

The Administration of Heritage Language Schools in Multicultural Societies: The Case of the Hellenic School of Ottawa, Canada

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Many ethnic communities living in multicultural societies have established Heritage Language Schools (HLS) to transmit ethnic language and preserve ethnic culture. The administration of these HLS is no easy task however (Arvanitis, 2004; Pu, 2012; Tamis, 2010). Research is needed to help better understand how HLS programs, such as the Hellenic School of Ottawa (HSO), are administered and what can help enhance administration practices and the sustainment of these schools (Zoupa & Karlis, 2015). The purpose of this paper is to examine the perceptions of administration towards the administrative practices of the HSO. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to present the perceptions of HCO administrators toward: (1) the structure and objectives of the HSO, (2) the strengths and weaknesses of the administration of the HSO, and (3) suggestions for the enhancement of the administration of the HSO. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on ten former administrators of the HSO who have been responsible for operation of the HSO. It was found that the structure of the HSO focused on the instruction of the Greek language, including the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing; whereas, the objectives of the HSO focused on instilling a love for the Greek language. Moreover, administrators presented two strengths of the administration of HSO - (1) support from the HCO, and (2) people involvement as well as three weaknesses - (1) support from the HCO, and (2) people involvement. Further, the administrators presented ten suggestions for the enhancement of the operation of the HSO - (1) teachers of higher qualifications, (2) addition of more Greek-content activities, (3) time-frame expansion, (4) resources, (5) teacher support, (6) summer camps in Greece, (7) create school partnerships, (8) Webinars and seminars, (9) trips to Greece, and (10) engagement in Greek-content activities.

Keywords: heritage language schools, Hellenic School of Ottawa, administration, ethnic language, ethnic culture

Introduction

The successful transmission of ethnic cultural identity is the goal of many immigrants in multicultural society. An attachment to the ethnic homeland of many immigrants comes with them during their travels to their new host society, and tends to stay with them during the acculturation period. Transmitting ethnic heritage to their descendants, including ethnic language, is of utmost importance for many immigrants (Tamis & Gavaki, 2002). In terms of assisting ethnic groups in preserving their ethnic culture and language, a plethora of ethnic families, under the

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administration and supervision of their ethnic communities, attempt to help their children preserve and develop their ethnic language and culture by attending ethnic schools (Arvanitis, 2004) or community-based HLS (Pu, 2012; Tamis, 2010). HLS are operated in order to teach the ethnic language and culture, hence, for cultural preservation (Arvanitis, 2004).

Specifically, according to Pu (2012), HLS are operated by ethnic groups to develop cultural knowledge and linguistic skills related with their ethnic languages. These HLS usually operate on weekends or after the everyday school, in locations rented by the community, church or public or private schools (Pu, 2012). The curriculum of those schools usually focuses on language skills and culture (Pu, 2012; Tamis, 2010).

The main objective of HLS includes the learning and maintenance of the ethnic language, as well as learning of school subjects, such as literature, history, geography, and crafts and arts related to the culture of the country of origin, so that cultural awareness can be developed and cultural cohesion and ethnic identity can be supported (Hellenic School of Ottawa, n.d.; Pu, 2012; Tamis, 2010). The educational activities applied in cultural-ethnic schools focus on the preservation of the mother language and the cultural heritage of immigrants and their descendants.

The Hellenic School of Ottawa (HSO), Canada is an example of an HLS. The HSO was established in the late 1930's and has since then undergone many changes and adjustments (Hellenic School of Ottawa, n.d.). Today, the HSO offers classes and ethno-cultural leisure activities only once a week, that is, on Saturdays. The objective of the HSO is the development and maintenance of the Hellenic language and culture (Hellenic School of Ottawa, n.d.).

Just like all HLS, the administration of the HSO is not an easy task. Research is needed to help better understand how HLS programs, such as the HSO are administered, and what can help enhance administration practices and the sustainment of these schools (Zoupa & Karlis, 2015). The purpose of this paper is to examine the perceptions of administration towards the administrative practices of the HSO. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to present the perceptions of HCO administrators toward: (1) the structure and objectives of the HSO, (2) the strengths and weaknesses of the administration of the HSO, and (3) suggestions for the enhancement of the administration of the HSO.

