E-LEARNING TEACHER TRAINING COURSES FOR DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS: REFLECTIONS UPON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES

By

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ABSTRACT

The focus and purpose of this paper is to present an e-learning teacher training course, including its aims and main results from teachers' interviews. The case study presented here examines the effectiveness of an in-service training seminar which was targeted toward teachers at multicultural schools. It concerns qualitative research that stresses interpretative and subjective dimensions of texts which comprise multiple meanings, resulting from multiple readings and interpretations. The structure of the paper is set out in three parts: First, the educational framework within which the study was developed is presented, then, the methodology connected with its development is described, and finally, teachers' replies are presented and discussed. The e-learning teacher training course was created within the frame of an Intercultural Education programme, focusing on differentiated instruction. Participating teachers were asked to create teaching scenarios in the direction of Intercultural Education. Human rights posters were used as motivation for the teachers and the derived scenarios were used for an arts-informed narrative inquiry aimed at investigating the teachers' knowledge on how to exploit resources as intercultural storytellers through media texts. The study also sets a framework for the development of visual literacy practices in multicultural classrooms, thus enhancing the intercultural competency of teachers.

Keywords: E-Learning, Differentiated Instruction, Intercultural Education, Narrative Inquiry, Teaching Scenarios.

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Underpinnings

The socio-cultural diversity of student population during the last three decades in Greece has created urgent needs concerning the intercultural competency of teachers (Palaiologou & Evangelou, 2011). Recent research findings have shown that Greek teachers' ineffectiveness in facing problems encountered in multicultural classes are associated both with their theoretical background and their ability to apply teaching practices in line with intercultural education (Dimitriadou, Pougaridou & Vrantsi 2009). Teachers should be able to enrich instruction with subject-matter and methods which will permit the students to mutually influence each other, demonstrate their individual talents and develop a variety of interpretations of reality (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Gundara, 2000; Kesidou, 2004). Working towards this aim, it was essential for them to develop their professional competency toward a gradual shift from an imposed, predefined teaching and learning delivery to a reflective collaboration and response, that would meet the different needs of different students (Koutselini, 2008). In accordance with this need textual practices turned to literacies as 'socially recognized ways in which people generate, communicate, and negotiate meanings, as members of Discourses, through the medium of encoded texts' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, 33).

Differentiated instruction should address equal opportunities for a broad range of learners, based on the acknowledgment of their varied readiness levels, interests, and learning preferences (Tomlinson, Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, Brimijoin, Conover & Reynolds, 2003; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Campbell, Gillborn, Lunt, Sammons, Vincent, Warren & Whitty, 2002). Educators have to respond to the socially and academically diverse populations in most classrooms,

including subject matters which are meaningful, namely, with deep and personal meaning for the students (Ausubel, 1963; Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). One of the most effective practices in this direction is the exploitation of multimodal texts in teaching.

Multimodality is based on the assumption that meanings are made, distributed, interpreted, and remade not only through language but through many representational and communicational resources i.e. 'modes' as organized sets of semiotic resources for meaning making. The students' background knowledge determines the qualities of meaning as the result of articulation and interpretation deriving from a learning activity (Kress, 2003, 37). Accordingly, the classroom culture influences not only the process of knowledge construction but also the way the students conceptualize the diversity of cultural meanings deriving from their interaction with and negotiation of signs. Teaching language and culture in a digital age is a challenge for today's teachers at all levels of education (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2012).

Due to dynamism they provide, the multimodal texts set the scene for flexible educational strategies which facilitate the diversification of teaching. Particularly, they can create educational contexts emphasizing denotative, connotative and symbolic meanings (Van Leeuwen, 2005, 94-100), thus offering opportunities for complex communication and bringing to the fore personal interpretations. Thus, multimodal texts can transform the function of reading at school from 'I speak about the world' to 'I see the world', a fact well founded theoretically due to the significance of design (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003, 120; New London Group, 2000, 19-23).

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001, 43-78), one of the fundamental functions of the image is narrative representation, which refers to 'doings' and 'happenings' (Jewitt & Oyama, 2003, 141) as it unfolds actions, events or processes of change. Its function as a narrative will constitute a core concept in this study, since it will be interrelated with the diversification of teaching in the direction of intercultural education. The question that arises: How is it possible for teachers working in schools with a diverse student population to be facilitated in such a way

as to develop their capacity in organizing differentiated instruction through the use of multimodal texts?

