

# Raising *Bilingual Awareness* in Greek Primary Schools

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This paper presents the results of a research project involving bilingual children in selected primary schools in Volos, Greece, focusing mainly on the findings that have led to the proposal of two class activities, with the aim of promoting 'bilingual awareness' in primary schools. The activities are the creation of 'The bilingual portrait' and the use of the children's book titled *My first book on bilingualism*, which was produced in order to help teachers in their efforts to raise awareness in relation to bilingualism in their multilingual classes. The research project in question took place during the school year 2002–2003, while co-operation with some of the teachers involved still continues, as the implementation of the research findings necessitates on-going efforts to turn theoretical issues on bilingualism into specific classroom activities. Both 'The bilingual portrait' and *My first book on bilingualism*, initiatives and practices suitable for first and second grade primary school children, provide an opportunity for teachers, children and parents alike to realise some of the important benefits of our multilingual Greek reality, both in and outside the school environment.

**Keywords:** advantages of bilingualism, bilingual awareness, classroom activities, multiculturalism

## Introduction

Bilingual phenomena in Greece have started to be noticed and studied mainly over the last decade, as the country has changed from being one of exporting migrants to one of receiving immigrants from many parts of the world. Therefore, issues of bilingualism and bilingual education are becoming all the more relevant for the Greek social and educational contexts. However, before we move on to the research project and findings that shed some light on these issues in the context of Greek primary schools, it would be useful to briefly present the linguistic profile of Greece, characterised by diversity, even before the recent influx of migrants. As Trudgill (2001) writes, the vast majority of the members of the old minority language communities in Greece have Greek as their native language. Namely, the minority languages of Greece have been: Turkish, Pomak (a variety related to Bulgarian, spoken by the Pomak Muslim minority of western Thrace), Romany (the language of the Rom or Gypsies, related to dialects spoken in northern India), Ladino (a Romance language spoken by the Jewish community in Greece), Armenian (spoken by the Armenian community in Greece), Vlachika (related to Rumanian and spoken by communities in Thessaly and in the area of Pindos), Arvanitika (related to Albanian and spoken by communities in the area of Thebes and Athens, as well as in the Peloponnese and some of the islands) and Slavika

(related to Macedonian and spoken by communities in the area of western Macedonia). From the aforementioned languages, Turkish is the only one that is officially recognised in Greece as a minority language, spoken by the Turkish-speaking minority of western Thrace, a minority that is protected by the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne.

Despite the existing linguistic diversity in Greece, as shown above, issues involving language contact and bilingualism did not concern the Greek political or educational scene until the recent influx of great numbers of migrants into the country. In Table 1, we present the linguistic profile of Greek primary schools, according to recent official information provided by the Ministry of Education (Μιτίλης, 1996: 109). It is clear from Table 1 that the largest migrant language groups, which are represented in Greek primary schools, are the Albanian one and the speakers of languages used in the former USSR countries. Efforts to establish strategies and means for the maintenance of minority languages in Greece are, nevertheless, in their infancy, while no official measures have been taken in this direction. Until now, the only concern that Greek political and educational institutions has voiced is the successful teaching of Greek as a second language, while issues raised by supporters of intercultural and antiracist education, from both the academic and the educational contexts, have minimal and sporadic impact on the mainstream educational system, depending on the interest and enthusiasm of individual educators.

As far as academic research is concerned, issues of language contact and bilingualism in Greece concern both language and education experts. Evidence of this is provided by the work of Greek researchers such as Σκούρτου (1997, 2002), Δαμανάκης (2002), Γκότοβος (2002), Χατζηδάκη (2000), Τσιάκκαλος (2000) and Γκόβαρης (2001), who come from either linguistic or pedagogical research backgrounds.

This paper is concerned with the issues, findings and educational practices that came out of a research project involving bilingual primary school students in Volos, Greece. Its scope, findings and educational parameters will be presented below, in the hope that they can provide some useful ideas concerning bilingual educational practices both locally and internationally.

