EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE ROMA CHILDREN? LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Abstract:
The aim in this paper is to examine the school achievement of Roma children drawing from the outcomes of a small case study conducted in a lower secondary school in the Western Suburbs of Athens. Reducing educational inequalities is a key issue in education policy, aiming at promoting equality of opportunity for all children. Roma children are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups in Western societies. In Greece, Roma people experienced an extreme social and educational exclusion of Roma people until the late 90s. During the last two decades, large intervention programs took place, aiming at including Roma children in education. The outcomes of these intervention progammes can be assessed as positive, as they bring and to a large extent retained Roma children in school for the first time, despite the huge difficulties and the resistance of the education communities and the local societies. However, it is argued that these achievements must be seen as only a first step towards enhancing equality of opportunity. The outcomes of this case study show that even in an area in which the most privileged Roma community is located, Roma children still underachieve compared to the non-Roma children.

Keywords: Roma children, equality of opportunity, school achievement, intercultural education

1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, a political and pedagogical discourse for the integration of the "others" in the Western societies and education systems is being developed. After the end of World War II, many people mostly coming from the former colonies settled in western countries, while in the years to come, Southern and Eastern European immigrants also

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moved to West and North Europe in search of better life chances (Banks, 2010). In addition, national states have to deal also with already established minorities, as well as other disadvantaged groups, such as the Roma people. Over a period of more than half a century, the West is responding in various ways to the political, cultural, economic and educational challenges posed by the respective presence of multiculturalism. The adopted policies vary between the European countries, according to the specific characteristics of their national context, as well as to the wider pressures in a globalized context.

In most cases, the presence of the "others" in western schools has provoked great controversy. After the dominance of the assimilation and integration models until the 60s (Govaris, 2004; Markou, 2010), it was the time for the celebration of difference. Various oppressed groups claimed their right to be different and sought public recognition for their collectivity (Modood, 2013). In the 1990s, multiculturalism was in the ascendant. The notion of a pluralized public sphere, where cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity could be positively accommodated, was becoming an increasingly accepted part of social and political life (May, 2009). Multicultural education is seen as a reform movement not limited to curricular changes; it involves changes in the total school system (Banks, 2010). The multicultural discourse gave room to the development of various approaches regarding the education of the "others", such as "multicultural education", "intercultural education", "anti-racist education", "social justice education" etc.. Despite the (minor or major) differences among these variants across the globe (Nieto, 2009), as Coulby argues (2011), what matters is not how the education policy is named, but what its actual content represents.

As Erickson argues (2010), cultural differences do not always lead to trouble between people. Differences become more troublesome in some circumstances than in others. That leads to a consideration of the circumstances of intercultural contact. Nowadays, multiculturalism is increasingly viewed as a threat to the cohesion, the security and the welfare system of European societies (Parthenis & Fragoulis, 2016). The "others" are often perceived as economic and/or cultural threat (Kymlicka, 2015). Currently, the public debate on multiculturalism is overshadowed by the economic crisis, the refugee flows in the West, the terrorist attacks across the globe, the rise of political parties embracing rhetoric against multiculturalism and the skepticism regarding the ability of western societies to include an increasing number of "others".

Under the current conditions, in which multiculturalism is largely faced with skepticism and simultaneously many European countries are struggling to overcome a severe economic crisis, the position of disadvantaged groups such as the Roma people is worsening. Everywhere Roma people resided, they were persecuted and faced with discrimination (McGarry, 2010; Widmann, 2007). The Council of the European Union (2009) described the living conditions of Roma as "*a human tragedy*". In Greece, Roma position in the society is also marginal, although they are present since the 14th century in territories that later became part of the Greek state (Terzopoulou & Georgiou, 1998). The Christian myth about the demonic nature of Roma that conduced to the crucifixion of Christ is dominant in the Greek tradition, while they were also considered

collaborators of the Ottoman Empire (Troumbeta, 2008). Nowadays, the Roma population is reported to be at least 150,000 (Moraitou, 2013), although the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2015) raises this number to 265,000. They were granted civil rights only in the 1970s; nevertheless, they remained marginalized. The reports of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance concerning the situation in Greece (2000; 2005; 2009; 2015) describe in detail the discriminations Roma face in the areas of education, employment, housing or health.

