



## EUROPEAN INSPIRATIONS FOR POST-GRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION IN GREECE

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### **Abstract:**

The present paper explores the extent to and the ways in which European mandates for teacher education for inclusion can inspire post-graduate teacher education for inclusion in the context of Greek higher education. With means of a longitudinal self-study on such a course for language teachers the empowering effects of teacher education for inclusion are identified, barriers to it are looked into and suggestions for improvement, as exemplified by the Greek context, are made. The present research aims to contribute to our thinking on inclusive education in that the Profile of Inclusive Teachers, so far related mainly to initial teacher education, is related to post-graduate education and language teacher education, so far minimally explored in self-studies, is explored.

**Keywords:** teacher education for inclusion, language teachers, Greece, self-study

### **1. Introduction**

Teacher education for inclusion has been in the centre of European research and language policy efforts for the last decade. Perhaps the most characteristic endeavour was the three-year project launched in 2009 by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education aiming to investigate the preparation of mainstream teachers via their initial training to be inclusive. Stakeholders such as policy makers, practitioners, students, parents and learners contributed to the creation of the Profile of Inclusive Teachers which boils down to the competences that all teachers need in order to support their work in inclusive settings (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EaDISE), 2012, p. 6) – the Profile). The post-graduate course for language teachers discussed here was inspired by the Agency's work and aimed to instigate teachers' work on and with the principles and core values of teaching and learning in inclusive education (IE). The longitudinal self-study conducted served two research foci: firstly, to describe and explore how teacher education for inclusion came across the

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course's participants, and secondly, to reflect, on the basis of the elicited picture, upon the way forward for teacher education for inclusion in Greece, by identifying its strengths and suggesting possible improvements. Both aims are in agreement with the call for research on a European level, since it is recommended that *"teacher educators should engage in research to inform the on-going content and structure of teacher education programmes"* (EAfDiSNE, 2015a, p. 44). In her review of the recent research and literature Symeonidou also (2017, p. 416) points out that studies *"do not generally address teacher educators themselves as variables that influence the outcome of any approach"* and it was this call for reflection which initiated the present research. In it two strategies were employed: conducting on-going research, which prompts teacher educators to challenge their own assumptions, and self-study, during which teacher educators produce local knowledge and theory and negotiate their own teaching practice (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EAfSNaIE), 2015a, p. 35). It was aimed at a growth, personal and professional, in both of my roles, that of teacher educator and that of researcher (Coleman and Leider, 2014, p. 53). With a sense of what LaBoskey calls *"a pedagogical responsibility"* (LaBoskey, 2007a, p. 839), it was intended to support the learning about teaching for me, my students and the context of higher education in general. This self-initiated self-study should additionally transcend the personal level and contribute to teacher education research in general, to conclude with a story that *"is no longer just a story"* (Berry & Kosnik, 2010; Loughran, 2010, as quoted in Han, 2016, p. 423) and the 'self' is not all that matters, in the sense that *"the 'self' continues to resurface as a focus, a focus that takes on new meaning when considered in terms of knowledge development"* (Loughran, 2018, pp. 3-4). It was, in other words, hoped to contribute to our thinking about the effectiveness of different routes into teaching, approaches to teacher education and the curriculum and the role of courses and how best to prepare all teachers for diversity (EAfDiSNE, 2011a, p. 65).

## 2. Why post-graduate teacher education for inclusion matters

Inclusion and inclusive practices in the classroom have been hot topics for some time now. The move towards inclusive practice can be pinpointed not only in the literature of the field but also in -and in connection with- European and international statements, recommendations, policies, laws, etc.<sup>ii</sup>, which confirm the centrality of inclusive education in the global educational policy agenda. Should one wish to summarise the current ideas in the field of IE that guided this research project, following points should be made: nowadays a wider definition of inclusive education is dominant, whereby inclusion is both a principle and a process (EAfSNaIE (2015a, p. 15), and the term is used in relation to learners who are vulnerable not only because of their special educational