**Table 1** Non-Greek-speaking students attending Greek primary schools during the school year 1995–1996

<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Migrants</i>	<i>Return migrants</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Former USSR	1828	11,691	13,519	40.2
Albania	7083	5658	12,741	37.9
Other countries	1723	2210	3933	11.7
Rom	–	–	3413	10.2
Total	10,634	19,559	33,606	100.0

## The Research Project: Structure and Methods

In an attempt to assist primary school teachers in their efforts to deal with the coexistence of non-native and native speakers of Greek in their classes, a research team from the Department of Primary School Education of the University of Thessaly, under the supervision of the author, embarked on the project 'Making the best of school multilingualism through the teaching of language', whose structure and main findings are presented in the first part of this paper. The findings of our research led to the proposal of school activities, the most important of which are 'The bilingual portrait' and a children's book on bilingualism, titled *My first book on bilingualism*. The aims and content of both these initiatives are presented in the second part of this paper. Through the use of the proposed activities, we intend to help raise 'bilingual awareness' for all parties involved. The notion of 'bilingual awareness' will be also discussed in the second part of the paper.

Accepting the premise that language development is essentially a social and cultural procedure (Bloome, 1985), as it necessitates sound social relations between teachers and students, monolingual and bilingual students, parents and students, writers and readers, etc., within the context of the project in question, we embarked on a research project that, after establishing the current level of awareness of issues involving the education of bilingual children, would result in the proposal of classroom activities that encourage the co-operation of students, teachers and parents. Our own previous research (Clyne *et al.*, 1994) has shown that the participation of community members in school activities contributes positively to the linguistic or bilingual development of primary school children. The recognition of the influence of the children's reality, home and community life, on their academic performance is also stressed by supporters of antiracist education (Τσιάκαλος, 2000) who claim, among other things, that in order to improve the lives and experiences of immigrants, we need to give them access to all social goods as well as to the political power necessary to actually obtain those goods. To this end, a fair and inclusive educational context of linguistic and cultural exchange can only function in a positive and empowering manner.

More specifically, as the project would be funded for one school year only, we decided to carry out a small-scale, qualitative research, restricted to three primary schools at Volos, which, according to the official records available to us, had a high proportion of children from non-Greek-speaking backgrounds. The small number of schools would allow us to become well acquainted with our sample and establish the necessary co-operation with the teachers involved. We selected the second and fourth grades in each school, so as to have a sample of younger and older students, respectively, who would still be in the same schools in the following school year, with the hope that we would be able to follow their progress, after the project was officially completed.

The research sample consisted of 23 bilingual students from grades B and D from three neighbouring primary schools and six teachers (one from each of the six classes involved). The schools and classes involved had the following proportion of bilingual and monolingual students:

PS1

Class B: 4/22 students (Albanian background)

Class D: 5/17 students (3 Albanian and 2 Rom background)

PS2

Class B: 6/22 students (4 Albanian, 1 Rom, 1 Rumanian background)

Class D: 4/17 students (3 Albanian, 1 Rom background)

PS3

Class B: 3/20 students (2 Albanian, 1 Rumanian background)

Class D: 1/11 students (Albanian background)

Number of students from the three primary schools:

Class B: 13/64 (10 Albanian, 1 Rom, 2 Rumanian)

Class D: 10/45 (7 Albanian, 3 Rom)

Total: 23/109 (17 Albanian, 4 Rom, 2 Rumanian)

As we can see from the above information, the majority (17 in total) of the 23 bilingual students of the three Primary Schools in question are of Albanian background.

The research project included two stages. The first one involved weekly observations of language classes and lasted for the first five months of the school year (October–February), while the second involved both observations and interviews with the bilingual students and their teachers and lasted till the end of the school year (March–June). We believe that as the interviews took place after a fairly long period of familiarisation between the researchers and our sample, the information gathered was reliable and based on trust between the parties concerned. Informal discussions with students and teachers, which took place during the first research stage helped us decide on the questions that should be addressed during the interviews. The interviews took place at the schools before and after the language classes and consisted mainly of open questions, as our aim was to get as closely as possible to the beliefs of the teachers in relation to bilingualism and the educational needs of bilingual students. Through the interviews with the bilingual students we aimed to find out the possible similarities and differences of the bilingual students involved and this information was used for ‘the bilingual portrait’ of each child. The content of the interviews with the teachers and the bilingual students will be discussed in more detail in the second part of the paper.

