Exploring intercultural capital through Greek teachers' narratives

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the narratives of two Greek teachers working in public elementary schools. The research seeks to examine the teachers' life experiences in relation to the factors that constitute intercultural capital. Intercultural capital theory draws on Bourdieu's framework of capital and interprets the experiences of personal and professional developing during the various stages of life. This type of theorizing allows for teachers' narratives to be viewed as a source of professional development and agency. Narrators focus on the primary habitus built on family capital resources and the secondary professional habitus based on educators' practice. Our data suggests that intercultural capital can server as a resource for the educators' professional development and individual advancement. Teachers who can draw on a rich cultural heritage derived from a supportive family environment are more likely to accumulate highly valuable and widely transferable varieties of intercultural capital depending on their level of social integration.

KEYWORDS

Life narratives, educators, intercultural capital, habitus

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article se concentre sur les narrations de deux enseignants grecs travaillant dans des écoles primaires publiques. La recherche vise à examiner les expériences de vie des enseignants en relation avec les facteurs qui constituent le capital interculturel. La théorie du capital interculturel s'appuie sur le cadre du capital de Bourdieu et interprète les expériences de développement personnel et professionnel au cours des différentes étapes de la vie. Ce type de théorisation permet de considérer les narrations des enseignants comme une source de développement professionnel et d'agence. Les narrateurs se concentrent sur l'habitus primaire construit sur les ressources du capital familial et l'habitus professionnel secondaire basé sur la pratique des éducateurs. Nos données suggèrent que le capital interculturel peut servir de ressource pour le développement professionnel et l'avancement individuel des éducateurs. Les enseignants qui peuvent s'appuyer sur un riche patrimoine culturel issu d'un environnement familial favorable sont plus susceptibles d'accumuler des variétés de capital interculturel de grande valeur et largement transférables, en fonction de leur niveau d'intégration sociale.

MOTS-CLÉS

Narrations de vie, éducateurs, capital interculturel, habitus

INTRODUCTION

Modern teachers act as change agents in societies (Arvanitis, 2017). In light of globalization and its 21st century societal demands, effective teaching has become even more important whereas teachers must be prepared to deal with rapid change and innovation (Altan & Lane, 2018). Class size and resources are important, but it is the teachers who have the greatest impact on student development (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Teachers' dispositions are also important for many other aspects of students' learning experiences. Dispositions have been associated with teachers' behaviors and practices (Serdyukov & Ferguson, 2011), beliefs, knowledge, and characteristics, and have long-term implications for classroom practice (Hong, Greene, & Hartzell, 2011).

In a globally interconnected world, intercultural capital is an asset for teachers dealing with diverse cultural backgrounds. It paves the way for significant (inter)personal and social benefits as well as intercultural awareness (Pöllmann, 2016). Intercultural capital can serve as a framework for analyzing the relationship between educational background, cultural patterns, and cultural responsiveness (Pöllmann, 2013, 2016). Improved intercultural capital can lead to decisions that are more beneficial to the teacher's personal and professional development helping to avoid social exclusion and ethnocentric thinking. The research on (inter)cultural capital suggests that individuals possess different amounts of (inter)cultural capital and, thus, elements of family life, especially cultural resources, are invested as capital to help solve problems concerning social acceptance (Gargano, 2022). In addition, enhanced (inter)cultural capital leads teachers to form unbiased perceptions of children's academic ability and inclusion (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the lived experiences of two selected Greek teachers regarding the development of their intercultural capital that may alter their pedagogical and social responsiveness to diversity. The methodology employed here is narrative inquiry that allows the researcher to examine the realization of teachers' intercultural capital. A central research theme is the role of family and professional environment in the formation of teachers' intercultural capital.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Population mobility in the context of globalization has inevitably changed the cultural composition of students (Shim, 2014). At the same time, scholars suggest that due to the mix of familiar and foreign others reflexivity and global consciousness emerges and redefines identity (Arvanitis, 2017). In this way, people and communities develop multiple forms of identity and personal expression that create intercultural capital (Pöllmann, 2013). Teachers, as individuals and as professionals, are called upon to ensure a sense of continuity with previous generations, to strengthen cultural identity and to take responsibility for their communities (Arvanitis, 2016). This leads to the question of how Greek teachers develop the ability to communicate and coexist in a multi-layered and multicultural society with people with different worldviews and perceptions as well as other ways of thinking and living. In other words, what kind of capital do teachers need to have to respond to social change?

