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Teacher development and coll@bor@tion

Συνεργατικότητα και επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη των εκπαιδευτικών

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Limitations inherent in in-service teacher training in Greece are often held responsible for the difficulty teachers face when they attempt to update their knowledge and skills as well as when they try to incorporate new approaches in their teaching practice. This paper, first, reports research which explored Greek primary school EFL teachers' views concerning issues related to more effective approaches to in-service teacher training and, second, it presents aspects of the experimental approach we adopted in an attempt to circumvent some of the shortfalls of the existing in-service teacher training system as they are described in the literature. More specifically, taking into consideration the principles of adult lifelong learning as well as the effects reflection and collaboration as learning modes can have on continuous professional development, we carried out a project where four teachers exchanged electronic diary entries during a school year. The analysis of their diary entries offers invaluable insights and reveals that teachers can spot their weaknesses, are aware of different approaches to problematic situations and are willing to try suggestions offered by colleagues.

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Οι εγγενείς περιορισμοί στην ενδοϋπηρεσιακή επιμόρφωση των εκπαιδευτικών στην Ελλάδα, συχνά ευθύνονται για τη δυσκολία που αντιμετωπίζουν οι εκπαιδευτικοί όταν προσπαθούν να εκσυγχρονίσουν τις γνώσεις και τις δεξιότητές τους, καθώς και όταν προσπαθούν να ενσωματώσουν νέες προσεγγίσεις στη διδασκαλία τους. Η παρούσα εργασία έχει στόχο, πρώτον, να παρουσιάσει μια έρευνα που εξετάζει τις απόψεις των Ελλήνων καθηγητών αγγλικής γλώσσας στην Πρωτοβάθμια Εκπαίδευση σχετικά με αποτελεσματικότερες προσεγγίσεις της ενδοϋπηρεσιακής κατάρτισης και, δεύτερον, να περιγράψει πτυχές μιας πειραματικής προσέγγισης που υιοθετήθηκε σε μια προσπάθεια να παρακαμφθούν ορισμένες από τις ελλείψεις του υπάρχοντος συστήματος ενδοϋπηρεσιακής επιμόρφωσης όπως αυτές περιγράφονται στη βιβλιογραφία. Ειδικότερα, λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τις αρχές της δια βίου μάθησης και της μάθησης των ενηλίκων, καθώς και τα αποτελέσματα του αναστοχασμού και της

συνεργατικότητας στη συνεχή επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη των εκπαιδευτικών, πραγματοποιήθηκε μελέτη κατά την οποία τέσσερις εκπαιδευτικοί αγγλικής γλώσσας αντάλλαξαν καταχωρήσεις σε ηλεκτρονικά ημερολόγια κατά τη διάρκεια ενός σχολικού έτους. Η ανάλυση αυτών των καταχωρήσεων προσφέρουν πολύτιμα δεδομένα και αποκαλύπτουν ότι οι εκπαιδευτικοί μπορούν να εντοπίσουν τις αδυναμίες τους, έχουν επίγνωση των διαφορετικών προσεγγίσεων σε προβληματικές καταστάσεις και είναι πρόθυμοι να δοκιμάσουν προτάσεις-λίψεις που προσφέρονται από τους συναδέλφους τους.

Key words: teacher development, in-service training, reflection, diary, collaboration, ICT

1. Introduction

There is general agreement that the quality of teaching and teacher education is a key factor in securing the quality of education and raising learners' achievement (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). In this respect, continuous professional development (CPD) appears to be central whenever changes are to be induced to problematic areas (Atay, 2008, p. 139). Yet, in Greece the obsolete structures of the prevailing professional development schemes for teachers seem to have been a major obstacle to meaningful educational change for decades (Kastis, 2004, p. 121) and as a result teachers often encounter serious difficulties when they attempt to update their knowledge and skills as well as when they attempt to incorporate new approaches, methods and techniques in their teaching practice. A number of studies attest the fact that changes introduced to the Greek education system at different times failed to fulfil the aims set by those who designed and introduced them, often due to reasons relating to teacher training (see Karavas, 1993; Verdis, Papadopoulou, & Chalkiadaki, 2006).

This particular context has inspired a number of EFL researchers and practitioners (Flouridou, 2011; Gkantidou, 2005; Griva, 2005; Joyce, 2011; Karagianni, 2012; Kourkouli, 2010; Ntoula, 2007; Strympni, 2010; Tsoukidou, 2010) to explore the Greek teacher training system in order to offer suggestions which could aid policy makers and stakeholders in general, first, to overcome the failure of the existing training schemes to cater for the teachers' real training needs and, second, to implement constructive suggestions abounding in the literature. In addition, the growing body of research on the social psychology of teachers according to which teacher development is contingent upon a number of factors, which are often ignored, such as teachers' personal motivation (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 157; Smith & Gillespie, 2007, p. 227; Suslu, 2006), centrality of teachers' emotions (Hargreaves, 1998; Karagianni, 2008; 2012; Nias, 1996), involvement of teachers in self-development activities (Edge, 2001; Farrell, 2001) and collaboration with colleagues (Bailey F. , 1996; Karagianni, 2012; Packett, 2002), has created a pressing need for in-depth research in the field of teacher development in Greece.