Literature Review

The Heritage Language Programs of Ontario, Canada

Ethnic schools, or else community-based HLS can be classified into: weekend schools, after-schools, as well as summer schools, yet most of them are delivered during weekends for two or three hours per week. Classes are organized into language acquisition, culture, as well as music and art (Arvanitis, 2004; Cheng, 2012; Pu, 2012). As Pu (2012) posits, community-based HLS are administered by community members. Specifically, Cheng (2012) states that "community-based heritage language schools, are generally funded by religious groups, local civic

groups, and group of parents" (pp. 119-120) and the administration of these schools is carried out by school administrators and instructors who generally volunteer and have a background in curriculum and teaching in the ethnic heritage language.

One of the most important factors for the quality in education is sound school administration (Chiaha, Ogakwu, & Amaefula, 2014). Little (1999) pointed out that the areas of administration that have to be adjusted to serve a cultural-maintaining purpose are the organization of the school and the school's policies and procedures. The organization of ethnic cultural schools is culturally orientated and includes cultural practices (e.g., customs, rituals, festivals) (Callins, 2006; Pu, 2012). More specifically, the resources, i.e., the materials in general, the curriculum, and the textbooks have to focus on the particularities of the culture. In addition, numerous cultural norms exist in these schools such as the fusion of academic and leisure activities for the attainment of educational goals (Chiaha, Ogakwu, & Amaefula, 2014).

The HLS programs of Ontario, Canada are administered by both the School Board- appointed by the Ministry of Education - and ethnic communities (Canadian Education Association, 1991). In 1991 it was reported that most of the School Boards in Ontario were in communication with ethnic communities. Specifically, they were in constant cooperation with representatives from ethnic communities, such as Parents Associations, other informal parent groups, as well as cross-cultural coordinators and school liaison committees (Canadian Education Association, 1991). Additionally, many of Ontario's school boards were financed by the Ministry of Education and were also financially supported by ethnic community groups in regard to resource materials and cultural activities (Canadian Education Association, 1991).

There are many HLS programs in the province of Ontario that reported to have gained great contribution from the input of ethnic community members (Canadian Education Association, 1991). Particularly, parents' associations and ethnic community organizations provide financial aid, consultation on human resources issues and more broadly on the delivery of the program, as well as input into the classes' curriculum and on educational materials. Moreover, school liaison committees deal with heritage program issues (Canadian Education Association, 1991). Besides these, the involvement of parents or grandparents as classroom assistant volunteers, as well as teachers from parents associations assist in a variety of events, such as plays, concerts, etc., while also providing input into the delivery of heritage language programs (Canadian Education Association, 1991).

Most of the HLS programs of Ontario were ascertained to include cultural components in their programs (Canadian Education Association, 1991). HLS programs offer activities such as Christmas concerts, celebration of cultural holidays, concerts, trips, dance, drama, songs, poems, arts and crafts, cooking, as well as religious festivities. Activities such as these are deemed to be "the basis for communicative development of language" by the Canadian Education Association (1991, p. 30).

The Hellenic School of Ottawa

The HSO is co-operated by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education of Ontario, as well as the Hellenic Community of Ottawa (HCO) (Hellenic School of Ottawa, n.d.). The HSO is comprised of the language program, the *International Language Program* (ILP), which is under the direction of the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and runs from 9:00am to 11:30am every Saturday. Also, the HSO consists of the cultural program, which is directed by the HCO and runs from 11:30am to 12:30pm every Saturday (Hellenic School of Ottawa, n.d.).

The administration of the cultural program of the HSO is under the direction of the HCO. The administrators responsible for the delivery of this program are the following: The School Director, the Parents and Guardians Association, and the School Liaison. A detailed description of the administrative tasks of each administrator follows, based on participants' descriptions.