Following Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory on cultural capital (knowledge and experience that serve as assets) and social capital (networks of relationships and influence), intercultural capital includes intercultural experiences, skills, and competencies (Pöllmann, 2013). Intercultural capital implies the skills to interact successfully with other cultures. These skills form a prerequisite for intercultural dialogue and learning. Studies have shown that intercultural capital can explain differences and gaps between education, lifestyles, cultural

beliefs and social status (de Graaf, 1986; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996). Indeed, research has shown that intercultural capital influences individual political attitudes (DiMaggio, Evans & Bryson, 1996) and religious beliefs. More recent research has shown that intercultural capital can serve as a predictor of educational success (Gargano, 2022). Overall, intercultural capital can be realized through four interrelated factors: Individual Characteristics/Practice, Familial Capital Resources, Group Memberships and Fields of Struggle over (Symbolic) Power that constitute teachers' intercultural capital (Pöllmann, 2013, p. 3).

FIGURE 1
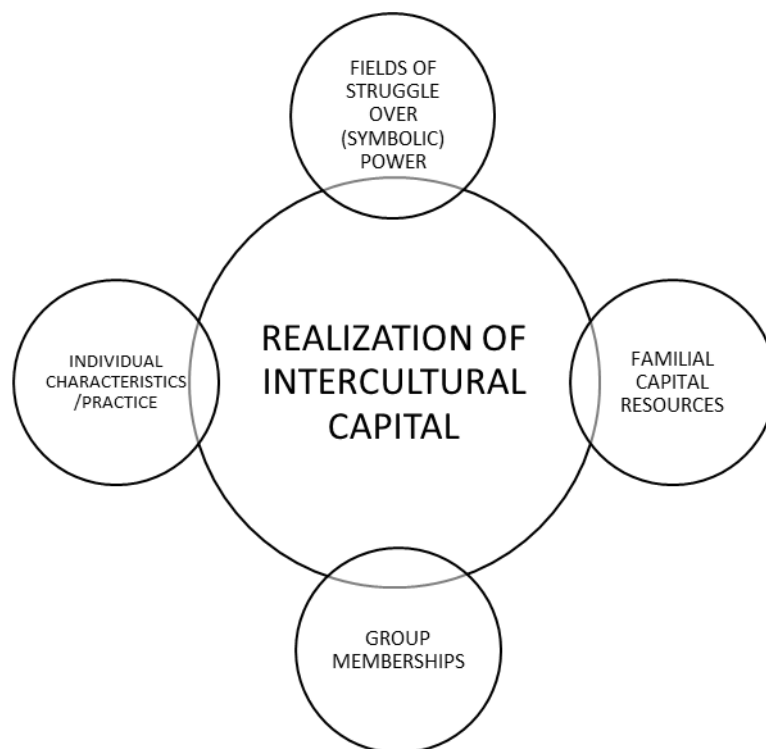
The realization of intercultural capital as the product of four interrelated factors (Pöllmann, 2013, p. 3)

More specifically, the first factor that affects intercultural capital is the characteristics of each individual, such as gender, age, educational background, and the skills that the individual may possess. In addition, individuals' participation in groups, clubs, and social networks can contribute to the development of skills, attitudes, and behaviors aimed at accepting diversity. According to research by American political scientist Robert Putnam (2000), participatory behavior in a community, trust in the authorities or in others, and interest in the public sphere can lead to the accumulation and development of (social) capital. Another factor concerns symbolic "power" or "force" that exists primarily within marginalized or hierarchically structured groups. In these groups, there are usually "hierarchies" in which members of the marginalized group are not accepted and are often discredited by members of the dominant group. Pöllmann (2013) cites Hall's (1976) research as an example, highlighting that black woman were discriminated against and socially excluded because they belonged to a marginalized group, despite all the skills they possessed at the time.

Finally, family is an important factor directly related to habitus. Family background or culture, morals, values and upbringing undoubtedly play a crucial role in the learning process of individuals and throughout their lives (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Individuals who can draw on a rich family cultural heritage that is widely convertible into economic, social, and

intercultural capital are more likely to accumulate highly valuable and widely transferable varieties of intercultural capital and to benefit from others who do not enjoy such privileges (Pöllmann, 2009). However, even in cases where individuals grow up in a supportive and affluent family environment, their intercultural capital may be low. This depends largely on the formed perception the individual has of ethnic, linguistic, racial, and religious diversity or the social/professional groups to which he/she may belong, and which have an ethnocentric orientation. Depending on the dynamics of the group, individuals may adopt ethnocentric or dominant positions or instead be led to marginalization. At this point, the other two factors (group memberships and fields of struggle over power) that shape intercultural capital and can reverse the inequality and lack of cooperation created by ethnocentrism are mentioned.