One of the most effective ways are distance learning programmes, which are suited to the teaching of individuals whose knowledge needs to remain current and competitive (Starr, 1998). This concerns an extension of traditional teaching with the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), 'where learning opportunities can be provided in asynchronous, self-paced formats or in synchronous virtual classes' in keeping with the needs of those being educated (Zahner, 2002, 12; Keegan, 2001). In this way, what is achieved is the dispensation with the temporal and geographic limitations of conventional training (Zgaga, 2008), while there is a saving of time, money and teaching staff. Distance e-learning programmes should be flexible, innovative, and applicable to the needs of the pupils, while their potentials range from the dispatch of texts by correspondence to sound recorded files and teleconferencing. According to Wilson and Harris (2004), the incorporation of ICTs into distance e-learning programmes augments cooperation and learning within a sociopolitical framework, as well as the development of critical thinking skills, reflection, self-adjustment and meta-cognition of the educators.

Designed on the multimodal theory of representation and communication (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress, 2001), the social semiotics of visual communication (Van Leeuwen, 2005; Jewitt & Oyama, 2003), the determining role of multimodal texts in the application of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, Brimijoin, Conover & Reynolds, 2003), as well as the usefulness of 'electronic technology that enables the compression of space-time' (Edwards & Usher, 2000, 32), the case study presented here examines the effectiveness of an in-service training seminar which was meant for teachers at multicultural schools. It concerns qualitative research that stresses interpretative and subjective dimensions of texts which comprise multiple meanings, resulting from multiple readings and interpretations (Basit, 2010, 181-201). It is noteworthy that its theoretical and methodological basis is the idea that images may serve as storytellers and provide for the creativity of teachers in order

to compile teaching scenarios toward the perspective of intercultural education. In this sense, this study deals with the narrative as a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change (Hermann, 2009). Since it extends into the three-dimensional space of the past, the present, and the future (Bach, 2007, 283), it may be seen as a visual narrative inquiry in the sense of an 'intentional, reflective, active human process in which researchers and participants explore and make meaning of experience both visually and narratively' (Bach, 2007, 281).

The Context of the Study

In the framework of the Educational Programme entitled 'Education of foreign and repatriated pupils' which has been assigned by the Ministry of Education in Greece to be developed by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (duration: 2010-2013) (http://www.diapolis.auth.gr/ index. Php)[1], an e-learning seminar on differentiated instruction took place during spring in 2011, incorporated in the Activity entitled 'Training of teachers and members of the educational community', Sub-Activity 'Distance Learning'.

The three co-authors have worked as trainers in the above programme during its e-learning courses.

The seminar was entitled 'Differentiating school work: methodological approaches', was of six week duration (17/05 - 21/06/2011) and addressed elementary and secondary school teachers of a variety of specializations employed at schools with students coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The objective was to encourage the participants to design and apply innovative educational strategies in their multicultural classes, combining theory and practice.

Blended e-learning was applied: The seminar begun and completed in two word of mouth meetings, while the four intervening meetings were conducted using an electronic platform constructed for this purpose. The thematic divisions of the seminar concerned the differentiation of teaching along the axes of (i) multimodal texts, (ii) notional maps, (iii) projects and (iv) the scientific and technological literacy. For each division the trainer uploaded educational material into the platform on a weekly basis. The

participants were asked to study the material and create assignments in the form of teaching scenarios for pupils in multicultural classes.

Having outlined the educational framework which the examined case study was placed, in the next sub-sections we refer to the aim of the study and the methodology applied; we also present its main results.

The Study

Aim

This study focused on the teaching scenarios created by teachers for the thematic division 'Didactic exploitation of multimodal texts'. These scenarios were based on posters with human rights contents, which served as storytellers 'through the photographs that others take of them' (Bach, 2007, 282). The objective was to determine to what extent the familiarization of the educators with visual literacy practices emanating from the didactic exploitation of multimodal texts in the role of storytellers enables them to incorporate socially informative practices in the classroom through differentiated instruction.

Research Questions

The main research questions were posed as follows

- In which ways can distance e-learning facilitate in-service teacher training aimed at visual literacy?

- How can visual literacy practices bring about change for differentiated instruction towards intercultural education?

- How can teachers exploit the pictorial image as a visual narrative inquiry field text in order to enable students to construct personally meaningful knowledge?

Attempting to answer the aforementioned questions, it would be useful to first mention the role played by posters as meaning-making resources, as tools for the production of teaching scenarios, but most importantly as narrative inquiry field texts resulting in data informing human rights education.