The Director of the HSO is responsible for communicating and cooperating with the School Liaison, the HCO, the HSO Parents and Guardian Association (PGA), as well as the Site Administrator appointed by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Specifically, the responsibilities of the Director include informing and giving report to the School Liaison about events and incidents that take place at the school. Also, the Director works with the lead teacher of the school in order to develop the curriculum (textbooks, school subjects, etc.). Moreover, the Director constantly works with the PGA and the HCO for financial matters of events and discusses with them ideas on how to best accommodate students' needs. Furthermore, the Director is responsible for the hiring process of instructors on behalf of the HCO; the instructors' performance evaluations, which has to report them to the HCO; the organization of monthly meetings with the instructors, as well as professional development events; the preparation of the instructors' payroll; as well as the preparation of the school calendar and the monthly newsletter to the parents, making announcements or informing them about upcoming events and the cultural theme of the month.

The PGA is the parent council of the HSO and it is consisted of the President, the Vice-president, the Treasurer, and members of the council. The PGA cooperates with the HSO Director and the HCO School Liaison in order to provide support to teachers and students by assisting them in organizing cultural events, extracurricular activities with a cultural content and by providing financial support by raising money to purchase school equipment, resources, and school material. Finally, the PGA is responsible for recruiting each Saturday's hall monitors of the HSO, who are responsible for assisting in students' supervision throughout the school day.

As far as the HCO School Liaison is concerned, he/she is the person who makes ties between the HSO and the HCO. The school liaison is responsible for advising the school on certain matters (e.g., hiring teachers), as well as guiding the teachers by providing teaching support, training or continuing education. Moreover, the school liaison is, among others, responsible for funding and budget issues, and human resources issues. Finally, the HCO School Liaison attends regular meetings

with the HSO Director and the PGA, discussing any type of issues and incidents there may be, as well as ideas on how to best advance students' learning.

The HSO is administered using the Management by Objectives (MBO) approach. MBO is a management model designed to focus on setting particular objectives and goals to be accomplished through joint collaboration of managers and subordinates. It involves establishing goals and selecting an effective mix of method and means to implement them (Elvik, 2008; Karlis, 1989). Hence, given the goals of an organization that need to be achieved, organizational objectives are put forward, discussed, agreed on, and aimed at in accordance with the purpose of the organization. The MBO approach involves discussion for the transfer of objectives between the different levels of the organization.

It is customarily known that there is no administrative manual on how the HSO should be administered. It is operated according to the MBO model and for the most part this is the procedure that has been followed. Specifically, it seems that according to the objectives of the HSO, its main body of administration, that is, the HSO Director, the HCO Liaison, and the PGA collaborate and jointly formulate a group of specific goals, expected achievements, as well as timeframes for the accomplishment of goals while establishing individual responsibilities.

Method

Participants

Ten administrators of the HSO were recruited and self-selected from a contact provided by the HSO. The size of the participants was a result of the small size of HSO administrators and their availability. As the phenomenological approach was deemed to be most suited for identifying the perceptions of administrators, the small sample size was deemed to be appropriate. As Higginbottom (2004) postulates, small sample sizes are utilized in phenomenological research, because of the in-depth nature of the interviewing.

Data Collection

In order to capture the experiences of the HSO administrators, a phenomenological qualitative approach, using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews was the means used to collect data. The interview questions focused on three main areas: (1) the structure and objectives of the HSO, (2) strengths and weaknesses of the administration of the HSO, and (3) suggestions for the enhancement of operation of the HSO.

Results

Structure and Objectives of the Hellenic School of Ottawa

All ten participants described the structure of the school as focusing on both the instruction of the Greek language, including the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing- and identification and familiarization with the Greek culture. The appreciation of the Hellenic culture is targeted through cultural activities, such as songs, poems, theatrical plays, festivities, as well as through the instruction of Hellenic history, mythology, geography, and religion. As one participant described:

It consists of the language program that accommodates all levels of learning [...]. It also consists of the cultural component: History, geography of the country, cultural customs.

