"Probing into the cultural identity of Roma students: A case study in the Greek EFL context"

Papalexatou Evangelia

University of Patras , Greece

21st century citizenry - No easy business!

► corruption

► squalor

► unequal power relations

► influx of migrants ⟶ *multiculturalism + multilingualism*

► *identity & culture* (subversive meaning) : enhance teaching / learning process

How can teachers deal with students' diverse cultural identities in their own classrooms?

SOCIAL LOCATION MAPS

Introduction

► **Probe** into the cultural identity / sociocultural context of Roma primary school students in the foreign classroom using *Social Location maps* and *drawings*.

►**Illustrate** the merits of using such tools within a broader EFL setting.

►**Explore** the implications of this process for second/foreign language pedagogy with respect to cultural identity and linguistic diversity.

Social Location Maps

A *social location map* is a web-like diagram that illustrates the complex and potentially contradictory contexts in which people find themselves (Hamilton, 2003).

● Process directly linked to various constituents of

   one's social identity:

• gender
• race
• social class
• age
• ability
• religion
• sexual orientation
• geographic location

It can also be extended to various social roles (e.g. student, friend, sister etc.) as well as one's experiences and relationships (Hamilton, 2003).

Social Location (theory)

Social location delves into the dynamic networks among the constituents that make up one's identity: gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion and geographic location. *Gender* and *race* are fixed, unchangeable and static (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, et al, in Daynes, 2007). Others (e.g. socioeconomic status, age) are acquired over time and constantly change ⟶ dynamic.

► Individuals view the world filtered through the above and their own experiences trying to understand their present and even future (Daynes, 2007).

► It also considers our past and the way it blends in with our current status, affecting future endeavors and aspirations (Daynes, 2007).
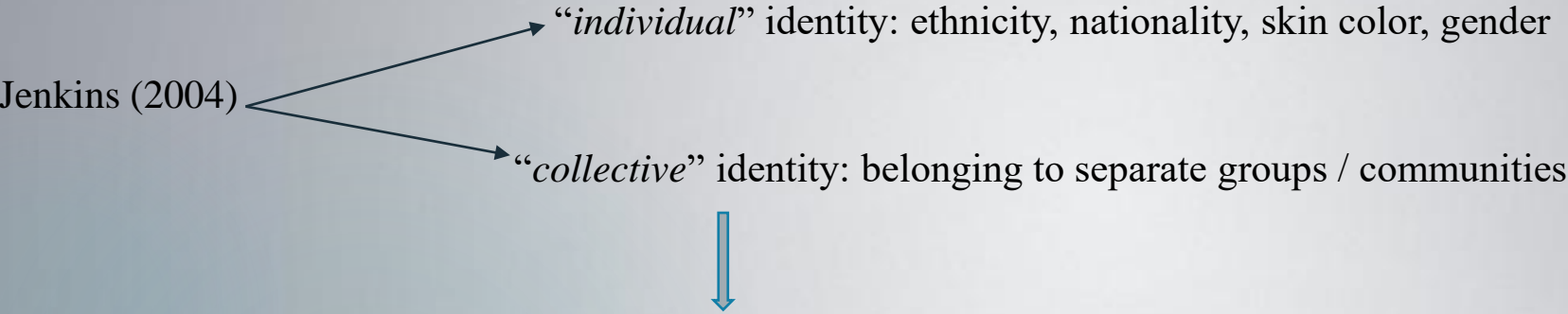
One's *social location* can **_never be static but rather changes over time_** given the interplay and dynamic networks of the above constituents throughout one's life (Daynes, 2007).

Cultural Identity (CI)

Key construct in: •intercultural communication studies

•humanities

•social studies

"*individual*" identity: ethnicity, nationality, skin color, gender

Jenkins (2004)

"*collective*" identity: belonging to separate groups / communities

Indicative of a set of traits that a group or community might share (music, religion, language, social habits etc.)

*Cultural Identity constitutes an intricate patchwork of personal and interpersonal situations and whether it being an individual choice or a group right (Yea-Wen Chen and Hengjun Lin, 2016), is constantly **negotiated**, **enacted** and **challenged** in today's world of multiple intercultural encounters.

The Roma (Student) Population

► Not a homogeneous group – suffer discrimination / racism / multiple stereotypes ⟶ exclusion from normal life (Zachos, 2012).

► Educational Status: "low school enrollment percentages, premature termination of compulsory education and unmannerly stance by classmates, parents and teachers" (Markou, 1996:60).

Some of the reasons that hinder their rightful participation in school:

*lack of financial resources
*socio-economic background
*constant wandering for professional reasons
*difficulty in accessing schools

Yet, they merit special attention ⟹ their education is inherently linked with intercultural education, dealing with multicultural and multilingual issues arising from students from diverse backgrounds.

Intercultural Education

Education: coherent and unified and include all the collective identities represented in the school.

There are no scientific criteria for the prioritization of cultures: each group ascribing to one or another culture has the right to be respected on the basis of cultural criteria such as language, ethnicity and so on (Gotovos, 2002).