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<sup>ii</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to review them in detail. It goes without saying, however, that they shape the present research frame, since such important documents represent developments, with an educational, social and economic justification (EAfDiSNE, 2010: 11), in the field of IE (for example, UNESCO, 1994, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, Policy guidelines on inclusion in education, UNESCO 2009).

needs. Inclusive education means offering quality education for all, is regarded as an “on-going process” and builds on “*respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities [and] eliminating all forms of discrimination*” (UNESCO-IBE 2008, p. 3). In this line of thought and in today’s educational and scientific discussions “*diversity is recognised as ‘natural’ in any group of learners and inclusive education can be seen as a means of raising achievement through the presence (access to education), participation (quality of the learning experience) and achievement (learning processes and outcomes) of all learners*” (EAfSNaIE 2014a, p. 11). What is important for the present paper is the declared commitment to “*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education*”, because “*no education target should be considered met unless met by all*” (UNESCO 2017, p. 7). For this to be achieved it is required that teachers and educators are “*empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems*” (ibid.). Therefore, teacher education plays a central role and is, hence, one of the six priorities set by the Council and the Commission (Joint Report, 2015, p. 26). What is imperative is “*strong support for teachers, trainers, school leaders and other members of educational staff, who play a key role in ensuring the success of learners and in implementing education policy*” (Joint Report, 2015, p. 29).

How inclusive education is to be achieved lies at the centre of the current discussions and efforts as can be seen in key issues explored in the last years which include progress at national level and the implementation of policy measures, so that teachers can best cope with differences in the classroom (EAfSNaIE, 2014a). This is the reason why the appropriate teacher preparation is singled out as the “*policy initiative most likely to impact on the development of more inclusive communities*” (EAfDiSNE, 2012, p. 9). The European Agency urged in 2011 that changes need to be made in initial teacher education (EAfDiSNE, 2011a, p. 18). In the present paper it is argued that the same holds for post-graduate teacher education and the following research questions are addressed: How can post-graduate teacher education for inclusion be inspired by the European Agency’s work? To what extent and in what ways can principles and core values of inclusive education become part of teacher education for inclusion in Greek Higher Education?

### **3. Greek post-graduate teacher education inspired by the Profile of Inclusive Teachers**

Four core values to teaching and learning are identified for IE in the Profile of Inclusive Teachers: Valuing Learner Diversity - learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education, Supporting All Learners – teachers have high expectations for all learners’ achievements, Working With Others – collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers and Personal Professional Development – teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning. Such core values, though not exhaustive, can serve as a “*starting point for discussions at different levels on the context specific areas of competence needed by all teachers working in different country*”

*situations*” (EAfDiSNE, 2012, p. 11). The Agency’s work, as crystallized in the Profile<sup>iii</sup> of Inclusive Teachers, had not been used in relation to post-graduate teacher education before (see review by Symeonidou, 2017). It was, therefore, of interest to address this gap in the literature. Symeonidou herself points out that “*teacher education for newly appointed teachers and in-service teachers is of equal importance*” (Symeonidou, 2017, p. 404). The emphasis lay on the ideas, educational action and research foci the Profile triggers and this decision is justified by the possible scenarios suggested by the Profile (Profile, p. 20) and by its third principle, where it is discussed in detail that the identified values and areas of competence can be also related to further teacher education opportunities and that it is actually a continuum of professional development opportunities which can inform our thinking and action (ibid., pp. 19-20).

Crucial components of inclusive practice, summarised by Sigurðardóttir in 2008, (as quoted in EAfDiSNE 2010, p. 38), were aimed at in the course, and these include students’ awareness for ethical and political issues, their enriched understandings of their learners, their competence to deal with different needs at the same time and to modify their teaching and assessment criteria. Such components are expressed in more detail in the Profile, in which for each core value there are areas of competences, and for each area of competence identified, the essential attitudes, knowledge and skills that underpin them are presented. They are interrelated in that “*a certain attitude or belief demands certain knowledge or level of understanding and then skills in order to implement this knowledge in a practical situation*” (EAfDiSNE, 2012). This approach builds, according to the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education upon the work of Ryan (2009) who describes attitudes as “*multidimensional traits*”, and the work of Shulman (2007), who describes professional learning in terms of the apprenticeships of the head (knowledge), hand (skill, or doing), and heart (attitudes and beliefs) (EAfDiSNE, 2012, p. 28).

