The Socrates School

A Reform Proposal for a Greek-American School

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Executive Summary

Setting:

The Socrates school is a Greek-American school that provides education to students ranging academically from Pre-K to 8th grade. It is a small private school, located in the Bronx, with a student population of 145 children. As any other school in New York State, it follows the New York State Learning Standards, with the uniqueness that it provides its students with the opportunity to study the Greek language and become familiar with the Greek civilization (history and culture).

The Socrates school was founded by Greek immigrants. However, it has also opened its doors to recently arrived immigrant children from Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and other nations. Currently, 60% percent of the school’s student population is Greek-American, whereas students with non-Greek background constitute the remaining 40% percent.

Problems:

In Socrates school – a Greek-American school – the Greek culture is faced as a subculture. The lack of (a) curriculum for the instruction of the Greek language, history and civilization (b) Greek resources and (c) sufficient professional development for the teachers teaching the Greek studies could be considered as the main reasons causing this problematic situation. However, a closer look at the ways the school functions and supports its students would lead to another assumption: the deepest reason of the creation of two distinctive cultures in one school could be the lack of a common school culture that facilitates the communication and cooperation
between teachers as well as acknowledges students and the people in their immediate environment as bicultural beings.

**Theory of Action:**

Our theory of action is presented in the following figure:
1. Introductory Statement: Multicultural Education in a Bilingual School

Our school is confronted with a unique and complex situation: Despite the fact that it is a Greek-American, private school, a large percentage of its student population is of non-Greek origin. In fact, about 40% of the students come from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Consequently, we are challenged to respond to the demands that are placed by the personal histories of such a diverse population. We believe that the biggest challenge of all is to combine elements of multicultural and bilingual education, so that all of our students are offered an equitable educational opportunity.

Even though multicultural education was originally identified with bilingual education, it is obvious that they differ in both their philosophies and their goals. As stated by Ramsey and Williams (2003), multicultural education is a product of the Civil Rights Movement and aims at bringing together people from different groups. According to the definition of the National Association for Multicultural Education (2003), it is built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity; as a result it values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities and teachers reflect.

On the other hand, bilingual education derived from the needs of the increasing numbers of immigrants especially during the 1960s. Even though the meaning of the term seems unambiguous and self-evident, bilingual education might be an oversimplified label used for a range of different educational phenomena. Baker (1996) makes the distinction between “weak” and “strong” bilingual schooling patterns. The underlying aim of the former is the social and cultural assimilation of language minority children into the dominant, majority language; on the contrary,
‘strong bilingual education’ attempts to protect and develop the child’s native language alongside the development of the majority / dominant language.

Our school belongs to the category of ‘strong’ bilingual schooling patterns. More specifically, it could be said that it belongs to the “heritage language bilingual schools” (Baker, 1996) or the “ethnic community mother tongue schools” (Fishman, 1989), which are maintained by communities that have lost or are losing their native language. The school is supported by the Greek Government and the Greek Orthodox Church. This confirms that beyond its academic goals, it must be recognized to serve “an important identity-forming and identity-providing function” (Fishman, 1989, p. 454).

Going back to the crucial question of how such kind of bilingual school should respond to the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population, different solutions could be proposed:

• The school could change its student selection process and require that all of its students would be of Greek origin.
• The school could change its mission, so that multicultural education would pervade all the aspects of its organization and function.
• The school could differentiate its practices, in order to support the development of different ethnic identities at the same time.

Excluding non-Greek students from the student selection process is unrealistic, since the population of the community around the school is continually changing with more non-Greek families moving in the area. Also, due to political and religious reasons the original mission of the school can not be fundamentally altered. Consequently, we believe that the third solution would be the most appropriate both for maintaining the original mission of this parochial school and addressing the needs
of its specific student population. It is important to note that the fact that the school is part of the Archdiocesan school system makes the infusion of the program with Greek and Greek-oriented elements inevitable. In other words, despite the potentials for changing and enriching the instructional procedures and, thus, the educational experiences, the school should continue to offer a program of studies that “includes the teaching of the Modern Greek language, Greek history and culture as well as elements of the Greek Orthodox faith and worship” (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2004). We believe that this will support the Greek students develop their bicultural identity; at the same time, non-Greek students will be given the opportunity to better understand their own identities through the appreciation of the Greek culture and history.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the unique demands of the students the school serves should not allow for the Greek culture to overwhelm the whole school program and philosophical orientation. Hence, it is our goal to create a balance through more multicultural approaches. Stating that our mission is to support all of our students to realize and develop their bicultural identity is our way to oppose discrimination and honor diversity.

2. School Setting:

2. a. Historical Overview: Greek Immigration to the United States of America

During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, there was a mass migration of Greek population to the United States of America and, to a lesser extent, to other Anglo-Saxonic countries. In the mid 20th century, both a transatlantic Greek Diaspora to all Anglo-Saxonic countries and a huge Greek Diaspora in the countries of Western and Central Europe took place. There are estimates that the present Greek
Diaspora global communities number between three and a half million to seven millions.

Early Greek immigrants arrived to the United States at the end of nineteenth and beginning of twentieth centuries (1890-1915). The last Greek immigrants came to the United States after World War II, especially from the 1950s up to the mid 1970s. The first phase represents those immigrants who came to America prior to the Civil War, approximately in the 1860's. During this phase only a few Greeks immigrated to the United States. The next phase of immigration to the United States roughly commenced with the industrialization and post reconstruction period in American history. This includes the later part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As late as 1880, there were about five hundred Greek immigrants in the United States. By 1890, the number of Greek immigrants reached eighteen thousand. The numbers increased tenfold to approximately 167,000 in the first decade of the new century and approximately totaled half a million by 1940. The final phase of immigration refers to those immigrants, who came to United States after World War II.

