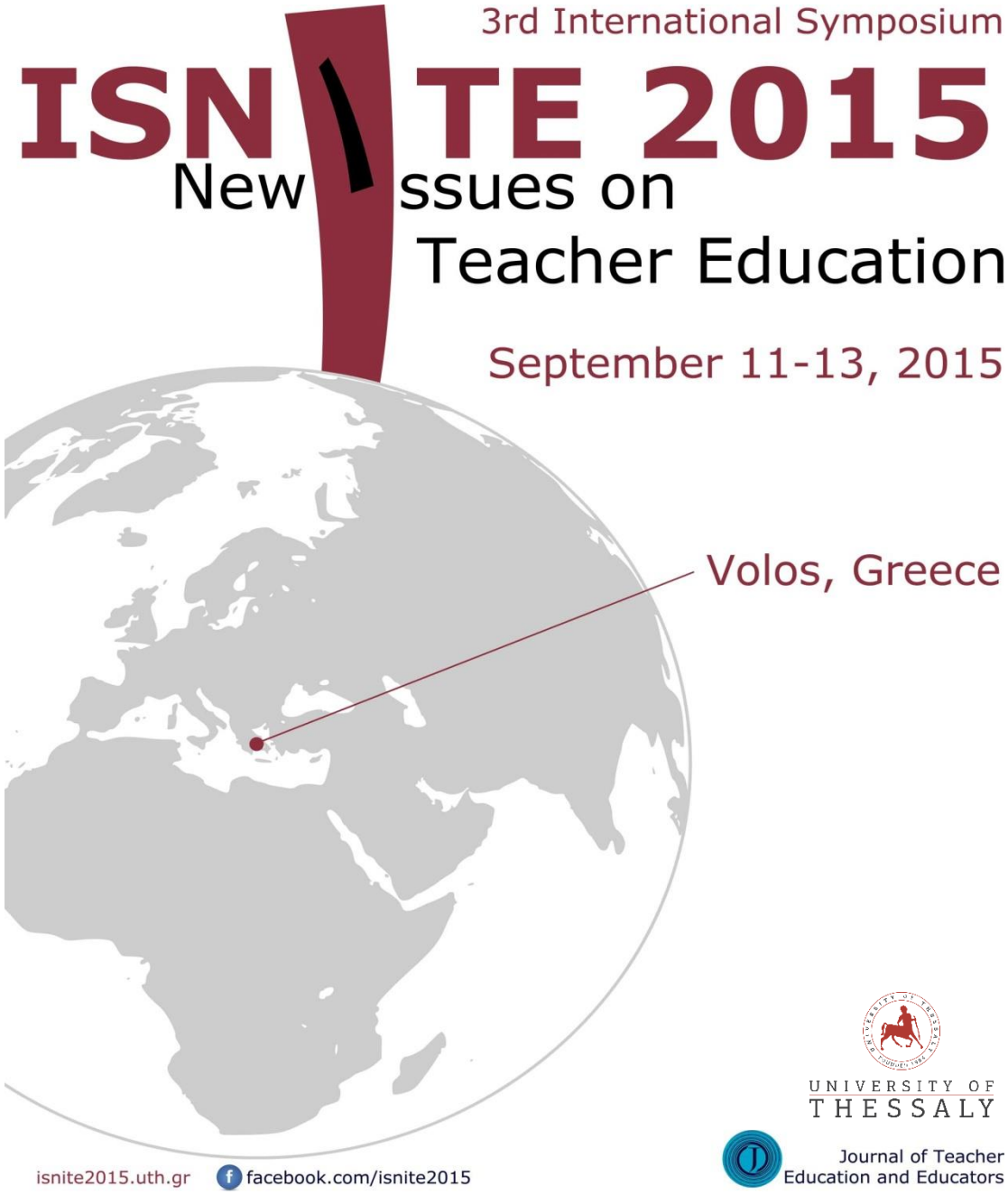
Proceedings from the 3rd International Symposium on New Issues on Teacher Education



E-BOOK (PDF)

Proceedings from the 3rd International Symposium on New Issues on Teacher Education

Editors: Domna -Mika Kakana & Polyxeni Manoli

Reference: Kakana, D-M. & Manoli, P. (eds.) (2017). *Digital Proceedings from the 3rd International Symposium on New Issues on Teacher Education-ISNITE 2015* (Volos, Greece, 11-13 September 2015). Volos: University of Thessaly Press

