students show interest and willingness to participate in integrated projects, even those that are more introvert or timid: *"-****As many times as I used such methods I had positive feedback,*** *er… I never had a problem with a student reacting negatively to all this.* ***Eh…clearly some children are by nature more timid, more collected,*** *they may not have been as active in this situation as they would have been in another,* ***but many times these children functioned better in these situations****. Then they would work in the basic teacher-centered lesson that we usually have".*

Regarding **parents 'attitude,** on the one hand, there are parents who at the beginning might have their objections cause is something new for them, but later they embrace the new approach because they like the way children learn to work.: *"-That is,* ***at the beginning they say "what do you want now that, what do you want the other, you won't teach" because they don't know****. Even though I may explain it at the beginning, in every meeting, at the first, when they see it in practice, they don't always accept it easily, they don't always accept change easily".* but then the positive response of parents derives mainly from the joy and excitement they receive from their children when they are involved in unifying activities: *"- Parents are always excited to* ***see their children engaged, tackling a topic, working in groups, interacting with other kids, socializing,*** *looking to find a topic, looking at how to present it, how to do it better.".*

On the other hand, some parents are opposed to integrated practices. Their refusal stems from their insistence on traditional forms of teaching and assessment: "- *Despite... even though they make the difficult ones. Yes, ok, because ok and* ***the parents are not familiar****.* ***They have a classic traditional model of what a school is****.".* This category of parents is usually only interested in the child's behavior in the classroom and at school in general and in his/her performance in taught subjects and considers any tasks that deviate from the content of the subject as an extra burden: *"-Uh... First, okay, there are quite a few parents, especially* ***if the kids have never done it before... they have never been in that kind of teaching before, they're negative. They find it difficult because they are demanding...*** *they find it difficult how they themselves will help the child if asked, say, to bring something to school or to prepare,* ***because it is beyond, let us say, classical teaching****. It is not just an exercise to do, it needs something else.".*

4. The perspective of integrated curricula in education and teachers' proposals

Teachers' views on the perspective of integrated approaches can be divided into two categories: pessimistic ones that see the gradual but definitive abandonment of these practices mostly because there no more seminars or training for teachers on integration and integrated activities: *"- I think* ***it has faded****. And* ***the***

***reason is because there is no reminder, within quotation marks, to the teachers**. It could be done with a tutorial. That is how we can approach this issue. To be able to do this. And because much is left, I tell you, to the teacher, he does not waste his time doing such things."*

Others put forward political reason as the main cause of a non-stable framework for integrated practices and for their elimination: *"- **There is no educational policy planning body in Greece.** The **Institute for Education Policy** has profound weaknesses. That is, it **is staffed almost every year with different teachers** and most important, **each minister has no guiding principles, so he/she moves in the perspective of his/her re-election** or maintaining his/her position etc., etc."*

Optimists who consider that integration came to stay in Greek educational system despite any difficulties and adversities their application in educational practice shows. These teachers, in fact, wish to keep them for pedagogical reasons. Particularly, both in elementary and lower secondary school, the amount of the material, the rigid timetable, but also the high preparation requirements the integrated activities require from teachers, invalidate their application in practice: *"- Because I see that in the end the **children are bombarded with a lot of information and they don't learn,** that is, there should be a management of what the children will learn every year, what we call the material and the goals. **Eh... and for the teacher to have more time at his disposal**. Therefore, **the detailed program and the program schedule need to be readjusted**. Eh... and through these, I think the... That is, the objects will then be able to be combined".*

Optimist teachers also believe that integration will be present to education because pioneering teaching practices are important because they are more experimental, collaborative, and experiential: *"- **Integration can be, as I said before, a catalyst for change**. To break down the barriers of the sciences and lead to more experiential, collaborative and investigative learning".*

Regarding **teachers' proposals,** the participants consider above all, as more important the existence of a space where teachers could meet, to plan and carry out programs and activities as a group: *- Yes, the most... one... the most important thing that **I think should exist is a framework that favors cooperation**. That is, the time specified for collaboration, for groups of teachers, of the specialty or different specialties, who should exchange opinions. This I think is especially important... A framework that favors cooperation".*

As equally important they note a well-planned and long-term educational policy with the participation of educational experts and not only politicians: ***"- of course, I already mentioned the planning of educational policy, the long-term**. With goals that can be set in terms of what we want them to learn or what skills anyone who completes compulsory education should have. And next to this planning, **I would like its support from people who are not party officials, but experts, they are experts in education**, let's say, politics, in education policy planning…".*