Schools: should manifest a kind of national identity which apart from the *traditional* criteria (religion, origin e.t.c) should be determined by *political* (equal opportunities, participation e.t.c) and *subjective* criteria (self-identification)

*act as the vessel for the 'cultural' meeting of the carriers of **ethnic identity**.*

Developing social justice through critical education and emancipatory processes without prejudices and hierarchies ⟹ combat racism and discrimination and be led to full personal, social and cognitive development in the 21st century (Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2012).

Only in such a context the Roma identity will be recognized and respected in school (Calogiannakis,P.; Karras,KG.; Ieronimakis,J.; Babalis, T., 2018).

Research Methodology

Case study (Glesne 2015) carried out at a primary school in a town in Western Greece, an area predominantly inhabited by Roma people.

- 7 primary Roma school students along with 9 Non-Roma students (6th graders)
- Purposeful / Homogeneous Sample

*∗"*Who am I?*"*: Part of a larger enrichment project, which aimed to raise students' intercultural awareness, so as to meet the curriculum's aim: multilingualism and inter/multiculturalism. It centered on raising intercultural awareness through various activities.

∗ One of the many requirements of this project was for students to create their own social location maps and produce their drawings

Procedure

►Students were asked to consider their multiple identities by filling out a personal and a social identity wheel to begin

Personal Identity Wheel   Social Identity Wheel

Research Methodology

Procedure

►Students were asked to consider the constituents of their personality and their social roles centering on their current state.

►On a blank sheet of paper, they would visually represent the relationship of these constituents to their personality.

►After presenting their social location maps, they were asked to *draw* themselves (the way they perceived themselves**):"their pictures can be a thousand words if you let them tell their stories"** *(Soundy,2012:45).*

►Finally, the students considered the following questions:

- What part of your identity are you most / least comfortable sharing with other people?

- What part of your identity are you most proud of?

- What part of your identity did you struggle the most with growing up?

- What part of your identity is the most / least important to you?

- What part of other people's identities do you notice first?

- For what part of your identity do you feel you receive privilege for most often?

- Your own identities you would like to learn more about.

- Identities that have the strongest effect on how you see yourself as a person.

- What part of your identity do you see having the most effect on your interactions with peers?

Data Analysis

● Specific dominating themes from their social location maps and drawings can be delineated

The main tenor that runs throughout their work revolves around the major principles deeply ingrained in the lives of this specific group: *religion*, *family ties*, *tradition* and *money*.

The specific facets of their *cultural identity* allowed us to group them into the following *identity clusters*:

• ***Keeping it within the family (holiday & wedding traditions)***

• ***Styling and profiling***

Keeping it within the family
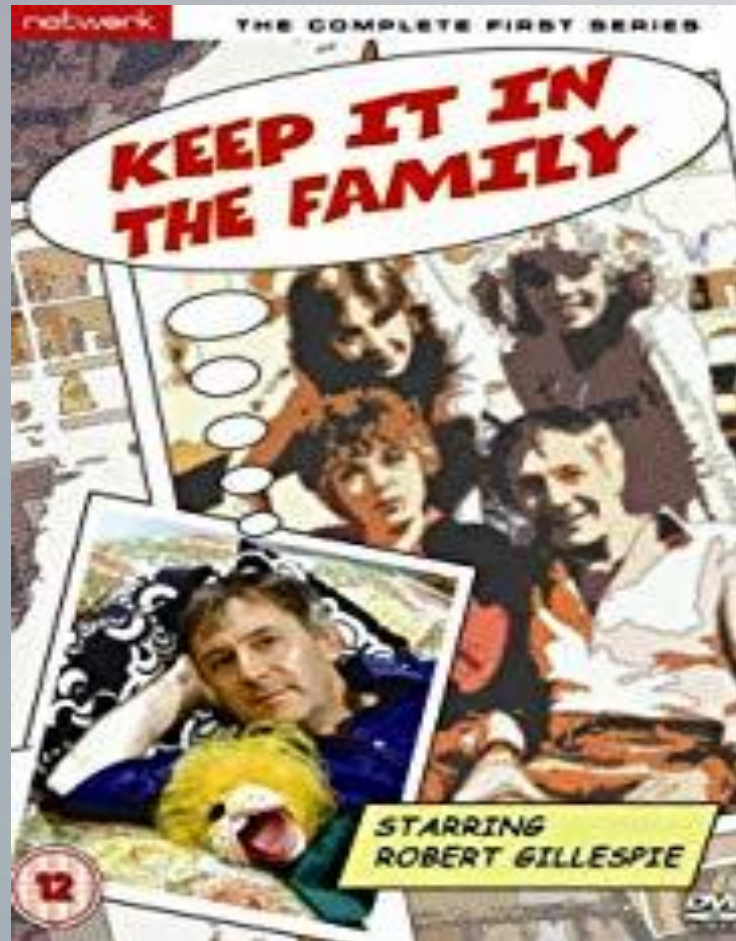
In this group, we find the family-oriented types whose main goal is to settle down with a significant "other." Their social location maps resemble a human apparition (rather than a web-like diagram) with body limbs in neat proportions, which probably connotes the image of a family unit.

