Achieving Continuous Professional Development through Peer Observation and Self-Reflection: The Case of the Greek INSET for Teachers of English

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Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of in-service training (INSET) to practicing teachers in Greece and the possible reasons that might make such training less attractive to them. Observation for development is considered as an alternative to short-term training programs so that teachers can develop a deeper awareness of their teaching context, in close collaboration with their peers. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from a questionnaire and a focused interview; seventy respondents participated in the former tool and seventeen in the latter. Findings indicate no fundamental change in the trainees’ beliefs or teaching practice. Theories of teacher training and development are used to explore what teachers expect from training, what the reality of INSET is both for the public and private sectors, and finally how self-reflection and peer-observation can be integrated into teacher education programs to boost teacher learning and development. It is argued that awareness-boosting training programs are essential in order for trainee-teachers to develop their own teaching theories.

Keywords: INSET Programs, reflection, observation, teacher development

1. Introduction

Teachers in service have the potential and experience to transform the educational system, but powerful educational programs are vital, as well. This paper focuses on reforming teacher training programs in a way that will make them more inquiry-based and relevant to teachers’ classrooms. This is not currently the case in Greece, as previous studies indicate that in-service training for English teachers has been neglected and the courses offered are mostly theoretical (Griva, 2005; Karagianni, 2012; Kourkouli, 2018). The study will point to different routes and characterizations of good teaching that lead to teacher development, and draw on previous studies that focus on the usefulness of self-development activities for teachers (Edge, 2001; Farrell, 2001) and the value of peer-observation for development (Donnelly, 2003; Harris et al., 2008; Day, 2013).

The goal of the study is two-fold: (a) to advance research on observational learning, which has been identified by many researchers as a hallmark for effective professional learning (Desimore, 2009; Guskey & Yoon, 2009), and (b) to inform the planning of future in-service training (henceforth, INSET). We argue that a change in INSET is absolutely necessary to help develop teachers’ professionalism, and then to dispel the current belief that peer-observation should only be offered to pre-service teachers in the form of peer mentoring; experienced teachers could also benefit from peer-coaching.

2. Theoretical Background of Teacher Education, INSET and Observation

2.1 Models and Perceptions of Teacher Education

In 1991, Wallace described three models of teacher education. “The craft model” is the oldest one, with teachers studying a “master practitioner,” who demonstrates the proper instruction. Through “the applied science model”, on the other hand, teachers acquire knowledge which derives from theoretical courses and research-based theories. Such a model is usually applied to in-service training, creating many tensions between teachers and trainers as it distinguishes expertise from teaching (Wallace, 1991). Most importantly, “the reflective model” advocates the merging of teachers’ experience with knowledge from other sources, such as training, academic
studies, journals etc. Teachers should be assisted to distinguish what is “morally right” and actively examine their teaching, as Zahorick (1986) maintains in his “values-based” conception of teaching. According to his “art / craft” conception, teachers should treat each teaching situation as unique. Freeman and Richards (1993) also support the idea that the teacher can try to find things that work, discarding old practices and taking on board new ones through decision-making, reflection, analysis and assessment. This paper is in line with Borg’s (2012) suggestion that, “getting teachers to tell us what they believe is not enough; we should encourage them to produce work in which their beliefs are implied” and, in that way, recognize the knowledge and experience teachers bring and build upon it (Luneta, 2012). Two reflective models of teacher education are based on such experiential and reflective learning: “the EROTI model” (experience, reflection, observation, trial and integration) by O’Brien (1981), followed by Kolb’s (1984) “reflection model”, which later turned to “enriched reflection” with the addition of “external experiences to personal input” (Ur, 1996).

2.2 On In-Service Training

In-service training aims at maintaining teachers’ expertise, thus leading them to continuous development. Woodward (1991) sees training and education as standing alongside but also opposite one another at the same time. Freeman (1989, p. 39) considers teacher education to be an umbrella term, and clearly distinguishes between training and development when he subsequently argues that training is “a direct intervention”, while development “is a strategy of influence that works on complex, integrated aspects of teaching” and not “trainable chunks”.

Drawing parallels from Freeman (1989), Borg (2015) presents two contrasting training models. “The training transmission” model, which according to Borg, is still the most commonly used model in teacher education nowadays as well as in the Greek context, is characteristic of a more invasive training approach. Firstly, it is planned and managed by outsiders, either experts or policy makers. Secondly, it is not trainee-oriented as previous studies have illustrated (Karkaletsis, 2010; Kourkouli, 2015). It is still top-down, like old school training, since, according to Day (1999, p 133), such an INSET course offers “less opportunity for extended learning, less choice over what they (trainees) learn as well as less support for study”.

In contrast to “the training transmission” model, “the development /constructivist model” (Borg, 2015) is geared towards teacher education in the form of active learning and development as it is trainee-centered and supports increasing personal involvement. According to Borg (2009), major concerns are now not only what teachers do, but also what they think or what decisions they make and why. The classroom is no longer viewed as a place for theory application, but rather as a medium through which teachers can implement meaningful teaching: by developing an open-class culture, observing each other, circulating and exchanging ideas, and viewing teaching as a social event. Such collaborative, class-based, context-aligned INSET is what this study supports and will try to validate.