Furthermore, they suggest less measurable evaluation for students, which contrasts with integrated and experiential learning: *"-that **we need to get away from measurable forms of evaluation**, the so-called objective ones - personally I wouldn't have a problem with them, would I? - but objective forms of assessment have led to the most subjective results and teachers with an infinite number of measurable qualifications are unable to get into the classroom and teach."*

Finally, teachers seek the support of the school counselor for the implementation of integrative practices. They claim that an individualized support approach is necessary, so that the teacher knows how to plan and organize his/her integrated project or activities during the school year: ***"-School counselors, let's say, can do such work. To ...come next. There should also be a support uh... from... from the educational leadership** that all this should be done in a timely manner. In other words, we cannot do this between September 1 and 10. These should be done with... at the end of the school year, planning the next one".*

B. Finish teachers' views about integrated curricula

1. The application of integrated curricula and integrated practices in teaching

All the participated teachers declare that they organize integrated periods in teaching during the school year at least for a week: a) *"- And these integrated periods what is the duration of these integrated periods? - **It is a week**…- Eh… it's a…4 or 5 days". b) "-Ok, so for you... at your school, I mean, it's a... a project week, theme weeks or theme… days? - It's more like, **it's more like days**, cause it's kind of like we have 2 days, 2 different days to kind of design and... and... and… like... form a team and come up with the subject and then we have the days, usually 3 or 4 days to do that…"*

During this week and in collaboration with other colleagues they designed a theme-based integrated period during which the time schedule changes for the application of the theme project: "*Then... **a planning group within the school**, breaks **up the schedule and** puts eh... **several teachers into one block and then you can decide within that group who takes care of what**. And quite often we do this when the two oldest years go out for a week on work training, to see what happens in workplaces. So, then we will have more free teachers. So... so we can do this ... work in teams. - **So, you do collaborate with other colleagues to implement the integrated periods? - Yes. Absolutely**"*

Teachers usually select the themes, but they also ask students to participate in decision or to decide between the proposed themes: "*In, in ... yes... of course, of course. Usually like the porter themes that we have are …eh… have not seen an issue for the... for the students,* ***so they are usually under a theme, they usually produce their own like inspirational ideas.*** *So, yes. And we ... yes, yeah, we usually ask."*

The themes can vary. For example, some teachers mentioned they give emphasis into environmental issues and others into various themes depending on teachers' and students' interests or some special occasions: a) *"So, eh... we have been having noted* ***more environmental like, you know, umbrella themes****,* ***like it could be like climate change*** *and ... and subjects like that." b) -We had this really* ***nice long one week project,*** *where it was, we had, it was from 1st to 9th grade, and we took like 2 students 2 pupils from each class, and we got these really mixed groups.* ***And all these groups had to create their own country, their own world. They had to figure out what kind of belief system if there… if there was,*** *of course there was government who rules…It was interesting".*

The themes are divided into sub-themes for different groups of students, and they are examined mostly through the different taught subjects: "*-We usually tend to pick like an umbrella theme* ***that could involve all the subject matters that we teach in school****, so we can have all the teachers involved in the process. So,* ***we usually have an umbrella term and then for the kids, because the students pick their own like specific project what to do, we tend to have like … eh... more specific themes*** *that they can like focus on as well. Like climate change and then under that we could have all sorts of like molar subjects"*

During theme weeks students can work either into their classrooms and inside the school or they can go and work outside the school like in a park or a library depending on the theme: a) "*Yes, so, we have eh… different classes of course, if I would be like eh… with my students who would be... that the groups I would like to help with, would be my biology class. To stay would probably… or geography class.* ***They would have something that they need from that class****. But then we have groups that when they need to do something outside,* ***we have this great park area close to school, so some kids might be there, some groups might be in the local area, like... it depends. It really depends on the team and the process that they are doing****. But we could use all the areas of the school and round of school as well.", b) "-There is* ***a library right next to the school****, municipality place library and we do some collaboration there…".*

Moreover, according to teachers their schools have the necessary places and areas where students can work as groups and investigate or create material for the theme project, such as library, laboratory, big backyard etc.: a) "*-except for our normal classrooms* ***we have facilities outside where can work in groups we have sofas we have around tables and we can use also the dining area****, we have downstairs a dining area for almost 200 people with tables and chairs and ..* ***And we also have outside they can use like in spring now when it's been when we have warm night spring so they like always to say, "Can we go outside to work?****" and then they can sit in groups, and it feels … they feel more free when were…", b) Yes,* ***we have library, a school library that is connected to the main library****, so when they want to borrow book or something it's .. they have a library card and then they ask, they borrow there and that works also very well".*

