EXPERIMENTAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CRETE (GREECE)

Cultivating Critical Engagement

An Erasmus+ Project Utilizing Autoethnography and Documentary-Making to Empower and Educate Young People

Participating Teachers: Dr. Konstantinos Sipitanos, Elisabeth Olivero | Project: "Entrevista al Pasado: Democracia y Europa Hoy" (EPDE) (2021-2024)

Needs & Inquiry

• Youth Voice & Digital Engagement:
There is a critical need to amplify youth voices and foster active digital engagement in a highly technological world, transforming students from passive media consumers to active creators.

• Connecting Past & Present:
Linking student lived experiences with historical socio-political contexts (Ancient Athens/Rome) and EU institutions allows young citizens to critically examine common European values of democracy, tolerance, and human rights.

Project Aims

✓ **Digital Empowerment:** Develop advanced ICT, media literacy, and video-editing skills through hands-on documentary production.

✓ **Historical & Comparative Thinking:** Foster critical perspective-taking by encouraging students to compare modern lives with those of their parents and ancient civilizations.

✓ **Multilingual Literacy:** Cultivate robust English language skills as a shared medium for transnational communication, collaboration, and writing.

✓ **Democratic Culture:** Promote active citizenship, gender equality, diversity, and tolerance by exploring complex socio-political issues within local communities.

Implementation Stages

1. Local Context & Photo Stories
Students researched their school and city contexts, producing short videos and creating daily life 'photo stories' shared with European peers.

2. Family Interviews & Oral Histories
Students acted as ethnographers, conducting interviews with parents and grandparents regarding their adolescence, childhood, and technological changes.

3. Socio-Historical Analysis & Reading Aloud
Using historical literature, students examined structures, gender roles, and democratic systems in Ancient Rome and Athens, comparing them to contemporary Europe.

4. Technical & Cinematic Training
Students received professional preparation on documentary-making, camera handling, audio recording, digital file labeling, and ethical representation.

5. Documentary Production & Fieldwork
Collaborative student teams conducted video-recorded interviews in Rethymno, Heraklion, and Chania, tackling societal issues like gender equality, immigration, and human rights.

Key Outcomes & Impact

Students evolved from passive learners into active community researchers, linking personal lived experiences with grand narratives and democratic institutions. The project significantly bridged the gap between school curriculum and civic reality.

>83% of teachers agreed that students' English language and digital (ICT) skills improved significantly through this collaborative, multilingual action research.

22 / 75 Teachers and students actively collaborated across 5 European countries (Greece, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal), co-creating oral histories and documentary media.

Democratic Citizenship Dimension

• Empowering Student Voices:
The project placed 'student voice' at the absolute core of the curriculum. Students formulated their own critical inquiry questions instead of simply answering preset school tasks.

• Confronting Stereotypes through Dialogue:
By investigating sensitive societal themes (gender inequality, LGBTQ+ rights, immigration, and EU discrimination), students actively engaged in building a culture of tolerance, equity, and inclusion in their classrooms.

Student Voices (Testimonials)

"I learned how to analyze an interview and discovered details about life in the past by talking to my relatives."
— Student (St4)

"We improved our camera skills, learned how different applications work, and, most importantly, got to know each other better."
— Student (St7)

CORE MESSAGE

Combining autoethnography and documentary-making transforms the classroom into a vibrant democratic laboratory. Students are not mere consumers of curriculum, but active co-creators of knowledge, developing empathy, and actively shaping European civic reality.

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