2.3 On Observation

We believe that observation should not be restricted to making a judgment concerning the person observed by an observer higher in status who poses as an expert, except if the context is clearly that of evaluation. Power relationships between the trainer and the teachers should be balanced, because, according to Gosling (2002), the purpose of observing teaching is to promote learning about teaching and do so in a relevant context. This is why there has been a shift towards less restrictive training approaches, through which both the observer and the observed can learn how to improve their teaching (Richards & Farrel, 2005). Such approaches, as presented by Freeman (1982), include: “the alternatives” one where the observer’s role is to offer alternative approaches, without forwarding one over the other, hoping to stimulate the teacher to think critically. Reflection that cannot be fostered by prescriptive training or achieved without knowing and considering the trainees’ needs is the key point of this study as well as the main principle behind the approaches that follow. Gebhard (1984) and Wallace (1991) put forward “the collaborative approach”, with which our research corroborates, since it is non-judgmental and the trainer takes up the role of a colleague who co-shares expertise with trainees.

In this light, Gosling (2002) presents “the peer review model”, which supports a process that is more formative. Teachers get the chance to observe each other, discuss the experience and engage in non-judgmental constructive feedback (ibid, 2002). Peer coaching can take place and help in fostering the exchange of teaching methods and materials, cultivating the development of teaching skills and encouraging participants to reflect upon their own teaching methods and styles (Vacillotto & Cummings, 2007). All the above collaborative and coaching practices where teachers see and treat themselves as equals can mostly benefit experienced teachers looking for greater reciprocity and feedback (Todd, 2017).
3. INSET Training for English Language Teachers in Greece

3.1 The Challenges of INSET Offered Exclusively in the Public Sector

English has been the first language to be introduced in the Greek state curriculum in the fourth grade of primary school. Although there used to be compulsory induction programs for newly-appointed English teachers by PEC (Peripheral Educational Centers), in-service teacher education and state EFL teachers’ training and professional development have almost been neglected (Tzotzou, 2017). While 1990-2000 was the decade when the Ministry of Education adopted new measures to upgrade the teaching of foreign languages in primary/secondary schools, it did not make any provisions concerning substantial measures for equivalent training for foreign language teachers (Griva, 2005). In 2011, the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) was founded to support the Ministry of Education in implementing programs at all levels and grades of education and is still responsible for the training of foreign language teachers. Additionally, since November 2019 ongoing research has been conducted by IEP concerning the educational needs of foreign language teachers in Greece. This research includes a meticulous questionnaire which aims at being the basis for planning more effective, in-service courses for the future (http://www.iep.edu.gr/el/component/k2/835-deltio-tyypou-erotimatologio-diereynisi-epimorftikon-anagkon-ekpaidytikon-kson-glossen). IEP has also played an important role in the years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2019-2022) through organizing asynchronous teacher education programs on platforms like MOODLE. In June 2021, teachers of all disciplines were offered the chance to receive training on “skills labs”. This educational innovation was inducted into the curriculum as an interdisciplinary, experiential, project-based teaching approach where students are allowed to develop real-life skills through learning. Another reform that IEP introduced for English language teachers specifically was the induction of English in kindergartens. The program was piloted in a limited number of kindergartens in the academic year 2020-2021 and implemented in 2021-2022 nation-wide.

Before the pandemic, INSET programs organized by the Ministry of Education were usually administered by educational coordinators. Policies regarding education in Greece are determined by the Ministry of Education, and so teachers (trainees) participate neither in the design nor the decision-making process (Kourkouli, 2018). Teachers are invited by the region coordinator to a school of their area. Since a differentiated training approach is not available, novice and experienced teachers attend the same training. Because of their lack of teaching experience, novice in-service teachers may need more prescriptive training. On the other hand, colleagues with many years in service (which is mainly the case) have valuable and long teaching experience to offer and many ideas to exchange. The right training program should assist them in examining what they already know and processing new knowledge. Despite all the reasons above, experienced trainee-teachers still do not have a choice over the content and methods of delivery concerning their training.

In the Greek training context, presentations and lectures constitute the basic modes of training, mainly due to the low implementation cost and relatively simple design (Maggioli, 2004). These training approaches lack components like “awareness raising” or the experiential component, which Ellis (1986) finds crucial and conducive to the success of any training syllabus.

3.2 The Challenges of INSET Programs Open to all Teachers of English

English language teachers in Greece can choose from a wide variety of programs if they are willing to pay tuition fees. They can choose from foreign universities, the Greek branches of which offer teacher training programs, to three public Greek universities (Kapodistian University in Athens, Aristotle University in Thessaloniki and the Hellenic Open University), which offer postgraduate studies for teachers of English and separate teacher training courses. Aristotle University led the way in university INSET in Greece and hosted a program designed upon the results of a national survey (Mattheoudakis & Nikolaidis, 2005). This program tried to effectively tackle the strong bias of teachers against approaches to language teaching stemming from their exclusively theoretical university training. Additionally, the Hellenic Open University, in order to respond to the increasing demand for more extensive teacher education programs, offers some of the modules included in the postgraduate EFL syllabus as separate INSET seminars. There is also the Panhellenic Association of the State School Teachers of English (PEKADE), which aims at covering the specific educational interests of English language teachers.