In these integrated periods the most common **teaching practices** used are group learning and research such as interviews, constructions, use of ICT: *"****They do experiments****…Yes, yeah... all those things.* ***ICT of course*** *comes into it strongly and they...* ***they do work in groups****, and they* ***can be asked to go often to interview*** *eh... somebody from a certain area. Eh... and then* ***they film, they do videos*** *and they... eh… yes, basically those things…"*

All teachers mentioned that they do use ICT during the projects and most of them said that their school provided them with the necessary technological equipment to implement the research project: *"-****We have a few dozen laptops or crown books at school,*** *but if they are all engaged, eh... internet, well they… you know the data, they are not data, it's max out, becomes difficult, so if we do this big project well, we must take terms about using laptops or we only gave one laptop for a group of 4 pupils, for example…*"

Furthermore, students very often can use their own smart phones to search for information: *"-* ***But they are fairly good with the phones, they have smart phones, and they can use them,*** *of course difficult to write a big project, but at least they search information using those. So, we always, always let them use their own devices".*

Regarding **students' assessment** in integrated projects all teachers underline that the goal is not students' evaluation or assessment but when there is, self-assessment methods and techniques such as oral presentation or self-questionnaires are mostly used: a) "*-Of course those activities they deal with,* ***might have the goal of an assessment*** *in one of the activities. But in general, there is no assessment of the pupils for these activities. Unless one of the activities is a part of the phenomenon. I think that is possible to be integrated into the subject curriculum. b) "-That depends.* ***Sometimes we do it orally but most often we do it in writing sometimes there is a ready questionnaire,*** *like forms online that they can fill in. sometimes we just give them a couple of questions and ask them to write down their own thoughts."*

2. The consequences of integration in teaching and in school climate

Finish teachers mention that participating in integrated periods helped them to improve their skills such as cooperation and responsibility: "*Well I would say that my experience is … after these periods, they've sort of grown a sense of 'Yes, **I carry my vet' and taking responsibility for producing something** and... seeing that it's not just boring that's lesson and then perhaps boring English. But I have a general feeling that it has helped. And sometimes I remember quite recently somebody telling me…I do really remember those words that we learned from this project', that was not only a textbook thing. So... **co-operation, absolutely, and… and sort of sense of responsibility**"*

Some teachers underline that during these integrated periods in which they collaborate with other colleagues, they learn more about their students because they see how pupils behave and react with other teachers and in other subjects or topics*: "…but **when you do multidisciplinary work you have at least 2 teachers working together with the pupils, you can see how they behave with someone else, how they behave in regards to another subject, a different topic and sometimes** even if it is something physical that we do, because it could be planting trees (laughing) sometimes then again **you see them in a whole new light and it's wonderful to see the different aspects a child has or a teenager**. So, that is pretty much the best part.".*

Concerning students, teachers mention that integrated periods can have a significant effect on them especially through teamwork and cooperation but also because students are forced to design, implement, and present their own work: "***Teamwork** and like eh… like eh... like **managing your own project**. -Of course. - You can say that. It sounds like... (laughing)… It sounds worse but it is a good learning process for them like **they must design, implement, and present their work**. So... who would not learn from that. I think that is the most important thing that they can get out of it".*

Some teachers believe that the skills students acquire during these projects such as cooperation, team working, designing can help them to outside life as well cause it gives them confidence and the feeling of independence*: "And then I hope and I see that **it gives students the confidence of like...doing independent like choices** and. Ok, this is where is looking into, this is where studying… it gets that experience out of it... as well".*

Others emphasize the fact that students learn or create something by themselves: *"-Seeing... seeing the pupils interested... **seeing them be able to do something, create something more, acquiring knowledge on their own**, they have seen how they find ways to work together. Ways to find information and of course it is a great class if they also have fun".*

Concerning **the school climate** participated teachers give emphasis on cooperation both with their colleagues and their students: *"-Hm... I can feel that yes, **it lifts us up in a way** and... You know... **we are doing something together**. So yes, positive influence in … the beats that are when we find that time to work in those integrated themes. -Hm... with your colleagues only or with your students as well? - **With the students and colleagues**."*

Therefore, they believe integration projects have a positive effect on students, not only because it's something different comparing to a typical subject-lesson but because it is more free and mostly because it combines different kinds of students: *"-Overall, I'd say **it has a positive effect**, **because it's something little different, something a bit more... a bit more free... to do**, but it's not good for everyone, **because of course you have many different pupils, some can't work on their own, some really need a teacher to tell them exactly what to do. So, all those pupils really kind of gain from it**."*

3. Students' and parents' acceptance of integrated practices

Most of the Finnish teachers refer a positive reaction of their students when participating in integrated periods. They underline the inspiration the students have because they asked to do something out of the usual and find out various aspects of a problem or theme. Especially for the weak students, teachers strongly believe that they have the chance to show their value and will: *"- I would say they**... they feel more inspired. They know that is something a bit out of the ordinary and... to see a different site of subject**…".*

Therefore, teachers describe their students as happy and excited to participate and proud to do their own thing: *"-We have variation of reactions of course. (laughing) They are teenagers, **but I have to say that like 50% of kids are super excited and incredibly happy about doing their own thing and maybe for once in school**. They can kind of show something… you know… individual*".