2. Literature Review

Greece has experienced radical changes over the last three decades, becoming the main gate of the migration streams and currently of the refugees' flows towards Europe. However, the challenge of including diverse population in education is not a new one. Despite the myth of the homogeneous Greek society and culture, other disadvantaged groups were present since a long time ago, such as the Roma people, the Muslim minority in Thrace or the Pomaks. As far as the Roma people are concerned, their access to the education system and the provisions of the welfare state were extremely limited for a very long time.

The education of Roma children was not even considered as an issue to be dealt with in the Greek policy discourse until very recently. It is worth mentioning that in the Circular *Γ1/206/14-4-1987* of the Ministry of Education (1987) regarding «The Education of Gypsies' Children», the state admits for the first time that most Roma children do not attend school, even in the compulsory grades. The Circular states clearly that Roma children "*are easily discouraged from attending school… they do not attend regularly, or they drop out*", transferring the whole responsibility to the individual (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). The Circular continues by listing some of the Roma cultural or other "deficiencies" that legitimize their exclusion from school, such as "*nomadism, poverty, illiteracy, way of life, fear of schooling*". There is only a reference in the Circular which recognizes that discriminations, stereotypes and even the school units "*sometimes inhibit school inclusion and social integration of the Roma children*".

In 1989, a new European policy regarding the education of Roma people was promoted, affecting national policies. The Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe adopted a Resolution on school provision for Gypsy and Travelers' children (Council of Europe, 1989). Thus, in the early 90s, the Greek Ministry of Education approved the production of new education material adapted to the needs of the Roma children and introduced policies regarding for example the training of Roma teachers or the establishment of preparation classes for the Roma children. In the following years, the Ministry issued several Circulars regarding the education of Roma children (Parthenis & Fragoulis, 2016). Some of these initiatives were of great importance, such as the Ministerial Decree *Φ4/155/Γ1/1257/11-9-1996* (Ministry of Education, 1996) for issuing Roma students with "study cards", allowing them to change school more easily during the school year in order to follow their parents when relocating. The introduction of intercultural education in Greece with the Act 2413/1996 largely failed to

promote an intercultural culture (Markou, 2010). The outcomes of most state interventions were poor, as the long marginalization and social exclusion of the Roma people and the distrust between the Roma and the non-Roma communities were deeply rooted.

European funding made feasible for the Greek state to launch large intervention programs for the social and educational inclusion of vulnerable people. These programs were implemented by the universities under the state supervision. As far as Roma education, University of Ioannina implemented the first intervention program during the period 1997-2004. As this program was the first actual attempt to bring Roma children in school, met with difficulties because of the resistance of the school and the local community, as well as of the Roma community itself. A two-year interruption of the program because of the lack of funding damaged its effectiveness and ruined the trust of both the Roma and the school community. However, for the first time, Roma children came to the forefront. New educational material was produced, preparation classes for the Roma children were introduced and the teaching staff was retrained according to the principles of intercultural education and got closer to the Roma culture. The program ended in 2004 and a new program was launched in 2006, implemented this time by the University of Thessaly. However, it operated only for two years. At that time, the number of illiterate Roma was still very high, despite the improvement of Roma school attendance rates in the period 1997-2008 (Markou 2008, p. 180).

A new program was launched in 2010, implemented by the University of Athens. This program is still active in many regions of Greece (Attica, Central Greece, Thessaly, Epirus, Western Greece, Ionian Islands, Northern and Southern Aegean, Peloponnese and Crete). The program increased gradually the enrollments rates and decreased simultaneously the dropout rates of the Roma children (Parthenis & Tseliou 2014), but it also faced with long interruptions during its operation because of lack of funding.