Penelope
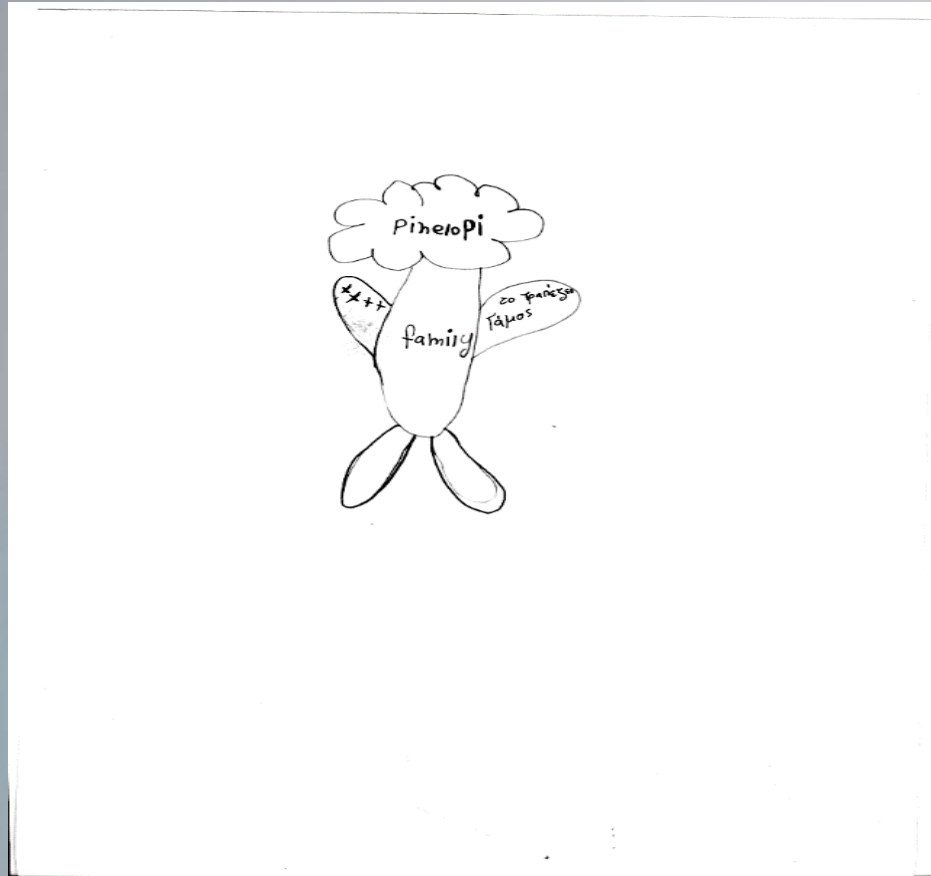
● She has scribbled three words on her social location map, which sum up the essence of her personal goals: *family*, *marriage* and *the wedding table*.

● She complements her map with a snapshot from a wedding ceremony.

Themis
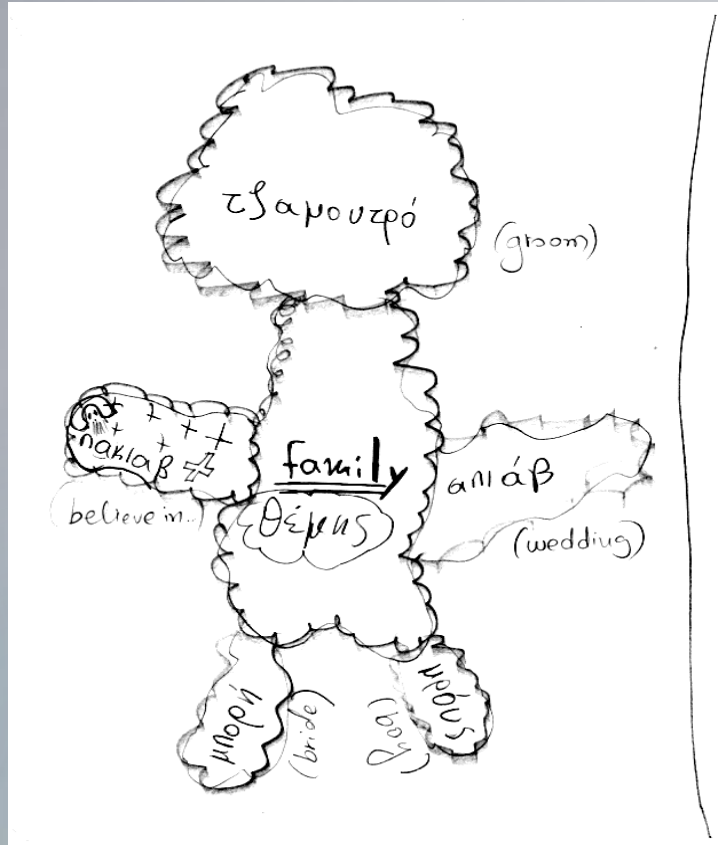
●*Family* comes in front and center. He views his role as the *groom* (tzamoutro) at the helm of the household while the *wedding ceremony* (sipiab) and his *religious beliefs* (pakiav) bear a significant weight balancing both ends of his life complemented by his offspring (son and daughter).