The course under investigation was part of a two-year postgraduate program of studies in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. It was offered in the years 2016, 2017, 2018, and addressed MA students, all teachers of various languages: Greek as a mother tongue, English, Italian, French and German as foreign languages. Course participants not only taught a series of languages, but they also taught at various educational sectors, primary and secondary, both state and private. Their background was homogeneous in the sense that they all held a four-year BA on Languages. Both male and female students participated in the course and their age and years of experience varied. None of them, however, had a research background, which was why the research methodology aspect of our work had to be introduced in the course. Each year twenty teachers on average participated in the course.

As far as the working methods are concerned a variety of activities took place. There were presentations, by me as well as by the students, in which we explored three sets of relevant literature: literature on language teaching methodology, literature on

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<sup>iii</sup> Profiles in general represent “*clear and concise statements of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do*” (OECD, 2005). They can help bridge the gap between theory and practice and “*ascertain whether teacher development programmes are making a difference*” (EAfDiSNE, 2010: 37) and are, therefore, a useful basis for teaching, learning and research.

learning difficulties, and literature on teacher research and reflection. These were contributed to the students' development both individually and combined. This theoretical framework was actively explored by the students through a series of exercises in class and they were to develop lesson plans and activities for assessment and intervention for a specific case/scenario of their choice, most of the time from their own teaching. These were reflected upon in the group and students handed in at the end of the semester an assignment in which both the theoretical and the applied work they had done was portrayed.

This combination of working methods was decided upon because, as Avalos notes, professional development is *"a complex process that requires both cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively, the capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs and the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for improvement or change"* (Avalos, 2011: 10, as quoted in EAfSNEaIE, 2016, p. 39). The course's objective was that teachers would learn, learn how to learn, and transform their knowledge into practice (ibid.), and, therefore, knowledge was not to be solely presented but developed in the group in an effort to modify the traditional separation between academia and the professions (ibid., pp. 41-42).

The type of the course could be characterized as discrete (separate) and of a single-unit approach, i.e. one unit of study over one semester with lectures, workshops and applied activities (Symeonidou, 2017, pp. 409-410). Such courses have been found in previous research to sometimes have a positive impact on attitudes towards inclusive education<sup>iv</sup> but findings are inconclusive as to what an effect single-unit approaches have on the students' knowledge, attitudes and skills or what role demographic factors play (ibid., pp. 410-411). As was already concluded in 2011, *"further research is needed to establish the impact of different models on the coherence of the curriculum and the development of knowledge and skills"* (EAfDiSNE, 2011a, p. 25).

Working with multiple sections of the literature, i.e. theories relating to language teaching methodology, learning difficulties, and reflective teaching as well as combinations of them was decided upon in order to ensure an interdisciplinary knowledge base and varying skills, all necessary for inclusive education. In addition, the variety of activities in the course would activate the students and empower them as inclusive teachers. Finally, the exchange of experiences, opinions, ideas and knowledge would result in a collaborative way of learning and professional development.

#### 4. Research design

A self-study was the appropriate research methodology in order to explore my own post-graduate teaching. Self-study research dates back to the early 1990s and is now in its third decade (Loughran, 2014, p. 278 and 2018, p. 1). It has developed in many ways<sup>v</sup> in this

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<sup>iv</sup> The research reviewed by Symeonidou (2017) refers to initial teacher education. However, there is no reason to believe that the same does not hold true for in-service teacher education as well.

<sup>v</sup> To take only two examples, self-study as teacher educators' research about teaching as well as learning is a research domain with a tradition of a decade (Grant & Butler, 2018: 32) and self-study is by now being

period and it is not always the ideas per se and their origin that are new but the self-study's legitimacy within the academy and its position as a field in its own right (Clarke & Erickson, 2007, p. 61). Despite the overall significant developments, a gap is noted in research on language teacher education as far as self-study research designs are concerned (Percy & Sharkey, 2018) and this further strengthened the justification of enacting pedagogical approaches in the present research project.