This paper reports findings based on research which utilised a social constructivist approach to EFL teachers' professional development and combined peer collaboration, reflection, diary writing and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in order to explore whether an alternative approach to in-service teacher training of EFL teachers can surmount some of the weaknesses

found in the Greek in-service teacher training programmes (for more information on this study see Karagianni, 2012). More analytically, this study has taken into consideration the lack of similar research in the Greek context as well as the limitations of current in-service teacher training programmes and investigated whether a collaborative ICT-based approach of teacher diary exchange, which accommodates the principles of adult lifelong learning and shares characteristics with examples of good practice, can result in an innovative form of continuous professional development.

2. Theoretical perspectives in teacher learning and development

2.1. Teacher education, teacher training and teacher development

Teacher education, teacher training, teacher preparation or teacher development are some of the terms used most frequently in the literature when referring to teacher preparation in general or to the various stages of this preparation before teachers start their career or while 'on the job', either in their early, mid- or late career. Adopting Freeman's distinction (1989, p. 37), *teacher education* is a superordinate term under which the other two coexist. Teacher training involves the acquisition and the mastery of a finite number of skills which constitute teaching and the address of immediate needs while teacher development encourages continuous growth and views teaching as a constantly evolving process and the teacher as the person who bears the responsibility for the struggle against professional atrophy. In this context, new ideas are put to testing and constant reflection is expected to be adopted as a way of moving teaching practice forward. Both terms are not limited by time, space, participants or purpose constraints. They are used to refer to structured training or development which is either designed and implemented by special institutions such as ministries of education and teacher training agencies, or is self- or group- initiated. In other words, they refer to both formal and informal or non-formal teacher learning.

Our study endorses Allwright and Bailey's (1991, p. 200) informal approach of *exploratory practice* which places teacher development in a context of self-directed learning where teachers observe what they do, reflect on it, analyse it but also share their thoughts and feelings with colleagues in order to consolidate, develop or redesign their course of action. As we will explain later in this paper, teacher development can be traced when teachers, first, attempt to verbalise their thoughts and actions concerning both positive and negative aspects of their practice and, second, when they try to elicit answers from their own understanding of things through reflection, discussion and negotiation with others or from their colleagues' understanding of the same issues and their suggestions.

2.2. How teacher learning can be enhanced

Teacher training programmes aim at improving teachers' instructional practice by applying a number of methods and techniques which promote teacher learning and consequently teacher development. A first step towards such an improvement is to raise their awareness. Underhill (1992) underscores the importance of teachers' awareness by viewing it as an essential prerequisite for teacher development. Teachers need to know what they do and why (Larsen-Freeman, 1983) but they should also be aware of any tacit influences exerted by past experiences

(Borg, 1998, p. 86). Such awareness develops more effectively when teachers are given opportunities to critically reflect on the origins, purposes and consequences of their actions and spot the mismatches between what they do and what they think they do so that change can be facilitated (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Clearly then, reflection is a key component of teacher development since it can contribute to teachers becoming '*active agents of their learning-to-teach processes*' and provides them with '*the groundwork for continuous self-development*' (Velez-Rendon, 2002, p. 463).

As regards the ways reflection can be facilitated, there seem to be various approaches and means which have been employed in attempts to raise teachers' awareness of their practice and foster reflection. Hatton and Smith (1995, p. 36) present four such strategies:

- action research projects,
- ethnographic studies and case studies of educational environments,
- microteaching and other supervised practicum experiences, and
- structured curriculum tasks.

Less formal but equally, if not more, widely spread options to teacher reflection include observations, discussions and writing about teaching experiences. Farrell (1998) explains that these activities can be carried out on an individual basis, in pairs or in groups and teachers can opt out for using only one of these ways of recording their experience or they can decide to combine some or all of them. Observations can be carried out by supervisors or by peers and can be accompanied by field notes, checklists and/or feedback sessions. Technical means such as audio or video recorders can be exploited and offer teachers the opportunity to observe themselves in privacy or with someone they trust if they wish. Discussions can be informal and private such as peer chats taking place in staff rooms or more formal and public taking place in the context of a conference or in a web-based forum. As far as writing is concerned, it can take the form of teaching diaries or journals, reflective lesson plans (see Ho, 1995) or lesson reports. Research has proved that integration of diaries or journals in teacher education is very effective in promoting teachers' reflective skills (Bailey K. M., 1990; Wallace, 1996). Their use has been motivated from the view that writing is a social and cognitive activity which can lead to learning through a discovery process and learner involvement (Porter, Goldstein, Leatherman, & Conrad, 1990, p. 227). It offers important insights into teachers' behaviour, beliefs and experiences and it can be utilised as a learning tool which can be exploited in teacher education to help teachers connect theory to their instructional practice and develop their reflective skills (Gilmore, 1996; Janisek, 1999). Moreover, as Reiman (1999) argues, writing '*centres attention, clarifies thinking, provides a means of symbolising thought*' and stimulates inner speech (ibid: p. 599; quoting Luria & Yudovich, 1959).

Another feature which can enhance the effectiveness of reflection is its practice in social contexts (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1991). Educational studies highlight the importance of social environments in the construction of teachers' knowledge and support that peer collaboration in networks (Lieberman, 2000), often termed professional learning communities (Grodsky & Gamoran, 2003; Stoll, *et al.*, 2003) or communities of practice (Wenger, 1999), has a strong effect on fostering teachers' reflective skills and influences not only their professional development but

the quality of learning and teaching (Lamb, 1995; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Vlachos & Papaefthimiou-Lytra, 2008).

Farrell (1998; 2001, p. 369), for example, proposes the notion of '*critical friends*', i.e., teachers who collaborate, discuss and reflect in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and gives evidence of how this type of friendship between teachers in Singapore can scaffold teachers' thinking and promote their professional self-development.

