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**IMPLEMENTING THE THEORY OF EDUCATIONAL COMMONS IN
ALTERNATIVE PREVENTION APPROACHES FOR ADDICTION**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a research conducted within the SMOOTH project. The main objective was to apply the theory of educational commons in addiction prevention interventions in schools. The prevention interventions implemented in this research are rooted in the ‘philosophy’ of third-generation strategies, which aim to refigure the school community so that all stakeholders (teachers, parents, and students) can openly and collaboratively discuss their issues and plan actions to resolve them. This theoretical foundation aligns seamlessly with the theory of educational commons, which is a collective practice for managing the common good of

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education. All members of the school community equally participate in managing the learning process and the daily life of the school.

The paper will begin by providing the theoretical background of the research. It will then outline its implementation in two separate case studies, along with specific results derived from the data analysis conducted so far. Finally, the paper will address specific challenges encountered during the intervention and highlight areas that require further researchⁱ.

Keywords: educational commons, prevention of addiction, empowerment of the school community, democracy in school.

Introduction

The case studies 'Prevention of Addiction' (hereinafter POA) focus on a school-based addiction prevention intervention inspired by third generation interventions. They were utilized in two first-grade classes at a vocational high school in Northern Crete. They aimed to apply the philosophy and principles of educational commons through action research methodology in order to examine whether their implementation can contribute to key prevention objectives.

The first section of the article will briefly address the existence of differing views among scholars regarding the causes of addiction and how these views influence the field of prevention. Subsequently, the concept of educational commons will be briefly analyzed and connected to critical perspectives in the field of prevention.

The scientific community is divided on the causes of addiction

In the field of prevention, one will encounter various approaches due to the controversy that pervades the domain of addiction. This controversy revolves around the causes that lead to the widespread emergence of addiction in modern societies (Ζαφειρίδης 1998, 2001β).

The dominant views place significant emphasis on individual psychological or biological factors, with a substantial portion of scientists regarding addiction as a brain disease (Granfield & Reinarman 2014 · Satel & Lilienfeld 2022). However, over several decades, many eminent scientists in the field have conducted studies that critique the medical/brain disease model. They argue that the proliferation of addiction is directly linked to the broader social, political, cultural, and economic context. These perspectives attribute the expansion of addiction to factors such as lack of psychosocial integration (Alexander 2001,2008), globalization, the free market economy (Alexander 2001, 2008 · Ζαφειρίδης 1988, 2001^α), social and economic inequalities, a sense of powerlessness in life, the exploitation of the natural environment (Albee 1986), the breakdown of traditional support structures, heightened stress, intense competition, and the association of happiness with the accumulation of wealth and material possessions (Ζαφειρίδης 2001^α).

Dominant approaches of prevention interventions

In accordance with the principles of traditional psychology, which place significant emphasis on the interpretation and intervention at the individual or interpersonal level (Fox & Prilleltensky 1997), as well as in alignment with prevailing paradigms within the field of addiction, the majority of

prevention interventions tend to overlook the substantial influence of broader social and political dimensions. Notably, school-based prevention interventions primarily center their efforts on the enhancement of decision-making, problem-solving, and resilience skills, the fostering of better peer relationships, the cultivation of attitudes that discourage the initiation of substance use or abuse, the bolstering of self-esteem, and the promotion of academic objectives (EMCDDA 2019).

While these objectives undoubtedly hold importance in the context of prevention, they appear to encapsulate a rather restricted approach when one considers the comprehensive array of factors that bear upon the complex issue of addiction. This limitation is primarily attributed to the fact that the primary objective of these interventions is to effectuate change within individuals, focusing on the impartation of specific attitudes and beliefs, along with the acquisition of essential skills aimed at abstaining from substance use. Consequently, these interventions tend to engage in the management of the problem, rather than achieving a resolution (Ζαφειρίδης 1998 · Μπαϊρακτάρης 2007).