Following Bullough's and Pinnegar's call, this study, like any good study, should be characterized by "*rigorous data gathering and analysis*" (2007, pp. 340-341). Hence data sources and the methods employed in data collection and analysis need to be clear, empirical and valid. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p. 15) put it earlier "[a] *claim to be studying oneself does not bring with it an excuse from rigor*".

Self-study employs many methods "*chosen on the basis of their consistency and their compatibility with the self-study methodology*" (LaBoskey, 2007b, pp. 1173-1174). This implies that "*compatible methods, derived from comparable methodologies, from similar epistemological, pedagogical, and moral/ethical/political underpinnings become subservient to the methodology of self-study*" (LaBoskey, 2007b, p. 1174).

In the work of Lighthall (2007, p. 212-213) methods which can promote change in teacher educators themselves are analyzed. In the present research project two of the methods mentioned were the main methods employed. Like Gipe (1998) I decided to develop a portfolio which would capture my teaching of the course. In it lesson plans, activities, students' marked assignments, my power point presentations, handouts, their power point presentations and our e-mails concerning feedback as well as students' assessments of the course (informal and formal ones) were gathered for two reasons. First, because they all belonged to my definition of "the course" (conceptual clarity) and second, in order to provide a rich description of it as well as my and the students' reflection upon them (trustworthiness of the data). The second method employed was a journal. Journals are widely used and appear under different names in the literature; to name just a few examples related to self-studies on teacher education, journal writing (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2016), professional journaling (Han, 2016) and self-reflective research journal (Óskarsdóttir et al., p. 2019). No matter the terminology used, what they all share is the essence and function of such a data collection tool, i.e. a tool that makes possible "*any kind of active reflection that provides context for the data collected*" (Phillips and Carr, 2014, p. 84). It was because of this that a journal was used in the present study too. Both methods used throughout this longitudinal study were intertwined in the sense that information and reflection in each of them fed into the other and this interaction contributed to the breadth, richness and completeness of the collected data. It was aimed that research should "*provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle*" (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20), in a trustworthy manner, so that knowledge of teaching and learning could be generated (LaBoskey, 2007b).

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done by professionals across diverse fields and contexts and is, therefore, transdisciplinary (Pithouse & Samaras, 2015: 1-2).

The gathered data was analysed against the literature on inclusive education in general as well as the Profile of Inclusive Teachers more specifically. In the process of the analysis and interpretation of the data a series of matrix displays were developed, and a content analysis of the matrices followed. This was achieved through numerous re-readings and constant comparisons. At the same time, it was cross-checked by means of which data collection strategy data had been collected, the teaching portfolio and/or the journal. In this way validity was strengthened. The analysis of the data aimed to identify which of the European IE principles, which of the Profile's core values, areas of competence and elements became part of teacher education for inclusion (absence/presence criterion). For all of them it was of interest to explore the reasons for their presence or absence. Identifying connections and patterns across the data resulted in the answers to the research question posed at the beginning of the project. In addition, they were the basis upon which suggestions for the way forward could be made.

## **5. Research findings and their interpretation**

In this section the research findings are discussed on the basis of helpful and illustrating examples and with reference to the literature on teacher education for inclusion in Europe. It is discussed to what extent and in what ways principles and core values of inclusive education can become a part of teacher education for inclusion in Greek higher education.