Furthermore, dispositions are generally individual tendencies to act in a certain way, although there are many ways to define them (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007, p. 361). Bourdieu has presented the concept of habitus to identify and understand these "tendencies to act" (1986). The concept of habitus derives from Aristotle's notion hexis, and according to Wacquant (2005)

> "is a mediating notion that revokes the common sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality' … the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu" (Wacquant, 2005, p. 316).

Moreover, Navarro (2006, p. 16) suggests that "habitus is especially developed through processes of socialization and determines a wide range of dispositions that shape individuals in a given society". He points out that habitus should not be viewed as a 'structure', "but a durable set of dispositions that are formed, stored, recorded and exert influence to mold forms of human behavior".

Habitus is acquired in family (primary habitus) and in education (secondary habitus). The first though is reinforced by school experience. For the individual, habitus is a system of acquired dispositions that function as categories of consciousness, evaluation, and organized agency. The main function of the habitus is to act as a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious (Martinjak, 2015). Overall, the secondary habitus concept focuses on social experiences (habits, praxis) that arise from the interaction between the individual, the primary habitus and the field (social, professional). Habitus can be perceived as a person's story that develops in interaction with significant others and the culture in which the individual has lived and lives (Martinjak, 2015). Society is produced and reproduced through the habitus. The habitus is deeply embedded in the system designed by previous generations and represents the foundations of culture, values, and norms (Shim, 2014). It also represents an active presence of early experiences that are embedded in the individual in the form of perceptual schemes, ways of thinking, and actions (Martinjak, 2015). Early experiences are the most important features for habitus, as they produce structures that are the basis for the recognition and evaluation of subsequent experiences (Bourdieu, 1986).

This means that for the individual teachers' habitus interrelates with all those people who are involved in the teaching process, formally and informally, not only during the period of study, but also much earlier, from their first personal experiences in school or in the classroom, when they were still students (Shim, 2014). Habitus is a memory that works in the long term, a memory written in body, language, and gestures. The memory that tells us what is right and how to do our work without questioning or checking (Martinjak, 2015). In that way, it is crucial to examine the role of past experiences and educational resources to the formulation of one's personality. In specific, whether and if the dispositions that someone

acquires during childhood within the family environment, and which "'implanted' a primary habitus in us" (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014, p. 125), have a more permanent impact. As researchers point out different social environments "also generate different systems of dispositions, in other words, different habitus". In addition, Costa, Burke & Murphy (2018, p. 10) suggest that "the interplay between subjectivity and reflexivity is, thus, an important aspect in the application of the Bourdieuian habitus".

In that way, it is important to understand the difference between the primary and secondary habitus. The primary habitus builds on family capital resources, family culture. Secondary professional habitus refers to individual characteristics, education, and professional identity. Thus, teacher habitus emerges in the case of the practice of self-teaching (Flynn, 2015). Since secondary habitus are 'transplanted' (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014), in the case of the teachers' development the question that arises is whether teachers' habitus is reinforced and confirmed by their primary habitus.

METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The purpose of this paper is to examine how teachers form their understandings of intercultural capital and which of the factors described above are evident in its construction. It is assumed that stories and practices of storytelling are closely related to human social formations (Bruner, 1991). Therefore, narrative analysis is applied to investigate whether increased intercultural capital implies high family involvement or well-developed professional status of teachers in Greece. Teachers' life stories reveal the factors that have influenced the construction and consolidation of their intercultural capital and shape their practice in a multicultural school environment. The research objectives focus on a) the factors that shape intercultural capital; b) the influence of "primary" family habitus as well as "secondary" professional habitus on teachers' intercultural capital.

In this paper, two teachers' narratives are presented. The narrative inquiry method was used to explore the influences of significant life experiences on the dispositions and teaching practices of one female and a male primary school teacher. Significant life experiences are those that "affect the individual personally and are subjectively evaluated by the individual" resulting in an "expansion of skills and abilities, self-awareness, or life perspective, or trigger a transformation that affects the whole person" (Merriam & Clark, 1993, p. 182). Even though there is not any specific answer to the minimum number of participants required in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018), researchers suggest that it depends on the qualitative research approach. In narrative inquiry the minimum number includes 1-2 cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, participants were selected based on the teaching experience in a public elementary school and the ability to narrate their experiences. In specific, researchers seek for well experienced teachers that had above 7 years professional experience in public schools. Also, other criteria for their selection were their primary and secondary habitus. It was important for the purposes of the research the family background and story of the discussants as well as their reflection capability upon their upbringing. Finally, their professional expertise, participation in networks and educational background that constitute their secondary habitus had a major role in their selection.