Hofman and Dijkstra (2010) view teachers' networks as an alternate form of professional development in reply to the failure to improve teaching through teacher development schemes applied in the past. They study the relationship between teachers' networks and professional growth and claim that their results are in line with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's study (1999) who showed that

'professional development activities, performed together in networks, will help teachers to pose problems, identify discrepancies between theories and practices, challenge common routines, and try to make visible much of that which is too often taken for granted about teaching and learning in the classroom'. (Hofman & Dijkstra, 2010: 1039)

Finally, the positive contribution of networks to the affective side of teaching cannot be ignored. Teachers work together to fight professional isolation (Bolam, 2008) or because they value appreciation, acknowledgement, personal support and acceptance (Erb, 2002; Hargreaves, 2001). However, Hargreaves (2001) contends that collaboration with colleagues may impede opportunities for improvement since teachers tend to avoid disagreement and conflict, regardless of collaborating with close friends or more distant colleagues. This last point underlines the importance of mutual trust, respect and support between members of the group (Bolam, 2008) but also strikes a note of caution as to whether working with others may not always be a better option than working on one's own (Mercer, 1995, p. 92). Therefore, offering a wide range of self-development options from which teachers themselves will be able to choose according to what suits them best is of utmost importance if we really want to take the best out of them but at the same time respect them as adult learners who have their own pace and preferred style of learning.

2.3. The use of ICT in teacher development

As we have seen in the previous section, instructional approaches which facilitate reflection and critical dialogue provide teachers with opportunities to make meaning from their experiences. When ICT facilities are utilised in this context, then teacher learning acquires new dimensions and offers considerable advantages. First of all, integration of technological tools (such as synchronous conferencing platforms, asynchronous discussion structures, social networking environments, video sharing websites, and so forth) in educational contexts provides the means to implement instructional approaches effectively (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Bannan Haag, 1995). Second, it promotes development of learning communities among teachers regardless of distance and time constraints. Being free of time and place constraints, this type of communication seems particularly suitable for a country such as Greece, where primary schools are often located in distant and isolated places and teachers in these areas are deprived of many of the facilities

offered to teachers working more centrally such as contacts with school advisors, access to libraries or opportunities to advance their career by taking up postgraduate studies (Nixon, 2001).

Another positive aspect of incorporating ICT options in teacher education, such as the use of asynchronous writing in e-mail exchange, can help EFL teachers improve their linguistic skills since more sustained interactions and greater syntactic complexity are promoted (Sotillo, 2000). Consolidation and improvement of students' linguistic skills in a foreign language through the collaborative use of ICT has also been observed in studies focusing on Greek learners of English (see Vlachos, 2006; Vlachos & Papaefthymiou-Lytra, 2008) as well as when attending postgraduate studies offered by HOU in distance learning mode (Papaefthymiou-Lytra & Sifakis, 2011). Moreover, according to Ada (2010), engaging in reflective discourse with peers in a computer-supported collaborative learning environment improves reflective skills further and offers opportunities for self-development. Last but not least, teachers' use of computers and the Internet in learning activities is likely to promote their continuing professional development (Davis, 1997, p. 167) with minimum social pressure (Chen, 2012) since, as Heng and Moor (2003, p. 334) claim, ICT tools free participants from the constraints of power relations and provide everyone with equal opportunities of participation in open discussions and information exchange.

2.4. The current teacher training context in Greece

Teacher training in Greece has suffered from inherent weaknesses related to basic teacher education, on the one hand, and to initial teacher training, on the other, for many years. With regard to basic teacher education, it has been widely admitted that teacher training cannot cater for its inadequacies (Xochellis, 1991). As we outlined earlier in this paper, teacher training should be a continuous process related to basic teacher education but it should also support teachers in service throughout their career and provide them with lifelong learning opportunities for professional development. Teachers should be acquainted with educational research during their initial training and encouraged to experiment with new ideas and draw their own conclusions. Further, they should be motivated to participate in learning communities in order to develop their reflective skills and enhance their teaching practice.

A second weak point of education in general, and teacher training schemes in particular, is the fact that they have unfortunately become a tug-of-war between political parties and governmental policies. Teacher training has operated as a system where governmental ideology is applied and teachers are made to conform to this ideology and apply it to their teaching practice without questioning it (Andreou, 1991; Athanasoula-Reppa, 1998; Kotsifakis & Kappos, 2001). Teacher training remains static instead of being dynamically evolving. Initiatives are not encouraged, conclusions drawn from the piloting phases of innovative projects do not seem to be taken into account and teachers are deprived of the opportunity to negotiate the content of the training courses in order to adapt them to their needs.

A third point is that in Greece, as Kazamias and Kassotakis (1995, p. 53) state, reality often differs from what is described in laws and circulars. Despite the fact that local educational authorities were established to achieve decentralisation of the Greek education system, we still face the paradox of all education-related issues to be regulated and validated by the Minister (Saitis, 1990). Additionally, there has been no serious attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of our education

system—whenever it was attempted, it met fierce opposition from teachers' syndicates—nor is there any political willingness to develop some kind of scientific research into these issues. As a result, personal views, observations and experiences are often turned into scientific discourse which is taken for granted (Kassotakis, 1983; Xochellis, 1991). In other words, teacher training has been implemented in an unsystematic, fragmented and inconsistent way without being based on sound scientific research. Teachers' needs have often been ignored and drawbacks of programmes implemented abroad or previous teacher training models applied in Greece have been transferred to new programmes without being analysed or evaluated. Very often newly-designed policies and programmes have ignored basic principles of adult education, lack originality and flexibility and disregard successful teacher training paradigms and suggestions made by researchers worldwide (see Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Scheerens, 2010) or European bodies such as the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission (Kelly *et al.*, 2002).