The seminar market became more open and prosperous since long-haul seminars (over 400 hours) were connected by the Ministry of Education with extra credits for the allocation of substitute teachers. Respectively, centers of life-long learning were created in both the Aegean University and the University of Thessaly to support in-service training for different disciplines. Moreover, programs that are offered through e-learning synchronous or asynchronous education are favored as time- and cost-effective solutions especially by teachers.
residing in suburban areas. EEPEK (Scientific Union for the Promotion of Educational innovation) is well known for offering asynchronous on-line training seminars for teachers of all disciplines.

Established examination boards and their publishing houses lead the way in offering seminars which mainly educate teachers on how to prepare candidates participating in their certification exams. Such training sessions might serve students’ testing and certification needs but do not assist teacher development since teachers are obliged to traditionally test what they teach and teach only what they must test. Such presentations and workshops are usually short, one-off and more of a commercial and less of an educational value.

4. Self-reflection and Peer-observation for CPD

4.1 Self-reflection/Observation

Nowadays, in order to assess effective teaching, practitioners are probing for more alternative forms, which favor continuous exploration of one’s context. Therefore, in order for teacher education programs to be successful, they should generate the need for reflection and constant research where reflection is the pre-requisite for development and research is a desirable option for development (Mann, 2005). Teachers must be urged towards self-direction, not surreptitiously pushed towards predetermined directions (Tomlinson, 2003), which is exactly what the current research is trying to support. The central professional learning action should be teacher-initiated classroom inquiry. Schön (1983) described such a reflective practitioner and later talked about “reflection in action” (while teaching) and “reflection on action” (upon one’s teaching). Another expert, Van Manen (1991) added “reflection for action” to boost further research. Through self-observation, teachers can reflect on what they already know and can do, and can also be helped to identify appropriate directions for further development. Some initial support and coaching by a trainer, though, is pivotal in refueling the cycle of self-reflection and in helping trainee-teachers’ research their students’ better learning. The coach/mentor should be standing by as a colleague and deciding, not ahead of, but in close collaboration with the trainee-teacher, on how to tackle the researched case. Especially in an INSET context, the emphasis should be on the empowerment of experienced teachers (our sample) in shaping their own professional development through developing their skills of self-reflection and leading them towards greater self-sufficiency (Wragg, 1999).

Class data should be the point of departure, which justifies why the area under scrutiny includes the practices trainee-teachers need to adopt with their actual classes in order to develop an internal dialogue of thinking and doing, through which they will become more skilled (Schön, 1987). Practices that can enhance class research might include: maintaining a teacher’s diary, recording one’s lessons for future viewing, constructing reflective lesson plans on what worked and what did not and what actually happens (Richards & Farrel, 2005). What this study and many before it (Porter et al, 2000; Tallerico, 2006) maintain is that, if peer-observation is oriented towards reaching an understanding without making judgements while bringing the practice of teaching to public dialogue (Bovill, 2011), collective reflection and learning can be accomplished.

4.2 Collaborative Reflection through Peer-Observation for Development

It is commonly held by English language educators that teaching is a process of lifelong learning and development (Murray, 2010). Consequently, while self-reflection might be the starting point of reflection for active teachers, the vehicle towards professional development is peer-observation as it helps teachers become more aware of the problems they confront and narrows the gap between ideal conditions of teaching (which most probably do not exist) and what actually happens (Richards & Farrel, 2005). What this study and many before it (Porter et al, 2000; Tallerico, 2006) maintain is that, if peer-observation is oriented towards reaching an understanding without making judgements while bringing the practice of teaching to public dialogue (Bovill, 2011), collective reflection and learning can be accomplished.

A primary form of peer-observation and a “safe place” for teaching to be discussed and valued as well as for non-judgmental and constructive feedback to be shared can be experiential teacher education activities. Accordingly, microteaching, simulations and problem-solving activities are surveyed as a good starting point that eventually leads to peer coaching in a real classroom setting. Along those lines, Gosling’s (2002) “peer review model” can reflect a more equitable and balanced relationship with mutual benefits for all participants.

The prerequisite for such an approach to work and not lead to overpraising or overjudging of colleagues is that the participating staff should be given some training on how to give constructive feedback to maximize the benefit of POT (Peer Observation of Teaching), since this is a demanding skill (Gosh, 1998). Furthermore, as Gosling (2002) argues, confidentiality plays an important role and so does mutuality of learning that should be achieved so that both parties (trainer and trainees) can benefit from the process.

A main concern of this study is the conditions for achieving CPD. However, to get there, it is essential that we understand how teachers become aware of their actions in a classroom and then able to describe them and
willing to discuss them. Bell (2010) claims that peer observation can be meaningful; however, the steps to be followed should be: (a) planning the observation, (b) conducting it and (c) reflecting upon it. Understandably, such a task can be daunting at the beginning and that is why a teacher-educator might initiate the observation sessions by demonstrating the “mechanics”, and then be there to support and extend development in as many ways as possible. A supportive environment is critical in forming a culture that nurtures a collegial exchange of ideas as teaching mainly improves in collegial settings where common goals are set, the curriculum is jointly developed, and expertise is shared (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Allowing time for observations to take place, particularly for peer-coaching and debriefing, is equally important for peers so that they can learn from the observation experience and engage in self-reflection again in order to inform and initiate future peer-observation activities. Thus, there should be many opportunities for discussion so that teachers can learn on their own as well as from one another; one option would be reflection in action, which can be used to develop teachers’ understanding and practice through sharing experiences. Further, for teachers in a single school or neighboring ones, a lesson study constitutes an effective collaborative approach. Another approach that supports professional growth is linked to “learning walks”, which are non-evaluative walkthroughs of colleagues’ classes in order for teachers to learn how to improve their own instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Practicing teachers might also decide to form a CFG (Critical Friends Group): small groups of teachers, under the guidance of a coach, observe each other’s lessons and meet regularly to develop collaborative skills and reflect on teaching practices and students’ work.