According to an ancestry-related report released in 1998 by the U.S Bureau of Census, the population of individuals with Greek origin, who reside within the United States of America, is estimated to be 920,000. The majority of this population has been settled in New York and Chicago, Illinois.

2. b. Greek Schools in the United States of America

The first Greek schools in the United States were established at the beginning of the twentieth century by Greek immigrants, who wished to maintain the Greek language alive and transplant into their children’s minds and hearts the spiritual values of Greek civilization and Greek Orthodox heritage. At the beginning, the
curriculum employed by the Greek schools in the United States equally supported the development of both the Greek and American language. Consequently, the instruction of the different courses that were taught in the first Greek-American schools was conducted partially in both languages. However, the noticeable decrease of the Greek immigrational movement, along with the fact that the current student population of Greek-American schools includes Greek students of 2nd and 3rd generation has resulted in the domination of the American language. Currently, the Greek-American schools follow the same curriculum that all public American schools do, with the difference that they provide their students with courses on the Greek language, culture and religion.

According to the Department of Greek Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 23 Greek Orthodox parochial day-schools and more than 300 Greek afternoon schools are currently functioning in the United States. The enrollment in those schools is estimated to be approximately 35 thousand students. In addition, many parishes within the country offer evening Greek classes to adults. The schools include nurseries, pre-school centers, kindergarten, elementary, middle and junior high grades. Eleven out of the 23 Greek-American day-schools are located in the five boroughs of New York. The Socrates school, on which our reform proposal is focused, is one of the Greek-American schools located in the area of New York. In the next section, the school organization and culture is portrayed.

2. c. School Organization and Setting

The Socrates school is a Greek-American school that provides education to students ranging academically from Pre-K to 8th grade. It is a small private school, located in the Bronx, with a student population of 145 children and a faculty and staff
team of 18 individuals. As any other school in New York State, it follows the New York State Learning Standards, with the uniqueness that it provides its students with the opportunity to study the Greek language and become familiar with the Greek civilization (history, culture, Greek Orthodox Christian values).

The Socrates school was founded in 1912 by Greek immigrants who wished to prepare their children for assimilation into American society, yet preserve the Greek customs and traditions. Ninety-two years later, the school still serves the Bronx’s Greek community. However, it has also opened its doors to recently arrived immigrant children from Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and other nations.

In regards to the school organization, the school coexists with the Greek Orthodox Church of the Greek community in the Bronx. Due to the small size of the school, there is only one class per grade, whose average size is 15 students. The Socrates school closely collaborates with the Greek Church, which provides the community with church services honoring the Greek-Orthodox traditions and customs. The church is administrated by the Parish Council that is elected by the members of the Greek community, which resides within the area of the Bronx.

The Socrates school is financially supported by State funding, student tuition, and donations offered by the members of the Greek community. In case of a budget deficit, the Parish Council offers financial support to the school. The Socrates school employs 18 faculty and staff members, and is administrated by an executive committee of 4 individuals, who have served the school as educators for over 20 years. This committee includes the Principal, the Assistant Principal, the Dean of the students, and the Director of the Greek Studies. The above committee supervises the daily administration of the institute, various academics matters, as well as faculty
hiring. The Parish Council on the other hand administers the financial decisions related to building repairs, funds for resource provision, and employee’s salaries. Last, a Parent-Teacher organization (PTO) established by the parents of current students also plays a significant role in administrating various issues of the school, such as parent-teacher meetings focusing on academic topics, extra-curriculum activities and fund-raising events.

As mentioned earlier, the Socrates school follows the New York State curriculum and standards, since it is partially funded by the State, and evaluates the students’ learning based on their performance on New York State standardized-tests. An average of 80% percent of the student population meets or exceeds the minimum standards of the New York State standardized tests for E.L.A, Math, Science and Social Studies. The majority of the school graduates (8th graders) are admitted to highly reputed High schools. Moreover, the 8th grade students may take the Greek Regents Examination that assesses their proficiency in the Greek language, and if they succeed, they earn credit towards their high school foreign language requirement.

The student selection in the Socrates school is a process based on multiple criteria. The principal interviews the future students and takes into consideration test scores such as C.A.T taken by the prospective students, as well as candidates’ academic history. On average, every year, 25 new students are admitted to the school. Usually, the majority of the new student population is admitted to the Pre-K class, whereas a smaller number of new students enter the elementary and middle school grades.

As previously said, the executive committee of the school (Principal, Assistant Principal, Dean of students, Director of Greek Studies) makes decisions regarding faculty hiring. The principal, in cooperation with the assistant principal, select and
interview the prospective teachers. However, when hiring a Greek teacher, the
director of the Greek Studies is also involved in the hiring process, since the
prospective teacher’s mastery of teaching the Greek language and history to students
should be also evaluated.

At this point it should be clarified that this reform proposal is mainly focused
on the teaching and learning area, as well as assessment and community involvement.
We believe that the current school organization does not appear to negatively
influence the empowerment of the instruction of the Greek studies of the school.
Therefore, we offer no reform suggestions related to the school organization. In the
following paragraphs, specific problematic aspects of teaching, learning, assessment
and community areas will be addressed; reform actions will be suggested in following
sections of the proposal.