The research team included the author and six other members who conducted the observations and the interviews with the teachers and bilingual students in pairs, each pair visiting one school. The author had the overall supervision of the research group and visited each school in order to meet the teachers, inform them of the aims of the project and acquire their consent for the observations required. The author also participated in one observation in each class, along with the other members of the research team. The research team met to discuss the issues that concerned the researchers on a monthly basis, so that we could compare the data from the observations in the three schools and organise the second research stage. During the school year 2002–2003, we gathered data from about 15 one- or two-hour observations in each class, two thirds of which took place at the first research stage. During the regular (almost weekly) class observations, the researchers took notes which

were collected by the author and the issues raised in them helped us decide on the questions to be addressed in the interviews that took place at the second research stage.

The data from both research stages led the author to the development of the notion of 'bilingual awareness', a process that could be realised through certain educational tools addressed to educators and students, such that would encourage the involvement of the bilingual students' families.

## Main Findings of the Research Project

One of the first important issues that came up during our observations and informal discussions with the teachers (including teachers that the author has come into contact during special teacher training programmes undertaken by the university) was the terminology used by educators and school administrators (not to mention many researchers in the field in Greece) in order to define non-native or bilingual children in Greek classes. More often than not, the term 'alloglossa pedia' (that is, 'other language-speaking children') is used as an umbrella term to describe all children whose native language is not Greek.

As we got to know the non-native children in the three schools in question, we realised that such a term is both unsuitable and limiting for children who were all from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with varying degrees of Greek language competence, all of whom were actively, passively or potentially bilingual. As the linguistic development of all children is a process, rather than a static situation, and children that come from non-Greek speaking families and communities have two language pools to draw from, the most suitable term to describe their linguistic behaviour is *bilingual children*. This change in the terminology used has both ideological and educational dimensions, as it suggests a positive and empowering attitude towards children of non-Greek background, both within and outside the school context. The term 'bilingual' gives emphasis to the linguistic repertoire and potential of children and eliminates the stigma attached to the static label 'alloglossa' (that is, 'other language-speaking'). The term 'alloglossa' also implies that educators do not make an effort to view things from the perspective of the children, for whom their first language is not 'other', but their own, equally important to the dominant Greek. Last but not least, the promotion of the children's bilingual abilities, whether active or passive, may encourage native Greek-speaking children to acquire other languages and become bilingual as well.

We will now turn to the main findings of the two research stages, which further made apparent to the author the need for raising 'bilingual awareness' in Greek primary schools. Through the observations during the whole of the school year, the researchers noticed that the teachers did not bring up in their classes any issues related to the other languages and cultures that were represented by their bilingual students. The teachers did not dedicate any language teaching time to other languages, bilingualism or language contact phenomena, while whenever they had the opportunity they made it clear to the class that they all had to use Greek only at all times. When spare class time

existed, teachers would prefer to spend it on reading aloud, rather than group work or extra language activities for those who needed more practice. The researchers also observed that the participation of most bilingual students in class activities was noticeably very limited and occasionally funny comments were made by the Greek students in relation to the accent of the bilingual students while reading or speaking in Greek. Unfortunately, the reaction of the teachers in such cases was merely to ask the students 'to mind their own business'.

At the interviews, when asked about the possible reasons why their bilingual students did not perform that well, all six teachers attributed their students' inadequacies in Greek to the lack of parental support for their homework. When asked to comment on the bilingual students' class participation, half of them commented that their bilingual students were not shy, while the rest made a point to comment on the lack of bilingual student participation in class activities. When asked to discuss the relations between themselves and the migrant parents, all teachers noted that migrant parents, on the whole, did not visit the school to inquire about their children's progress and that most of them could not communicate adequately in Greek. On the rare occasion that migrant parents did meet with the teachers, all six teachers said that they would advise them to speak to their children in Greek as much as possible. Through the discussions/interviews with these as well as many other teachers, during university seminars, it has become apparent to the author that teachers do not believe that the use of L1 at home will have any positive impact on the development of L2 for bilingual children, which is directly opposite to the documented necessity for educators to build on the children's home languages in order for them to have better chances to develop both linguistically and cognitively (Cummins, 2000). All teachers thought that having Greek with migrant children in the same class resulted in reduced progress for the former, while they all agreed that they lacked the time and special teaching material necessary for the needs of migrant children.