In this paper, we move one step forward and focus on Roma student achievement in lower secondary education. In policy terms, the rise of enrollment rates may be satisfactory, taking into account the long and deeply rooted social and educational exclusion of Roma. However, from a social justice perspective, Roma children should also have equal opportunities to improve their life chances through a long and successful educational career. Before presenting our case study, we shortly present the theoretical frame of this paper.

3. Equality of opportunity for the Roma people

Reducing educational inequality has been one of the key topics of educational reform in the past half-century (Green et al, 2006, p. 118). Evidence shows that educational inequality is associated with social cohesion problems over long periods of time (Green et al, 2006, p. 58). Equality of opportunity, which is a necessary condition for reducing educational inequalities, has been at the core of political philosophy since the Enlightenment. From a liberal view, equality of opportunity in education is assured by

removing institutional obstacles and making education equally accessible to all people, irrespective of their socio-cultural or ethnic origin, physical ability, sexual orientation etc. Thus, people will have the opportunity to pursue a school career according to their abilities, talents and effort.

Equality of opportunity is a basic aspect of social justice discourse. In Rawles' perspective, the two principles of social justice are the one of *Equal Liberty*, claiming that each person is to be granted the greatest degree of liberty consistent with similar liberty for everyone, and the *Difference Principle*, stating that practices producing inequalities among individuals are allowable only if they workout to everyone's advantage and the positions that come with greater reward are open to all (Nieuwenhuis 2010, p. 272-273). These principles are tied together as one conception of justice, which applies to the basic structure of society as a whole (Rawles 1999, p. 136). As Rawles (1999, p. 54-86) argues, the distribution of wealth, income and positions of authority and responsibility should be consistent with both the basic liberties and equality of opportunity. Thus, all social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any of these values is to everyone's advantage. Liberties and opportunities are defined by the rules of major institutions and the distribution of income and wealth is regulated by them. In that context, Rawles argues for the principle of fair equality of opportunity, trying to reject the view that this principle leads to a meritocratic society. As Haydon (2010, p. 10) argues, benefiting the least advantaged is an important element of Rawls' theory of social justice.

In a similar theoretical perspective, Brighouse argues that the principles of *personal autonomy* and *educational equality* are necessary for promoting social justice in education. Regarding personal autonomy, each child should have the opportunity to become an autonomous person, while teachers are responsible for facilitating that process. With regard to educational equality, the state must guarantee a set of liberties, as all children have the right to be provided with equally good education. Thus, disadvantaged students have to be provided with more resources in order to ensure the same quality ((Nieuwenhuis 2010, p. 273). According to Brighouse (2010, p. 27), *"equality rests on an intuition about what it takes for a competition to be fair. Modern industrial societies are structured in a way that socially produced rewards are distributed unequally. Education is a crucial gateway to these rewards; It is unfair, then, if some get a worse education than others because this puts them at a disadvantage in the competition for these unequally distributed goods. Thus, there is a need to eliminate any influence of social class on educational achievement by benefiting disadvantaged groups"*.

Those views have been criticized from various perspectives. With regard to education, since the early 60s, sociologists of education have shed light on the various ways through which official education ensures the reproduction of socio-cultural inequalities. Haydon (2010, p.8) argues that *"on the meritocratic conception of educational equality, it is legitimate for an individual's prospects for educational achievement to be a function of that individual's talent and effort. This conception implicitly acknowledges that there will be differences in actual educational achievement between individuals; its concern is that the*

processes that lead to these differences should be fair ones". He also stresses that Brighouse seems to reject or not assume as realistic more radical approaches of educational equality. Moreover, either we talk about equality of opportunity or equality of outcomes, which differ in the sense that the latter it seeks to ensure equal rates of success for different groups in society through direct intervention to prevent disadvantage, both of these liberal conceptions of social justice do not confront with the fundamental problems of hierarchies of power, wealth and other privileges (Lynch, in Gewirtz, 1998, p. 472).

Young suggests that social justice should not be used exclusively in the narrow conventional sense of referring to the way in which goods are distributed in society. Instead, it should be expanded to include all aspects of institutional rules and relations insofar, as they are subject to potential collective action. Young's approach rests on a conceptualization of injustice based on a detailed explication of five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. She argues that distributive injustice may contribute to and result from these forms of oppression, but none is reducible to distribution and all involve social structures and relations beyond distribution (Gewirtz 1998, p. 470).