Regarding parents, some teachers who teach mainly in 7th to 9th grades mention that parents are not interested in these periods, and they do not participate in general: a) "- *how it's for you guys, but for us, when we're teaching in 7th to 9th graders**, the kids, the parents are pretty… absent**. They are there if there is a problem, but otherwise…b) -Ok. -you do not hear or see. Of course, they are like individual that eh… if they have an issue with those types of… ways of working, we might have but usually…**-Ok, they are not interested at all**."*

Some others, though, say that parents' reaction to integrated periods are positive and some of them can participate into theme projects: a) *"I feel that parents… then of course often these thematic halls they result in*

something that can be exhibited, you know, on the walls or so. ***And we show it when we have parents' meetings. And the responses are positive. They feel it is something eh... interesting and helps the kids to develop****". b) -Do parents can participate in eh… in some integrated periods? In some way, I do not know. - Hm... I would say yes... during... eh...* ***you could ask the students to interview somebody about their job and so on... In that sense yes. They can come to school and talk about their area of work and so on****".*

4. The perspective of integrated curricula in education and teachers' proposals

For Finish teachers integrated practices and curricula are something important in school and they think are positive for them and for students regardless the luck of time and the challenges these practices require: *"- Yeah… eh…* ***My feeling is absolutely that it is important, and it is uplifting****. It also takes quite a lot of work, and time must be found from somewhere****. But eh… the more you do it the easier it gets to…So absolutely on the plus side…Yeah, generally positive".*

They also mention that integration in teaching is important because the hall world and life is integrated, and so young people must acquire more skills and information linked to real life but necessary for the future as well: a) *"- Well. First, I think it should be of course the part of the basic education, because* ***world is integrated, you know****…", b) "-Well as to prospects I'd say that we ... we should keep doing this and do them all because they are… kind of... more... I do not know the representative of real life or ... might be because* ***real life, almost any kind of work that will do in the future will not be specifically on one subject.*** *On one kind of skill, so being able to combine your skills, your teamwork skills, subject skills, finding and combining, representing information,* ***all that is much more linked to... real life and the jobs we go to the future.****".*

In addition, some they believe that participating in integrated practices, gives them new perspective and approach to their own subject or science and helps them to understand the world as something "multi" and so far makes them more open minded: *"- So, I'd say that, these ... these are good and it would be good for teachers as well. (laughing). It will help...* ***it will give us new approaches to our own subjects*** *and also have us kind of combine of work and collaborate more,* ***because considering the world, which in depth...is multi on everything,*** *we have languages, cultures, back rounds, all that,* ***and it is a global world, so being able to ... let's say have ... have an open mind and abroad view on things****, would also help us, you know, our work helping the children, helping the teenagers to go for and just do our own work better or in depth knowledge".*

Regarding ***teachers' proposals*** for integration in teaching some asked for more guidance in designing integrated periods: *"-Eh... perhaps… eh…* ***it would be nice to have … In some ways more guided periods*** *and putting at more frequent into walls that you would say that … Now during this period, let us say, we have these three periods… these two subjects are given these lessons times, so we wouldn't have to start from breaking up everything that we do, you know, normally…"*

Finally, some others ask for more integrated periods in school so they can find the time to create the right environment for students to work in teams, to collaborate and to learn but to cooperate with their colleagues as well: *"- Eh… and* ***it should be more****. Like what creates obstacles for me as a teacher is eh… we have 5 periods in our school, so… it's like 7 weeks and then 7 weeks, and 7 weeks and 7 weeks, so it's quite quick.* ***And it's hard to eh… find time to build eh… eh… like collaboration with other subject teachers****."*

V. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research material's analysis revealed interesting findings about integration in teaching practice for Greek and Finish teachers in compulsory education.

At first, both Greek and Finish teachers mention that they apply integrated practices but there is an enormous difference between these applications. In Finnish school there is an institutionalized, delimited, and stable framework for the implementation of integrated practices since 2014, "the integrated periods" [37]. In Greek school, on the contrary and due to the unstable educational policy, there is no institutionalized and delimited framework for the implementation of integrated practices the last decade. Therefore, even previously institutionalized forms of implementation, such as the "Flexible Zone" and "Thematic Week", which were created for the implementation of thematic or cross-thematic projects, have either weakened or been abolished mostly for political reasons.