Narratives can function as a form that both represents and constitutes reality by redistributing real time, establishing norms of behavior, and negotiating contexts and meanings (Bruner, 1991, p. 1-21). In this way, stories give meaning to lived experiences through language that depends on cultural conventions and culturally contextualized life histories (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001). According to Riessman's view (2008, p. 116), a narrative as a story is "a bounded segment of conversation that is temporally ordered and

presents a sequence of events ... recapitulated in a personally and culturally coherent, plausible manner".

Narrative inquiry has been used to study teachers' identity construction, in specific the role of personal, cultural, historical, and social events (Court, Merav, & Ornan, 2009). By sharing their stories, teachers reflect on how emotions contributed to their professional growth (Day & Leitch, 2001), identify crucial events that may have affected their perspectives and seek reforming experiences that have determined their practice (Orland-Barak & Maskit, 2011). The aim of narrative research is not to find one common truth but to "sing up many truths/narratives" (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001, p. 112). So, Narrative researchers are not focused on generalizability of the findings from the study sample to the entire population (Myers, 2000).

Moreover, narratives are based on participants' memories, and as such they may be distorted or influenced. Recalling past experiences from autobiographical memory may involve affected and/or reconstructed versions of past experiences (McAdams, 2001), thus, narrative data is subjective and context specific. For this reason, Riessman (2008) suggests that criteria for reliability should be based on persuasiveness and coherence. It is the responsibility of the narrator to "convince the readers of the likelihood that the claim can serve as a basis for understanding of and action in the human realm" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 476). This research does not lead to generalizations about the intercultural capital of teachers (Powles, 2004, p. 20). On the contrary, the two narratives reveal the complexity of embodied life experiences and the importance of the secondary professional habitus. However, even though generalization has not been sought in this case, further triangulation of narrative data with other sources of inquiry could enhance its reliability.

Furthermore, this study adopted one of the most important data collection tools in narrative research: the unstructured interview. Instead of a series of prescribed questions, a more open-ended format was used to ask participants to recount significant life experiences that may have contributed to their primary and secondary habitus. Two in-depth interviews were conducted in June-July 2020. Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was recorded with participant's consent. The interviews were designed to allow participants to recall, reflect, infer, and review. The purpose of the narratives was to explore the participants' significant life experiences that represent their life stories based on autobiographical memories. Autobiographical memory is people's recollection of personal events that they experienced at a particular point in time (Brewer, 1986). Events that are of great significance evoke more vivid memories than events of little significance (Herlihy, Jobson, & Turner, 2012). On the other hand, unstructured interview questions help people recall significant memories more openly and with less influence or bias (Chawla, 2010).

Detailed notes were taken while a thematic analysis was conducted. The focus was on understanding the narrator's point of view. Major themes were identified, such as upbringing, family culture, education, group membership, power, individual characteristics. The themes were classified by dividing the narratives into sections, including descriptive, narrative, and explanatory texts (Rosenthal, 2004). Analytic induction (Janesick, 1998) was used to "identify regularities in the data that lead first to a description and then to an explanation of the regularity" (Krathwohl, 1993, p. 324).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers selected two teachers, one male and one female, who work in public elementary schools. The sample was purposeful, and participants were selected based on their educational background, considerable professional experience (meaning secondary habitus)

and primary habitus. One participant has worked for many years in Athens, the capital of Greece, and the other in a rural town in the Peloponnese. Interviews were conducted by telephone and Zoom due to covid19 restrictions. Participants were provided with an information document indicating the aim of the study and signed the informed consent form prior to their participation. Participants were also given an alias name to ensure their anonymity and policies were applied according to GDPR to ensure that there was no potential harm for the narrators. An environment of trust was established between the discussants and the researchers. Discussants were constantly informed for the purpose of the research, and they were able to voice their concerns or pull out at any moment. Below is a brief profiling of each participant based on their narratives.

> *Faidra*. Faidra age 32 comes from a family of five. She has been a primary teacher for ten years and works with children with special educational needs. Faidra was born in Albania of Greek parents and moved to Greece when she was six years old. She has a solid academic background with two Bachelor's degrees in Pedagogy and Pre-School Education, a Master's degree in Special Needs Education and is currently studying for a PhD. Due to her migration trauma and the social exclusion, she faced, her attitudes and beliefs in education are open and supportive towards students from different cultural backgrounds. Faidra described her parents as supportive, influenced by migration trauma and the obstacles of settling in Greece.