Posters as Intercultural Storytellers

As a tool and means of representing cultural experience and cultural values, images form non-neutral rhetorical

accounts aiming at the desire to communicate meaning and create stimuli for forms of personal understanding, interpretation and appreciation of the world (Bruner, 1986; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Narratives can be perceived as cognitive structures, types of text, and resources for communicative interaction, where stories are told and interpreted, exchanged and transformed. It should be noticed that in the present text the term narrative is used synonymously with story, while narrative inquiry is an understanding of narrative as both phenomena under study and method of study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Images correspond to a particular part of storytelling which is placed in time in order to 'assume an experience of time' and capture the emotion of the moment described. They convey stories that can be relayed, stored and retrieved. This was the role of the posters given to the teachers as main material to be used for their assignments. Due to the photographic field texts they conveyed (Bach, 2007, 290), they were expected to function as storytellers with meaningful messages addressing intercultural education.

The conception of a narrative which we use for the posters is grounded in the Vygotskian theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1962 & 1978), which suggests that personally meaningful knowledge is socially constructed through shared understandings. It may, thus, refer to the concept 'the world shown' as the reader perceives it, as well as his personal experience as 'the organic intertwining of living human beings and their natural and built environment' (Bach, 2007, 283).

Due to the photographs and the designated captions they convey, the posters can be considered as objects of art and constituent parts of the analysis during the transition from field texts to research texts. Moreover, they set the scene for the creation of teaching scenarios by the educators and the application of visual literacy practices by the students. Under this consideration, this study corresponds with what Mello (2007, 214) calls arts-informed narrative inquiry. The whole process included activities such as the effort of the core researcher (i.e. the trainer) to gather field texts (i.e. posters), the invitation to the participants (i.e. the teachers) to formulate image-based teaching scenarios for the students, the effort of the teachers to create teaching scenarios and the expected effort of the students to respond to the assignments, thus constructing personally meaningful knowledge and achieving different learning outcomes. As a result, the poster was expected to be repeatedly re-contextualized in frames of meaning making, within a space-time context of pedagogic discourse (Leander, 2001) (Table 1).

At this point it should be clarified that in conjunction with the functioning of storytelling, there also takes place - with semiotic terms - the function of design (Kress, 2001) for the rendering of meaning to the pictorial elements of the poster. The role of the designer is in turn taken by the trainer for her to plan the teachers' assignments, the participating educators to create the teaching scenarios and, following that the pupils for them to construct their own assignments.

Sample and Research Data

The sample of the participants in the seminar was sixteen educators (N=16) who were working at various schools in the region of Western Macedonia. From these, 6 were secondary teachers of Greek language, 1 mathematician, 1 agronomist, 1 home economics teacher, 2 chemists, 1 computer instructor, 1 English teacher, 1 French teacher, 1 kindergarten teacher and 1 assistant nursery school teacher. Each was supplied with a set of 9 posters from the Greek Section of Amnesty International on the theme of human rights, enabling each participant to select one of the posters to be used as a basis for the creation of a teaching scenario for differentiated instruction in intercultural education.

The research data of the study consists of the four teaching scenarios delivered, all focused on the poster illustrated in Figure 1, since it was that one which was most frequently

Level	Readers	Functions	Outcomes
1st	Trainer	The choice of meaningful multi modal texts for the promotion of teachers' visual literacy	Decision making on the educational use of particular posters implying sensitivity towards human rights
2nd	Trainer	Re-contextualization of the posters in the assignments designated for the teachers	Formulation of a framework for narrative inquiry through visual literacy practices
3rd	Teachers	Re-contextualization of the posters in teaching scenarios	Teachers knowledge creation about narrative inquiry through visual literacy practices
4th	Students	Re-contextualization of the posters in students' assignments	Engagement in visual literacy practices. Construction of personally meaningful knowledge.

Table 1. The Four Levels of the Arts-Informed Narrative Inquiry as a Framework of Our Study

selected by the participants. In the lingual text of the poster the following was written:

'Odyssey[2] 2006'. 'They travel in a tub searching for a better future. They encounter everywhere the hideousness of xenophobia and racism. However, they have not found Ithaca anywhere…' 'Amnesty International Greek Section' Resist Against The Violation Of The Rights Of Refugees.

The poster is considered as part of the analysis during the transition from field texts to research texts, as a way of informing the meaning made by the participants. The analysis refers to the delivery of the teaching scenarios that the teachers created for their students and follows the model described above, furnishing elements of content analysis and – to a limited extent – of semiotic analysis.