Edited by: Domna -Mika Kakana, Polyxeni Manoli

For the proceedings

Theologia Avdelli, Marianna Lepida **&** Katerina Veniopoulou, Sonia Likomitrou & Sofia Avgitidou, Apostolia Beka & Stathis Xafakos, Ioannis Dimakos & Athanasia Apostolopoulou, Ertug Can & Hüseyin Çaglar, Anastasios Maratos & Aggeliki Lazaridou, Olga Mpatsoula, Glykeria Reppa & Anastasia Intzevidou, Türkay Nuri TOK & Şükran Tok, Rosy Angelaki, Christine Bourlaki & Domna-Mika Kakana, Despina Desli & Elisavet Galanopoulou, Gerasimos K. Pagiatakis & Nikolaos F. Voudoukis, Lampros Papadimas, Sofia Avgitidou, Penelope Papadopoulou & Petros Kariotoglou, Efthymia Gourgiotou, Marina Sounoglou & Aikaterini Michalopoulou, Nikoletta Avgerinou, Maria Giakoumi, Maria Gkountouma & Maria Kouklatzidou, Anastasia Fakidou & Maria Gotzia, Konstantina Kotsari, Spyros Kourias, Anna Chronaki & Elias Houstis, Aikaterini Mastrokoukou & Emmanuel Fokides, Nikolaos F. Voudoukis & Gerasimos K. Pagiatakis, Katerina Boutsi & Theodora Tsiagani, Georgios S. Gorozidis & Athanasios G. Papaioannou, Vassilis Pantazis, Efpraxia Triantafyllou & Georgia Pantazi, Ilknur Savaskan, Spyridon-Georgios Soulis, Eirini Maleskou, Ismini-Charikleia Karatzeni & Vasileios Masouras, Despoina Styla & Aikaterini Michalopoulou, Nikolaos Yfantopoulos, Antigoni-Alba Papakonstantinou & Anastasios Emvalotis, Efstathios Xafakos & Jasmin-Olga Sarafidou, George Androulakis, Mariarena Malliarou, Irene Ntasiou, Vicky Panagou, Iro-Maria Pantelouka & Sofia Tsioli, George Androulakis, Roula Kitsiou, Eleni Paparoidami, Argiro – Maria Skourmalla, Emmanouela Sotiropoulou, Alexia Giannakopoulou, George Giotis, *Vasiliki Mitropoulou* & *Maria Anagnostopoulou,* Irini Dermitzaki & Maria Kriekouki, Erhan Dönmez & Türkay Nuri Tok, Vasiliki Karavakou & Genovefa Papadima, Panagiotis J. Stamatis & Athanasios Papanikolaou, Ioanna Georgiadou & Anastasia Vlachou, Domna – Mika Kakana, Katiphenia Chatzopoulou, Magda Vitsou, Eleni Xiradaki & Anastasia Mavidou, Michael Kamoudis, Eleni Mavroeidi & Charalambos Lemonidis, Anastasia Psalti, Natassa Raikou, Maria Kampeza, Thanassis Karalis, George Bagakis, Kafenia Botsoglou & Elefhteria Beazidou, Bahar Çağri San & Türkay Nuri Tok, Maria Chaitidou, Anna Spyrtou & Petros Kariotoglou, Olga Imellou & Aris Charoupias, Paola Nicolini, Valentina Corinaldi, Monica De Chiro, Christina Formiconi & Elisa Attili, Maria Papadopoulou & George Bagakis, Maria-Eleni Sachou & Konstantinos Chatzidimou, Despina Tsakiris, Sophia Smyrni, Dimitra Pavlina Nikita, Christina Tsaliki, George Malandrakis & Petros Kariotoglou, Anastasia Voutyra & Sofia Smyrni

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UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY PRESS, Volos, 2017

ISBN: 978-960-9439-47-3

University of Thessaly Press
http://utpress.uth.gr

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7.2. A case of training second language teachers online: Affordances, constraints, advantages and achievements

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Abstract
This paper focuses on an intensive online teacher training seminar addressed to teachers who were asked to teach in a Greek Language and Culture program for immigrants. The MATHEME project aimed to help teachers develop a set of cross-language and intercultural skills so that they could teach a multicultural audience. A two-day seminar was held online in order to inform the teaching staff regarding the design, organization and implementation of the project, the expected outcomes and the specific features of the project. The results of our analysis support the view that effective online teacher training presuppose consistent and meaningful participation in digital learning communities of practice.

