

Original Paper

Elementary School Students Approach the Pontian Greek as a Refugee within the Drawing Activity

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Abstract

Children tend to express themselves in detail through the design activity since they greatly lack linguistic and verbal competence. In the present study, we gathered and analyzed the drawings of elementary school students, aged 8-12, (total num = 110) to explore their views and thoughts for the Pontian Greeks as refugees. The drawings were collected during their visit to a multi-themed exhibition regarding the culture of the Black Sea and they were analyzed based on their content. The results show that children approach the Pontian Greek refugees with sensitivity and empathy, while gender and origin influence the presence of cultural elements and symbols that refer to the Pontian Greek Genocide and the exile that followed.

Keywords

refugee, design activity, education

1. Introduction

The design activity as a free means of expression and communication constitutes rich educational material with cognitive content (Fineberg, 1998) and is a remarkable way to explore children's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, knowledge and experiences (Gika, Athanasopoulou, & Damianaki, 2015). It is one of the many "languages" through which children can narrate stories that would otherwise remain unknown or fragmentary (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 1999). Children's drawings are said to be a "window" for their thoughts and feelings, mainly because they reflect an image of their mind (Thomas & Silk, 1990), giving them, at the same time, the opportunity of visualization (Brechet & Jolley, 2014). They give children the opportunity to think, organize and express issues that concern them. Children's depictions in their designs can have both conscious and unconscious content; they can reveal many aspects of themselves

while they are purely personal creations of great importance (Golomb, 2002).

Various surveys suggested that students' drawings could be used as great diagnostic tools to check students' understanding of an issue (Glynn & Duit, 1995; Dove, Everett, & Preece, 1999). For this reason, special attention should be paid to the way we evaluate and interpret drawings as it is one of the main ways of expressing children's concerns and even their inner perceptions (Rollins, 2005). According to Matthews (2003), children's drawings are often the result of a combination of different types of knowledge that are encoded in various systems. It is therefore important to observe how children compose, decompose and transform information and how they structure and verify mental representations (Karamolegkou, 2017). Through the design activity, children capture what they see in their own way of perception (Wright, 2001). According to Goudnow (1977), children's drawings is a means of communication, a message itself, a code, a way of getting in contact. Teachers, therefore, are asked to decode all this information in order to receive the message (Cox, 2005) and, then, use it properly in the educational activity. In the present study, children's drawings sought to be used as a tool for understanding and approaching their views and ideas for Pontian Greeks as refugees.

2. Method

2.1 Sample

This paper presents information collected by elementary school students who attended an educational program of a multi-themed exhibition titled "Pontus: We have the right to remember, we have the obligation to remember". The program aimed at children aged 8-12 and included a tour in various theme collections (maps, objects, sculptures, works of art, audiovisual material) and some experiential actions and follow-up discussions. After two weeks, students were asked to capture their thoughts about Pontian Greeks as refugees through the design activity. 110 out of 1200 students' works were randomly selected for the present study (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Gender	N	%	Accommodation area	N	%
Boys	46	41.8	No Pontian	25	22.7
Girls	64	58.2	Pontian	85	77.3
Total	110	100.0	Total	110	100.0
Class	N	%	Origin	N	%
C primary (8-9 years old)	14	12.7	Pontian	45	40.9
D primary (8-9 years old)	28	25.5	Asia Minor	8	7.3
E primary (10-11 years old)	24	21.8	No Pontian	57	51.8
ST primary (11-12 years old)	44	40.0	Total	110	100.0
Total	110	100.0			

2.2 Research Tool

Students' drawings were collected and analyzed according to Kress' and Leeuwen's (2010) model. It is about the visual semiotics which incorporates visual representation within a theoretical framework of social semiotics, emphasizing the creation of points. Point makers use the appropriate forms to express what they want, depending on the context in which a point is produced (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2010, p. 51). This tool is considered the most suitable one for collecting data as it allows the participation of all students, regardless of their verbal and graphic difficulties (Kapoulitsa & Toulou, 2007, pp. 152-153). It is considered a deliberate process of creating meaning as it helps children to represent their thoughts more directly (Vamvakidou, Kyridis & Bessas, 2005, p. 54; Trouli et al., 2015, pp.4-5).