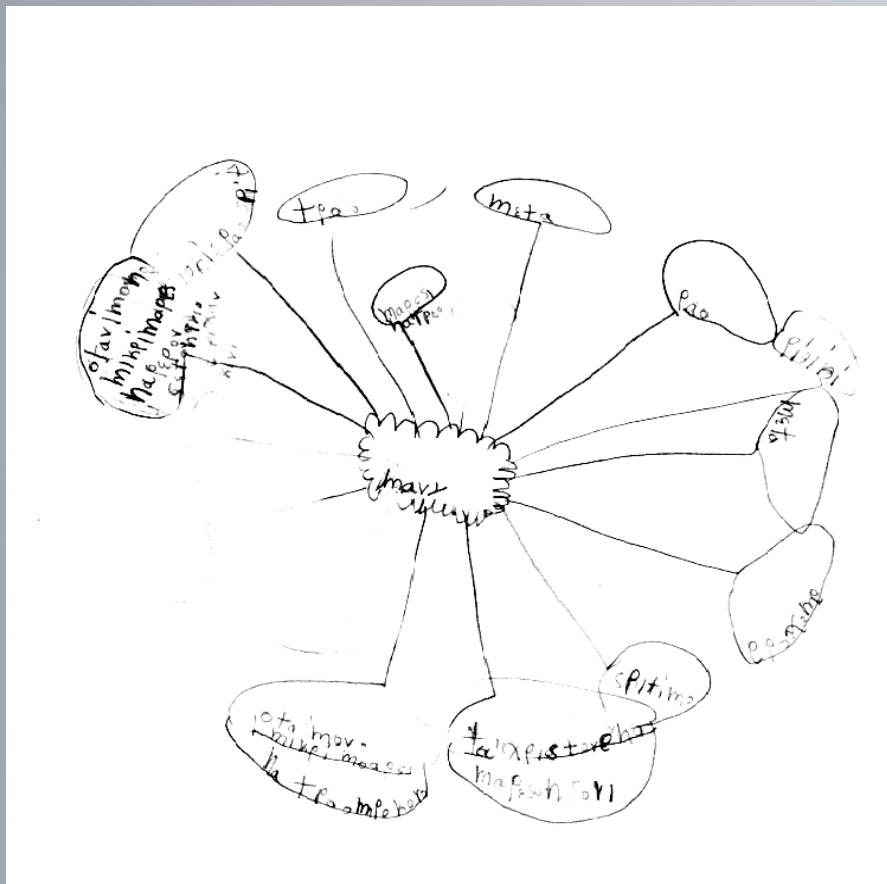●Themis states that according to the Roma tradition, the groom party "buys off" the bride at a very high "bid."
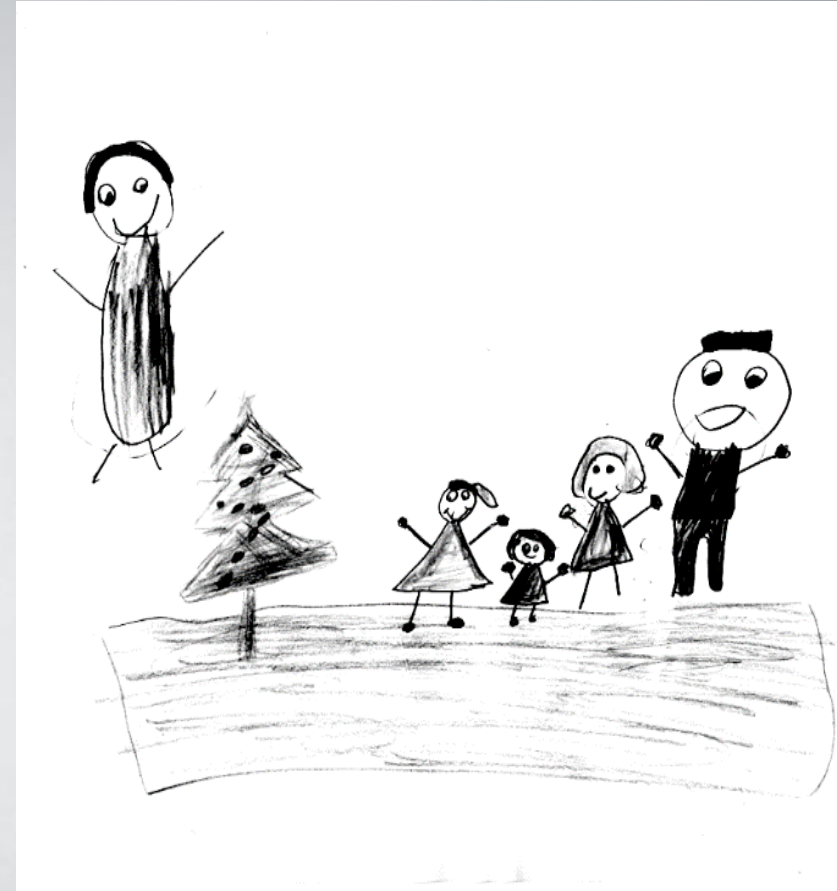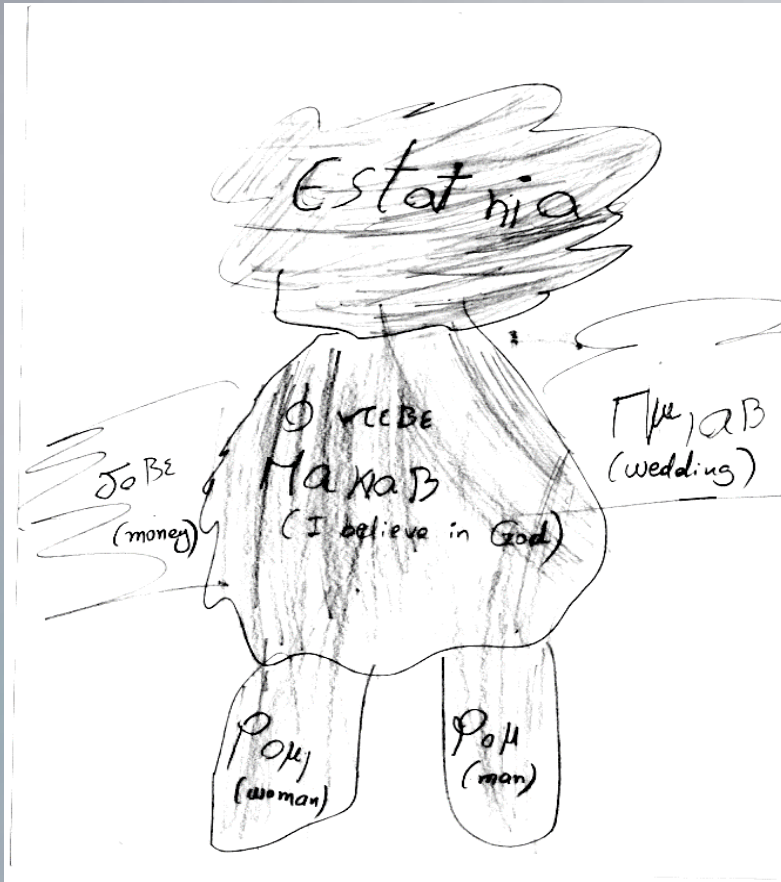
● Religion (devie pakiav = *I believe in God*) features quite heavily on her map while *marriage* and *money* teeter on both ends of the pendulum in equal proportions. It seems that for Efstathia both the *man* (Rom) and the *woman* (Romi) constitute the pillars of one's adult life.

