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Supporting pre-service teachers' awareness of children's participation in decision making: an evaluation of the VOICE intervention in initial teacher education

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Aim of the presentation

To present shortly the programme within which this study took place

To explain the reasons of placing emphasis on children's participation in decision making and in Initial Teacher Education

Research questions, study design and methodology, examples of educational material used

Tentative results and discussion

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The aim of the program VOICE

Voicing children **O**pportunities **I**nteraction **C**ollective decision making **E**ducation

Dissemination of scientific knowledge to teachers and parents

Concerning: enhancing opportunities to listen to children's voices and supporting their participation in decision making during their education

Project leader: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Funded by HFRI

Greek Regional Directorates of Education (Central Macedonia, Western Macedonia, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Western Greece, South Aegean and Crete).

A. Development of educational material and website for teachers and parents

- Pilot study with becoming teachers - improvement

B. In-service one day seminar and workshops in 6 Regional Directorates of Education

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Aim of the study and context of the study

- The study aimed to question

the effects of a teaching intervention with becoming teachers of ECE focusing on student teachers' awareness of the:

- *Necessity* of children's participation

- *Meanings* of children's participation

- *Strategies* to enhance children's participation

Though the use of **specially designed educational material** that drew from

Theories and research generated both from international and national studies on teachers' beliefs, practices and support regarding children's participation in ECE

and involved Theoretical, research and reflective tools

3 ECE departments (Uowm, Univ. of Patras and Democritus Univ. of Thrace) participated in the study

At least 9 hour teaching intervention

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Why focus on children's participation

Participatory practices in ECE and…

Quality of children's experiences and educational programs
(Bae, 2009· Bowden-Clissold, 2011· Bredekamp & Copple, 1997· Dickinson & Sprague, 2001)

Applied participatory practices
(Avgitidou, 2014 · Clark, 2005 · Clark & Moss, 2010· Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993 · Papandreou, 2020 · Rinaldi, 1993· Sofou, 2022· Tanakidou & Avgitidou, 2016)

Children as active agents
(Dahlberg & Moss, 2005· MacNaughton et al., 2008· Prout & James, 2005)

Participation as children's rights
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)

Participation as a presupposition for learning – constructivist theories

However,
Participatory practices in Greek ECE settings are not taken for granted and need further enhancement (Alexiou, 2018 Avgitidou, 2014, Likomitrou, 2015 Velkou 2018)

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# Why focus on children's participation in Initial Teacher Education

Research on student teachers' beliefs about childhood (Avgitidou, Pnevmatikos & Likomitrou, 2013)
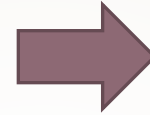
→ Dominant discourses: romantic or deficit image of childhood (playful, joyful or immature, unable to make decisions, lacking critical thinking)
Emphasis on becoming than on being

Expected to support fewer opportunities for children's participation

Research on student teachers' beliefs about teachers' and children's role in ECE (Avgitidou & Sidiropoulou, 2020)
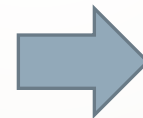
→ Dominant role of ECE teacher, technocratic teaching aiming at outcomes, children as recipients of teaching

Possibilities for transforming student teachers' beliefs when teacher education's content and process are specially designed