2.3 Codification

Content analysis followed. According to Berelson (1971), content analysis is used to study the views and perceptions of an individual or a group of individuals. Using this type of analysis, we try to have an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the obvious content of communication, written or oral speech, with ultimate goal the right interpretation (De Sola Pool, 1959). Then, thematic analysis followed, with the aim to identify, analyze and report the various issues that arise through data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This tool was employed to combine quantitative and qualitative data, so as to detect and record specific forms of social interaction, historical and cultural elements and social ideologies (Bardin, 1977; Grawitz, 1981; Moscovici, 1970; Mucchieli, 1988; Veron, 1981).

3. Result

According to students' drawings, they expressed their inner thoughts that were closely related to the history of Greeks in Pontus using scenarios. Evidence and information from the historical period of the Pontian Greek Genocide and the exile of these people were more often observed, while the use of elements-symbols was also evident, emphasizing cultural, social and religious information (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Characteristics of Children's Drawings

Category	Subcategory	Data/Information
Cultural elements		Local costumes, musical instruments
Category	Genocide	Images from the Genocide history
	Immigration	Refugees, People who are forced to move (on foot, by train, by ship) and leave their homeland
	Cultural elements	Flags, laurel plant, olive trees
Special	Gender	Women, men

elements/Symbols	Refugee	Misery, hardships, forced/reluctant movement of people, uprooting
	Religion	The cross, the church, religious icons
	Social class	Contradictory images of people in power and people under submission
	Tribe	Through local costumes



	
<p>Boy, 11 years old. In his drawing, he depicts the forced and reluctant movement of Pontian Hellenism. The use of cultural elements (flag) is characteristic.</p>	<p>Girl, 9 years old. In her drawing, she depicts a mother with her child who are forced to leave their homeplace. Emotional data (tears) and cultural elements (black clothes, headscarves) are used.</p>

Figure 1. Student's Drawings Concerning Refugee


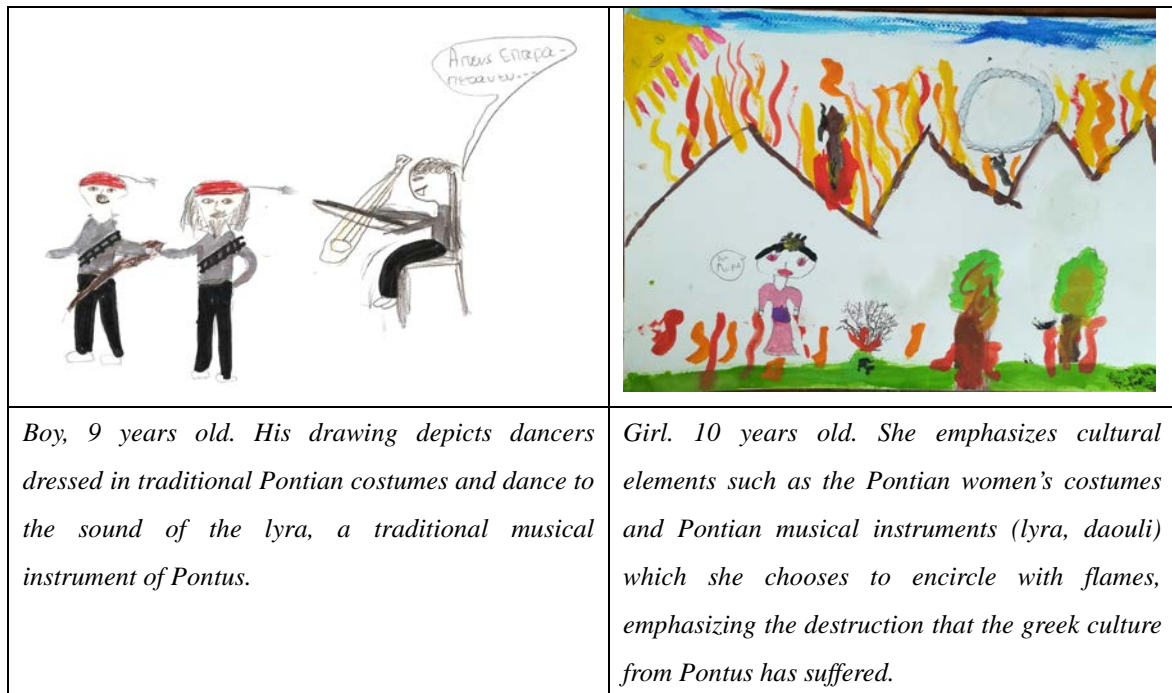
	<p>Girl, 12 years old. She divides her work into individual sections where in each of them she depicts moments and images from the history of the Genocide in combination with representative symbols (flags, a map, the cross, laurel wreaths).</p>
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Figure 2. Students' Drawings Referring to the Pontian Greek Genocide



