

Using the *Compasito* Manual in Cyprus



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INTRODUCTION: THE CHILDREN OF CYPRUS AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

The overall aim of this EEA (European Economic Area) funded project was to make Human Rights training more accessible to Cypriot school children. The project was guided by the *Compasito Manual*, a tool developed by the Council of Europe in order to promote Human Rights Education. Along with providing useful information for teachers and child care-takers on Human Rights and alternative teaching methods, the manual consists of in-class exercises addressing various themes, such as citizenship, environment, gender equality, etc.

The project consisted of three parts: teacher training using the *Compasito* guidelines: in-class pilot studies informed by surveys in order to create a region sensitive report; and a translation of the *Compasito* manual from English into Greek (a Turkish version was finalized earlier this year), to promote easier use in the classroom. The overall objective was to build on previous *Compasito* training programmes in other European countries, to assess how *Compasito* can be best applied to a Cypriot context, and to provide the means for this to occur.

This report is intended to for use by teachers and other agents in the Cypriot education system; to demonstrate the benefits and challenges of using the manual as a tool for educating children about their fundamental rights, and building confidence in children through non-formal² educational methods.

² Non-formal education is education that adapts to the special needs of each individual. It contributes, together with other forms of learning, to the individual's personal development and his/her preparation for active participation in civil society. Non-formal education is complementary to formal education (e.g. school, higher education, and vocational training) and represents an added value within the learning process; for these reasons it should be given a prominent place in the education system. Non-formal education typically takes place outside of school. In addition to this, its focus is on social learning as well as the individual learning that is promoted by formal education. It is based on experience and so has direct implications for real concerns. Furthermore, non-formal education learning is intentional, voluntary, participative, and centred on the learner². Moreover, due to the variety of its structures and methods of delivery, it offers additional possibilities for providing diversified responses to new and emerging educational and training needs. It is therefore important to promote non-formal education and to reinforce links with formal education. Source: Council of Europe; youth-partnership.coe.int/.../documents/.../PRS_ToT_Lebanon_June_2009_EN.doc

THE PILOT STUDY

Methodology

During the *Compasito* training courses (Part A), all the participants were informed that they could voluntarily participate in a pilot study (Part B), in which they would give feedback on the implementation of *Compasito*. They were requested to implement one activity from the *Compasito* manual and reflect on this experience. Part B consisted of three questionnaires:

1. A declaration of interest in participation, and definition of the activity, targets and other aspects of the study (e.g. the age of the students).
2. A form to record the reactions of the children to the activity.
3. A final evaluation of the experience.

In addition, a focus-group discussion was conducted with participating teachers during which personal experiences were shared and concrete suggestions were made. 22 people participated in this pilot study.³

Preparation

The preparation time required prior to the *Compasito* exercise was perceived as minimal. Half of the participants of the pilot study stated that they had to prepare for a maximum of 1 hour, whilst the rest spent “a few hours” preparing. This preparation usually happened on the day prior to the implementation.

Objectives

Some of the participants’ common objectives were for the children to learn their Human Rights, to be familiarised with the Convention on the Rights of a Child, and, through becoming aware of their own rights, to become more assertive. Moreover, they aimed to make children think about respect for the Human Rights and diversity of others (e.g. respect for children with special needs) and to show them how stereotypes affect their own lives. Some of the educators also aimed to develop respect for the *Compasito* manual.

³ Among them there were 19 teachers, 2 NGO workers and 1 speech therapist. 20 were women and only 2 men and they had all participated in a *Compasito* training course. The participants’ age range was between 27 and 50 years old. During the school year 2009-2010, 10 of them were working in Nicosia district, 6 in Limassol district and the rest in other districts of the country. Among the teachers, there were 15 working in public primary schools and the rest in private primary schools. There were 2 teachers working in kindergarten schools and 1 in special unit. The range of their students’ age was between 4 and 12.