Another participant stated that: "It is not only learning the Greek language. It is also learning a little more history, geography and through all the different phases of Greek religion [...]". Thus the ethno-cultural and ethno-religious values seem to predominate in the structure of the operation of the HSO.

As far as the objectives of the school are concerned, all participants agreed that the school's objectives can be summarized into instilling love for the Greek language, promotion of the Greek heritage, along with encouragement of social identification- i.e., students' interaction with other children with Greek background. For example, one participant noted:

I think it's to introduce 2nd, 3rd, 4th generation students to aspects of Greek culture and Greek language that they wouldn't have the opportunity to experience anywhere else; learning a play, learning a song, going to a museum, doing something that exposes them to Hellenic culture and Hellenic language.

Moreover, another participant stated that: "The general objective is to instil love for the Greek language [...]. Also, to instil an appreciation for the culture and the history of Greece [...]. There is the social part too: Getting to know kids with Greek background". The objective of the HSO was thus deemed to build a love and closeness for Greek culture.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Administration of the HSO

Strengths of the HSO Administration

When asked to identify the strengths of the HSO administration of services two recurring themes were indicated by participants: (1) support from the HCO, and (2) people involvement. The results as presented below indicate that the greatest strengths of the HSO was deemed to be its people who administer the service – those within the HCO and those within the HSO.

(1) Support from the HCO

Support was a recurring theme that appeared from seven of the participants. Support stemming from the HCO via different ways, such as offering financial assistance, paying the teachers for the additional hour that is meant for cultural engagement, providing venues for cultural events, as well as equipment and resources for carrying out cultural events, not only contributed to the promotion of culture, but also to the creation of sense of cultural belonging. As one participant explains, the contribution of the HCO: "It's the contact with the Hellenic Community of Ottawa. That enables the broader contact". A further participant highlighted the the major support of the HCO as:

The Hellenic Community helps a lot the Greek school. For example, there are some events that take place at the Hellenic Community and we use the space of the Hellenic centre and that means that all those costs are covered by the Hellenic Community [...]. Sometimes we use their microphones; we borrow them for events that take place. Of course, the Hellenic Community pays the teachers not only for the cultural program, but also one hour for preparation, one hour for the meeting that we do almost every month. The HCO supports the school financially and in many other ways.

(2) People involvement

Another relevant theme that was mentioned by five participants stressed that the administration is run through capable administrators who are interested in the cause and are eager to ensure that the program is managed soundly. Administrators were not only limited to the Director, the PGA, and the HCO School Liaison, but also the instructors of the HSO were included. As one participant stated:

There are a few key people who are very experienced in all of these things and very willing to teach others [...] They are going to do things either on a personal level, or on a community level to promote that educational culture [...] you are going to find out that people are interested in promoting their culture and they're going to encourage you to do it too.

Weaknesses of the Administration of the HSO

Participants were also asked about their perceptions towards any weaknesses of the delivery of the program. Themes that were indicated by participants were: (1) funding, (2) lack of human resources, and (3) insufficient time.

(1) Funding

Interestingly enough, despite the fact that the HSO obtains financial support from both the HCO and the PGA, four participants stressed that there is need for additional funding in order to better administer the cultural program. One participant expressed "I wish we had more money to help out with more things". Another participant stated that "there's always an issue with the funding [...]. You need money to administer all these activities". Moreover, a further participant noted "we

do have the support from the HCO and the PGA, but there could be other stuff we could do if we had further financial assistance".

(2) Lack of human resources

Four of the participants reported that the amount of people responsible for the administration of the cultural program is limited and that there is need for more people to get involved. Specifically, participants regarded that more parents should be involved in administrative tasks related to the PGA responsibilities. Further, a more direct participation on behalf of the parents in the administration of the school would motivate the students to be more willing to engage in the school program. As one participant indicates:

I think every PGA needs more parents involved. I think always the same group of people will get involved or help. I think if the children see their parents more involved in the Greek School, it will make them more to want to be there and participate in what is happening.