The study of the Greek language and culture constitutes an integral part of the
school’s curriculum. Greek is taught daily in every grade for one class period (45
minutes). In an attempt to better meet the individual abilities and skills of the students
who come from a variety of backgrounds, the students of each class are divided into
two groups, the Greek-speaking students and students for whom Greek is a foreign
language. In the 8th grade, students (Greek-American or non-Greek) may take the
Greek Regents examination and earn credit towards their high school foreign
language requirement.

Currently, 60% percent of the school’s student population is Greek-American,
whereas students with non-Greek background constitute the remaining 40% percent.
The majority of the school’s Greek-American population includes children of 2nd or
3rd generation, while many of these children come from half-Greek families (only one
of the two parents has Greek origin). Consequently, many of the Greek-American
students of the school have a poor ability of speaking Greek, while their knowledge about the Greek civilization is very limited. Additionally, there has been observed a very disappointing fact pointing the unwillingness of some parents to develop their children’ ability of speaking Greek, even though these parents appear to speak Greek fluently.

Moreover, the school appears to have an inadequate body of resources for the Greek studies. Most of the textbooks used do not respond to the language level of the current student population. These textbooks are sent by the Greek government to the Greek-American schools in the United States and Canada. However, the authors of the textbooks are not always familiar with the needs and the language level of the Greek-American students. Especially, in our school, because of the composition of the student population mentioned above, there is a big gap between the students’ language ability and that required by the books. The school also lacks of materials, such as a library providing Greek books to students, videos related to Greek life and history, tapes and CDs with Greek songs that could be used in the instruction as supplementary educational tools. Also, professional development is not adequately provided to the Greek teachers of the school. In general, the Greek Department needs to be financially supported more actively by the school, so that it could improve the quality of its human and non-human resources.

Furthermore, the teachers of the Greek studies do not have a well-designed curriculum, on which they would base their instruction. The existing curriculum for the Greek courses is very vague, and it seems to be inconsistent with the students’ knowledge of Greek language and civilization. Moreover, the instruction of the Greek studies in its current form does not allow connections between different civilizations our students represent. Consequently, the instruction of the Greek Studies is held in a
context that is not meaningful for all the students of the classroom and causes lack of interest for this subject area. In addition, the current curriculum seems to be disconnected with the curricula that other Greek-American schools employ. Finally, it seems that the lack of communication and collaboration between the Greek and the American program results in undervaluation of the Greek language and culture.

3. Theory of Action

Inventing ways to deal with these problems is of particular importance. Consequently, our mission – and our vision – is to create a common school culture that facilitates the communication and cooperation between teachers as well as acknowledges students and the people in their immediate environment as bicultural beings in a multicultural context. Celebrating the bicultural identity is our way to struggle for equity and diversity in our schools and our society.

Beliefs

Scaffolding all our students to discover their identity constitutes a main issue of the reform we propose. We believe that every individual should be acknowledged as a distinct personality, the features of which partially result from his participation in organized groups of people and the embracement of the cultural heritage of his primary or secondary community. The above statement is supported by Ramsey (1998), who argues that, in order to develop a strong identity, children need to feel deeply rooted to the groups or combinations of groups that are most important in their families’ lives, i.e. ethnic groups, extended families or religious organizations. Kelley (1997) adds on that, stating that an individual’s family ethnicity clearly establishes the core of his being. Moreover, the Vygotskian approach suggests that the development
of a human being is shaped through social interaction mainly occurring within the family environment.

Language is a fundamental element of one’s culture and heritage. In Socrates school, keeping the native languages of our students alive is of significant importance for maintaining their ethnic and cultural identity. More specifically, offering opportunities to maintain and develop the home language can promote self esteem, family cohesion, socio-cultural identity and openness to alternative views and ways of thinking (Jones-Diaz, 1999).

The preservation of the students’ native linguistic background along with the development of their abilities in English, which is the main language of instruction in the school, serves as a way to support their cognitive growth. Empirical studies over the past 30 or so years show a positive association between bilingualism (either simultaneous bilingualism or learning a second language in childhood) and students’ linguistic, cognitive or academic development (Cummins, 2000; Jones-Diaz, 1999). As Zhang (1999) argues “broadly speaking, being able to speak two languages means being able to think in two languages and, to some extent, to think in terms of two cultures. This certainly is a considerable advantage in the development of one’s intelligence and social knowledge”. Even though, these arguments may seem extreme, a review of research on cognitive functioning and bilingualism suggests that bilinguals have some cognitive advantages over monolinguals, especially in areas such as divergent/creative thinking, metalinguistic awareness, communicative sensitivity (Baker, 1996).

Since the instruction of Greek studies and especially of the Modern Greek language is a mandatory component of the curriculum, considering the type of the school, we believe that it is important to be modified in a way that supports all
children’s cultural development. More specifically, non-Greek students will be offered the opportunity to understand their own culture through the appreciation of the Greek civilization and language. We regard this as an important dimension of multicultural approaches, which values cultural pluralism and affirms that schools should be oriented toward the cultural enrichment of all children and youth (AACTE, 1973 – cited in Ramsey & Williams, 2003). Hence, we believe that the content of our curriculum should integrate elements from a variety of cultures represented by our students so that the education program would make cultural equality real and meaningful. This can only be achieved in the context of a productive school culture.

Goals

Based on the beliefs presented above, our reform proposal focuses on two general goals.

• **Enrichment of the Greek studies**

  The instruction of the Greek studies will be supported through the development of curriculum that corresponds to the needs of all students. The linguistic backgrounds of all students will be a starting point and a resource for the enrichment of the instruction.