Gewirtz (1998, p. 471) perceives distributional justice as only one dimension of social justice and he adds the relational dimension, which refers to the nature of the relationships that structure society. A focus on this more holistic dimension compared to the individualistic form of distributive justice, helps us to approach issues of power and the nature and ordering of social relations, i.e. the formal and informal rules which govern how members of society treat each other both on a macro level and at a micro interpersonal level. Thus, it refers to the practices and procedures which govern the organization of political systems, economic and social institutions, families and one-to-one social relationships. The relational dimension incorporates what Fraser (1997) refers to as cultural justice, examples of which would be cultural autonomy and respect.

Drawing from this theoretical frame, we will explore whether equality of opportunity is ensured for the Roma children in Greece. Roma people have experienced educational exclusion over a long period. However, in some areas, a high degree of social and educational inclusion of Roma people has been achieved. One of these areas is located in the Western suburbs of Athens. Still, a more thorough examination of the actual equality of opportunity in these more "privileged" areas for the Roma people has not been done yet, because the issue of Roma school achievement is marginalized. Roma culture is largely perceived as "anti-schooling" and it sets the limits of their school and professional prospects, as it is taken for granted that Roma students cannot compete with the non Roma students in equal terms (Parthenis & Fragoulis 2016a). Roma children are mostly expected to follow their parents' professional activities and not to make their own choices.

Clearly, social justice discourse has various aspects. In this paper, we emphasize on issues of equality of opportunity and outcomes in education. The maintenance of high enrollment and attendance rates of the Roma children is still fragile and it requires consistent policies. However, the improvement of Roma life chances via a long school

career that could possibly lead to higher education should not be considered as unrealistic, although difficulties are well acknowledged.

4. Method

In this paper, we explore the school career of Roma children in a lower secondary school (Gymnasium), located in an area of the Western suburbs of Athens that represents one of the best examples of social inclusion of Roma people. The specific school presents high attendance rates of Roma children and the teaching staff is highly committed to the education of all children. In specific, we examine the following issues:

a) Does the school achievement of Roma students differ from the achievement of the non-Roma students?

b) Which are the drop-out rates of Roma students in comparison with the respective rates of the non-Roma students?

c) Why Roma students who managed to graduate from primary education, failed to graduate from lower secondary education?

The research plan combines both qualitative and quantitative methods. Firstly, a panel study (Newman 2014, σ. 45-46) was designed. The sampled students were enrolled for the first time at the 1st grade of Gymnasium in the school year 2014-2015, irrespective of their age or their previous school career. School achievement of students that were re-enrolled at the 1st grade because of failure to be promoted to the next grade is not examined. However, we track the school career of these students too, as well as of other children that our sampled students met with during their promotion to the 2nd and the 3rd grade of Gymnasium. We examine student achievement in two crucial subjects for their future school career, Greek Language and Mathematics, as well as their average achievement until the end of the compulsory lower secondary education. Thus, the sampled students should attend the 3rd grade and graduate from Gymnasium at the end the school year 2016-2017.

Moreover, drawing on Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990), we collected data on student background through a questionnaire distributed to the sampled students in order to gain a better insight of their achievement. In specific, students were asked to fill in: a) their parents' profession and educational level, b) their ethnic origin, c) the language they use at home, d) the size of their families (number of siblings) and the existence of siblings studying or having graduated from a higher education institution. The limited number of students in this small case study does not allow establishing groups of students with different socio-cultural origin for statistical purposes. Thus, we only examine student achievement in relation to Roma-non Roma variable.

Furthermore, we will attempt to gain insight why some Roma children eventually drop out of compulsory education in a community and a school context in which they meet more favorable conditions compared to other areas where Roma people live. To this extent, we will conduct an interview with the principal of the school, facing him as key-informant. The principal has a long working experience with

Roma and other disadvantaged children, he is specialized in intercultural education and he is strongly committed and involved in many actions regarding the inclusion of Roma people. The principal is well informed about student background, he contacts regularly students' families and he makes constant efforts along with the teaching staff to support all children. Our informant holds a key position in the school and the local community; however, we acknowledge the limitations of this approach, as we do not ensure a wide and diverse range of information (Babbie 2014, p. 202-203).