Key-words: ESL teacher training, online teacher training, e-class, chats

1. Background: GreekLangLab and the MATHEME project

This paper is the result of teamwork. All the presenters are members of the Greek Language Laboratory of the University of Thessaly, in Volos. The Greek Language Laboratory was founded in 1999, as part of the Department of Primary Education at the University of Thessaly. The Laboratory consists of professors, researchers, students, and teachers who participate, often voluntarily, in its activities and projects. Among others, its main priorities include:

-The dissemination and teaching of Greek as a second and foreign language
-The study and analysis of Modern Greek through the perspective of sociolinguistics
-The scientific contribution to educational and linguistic policy issues.

Related to its overall action, in early 2015 the Greek Language Laboratory was selected, after a call for proposals, to implement the project 1.3 b / 13 under the annual programme of the European Integration for 2013, aiming at the integration of nationals from countries outside the European Union, which was managed in Greece by the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction. More specifically, the proposal

refers to “courses of Greek language, history and culture to immigrants of the following categories: unemployed, mothers, persons with disabilities (PWD) and illiterates” for a target group of around 300 legally resident immigrants. The project was then named as MATHEME, which came out from the corresponding Greek phrase “Greek language courses for immigrants”. The 80-hour courses organized in three different levels (beginners, intermediate and advanced level) took place in the following seven (7) cities, the capitals of the Decentralized Administrations around the country: Athens, Larissa, Ioannina, Patras, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, and Heraklion.

It has to be noticed that immigrants’ participation was voluntary and free of any financial obligations. Conversely, a small remuneration and a certificate of successful completion of the courses cycle were addressed to students who attended the courses assiduously.

Concerning the teaching methods, the classes used brand new and innovative teaching materials, created by the project’s team according to task-based approach, and adapted to the participants’ needs as recorded by the research team of the project through interviews and in situ vitus in the respective cities.

The ultimate purpose of the action was to enhance social cohesion and harmonious coexistence between communities with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this context, the effective learning of Greek as a second language, as well as the contact and the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the field of Greek history and culture, are considered to be an important factor.

The teachers, who worked for the MATHEME project, were chosen after a formal evaluation of their CVs. More specifically, the necessary skills required for the teachers of the Greek language were the following: a degree in the field of languages or education, a postgraduate diploma in teaching Greek as a second language, certified experience of at least two years in teaching Greek as a second language to immigrant audience and optionally teaching in educational programs based on the principles of task-based teaching. Based on the same rationale, the teachers for Greek history and culture should have had the following skills: a degree in the field of humanities or social sciences, a master degree in Modern Greek history or culture or their teaching, certified experience of at least two years in the teaching of Modern Greek history or Modern Greek culture in immigrant audience and optionally teaching in educational programs based on the principles of task-based teaching. Fluency in a language other than Greek was required for both categories.

2. Teacher training: Process and principles

The aim of teacher training has to be high quality education. With a view to getting the best possible results, the teacher training process had to take into consideration some “prime elements”, such as: the trainees’ personal attributes, the students’ individual and group attributes and the nature of the educational process in general (Strevens, 1974). The MATHEME teacher training focused on effective teaching of Greek as a second language (and, to a lesser extent, of Modern Greek history and culture) to immigrants.

To do so, training in the MATHEME included a four-hour online webinar. For the imple3mentation of the webinar, members of the support team of the Greek Language Laboratory got in contact with the Centre of the Electronic Governance of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in order to get permission to use its online platform https://it.auth.gr/el/academicSupport/eLearning. 41 teachers who attended the webinar got informed about the project and discussed a variety of other subjects.

After that, during the first week of the implementation of the courses, both teachers and students were invited to evaluate their experience from the first stage of the project

and pose their questions and demands for the rest of the project. As a result, a second webinar was set to provide solutions and proposals to the issues that came up. In other words, the meeting had a form of feedback to the coordinating team of the project. For practical reasons, this second webinar was organized in two distinct parts, the first with collaborators from Athens and Piraeus,and the second with teachers from Patras, Heraklion, Ioannina, Thessaloniki, and Larissa.

The first webinar focused on seven basic work streams. More precisely, the support team started the meeting with some remarks about the technical settings and a brief reference to the context of the project. Afterwards, the attendees discussed the organization of the classes and the teachers' and mediators' role in order to achieve the best possible results. Towards the end of the webinar, the scientific coordinator presented some of the pedagogical and methodological principles that our laboratory follows. Those principles were accompanied with a short demonstration of the teaching material created for the MATHEME project.

Subsequently, the content of the twofold feedback webinar can be summarized in three units:

-the definition of the students' level in Greek language

-the different options and opinions for the use of the teaching material proposed and

-a set of other important matters concerning the process of the project.