Data Analysis

In order to initiate a notional framework for the analysis of the teaching scenarios, the trainers turned to the 'Reflective Learning through Storytelling Model' shaped by McDrury and Alterio (2003, 60), which, in turn, is based on the five stages of reflected learning, as outlined by Moon (1999). Based on the assumption that the participants were guided towards knowledge creation on how to incorporate the poster in their scenarios' articulation, we linked Moon's learning stages corresponding to the five-stage approach to learning with a set of representations of learning, assumed to be within the teachers' scenarios.

The structural elements of this rationale, as well as the relationship with which they are interconnected are illustrated in Table 2.

Based on the stages of classification of learning representations in accordance with the stages of reflected learning, as presented in Table 2, there follow corresponding indicative examples of quotes from participant teaching scenarios, arising from the analysis of their contents (Table 3). The trainers used the content analysis method in an effort to understand the inherent meaning in the teachers scenarios' components and then synthesize them by using a meta-language (Unsworth, 2001, 16-19), in order 'to tell the complete story' as the

[2]In Greek: Οδύσσεια (Odysseia) is one of two major ancient Greek epic poems attributed to Homer. It [2]is, in part, a sequel to the Iliad, his other work.

teachers conceptualized it (Basit, 2010, 195).

From within the scenarios the pupils were supposed to be prompted to negotiate relationships, reevaluate purposes and negotiate transitions, and to live their stories alongside the protagonists who appear in the poster picture. Moreover, they were given the opportunity to play the role of a narrative enquirer, who maintains flexibility and openness to an ever-changing landscape (Bach, 2010, 285).

Results of the Interviews

Following are mentioned the main results that came out from the interviews addressed to teachers, in congruence with the main aim of the interviews: to find out whether the teachers six months after the completion of the seminar applied techniques that are associated with the differentiated teaching, which they were taught during the seminar.

Initially, teachers were asked to express the echo of the e-learning training they followed on their teaching during that school year. Teachers stressed that henceforth they give more importance in the elements that compose the thematic units were taught; for example, they give more emphasis on pictures and conceptual maps that exist in the books and develop them during the differentiated instruction. Moreover, teachers provide their students with educational material that includes pictures and encourage them to work as a team for the implementation of activities during the duration of one teaching hour.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the thematic unit "Differentiated teaching with picture as its axis" constitutes the thematic unit that teachers remember more intensely

Learning Stages	Learning	Learning through Storytelling	Representations of Learning in the teachers' scenarios
1st	Noticing	Story finding	Memorising, representing
2nd	Making sense	Storytelling	Re-contextualizing, producing ideas
3rd	Making meaning	Story expanding	Designing, linking meaningful ideas
4th	Working with meaning	Story processing	Developing alternative perspectives
5th	Transformative learning	Story reconstructing	Developing critical implications to self and practice

Table 2. Links Between Learning, Storytelling and Learning Representations in the Teachers' Scenarios in Accordance with Stages of Reflected Learning