• **Alteration of the school culture**

  Our aim is to develop a dynamic school culture that facilitates the collaboration of students and teachers and supports the acknowledgement of all students and the people in their immediate environment as bicultural beings.

The accomplishment of these goals will be steered by the need to **support all students to discover their bicultural identities and honor multiculturalism**. Even though ‘Socrates’ is a Greek-American school, our intention is to honor
multiculturalism and support all our students to realize their bicultural identities by providing knowledge and experiences about the history, cultures, and contributions of the diverse ethnic groups that our students represent.

Outcomes

Following, we list the outcomes that would determine whether or not our goals have been achieved:

➢ High academic achievement of all students will be maintained and further developed as this will be evident in their performance in a variety of tests.

➢ The students will be able to speak Greek or their native language as a form of communication in their everyday life. In addition, they are expected to be acquainted with the languages of their peers.

➢ A variety of instructional activities and resources will be utilized in order to meet the needs of all students and promote the goals of multicultural education.

➢ The program of professional development for all teachers will be enriched so that collaborative skills and trusting relationships will be enhanced.

➢ The school will provide a safe and supportive environment, in which students, families, teachers and administration will work cooperatively to succeed personal and general goals.

➢ Each student will be involved in activities that promote his/her communication with members of his/her ethnic community as a way to discover his/her bicultural identity.

➢ The Greek and all other communities from students’ cultural backgrounds will embrace the efforts of the school.

Below our key activities are analyzed in detail.
4. Teaching and Learning in a Community

As mentioned before, one of the problems our reform proposal should address is the fact that in Socrates school – a Greek-American school – the Greek culture is faced as a subculture. The lack of (a) curriculum for the instruction of the Greek language, history and civilization (b) Greek resources and (c) sufficient professional development for the teachers teaching the Greek studies could be considered as the main reasons causing this problematic situation. However, a closer look at the ways the school functions and supports its students would lead to another assumption: the deepest reason of the creation of two distinctive cultures in one school could be the lack of a common school culture that facilitates the communication and cooperation between teachers as well as acknowledges students and the people in their immediate environment as bicultural beings. Consequently, our suggestions focus on two aspects of the problem: the initial support of the Greek studies and the development of a productive school culture in ways that would best serve the development of bicultural identities in a multicultural context.

4. a. Support of the instruction of Greek Studies:

Supporting the instruction of the Greek Studies in ways that promote the mission of this reform would allow both the enrichment of the program, so as to be appropriate for Greek-American and non-Greek students, and the recognition of all teachers and all subject areas as equally important. Therefore, the primary concern of the school should be to identify the characteristics and needs of its student population, in an attempt to redefine its overarching goals and develop appropriate curriculum. More specifically, the ways, in which the students are supported to develop their
academic abilities as well as their sociocultural skills in all subject areas, should be made clear.

Collaborating with institutions of similar type might enhance the ability of the administration and staff to produce a meaningful program of study. Starting with the Greek-American schools located in New York, our teachers should exchange ideas regarding the ways in which these ‘ethnic community mother tongue schools’ (Fishman, 1989) should be evolved, so that both the needs of the students and the maintenance of the schools’ initial mission are taken into consideration. More specifically, teachers should cooperate with their colleagues in Greek – American schools around the United States, as well as representatives of the Greek Government and the Greek Orthodox Church, in order to develop a number of general curriculum guidelines. It is important that the guidelines address issues regarding the orientation of the Greek studies and the instruction of the Greek language, considering that even the majority of Greek-American students have only basic knowledge of the Modern Greek language.

Nevertheless, it is the role of the school to transform these general guidelines into specific skills and content that all of our students need to be taught. The parents of both Greek-American and non-Greek students would play a crucial role, since they should articulate their expectations regarding this part of the school’s program. Personal communication with Greek parents has revealed the need to continue offering a high-quality instruction, especially of the Modern Greek language, considering that they alone cannot support their bicultural identity of their children. Similarly, the expectations of non- Greek parents should infuse the program of the Greek studies. Focusing on the Modern Greek language instruction, we propose that the lessons are tailored to the ability levels of different students. The classroom should
be organized into ability level groups, so that all students receive differentiated instruction. Teachers should also deal with the lack or inappropriateness of resources, considering that the textbooks sent by the Greek Department of Education for the instruction of the Greek language place demands beyond the capacities of all students. Therefore, they would need to adjust the existing textbooks or even develop supporting instructional material, in manners which embrace the new philosophy of the instruction of the Modern Greek language.

In an effort to help all students to better realize their identities through the appreciation of each other’s culture, the instruction of the Greek language should include activities that promote the linguistic identities of the non-Greek students. For instance, non-Greek students would be deliberately invited to draw on their native language and identify commonalities and differences with Greek students. Sharing these in the classroom would facilitate all students make connections between elements and aspects of different languages of the world. Another example would be the organization of “National Languages Month”. During this month, the non-Greek students with the assistance of volunteering parents would be responsible to teach their teachers and classmates some basic communication skills in their native language. A concluding event during which students would be asked to communicate with each other in different languages would offer the opportunity to celebrate linguistic diversity in our school.

Finally, efforts should be made, so that the library of the school would be enriched with additional resources, both electronic and printed, that would support the new orientation of the Greek studies. Different kinds of books - Greek ones as well as in the languages of the non-Greek students – should be bought or donated by organizations and individuals who would wish to support the school: encyclopedias
and reference books could be used by students and teachers to expand their knowledge and enhance their understanding; literature books for different ability levels could be used as the central or additional reading material during language instruction. Electronic media would also be useful tools for the expansion of the instruction. For example, videotapes with documentaries of any kind, CDs with modern and traditional music or CD-ROMS about different aspects of life in Greece and the countries our students originate from would offer the opportunity to expand the instruction of the Greek language. It is also acknowledged that such resources would be utilized by teachers and students for answering questions, clarifying ideas and gaining deep understandings in the context of other subject areas, too.