Another point is that many agencies and institutes are responsible for teacher training, which is not negative per se, but the fact that there is little coordination and cooperation between them is certainly neither constructive nor beneficial. Very often teacher training programmes become fields of conflict between interested parties as their design and implementation brings not only prestige but additional financial support as well (Chronopoulou & Giannopoulos, 2001). Thus, due to insufficient cooperation between all relevant parties, teacher training often fails to combine scientific research with everyday teaching practice effectively (Andreou, 1991).

Despite all the shortcomings and complexities mentioned above, there has been some progress during the last decades. Regional Teacher Training Centres operating all over Greece have aided teacher training become less centralised and gave a large number of teachers the opportunity to develop professionally. Furthermore, the institution of school advisors, despite their limited number, has helped to improve our education system. School advisors have assumed an active role in teacher training and they have often organised school-based seminars focusing on the introduction of innovative programmes (one such programme was the recent introduction of English to very young learners in primary schools, see <http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/peap/en>) or on facilitating school teachers solve local problems.

Another important aspect related to teacher training is the enormous funds coming from the European Union in the form of Support Frameworks to be spent on training teachers. This funding has offered Greece a unique opportunity which, if it was appropriately exploited throughout, could have upgraded teacher education and training tremendously. Two highly successful examples of utilising European funding on teacher training are the following:

- a. Teacher training on the basic know-how use of ICT in which about 76,000 teachers completed the first training phase in 2002-2005 (Papadakis, Velissarios, & Fragoulis, 2003). A large number of teachers have also attended the second phase which is more demanding and links use of ICT to teaching practice (this is not available to EFL teachers yet).
- b. The second more recent example is a piloting scheme called Major Training Programme which was attended by thousands of state school teachers in 2011 (www.epimorfosi.edu.gr). It aimed to acquaint primary and secondary school teachers all over Greece with the aims and principles of the new ambitious educational scheme of the Ministry of Education, called New School and the curricula accompanying it.

In conclusion, however, we should bear in mind that effective teacher training programmes are not those that increase teachers' theoretical knowledge but those which reconcile theory to practice, succeed in changing teachers' attitudes, views and teaching techniques and bring better learning outcomes.

3. Research design

3.1. Rationale

Taking into consideration the context described in the previous section, the aim of our research was two-fold; firstly, we wished to *investigate the views of EFL teachers working in primary schools* as regards important aspects of teacher development in order to corroborate the inadequacies of the teacher training system as applied to date and secondly, *to apply an alternative innovative approach to INSET of EFL teachers and explore its potential.*

More analytically, we wished to:

1. investigate what Greek primary school EFL teachers believe as regards teacher training, self-development, self-awareness, collaboration, the use of ICT and reflectivity
2. examine whether the exchange of electronic diary entries between members of a small group of colleagues can promote reflection and professional growth.

Thus, we formulated a number of research questions in order to achieve the aims of the study:

- a) Are EFL practitioners interested in their professional development?
- b) Are they satisfied with the INSET they have received?
- c) Do they engage in activities which promote their professional development?
- d) Do they collaborate with colleagues and does this collaboration help them think reflectively about their practice and enhance their professional development?
- e) Can the use of ICT facilitate this collaboration further?
- f) Do EFL teachers engage in development activities such as observing other teachers, being observed, being given feedback or keeping a teaching diary?

As regards the potential of our proposed model of teacher development, we considered a few more research questions:

- g) How do teachers feel when they collaborate with colleagues?
- h) Does peer collaboration help EFL practitioners develop?

3.2. Research methodology

Guided by recent trends in the field of teacher development research and in order to better serve the purposes of this study, a multi-method approach was adopted, consisting of different means of data collection, and multiple ways of analysis. This approach gave us the opportunity to capture different aspects of the phenomenon in focus making it, thus, easier to interpret the connection between the way EFL teachers view and feel about certain aspects of their job and the prospects our proposed alternative framework of INSET offers as regards teacher development.

3.3. Research Instruments

Two instruments were used for the purposes of this study; first, a questionnaire designated with the term Teachers' Views Questionnaire (TVQ) was adopted. Second, the data collected from the TVQ, informed the design of the second research instrument, namely, the Collaborative Electronic Diary Exchange Project (CEDEP). In other words, by being aware of EFL teachers' views and preferences regarding INSET from TVQ, we were able to construct a more effective teacher development model which provided us with the right framework to apply our theory to.

3.3.1. The Teachers' Views Questionnaire (TVQ)

Questionnaires are known to be the most appropriate method of data collection when one is interested in the perceptions of individuals (Kumar, 1996, p. 104). Thus, first of all, TVQ served the purpose of this study which was to explore EFL teachers' beliefs, views and preferences concerning INSET and teacher development. Second, the population of interest was geographically dispersed and this method would be more convenient and less expensive. Third, this method was chosen because it provides greater anonymity since there is no face-to-face interaction between the respondents and the researcher and the likelihood of obtaining accurate information is increased (ibid: p. 114). In addition, the use of this instrument was important because EFL teachers' views as regards INSET had never been officially recorded separately from other subject matter teachers' views with the exception of a few studies which examined smaller samples (see for instance Gkantidou, 2005; Griva, 2005; Joyce, 2011; Kourkouli, 2010; Ntoula, 2007; Strymonni, 2010; Ussher-Crespi, 2004). Last but not least, the TVQ was used to inform the design of the qualitative data collection method (CEDEP).