The interviews with the bilingual students aimed to bring forward the kind of bilingualism that the students had, their relation with their two languages and their views concerning their life in Greece and their relations with their teachers and schoolmates. This information was used for 'The bilingual portrait', which we will present later in the paper. One general issue that is worth mentioning, at this stage, is that the majority of the student immigrants from Albania claimed, initially, that they only spoke Greek at home and that they did not know Albanian. However, as they got to know the researchers better and were convinced that we thought that being bilingual is an asset, they would admit to us, during our co-operation on the creation of their bilingual portrait, that they still had some knowledge of Albanian and they would write some words in their other language, upon request.

To conclude the first part of the paper, our small scale, qualitative study showed us that Greek teachers need support in becoming themselves more aware of the educational and social issues related to bilingualism, as well as in developing and implementing class activities with the aim of promoting

bilingual and intercultural issues for their students in their multilingual and multicultural classes. Moreover, all children would benefit even more if such activities involved, one way or another, the co-operation of their parents.

### **Proposed School Practices of Raising ‘Bilingual Awareness’**

The findings of the research project that were presented in the first part of this paper led us to the proposal of class activities and practices that may assist both teachers and students to develop what we have called ‘bilingual awareness’, regardless of whether they, themselves, are bilingual or not.

The notion of ‘bilingual awareness’ has been inspired by some of the well known advantages of bilingualism, as proposed by Baker (2000), especially those whose repercussions go beyond the bilingual child or person *per se* and affect our social context. Thus, we can be bilingually aware without, necessarily, being bilingual. This can be achieved through the acknowledgement of what Baker (2000: 12) categorises as communication and cultural advantages of bilingualism. In more detail, wider communication, deeper multilingualism and greater tolerance towards people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are beneficial to all and not only to bilinguals *per se*. Having bilingual students and children in our classes and communities cannot but contribute to a richer, more colourful, diverse and dynamic environment that enables us to get to know other lifestyles and experiences and benefit from them. However, it became apparent through our research that, currently, such diversity is, more often than not, treated indifferently, if not negatively, with the result of bilingual children, mainly from an Albanian cultural and linguistic background, often hiding or ‘forgetting’, as they claim, their home languages.

In the context of the Greek classroom, we are convinced that, through the systematic promotion of bilingualism and the encouragement of intercultural exchange among students from various backgrounds, both bilinguals and monolinguals will be benefited and enriched. One step towards this goal can be made through ‘The bilingual portrait’ activity and the use of the proposed children’s booklet called *My first book on bilingualism*, which we will present below.

### **The Bilingual Portrait**

The activity of ‘The bilingual portrait’ has been inspired by the research finding that bilingual children in Greek classes are characterised as ‘alloglossa’ (that is, ‘other language-speaking’) and the observation that teachers do not seem to know how to promote the bilingual children’s languages for the benefit of the whole of the class, as we discussed earlier in this paper. Moreover, we observed the paradox that although these children were described as ‘other language-speaking’, the children themselves often claimed that they had forgotten their ‘other’ home language.

In order for us, the teachers and the rest of the class to get to know these children better, we decided to create an individual portrait of each bilingual

child with information on their languages, countries of origin, home and community environments, their own views on Greece, their country of origin and their school experiences as they themselves described them. All this information, gathered by the researchers with the co-operation of the bilingual students, their teachers and parents, was then put together on a board that included photos, pictures and drawings made by the children themselves. The bilingual children gladly agreed to participate in this activity and their parents were only happy to provide them with photos to be publicly displayed upon completion of the portraits.

The original idea was to put together as many such portraits as possible during the school year and display them at the end of the school year in every school. Since by the time these portraits were ready, the school activities had already been formalised, we presented some of the portraits from every school at a public university conference, organised in cooperation with the schools, at the end of the academic year, where a few bilingual children with their parents and teachers attended. The reactions of the bilingual children to the display of their portraits to academics and teachers was indeed very encouraging and the author's overall impression was that they all felt proud of becoming the centre of attention for one day.