### **5.1. Empowering effects of post-graduate teacher education for inclusion in Greece**

The teachers' motivation for participating in the course became apparent from the start, since they were all concerned about their preparedness for inclusive education and the shortcomings in their training. They all expressed their willingness to teach for inclusion but felt insecure due to the lack of knowledge and skills for IE. This is a situation common in many educational settings (see, for example, the review by Donnelly & Watkins, 2011). My students experienced problems identified before, for example by Casanova et al. (2006), who point out that teachers wish to *"attend to the learning difficulties encountered by their pupils, but their 'empirical and inappropriate responses' appear to be related to a stereotyped idea of what a pupil should be and apparent lack of knowledge of what is involved in the act of learning"* (Casanova et al., 2006, as quoted in European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010, p. 33). Therefore, it was good that an introduction to the theoretical concepts and principles underpinning inclusive education within the global and the Greek context was made. Its manifestations and implementations were discussed, and the difficulties faced in the Greek educational system in relation to inclusion were analyzed on the basis of the teachers' experiences and in relation to the relevant literature. Ways of dealing with them were explored in plenary discussions in the course and in the students' assignments using the relevant literature on learning difficulties and language teaching methodology.

Teacher's views, attitudes and beliefs concerning learner difference were elicited. Plenary discussions on such topics took place, experiences and opinions were exchanged

and literature on learning difficulties and language teaching methodology was analyzed. The main concepts which were singled out by the course participants as important and on which we worked on extensively related to how it is normal to be different, learner diversity is to be respected, valued and understood as a resource that enhances learning opportunities and labelling of learners can have a negative impact upon learning opportunities (Profile, p. 12). Therefore, skills and abilities like empathy and respect, appropriate language and sensitivity to the diverse needs of the learners were skills promoted in the course. The diversity of learners was introduced from the viewpoint of a language teacher and not as pathology or medical-based knowledge that is separate from a teacher's daily work. The language used was the language changed from the medical to the social model (cf. EAfDiSNE, 2010, p. 26). We were interested in "*providing learning opportunities and support learning*" and "*move away from deficit categories*" Norwich (2010, as quoted in EAfDiSNE, 2011a, p. 14). Already in 1993 Ayers warned about how categories "*misdirect our vision and mislead our intentions*" and stressed that "*what we need are multiple ways of seeing a child's ever-changing strengths*" (cf. EAfDiSNE, 2011a, p. 14). Teachers must see learners, typical and atypical, as having "*multiple intelligences and learning styles along many dimensions, rather than belonging to a category*" Naukkarinen (2010) (ibid.). The aimed knowledge and competences were, therefore, aligned with a "*continuum of support services model*" (cf. EAfDiSNE, 2011a, p. 14). Having said that, the conceptual and praxis boundaries were not always so clear, a balance discussed for many years already in the literature as well, for example by Minnow (1990) when he refers to the dilemma around commonality, i.e. meeting the needs of all children and promoting belonging and acceptance and differentiation, i.e. responding to individual needs (cf. EAfDiSNE, 2011a, pp. 15-16).

In the course it was the mainstream classroom with the diverse range of learners and their different needs that provided our context. In it the learning process is essentially the same for all learners – there are very few special techniques and teachers need to respond based upon adaptations to the curriculum and teaching approaches. Teaching in a classroom like this means teachers need to be working with individual learners as well as heterogeneous groups (Profile, p. 14). What all learners share is learning to learn. Anyhow it needs to be kept in mind that diversity cannot be seen as a static concept (ibid., pp. 13 and 14). Additionally, the source of learning difficulties or difficulties in school does not come from within the learners and their context but, on the contrary, difficulties are seen as a result of the educational system's and the environment's influence on the learners, a relatively recent shift in our thinking about inclusive education (cf. Óskarsdóttir et al, 2019, p. 45).

Students, therefore, extensively practised in the course and for their assignments the development of personalised approaches, individualised learning plans and assessment to support the learning process (Profile, p. 30). This involved two stages: assessment for learning and planning for the most appropriate ways of responding to identified diversity. Assessment for learning implied using assessment that supports learning and does not label or lead to negative consequences for learners (Profile, p. 15). This kind of assessment aimed to highlight strengths and weaknesses learners may have



in different areas of their educational experience, in a formative way and as the starting point for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or other target-setting approaches (cf. EAfSNaIE, 2014a, p. 9) and (Profile, p. 14). Teachers practiced ways of identifying and then addressing different barriers to learning and the implications of these for their teaching approaches (ibid.). On the basis of the outcomes of such assessment teachers used a range of teaching methods and approaches in systematic ways, developed, implemented and effectively reviewed their plans and also differentiated methods, content and outcomes for learning (Profile, pp. 14-15).