5. Research Design

5.1 Research Hypothesis and Questions

In light of the above, the basic hypothesis of this study is that teacher education for practicing teachers, mainly in the public sector in Greece, has been neglected; therefore, the INSET offered to English language teachers should be thoroughly examined so that teacher awareness can be increased and a change in teacher attitude be achieved via developmental programs that focus on self-reflection and peer-observation. The following are the research questions this study will examine:

1) Which are the challenges of training in-service teachers?

2) How should educational programs be shaped in order to facilitate CPD?

3) How can self- and peer-observation change the trainees’ cognitive and affective beliefs?

5.2 Methodology and Tools

A mixed-method approach (both quantitative and qualitative analyses) was adopted for the current study, including a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview for teachers of English working for both the public and the private sectors in Greece. A piloting phase was carried out before the questionnaire was administered to check the comprehensibility/quality of the questions; five teachers from diverse teaching environments participated at that stage. The internal structure of the questionnaire was comprised of twenty-two close questions, which were formed according to a five-point or a three-point Likert scale. One open question was also included and strategically placed in the middle to mark the transition of the survey from inquiring about INSET to inquiring about collaborative reflection and peer-observation. Seventy participants were asked to offer an account of their peer observation experience thus far. The interview that followed the questionnaire was an effort to make the research more qualitative. Because of its flexibility, a semi-structured interview of 9 open-ended questions was prepared. Seventeen trusted colleagues, each with a different professional profile, were chosen and asked to be interviewed so that plurality of opinions would be achieved.

6. Discussion of the Findings

6.1 Discussion

Regarding the first research question that is related to the challenges of training in-service teachers, the findings show that experienced in-service teachers, (see figure 1 below), need teacher education programs to help them constantly evolve to catch up with their students’ varied needs.
In relation to the potential professional development of teachers, the offered INSET is examined first, starting with the duration and venue and continuing towards challenges and supervision. Particularly for duration, short-term training prevails (see figure 2 below).
Participants, in both research tools, view this short duration as a major problem since such minimal training has no real impact, lacks real feedback, and does not take into consideration teachers’ actual needs. Most interviewees criticized the offered INSET in Greece (94.1%) and only one found it unproblematic. Lack of satisfaction was related to the duration of programs, as many of the respondents characterized them as minimal or too short. For most respondents, the training content was regarded as too general, impossible or too time-consuming to implement in a classroom, utopian for the reality of classrooms in Greece, not giving practical teaching tips, and not affecting the way teaching is actually implemented. A further issue raised by public sector teachers is that there are not enough positions for everyone in seminars organized by the Institute of Educational Policy. Private sector teachers pointed out that only longer seminars have worth, but are expensive as well. Considering the above results, we realize that for teachers to enhance their practice, a change in awareness and attitude is crucial. Understandably, such a change can only be gradual and thus time-consuming, idiosyncratic and individual. Offering ample educational opportunities is essential in order to achieve the “follow up” impact or, in other words, the desired changes in teaching practices. However, an increase in training time may not suffice if training is decontextualized, with no regard for the trainees’ class data, as was the case for the majority of teachers in our study.

Cluster-formed, pull-out training seems to prevail, which, in its simplest form, comprises trainer-centered lectures or presentations with limited “working” time for the participants; these are programs that derive from the “Craft model” (Wallace, 1991), where the master practitioner speaks and trainees listen. Although solutions like lectures or presentations are chosen as time- and cost-effective ones, what they lack is original and first-hand feedback, through which teachers can become aware of how their class really functions and what kind of changes they need to make to improve their instruction (Halime et al., 2018). In the same vein, all but one of the participants in the interview agree that classroom observations are more effective than pull-out seminars. They favor classroom-based training as they can witness real-time teaching along with students’ reactions. In this way, they get real feedback on how they actually teach, which renders such training both practical and experiential. On the other hand, they criticize pull-out seminars because these neglect real classroom needs and present ideal teaching conditions rarely present in a real classroom. To the study participants, such training is speculative and a lot of time is spent on theory. In other words, teachers in service receive training as direct intervention on specific aspects of teaching (Freeman, 1989), while what they need are educational programs that aim at development as a process of influence and indirect intervention, which works on complex, integrated aspects of teaching (Freeman, 1989, p. 40).

The offered INSET is far from trainee-centered, especially in relation to the state sector; those working for the state follow, to a great extent, training related to the grade they serve in and the region their school belongs to, without further distinctions pertaining to their needs or teaching experience. By contrast, teachers working for the private sector can really get training based on their needs. This differentiation is shown in the graph below (figure 3).
Training is regarded by almost all our respondents in the interview as “minimal”, “too theoretical”, “offering approaches difficult to implement with real classrooms” and “with the trainer assuming the central role”. Those challenges that in-service teachers describe point to the training-transmission model, which usually follows a nation-wide, top-down implementation model where the content of training is determined by the educational authorities. In other words, language teaching and learning are viewed as a fixed body of knowledge (coded in research articles and books) that will then be transmitted to trainees, who will understand and incorporate it into practice (Diaz-Maggioli, 2012, p 10).