Sample bilingual portraits are presented below:

Robena's portrait	
Name:	Robena
Age:	10
Grade:	4th grade
Father:	Ilias (technician)
Mother:	Monda (home-carer)
Siblings:	two brothers, aged 5 and 1
Country of origin:	Albania
Years in Greece:	4 years

*About her two countries:*

She likes to visit Albania in the summer but prefers to live in Greece.

*About her two languages:*

At home she speaks mainly Albanian with her mother and mainly Greek with her father. The same holds for her brothers. She cannot read and write in Albanian and prefers to read Greek literature.

*Her interests:*

She likes to play the organ and the piano, especially the song 'Happy Birthday'. She prefers Greek music but her parents mostly listen to Albanian songs. She also likes cooking.

*At school:*

She spends most time with her three cousins (all girls) but also has three Greek girlfriends.

*Her teacher about Robena:*

'Robena is diligent, has some problems at spelling and is mostly interested in language. She is good at maths, solves problems and asks questions. She is polite, friendly and eager to be helpful to others'.

*Her schoolmates about Robena:*

'Robena is nice, a little forgetful but that is ok.'

'Robena is a little mean and very good and stingy.'

Apart from the information above, Robena's portrait includes photos of all family members and a long list of words in Albanian, written with Greek characters, with their Greek translation.

Elda's portrait	
Name:	Elda
Age:	13
Grade:	4th grade
Father:	Bendri (farmer)
Mother:	Violeta (farmer)
Siblings:	one brother, 17 years old
Country of origin:	Albania
Years in Greece:	3 years

*About her two countries:*

In Albania she and her family lived in a beautiful house with flowers and animals. Their house in Greece is smaller but pretty. Her only reason for visiting Albania is to see her grandparents and relatives. She likes Greece more because she likes the people and her school.

*About her two languages:*

At home her parents speak Albanian but she often does not understand some Albanian words. With her brother she speaks Greek. With her schoolmates from Albania, they speak Albanian to one another.

*Her interests:*

She likes to read stories, watching television and playing hide and seek in the neighbourhood.

*At school:*

In the beginning the other students did not play with her and she used to cry. Now she has a few good friends and she is happy.

Elda's portrait also includes photos of her family and a drawing she made to express her feelings about the time her family first came to Greece. The drawing depicts children playing at school and herself sitting alone on a bench crying.

Both Robena and Elda can be described as Greek–Albanian bilinguals, who are dominant in Greek, although they have lived the first 10 years of their lives in Albania. Elda appears to have a closer relation with her home language, as she uses it more at home (with both parents) than Robena. This imbalance between the dominant Greek language and the weaker Albanian has been noticed in all the portraits of the Greek–Albanian bilinguals. It may be explained by the fact that, at this stage in Greece, there are no organised schools for the systematic teaching of Albanian and many parents, following the advice of Greek teachers, do not actively pursue the use of their first (and clearly dominant for them) language with their children.

The sketchy presentation of the portraits of Robena and Elda above can only give us a general idea of the lives of the two bilingual children between Albania and Greece. What is more important than that, however, is the process of familiarisation and the exchange of experiences and knowledge between the researchers and the bilingual children, which preceded the final product. Although this cannot easily be documented, as it has to do with the development of mutual trust and sympathy over time, it is the main reason why we propose this activity to educators for their own multilingual and multicultural classes. In the current school year we aim to propose to interested teachers to carry out the activity of ‘The bilingual portrait’ in the form of a project that would involve monolingual and bilingual children working in pairs or groups with the supervision and guidance of the teacher. We strongly believe that the process of getting to know the ideas, experiences and languages of one’s schoolmates will be more beneficial to all than more reading aloud, as our research showed that some teachers often do in order to fill spare class time.