Third generation prevention interventions

A promising approach in the field of addiction prevention are third generation interventions, which exhibit an acknowledgment of the multifaceted social, cultural, and political factors that contribute to addiction (Wheller, 1990 · Ζαφειρίδης 2001b). The primary objective of these interventions is the revitalization of the school community, with a particular emphasis on the cultivation of social bonds. Third generation prevention interventions treat the school as a community in which its members possess the ability to identify and articulate their needs and concerns. Through open dialogue and collaborative efforts, students, parents and teachers can collectively endeavor to address and resolve the issues that pertain to them. The content and nature of these activities are not predetermined by the prevention practitioner(s); instead, they are shaped and derived from the interests and aspirations of the participants. As a result, these interventions are inherently adaptable to the specific requirements of the particular school community under consideration. Consequently, democratic and participatory processes form the foundational principles of these interventions, and the role of the practitioner is to establish processes that actively involve all segments of the school community in collaborative planning and implementing of collective actions. (Ζαφειρίδης 2001b · Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2019 · Herr & Anderson, 2005 · Wheller, 1990 · Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

Educational commons

In recent years, there has been a growing debate surrounding the concept of educational commons. Educational commons represent a collective practice for managing the common good of education, connecting members of the educational community equally with each other. In contrast to individualization, which lies at the core of neoliberal logic, the creation of social structures that meet the requirements of the community and give people a feeling of belonging is made possible by commons. (Πεχτελίδης 2020).

By highlighting peer governance in the educational process and in day-to-day school operations, the educational commons seek to give stakeholders a significant role. Students are not the only ones that rely on their teachers to explain reality to them throughout the educational process. Rather, the teacher inspires and facilitates the students to investigate, participate, and implement the required processes. Everyone in the educational community is responsible for managing governance and decision-making procedures in an equal manner (Πεχτελίδης 2020).

The principles underlying the concept of educational commons are relevant to third generation prevention interventions. Building upon the argument presented by Potts that school-based prevention interventions should integrate the principles of emancipatory educational approaches (Potts 2003), it is intriguing to consider the application of educational commons principles in third-generation interventions. By bridging these two fields, it becomes possible to explore the potential for addressing the social and political causes of addiction and enabling students to become active agents of change for the issues that concern their communities (Potts2003).

Research aims and specific objectives

The aim of this research was to examine the impact of implementing educational commons in addiction prevention in the field of public formal school education. Additionally, it was crucial to explore if social inequalities could be addressed within the school environment by implementing the logic of the educational commons. More specifically, the research objectives were to assess the feasibility of applying the commons in public schools, to determine whether students can act as commoners, and to discuss the challenges that arise during the implementation of such interventions.

Methodology

In this research, the principles and philosophy of action research were employed, as it is a participatory and democratic methodological process

that actively involves the participants. Action research aims to discover practical solutions to issues of concern to the participants and to foster their personal and community development (Reason & Bradbury 2001).

Additionally, the researcher attempted to implement the peer governance principle, which is a basic idea and approach in educational commons and entails group decision-making and equitable management of community issues (Πεχτελίδης 2020).

Participants

The research was conducted in different time periods and in two separate classes of the first grade. Both implementations were carried out by a single researcher, Evgenia Adamopoulou, under the supervision of Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Yannis Pechtelidis.

The first case study took place from January 2022 to May 2022. The teachers responsible for this course were a computer science teacher and a physical education teacher. The computer science teacher was involuntarily reassigned one month after the study's commencement and was replaced by a substitute computer science teacher. During the implementation, participated 19 student participants, including 8 students with migrant backgrounds. The age range of the participants was 15 to 16 years old. The activities implemented included a football tournament, a ping pong tournament, a volleyball tournament, the establishment of a film club, a chess game, and playing with the 'games of the world'. The researcher conducted a total of 17 sessions inside and outside the classroom.

The second case study was carried out from October 2022 to May 2023. The course instructors were a computer science professor and an associate professor of agricultural technology. Twenty-four students participated, with 7 of them diagnosed with learning disabilities or other psychological or psychosocial issues. The age range of the participants was 15 to 16 years old. Two projects were conducted throughout the academic year: the first was titled 'Health and Wellbeing', involving sports activities at the city stadium, and the second was 'Monuments of my city', which entailed short guided tours of historical monuments in the city by the studentsⁱⁱ. There was a total of 22 sessions, both inside and outside the classroom.