Boy, 9 years old. His drawing depicts dancers dressed in traditional Pontian costumes and dance to the sound of the lyra, a traditional musical instrument of Pontus.

Girl, 10 years old. She emphasizes cultural elements such as the Pontian women's costumes and Pontian musical instruments (lyra, daouli) which she chooses to encircle with flames, emphasizing the destruction that the greek culture from Pontus has suffered.

Figure 3. Students' Drawings Referring to Cultural Features

Content analysis of children's drawings revealed three main categories, namely the existence of a scenario in children's drawings, the existence of elements-symbols and the presence of cultural elements. The existence of a scenario was overwhelming (N = 89.1%) and was analyzed in three sub-categories which concerned the reference to the genocide (N = 38.2%), the reference to refugee (N = 42.7%) and the reference to cultural elements (N = 19.1%). Rather important was also the existence of elements-symbols (N = 73.6%) which was analyzed in five subcategories, the elements-symbols a) of race (N = 80%), b) of gender (N = 56.4%), c) of refugee (N = 35.5%), d) of social class (N = 20%) and e) of religion (N = 10.9%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Characteristics of Children's Drawings

Scenario	N	%	OBJECTS-SYMBOLS	N	%
With scenario	98	89.1	With scenario	81	73.6
Without scenario	12	10.9	Without scenario	29	26.4
Total	110	100.0	Total	110	100.0
GENDER			RACE		
ELEMENTS/-SYMBOLS			ELEMENTS/SYMBOLS		
Present	62	56.4	Present	88	80.0
Absent	48	43.6	Absent	22	20.0
Total	110	100.0	Total	110	100.0

IMMIGRATION IMAGES-SYMBOLS			SOCIAL CLASS IMAGES-SYMBOLS		
	N	%		N	%
Present	39	35.5	Present	22	20.0
Absent	71	64.5	Absent	88	80.0
Total	110	100.0	Total	110	100.0
RELIGION OBJECTS-SYMBOLS			CULTURAL ELEMENTS		
	N	%		N	%
Present	12	10.9	Present	51	46.4
Absent	98	89.1	Absent	57	51.8
Total	110	100.0	Total	110	100.0
CATEGORY			TOTAL NUMBER OF ELEMENTS/SYMBOLS		
	N	%		N	%
Genocide	42	38.2	0	30	27.3
Cultural elements	21	19.1	1	34	30.9
Immigration	47	42.7	2	24	21.8
Total	110	100.0	3	16	14.5
			4	4	3.6
			5 +	2	1.8
			Total	110	100.0

Investigating the possible impact of different variables statistically, we observe significant differences in gender and origin in relation with the existence (sig = .023, sig = .033 p <.05), the number of data-symbols (sig = .011, p <.05), the gender symbols (sig = .002, p <.05) and the refugee symbols (sig = .001, p <.05) (Table 4).