## **My First Book on Bilingualism**

The second main product of our research efforts to promote bilingual awareness, as we mentioned earlier, was the creation of a children’s book on bilingualism. The book was mainly inspired by the research finding that educators do not seem to be aware of the importance of maintaining the children’s home languages, especially in the case of Albanian and Rom background children, whose home languages and cultures are socially stigmatised and undervalued in contemporary Greek society (Swadener *et al.*, 2001). Instead, as we mentioned previously in this paper, they often advise migrant parents to use Greek at home and express the complaint that bilingual children do not have parental support in their homework. Moreover, the teachers themselves expressed the need for classroom material that addresses the needs of migrant or bilingual children.

Before we move on to discuss the structure and content of *My first book on bilingualism*, it is useful to compare it to the inspiring initiatives of Edwards (1998) and Chow and Cummins (2003) which include the proposal and implementation of dual language books and stories for ESL students. The principles and aspirations of all such projects and types of educational material are very similar, namely the acknowledgement and use of our

students' L1 at school, the building of a bridge between the school and our students' migrant families, the promotion of our students' self-esteem in relation to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the creation of an overall positive school environment for children of migrant backgrounds. However, as our research showed that Greek educators need to become 'bilingually aware', that is convinced of the advantages of bilingualism and the importance of creating an intercultural school environment for all their students, we needed to begin our efforts at an introductory level for both educators and students. Therefore, *My first book on bilingualism* is not a dual book only but a children's book on bilingualism. It promotes the basic advantages of bilingualism, rather than the direct use of migrant languages, especially those of stigmatised communities in Greece, such as Albanian, and it provides an introduction to bilingualism, which is aimed to convince teachers, young students and parents alike of the personal and social benefits of bilingualism. Its novelty, therefore, lies in the idea that it evolves around bilingualism *per se* and, secondarily, around specific migrant languages. By doing so, the book, in any of its forms (that is Greek–English, Greek–Russian, Greek–Arabic and Greek–Albanian, so far), can be used by monolingual students as well, with the aim of promoting interculturalism and the exchange of knowledge between monolingual and bilingual children. It is the first of a proposed series of children's books on bilingualism and can be employed both in class by teachers and students and at home in order to encourage all children, teachers and parents to find out how widespread and important bilingualism is. It is illustrated by bilingual and monolingual preschool and primary school students, some of whom, through their pictures, express their feelings about their two languages/countries.

The book begins with a short introduction for teachers. The introduction discusses the notion of 'bilingual awareness', based on the documented advantages of bilingualism (Baker, 2000), and encourages the teachers to include issues of language contact, migration and bilingualism in their teaching content. It also explains the structure of the booklet and encourages them to adapt and supplement it according to the needs of their students.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is mainly theoretical and gives simple definitions of child bilingualism, i.e. the ability to speak different languages with one's parents or in different contexts and 'advertises' the ability to know other languages in terms of intercultural communication, travelling and making friends. The second part is interactive as it encourages the children to learn some words in another language and fill them in or to write some words in the other language that they already know. If they prefer, the children can draw something instead. The third part of the book, which we have called 'intercultural', aims to raise bilingual awareness by bringing forward the linguistic pluralism of our society ('In our world people speak many languages . . . All languages are useful and good. Some . . . are spoken by people who live in the same neighbourhood or go to the same school as you'). It closes with an attempt to put theory into practice by inviting children to ask other children in their neighbourhood and school to offer them a word from their languages. The conclusion is that these words from other languages are 'a gift that does not cost any money but has great value . . . Because: when you

teach me another language, you teach me to think in another manner, you open a window into your life for me, you open your heart to me. . . Thank you.'

As the book was created at the end of the school year, by which time the research project had to be completed, we did not have the time and opportunity to suggest its use to the three schools involved in our research. However, during the current school year, the Greek–Albanian version has been proposed to one of the schools involved in our research as well as a few others, which our fourth year university students visit on a regular basis for their school practice.

Teachers are given very general ideas about how to use the book in class, as each class responds to the book's content in a different manner and all reactions are welcome. The teachers' most frequent complaint so far has been that they have a very strict schedule to follow during language class time, as the requirements from the Greek Ministry of Education are very specific. Recently, the Ministry has introduced a 'flexible school zone', which is about two hours a week, where teachers have the opportunity to use any teaching material they like and give emphasis on any subject or project they consider important. This development has allowed me to propose the use of the book as supportive material for 15–30 min during either the daily two-hour language class time or the 'flexible zone' time. I have termed this time 'bilingualism awareness class time' and it can take place on a daily or weekly basis, depending on the teacher's priorities and teaching schedule.