(3) Insufficient time

The HSO was initially operated from 9:00am to 11:30am, yet the program was extended to an additional hour-up until 12:30pm every Saturday. Despite the expansion, some participants regarded that the time for cultural activities is still insufficient. Further, they did not consider that three and a half hours once a week is an adequate timeframe that could lead to the acquisition of knowledge on the Greek culture and maintenance of the cultural heritage. One participant mentioned that: "it would be surely better if we had more time". Whereas, another participant stated that:

The school is only every Saturday- once a week- and we don't have enough time. I have parents meeting with me and telling me "you are doing so wonderful job, but it should be twice a week". In the past it was twice a week, I think Wednesdays and Saturdays- two hours on Wednesdays and three hours on Saturdays. That would help the students with learning the Greek language and with getting them to understand the Greek culture.

Suggestions for the Enhancement of Operation of the Hellenic School

This section provides the administrators' suggestions in order to ameliorate language services provided at the HSO, as well as suggestions to pass on Hellenic culture. These suggestions may aid in eliminating weaknesses of the HSO administration while contributing to the maintenance of the Hellenic heritage. Below are the suggestions presented by the participants: (1) teachers of higher qualifications, (2) addition of more Greek-content activities, (3) time-frame expansion, (4) resources, (5) teacher support, (6) summer camps in Greece, (7) create school partnerships, (8) Webinars and seminars, (9) trips to Greece, and (10) engagement in Greek-content activities.

(1) Teachers of higher qualifications

According to five participants, in order for the HSO to best administer language services, it is necessary for the HSO to recruit instructors fluent in Greek- preferably native Greeks. If this is not an option, since most of the teachers' first language is English, the administration of the HSO could provide professional development opportunities and workshops for the teachers so that they can perfect their language skills and transmit them to students. As one participant stated:

I would love to have more professional development opportunities for the teachers themselves. I know that some of our teachers don't come from Greece and Greek is not their first language and that plays an important role in teaching Greek itself. I would love to have workshops for those teachers.

Another participant recommended that the HSO hire instructors proficient in Greek or train them to reach this level. This was articulated in the statement below:

The way to do it I think is to have teachers who can speak Greek well, if they are not teachers themselves provide them with some training and some techniques for helping them teach- because teaching is a skill- but I think, ultimately, you need people who can speak the language very well and are passionate about it [...] so that the students can hear what Greek should sound like.

(2) Addition of more Greek-content activities

While five participants regarded that the HSO would need better qualified teachers, three of the participants suggested that the HSO includes more Greek oriented activities that can assist students in advancing their language level. As stated by one participant: "more Greek content teaching activities could be added". Such activities could include presentations to the public, theatrical plays, Greek movies, (Greek) music performances, and museum presentations.

(3) Time-frame expansion

As aforementioned, one of the weaknesses of the administration of the HSO is related to the limited time of instruction. Related to this stated weakness, two administrators perceive that in order to best administer language services, the language instructional time should be increased. This is clearly articulated in the statement below made by one of the participants:

More teaching hours. In the older times they had lesson twice a week, Wednesday and Saturday. Later on it became once a week but only until 13:30 (from 9:00 to 13:30). Not all children stayed (until 13:30), but most of them did and better teaching work was done.

Another participant also presented the rationale for increased instruction time. This participant believed that it would be beneficial for language mastering if more time was added by stating:

I realize now that we don't have enough time. We have so many things to cover in terms of the curriculum and in terms of the events- we prepare four main events- but if we had more time, it would be something that would help the students to better acquire the Greek language.

(4) Resources

Lack of resources was also noted as a weakness of the administration. Hence, two administrators suggested that if the HSO could find the way and had more enriched resources, students would be provided with the opportunity to engage in more linguistic activities. This point was emphasized by one participant as follows: "having more resources is very important and creating opportunities for students to work on activities that would help in acquiring the language.

(5) Teaching support

While some participants' suggestions varied into teacher's professional development, time, and resources, an administrator, on the other hand, recommended that assistance could be offered to teachers in the classroom by either parents or volunteers who could help in the language learning process. This point was stated by the participant as follows:

What would actually help is to have an aid for the teachers, to help even the ones that do not understand what is going on in the class- whether it is a parent or somebody else or a volunteer. I think that would help the teachers a lot and the kids, so that the teacher can focus on teaching.