● Her drawing portrays a family clustered around a Christmas tree, which, according to her, represents the epitome of a family union.
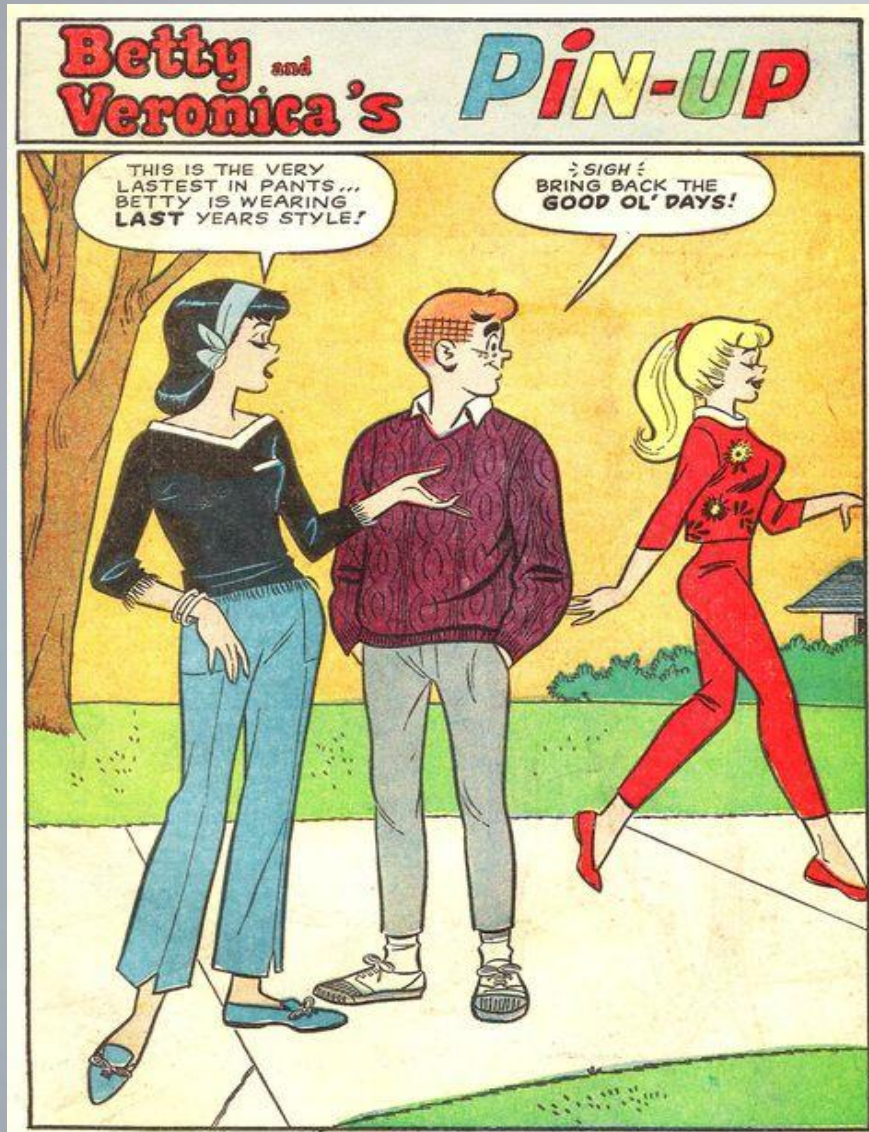
Mary