Data collection

The data collection methods used in this study include the following:

a) Researcher's diary notes, which contained a record of the researcher's experiences and thoughts throughout the research process.

- b) Field notes with observations, thoughts, feelings and reflections, which were collected during the fieldwork and served as a record of the researcher's observations and experiences.
- c) Minutes of participants-researcher meetings, which record the interactions and discussions that took place between the researcher and the participants during the research process.
- d) Minutes of researcher - research team meetings, which record the reflections between the researcher and the other researchers of the SMOOTH team as well as the meetings with the supervisors.
- e) 4 focus groups conducted with groups of students during the second case study of the intervention.

Procedure

The case studies were conducted within the context of a school course to explore the feasibility of implementing educational commons in public schools. The course, "Creative Activities Zone", taught in Vocational High Schools, was deemed suitable for this purpose. According to the Ministry of Education's curriculum, the course is designed to actively engage students, promote teamwork, and encourage experiential learning. Additionally, the official instructions for this course emphasize the need for collaboration between teachers and students in selecting lesson topics.

The primary idea behind the case study was for both students and teachers to collaboratively and democratically choose the lesson topic, with a focus on the children's needs and interests. Subsequently, they would work together on lesson design and implementation. This approach aimed to empower children to take ownership of their learning experiences. A joint evaluation would then be conducted with all participants to assess the impact of this approach on key prevention objectives, such as strengthening relationships among participants, fostering positive learning experiences, developing individual and social competences, and improving the classroom climate.

Specifically, in the first case study, the researcher joined the course midway through the school year, and the topic, "diversity", had already been selected at the beginning of the school year. However, due to students' indifference and non-participation, the researcher and teachers decided to implement some actions. To solicit the students' input, the researcher showed them photos of previous interventions, as they had not responded when asked about their interests. Six actions were chosen, but there was a lack of consistency in planning and implementing these actions between the adults and children. Collaborative meetings between the

researcher, students, and teachers were also minimal, missing a crucial step in action research.

Following the principles of action research and its cyclical nature (Herr & Anderson 2005), and after evaluating the implementation of the first case study, the researcher attempted some changes in the second case study. First, the aim was to involve children actively in shaping the lesson content, as she had observed that the topic 'diversity' was solely decided by the teachers.

Second, the researcher proposed holding regular class assemblies to reinforce the concept of peer governance. The class would convene a monthly assembly, and more frequent meetings in case of emergencies, to provide a space for open discussion and collective feedback on the actions being implemented. The assembly also served as a platform to co-create rules, address everyday tensions, and plan future actions. Students were assigned roles in the assembly from the outset.

Third, the researcher placed great emphasis on building relationships with the children characterized by interest, warmth, active listening, and honesty. This approach aimed to understand the students, gain familiarity with their interests and perspectives through discussions, motivate active participation, build trust, and foster open communication to improve the classroom climate.

Fourth, the researcher stressed the importance of establishing a strong partnership with the teachers. Despite her repeated suggestion for regular group meetings focused on lesson preparation and reflective practices, this was not put into practice. Simultaneously, the researcher aimed to commit and be consistent with what was jointly agreed upon with the children and teachers to establish a sense of continuity.

Finally, the researcher conducted focus groups with as many children as were willing to participate, aiming to explore their views and feelings about the existing school, as well as their ideas for an ideal school.

Findings

Some initial findings will be analyzed along two axes: the role of teachers during the intervention and the children's ability to act as commoners.

Teachers' role

First and foremost, it appears that teachers do not consistently embody the role of the teacher as envisioned by the theory of educational commons. This is one of the main findings. Although the teachers expressed their

willingness to operate in a democratic manner, they often behaved in ways contrary to the values of the commons. These behaviors included shouting, imposing punishments, making threats, or removing children from the class when students did not follow instructions or broke the rules. Enforcing children's compliance with rules was often seen as authoritarian. These frequent behaviors led to tension, anger, and frustration between the children and teachers. A conventional teaching approach was also observed, with teachers telling students that those who followed a certain rule would receive a higher grade or discussing many topics in a didactic tone.