Researching the relevant literature and the planning procedures for the development of the ways of responding to diversity were considered to be known to the teachers from their BA studies. Literature on language teaching methodology was also, to a greater or lesser extent, known to them in contrast to the literature on learning difficulties, differentiation, etc., which was new to them. Intervention processes were also completely new to the students and one of the main reasons why they wanted to participate in the course in the first place. The theoretical framework for the students' work varied according to the topics explored and such variation and interweaving of literature reflect the interdisciplinarity of the field. It was found to be very important for the teachers and had an empowering effect on them. At the end of the course they felt more confident and prepared to assess, plan and teach for inclusion in the future.

Finally, reflection upon their inclusive teaching and upon themselves also became part of the teachers' education for inclusion in the course. Participants were open to their own professional development and eager to learn how to research on their teaching. Observation was a process partly known to them and had to be refined and enriched in relation to issues of diversity. Theory on reflection and teacher research, on the other hand, were new domains and it was therefore considered by them to be a major advantage that they mastered this at the end of the course. We explicitly discussed how teaching is a problem-solving activity that requires on-going and systematic planning, evaluation, reflection and then modified action and the importance of evidence-based practice to guide a teacher's work as well as the value of developing a personal pedagogy to guide a teacher's work (Profile, p. 17). On the one hand, the participants of the course acquired knowledge in relation to what makes a reflective practitioner, action research methods and their relevance for teachers' work and how personal reflection on and in action can be developed. On the other, they developed skills, such as personal meta-cognitive and learning to learn skills, methods and strategies for systematically evaluating their own work and performance as well as personal strategies for problem solving (ibid.).

To sum up, teacher education inspired by the European work on inclusive education, as experienced by my students and me, had important empowering effects on teachers. They engaged in discussions relating to IE and were sensitised in relation to it, they acquired knowledge about teaching approaches in heterogenous classes so as to support individual learners and the whole of the class and they developed their planning skills for IE. Finally, they learned how to research on their inclusive teaching and thus professionally developed.

## 5.2. Barriers to post-graduate teacher education for inclusion in Greece

Data analysis in the present research shed light to certain elements of IE which proved to be less easily developed. Data interpretation indicated that these related both to the teachers' thinking about IE and to the ways the feel the Greek context affects them.

In our discussions with the students, and as can be deduced from the findings analysed in the previous section, it became apparent that they felt it was urgent for them to orientate themselves in the context of IE and to cope with the needs of the learners and the activities for their learning. In their concepts of IE diversity as well as their empathy towards all learners were demonstrated. However, the call for equality, societal reform, rights and democracy and the belief that inclusive education is a prerequisite for quality education were not expressed by them and when challenged about them they explained that they were not their priority. Thus, attitudes and beliefs related to equality as an intrinsic feature of quality education, human rights and democracy for all learners and the non-negotiable societal reform (Profile, p. 11) as well as skills and abilities concerning the critical examination of beliefs, ethical practice and a more active stance towards problematic situations in educational contexts (Profile, p. 12) were not part of the students' development.

One could argue that this is the case, because of the lack of support for Greek teachers as far as their basic needs are concerned; needs like the ones addressed in the empowering effects mentioned in the previous section. Maybe once they feel they can cope in their class everyday they will focus on social justice as well. Such priorities, however, need to be part of the ways in which teachers nowadays think about and teach for inclusion. As emphasised in the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7), "*inclusion and equity through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda*". The humanistic vision of education (ibid.) aimed at depends significantly on the teachers and, therefore, intense efforts need to be made, so that teachers perceive and practise IE accordingly.

As far as the learners' families are concerned teachers emphasized how families often show minimal desire to co-operate, challenge the teachers' authority, especially when learning difficulties or other instances of diversity occur. Parents and the learners' families were found to be controversial, if not problematic, and not valued by the teachers as an essential resource for a learner's learning (Profile, p. 13). Teachers were also reluctant to accept the responsibility for effective communication and collaboration with parents and families (Profile, p. 15). Respectively they did not develop their skills in relation to communicating effectively with parents and family members of different cultural, ethnic, linguistic and social backgrounds and succeeding in their involvement to support their child's learning, (ibid.).