4.1 Data collection and analysis

Student achievement data were collected with the assistance of the school principal at the end of the school year 2016-2017. In specific, data collection ended in July 2017, when data of student achievement of the 3rd grade of Gymnasium were available. The questionnaire regarding student background was distributed during a school hour in May 2017. The interview with our key informant was conducted in the school in July 2017. Data regarding student achievement were analyzed with SPSS.

5. Results

Before we present data analysis, we will outline the social profile of students in the 3rd grade. On the day of data collection, 41 students out of the 47 in total were present. Regarding students' ethnic origin, all children and their parents were born in Greece, except from three mothers that were born in other countries. Almost all children speak Greek at home, except from one child speaking also Russian. All Roma children speak also the Romani. As the principal informed us, this is a typical situation at school regarding students' ethnic origin. Regarding the size of the family, tt is suggested that parental attention is reduced as family size increases (Dustman and Van Soest, 2010). In our case, two Roma and two non-Roma families have four or more children. All other families have three or fewer children (usually two). Moreover, five non Roma students have older sibling that are studying or having graduated from a higher education institution, a condition that could possibly affect their education decisions and efforts in pursuing a long education career.

Almost all Roma fathers are engaged in trade, being peddlers and some of them shop owners, while mothers usually assist them in running the family businesses. Most non-Roma fathers are from the lower social strata (technicians, electricians, car engineers, professional drivers, or low-level private employees). There are also three military officers (one of them a senior one), a programmer and an accountant, both holding a higher education degree, as well as two civil servants. Similarly, non-Roma mothers are also from the lower strata (housewives, make-up artist, seamstress, hairdresser, school guard, singer, nurse, cashiers, low-level private employees). There are also two accountants holding a higher education degree, a teacher of foreign languages, a senior military officer and a civil servant. According to the principal, students' social characteristics are typical in the area.

As far as mothers' education level is concerned, which is an important factor of children's school success (Baker and Stevenson, 1986; Dustman and Van Soest, 2010), Roma in this area have a higher education level compared to the general Roma population. Thus, there are only two mothers that never attended school, or dropped out before completing primary education. Five Roma mothers attended some classes of lower secondary education (Gymnasium), while three mothers graduated from Gymnasium. There are three mothers that graduated from higher secondary education (Lyceum) and two mothers holding a higher education degree. On the other hand, all non Roma mothers graduated from primary education, while most of them graduated from higher secondary education. Moreover, there are nine non Roma mothers holding a higher education degree.

We address the limitations of this case study, as the small size of the sample does not allow us to categorize students in different socio-cultural groups and make further analysis of student achievement data.

5.1 1st Grade (school year 2014-2015)

In the school year 2014-2015, 73 students in total attended the 1st grade of Gymnasium. 56 students were enrolled for the first time, while 17 students repeated the grade (Table 1).

Table 1: Total number of students in the 1st Grade of Gymnasium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1st enrollment	56	76,7	76,7	76,7
	Repetition	17	23,3	23,3	100,0
	Total	73	100,0	100,0	

As far as the students that were enrolled for the first time in the 1st grade are concerned (Table 2), 28/56 students were Roma children and 28/56 students were non-Roma. Almost all students are of Greek origin, thus ethnic origin does not make any difference.

Table 2: Number of Roma and non Roma students enrolled
for the first time at the 1st Grade of Gymnasium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Roma	28	50,0	50,0	50,0
	Non Roma	28	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

All non Roma children were promoted to the 2nd grade of Gymnasium. On the other hand, 17/28 Roma students managed to be promoted, while 11 students failed because of inadequate attendance. In Table 3, the school achievement of these 28 non Roma and 17 Roma students in Greek language, Mathematics, as well as their average achievement in all subjects, is presented.