The second research question is related to the form that educational programs should have in order to facilitate CPD. Firstly, our participants are asked about the personal reasons that might have stopped them from evolving professionally (see figure 4 below). They note that their limited time and heavy workload, and occasional low student-ability, have mostly kept them from evolving. In addition, limited training on new teaching approaches and lack of resources play a role to a certain extent.
A major issue we should be concerned with is in what ways teachers aspire to develop professionally and thus why they attend educational-training programs (see table 1 below). The vast majority of teachers (only 1.4% were neutral) agreed that they wanted to learn new approaches and apply them in class as well as to enrich their teaching material (only 1.4% strongly disagreed, 2.9% were neutral). The use of technology in teaching received a lot of interest (57.1% strongly agreed, 35.7% agreed), as well as the ability to develop personally and professionally (65.7% strongly agreed, 25.7% agreed). Additionally, most of the respondents agreed that catering for their students’ needs (only 1.4% disagreed) as well as their psychological support (0.0% disagreed and 7.1% were neutral) is a priority. In other words, teachers assert that they need educational-training programs which will help them develop at multiple levels: professionally, linguistically, personally, methodologically, technologically. In this respect, teachers take it upon themselves to lay claim to more developmental and targeted training with a central role for them and their students. They see effective training as a holistic and dynamic approach informed by the demands of each teaching situation. The importance of such professional development which involves active learning and reflection is established in many studies (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Desimore, 2011) which opt for continuous professional development as a constant goal and pursuit.
Table 1. Reasons for attending training seminars or sessions

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To learn new methods and approaches and learn how to apply them in my class</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. To cater for my students’ needs and interests</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To enrich or update my teaching materials</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. To cooperate with colleagues and draw from their experience</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To learn about new technological teaching tools (online platforms, web pages, social media in the use of teaching, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To further develop my knowledge of the language (linguistic skills)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7,1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5,7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To learn how to assess in non-traditional ways (alternative assessment)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. To tackle student psychology and class management problems</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. To draw inspiration and ideas on how to use more of my potential in order to develop personally and professionally</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

Similarly, the majority of participants describe ideal training programs by supporting trainee-centered practices that can accommodate their beliefs and shy away from methodological prescriptivism (see table 2 below). Most participants opted for collaborative training where data comes from multiple resources like their action research or collaboration with peers (54.29% strongly agreed and 34.29% agreed) and not just the trainer. The majority of the respondents (66 out of 70) agreed (41.43%) or strongly agreed (52.86%) that training should not only focus on skills but should raise awareness and influence our attitude. Through the participants’ answers, chances for experiential learning were favored (38.57% agreed and 51.43% strongly agreed). The vast majority asked for training programs, which can accommodate the trainees’ needs (48.57% agreed and 45.71% strongly agreed) and which are relevant to each teacher’s teaching context (47.14% agreed and 44.29% strongly agreed). Lastly but most importantly, follow-up sessions to facilitate continuous reflection, were requested by most participants (48.57% agreed and 37.14% strongly agreed). Considering all the above, participants ask for INSET programs to be positioned as developmental activities and not deficit-oriented ones; programs that influence their attitudes towards the right direction by being based on experiential training, and equip them with the strategies to go on reflecting. Borg and Albery (2015) seem to concur with the above view, when they start their set of principles regarding effective in-service teacher education by stating that it should acknowledge and build on teachers’ prior experience, beliefs and knowledge. Therefore, we realize that the driving force of any decision teachers make is deeply rooted in their value system and thus emphasis should be placed on what teachers know in order to examine what they need to enable them to treat every teaching situation as unique and create or use practices that are promising for that situation, as Zahoric (1986) maintains in his “art/craft model”. That is why training.
should be experiential, originating from not just the trainer, but also from multiple sources (action research, collaboration with peers, diaries, research tools etc.).