Our sample ($n=483$) comprised about 1/10 of the total population of primary school EFL teachers. As we opted for convenience sampling (see Cohen & Manion, 1989, p. 103), the questionnaire was mainly distributed during school advisors' seminars which took place in different regions of Greece. The advantage of the specific procedure of data collection was that a lot of EFL teachers from different geographical regions and of various socio-economic strata would gather at a specific place on a specific date and the response rate would be high. In order to cover the rest of Greece, a stratified random sample of primary schools was selected from the official list of primary schools of the Ministry of Education. These schools were initially contacted by telephone or via the school e-mail address and then the questionnaire was sent by e-mail or by post. The EFL teachers working in schools which were located in the area of Athens were contacted in person by the researcher.

3.3.2. The Collaborative Electronic Diary Exchange Project (CEDEP)

The second instrument, CEDEP, was used with a small number of volunteer teachers ($n=4$) for about a school year (25 weeks). CEDEP consisted of four elements; each participant's profile of reflective thinking attributes (adopted from Taggart & Wilson, 1998, pp. 45-46), a short autobiography, their electronic diary entries and two reviews of the diaries and the project. The four participants were chosen among those who had expressed their willingness to participate in this project while filling in the piloting questionnaire and met all the requirements for participation. A Yahoo Group named State School EFL Teachers (accessible at

https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/state_schools_EFL_teachers/info) was set up in order to facilitate the electronic communication between the group members and the researcher.

The main task the participants had to perform during this project was to keep a diary once a week for a period of about 25 weeks. As explained earlier, diary writing is a useful tool for classroom research and a vehicle for teacher development as it is believed to promote reflective thinking (Bailey K. M., 1990; Wallace, 1996). For the purposes of this study, participants had to choose a particular class to focus on throughout the project and share a diary entry about the lesson they had with this class with the other members of the group once a week. More analytically, teachers were asked to provide details about the profile of the class they had chosen and describe what they did and what happened in that particular class on the day of the week they had chosen to keep their diary for. Following that description, they were encouraged to reflect on their teaching practice and seek alternative ways to achieve their aims better. Also, they were advised to ask their colleagues who participated in the project for advice, suggestions or comments on areas they felt they needed to improve or were in doubt as to whether they handled them effectively.

Moreover, as part of this task participants were asked to review their diary entries because just writing diary entries does not yield the greatest benefit and in order to really learn from this process, the diarist should be encouraged to read the journal entries again and try to discover the patterns therein (Bailey K. M., 1990). In our study, participants were encouraged to reread their diary entries twice during the project and write their thoughts and comments on them following a number of guidelines.

4. Presentation and discussion of results

4.1. The teachers' views questionnaire results

As outlined earlier in this paper, one of the purposes of this study was to explore teachers' views on teacher training. The findings obtained through the subjects' responses to TVQ provided us with interesting answers to the research questions concerning EFL teachers' views on INSET. First, most teachers in this study (50.1%) were generally positive about INSET offered by the state although it does not appear to fully satisfy their teaching needs (86.1%). In-depth analyses of the findings indicate that this positive attitude manifests itself in the great majority (77.2%) of EFL teachers attending INSET programmes regularly despite their not being compulsory. Moreover, respondents (79.7%) contended that INSET programmes do not generally disturb their personal or professional lives and when they do, it is mainly because they take place off working hours. As far as teachers' preferences for INSET programmes are concerned, the majority of respondents (79.5%) prefer short-duration programmes that take place at conference centres or schools and focus primarily on practical issues. The majority of these findings are in accordance with the results of a major study undertaken by OEPEK (2007). There was, however, a slight dissatisfaction (43.5%) expressed as regards undergraduate preparation for real teaching situations revealing what is generally known as theory/practice dichotomy (Clarke, 1994; Strymonni, 2010). Nonetheless, the reasons why respondents might not be feeling satisfied with their preparation for school teaching they had during university years could be associated, on the one hand, with the limited duration of the practicum included in their studies which had been oriented towards secondary school teaching for many years, and, on the other, with the fact that very few of the

respondents had attended the induction courses offered by the state when they were appointed although such courses are officially characterised as compulsory.

Findings regarding the content of the training courses offered revealed other interesting aspects of teachers' training experiences. In this study a great number of teachers (46.2%) claimed that the in-service courses they had attended combined theory and practice and most training sessions were delivered either as lectures (49.8%) or as a combination of lectures and workshops. (47.5%) Yet, in this part of the questionnaire, another weakness of the system was brought to the foreground. According to many teachers (25.2%), the teacher training courses they had attended did not promote collaboration among colleagues or at least a large number of teachers (36.4%) were not certain as to whether they did. Lack of collaboration was also attested in the limited communication (75.1%) that takes place between teachers and school advisors. This was a very important parameter which was taken into consideration in this study. Thus, through the exploration of our proposed collaborative model of INSET we wished to provide stakeholders with a viable alternative to traditional INSET approaches.

As regards conclusions about EFL teachers' perceptions about professionalism and self-development, the findings indicate that the vast majority (94.6%) of the teachers who participated in our research are interested in their professional self-development and engage in a number of activities to achieve this aim. More analytically, they subscribe to professional associations (43.6%), read EFL magazines and journals on a regular basis (66.3%) and attend seminars and conferences on TEFL (63.6%). Additionally, they try to keep their English at a good level mainly by using English in the classroom (46%) and having foreign friends (33.7%) and most teachers have tried to learn another foreign language for personal development reasons (52.2%). Another important experience which has positively influenced their professional development is the participation of some teachers in European projects (24.4%).