The effectiveness of the Greek studies instruction relies on the abilities of the teachers to incorporate characteristics of multicultural approaches into their practices. Support that would be provided for these teachers is analyzed in following sections.

4. b. Developing a productive school culture:

As mentioned before, the lack of communication and cooperation between teachers does not allow for collegial support and disassembles the metaphor of the school as a community working toward the accomplishment of common ends. As a result, each teacher focuses on his/her own instruction with the danger of discontinuation of the curriculum and fragmentation of the learning experience the school offers to the students it serves. Changing the school culture could be accomplished through: 1) modifying the existing curriculum of the whole school, so that the bicultural identities of the students would be supported by more multicultural approaches, 2) providing a comprehensive professional development plan for all teachers of the school, and 3) building a community in and out of the school.
4. b. 1. Modification of Curriculum and Instruction:

It is a common assertion that the overall program of studies the school offers to its student population should be tailored around the need of individual students. Thus, the importance of setting **personalized curriculum goals** is emphasized. More specifically, we propose a curriculum resulting from the exchange of ideas and expectations between teachers and students – Greek-American and non-Greek – regarding (a) their overall academic performance and (b) the experiences that would best promote the realization of their bicultural identity through their whole learning experience. Such ‘contracts’ guarantee the engagement and intensify the efforts of students and teachers.

A number of changes are required, so that the above are accomplished. As in the case of the instruction of the Greek studies, efforts should be made, so that the content and the structure of each subject area promote the realization of the bicultural identity of the learners. As mentioned earlier, the emphasis on the Greek culture is inevitable; however the **enrichment of the program** with elements directly linked to the background cultures of non-Greek students would allow all students realize and respect each others’ identities. Hence, starting with the study of the Greek culture the program of specific subject areas should be modified, so that the connections between different civilizations our students represent are highlighted. Subject areas, such as Music, Visual Arts and Physical Education, offer unique opportunities for the instruction of traditional music and dances of different countries. Also, the evolution of the Greek art throughout the centuries should be studied in relation to the art in other cultures, so that all students would realize the interchange and interrelation of ideas across time and space. Yet, instruction should not be limited to the study of the past; on the contrary, various aspects of modern life in Greece and other countries as
well as the history of immigration in the United States should be approached through all subjects. Including such issues in the content of Social Studies and examining works of significant authors (Greek and non-Greek) in the Language Arts instruction would be examples of what is proposed.

The enrichment of the content of all subject areas with elements deriving directly from the cultural background of Greek- American and non-Greek students would develop a sense of a continuum across disciplines. This would be further supported through the replacement of the existing curriculum of the school, which is based on the instruction of distinct areas or subjects, by a multidisciplinary, project-based curriculum (Example of a unit is provided in Appendix A). The content of the curriculum would derive from and be organized around the essential questions that our students have as far as themes, issues and problems relevant to the appreciation of their and others’ bicultural identities. Greek-American students could focus on aspects of the Greek civilization, whereas non-Greek students would be asked to set their own questions regarding their ethnic group and culture. In either case, identifying differences and similarities between cultures would be crucial. Thus, cooperative learning through heterogeneous organizational structures is valued. In order to make more meaning of what they learn, all students would work on projects that integrate ideas from different subject areas. They would be encouraged to propose specific solutions or articulate their interpretation of the issues they deal with. As a result, all teachers would need to cooperate effectively and coordinate their efforts, so that each student’s program of study would be coherent.

The aforementioned curriculum design requires the modification of the daily and weekly schedule. More specifically, the schedule should be organized in such way that would allow the integration of specific subject areas if and when needed.
Table 1 shows a program where the teacher presents an integrated math, language arts, social studies and technology unit (based on the example in Appendix A). Most of the mornings, the Language Arts program is integrated with Math, Social Studies or Technology. In addition, during some afternoon blocks the team of the teachers involved in the interdisciplinary unit co-teaches different aspects of the unit.

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Table 1
Integrating Math, Language Arts, Social Studies and Technology

Taking advantage of the existing technology would be a useful tool towards the success of the proposed curriculum design and the enrichment of the instruction of various fields of study. Currently, the school’s computer lab is equipped with a number of computers, as well as access to the Internet. Students and teachers could
use this equipment for searching the web, so as to find supporting information for their projects. Moreover, technology would provide students with a meaningful way to practice their general and linguistic knowledge through interactive websites with word games, puzzles or content – specific games both in Greek and in the native languages of non-Greek students. Additional ways in which technology is utilized in the context of this reform are presented in following sections.

4. b. 2. Provision of a comprehensive professional development plan:

Developing a common school culture would require that teachers embrace the mission and goals of the reform proposal as well as engage in instructional forms like the ones mentioned in the previous section. As a result, a specific professional development plan is needed, so that all teachers’ abilities to teach and cooperate with each other are supported.

Teachers would initially be prompted to participate in professional development programs regarding the basic concepts and practices, on which the reform relies. More specifically, specific knowledge is needed regarding the notion of multicultural education, so that teachers realize its theoretical dimensions and implications on their teaching and the development of their students. They should also be provided with instructional guidelines that would best promote students’ realization of their bicultural identities through the appreciation of multiculturalism. The concept of multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary curriculum should also be a common element of the professional development program for all teachers. Thus, they would develop the abilities to integrate content and skills from different disciplines to approach a central problem or issue. Such training would make clear that the
cooperation between teachers across grades and subject areas is essential for the effectiveness of the school program.