● Lastly, we have Mary who has managed to furnish us with a detailed account of the nuts and bolts of the Roma holiday and nuptial traditions.
● Her social location map is laid out in a cyclical format (perhaps the circle of life) where she details the most memorable aspects of her upbringing.
● The accompanied drawing documents certain aspects of the Roma traditions.

It is all about the "image" for the individuals in this group. Everything revolves around the manner with which they look, they socialize with others and entertain themselves.

Steve
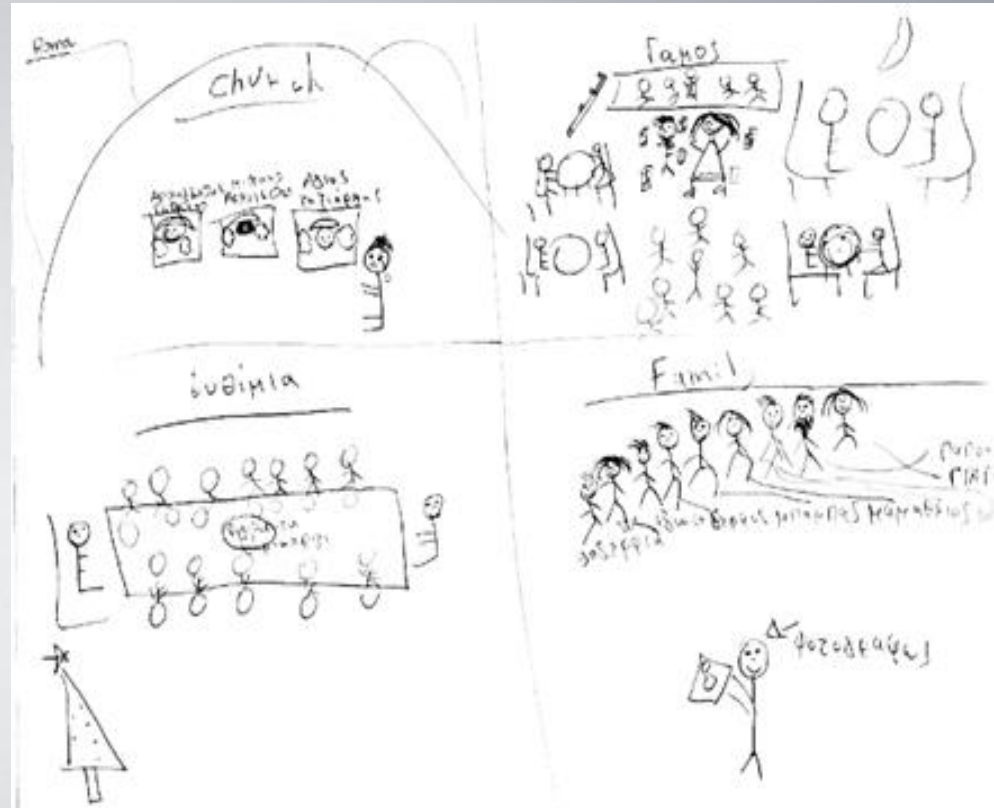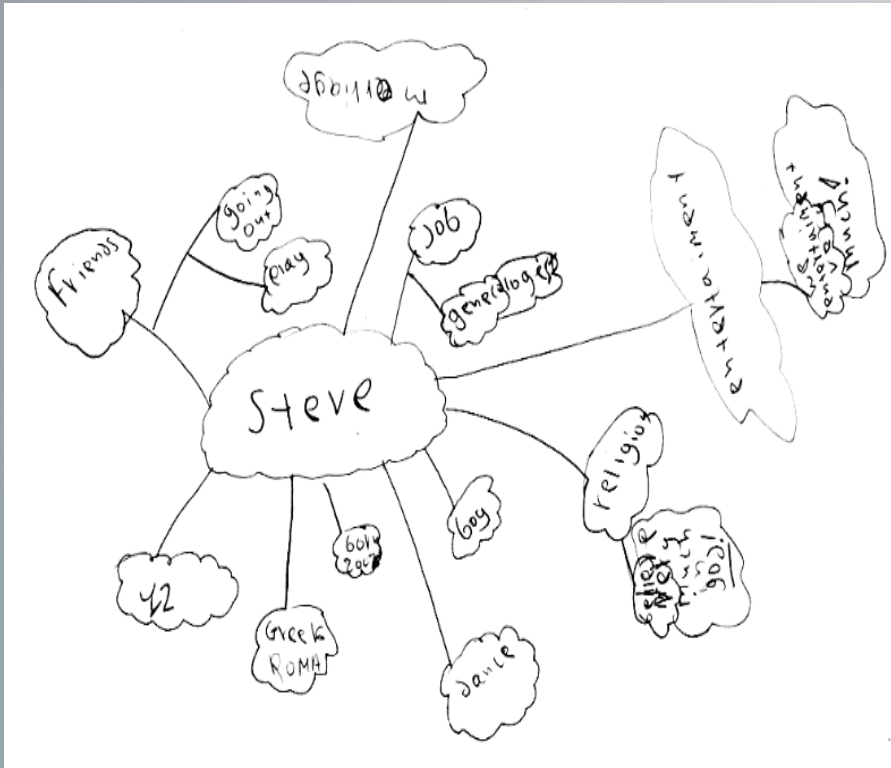
● Regardless of his well-polished exterior, he continues to clench on to his family's traditional and religious values (he believes in God a lot) while his ultimate goal is to settle down with someone at a certain point.
● He provides us with snapshots of these values (i.e., church, wedding table, Christmas dinner, members of his extended family) in his drawing.