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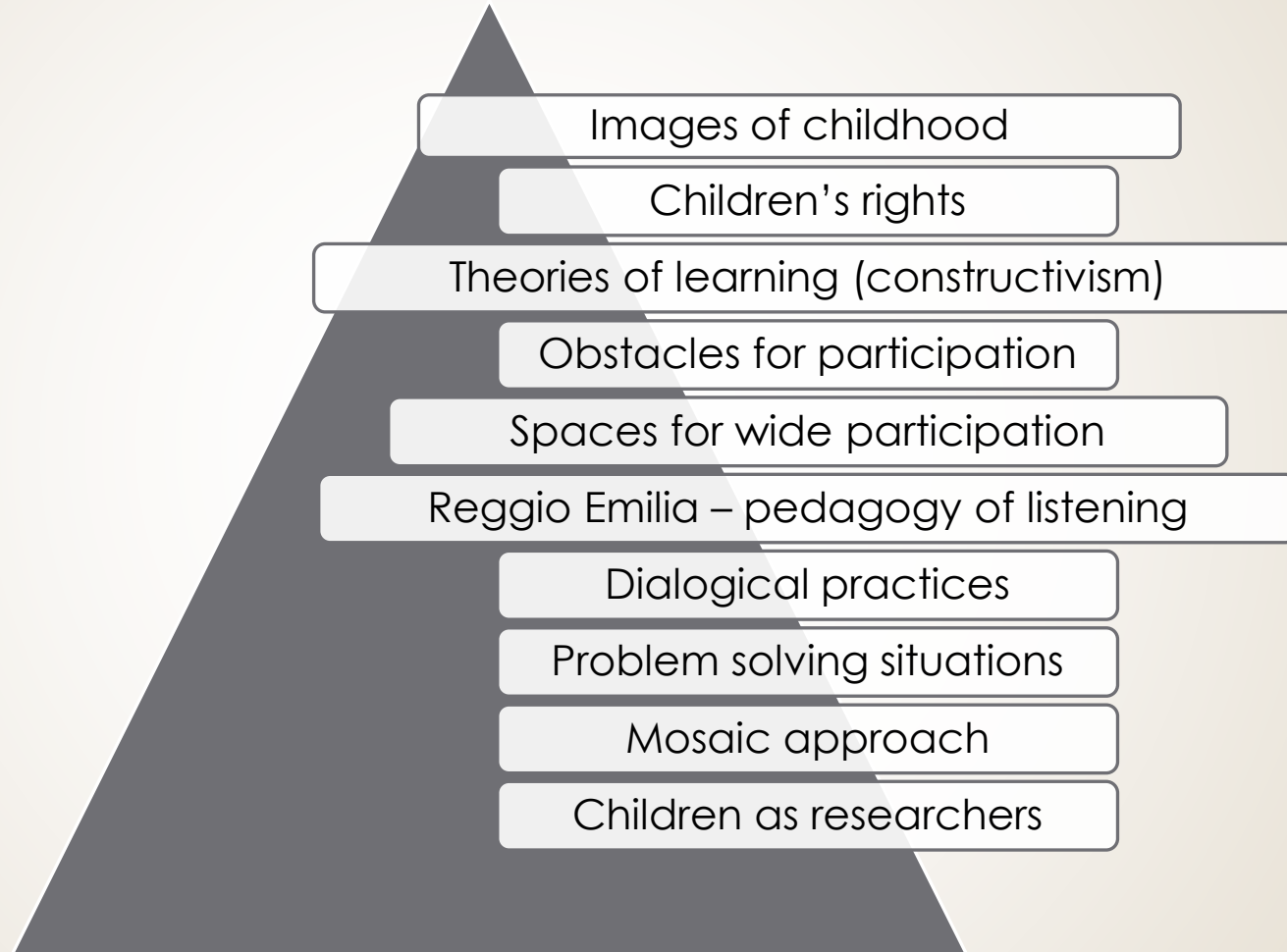# The context and characteristics of intervention during the courses

- 4 Pedagogic courses (2nd and 3rd year): Early Childhood Pedagogy (Patra), Current trends in Education (Alexandroupoli), Co-operative forms of learning in ECE (Alexandroupoli), Teaching Practice: Observation and Reflection (UoWM)

- Lasted at least 9 hours (3 three – hour courses)

- Based on specially designed educational material

- Content: meaning, necessity and strategies for children's participation

Both presentations and theoretical/research/reflective tools

Presentations were interactive: examples, case studies, reflective questions to

a. bring to the fore student teachers' personal theories and opportunities to realise their assumptions and rethink them

b. Propose alternative ways of thinking and practice and support reflection

c. Provide space and time for exercises to use new theories and understandings

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Basic axis of intervention

Images of childhood

Children's rights

Theories of learning (constructivism)

Obstacles for participation

Spaces for wide participation

Reggio Emilia – pedagogy of listening

Dialogical practices

Problem solving situations

Mosaic approach

Children as researchers

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Methodology

➡ Voluntary, anonymous, open-ended questionnaires prior and after the intervention

Approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the participating Universities

➡ MEANING: 4 questions a. what does children's participation in the educational process means for you and how does it become evident? B. I think that children participate in the educational process when…(complete the phrase with selected actions by children), C. when do you think children's participation is satisfactory? (criteria) d. Give an example of children's participation

➡ NECESSITY: 2 questions: Do you consider children's participation necessary? Why yes/no?

➡ STRATEGIES: 2 questions: How can a teacher support children's participation? What are the presuppositions that foster or hinder children's participation?