In addition, teachers should be encouraged to participate in seminars and workshops focusing on their special interests and the subject areas they teach. For example, the teachers of the Greek studies should be given the opportunities to participate in professional development programs in Greece. Doing so, they will be directly informed of the current trends in the Greek Language Arts instruction; most importantly, they will be able to discuss their experiences about the educational realities of the Greek–American schools with colleagues and curriculum developers in Greece. It is important that all teachers are entitled to the same amount of high quality professional development, so that the disparities that some of the teachers currently experience would be eliminated.

This could also be accomplished if teachers receive training on and implement practices that best promote collaboration among them. In other words, teachers should know how they could “open their classroom doors”. Colleagues should cooperate with each other aiming at the optimization of their teaching. More specifically, experienced peers would serve as ‘coaches’, helping others prepare, implement and reflect on their lesson plans. Observations of classes and peer reviews might also provide feedback to teachers and help develop the sense of collegiality.

In addition, great attention should be paid on the ways technological applications are integrated into the lessons, since technology will be central in the implementation of our proposals. Professional development on how to design and use software and CD-ROMs according to the general and specific goals of their instruction could be provided. Developing websites, in which the above materials, as well as links to educational websites and specific lesson plans could be uploaded.
Through these websites the teachers could participate in discussion forums sharing ideas with teachers around the globe.

4. b. 3. Building a Community

Since our mission is to develop a school culture that honors the bicultural identity of all students in a multicultural context valuing all participants and means of instruction to the same extent, emphasis will be given in the development of productive communication and close relationships between the members of the school and of the community. We first examine the ways, in which the sense of a community develops within the school with the participation of students, teachers, parents and other members of the immediate environment. Then we investigate how the community outside the school can be reached.

**Building a community in the school:**

Building a community within the school requires the development of strong interpersonal relationships and the recognition of all members of the school and its immediate community as individuals with bicultural identity. Encouraging students, teachers and members of the administration to participate in clubs of different types would be a way to promote their communication beyond the classroom context. Such participation would allow them to get to know each other better and recognize everyone’s special interests and talents. It would also facilitate their acknowledgement as equal members of a group, who share common ideas and work towards common ends.

These common ends could be also reached through the definition of annual academic and sociocultural goals for the school. Lectures and meetings could be
organized to inform the parents of all students about the mission of Socrates school. Thus, both Greek and non-Greek parents would realize the efforts made by the school, so that no child is left aside, despite the difficulties set by such a school type. The parents would be also asked to propose ways in which they could actively be involved in the school life. For example, the parents and grandparents of the students could participate in classroom activities and act as tutors during the Greek language instruction (as in “National Languages month”). Moreover, all members of the surrounding community could serve as primary human resources, sharing with students their experiences both as members of specific ethnic groups and as immigrants. Artists and authors from Greece and other countries could also be invited to spend some time with students and teachers. Such involvement would increase students’ motivation and engagement towards getting to know their cultures, since classroom instruction would be expanded in meaningful ways.

In addition, the organization of extracurricular activities, in which all members of the school community are involved, would support the development of school culture, as well. Cultural events, such as plays, fairs and exhibitions would allow different people come together and present their cultural heritage. As mentioned in different sections of our proposal, it should be expected that greater emphasis would be given on the presentation and promotion of the Greek civilization and culture. However, non-Greek members of the community would be always given the time and the space to participate and present their cultures. For example, in a dance and song festival members of all different ethnic groups would be asked to prepare a short presentation.
Reaching the community outside the school:

The community outside the school consists of people, schools and organizations located both in the United States and within the countries that our students originate from. Communication between them and our school is vital for the effectiveness of our reform. Despite that the type of the school implies direct and closer communication with the Greek community in the United States and in Greece, efforts would be made so that individual students or group of students find the ways to reach their own communities.

It is possible that cultural events like the ones described in the previous section would be organized in association with other Greek – American schools in New York City, so as to promote the communication and cooperation between different Greek-American communities. Regular meetings between members of the administration, teachers, parents and student councils of these schools would contribute to the success of the events. A goal of such meetings would be to identify the origins of non-Greek students attending these schools, so that the communication between students of the same origin is facilitated. It is also possible that events are organized and held through the cooperation of our school with other ‘ethnic’ schools (if any exist in the area). This would strengthen the bonds between people of the same culture and would allow our students preserve their cultures and identities. Also, it would bring students’ parents closer to the school, since it would provide them with opportunities to reach their own backgrounds.

Schools and communities would communicate for other reasons and through different means, as well. For example, classes from schools in the United States and Greece could become “partners” and co-organize and co-implement classroom activities. The existing technology, especially Internet applications, would support
this effort. First, teachers of the partner-schools would communicate with each other via email or teleconferencing to arrange for shared activities. Teleconferencing would also support the existence of ‘virtual classrooms’, through which students from different places would work on common tasks. Finally, students of our school would be encouraged to become electronic pen-pals with students of other schools, so that closer relations would be developed. Even though it is expected that much of the communication will be held in English, students should be encouraged to communicate as much as possible in Greek. Hence, both Greek-American and non-Greek students would practice their skills in Greek in meaningful communicative contexts.