Table 2. The kind of training programs participants prefer

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Those that prescribe the right practices</td>
<td>9 12.86</td>
<td>17 24.29</td>
<td>12 17.14</td>
<td>19 27.14</td>
<td>13 18.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Those that influence your teaching towards the right direction</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>4 5.71</td>
<td>8 11.43</td>
<td>34 48.57</td>
<td>24 34.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Those that focus only on skills</td>
<td>7 10.00</td>
<td>26 37.14</td>
<td>26 37.14</td>
<td>7 10.00</td>
<td>4 5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Those that help raise your awareness and influence your attitude</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>4 5.71</td>
<td>29 41.43</td>
<td>37 52.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Those where knowledge is transmitted</td>
<td>3 4.29</td>
<td>3 4.29</td>
<td>12 17.14</td>
<td>33 47.14</td>
<td>19 27.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Those that also offer chances for experiential learning (micro-teaching, case-studies, simulations, etc.)</td>
<td>1 1.43</td>
<td>1 1.43</td>
<td>5 7.14</td>
<td>27 38.57</td>
<td>36 51.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Those that are one-off</td>
<td>13 18.57</td>
<td>17 24.29</td>
<td>31 44.29</td>
<td>4 5.71</td>
<td>5 7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Those that offer follow-up sessions and provide you with the right tools/strategies to go on reflecting</td>
<td>1 1.43</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>9 12.86</td>
<td>34 48.57</td>
<td>26 37.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Those that are based only on what the trainer sees useful</td>
<td>22 31.43</td>
<td>30 42.86</td>
<td>7 10.00</td>
<td>5 7.14</td>
<td>6 8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Those that are flexible to accommodate your teaching needs</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>1 1.43</td>
<td>3 4.29</td>
<td>34 48.57</td>
<td>32 45.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Those where data comes only from the trainer</td>
<td>23 32.86</td>
<td>29 41.43</td>
<td>11 15.71</td>
<td>2 2.86</td>
<td>5 7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Those where data comes from multiple resources (your action research in collaboration with peers and research tools (Observation questionnaires, diaries, etc.))</td>
<td>1 1.43</td>
<td>2 2.86</td>
<td>5 7.14</td>
<td>24 34.29</td>
<td>38 54.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Those that are pre-cut for everyone</td>
<td>21 30.00</td>
<td>22 31.43</td>
<td>17 24.29</td>
<td>3 4.29</td>
<td>7 10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Those that are relevant to your teaching context</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
<td>1 1.43</td>
<td>5 7.14</td>
<td>33 47.14</td>
<td>31 44.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let us now turn to the role of the trainer (see table 3 below). All respondents, except 4.29% who were neutral, agreed that s/he should help trainees become autonomous through practice, reflection, and self-evaluation. Almost all of them also profiled the right trainer as a partner/advisor. Consequently, trainer and trainees should co-share expertise (only 1.43% disagreed) and that is why the trainer should consider listening as important as speaking (51.43% agreed, 37.14% strongly agreed) and not follow a “blueprint”. The outcome is the profile of a supportive trainer who listens more and tries to understand the trainees’ point of view while at the same times challenges them to reflect upon alternative teaching routes through “collaborative” or “self-help/exploratory” supervision. Even in the case when the content of training is dictated, e.g. by the Ministry of Education in the case of the official evaluation of teachers, the trainer must actively engage the trainees through experiential and reflective training. As indicated by the vast majority of respondents, successful trainers should lead by example through supporting and facilitating reflection and discovery in programs where theoretical and practical knowledge is developed in an integrated manner, while treating experienced teachers as equals and including them both in the assessment of their needs and in the planning of the training program.
Table 3. Ways a trainer can support teacher development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The trainer should be an authority figure</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24,29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35,71</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The trainer should be a partner / advisor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The trainer should be the only source of expertise</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32,86</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40,00</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The trainer and the trainees should be co-sharers of expertise</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,43</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The trainer applies a “blueprint” of how the lesson ought to be taught</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18,57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28,57</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The trainer has no “blueprint” and tries to understand the trainees’ point of view</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7,14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The trainer talks. The trainee listens</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42,86</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31,43</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The trainer considers listening as important as talking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,86</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The trainer prescribes specific techniques</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21,43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18,57</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The trainer attempts to help trainees develop autonomy through practice, reflection and self-evaluation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A “safer” way for a trainer to initiate trainees in such self- and peer- exploratory approaches, according to all of the respondents in the interview, is micro- or even simulated teaching where they can mock-teach new practices, while moving back and forth in reflecting on their teaching practice with the help of trusted peers. In the respondents’ actual words “a trainee-teacher can have the audience, the real time feedback, and the chance to adapt and retry, but without the anxiety of performance”. A coach/advisor, as described in table 3 above, is valuable in facilitating teachers develop autonomy through co-sharing expertise and offering them ample chances to “rehearse” new approaches as well as reflect and self-evaluate.

Regarding our third and most crucial question which is related to the changes that self- and peer-observation can bring to the trainees’ cognitive and affective beliefs, respondents’ contributions were very interesting. Starting from the areas of teaching that trouble them, participants were mostly concerned about actively accommodating their students’ diverse needs and, through that process, monitoring and sustaining their own individual reflection and development. In other words, our respondents opted for an expansion not only of their skills, but also of an understanding which will help them develop and avoid professional atrophy and the feeling that one has done it all before (Freeman, 1982). They asked to be guided in the process of development through generating and testing hypotheses and using that knowledge to create the teacher as a “researcher” (Beaumont, 2005, p 278).

Concerning self-exploratory methods, interviewees stated that “they help you understand your strengths and weaknesses”, “reassess deeply rooted preconceptions about teaching”, “become more aware of the dynamics of your class” and finally “realize your teaching style”. In the questionnaire, they opted for self- awareness as a means to update their methods and monitor their lesson planning and as a boost to discuss their concerns with peers. They seem to understand that they should examine phenomena of teaching and learning in their classrooms (Nunan, 1992) in order to become active researchers of their teaching situation and elicit formative feedback for the next reflection cycle. Conversely, they hesitated when it came to opening their classes for others to observe (live or through video) and that can easily be explained upon viewing the results of our key question.
where half of the participants state that they have no prior experience of observing or being observed (see figure 5 below).

![Figure 5. Prior participation in peer-observation](image)

Of the remaining half of the sample, only a limited number had a bad experience from observation, as most describe it from “interesting” to “enlightening” and “eye-opening”.