> *Themis*. Themis age 56 comes from a single-parent family, his parents divorced when he was eleven and he grew up in a traditional Greek society. Nowadays, he has his own family, parenting four children. He grew up in a suburb of Athens, graduated with a bachelor's degree in education, joined the army for mandatory service, and worked as a construction worker for a few years before becoming a teacher. He has been working in elementary schools in Athens for twenty-eight years. Themis is active in professional associations and social groups and holds an elected position in a teacher's union for more than twenty years. For the past three years he has been assistant principal at his school. He used to be an athlete on martial arts and have won two national championships.

The researchers deliberately chose to discuss in detail the life experiences related to the family environment, the educator's pedagogical practice, participation in social/professional groups, and personal characteristics. All these factors form the teacher's intercultural capital. The narrative data analysis showed that the significant life experiences of both participants could be divided into two categories: The primary habitus, which relates to the participant's upbringing, and the secondary professional habitus, which relates to the participant's professional development and personal attributes. The first category has to do with the family learning environment, especially the cultures and experiences in which the individual develops his or her personality as well as values and beliefs. The secondary professional habitus of these teachers refers to his or her pedagogical practice, the skills, and attitudes that an individual has acquired as a result of his or her education, teaching experience, participation in groups, and most importantly, the significant experiences that the individual has purposefully initiated in his or her adult life.

In the following sections the narratives of the participants are presented in relation to the intercultural capital factors.

i) Primary Habitus-Familial Capital Resources

Faidra's primary habitus is based on her migration experience and the difficulties of settling in Greece. She comes from a Greek family that lived in a town in Albania and decided to return to Greece. The trauma of settling in her native Greece was severe for young Faidra.

"I was born in Agioi Saranda, Albania, where I actually lived until I was 6 years old, attending an Albanian kindergarten, since it was not possible for me to go to a bilingual Greek-Albanian kindergarten at that time. My memories of this time are minimal to nonexistent. My memories are basically from my migration to Greece, which took place at the age of 6 and was directly related to my enrollment in elementary school in 1994. In the first grade I had to forget my Albanian language, my Albanian thoughts, my way of thinking and follow only Greek culture. It was necessary, in order to meet the requirements of the Greek school, to leave one language, forget it completely and go only with the Greek language".

Discussing her upbringing, she points out that her parents where supportive but influenced by the fear of living for years under an oppressive communist regime. Their upbringing revolved around rules of obedience, discipline, and non-reaction (passivity), which led to tendencies of introversion.

"My parents were always by my side, I cannot say that they were not with me... that they did not... that they did not stand by me, that they did not defend me, that they did not comfort me, but they also had something negative... They used to tell me 'Do what you have to do, work, study and... Do not worry, do not react, do not talk'. Do not talk about it, do not react and that's what I did for many years… they came from a very harsh communist regime, from a totalitarian regime where they were forced not to speak, not to express their opinion, not to react, not to express disagreement, so they tried to pass this attitude to me. And at the school I just endured, until I could breathe in the university".

Since she was the youngest, there was an age difference with her two sisters, her daily family life was dominated by her parents. When she describes her relationship with her parents, she emphasizes that her mother was the breadwinner and her father was strict and followed a patriarchal way of upbringing. Her parents were blue collar workers with no educational background and tried to help her get to university. They had to work extra hard since they had been living in a rural city of Peloponnese.

"I have two sisters who are much older than me… I tried to draw more strength from my mother, because my father was the classic paternal traditional figure, the strict one. He was not attached to his children but trying to provide the best for the household of the family. However, he was not delving into the problems of the child, the spiritual needs of the child. They guided me to success in education. Final Greek exams were the key to my success. I had to work hard and succeed".

Themis, on the other hand, grew up in a working-class neighborhood of Athens. His parents had no educational background, his father was a taxi driver and his mother worked as a cleaner. Their main goal was to ensure Themis' educational success so that he could be accepted at university.

"…my parents divorced when I was in sixth grade... it became clear to me that in six years I would have my main exams and so I had to prepare … I always had in the back of my mind that the main goal was to get into the university. Of course, we did not know what we were going to study, we were focused in being accepted to a university. That's what my parents had cultivated in me... I think it was with that in mind that I made the appropriate effort. Maybe I got a little lucky and everything worked out".

The divorce of his parents was a drastic life experience for Themis and shaped his childhood and youth. At that time, it was a kind of stigma for a married couple to divorce, and the child was sometimes excluded from society.