The findings relating to teacher perceptions about aspects of their teaching practice indicate that the majority of EFL teachers who participated in our study were aware of their advantages (72.9%) as well as their limitations (62.7%) as practitioners. Although this finding is of particular interest as it shows that teachers can apply critical thinking to their practice and reflect on what they do in the classroom, it is worth mentioning that a much smaller number of teachers (24.8%) were capable of spotting critical incidents in their career, analyse them and explain how that incident changed their course of action and improved their practice. This finding underscores the need many teachers may have to participate in learning activities which will help them raise their awareness of their classroom practice through observation, reflection and discussion.

Besides teachers being aware of their positive and negative aspects of their teaching, they reported a number of parameters that they perceived as conducive to successful or less successful teaching such as organisation, time management, patience, rapport, training and knowledge of the target language. This last point of target language development is another area of teacher training that deserves more attention as it is a rather neglected aspect and only occasionally has it been brought to surface by researchers in Greece (Karagianni, 2012; Papaefthymiou-Lytra & Sifakis, 2011; Ussher-Crespi, 2004).

As far as their views on collaboration, the use of ICT and reflectivity are concerned, the majority of respondents (88.4%) stated that they often discuss teaching problems with colleagues and share materials and teaching ideas with their colleagues (66.1%). They (78.5%) also regard peer observation as conducive to the development of their teaching skills. Furthermore, they believe that teacher training can be facilitated by the use of technology (90.2%) and that collaboration with colleagues through the Internet can help them deal with teaching problems (60.6%). Finally, the last section of the questionnaire brought to the foreground some contradicting findings. Although teachers stated that they reflect on their teaching (94%), this was not manifested in their responses about the use of instruments or techniques that are known to promote or facilitate reflection. In other words, they have almost never kept a diary to write their thoughts on their teaching (78%), they have almost never observed colleagues teach either live or on video (79.1%) and they have not audio or video recorded themselves while teaching. Another significant finding of this study is that the great majority of teachers have neither been observed teaching (87%) nor have they been given feedback on the way they teach (79.7%). These findings, which our research incorporated in CEDEP, need to be seriously considered by stakeholders and exploited in the design of future INSET programmes aiming to enhance teachers' critical thinking skills.

4.2. The Collaborative Electronic Diary Exchange Project (CEDEP) analysis

Teachers who participated in our study had to share their diary entries and read their colleagues' descriptions of their lessons. These diary entries (a corpus of 37,042 words as shown in Table 1 below) were analysed using 'content analysis' (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994) or 'meaning categorisation' (Kvale, 1996), where diary entries were broken down into smaller units for coding. Although codes are expected to reflect the researcher's perspective, the data were not analysed with a preconceived framework in mind but we allowed 'grounded' categories of analysis to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We looked for patterns and themes and we kept re-examining data in light of developing theory (Seale, 1999, p. 92). This approach helped us expand, revise and refine our ideas so that final conclusions could be drawn.

| | Teacher A | Teacher B | Teacher C | Teacher D | TOTAL |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| Total number of words written in all tasks | 13,585 | 4,694 | 9,069 | 9,694 | 37,042 |
| Diary writing (number of diary entries) | 20 | 16 | 17 | 20 | 73 |
| (number of diary reviews) | 2 | -* | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Number of words written in diary entries | 9,878 | 4,694 | 5,536 | 7,423 | 27,531 |
| Average number of words per entry | 494 | 293 | 326 | 371 | 377 |

* a dash (-) shows that the participant did not do the task.

Table 1: Corpus collected during CEDEP

4.2.1. Levels of Teacher Development in CEDEP

Through the multiple levels of analysis we applied to CEDEP data, a teacher development pattern was identified. When teachers described their teaching experiences in their diaries and how they felt about what happened in the classroom (for a detailed analysis of the role of emotions in teacher development see Karagianni, 2012), a cycle of reflection was initiated which often revealed evidence of teachers' personal and professional development. In *Figure 1* overleaf, we can see a schematic representation of this teacher development pattern. The circular shape of the figure underlines the on-going process of teacher development and demonstrates how what appears to be an end in the process of teacher development, in reality, it comprises a new experience which becomes the threshold that initiates a new cycle of development, which, in our case, is self-development.

Finally, through a deeper analysis of CEDEP data and drawing on a number of studies on teacher development (see Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Hatton & Smith, 1995), we devised a four-level construct in order to study and measure teachers' development.

More analytically, in our analysis of teacher development in CEDEP:

- *Level 1-development* is any systematic form of recording of what teachers do during their instructional practice and what they think about it.
- *Level 2-development* takes place when teachers turn to colleagues to share any thoughts on their teaching, to ask questions, to comment on what their colleagues write in their diaries or to answer their colleagues' queries.
- *Level 3-development* occurs when teachers explicitly or implicitly draw on 'expert' knowledge to explore solutions or to provide a rationale for their course of action or to offer suggestions to their colleagues.
- *Level 4-development*, the highest form of development in our model, takes place when there is evidence that teachers change what they believe or what they do because they are convinced that a new approach is more appropriate or effective.