The above activity would offer Greek-American students the opportunity to realize their identities, whereas non-Greek students would be helped to appreciate their own ethnic backgrounds through an understanding of the Greek culture. However, we believe that this activity should be organized in a reverse way, too: non-Greek students should be supported to communicate with members of their ethnic group, so as to develop the bonding needed for the support of their identity, as well as to complete academic and other tasks. At the same time, Greek-American students should be prompted to communicate with people from the ethnic groups of their peers.

Direct communication between students and teachers from all around the United States and Greece is another way to support the bicultural identity of the Greek-American students. Camps and trips to Greece will be organized, so that all students would be given the opportunity to visit historical monuments and sites and, above all, experience the everyday life of the Greek people. At the same time, student exchange programs between the Greek-American schools and their partner-schools in
Greece would be developed, so that stronger bonds would be developed. Non-Greek students, who might wish to participate in such programs, will be supported to do so, since it would be a great way to familiarize with Greek civilization. Finally, scholarships and grants would be awarded to students (both Greek and non-Greek) that might choose to continue their studies in Greece.

5. Assessment

Determining the effectiveness of all the aspects of the reform that we propose would require ongoing assessment, in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and implement the appropriate changes. We intend to use a multidimensional assessment approach employing multiple sources, in order to gain information concerning the success of both the support of the Greek studies and the development of a productive school culture.

5. a. Assessment of Greek Studies

In regards to the assessment of our proposal, norm-referenced assessment will be utilized for detecting the success of the reformed Greek studies. First, students’ performance in the Greek Regents Examination will be used as a criterion for evaluating their proficiency in the Greek language. The above examination will be indicative mainly for Greek students’ learning, since the Regent exams will be optionally taken by the non-Greek students. Moreover, the Greek Proficiency Examination, which is an advanced language level exam, will be taken by Greek-American students, who posses advanced language skills. The Greek Proficiency Examination is prepared by professors and scholars in Greece, and sent to designated
educational organizations located within the United States. Students, who succeed to the examination, are allowed to attend institutions of higher education in Greece.

As mentioned earlier, the instruction of the Greek studies will be enriched with elements of the cultural backgrounds our students represent. Therefore, in our attempt to assess the enrichment of the Greek studies with language elements of other countries, and review the interconnections made between Greek and other languages spoken by our students, journals of students written in Greek classes will be evaluated. In addition, students would undertake the development of mini projects that would be used as a tool to assess various aspects of students’ learning concerning cultural and linguistic interconnections.

5. b. Assessment of school culture

As it has been already mentioned, one of the key aspects of our reform is the creation of a productive school culture in ways that would best serve the development of bicultural identities in a multicultural context. However, it is very difficult to assess the change of a school culture, since it will be reflected in various aspects of schooling, which cannot be measured by specific quantitative methods. Thus, multidimensional assessment tools will be employed to evaluate the change in our school culture.

First, our assessment will use individual portfolios. Sample of students’ work accomplished throughout the year, teachers’ observations and suggestions about their performance, as well as students’ journals will be included in the portfolios. Portfolios will also contain evidence of students’ performance in a variety of subject areas so that their overall academic achievement is assessed. In addition to the above, portfolios will reflect students’ interactivity with the various cultures that our student
population represents, as well as students’ appreciation and respect for other ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. More specifically, the students would be encouraged to compare aspects of their own culture to other cultures, and identify similarities and differences between them. Furthermore, the individual portfolios will definitely advance the self-assessment and self-reflection skills of students. According to Wardle (2003), portfolios offer a developmental picture of the whole child through incorporating information concerning the child’s emotional and social capacities, cognitive capacities and language. Moreover, the employment of portfolios will promote the communication between the school environment and students’ family. Specifically, family will be encouraged to check the student’s portfolio and provide teachers with feedback regarding the child’s learning development and progress.

Furthermore, student interviews and classroom observations will be a valuable tool for evaluating students’ interactions and cultural communication. Observation is recognized as an important tool for gaining information, generating ideas and drawing conclusions (Boehm & Weinberg, 1997). Therefore, classroom observations will be conducted by the educators in order to determine whether or not students have realized their bicultural identity as well as the identities of their peers. We expect that by realizing their bicultural identity, students will: a) identify the distinctive characteristic of their both cultures, b) feel confident about their bicultural identity, c) present and promote it.

Assessing teachers’ instructional methods is definitely of significant importance, since, according to Elmore (2003), it is impossible to improve student performance without eventually improving the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in classrooms and schools. Therefore, assessment of teachers’ instructional
methods will be carried out. Teachers will reflect on their own teaching approach as well as observe their colleagues teaching. Consequently, opportunities for offering feedback and exchanging ideas will be often presented. Through weekly meetings, discussions, and collaborative work, the teachers of the school will evaluate the methods utilized to achieve the proposed academic goals, and customize them every time according to students’ needs.

In addition, the principal of the school will frequently observe teachers’ instructional approaches and classroom interactivity. The observations will enable the principal to provide teachers with feedback regarding their instructional methods and the implementation of multicultural elements in their instruction. Consequently, these observations will determine whether the creation of a productive school culture has started taking place.

The quality of our school mainly lies in its culture, which can be primarily portrayed by what students experience in being part of it (Berger, 1996). Evaluating the quantity and quality of the extracurricular activities will also determine whether or not the school culture has been changed. Student, family and teacher interviews, meetings and conferences will be frequently carried out, in order for us to get feedback about the effectiveness of the new school status quo originating from our reform. In addition, these interviews will be used in order to determine whether the students and the families feel that their cultural identities are equally represented in the school environment.