(6) Summer camps in Greece

It was suggested by one of the participant that the organization of summer camps to Greece be organized by the HSO. The argument that was presented was that summer camps would help the students familiarize themselves both with the language and the culture. This participant stated the following:

There are also summer camps in Greece and we informed the parents about this through the newsletter, however, those camps were cancelled [...]. If they are immersed into the Greek surrounding, they are in Greece and they talk to people in Greek, this is how they will learn the language for sure.

(7) Create school partnerships

It was also suggested that students of the HSO communicate regularly with students from Greece in order to enhance their knowledge of Greek language.

Besides students from Greece, they could be in touch with other students of Greek descent from all over Canada or the U.S. As the participant stated: "Something else that would be a wonderful idea is to create school partnerships- relationships with schools from Greece- and have students from Greece talk to our students here [..]. So, that would be something, but it requires a lot of organization".

(8) Webinars or seminars

Conversely, one of the participants suggested that the school could get involved with the Internet side of the education for the teachers and administrators to benefit. In other words, more on-line resources and opportunities need to be utilized by the HSO>

Maybe, I would like to see some webinars or seminars to introduce new techniques and show what we are aiming at, what we are planning of changing and hear what the teachers have to say and then be able to adjust the manuals. I think it would be necessary to have a connection-that's what's missing right now.

(9) Trips to Greece

All ten participants suggested that trips to Greece or even summer camps in Greece are the optimum way to pass on the Hellenic culture to students of Greek descent. All participants recognized that it may not be a recommendation that could be carried out easily, due to financial reasons; it is though the soundest way to integrate into Greek heritage. As one participant explained: "The best solution is a visit to Greece. We should encourage that and do what we can to do that. It's another thing to learn about this place far off away and another to experience it.

(10) Engagement in Greek-content activities

All of the participants indicated that participation into more Greek-oriented activities is a major contributor for maintaining the Hellenic heritage. Those activities are varied from watching Greek movies, reading Greek books, listening to Greek music, participating in theatrical plays, participating in Greek dancing, participating in religious events, getting involved with what the HCO has to offer, participating in the Greek festival and so on. As one participant noted:

Try and live it. So, whether it is watching Greek videos, going to museums, going when possible to Greece, having a community of people who are also Greek, reading stories about Greek history and Greek culture, going to church; Living it, identifying yourself as a Greek-Canadian; whether it's the food, the music, the language, having it as part of your life and your day-to-day existence.

Conclusion

For HLS programs to operate successfully, a lot depends on the efforts put forth by administrators. As little research has been conducted on HLS programs and the perceptions of administrators, this study purported to contribute to this limited research by examining the perceptions of administrators of the HSO. The results present findings on the administrative structure and objectives of the HSO, the strength and weaknesses in the administration of the HSO, as well as suggestions for improvement for the administration of the HSO.

It was found that the structure of the HSO focused on the instruction of the Greek language, including the fourlanguage skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing; whereas, the objectives of the HSO focused on instilling a love for the Greek language. Moreover, administrators presented two strengths of the administration of HSO - (1) support from the HCO, and (2) people involvement; as well as three weaknesses - (1) support from the HCO, and (2) people involvement. Further, the administrators presented ten suggestions for the enhancement of the operation of the HSO - (1) teachers of higher qualifications, (2) addition of more Greek-content activities, (3) time-frame expansion, (4) resources, (5) teacher support, (6) summer camps in Greece, (7) create school partnerships, (8) Webinars and seminars, (9) trips to Greece, and (10) engagement in Greek-content activities.

As these findings are relevant and particularly practical for the HCO, while also making a contribution to research, it is recommended that more research be conducted as administrators change and education continues to evolve. It is also recommended that more research be conducted examining ethnic groups involved in HLS programs to provide a more diverse perspective of findings.

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