> "My parents divorced when I was 11 years old. At that time divorce sounded a little strange. There were very few families that were in such a process, but I believe that although my parents - as I know - did not continue their life together, I was close enough to them despite the divorce... uh... and I think that growing up... in a bizarre situation, perhaps matured me a little earlier than some of my peers".

As he points out, having a code of ethics, respect, and discipline was important to the development of his personal values. It is at this point that his need for role models arises.

> "From the family environment...okay, my parents, even though they did not continue their lives together, I want to say that they did not devalue each other… my mother did not speak negatively about her mother-in-law and father-in-law, and my father did not speak negatively about his mother-in-law on my mother's side. That is, I think that was important in the sense that there was no discrediting of people at that age. If you cultivate a discrediting on the side, from one family to another and stuff...a kid of that age has to believe somewhere. Not everyone/everything can be devalued".

Based on their narratives, it seems that familial capital has a crucial role in the formation of their intercultural capital. Scholars point out that family background and upbringing have a crucial influence in the course of the educational and personal formation of individuals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; Pöllmann, 2009). In these narratives, the trauma of immigration on the one hand and the collapse of the family home played an important role in the way of thinking and action of these two teachers. In addition, it seems that their strong guidance from their family pushed them to pursue an academic education in order to gain a new status.

ii) Fields of struggle over (symbolic) power

Comparing the primary habits of the two participants, it seems that the influence of the field is crucial. For this reason, the factor of fields of struggle over power is presented below.

Faidra's early childhood and adolescent years are surrounded by memories of struggling due to her migration from Albania to Greece. She struggled to adjust to the new reality since her parents decided to fully abandon their previous culture.

> "My parents contributed a lot to this, because they preferred not to speak Albanian at home for personal reasons, as they were forced to speak only Albanian in Albania due to the communist regime. So, when they came to their motherland Greece, they decided to renounce and throw overboard any Albanian element in order to keep only the Greek element and culture. So, I kind of forgot about the Albanian language very quickly".

Fields of struggle over power relate to experiences where members of the marginalized group are not accepted and often discredited by the dominant group. These kinds of memories branded Faidra's first years in the Greek school and were due to the behavior and actions of her first teacher.

> "At that time, at least in my case, corporal punishment was allowed. She [her first teacher] favored this behavior especially with children who were children of immigrants, children from lower economic backgrounds, Roma children, so this all cultivated the fact that I was too introverted, too shy, not raising my hand to answer questions in case I make a mistake. People were thinking 'what kind of culture you will bring us when you come from Albania".

Faidra had to deal with strict hierarchies and social exclusion at a young age. This situation continued throughout the years, but since she began her studies at the university, she was able to fight back and voice her opinion. At this point, the transformation from a child who did not share her opinion to a woman who can fight back against the symbolic power of the dominant group becomes clear.

This dynamic shift is evident at the following memory where Faidra visited the public service and administration office in the time framework of Holy week, celebrations prior to Orthodox Easter.

> ""Hm ... Did you come on Holy Wednesday? We have to deal with you too" (Administration officer). And I (Faidra) answer her very firmly, "Is this a working day?" and she says to me, "What do you mean? (Administration officer)"... "Is this a working day? (Faidra)" She says "Yes (Administration officer)" ... "Then please do your job! (Faidra)" So she backed off because she realized I might make an additional comment or complain to her boss, so she lowered her head and did her job. But if someone without the notation that he/she was an expatriate Greek had visited the office in that day, there wouldn't be an issue".

Due to her migration experience, Faidra's habitus is in a constant negotiation. Pöllmann (2021, p. 1) suggests that "due to its plural dispositional composition, habitus remains open to amplifications and modifications over time and space". Especially, a habitus that is "divided divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and with its ambivalence, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities" (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511 as cited in Pöllmann, 2021, p. 1). The way that Faidra perceived and managed her integration to the Greek society has to do with the personal characteristics, which are presented below. Themis on the other hand did not raise this issue in his narrative.

iii) Individual Characteristics/Practice- Secondary Professional Habitus

Faidra's worldview has been transformed since she was accepted at the university. She feels liberated, gains confidence, and discovers her creativity as she pursues her career as teacher. She has begun to feel like an equal member of society and to define her own identity. She no longer feels the need to defend herself for where she comes from.

> "At university I began to feel freer, to be able to communicate. Of course, it took me a while to communicate, I thought my migration background was a very bad thing… that they would reject me, that they would not keep me company, that they would not accept me, that I would accept criticism. So, I kind of started to understand that I am equal and that I am not behind my fellow students in any area. Since graduation, I have pursued a more creative career in terms of my studies. I feel much stronger, much stronger to communicate my background story...".