Families, however, are amongst the main stakeholders in any educational context and their role and involvement greatly affects the learners' academic and social development. To name only one example which exemplifies the importance of such collaborations, in the INCLUD-ED project (2012) five types of family and community participation are defined and extensive literature is reviewed, which points to the undisputable significance of them. Hence, working with the teachers and the families,

their attitudes and the ways of working together belongs to the top priorities of IE in the Greek context.

When it came to the value and the ways of collaborative working approaches with other teachers and educational professionals or in relation to support systems and structures available for further help, teachers were interested and willing to discuss about positive inter-personal skills, the impact of inter-personal relationships on the achievement of learning goals multi-agency working models or collaborative teaching approaches (Profile, pp. 15-16). They were not, however, interested in acquiring relevant knowledge and to pursue readings or develop competences for such issues as strongly as for issues mentioned in the previous section. This became also apparent in the topics they chose for their assignments, which mainly dealt with their own teaching practice in heterogenous classes. On a school level, teachers felt the Greek context usually does not allow either for the motivation or the ways in which schools are learning communities they can actively contribute to. They, on the contrary, felt restricted by the school, as an educational context, and felt exhausted by the difficult working conditions. These resulted in their unwillingness to become involved and to invest time and effort outside their classroom, and, therefore, skills related to building schools as learning communities (Profile, p. 13) were absent. Skills like implementing classroom leadership and management skills that facilitate effective multi-agency working, co-teaching and working in flexible teaching teams or drawing on a range of verbal and non-verbal communication skills to facilitate working co-operatively with other professionals were minimally developed in the course (Profile, p. 16). As would be expected based on the aforementioned findings, the dimensions of collaboration (with families and other professionals) and the teachers' contribution to changing today's schools were missing in relation to teachers' reflective practice as well (ibid., pp. 17-18).

It becomes apparent that systematic work needs to be done in relation to the teachers' beliefs and appreciation concerning the learners' families and in relation to the way they can as teachers work with them. At the same time, initiatives should be strengthened concerning the attitudes of the parents and families as well and the ways in which they can contribute to the learning process. The issue of collaboration is central; Rao (2009, in European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010, p. 38) points out that teacher educators need to prepare teachers for four broader roles involving four forms of collaboration: collaboration-consultation (general education teacher requests services of special education teacher to help generate ideas for addressing an ongoing situation); peer support system (two general education teachers work together to generate ideas); teacher assistance teams (teams that include special educators provide assistance to general education teachers); and co-teaching where general and special education teachers work together to provide service to students. The issue of collaboration in school is nowadays one of the most central ones, as concluded by the Agency as well in its Follow-up study, in which it is considered essential to "*promote effective practice in teacher and support staff collaboration in the classroom*" (EAfSNaIE, 2019, p. 21). Collaboration with the learners' families and with other professionals in educational contexts is mandatory. Attitudes in relation to this as well as

knowledge and skills, must be part of inclusive education. From the analysis one could conclude that this core value and all the elements included present one of the major targets/necessities in IE in the Greek context.

## 6. Suggestions for teacher education for inclusion in Greece

There are general improvements in the training for inclusion in the Greek context already discussed in the most recent national report (EAfSNaIE, 2018: 26-27). These involve the acquisition of knowledge and skills in both the actual teaching (e.g. differentiation and meeting diverse needs) and the aspect of collaboration (with families as well as with other professionals). Official training efforts by the Greek Institute of Educational Policy, are already on the way and will hopefully soon begin. It is intended that they address teachers of all levels of education and will focus on issues of instruction as well as attitudes. If we turn attention to the wider context of teacher education for inclusion in Greece, on the basis of the research findings and in relation to the European thinking on IE, there are three improvements to be suggested.