Table 3: Student achievement in Language, Mathematics and average achievement_1ˢᵗ grade

	Students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Language	Roma	17	14,53	2,718	,659
	Non Roma	28	15,96	2,285	,432
Mathematics	Roma	17	13,47	2,831	,687
	Non Roma	28	14,36	2,542	,480
Average achievement	Roma	17	15,29	2,443	,593
	Non Roma	28	16,57	2,235	,422

As we see in Table 4, achievement differences of Roma and non Roma in both subjects, as well as the differences in the average achievement are not statistically significant.

Table 4: Independent Samples Test_1ˢᵗ grade

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Language	Equal variances assumed	,556	,460	-1,901	43	,064	-1,435	,755
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,821	29,458	,079	-1,435	,788
Mathematics	Equal variances assumed	,440	,511	-1,087	43	,283	-,887	,816
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,058	31,081	,298	-,887	,838
Average achievement	Equal variances assumed	,269	,607	-1,795	43	,080	-1,277	,712
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,755	31,556	,089	-1,277	,728

Thus, the Roma students that managed to be promoted to the 2ⁿᵈ grade achieve similarly with the non-Roma students. However, this is only one side of the coin. Getting back to Table 1, we saw that they were also 17 students that were repeating the 1ˢᵗ grade. All of these students were Roma children that failed to be promoted because of inadequate attendance. Moreover, 14 of these Roma students failed again in the examined school year to be promoted, getting closer to final school drop-out. If we take into account that there are 11 more Roma children that also failed for the first time to be promoted to the next grade, more than half of the total Roma population in school faced

with school failure. That is a very high percentage compared to the class repetition rates of the country. According to the official data of the school year 2014-2015, in the prefecture of Attica, in which our school is located, only a small percentage of students of the 1st grade (2,34%) did not manage to be promoted to the 2nd grade, while even fewer students of 2nd grade (1,4%) did not manage to be promoted to the 3rd grade (Ministry of Education, 2016).

These results may be variously interpreted. Probably the "flexibility" in primary education regarding students' regular attendance (meaning a tolerance for Roma students overcoming the limit of days they can be absent from school), is not usual in secondary education. Moreover, Roma families may be satisfied when their children graduate from primary education and they do not encourage them to regularly attend in secondary education for various reasons (early marriages, work in family business, taking care of younger members of the family etc). Or, one may suggest that the different structure of secondary education (i.e. many different teachers, increasing difficulty of the subjects, learning gaps from the previous school years, greater discipline and emphasis on achievement), may discourage Roma students.

5.2 2nd Grade (school year 2015-2016)

In the school year 2015-2016, only 48 students in total attended the 2nd grade of Gymnasium (see Table 5). This decrease of the total population is largely due to the high numbers of Roma students failing to be promoted from the 1st grade. 43 students were enrolled for the first time, while 5 students, all Roma children, had failed at least once in the past to be promoted. From those 5 students, three managed to be promoted to the 3rd grade.

Table 5: Total number of students at the 2nd Grade of Gymnasium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1st enrollment	43	89,6	89,6	89.6
	Repetition	5	10,4	10,4	100,0
	Total	48	100,0	100,0	

Following the school career of the students that were enrolled for the 1st time in the 2nd grade of Gymnasium, 16/43 students were Roma children and 27/43 students were non-Roma (Table 6). It is noted that one Roma and one non-Roma student that were promoted from the 1st to the 2nd grade of Gymnasium, they were moved to other school units.

Table 6: Number of Roma and non Roma students enrolled
for the first time at the 2nd Grade of Gymnasium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Roma	16	37,2	37,2	37,2
	Non Roma	27	62,8	62,8	100,0
	Total	43	100,0	100,0	

Starting from the non-Roma students, almost all of them (26/27), managed to be promoted to the 3rd grade. Situation is similar for the Roma students as well, as 15/16 managed also to be promoted to the 3rd grade. Thus, it seems that the promotion of the specific Roma children from the 1st to the 2nd grade of Gymnasium was not accidental, since they continued their successful school career.