In informal discussions with the researcher, the children pointed out the contradiction between the teachers' words and actions, the lack of fairness in the rules, and the often disproportionate punishment or impunity in relation to the students' actions.

Children as Commoners

In most cases, the children did not behave as commoners. Initially, when asked about their interests at the beginning of meetings, they did not offer any suggestions.

In the first case study, the topics they worked on were based on suggestions made by the researcher. The children actively participated in implementing these topics, and they were happy to take part as the topics were close to their interests. However, their involvement in the design and evaluation of the topics was limited.

In the second case study, the lesson theme was derived from the teachers' suggestions. While the children voted on the topic they would work on, they often expressed disinterest in actively participating during meetings. This disinterest was displayed by not paying attention, openly stating that they were bored, or complaining. Additionally, they frequently voiced their lack of interest in the lessons and school in general.

On the other hand, there were moments when the children seemed empowered when asked about their opinions or interests. Some children freely expressed their opinions, suggestions, and criticisms in the intervention evaluation processes. However, in most meetings, the children did not express themselves freely, especially in the presence of teachers. Nevertheless, as the number of meetings increased, some children began to express themselves more freely in personal discussions with the researcher and in some focus groups with her.

It is essential to highlight the children's recurring complaint that their views are not heard, as they mentioned this concern several times during various discussions.

Discussion

Although the Creative Activities Zone course had the potential for experimentation in its delivery, the reality did not reflect this possibility. In the specific case studies, the researcher cannot assert the successful implementation of educational commons' philosophy and methodologies.

Consequently, it is not feasible to examine how the incorporation of educational commons would impact the prevention interventions. This is because there was no conducive environment for students to express their interests through dialogue and actively participate in the planning and implementing of collective actions. As a result, we cannot assess whether or how such an intervention would influence the relationships between participants, foster their empowerment, enhance classroom climate improvement and contribute to inclusion for individuals facing inequalities.

One major factor was that the teachers were unable to consistently adhere to the values of educational commons. To make educational commons feasible, teachers need to consistently uphold democratic principles and practices, establish an environment that fosters genuine student participation, and develop caring, empathetic, and respectful relationships with them.

Another reason for the failure to implement educational commons is that the students did not behave as commoners either. Their behavior often lacked consistency, and they exhibited limited interest and willingness to actively engage in school activities. It is imperative to delve deeper into the root causes behind the inability of both educators and students to embrace the concept of commons within the educational setting. The factors that may contribute to the deficiency in participation, as well as the impediments to achieving a democratic function within this framework, are multifaceted. Among these factors could be the preexisting perceptions and attitudes held by both teachers and students regarding behavior within the educational environment. Furthermore, the depreciation of vocational high schools in the Greek context, as well as poorly maintained facilities and a wider lack of organization in Greek schools in general may play an important role. Finally, the pervasive prevalence of individualism and competition within modern society may also significantly contribute to the observed hurdles in implementing educational commons.

To finish with, it is essential to briefly address that the researcher gathered valuable insights through focus groups with children regarding the characteristics of a comfortable learning environment. Most students provided responses that fell into the same categories. They discussed specific issues such as the outdated content of courses that needed to be

adapted to children's needs, the intensive curriculum, teachers' behavior lacking respect and willingness to listen to children, and inadequate, poorly maintained, and old infrastructure. Importantly, many of them did not see the point in discussing these issues as they did not believe them achievable. Similarly, when it came to democracy and co-decision in school, they shared the opinion that these were merely ideas that could not be realized.

In conclusion, since children have lost hope for a more democratic school, we must take action. It is essential to emphasize the necessity for additional research and the implementation of actions aimed at democratizing Greek public schools. This will help include the voices of students and ensure that schools genuinely serve their needs.

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ⁱⁱ The "Games of the World" are handmade games from various countries and historical periods, crafted primarily from reusable materials, mainly wood, and other recyclable resources. The collection of information and research on these toys has been conducted by the French organization "Kaloumba."