First, changes related to the courses' type seem necessary. As mentioned in section 3, the course analysed here was of an isolated type. In such isolated courses, it cannot be argued that focusing on identifying barriers to learning and participation and providing anticipatory responses, planning for all learners up front can be fully achieved. In the course one of the objectives was change in thinking at system level, in order to increase teachers' capability to respond to diversity. However, this was achieved only in terms of reflection and awareness raising (EAfSNaIE, 2015b, pp. 14-15). Despite the significance of this, this isolated course was only a starting point for future efforts (EAfSNaIE, 2014a, p. 16). A change in thinking at system level was considered impossible, since it would surely demand cooperation and educational as well as legislative changes on a national system level, i.e. ministries, universities, schools and other parties involved. As has been commended by the EAfSNaIE (2015b, p. 49) *"a clear vision is needed to support work towards country level legislation and policy that sees inclusive education as the responsibility of all policy-makers and all stakeholders in education"*. As relevant stakeholders are regarded decision-makers, researchers and practitioners, as well as people with disabilities and their families (EAfSNaIE, 2014b, p. 7). This has, to a greater or lesser extent, been done for example in Austria, Finland, France, Portugal or the UK (see EAfSNaIE, 2015b, pp. 15-20) but such accomplishments within the framework of a single research project, like the one discussed here, were considered not feasible and beyond its scope. In the Agency's project briefly outlined above no representative from Greece was unfortunately among the fifty-five experts from 25 countries and this was one of the reasons further exploring this issue for the Greek context is considered essential. The Agency project's important recommendations, directed to professionals working in teacher education, among others, e.g. policy makers, rooted in systematic research and reflection, since they drew *"on the commonalities between policy and practice for teacher education for inclusion in participating countries, on the policy and literature reviews produced as part of the project and information gathered from a wide range of stakeholders during 14 country study visits"* (EAfDiSNE, 2011b).

Because Greece was not one of the aforementioned countries one first future research aim could be to explore the Greek educational context of teacher training for inclusion with both a descriptive and an improving intention, bearing in mind that despite the differences across countries there are key principles to be agreed upon, in this case “*education and training in inclusive education for all teachers*” (EAfDiSNE, 2010, p. 12).

A second, perhaps more feasible, step in this direction would consider forms of collaboration between faculties and general as well as between specialist teacher educators. This would not only have a greater impact on our attitudes and beliefs about including all learners, but it would also advance improvements in the teachers’ preparation for inclusive education as a whole. Even within one faculty it would be worth striving for models of education, which would be more collaborative, for example approaches like the “*permeation*”/“*embedded*” model and the “*content infused approach*” which would also foresee school placement with an inclusive education focus (Symeonidou 2017, p. 411-412). As recently pointed out, however adding some courses on inclusion to the general curriculum is insufficient and inadequate (EAfSNaIE, 2015a, p. 21).

A final suggestion would be that higher education-based professional learning communities are created, in which through collaborative work not only on the teachers’ but also the educator’s work will be reflected upon and relevant evidence will be examined in order to improve them. Students would in this case become collaborators (Lighthall, 2007, pp. 204-205) within a research framework that makes collaboration possible. There are several reasons why this is important, two of which being the participants’ growth and the strengthening of the research itself (Grant & Butler, 2018, p. 32). It has often been pointed out that teacher educators must practice what they preach, i.e. model the role of the teacher. Hence, the development of inclusive practice should be considered to be an essential feature of professional learning for both the teachers participating in higher education courses and for teacher educators alike.

## **7. Inspirations and aspirations for inclusive education in Greece**

Inclusive education is essential and, at the same time, challenging. Many factors support or complicate it. In the present paper the focus was teacher education for inclusion, one of the most significant influencing factors for IE. It has been discussed how European thinking on IE can inspire teacher education in the Greek context and suggestions for the way forward were made. The centrality of teachers, their attitudes, experiences, training and teaching, was confirmed. At the same time, the important role the context plays emerged. The identified goals for the future concern both the individual teacher and the context and it appears that the most promising way to achieve them would be to aspire to a synthesis of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

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