Marianna

● Marianna is our coquette. Her appearance seems to rank first on her list ("people say I am pretty"). This is also evident in her drawing, which appears to be a portrait of herself.

● On a more serious note, she clings to her family traditions and religious values, wants to get married and aspires to become a nurse.

Christina
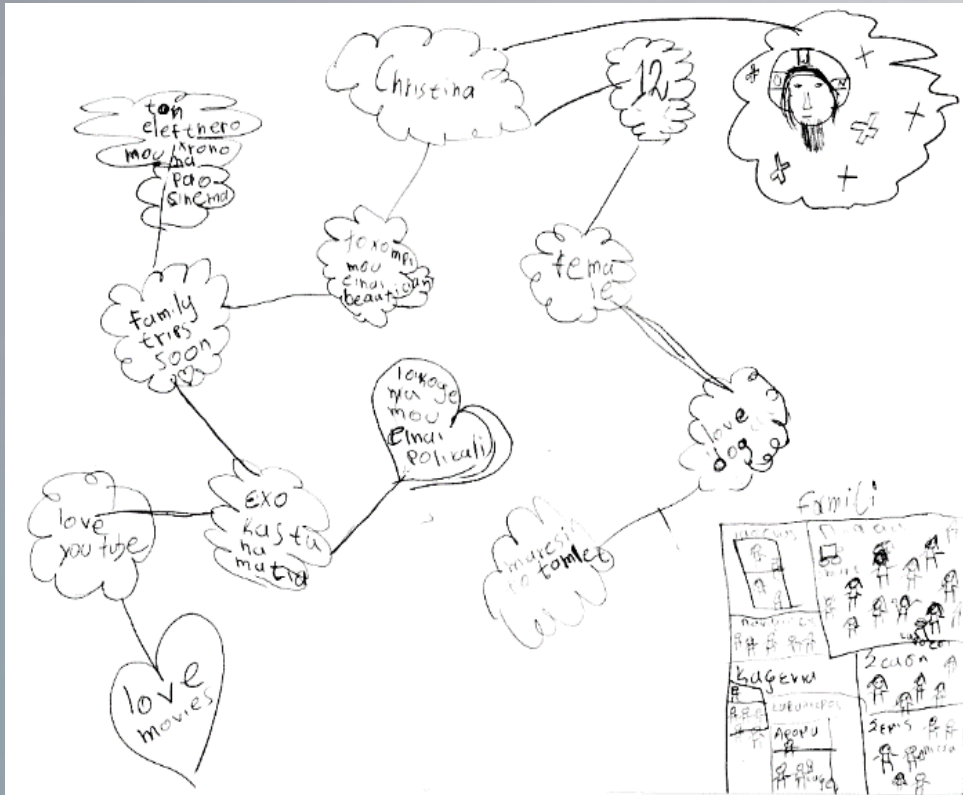
●Our moviegoer and beautician. In her free time, Christina will clasp on the opportunity to hit the movie theater. When at home, Christina sifts through YouTube video clips, takes care of her dog whom she adores dearly and spends quality time with her family.

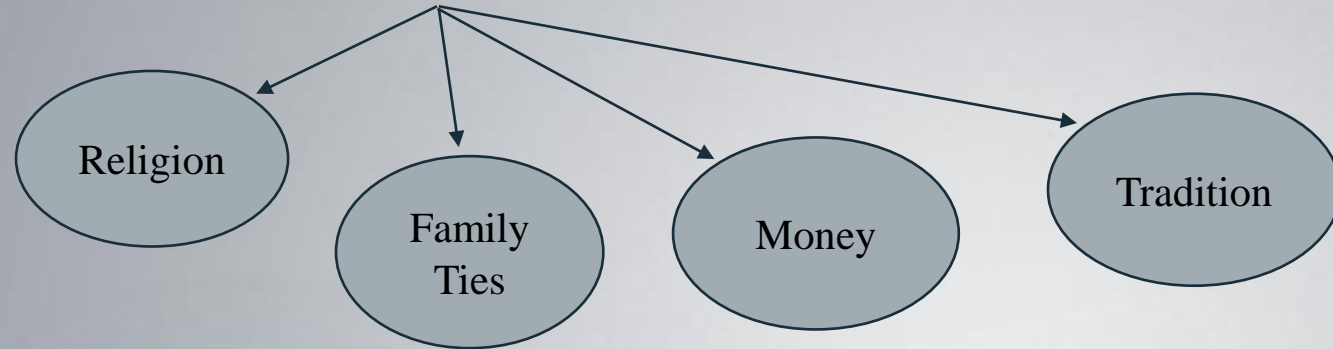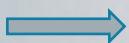●As evident from her drawing, she is very religious as well and envisions herself getting married.