From the participants’ point of view, there are certain conditions, the majority agreed with, which clarify that observation should not lead to judgement and evaluation but to reflection and development for all the stakeholders (see table 4 below). Regarding what kind of peer-observation teachers prefer, the vast majority of the participants agreed that all participating in peer-observation should benefit (61.43% strongly agreed and 32.86% agreed) not just the institution. When asked if observation should lead to judgement, participants disagreed, instead they opted for discussion and experience of new teaching methods (51.43% strongly agreed, 41.43% agreed), disproving in that way of the power relationship a supervisory approach to observation presupposes. Teaching performance was mostly connected with the students’ reactions (only 4.29% of the participants disagreed). Finally, when the majority of respondents supported that teachers can observe each other (only 1.43% disagreed), they can develop their own teaching theories with their peers (only 1.43% disagreed) and that they should receive non-judgmental feedback (only 4.29% disagreed), they clearly outlined the basic principles of peer-coaching. All in all, peer-observation for development is highlighted in the results above when experienced practitioners are empowered to observe each other and build their own teaching theories upon multiple resources of data (students’ reactions, materials, resources and performance). Participants clearly agree with the definition of peer coaching as a partnership between teachers in a non-judgmental environment which is built around a collaborative and reflective dialogue (Scott, V., Miner, C. 2008).
Another question the current research deems crucial is what schedule a class-observation should follow in order for it to be manageable, systematic and effective (Tsagari, 2004). This study found that in order for peer-observation to be meaningful, it should follow steps that promote trainee-centeredness (see table 5 below), the backbone of this research, and facilitate a reflective review on the basis of others performances (Farrell, 2001). Accordingly, it showed that all stages of peer-observation are considered useful or really useful with very high percentages, in other words the participants favored discussion, flexibility, collaborative reflection and ultimately development. Only a minority of participants (10%) did not find deciding on the observation tool useful and even fewer participants (7.14%) objected to observing the whole lesson and taking down notes and observing with special attention to the areas of interest to them.

What participants clearly agree on here is that the right peer-observation should feature all the learning modes suggested in Kolb’s “reflection model” (1984) such as experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, but enriched with external sources of experience as in “the enriched reflection model”. It also showed that pre-, while- and post-observation stages should be trainee-mediated approaches, which will gradually increase self-access work for trainees in planning, observing and reflecting in order to provide mutual support.
Table 5. The usefulness of each stage of peer-observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1. Not useful</th>
<th>2. Useful</th>
<th>3. Really useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent %</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Discussing with a colleague, you are going to observe / who is going to observe you, your needs and teaching context</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Discussing with your colleague, the lesson plan and especially the areas that are of interest to you</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Determining the objectives of the observation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Deciding on how to record your observation (notes, diary, observation sheet etc)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Observing the whole lesson and taking down notes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Observing, with special attention on the areas that are of interest to you</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Observing teacher-student as well as student-student interaction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Observing classroom resources and other materials</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Reflecting on the observed lesson</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Checking if the initial observation objectives were met</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Reflecting on how the observation experience reconstructed your knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Reflecting on the implementation of new strategies for improved teaching/learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study is also in line with previous ones (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Shortland, 2004; McMachon, Barret & O’Neill, 2007; Cakir, 2010; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005) which pointed out how helpful and beneficial peer-observation can be. More specifically, the helpfulness and practicality of peer-observation is examined next (see table 6 below). The vast majority of participants mentioned that they were helped to identify theirs and their students’ needs, plan better, develop activities, manage classes and engage students, while they learnt to trust their colleagues and exchange constructive criticism towards a common goal (almost no one disagreed and few participants were neutral). Consequently, observation, amongst reflective and alert peers in an INSET setting, is examined as a possible solution to generate not only relevant but useful feedback for awareness raising and development; on the sole condition that peer observation is of the kind where the observes make (perhaps with support) their own decisions about how to use the observer and the observation (Maldarez, 2003).
Despite all its benefits, it would be naïve to maintain that peer-observation does not have drawbacks and our interviewees elaborated on those. More particularly, they mentioned in the interview feeling “exposed” or not “spontaneous”, they said it demands time and preparation and that it should be confidential amongst trusted peers. As regards practical elements like time or distance, teachers can cooperate online and form small electronic hubs or else “communities of practice” comprised of people (teachers) informally bound together by shared expertise and passion (Wenger and Snyder, 1999). Real visits can be exchanged for peer-observations to take place, as simply discussing the class problems on-line is not enough.

Lastly, peer-observation based on what O’Brien (1981) dictates in the EROTI model, which is trainee-centered, reflection–driven, longitudinal, experiential and classroom-based training, which offers teachers ample opportunities to reflect in- and on-action, was researched and voted by the vast majority of the participants as the optimum solution (see table 7 below). Again most of the participants supported trainee-centered programs where the trainer is allowing the trainees space to grow since collaborative learning and initiative-taking are encouraged. In such a spirit of continuous development, follow-up sessions are deemed necessary to sustain the training impact, and observation is used to expand teachers’ knowledge. As regards the locality of observations, the vast majority agreed that they should be classroom- based (42.86% agreed, 42.86% strongly agreed). All but 1.43% of the participants, opted for experiential training and all but 1.43%, asked to cooperate with peers by forming on-line or real support communities. Lastly, almost all respondents (only 2.86% strongly disagreed and 1.43% disagreed) asked to have a say in how effective the whole program was. The clear outcome was that the existence of a wider support system was deemed helpful, which might include “Critical Friendships” (Farrell, 2001), conferences, forums or even peer-mentoring to help fight teachers’ insecurities. Social support by peers, virtually and in reality, not only helps teachers learn from each other but also gives teachers access to a wider range of ideas they would never reach without collaboration. Furthermore, peer observation and support help fight professional isolation (Bolam, 2008), making teaching and training a communal and gradual process of learning. In such a constructivist/developmental process which abides with Wallace’s reflective model (1991) all participants are equal and receive, besides valuable knowledge, personal support in order to develop. Most importantly, they are helped to achieve constant development and forestall or solve problems, like burn-out, later on in their careers (Ur, 1996).
Table 7. Ways peer-observation can better serve teachers' training needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. If it is organized based on the trainees’ needs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If it encourages collaborative learning and initiative taking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If it takes place in the trainees’ actual class or a relevant context</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If the trainer is consistently allowing the</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If it is not one-off, but longer in time, with follow up sessions to sustain the training impact</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If trainees get engaged in various modes of experiential learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If trainees can form communities of practice with peers who have the same needs and concerns</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If observation is not strictly connected with evaluation but with expanding one’s knowledge</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If it is a part of a wider support system with online communities, conferences and forums</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If trainees are allowed to assess the usefulness of the observation tasks and their long-term impact</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. If participants are allowed to evaluate the trainer and the program</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 The Suggested INSET Program

