Who owns the classroom?

Suburban area, Crete, Greece

DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION
Teacher Academy Project

Fifteen sixth-graders and their teacher try to share the classroom as a commons, through two lockdowns (2020 – 21)

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The school year, in students' words

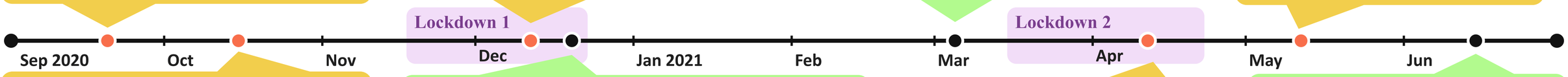
The class assembly met every week, on Webex too. I studied the year from inside, as their teacher, through critical participatory action research [1, 6]

"An eye for an eye, that's what the Apostle Paul said. And we're pretty good at following it."
Student, September [6]

"Sir, I give up. Someone wrecked our group at the last minute, when we were doing fine."
Student on Webex, December [7]

"It feels good when we decide together."
Student, March [6]

"Are we going to finish the [maths] textbook?"
Student, May [6]



"It feels strange that we're deciding things you're supposed to decide."
Student, October [6]

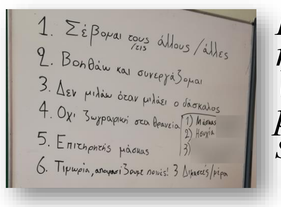
"Sir, that's not fair. You didn't follow what we decided, and in the end you just do whatever works best for you."
Student at the class assembly, December [6]

"If the teacher doesn't shout, no one stops."
Student, April [6]

"When we do assemblies, I feel more responsible."
Student, June [6]

Where we started

Colleagues called it a "difficult" class. The children fought often, trusted each other little and waited for every answer to come from the teacher. In the first group I formed, one boy made the others cry. [1, 3]



Day one. Their own rules mostly copied the school's. Where they did give themselves power, they reached for the same tools, a mask monitor and "3 judges a day". [1]

What I hoped for

- Children share decisions on rules, time and space
- Learning moves from my desk into the group
- Helping a classmate becomes ordinary

Commons-based pedagogical practices

Governing together. A weekly assembly with a rotating chair kept rewriting the rules, and children took on daily roles. [1]

Learning together. Peer learning, flipped lessons and history "missions", such as planning an escape from besieged Missolonghi. [3]



A group's escape map, with feigned attacks and a meeting point [3]

"But we are the Turks, remember?"
"Oh, right. D**n, we are the conquerors."
Two students in a role-play on oppression [3]

The schoolized mind

What ordinary schooling leaves in children, parents, teachers and in me, returning as three beliefs. [2, 3]

1. **Learning means the teacher explains**

"What games, movies, projects and silly things? We need to do lessons!"
Student [3]

2. **Knowing means memorizing for exams**

"If you don't memorize for the Panhellenic exams, you won't pass."
Student, six years before those exams [3]

3. **Authority is the teacher's alone**

"Let sir coordinate us properly, like [our old teacher] who said 'quiet' and we all shut our mouths."
Student, asking to scrap the quiet monitor [2]

What happened

Children stayed in at break, and groups refused to move on until everyone understood. Helping became ordinary, partly, I suspect, to please the teacher. A quiet boy chairing an assembly still heard "shut up, you little snot", and the class voted to hand its court back to me. [1, 3, 7]

"Sir, can we stay inside?"
"Let's stay. We need to help."
Students at break time [3]

Where democracy is. Fifteen children arguing over the rules of their own school day, and a teacher losing the full overview. Their voice counted where it could change a rule, and where it could not.

What pushed back

Lockdown

Twice we moved onto Webex. The class wrote 13 rules for its chat, and weeks later asked me to control it. One girl was blamed, with no evidence, for deleting a message. [7]

Parents

Some parents objected openly, some through their children, and some backed us. A mother's call turned her daughter against group work. [4]

"So my son, who is a good student, has to be in a group with weak students? That isn't fair."
A father, first meeting [4]

"It is unacceptable that the children are heard more than you."
A mother, phoning during a Webex break [3, 4]

Colleagues

«Χαλάς την πιάτσα»
"You are spoiling it for the rest of us"

Participation was read as disorder. I stopped sharing anything in the staffroom, and a few allies kept small islands of solidarity going. [5]

"Too much democracy is harmful."
"The class is for tests, so they're ready for secondary school."
Heard at school, 2020–21 [5]

"It is stressful to feel your way along the limits of the institution. It hurts."
From my research diary [5]

Some weeks the groups ran without me and the assembly settled its own disputes. In others I wanted the whole thing back, with more anger and disappointment than a poster usually shows. Neither set of weeks settles anything on its own: in one class over one year, what the case can show is the experiment itself, pushed past the logic the school takes for granted, the schoolized mind. [1, 5]

In English open access [3]

Full thesis in Greek [1]

Democracy begins when children can co-manage the life of the classroom.

Quotes come from fieldnotes, assembly records, chat logs and my research diary, translated from Greek. Ethics approval, University of Thessaly; parental consent; names removed, no faces shown.

[1] Pantazidis, S. (2023). Η παιδαγωγική των εκπαιδευτικών κοινών για τη δημοκρατία στο δημόσιο σχολείο. PhD thesis, University of Thessaly.

[2] Pantazidis, S. (in press). Ο αγώνας μιας σχολικής χρονιάς για εφαρμοσμένα εκπαιδευτικά κοινά: Η αποκάλυψη του σχολειοποιημένου νου. In Y. Pechtelidis & N. Nikonanou (Eds.), Οι αγώνες των κοινών στην εκπαίδευση. Psifides.

[3] Pantazidis, S., & Bantiou, M. (2026). Commoning history education: Developing in-curriculum and beyond-curriculum thinking skills. Thinking Skills and Creativity, 61, 102151.

[4] Pantazidis, S. (2024). Στάσεις γονέων σχετικά με τη συμμετοχή των παιδιών τους σε μία εναλλακτική εκπαιδευτική διαδικασία βασισμένη στα Εκπαιδευτικά κοινά. Proceedings of the 2nd Panhellenic Conference "School, Family and Community".

[5] Pantazidis, S. (in press). «Χαλάς την πιάτσα»: Ο αντίκτυπος εφαρμογής της εναλλακτικής παιδαγωγικής προσέγγισης των εκπαιδευτικών κοινών στο δημόσιο σχολείο. Proceedings of the 6th Panhellenic Conference of Sociology of Education, Volos.

[6] Who owns the classroom? Framing a common pool resource in an educational system designed for control. Manuscript under review.

[7] Hacking the banking model through postdigital commoning in a primary classroom. Manuscript under review.