Discussion

► All Roma children ascribed to four principles which seem to be ingrained in their everyday lives;

(there was **no** reference whatsoever to *school* and their *education*)

```
          Religion          Family            Money          Tradition
                             Ties
```

● They depicted men's superiority, gave a sense of manhood, men's intrinsic sense of justice and financial power.

●They adopted mostly the *spiritual* and *mental* culture of the community (Petkova, 2005):
identified with all the customs, traditions, values, symbols or even behavior shared within their community.

● They displayed a strong sense of sharing their cultural horizons with their community through the use of Romani language- which is handed down orally- and the interpretation of local traditions of theirs.

►through the socialization in their families and the interrelations in the community, the bonds are so strong that no external intervention is allowed ⟹ value highly the close family ties.

● They are deeply religious: The presence of God and their strong belief in Him was ubiquitous throughout both their maps and drawings: ***"Savoro pes prejal cha o Del achhel – everything passes, only God lasts"*** .

● Roma's concept of society differs from the one of the Western's world; the latter has its foundations in the personal individual rights, whereas the former develops the community as a unified whole.

Discussion

► Another aspect of using social location maps in the classroom is *cultural diversity*. We more or less see things differently and interpret events filtered through our own cultural "lens."

Roma Students:

● gained insights into the experiences of other people, saw similarities and differences with others and tried to define who they are.

● broke down 'cultural conflicts', brought up issues about other cultures' special occasions, and they considered their own culture as something relative and not absolute.

● Used the Romani language ⟶ although used exclusively orally, it is highly ranked even in its written form (there is the element of *constructing cultural identity* in every language).

"At level of relations between groups, language is worth what those who speak it are worth, so too, at level of interactions between individuals, speech always owes a major part of its value to identity of the person who utters it" Bourdieu (1977:652) .

Conclusion

Education unavoidably brings shifts; yet:

∗ Foreign language teachers can use *social location maps and adopt a communicative approach to cultural identities* to raise students' awareness and sensitivity towards current global issues, so that they can view the world in more complex and contradictory terms.

∗ Foreign language teachers should develop awareness of cultural identity and value Roma students' language and customs ►the latter experience both enculturation and acculturation in the school environment.

! *Sparse assorted traditions and fragmented understandings of cultures should be bridged to foster intercultural relationships and interactions.*

A more 'welcoming' and 'open' national identity -on the basis of pluralism and diversity, will eventually be a reality.

Works cited

Bourdieu, P. (1999). Language and symbolic power. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Calogiannakis,P.; Karras,KG.; Ieronimakis,J.; Babalis, T. (2018). Approaching Diversity in Education: The Case of Roma Pupils. Tuvojoties izglītības daudzveidībai. Romu skolēni: gadījuma analīze. LATVIJAS UNIVERSITĀTES RAKSTI. 2018, 816. sēj. PEDAGOĢIJA UN SKOLOTĀJU IZGLĪTĪBA 166.–184.

Daynes, Rosemary. (2007). Social Location and Practising as an Ally in Community Development. *Research and Perspectives on Development Practice* (series). Dublin: Kimmage Development Studies Centre.

Georgiadis, F. & Zisimos, A. (2012). Teacher training in Roma education in Greece:Intercultural and critical educational necessities *Issues in Educational Research, 22(1). Special issue in intercultural and critical education*

Glesne, Corrine. (2015). *Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction* (5th Edition) (Paperback). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Gotovos, A. Education and diversity . Issues of intercultural pedagogy[…]. Athens: Metaichmio, 2002.

Hamilton, Gregory. (2003). English in the City: Responding to Literature in the City. *The English Journal*. Volume 93, Issue 1.

Jenkins, Richard. (2004). Social Identity. London and New York. Routledge.

Markou, G. (1996). *Aspects of multiculturalism and cross-cultural education –Teachers training*. Athens: General Secretariat of Popular Culture.

Works cited

Petkova, Diana. (2005). *Cultural Identity in an Intercultural Context*. Publications of the Department of Communication, No 27. University of Jyvaskyla, Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Yea-Wen Chen and Hengjun Lin. (2016). PRINTED FROM the OXFORD RESEARCH ENCYCLOPEDIA, COMMUNICATION (oxfordre.com/communication). (c) Oxford University.

Zachos, D. (2012). Institutional Racism? Roma Children, Local Community and School Practices. Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 10, 53-66.
http://jceps.com/index.php?pageID=article&articleID=240

Thank you for your attention!

evelpap@upatras.gr