As mentioned above, during the first webinar, the project's pedagogical and methodological principles were presented and commented; they concern the "open" spirit of the classes and the local solutions to issues that arise. Furthermore, the differentiated teaching, the students' autonomy and the sensitivity and utilization of the linguistic portrait –based on the detection during the courses- are of great importance for the objectives of the project. In addition to these, the principles also include several linguistic aspects, such as mutual understanding between different languages, and the transition from oral to writing and literacy skills. Moreover, the support team suggested that the teachers should invest in students' previously acquired skills in combination with the development of strategies and techniques which are connected with the requirements of the courses of the project.

3. Discussion

The webinars were definitely a very informative and interesting part of the MATHEME project. All the participants felt free to express their opinions and shared their thoughts and worries about the courses. The questions posed by the teachers concerned both procedural and pedagogical matters.

At the beginning of the first webinar, the distribution of the educational material, the kick-off, the duration and the space for the implementation of the courses, as well as the contracts and insurance issues, were the dominant procedural questions. On the other hand, the pedagogical questions about the task-based method required more emphasis and discussion due to their complexity and importance.

After the first week of the courses, numerous questions concerning the educational subjects were expressed by the project collaborators. Those subjects were the main issues developed during the feedback meetings. To be more specific, the teaching of grammar was a controversial point. The students expressed their need for grammar and orthography through exercises. Similarly, the teachers considered the practice of grammar, through drills and exercises, to be necessary. In order to help students develop this kind of skill, teachers used material from previous programs that were addressed to immigrants. In fact, negotiations between the coordinator and the teachers were needed, as the background of the application accepted for funding postulated that task-

based teaching and learning has no or very limited compatibility with explicit grammar teaching. Evidence from research projects in Greece and elsewhere was used to persuade teachers about the low suitability of explicit grammar for the development of communicative and social skills (Seowon, 2004). So, the project principle for "grammar through tasks" had to be reconceived and applied as "tasks with a bit of grammar".

The second important pedagogical thread, during the webinars, was about the educational material developed by the project team. The lack of contact, adaptation time and technical equipment was the main obstacles that teachers had to face. They did not have enough time to get acquainted with the proposed material and its way of use. However, it was clarified that this material should not be taught in its entirety, while teachers were free to choose and adapt every chapter to the needs of their groups. In addition to these, the attendees made their own proposals on the material. More specifically, although they found the MATHEME material very good for the oral skills, they suggested, for instance, that adding subtitles to the videos for our deaf students and recording dialogues with the voice of other immigrants would be more helpful to facilitate the listening exercises.

Many teachers commented about the level of the material for beginners, which they considered too high. They claimed that there were lengthy dialogues which were hardly understood by the students. The mediators posed the heterogeneity in the classes as a problem, which very often complicated the teacher's work. As a consequence, some help from the classmates which had the same nationality or spoke the same language was provided very often.

Other practical problems in terms of the implementation of the lessons were caused by the presence of the migrants' children, the difficulty of attendance by the migrants due to the season (e.g., May and June are regarded as a good period for temporary work).

Regarding the students who were illiterate in their mother tongue, specific questions were raised and specific guidelines were given. Besides, as most of the students of the beginner level could not speak Greek fluently, sometimes the teachers used English or French and, subsequently, adaptation of the teaching material had to be performed. In addition, it was observed that the educational system that the students were familiar with had a great impact on the courses.

Despite the above concerns, the teachers underlined that the students' interest for the courses was very high, as well as their keenness on participation in the lessons. At the same time, the teachers trying to identify the reasons for this high interest attributed it to the overall orientation and priorities of the project, the interesting topics and materials around which the tasks were developed. In this context, differentiated and experiential teaching appeared to the teachers' view as a rather natural way of constructing their teaching practice.

4. Concluding remarks

The effective online teacher training presupposes consistent and meaningful participation in digital learning communities of practice and a thorough understanding of the role of the citizenship that, civility, digital literacy and openness serve in successful online instruction. Moreover, appropriate participation in the online sessions was usually linked with communication and creation skills.

In conclusion, teachers who participated in the training seminars of the MATHEME project reported that the training process and the project in its totality helped them raise awareness of three facets:

- Methodological awareness attached to understanding and applying important language teaching principles, such as task-based teaching and learning;
- Intercultural awareness, regarding the immigration phenomenon, the immigrants' needs and everyday life in Greece;
- Professional awareness linked to choice making and decision making in order to assure effectiveness and appropriateness in language teaching, mainly through processes, such as negotiation and mediation.

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