As the book is divided into separate parts, its first (theoretical) part can be read to the class and trigger a discussion of the various languages or language varieties our students are or would like to be familiar with. The Greek text can be read by the teacher or the students, while the text in the other language by one of the students or at home by the parents. The students can be encouraged to record their parents' reading of the text in the other language and bring it to class for all children to listen to. Likewise, children can be encouraged to discuss or write about a variety of issues in class and to convey the opinions of their family and community members at the next 'bilingualism awareness class time' session.

The second (interactive) part of the book invites students to bring in words from other languages (or other varieties of Greek) and either fill them in themselves or ask other students or their parents to help them do so. The interactive part of the book offers them an opportunity, on the one hand, for bilingual students to be encouraged to develop their writing skills in their L1, with the help of their parents, and for monolingual students to get to know their bilingual schoolmates better and realise that they have things to learn from them. The proposed activities, often supplemented with expressions and proverbs from the languages of the students, can take place over 4–5 sessions. The third part of the book, which has been called 'intercultural', can be read in class in a similar manner to the first part but it also provides an opportunity for role play activities, where students can pretend to be native speakers of other languages, use their own native languages or even exchange languages, by putting themselves 'in the shoes' of their classmates.

Putting emphasis on bilingualism and striving to raise children's awareness of bilingual phenomena will help create an intercultural educational context

that will benefit the whole of the class. Moreover, especially for language groups with a low social status (such as, presently, the Albanian community in Greece), the use of the book at home will also help parents realise the importance of helping their children develop bilingually and, in the long run, such a conviction may impact positively on their own self-esteem as speakers of socially weak languages.

So far, the reaction of bilingual students and their parents has been very encouraging, with bilingual children being very eager to take the book home with them. On the other hand, teachers who have read and used the book expressed their 'surprise' that there are so many advantages attached to bilingualism and seem more willing to allow the use of the other languages of their students in class. We presume that if teachers, becoming more bilingually aware, adapt, to some extent, the content of their teaching to suit the needs of their bilingual students and their communities, migrant parents may also become more involved with their children's school life and the gap between migrant parents and Greek teachers may start closing, for the benefit of bilingual children.

## Conclusion

Although our small-scale research in selected Greek primary schools may not be representative, in a quantitative manner, we are convinced that the teachers' attitudes and practices observed in the specific schools in Volos hold true for a great number of Greek educators, who are faced with the challenge of teaching Greek in mixed classes of Greek and migrant students. We can also be certain that most teachers in contemporary, multicultural Greece have not been trained and are, certainly, not experienced in intercultural educational approaches. The majority has a long way to go before they can appreciate the benefits of their multicultural classes and become aware of the advantages of bilingualism for their students, their schools and the society that surrounds it.

On the other hand, we are convinced that the development of bilingual awareness for teachers, students and parents alike is of great value and we need to work towards its acquisition. The author has suggested two possible educational practices, which can contribute to the development of bilingual awareness for both teachers and students, at the same time.

'The bilingual portrait' constitutes an attempt for students and teachers to become familiar with the views, ideas, realities and linguistic behaviour of bilingual children, some of which may or may not differ from those of monolinguals, thus encouraging both parties involved to reach a higher appreciation of the complexities and uniqueness of each bilingual student. *My first book on bilingualism* aims to help students, teachers and parents, better appreciate the advantages of bilingualism, while involving both monolingual and bilingual children in activities of intercultural exchange.

We believe that, as Tollefson (1991) states, it is impossible to adopt a neutral or objective attitude towards linguistic heterogeneity and bilingualism, as the linguistic policy that we opt for shapes, one way or another, the world in which we choose to live. On a macrosocial level, we are convinced that raising the bilingual awareness of teachers, bilingual and monolingual students,

parents and communities will help promote a positive broader ideology, both educationally and socially, that will help lead our modern multicultural societies to the recognition that linguistic pluralism is a unique asset, 'a gift that does not cost any money but has great value'.

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