The achievement of the 26 Roma and the 15 non-Roma children that managed to be promoted to the 3rd grade is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Student achievement in Language, Mathematics and
average achievement_2st grade Group Statistics

	Students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Language	Roma	15	13,93	3,195	,825
	Non Roma	26	15,76	2,587	,517
Mathematics	Roma	15	12,20	3,745	,967
	Non Roma	26	14,48	3,743	,749
Average achievement	Roma	15	14,47	2,356	,608
	Non Roma	26	16,88	2,108	,422

Compared to the 1st grade, it seems now that there is a greater gap achievement between Roma and non Roma students. Indeed, differences in average achievement of Roma and non Roma students are statistically significant, but not in the subjects of Language and Mathematics (Table 8). We note once again that the methodology used here is a guide for future research in a lager sample, as the size of this sample is small.

Table 8: Independent Samples Test_2nd Grade

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Language	Equal variances assumed	2,604	,115	-1,979	38	,055	-1,827	,923
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,876	24,925	,072	-1,827	,974
Mathematics	Equal variances assumed	,070	,793	-1,865	38	,070	-2,280	1,223
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,864	29,604	,072	-2,280	1,223
Average achievement	Equal variances assumed	,452	,505	-3,355	38	,002	-2,413	,719
	Equal variances not assumed			-3,260	27,036	,003	-2,413	,740

5.3 3rd Grade (school year 2016-2017)

In the school year 2016-2017, 47 students in total attended the 3rd grade of Gymnasium (Table 9). 41 students were enrolled for the first time. Once again, the remaining 6 students are Roma children that had failed at least once in the past to be promoted. It is noted that none of these 6 students graduated from Gymnasium that year.

Table 9: Total number of students at the 3rd Grade of Gymnasium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1st enrollment	41	87,2	87,2	87.2
	Repetition	6	12,8	12,8	100,0
	Total	47	100,0	100,0	

Following the school career of the students that were enrolled for the 1st time, 26/41 students were non Roma and 15/41 students were Roma children and (Table 10).

Table 10: Number of Roma and non Roma students enrolled for
the first time at the 3rd Grade of Gymnasium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Roma	15	36,6	36,6	36,6
	Non Roma	26	63,4	63,4	100,0
	Total	41	100,0	100,0	

In the last grade of Gymnasium, the picture changes once again regarding the Roma students. Almost half of them (7/15) failed to graduate because of inadequate attendance, except from one student that failed because of underachievement. On the other hand, again almost all non Roma students (25/26) graduated from Gymnasium, except from one student that failed because of underachievement. It is noted that underachievers can be re-examined in September examinations in order to graduate. Roma and non Roma achievement is presented in Table 11, but the small number of Roma students that graduated does not allow for any comparison.

Table 11: Students' achievement in Language, Mathematics and
average achievement_3rd grade Group Statistics

	Students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Language	Roma	8	16,25	2,550	,901
	Non Roma	25	16,84	2,035	,407
Mathematics	Roma	8	14,00	3,295	1,165
	Non Roma	25	14,84	3,496	,699
Average achievement	Roma	8	16,38	2,134	,754
	Non Roma	25	17,24	2,026	,405

5.4 Approaching the school failure of Roma children in secondary education

Almost half of the total Roma population of the school faced with class repetition, coming closer to school dropout. In order to gain a better insight on this issue, the principal, as key-informant, was asked to interpret the difficulties of these students. The

principal did not know or could not retrieve any information for 4 Roma children. For the remaining 26 Roma children, a clear gender distinction arises.

Thus, the principal noted that most of the girls (12/15) were quiet, without disrupting the daily routine. Only 3 girls were characterized as undisciplined "*she was making trouble in the classroom, she was talking all the time, she was only talking about a boy she liked…*". The principal stressed out the lack of communication with their families, as he used to meet with their parents (usually their mothers) at the beginning of each school year, but very rarely thereafter "*Roma parents give us a mobile number, but they never pick it up… they change phone numbers very often…*". Moreover, the principal informed us that three girls got married and that's why they dropped out of school, while one girl was facing health problems "*she had not enough family support for her problems, we could not do many things for her…*". Finally, two more girls were facing with serious family problems "*there were two men who claimed to be her father…*".