For the purpose of using *Compasito*, 4 of these teachers used the “Rabbit’s Rights” exercise, whereas 3 of them used the “Putting Rights on the Map”. The following *Compasito* activities were also implemented twice; “Blindfolded”, “Speech Bubbles” and “A Body of Knowledge”. Other exercises were put in practice as well, such as “Sailing to a New Land”, “Take a Step Forward”, “Advertising Human Rights”, “Bullying Scenes” etc. The majority of the participants in this study used *Compasito* in the Language lesson at schools. Other possible lessons for hosting *Compasito* activities were Science, Health Education and Extracurricular Activity sessions.

Multiplying effect

Fortunately, the participants in this study did not merely use the insights they had gained from *Composito* for themselves, but were keen to extend them beyond their own classroom. The majority said that they had informed all, or at least some, of their colleagues about it.

FINDINGS

The educators reported that through *Compasito* the children gained awareness about their Human Rights and the implications of having *or* lacking such rights. Children were also particularly sensitised to notions such as equality, diversity and opportunities in life. One kindergarten teacher explained how, following their activity, the children became more assertive of their Human Rights at home. Another teacher mentioned that after the activity, some students wrote a note to the children of the special unit of the school saying: “We love you, you are our friends”.

Student’s level of interest and response

On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the maximum) the average level of interest and response of students, as perceived by the teachers, was **4.7**.

The participants reported that children’s responses to the *Compasito* activities were positive, enthusiastic, and highly involved. From the teachers’ comments we can conclude that the tasks were straightforward, enjoyable for the students, and provided food for thought for the future.

These are some of the students’ comments after the activity:

Getting awareness about Human Rights...

- Others have the same rights as me too!
- Do we have so many rights and we didn’t know it?
- This activity helped me discover that I know my rights without ever reading the Convention of the United Nations for the children’s rights.
- I am very glad to know there are universal Human Rights.
- I don’t want to leave our village. I love it because I have all my rights.

Realising violation of Human Rights...

- My parents didn’t take me into consideration. They painted my room with the colour they wanted.
- I don’t have any opinion at home, they think I am a child and they decide for me. My views are not taken into consideration at home.

Respecting diversity...

- We should stop making fun of the children that do not speak Greek correctly.
- My brother is at the special education unit and he has the same interests with us, he likes music, cars and he is happy when they help him and love him. But when they reject him, he gets angry.

- All children are the same.
- It gave me a chance to think about what I have, which otherwise might have taken for granted e.g. sibling or a pet, thinking that everyone had the same.

Enthusiasm about the activity...

- We want to continue in the next lesson.
- I liked this activity very much. It was like a game.
- I want us to talk about our rights again.
- Wow! This is so exciting and interesting.
- I would like to be involved in more activities.

Feelings during the activity...

- I felt confusion when I couldn't see; I felt love for the one that helped me and success because I helped someone that needed me.
- I was Andrew and I was 9 years old. I didn't make any step forward because I had nothing, neither food, care nor play. I felt very bad and I thought that all children of the world should have rights and the same opportunities in their life.

Overall impression for *Compasito*

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1-bad, 5-wonderful), the average overall impression of *Compasito* was **4.6**.

Motivation for using *Compasito* again

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1-not at all, 5-very very much), indicating the level of motivation for using *Compasito*, again the average was **4.6**.

Satisfaction for deciding to use *Compasito*

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1-not at all, 5-very very much), indicating the level of satisfaction for deciding to use *Compasito*, the average was **4.8**.

Added value of the activity

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1-very small, 5-obvious), indicating the added value of the activity in the classroom, the average was **4.1**.

Expected Challenges

Before implementing the *Compasito* activity, the teachers and NGO workers stated some of the challenges they expected. One of them was the fact that their students were not used to this kind of exercises, and so there was some speculation about their responses. These included: laughing; misunderstanding the purpose of the activity as just for fun; lack of cooperation; lack of interest; difficulty understanding the activities. For teachers with younger students, the age of the students was also expressed as a concern. The following challenges were also anticipated by individual teachers: pressure of the curriculum; students' low self-confidence; connection of the themes with reality; management of students' stories of Human Rights violations.