An important factor in her transformation was her professional identity, an identity that she had chosen so to counteract social exclusion. As she says, she became teacher because she thought she could care for children like her.

> "Why did I become a teacher?…because it was something I liked. I had reflected upon my own educational experiences, especially the hostility from my first teacher, and how I could help these children who come from other countries or come from other social strata and can accept these behaviors… these different behaviors".

She is a highly motivated person who always wants to develop herself. Faidra focuses on developing her professional skills and has the attitude that she wants to deepen her knowledge, to learn more in order to provide the best outcome for her students. Also, she has an attitude of curiosity, feeling the need to explore the educational background of her students.

> "... for about two years I actually worked in the primary education sector without furthering my studies ... without having thought of furthering my studies, so at some point all that was not enough for me, working five hours in the primary education sector and then having nothing else to do. So, I kind of I started looking for what else I could do to develop myself as a person emotionally, mentally, and professionally. What fascinated me was how the children come from kindergarten to primary school so well prepared, because now the children come very well prepared, very well organized, in a very good way, and so I started to look into pre-school education. And somehow, I found myself going through the qualifying exams to study in pre-school education department".

For Faidra, education is key to her emotional and personal development. Especially after she started teaching children with special educational needs, her empathy is evident in her educational practice. In a way, she projects her life experiences onto her students and, as a teacher, tries to understand their background and make them feel accepted and supported.

> "…I was hired as a special education teacher, in a field I had only a basic knowledge up until then. So, I decided to look more deeply into special education, and shifted my studies to post-graduate special education. I learned a lot. New horizons opened up for me. I read a lot, I studied a lot, I understood a lot of things I did not know before. I became very emotional. Until then I was very dynamic and had a defensive attitude because of what I had been through. However, dealing with vulnerable student groups I became very emotional. I no longer have a defensive attitude for these groups".

Her professional identity and practice were built around the notion of education. She finds herself in new environments and evaluates herself in them. Education was a very important factor in her primary habitus, a means to achieve her goals and be an accepted member of society. It appears that habitus, through its reproductive and transformative functions, directs young people from socio-culturally more or less privileged backgrounds in the development of educational-occupational options and choices in order to retain or alter their place in the social structure (Spiliopoulou, Koustourakis, & Asimaki, 2017). Her early childhood trauma is still present in her mind and therefore she has decided to direct her educational efforts in addressing it.

> "…I was the principal of a bilingual school. Then, I realized that my administrative skills were good, but my administrative knowledge was not sufficient. So, I decided to do additional studies, namely a master's degree in educational administration, which I also successfully completed ... and from that I had drawn many questions, I had searched within myself and discussed both my beliefs and ideas, many questions were resolved, and new ones emerged… my goal was to shed light on the problems of teaching Greek to the minority in Albania, and so I am still at the point today where I am preparing my doctoral thesis...".

When reflecting on her pedagogical practice and secondary habitus, she points out that it all goes back to her background and how her life experiences have shaped her attitudes and beliefs.

"My needs are reflected in the eyes of the children before me and in the eyes of the people before me. Everything I have been through up to a certain age has made me very resilient and made me struggle. My additional studies actually opened me up and I decided to help as much as I can through my work, especially children that face difficulties like the ones I did. Situations where they might feel bad about... their background or even their existence".

Themis, on the other had remembers his workplaces with great detail. He focuses more on finding a workplace and succeed in that environment. After he finished his mandatory service in the army, he worked as a builder for a couple of years and started working as a teacher later. Since he has been working for more than twenty-eight years, the profession of the educator has changed, and his experience has developed accordingly.

"When I finished school, I went straight to the army… after the army I worked for a while as a builder… later I started offering private lessons and at some point, through the Parents' Association I worked for 5 years in Maraslio as an assistant teacher…. In 1997 I was hired in the public sector. Initially in Menidi for a year and then I came to a two-seat experimental school in Skoufa and since 1999 I have been in the same school for 21 years".

His pedagogical practice is shaped to some extent by the school environment as he has taught in the same school for many years. When he reflects on why he became a teacher, he says that he became a teacher because he was influenced by a teacher he had at the secondary level.

"…he first made me think the identity of a teacher. And he made me think for the first time, with the methodology he had, his involvement with students... And I thought for the first time about the field of education...".