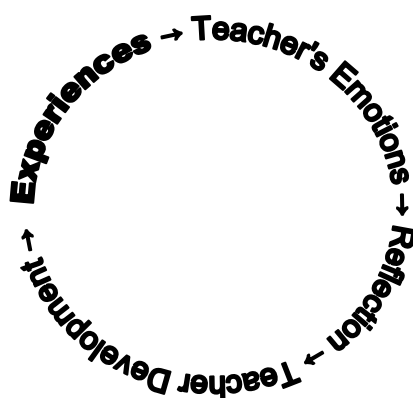


Figure 1: A schematic representation of teacher development in CEDEP

We placed change in the highest level of the construct because it is widely believed that ‘*change is a slow, difficult, and gradual process for teachers*’ (Guskey, 1985, p. 59) and despite teachers generally wanting to contribute actively to the improvement of their students’ learning, most of them face great difficulty accepting innovations that require drastic changes in their instructional procedures.

4.2.2. Teacher Development

As stated earlier in this paper, CPD emphasises practices that aim at professional and personal empowerment of teachers by means of reflective practice and critical thinking. It is an on-going, self-motivated learning process which brings one’s best abilities to the foreground but also encourages them to collaborate with more knowledgeable or more enthusiastic individuals (Edge, 2002) and share their ideas in order to improve their practice (Woodward, 2005). CEDEP incorporates all these core components of teacher development and provides numerous instances of on-going collaborative self-induced teacher learning. First of all, volunteering to participate in the project and not abandoning it despite the difficulties they faced was a major commitment on the teachers’ part and constitutes a teacher development process per se. Secondly, compiling autobiographies and writing a large number of diary entries and reviews on a regular basis and critically reflecting on them was another task they undertook and accomplished successfully. Additionally, commenting on their colleagues’ diaries and offering ideas and suggestions as to how they could tackle teaching problems more effectively constitutes additional evidence of teacher development (Bell, 1994; Bell & Gilbert, 1994).

Regarding the four-level construct of teacher development we described in the previous section, there was evidence of all four levels of development in our data. More analytically, as we can see in *Table 2* below, out of the 837 teacher development instances we spotted, 62% are of Level 1 type. In our model Level 1-development relates to technical and descriptive reflection as teachers describe their teaching practice and attempt to explain what they do (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Golombek & Johnson, 2004). Level 2-development (23.8%) is achieved when teachers communicate with their colleagues in order to seek advice on or a solution to a teaching problem, listen to their opinion or comment on their practices. This type of development appears to be very successful if we consider the fact that Greek EFL teachers rarely have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues so closely.

| TEACHER DEVELOPMENT | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Level 1-development | 519 | 29.4% | 62.0% | 62.0% |
| | Level 2-development | 199 | 11.3% | 23.8% | 23.8% |
| | Level 3-development | 91 | 5.1% | 10.9% | 10.9% |
| | Level 4-development | 28 | 1.6% | 3.3% | 100.0% |
| | Total | 837 | 47.4% | 100.0% | |
| | No development | 930 | 52.6% | | |
| Total | | 1767 | 100.0% | | |

Table 2: Types of Teacher Development

As far as Level 3-development is concerned, percentages drop to a 10.9% as this type of development is much more demanding. In our model of analysis, Level 3-development requires teachers to reflect more deeply and explore their practice by examining the wider socio-cultural context they work in and illustrate their views by drawing on 'expert' knowledge. It is worth noting here that due to the informal environment this project took place in, most of them (with the exception of one teacher) did not consult the articles the researcher had uploaded on the issues that seemed to concern them. They even chose to ignore their colleague's suggestion to discuss the articles she had read twice probably because just reading the articles would demand more time. Finally, the highest level of teacher development that is Level 4-development amounts to 3.3% only. In our model of analysis, Level 4-development requires teachers to show some change in their views or their practice. Although collaboration can be conducive to such changes to occur since teachers are exposed to a number of teaching ideas and practices, in our study participants mentioned very few aspects of their teaching that they would alter by incorporating a colleague's idea. This is quite understandable since it is difficult to find hard evidence of change without observing teachers in the classroom most probably over a long period.

4.2.3. Collaboration in CEDEP

As regards the element of collaboration in CEDEP, the second most frequent type of development in our construct, there is a number of interesting findings which are worthy of our attention. First of all, teachers turned to their colleagues for advice or to discuss an issue they could not provide a satisfactory answer themselves very often. The issues teachers often seemed to be worried about relate to:

- class management and more specifically noise and misbehaviour during classes
- teaching of different skills such as reading and listening especially as regards new vocabulary learning
- workbook tasks and their correction
- learners' attitude towards tests, grades and learning in general
- use of mother tongue and teacher's talking time as well as
- helping weak learners.

Let us now present the collaboration aspect in CEDEP by exploring some characteristic excerpts from the teachers' diary entries referring to the issue of noise and examine how teachers interact in their effort to find a solution to their problem.

Teacher A raises the issue of noise in one of her first diaries:

'I didn't like, however, the noise in the classroom and I still don't know how to manage my classes when it comes to carrying out writing tasks in class.'

Teacher C, while describing her lesson, refers to her students being noisy as a disadvantage:

'Learners were enthusiastic about it, practiced forming questions, all contributed even in Greek, however, they made noise.'

and a little later turns to her colleagues for suggestions, expressing her views on the issue in a humorous tone:

'Do you feel comfortable with noise during group tasks? Sometimes I think that other teachers or parents may think 'lots of noise, lots of games and chants – no wonder why students get certificates from frontisteria'

In another diary entry, Teacher C brings up the issue of noise once again wishing to discuss a specific case of a student who disturbs the class. She has taken some action but she does not feel it is as effective as she would like it to have been:

'[Teacher A] refers to one student who is non-existent in her English class. I have a similar case, a student who has major problems and disturbs a lot. I give him handouts to copy simple words to keep him busy. I ask him to help me collecting homework to make him feel useful. I also give him stickers if he manages not to make any noise. However, his presence in class is a constant source of disturbance. Any suggestions?'