Table 4. Statistically Significant Differences per Factor

Factor	GENDER	Df	F	Sig.
Category	between groups	1		
	within groups	108	11.450	.001
	Total	109		
Elements- Symbols	between groups	1		
	within groups	108	4.681	.033
	Total	109		
Numerous elements- Symbols	between groups	1		
	within groups	108	6.779	.011

	Total	109		
	between groups	1		
Gender Elements-Symbols	within groups	108	10.264	.002
	Total	109		
	between groups	1		
Immigration Elements-Symbols	within groups	108	12.331	.001
	Total	109		
Factor ORIGIN		Df	F	Sig.
	between groups	1		
Elements-Symbols	within groups	108	5.341	.023
	Total	109		

Analyzing correlations between factors and variables, we observe that gender influences the presence of elements-symbols in children's drawings. Most drawings contain one up to three elements-symbols (N = 67.2%), few contain more than three elements-symbols (N = 5.4%), while many do not contain any symbols at all (N = 27.3%). More girls use at least one element-symbol in their drawings (N = 46.4%) compared to boys (N = 26.3%), while boys do not seem to use symbolic elements (N = 15.5%) compared to girls (N = 11.8%) (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlations between Factors and Variables (Gender-number of Elements/Symbols)

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	GENDER		TOTAL
		BOYS	GIRLS	
	0	17	13	30
		15.5%	11.8%	27.3%
	1	18	16	34
		16.4%	14.5%	30.9%
	2	5	19	24
DIFFERENT STEREOTYPES		4.5%	29.7%	21.8%
	3	4	12	16
		3.6%	10.9%	14.5%
	4	1	3	4
		0.9%	2.7%	3.6%
	5+	1	1	2
		0.9%	0.9%	1.8%

TOTAL	46	64	110
	41.8%	58.2%	100.0%

More specifically, it seems that more girls than boys include elements-symbols in their drawings (N = 47.3%), concerning both gender (N = 40%) and refugee (N = 28.2%). On the other hand, boys tend to avoid including refugee symbols (34.5%) (Table 6).

Table 6. Correlations between Factors and Variables (Gender-type of Data/Symbols)

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	GENDER		TOTAL
		male	female	
Elements-Symbols	Present	29	52	81
		26,4%	47,3%	73,6%
	Absent	17	12	29
		15,5%	10,9%	26,4%
Gender Elements-Symbols	Present	18	44	62
		16,4%	40,0%	56,4%
	Absent	28	20	48
		25,5%	18,2%	43,6%
Immigration Elements-Symbols	Present	8	31	39
		7,3%	28,2%	35,5%
	Absent	38	33	71
		34,5%	30,0%	64,5%
Total		46	64	110
		41,8%	58,2%	100,0%

Analyzing the categories and subcategories of drawings' content, we observe that students refer mainly to the Genocide (N=38.2%) and the refugee of Greeks of the Black Sea (N=42.7%) and less to the cultural elements (N=19.1%). Boys include more information of the genocide in their drawings (N = 22.7%), compared to girls (N = 15.5%), who mainly focus on the refugee/immigration section (N = 31.8%) (Table 7).

Table 7. Correlations between Factors and Variables (Gender-category)

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	GENDER		TOTAL
		male	female	
Category	Genocide	25	17	42
		22,7%	15,5%	38,2%
	Immigration	12	35	47
		10,9%	31,8%	42,7%
	Cultural elements	9	12	21
		8,2%	10,9%	19,1%
Total		46	64	110
		41,8%	58,2%	100,0%

Finally, with regard to the “origin” factor, we observe that more elements-symbols are used by students of Pontian origin (N = 60.9%), while students of non-Pontian origin share between integration (N = 12.7%) and non-integration at all (N = 10%) concerning some elements-symbols in their drawings (table 8).