Difficulties in practice

It is quite positive that despite the initial fear of doing something unusual, most of the participants said that they did not face any difficulties when they implemented the activity. It was said that the activities of *Compasito* are flexible and adaptable to the school, age group, and available time. It was also mentioned that the analytical way in which the activities are written makes their implementation easier. It has also been stated that the concept of Human Rights can be easily understood by children as long as it is presented to them in an interesting format. Besides, many relevant ideas are already taught in schools without connecting them with Human Rights per se.

Impact on educators

At the end of the activity, the educators reported experiencing a range of positive emotions: satisfaction, contentment, enthusiasm, joy, surprise, optimism, inspiration, motivation. These feelings are an indication of the success of the objectives set and the positive impact on students. Two teachers specifically expressed sadness for the unequal opportunities in life whilst another teacher said she felt touched by the results. It is also interesting that a few teachers were reminded of Human Rights issues that they had in "the back of their minds" through the procedure of preparing and implementing a *Compasito*. There was also an enhanced interest in further networking activities among local actors.

About Human Rights Education

Human Rights Education is associated, as described by the participants in this study, with ideas such as the humanistic and democratic school of thought, and enduring objectives of education. Some educators used interesting similes to describe the importance of Human Rights Education: "it is like the root of a tree", or "a cornerstone". It was also mentioned by many educators that Human Rights Education is not only about awareness of one's own rights, but about the Human Rights of others too.

What is *Compasito*?

When asked the question “How would you describe *Compasito* to somebody that doesn’t know what it is?” some of the educators gave the following answers:

- It is a series of activities, based on the charter of the Human Rights of the child, that aim to strengthen the dignity and the potentials of children, so that they can improve the level of morality in tomorrow’s society.
- I would say that it is a tool that helps educators to teach children to defend their rights and respect the rights of the others. If it is used the right way, I believe that it is a way to face aggressive behaviour, bullying and discipline issues in schools.
- It is a book that can be of inspiration for the teacher to invent his/her own activities relevant to Human Rights.
- It is a wonderful manual for educators and teachers and includes a big range of experiential activities for children with the aim to sensitize them about their Human Rights.
- It is a guide to use Human Rights activities through fun

Towards active inclusion of *Compasito* in education in Cyprus.

The following recommendations were made by the participants in this pilot study:

- Experiential workshops for teachers initiated by the Ministry (not only for the schools in the Health Promoting network). Human Rights workshops for principals and people working in Ministry, and workshops for parents and the community.
- *Compasito* workshops for teachers given by an experienced colleague during staff meeting, or given by a colleague to his students, or co-teaching.
- Inclusion of Human Rights Education in school curriculum, e.g. in environmental education, or health education (for example each teacher to do 3 mandatory activities per year).
- Matching *Compasito* activities with specific lessons and themes of the curriculum.
- Upload the Greek version of *Compasito* on the internet together with accompanying material.
- Initiate peer to peer education for Human Rights.
- Human Rights Club societies in schools or Human Rights week in schools.
- International seminars with the participation of other countries.
- Encourage teachers that already used *Compasito* to keep using it and share the experience with other colleagues or attend advanced level workshops.

CONCLUSION

This pilot study has been used to provide the first report on *Compasito* use in the Cypriot context. The outcomes of this pilot study have been particularly encouraging. It can be confidently asserted that *Compasito* has been successfully used in Cypriot classrooms and elsewhere with positive effects. We anticipate that this report will be used as a *Compasito* supplement, inspiring and encouraging educators to apply its methods for the children's benefit. Moreover, we expect that this document will promote *Compasito* during policy-making in the field of education. Whether from a "bottom-up" perspective (teacher training and classroom based exercises) and a "top-down" perspective (guided by a "ready-made" Council of Europe manual), this report has clearly indicated the necessity of Human Rights Education in Cyprus. Therefore, the *Compasito* manual can and should play a key-role in Human Rights Education in Cyprus.

We would like to extend special thanks to all of the educators who participated in this pilot study.