Secondly, for Finish teachers it is obligatory to design and implement such integrated practices, while Greek teachers are not obliged to implement integration during the school year. This obligation for Finish teachers was incorporated into the new curriculum of 2014 and is primarily intended to create a framework in which students will study holistically social and natural phenomena. The main goal for Finnish students is to acquire the desired "transversal competencies" which are the basic principle and goal of the new [38].

Thirdly, Finish teachers to design and implement an integrated period they do work in groups and cooperate with each other, unlike Greek teachers who don not cooperate so often with their colleagues. This difference in collaboration can be explained, if we think how much difference there is between Finish and Greek teachers' mentality in co-working and in group working. In Greece less importance is given on teamwork in

teachers' education and training in contrast to Finish teachers education and training in which working in groups is a daily routine [39]. Consequently, Finish teachers are more prepared to work and cooperate with their colleagues than Greeks, because they have cultivated a spirit of teamwork during their studies and internships. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Greek teachers in their proposals emphasize the need to create a framework of cooperation in the school, so that they can collaborate with other colleagues.

Fourthly, the themes chosen in integrated activities, in Finish schools derive from students interests after discussion with the group of teachers, in contrast to the Greek school where the teacher mostly makes the choice of themes. This finding is linked to the philosophy of the curriculum in Greece and Finland. In the first case and despite the theoretical formulations in the official curricula of the last decade, the emphasis is not on how the student learns but on the learning results. However, this automatically implies less student autonomy in the learning process. On the contrary, in Finnish curricula of the last decade, which are even more open compared to those of Greece, the emphasis is on the student and his autonomous learning [40].

Fifthly, Finish students can work their projects either inside the school or in areas outside. Moreover, they have access to libraries, to laboratories, and to ICT in their schools, so they can easily work in groups, cooperate, and do research [41].On the other hand, Greek students work on their projects at school and not outside areas around it, plus they do not always have easy access to ICT or to libraries, because school's infrastructure does not allow it. Unfortunately, in Greek educational system the lack of funds to equip schools with the necessary technological infrastructure is a constant problem of Greek education. At the same time, economic hardship becomes "alibi" for each government to upgrade the existing infrastructure or to provide a new one for schools.

Sixthly, Greek teachers complained about the large volume of information they must teach in a school year, and which makes difficult the implementation of integrated practices. In fact, the taught information in Greek school is drawn from a single school textbook, which is still directly linked to the teaching practice and for that its planning, organization, and evaluation, creates a very limited perception of knowledge and its validity, while at the same time, it binds teacher to the implementation in his/her teaching. However, Finnish teachers did not report similar dissatisfaction.

Apart the differences between Greek and Finish schools in implementing integrated curricula, we can find similarities as well. Particularly:

a) When integrated practices are implemented the teaching practices used are teamwork, research, use of ICT and educational visits.
b) Both Greek and Finish teachers point out the positive results that integrated practices have both for them, for the students and for school in general.
c) Both Greek and Finish students-according to their teachers- are referred to enjoy integrated practices better than the more traditional methods of learning, for the freedom they offer to them in learning and in approaching the theme.
d) Parents' reaction to integrated practices at school appears to be similar. In both cases there are parents who react negatively to the innovation of integration and others that, when they get to know it and see its results through their children, accept and support it.
e) Finally, it is worth noting that both Greek and Finnish teachers state that implementing integrative practices they use qualitative forms of assessment of their students, which they would like to be able to use in their daily teaching in combination with more traditional assessment methods.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we could say that both Greek and Finnish teachers consider the implementation of integrative practices at school as an important pedagogical innovation, firstly, because it has positive effects on the activation of students and on the experiential way of learning, and secondly, because it prepares students to acquire basic knowledge and skills deemed necessary for the society of the future [42]. For the implementation of integrated practices Greek teachers consider necessary for the state to create a stable framework that will supply the time and space so that they can implement integrated practices. At the same time, they seek a reduction in the taught material, so that they have more time to develop thematic projects. On the other hand, Finnish teachers are looking for more integrated periods during the year and for some more guidance from the planning authorities, Ministry of Education, and municipalities.

In each case, if the "official" bodies of the educational policy both in Greece and Finland still recognize the pedagogical importance of integration for students' "holistic" development and for educational practice's modernization and efficiency, it would be useful to work in the direction of a meaningful and in-depth modernization of their educational systems, so that Greek and Finish school can follow social changes and respond to the demands of a modern and evolving society [43].

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