However, it should be mentioned that changing the culture of a school is a time consuming process. Therefore, we expect no noticeable changes in the first phase of our reform’s implementation. Observable changes in school culture will be
apparent, as our reform actions have been completely assimilated by the school environment.

6. Financial Feasibility

As it has been already mentioned, our proposed reform focuses on two key aspects: a) the support of the Greek studies, and b) the creation of a productive school culture in ways that would best serve the development of bicultural identities in a multicultural context. In our attempt to support the Greek studies, and at the same time, change the school culture, we have proposed several modifications for both aspects. On one hand, the promotion of the Greek studies will be realized through the development of curriculum guidelines for the instruction of Greek language, and the provision of appropriate educational resources. On the other hand, the school culture will be transformed through the revision of the existing curriculum followed by the whole school, the provision of a comprehensive professional development plan for faculty, as well as the building of a community that organizes extracurricular activities and builds strong relationships between the community members.

As explained in previous paragraphs, to achieve the above modifications, continuous support from the school itself, the community, and other organizations is required. However, since this section discusses the financial feasibility of the reform, only modifications that require financial support will be analyzed.

The development of curricular guidelines for the Greek courses and the revision of the existing curriculum of the whole school are modifications that mainly depend on the communication and collaboration of the faculty members of the school environment without any additional financial demands. Therefore, we are only focusing on: a) the provision of educational resources, b) the organization of
extracurricular activities, and c) the provision of a professional development plan for all faculty members of the school.

In the following section, we suggest some actions that can financially support the provision of educational resources and organization of extracurricular activities.

Financial support for educational resources and extracurricular activities

The costs of educational resources and extracurricular activities should be mainly covered by tuition payments and the support of the Greek Orthodox Church. The financial needs not met could be addressed through fundraising campaigns targeting the immediate and distant community and events held within the school throughout the academic year.

Fundraising campaigns would seek donations from Greek and American organizations interested in maintaining the Greek language and culture. Publishing houses might donate books and instructional materials. Moreover, individuals will offer sponsorships, grants and scholarships. In this point, it should be mentioned that our targeted financial supporters are mainly of Greek origin due to the type of our school. However, donations from any other individuals and organizations are welcomed.

In addition, fundraising events will be held within the school. Such events would encourage student and family participation in the school life, and provide opportunities for interaction between faculty and students’ families outside the usual context of classroom. Such events can be:

• Book fairs
• Cultural Festivals and fairs
• Merchandise Sales
• Fashion shows
• Lotteries

In addition, the Greek Board of Education supports exchange programs for Greek students with students from European programs. Contacts with the Greek Board of Education would intent to establish similar programs between Greek students and students from the United States. It is important to note, that relevant arrangements would be held to promote exchange programs for students from various cultural backgrounds. The above would provide our students with the opportunity to interact with peers of the same culture, and expand their knowledge in a school environment that promotes the language, history, values and ideas that are important to them.

Financial support for professional development

Professional development for the faculty of the school is currently sponsored by the New York State. Teachers may choose to attend any graduate level courses of their interests in various universities within the New York area. However, the professional training has not been mandatory so far. As a result, many teachers are not aware of current instructional approaches. On the other hand, faculty members teaching Greek language and history participate in one-day seminars that are occasionally organized by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Since funding is available and the effectiveness of our reform significantly relies on the professional development of all teachers, it should be required from all faculty members to participate in programs of training relevant to the goals and practices of the school. Finally, we would further examine whether the Greek
Orthodox Archdiocese of America could fund and organize additional seminars and workshops.
References


Appendix
Student Population: 7th grade, 10 students,
    Greeks, Russians, Spanish

Problem: Prepare and organize a cultural poetic night for your school. Students of other grades, teachers and parents will be invited to attend the event. You should work in groups of peers of the same ethnic background and prepare a poem presentation. Some suggestions regarding the poem presentations include to: a) recite and analyze a poem, b) create a melody to accompany the recitation of a poem, c) reproduce a poem through art i.e., painting, drama. However, the above suggestions should not limit your creativity and imagination.

Essential Questions

1) Who is one of the most representative poets of your country? Select a poem of him to present and analyze.

2) How would your poetry presentation be most comprehensive and efficient?

3) How would you organize the whole event, i.e., money needed for buying snacks and refreshments?
Cross-Disciplinary Skills

- Use Standard English effectively.
- Ask and respond to questions to clarify their thoughts and ideas during group work and whole class presentations.
- Use pre-writing activities, such as note taking and brainstorming, to gather and organize information.
- Express their ideas clearly and respectfully in small group discussions.
- Understand and discuss different points of view the members of their groups express.

Math

- Estimate the people that would attend the event, tables and chairs needed for the guests,
- Estimate how many chairs would be at each table,
- Estimate the money needed for buying snacks and refreshments for the guests.

Social Studies

- Discuss the role of poetry during the poet’s time period and culture,
- Identify representative poets and select one to analyze,
- Discuss the social influence evident in the specific poet’s work,
- Discuss the poet’s influence on his culture and society
- Identify similarities and differences between poetry of different cultures.

Language Arts

- Analyze the language of the poet,
- Analyze the vocabulary of the poet’s work,
- Discuss the figurative speech of the poet, e.g., metaphors, ironies, personification,
- Analyze the poem selected for presentation,
  (Ideas, thoughts, feelings, poetic style of the poet)
- Identify different formats, structures and tools of poem presentations
- Define the key features of an efficient poem presentation.

Technology

- Use of technology for gathering information, using various research tools such as internet, books, textbooks, journals,
- Use of technology for designing and presenting the poem presentations.

Cultural Poetic