In August 2021, the evaluation of all primary and secondary school teachers in Greece was made mandatory. According to the new law (P.L. 4823/2021), teacher-assessment would have a formative and not a punitive character so teachers whose performance is found “non-satisfactory” will receive further training. In alignment with all the above, the aim of the suggested INSET is not only to meet the teachers’ instant training needs in the given context, but to help them achieve development and address broader, long-term concerns that occur in most training contexts; for instance, how they can be encouraged to grow and explore new avenues and ideas. Consequently, through various observation techniques (self- and peer-) the planned INSET aims to guide teachers in achieving a happy medium between introversion and reflecting upon one’s teaching, while opening up to the extroversion required in exchanging peer-review visits and evolving through them. O’ Brien’s (1981) EROT Model is the basis of our observation cycle where collective experience, active reflection, observation of real teaching and trial of new techniques will help sustain the “follow up” training impact, and, finally, lead to the integration of the desired practices into the trainees’ teaching repertoire.

The opening seminar will be dedicated to observation practices and followed by a cycle of school-based peer-observations. On the day of the seminar, a trainer will guide participants from self-reflection to
microteaching and finally to mutual peer-observation for development. Our training day will also concentrate on the specific areas of the trainees’ teaching that needs enhancement, according to the results of the official assessment.

As a follow-up to the training day, the cycle of observations will start. Teachers will form small groups and alternate in observing each other teach their actual classes. The trainer will have the responsibility of organizing the schedule of observations, answering any possible questions, and initiating the cycle of observations. S/he can also help teachers with pre-observation discussions, with choosing or creating focused observation tools and with debriefing. Observations can be recorded for further reference and teachers will be strongly advised to apply self-reflection practices (e.g. diaries, reflective lesson plans, portfolios etc) alongside peer-observation ones. The cycle of observations will be completed in a month. A new training seminar and observation cycle may follow on the next mostly requested topic. Teachers can also cooperate online by forming communities of practice in order to support their research. Participants will be able to evaluate both the training days as well as the whole program and the trainers’ contribution. Finally, the training, although obligatory, may offer initiatives to teachers, as the certificate of attendance can be connected with extra credits for their next official evaluation. Concerning the logistics of the INSET plan and in order to save money, the role of the teacher-educators can be assumed by the same trainers hired by the Ministry of Education to carry out the official evaluation process and the trainees might also pay a small tuition fee.

6.3 Limitations of the Research and Suggestions for Further Research

While every effort has been made to carry out a study that would be methodologically sound, certain limitations should be noted. First, this was a small-scale research due to the limited time and resources. Practical constraints also existed, in particular social distancing because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited both the number of the participants (70 responses in the questionnaire, 17 in the interview) as well as the length and quality of the answers, especially in the interviews, which were conducted over the phone. Personal contact might have yielded more authentic, rich and in-depth responses. Furthermore, cross-checking the impact of the offered INSET, in a more longitudinal research, through class observations, would have been useful.

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to further research by being a starting point for more work on how in-service teachers can achieve CPD and be helped to become well-qualified, highly-motivated, knowledgeable and skillful, not only when they start teaching but, most importantly, throughout their careers (Day & Sacks, 2004). Concerning suggestions for further research, training experienced teachers could be researched more. Further research that includes data provided by trainers or school administrators would be useful to offer a wider perspective as to what constitutes effective teacher education and who would qualify as a teacher educator. Finally, the question of how teacher-learning affects students’ learning deserves more attention.

7. Conclusion

This research suggests that training procedures that are not based on the specific needs of practicing teachers or focus only on the transfer of skills have a low impact. Consequently, a change concerning the duration, location, underlying values and perspectives of the programs offered can be considered vital. Participants opt for programs that build on their prior experience, beliefs and knowledge, and facilitate constant reflection and discovery. Since the current INSET has not successfully trained teachers, our participants seriously consider more sustainable approaches to teacher education that gradually support a better understanding of effective teaching. Self-reflection as well as peer-collaboration through observation are indicated as solutions which will foster constant teacher development that will hopefully lead to solving problems that real teachers face in real classrooms. Overall, the study advocates that teachers ought to be recharged and empowered, by exploring their own as well as their colleagues’ potential even further.

References


**Greek References**


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