Noise is also one of the reasons she avoids group work with her classes:

'I usually avoid group work in my lessons, since I consider it noisier and less effective than individual or pair work. Noise and loss of control is something I detest during lessons.'

On the other hand, Teacher D commenting on the issues of noise and group work convincingly explains her views by drawing on relevant theory:

'However, group work is tiring and most of the times noisy. I don't really mind about what parents or co-teachers say about noise. Educational Psychologists say that children learn by doing and not by pathetically listening.'

In another diary entry, Teacher D grasps the opportunity to downplay the importance of noise in the classroom once again:

'Since the computers aren't connected in a network I had to save everything in a diskette before printing. Waiting makes students noisy and the teacher frustrated but it doesn't really matter. Losing control of the order in the classroom isn't always bad.'

From the CEDEP data we analysed it was apparent that collaboration between members of this group was manifested in a variety of ways. Teachers exposed themselves and their teaching practice to colleagues they had never met, exchanged comments, shared ideas and contributed substantially to discussions of fundamental issues in the EFL field. Although many teaching problems may have remained unresolved and teachers' questions unanswered according to what the participants wrote and the researcher was able to observe, the sense of belonging to a group that shares the same interests and works in a similar context can be a catalyst for one's self-induced professional development, especially in the working context of state school EFL teachers

where professional development and support offered by the state has been limited. Finally, as Hargreaves (2001) and Lasky (2000) have also maintained, another advantage of collaboration, which was recorded in the teachers' diaries in our study, is that collaboration with colleagues is another source of positive emotions. Teachers often appeared to be in need of reassurance as to whether their practices or beliefs are fairly acceptable and, despite recognising that there is no single correct approach or that an issue is too complex, they still chose to bring the topic up for discussion in the group as a way of freeing themselves of the *'bout of guilt'*, as they said, they were suffering from.

5. Implications of the study

The findings of TVQ, which were presented earlier, emphasise how important it is to exploit EFL teachers' positive attitude towards teacher training whenever major or minor teacher training schemes are designed in order to have more effective practitioners. As the principle of one-size fits all does not apply to educational contexts, various options regarding content and modes of delivery should be available to teachers working all over Greece. A wide range of long-term teacher training schemes could be designed centrally by teacher training agencies. These schemes, which could be face-to-face training, distance mode training or a combination of both, should have clearly defined aims and their content could be adapted to meet local needs by school advisors so that overall coherence can be maintained. Moreover, it is of vital importance that components which raise EFL teachers' awareness of their teaching practice, systematically enhance their reflective skills and critical thinking and promote their linguistic development be included in INSET courses. Finally, formal on-going evaluation processes should be applied at all levels of formal and non-formal INSET training and their results should be taken into account in order to improve these courses further.

As regards the findings of our research from CEDEP, it could be claimed that when EFL teachers collaborate with colleagues, share their electronic diaries and critically talk about them, they actively reflect on their practice, they rationalise their course of action, they understand the benefits and drawbacks of options available to them better and see themselves through the lens of others, which clearly boosts their professional confidence.

In addition, CEDEP encompasses all the characteristics of examples of good practice as these are described by the Commission of the European Communities (Kelly, *et al.*, 2002) and can contribute to EFL teachers' professional growth by enhancing teachers' reflective skills and critical thinking, also promoting their linguistic development since diaries should be written in English and any relevant reading could be done in the target language. Further, CEDEP proves that exploiting the asynchronous ways of communication and working collaboratively with peers in distance mode offers EFL teachers as well as stakeholders such as school advisors, an effective, viable and most probably cheaper alternative to traditional and less successful approaches to teacher training. This approach can be applied to a wide range of teacher training contexts from initial training sessions in the form of practicum or induction courses, to school-based training or long-term teacher development programmes designed either locally by a group of self-motivated teachers under the guidance of a school advisor or more centrally by teacher development policy makers. It can also be designed to focus on specific problem areas depending on the particular teachers' needs. What is more, CEDEP is particularly suitable for the geographical uniqueness of Greece where any face-

to-face form of teacher training requires transportation of either teachers or advisors or both to more centrally located areas.

A further benefit of this approach, as with all asynchronous modes of communication, is that it lets the participants decide when and where they will carry out the writing task the project requires. Furthermore, belonging to a learning community which shares similar experiences is a great advantage which offers unique opportunities of professional development, especially in the working context of primary school EFL teachers where there is usually only one EFL teacher for every two or sometimes even more schools and as a result communication with colleagues of the same field is limited either to personal acquaintances or to scant teacher training meetings organised by school advisors.

Last but certainly not least, it gives teachers a sense of independence and a feeling of confidence and security as they are solely responsible for what they reveal about their teaching practice. As a consequence, this form of teacher development can also function as a gradual transition stage from self-appraisal to other-appraisal, which (other-appraisal) has faced widespread opposition for years not because teachers are against being appraised but mainly because, when it was applied many decades ago, neither the criteria used were clearly defined, nor the process applied was objective or fair to all. Through this appraisal process, more experienced and highly qualified EFL teachers could be offered opportunities of career advancement such as serve as mentors or INSET co-ordinators. This approach would acknowledge their expertise in practice and would be very likely to discourage them from early retirement or change of career.

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