On the other hand, all boys appear to be undisciplined and constantly disrupt the daily school routine, while some of them were involved in bullying. They were often being expelled from the class or school and their parents never appeared when the principal was calling them "*the truth is that it is hard to deal with his behavior in class… he does not assign any importance in what is going on in the classroom… he is often expelled from the classroom…*", "*he was constantly involved in quarrels… he was bullying other children…*".

Following the narrative of the principal, it seems that the whole responsibility is transferred to the children and their families (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Roma students were often absent, while the principal was unable to contact their families. Parents appear to be indifferent and absent from the school life (see also Lareau, 2003; Zachos, 2012). Most Roma boys are perceived as a threat to school peace. At this part of the narrative, the school appears to be a passive receiver of the anti-schooling behavior and culture of Roma children and it reacts mainly by punishing students, leading them gradually to school drop-out. It is characteristic that the principal mentioned two cases of Roma students that they had complained of discriminatory treatment by their teachers, but he avoided to make any comment on whether students were right in his point of view.

The principal was also asked to comment on the fact that the inclusion of many Roma children in his school seems to be a hard task. At this point, a different picture arises, as the principal transfers now the responsibility to primary school "*Roma children should have acquired a school culture when graduating from primary schools…Roma children cannot easily accept school rules…*". According to the principal, the school environment of primary education is loose, making it difficult for the Roma children to be adapted to the more disciplined and demanding environment of secondary education.

Moreover, he criticizes part of the teaching staff of his school. Thus, he claims that most teachers do not try to approach Roma children by applying practices that could raise their interest in the learning process. Instead, teachers are mainly interested in getting rid of the presence of undisciplined students. Hence, the conflicts between teachers and Roma children, especially boys, are quite frequent and sometimes end with the expulsion of students from the class. At the end, as the principal stated "*some*

Roma children stopped attending classes, as they knew that even if they entered the class, they would be soon expelled". In that point, the principal clearly highlights school's responsibility. He goes on further by adding that the teaching staff could at least handle the behavior problems of Roma students in a better way in order to keep them at school for as much as possible. However, at the same time he is clear that teachers cannot do anything to improve the learning process, as many Roma students "*have major learning gaps from primary school… it is not possible to deal with them in gymnasium...*".

6. Conclusion

A case study obviously does not allow us to draw generalized conclusions. However, it gives us the opportunity to put several issues on the table. Over a short period of time, many Roma children have been enrolled and have graduated from primary education. This is very important, as these children are mostly coming from illiterate families and have grown up in a social context in which they were often treated with discrimination. However, this progress should not be considered as adequate.

In our case, a large number of Roma students attend the particular lower secondary school and those that do attend regularly appear to achieve similarly with non -Roma students in the 1st grade, as well as in the 2nd grade in the subjects of Greek language and Maths. Moreover, it is probable that some of the Roma children that repeated grades -mostly because of inadequate attendance- may graduate at the end. However, it is also true that only 8 Roma children who enrolled for the first time in the 1st grade of Gymnasium in the school year 2014-2015, managed to graduate from Gymnasium without repeating grades.

The liberal discourse on the equality of opportunities was an important step towards the educational inclusion of disadvantaged children. However, we are still far away from achieving equality of outcomes and, even more, from a social justice perspective as developed by Young and Gewirtz. In our view, the faces of oppression, as argued by Young, i.e. exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence are, indeed, not reducible to distribution and all involve social structures and relations beyond distribution.

The implementation of positive discrimination policies, for example the enrollment of a given percentage of Roma students in higher education institutions, would increase the life chances of some Roma children, but it would not be still enough for the majority of Roma people. In our perspective, the policies designed at the school, the local and the national level have to directly aim at increasing the percentages of Roma children graduating from compulsory education at least, in order to increase their life chances and open up new possibilities. To this extent, social and educational inclusion should be considered as two complementary processes.

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