This teacher was something of a role model for him, he was a member to a professional association for teachers and Themis admired him for what he had to offer. When asked to reflect on his professional identity, Themis focused on his participation in professional networks and support of his fellow teachers. He evaluates the changes in education over the years and the burnout he and his colleagues may face. He has a practical human attitude, focusing through his experience on how to help his colleagues and deal with problems.

"You know in our profession; our function has become difficult in recent years and time and again colleagues who spend over 20 years in the field of education can... cannot serve with dignity. There is no more discipline that used to exist in schools. Things have changed throughout society, but also in the field of education. And many cannot move on at the end of their careers the way they would like to. And having been fortunate enough to work as an assistant principal for 3 years, I have tried to help colleagues who have had such problems to do their jobs as best I can".

The question of discipline is something that worries him, he points out the importance of the family environment.

"There are children and youngsters who, unfortunately, have not been taught the basic behaviors rules... from home. Respect and discipline. We try to earn this respect at school or teach them about it, but it is a slow process. It has many steps and is very tedious at the beginning...".

He relates educational success to family environment. His own family acted as a second school for his children as he and his wife are both teachers. Themis' secondary habitus was built on his professional identity as teacher. His pedagogical practice was shaped by the need

to support his colleagues and provide a safe environment for his students. In a sense, he used his professional status to navigate his daily life.

It seems that Themis secondary habitus is defined and formed by the influence of other individuals. Thus, it is important to understand his participation in larger groups in order to understand the construction of his intercultural capital.

iv) Group Memberships

Faidra is cautious in participating in social groups, although she is a member of a few professional associations and chooses to connect with people that have faced the same situations.

> "I have met many people. With some of them I have connected from the first day. With others I needed time. It is easier when you meet people that have been to your situation dealing with the same difficulties".

In contrast, Themis has a high degree of participation in groups from an early age. He used to be an athlete from his adolescence, playing in football teams and later he became Greek champion in martial arts twice. He learnt from a young age how to behave as part of a group and how to provide for the members of his teams. He also holds an elected position in a teaching union for more than twenty years. He points out that for him it is important to understand the solidarity and support that a teacher needs and through this kind of networks he can provide and assist.

> "First of all, we need to recognize the value of teachers and the difficulties of the profession. In other words, recognition of the value these people have over the course of their careers and the realization that we may find ourselves in a similar position at some point and need a hand to hold us up. For example, I try to be there for my less experienced colleagues that struggle to adjust their educational practice, remembering my first teaching years. Also, I assist colleagues that have been teaching for many years and face burn out. Supporting our colleagues is part of our identity as teachers, we evolve as a professional group".

For Themis participating in professional groups is another aspect of his professional identity incorporated in his educational practice. Researchers suggest that social capital's dimensions of networks affect the transfer of knowledge between network members (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). A finding that is demonstrated in Themi's personal and professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

A detailed narrative analysis of the life stories of two teachers suggests that intercultural capital may be shaped primarily by individual characteristics (e.g., experience, educational background, beliefs, attitudes, and skills), social integration, power, and family (family values, ethics, upbringing).

The intercultural capital of both teachers was mainly based on their secondary professional habitus, i.e. their individual level of education. They had furthered their education in order to be accepted at university and become teachers. Faidra, although much younger, had a stronger educational background due to her further education and she seemed to be aware of her intercultural capital. Themis, on the other hand, was able to use and enhace his intercultural capital through his participation in professional and athletic networks. As a long-time member of a teachers' union and a professional athlete in team and individual sports, he was able to understand group dynamics and develop a strong sense of social

inclusion and equality. In terms of Faidra's social integration, a key difference arose from unequal power relationships in the social and educational field. Because of her migration, she felt she was not accepted and often betrayed by members of the dominant group. Specifically, Faidra stated that she was treated differently because of her background, which affected her early communication skills and motivated her to develop her professional skills.

The important factor mentioned in both narratives is the role of family. Family background, morals, values and upbringing played a key role in the teachers' learning paths and life orientations. Both teachers grew up in a supportive and affluent family environment. Both struggled with difficulties that shaped their dispositions. The difference was that Faidra addressed these issues with her professional and personal development and Themis chose to build a strong network and be an active member of groups.

Overall, intercultural capital can server as an asset for the educators' professional and personal development. Teachers who can draw on a rich cultural heritage derived from a supportive family environment are more likely to accumulate highly valuable and widely transferable varieties of intercultural capital. A fundamental parameter, however, is social integration, which encompasses the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes one must have to navigate a modern multicultural context. The concept of intercultural capital explicitly implies intercultural communication skills, abilities, and sensitivities. Improved intercultural capital means that decisions are made with greater benefit for individual development and to prevent social exclusion.

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