Table 8. Correlations between Factors and Variables (Origin-symbols/Elements)

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	ORIGIN		TOTAL
		Pontian	No Pontian	
Symbols/elements	Existence	67	14	81
		60.9%	12.7%	79.6%
	No existence	18	11	29
		16.4%	10.0%	16.4%
TOTAL		85	25	110
		77.3%	22.7%	100.0%

4. Discussion

From the above examples we clearly notice that the design activity maintains a language of communication for children, through which they easily share thoughts and ideas that they may not have expressed otherwise (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 1999; Konstantinidou et al., 2019). Images constitute a means of non-verbal communication, allowing us to interpret it in various, different ways (Kiridis, Vamvakidou, & Daskalaki, 2009).

Kirova (2006) suggests that indirect activities, such as drawings, are particularly useful for young children, as they help them express their thoughts on issues that they know little or they just have some

abstract perceptions about. Drawing is a tool through which children can visualize their mood, emotions and thoughts (Brechet & Jolley, 2014; Jolley, 2010). All art expressions are uniquely personal statements that carry both conscious and unconscious meanings (Golomb, 2002). For children, drawing is a personal, enjoyable and unique experience (Malchiodi, 1998) through which they express their thoughts, ideas and feelings (Brooks, 2005; Cox, 2005).

Through the present study, we saw children, aged 8-12 years old, expressing their thoughts about Greeks from Pontus as refugees using a variety of elements and symbols. Scenarios were important, as they helped children depict in paper what had influenced them the most. According to Fineberg (1998), the production of drawings by young children constitutes very rich material with cognitive content through which they can tell a story with images-symbols. That is why we are highly interested in drawings, since apart from being a system of depicting images, it is also a means of revealing information for the child itself.

A drawing by Hopperstand (2008) is always representative of the child that has created it because it reflects his interests and intentions, while at the same time, s/he can convey his own message in his personal, unique way. In the present study, it was observed that girls were more associated with drawings concerning the refugee part, expressing, at the same time, feelings of empathy, while, on the other hand, boys were more concerned about the Genocide connotations, therefore, creating images of action. Both sexes used iconic images in their efforts to convey their thoughts. These symbols were related both to cultural elements (flags, clothing, church, the cross, olive trees, etc.) and to historical events (exchange, population movement, etc.). The use of symbols to construct meanings that we usually want to convey or communicate is described by Van Oers (1997) and reflects children's efforts to understand the world around them (Papandreou, Siambani, & Douma, 2011).

It is noteworthy that children of Pontian origin used more symbols in their drawings, expressing this way, elements of their own culture. This emotional identification may be due to the fact that children's drawings have always been influenced by their socio-cultural environment and background. Similar findings were observed in relevant research in secondary school students, as well (Konstantinidou, Fotiadis, & Kyridis, 2019). According to previous studies, children tend to use the design activity quite instinctively in their need to observe the surroundings and feel at ease in a given environment (Kouvou, 2016). This result, as a cultural product, is greatly influenced by the environment in which they live and grow (Eco, 1989). It is an act of representing their way of thinking (Whight, 2010) as they capture what they see in their own way of perceiving. Through the images they draw, we have the opportunity to observe not only children's current living conditions but also how this reality is interpreted according to the cultural community standards they belong to (Vallier, 1998).

5. Conclusion

This paper highlighted the thoughts of elementary school students (aged 8-12) about Greeks from Pontus as refugees within the design activity framework. It became quite clear that students are aware of the historical issues of humanity in which ill-treatment and the forced movement of populations are projected. Students' sociocultural environment affects the way they think and, therefore, helps them enrich their drawings with emotions and signs of sensitivity towards the Pontian Greek refugees. The design activity is an important tool for detecting children's thoughts and ideas, enabling them to externalize important information that they might not otherwise be able to externalize. For this reason, it is proposed to employ it both as a research tool and in the educational process with the aim of approaching corresponding topics.

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