➡ Teacher educators' diaries (description, reasoning, suggestions)

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Participants

- 190 (150 2nd year and 40 3rd year) student teachers systematically attended the courses in the 3 Departments

- 90 completed the questionnaire prior to the intervention (47,3%)

- And 79 after the intervention (41,6%)

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Analysis

- Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

- Open coding (codes), axial coding (categories), thematic analysis (themes)

(themes are still in progress) both for responses PRIOR and AFTER the intervention

- All data were coded by two researchers (interrater reliability)

(agreement 85%-100%, mean: 94%, 100%achieved after discussion)

-Constant comparison between responses PRIOR and AFTER the intervention

Qualitative differences (i.e. students-teachers enriching or transforming their beliefs)

Quantitative analysis was also chosen to trace changes in meanings and understandings

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Tentative results: meaning of participation – qualitative changes

➡ Moving FROM participation as children's response to teachers' actions or mere expression of ideas and interests TO children's initiatives and active role in co-shaping the educational process either together with teacher or based on their own actions, thus moving FROM the central role of teacher to take into account children's needs and interests TO children affecting the educational process with their actions and proposals TO high levels of participation, children making decisions and putting them into practice

BEFORE

Participation becomes evident when children are eager to take part in everything that the teacher has decided to do during the daily program (Pst25)

..when the children express their interests and needs and the teacher takes them into account to design the educational process (Fst37)

AFTER

Participation means to undertake initiatives in the context of the educational process, to express their ideas freely and to ask questions in order to explore the new knowledge (Pst5)

...when the children co-shape the educational process, decide together for matters that concern them, undertake roles, then the teacher gives opportunities and supports their participation... (Fst13)

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Tentative results: meaning of participation – quantitative analysis

	SIMPLE RESPONSE OR CHILDREN EXPRESSING IDEAS /MAKING QUESTIONS –CENTRAL ROLE OF TEACHER	CHILDREN CO-SHAPING THE PROCESS, SHARING POWER WITH TEACHER, TEACHER-CHILDREN INTERACTIONS
BEFORE	72%	28%
AFTER	52%	48%

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Tentative results: necessity of participation – qualitative and quantitative analysis

➼ Enrichment of reasoning necessity of participation with more than one reasons

➼ Movement from necessity for learning (functional approach to participation)

(after: -5,8%)

to children's rights for participation and children's abilities for participation

(after: +7,35%)

➼ **BEFORE**

➼ *"children learn more easily and they develop abilities in this way (through their participation) (Fst2)*

➼ *"…pupils can not learn without their participation in the educational process…" (Tst5)*

➼ **AFTER**

➼ *"Because children have abilities. They are perceived as active agents who can shape their daily life. Through their participation, adults can see things from a different perspective, they can learn things that they didn't knew" (Tst13)*

➼ *"Children are going to become the future citizens of the society. They have rights, They can be involved in dialogue with adults on equal terms. They are not adult miniatures" (Fst7)*

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Tentative results: strategies of participation – qualitative and quantitative analysis

- Before emphasis on teachers' actions but without making clear how children will participate while after recognising children's potential for participation

- References to ECE teachers' personality (-3,3%) and teacher centred techniques such as "to explain and guide well pupils" (-3,2%) are reduced while teacher creating opportunities for children's participation such as supporting, encouraging, having respect to particularities, design action for co-decision (+6,2%) and ensure a positive climate of acceptance (+3,4%) are enhanced

- Enrichment of pre-suppositions for learning

- **BEFORE**

- *To find activities and games that combine both children's enjoyment and their learning (Pst6)*

- *The teacher should give correct guidance to the pupils… The lesson should be more lively and joyful so as to hold children's interest. Finally, children should take part in all activities without exception (Fst16).*

- **AFTER**

- *I learn about the children of my class, I acknowledge their interests, their experience and take them into account n the educational process, I create relationships with children based on dialogue and the values of democracy, I utilize the knowledge, interest and opinions of the children for problem solving, I trust children's abilities and offer spaces for their initiatives (Tst22)*

- *To form my questions according to children's answers (as an extension of their answers) and to give emphasis on what they mention. To decide together about our activities, to count their opinion and to consider their interests in shaping the activities (Pst5)*

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Conclusions - discussion

- Many student teachers hold beliefs about teaching and learning, the role of teacher and the role of children in ECE that hinder opportunities for their participation in decision making

- Beliefs about children's abilities, process of leaning and the teachers' role are important aspects of these beliefs

- Effects of intervention vary and are not homogeneous

- However, qualitative and quantitative results showed the potential of specially designed focused intervention to transform student teachers' beliefs

- In all 3 Departments changes were observed concerning student teachers' understandings of meaning/necessity/strategies for participation despite, the differences in context (different students, different teacher educators, different years of study)

- Transformations are cognitive-based and need further support to be put into practice

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Thank you for your attention

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