Learning Stages	Quotes (from the delivery of the scenarios)	Representations of teachers' learning
1st	Study the picture and attempt to decipher it, taking into account the text written on the poster (inparticular the word 'Odyssey').	Memorising, representing: Homer's Odyssey epic. The metonymic use of the word (metaphor): odyssey = eventful wanderings. Denotations-connotations.
2nd	We observe the picture 'Odyssey 2006'. In what way are the people in the boat crowded? What are their faces like? What do their stares show? Write the personal story (300-400 words) of a refugee of your age to be published in a magazine's special report concerning human rights, after you take into consideration the answers you will give to the following questions: What sentiments does the picture arouse in you? In what condition (economic, social, emotional) are the refugees? Comment on the means of transport (e.g. its condition, age, technology etc.). What makes an impression on you? How do youimagine the end of these people's journey? How would you confront such an 'Odyssey'?	Re-contextualizing, producing ideas: The universality of the refugee problem: the characteristics of this vulnerable social group; special factors in the survival difficulties of refugees; human rights; the analysis of sentiments; empathy; personal story; denotations-connotations; a story without an end; creativity; continuation.
	Note the distinct elements of the picture (the sea, the wretched vessel, – far too small for the large number of people it carries – passengers from Africa). What are the differences between Homer's Odyssey and the Odyssey of the refugees? How do the refugees feel? What are your feelings on seeing the poster? Why is the term 'refugees' used? What is the difference between this term and the word 'migrant'? What other terminology is used to describe those uprooted and made homeless? How would you define what a refugee is if asked to give a general description? How would you react to social exclusion, to the violation of human rights, to the misery of social oppression? What does the logo of Amnesty International in the bottom right hand corner of the poster symbolize?	Designing, linking meaningful ideas: Analysis and interpretation of composite meanings: refugee, migrant, xenophobia, racism, inclusions, human rights; empathy; analysis of the sentiments of the refugees and the pupils; the development of a sense of toleration, solidarity and respect for fellow human beings; critical awareness.
4th	Give voice to one of the refugees in the picture, so that he tells us his personal story. Using the contents of this story answer the questions: What was his life like prior to the journey? What forced him to leave from his country? What difficulties did he encounter during the journey? What is the refugee's life like? The task may be presented in two ways: either in comic form or as an interview for a magazine accompanied by photographic material.	Developing alternative perspectives: Scenario in a scenario; storytelling in storytelling; creation of comics; an imaginary interview; the collection of photographic material in tandem with a written text.
5th	Initiate a discussion on the subject of refugees and their rights in our country and the rest of the world. In which parts of Greece are most of the recently arrived refugees gathered? Why? Why is it that the country receiving the refugees does not wish to accept them? What problems would be created if the receiving country obliged them to return to their home country? Which human rights hold in this case? How does the UN protect refugee rights? Search for information concerning the work of Muhammad Yunus and for organizations such as Amnesty International, UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, Minority Rights Group, Antigone, Hellenic League for Human Rights. Find relevant literary extracts, interviews and texts from international organizations. Prepare a collage with related photographs and mottos from magazines, newspapers and the internet.	Developing critical implications to self and practice: Definitions; rights of refugees and human rights; protection of refugees by the UN; hypothetical scenarios; research of jurisprudence; international organizations, literary texts, documentaries, photographs, posters and the bibliography concerning refugees and human rights; the creation of a collage.

Table 3. Content Analysis of the Participants' Scenarios and Correspondence with Representations of Learning

and apply it during teaching. The target of the e-learning course was differentiated teaching with axis (i) the teaching use of picture, (ii) the use of conceptual maps, (iii) the assignment of projects, (iv) students' educational and technological literacy.

A language teacher reported the following as an example of application of the instructive use of pictures connecting cross-thematically/disciplinary the history and literature courses at the second grade of junior high school. This teacher initially asked from the students to read the literary text "Hiroshima's flowers" and then to observe pictures from the destruction in Hiroshima. The pictures constituted the inception for a discussion around the nuclear explosion and its consequences on the environment and people's lives.

Following are two characteristic answers that indicate the usefulness of the seminar in the question: What is the echo of the distance e-learning training on your teaching during the current year?

Informant 1: Onwards, I can use new things for first time, which I could not use easily in the past. For example, I use more the digital pictures which the Ministry of Education had given to us and I try to inspire children to use the pictures in order to discover things on their own.

Informant 2: The seminar was a new field for application of new ideas and thoughts. I believe that the thematic session

which refers to the teaching use of pictures is something very useful that all teachers could follow.

Teachers have comprehended that the design of a conceptual map is characterized as an excellent activity for the support and promotion of creative thinking as well as for the recognition of new methods for the resolution of problems (Novak & Cañas 2008). However, because for two teachers it was the first time that they dealt with this thematic issue, they do not feel the familiarization that is necessary so that they can use it widely during their teaching. The rest of the teachers reported that henceforth they use conceptual maps in order to represent the theoretical part of the course, so that it is more easily comprehensible from the students mainly in the theoretical courses (e.g. history, domestic economy, geography). A teacher uses, where this is feasible, the conceptual maps as a tool of evaluation in order to find out whether the objectives of the thematic unit have been achieved. For example, whether students can design a conceptual map that would contain the basic concepts of the course.

As far as the assignation of writing assignments (teaching scenarios) to teachers, most participants reported that they had the enthusiasm to apply them. However, teachers had difficulties because of the big heterogeneity in the classroom and the lack of time. For this reason, the projects that they were assigned to their students were of short time duration (approximately 40 minutes), so that they could be completed during one teaching hour. However, a project was applied in the biology course (first and third grade of junior high school) with satisfactory results.

As far as differentiated teaching is concerned with reference to the scientific and technological literacy of students, teachers found very interesting the knowledge which they acquired as well as the methods they were taught. As a teacher reported, he is planning to apply in future some from these methods with the form of project during teaching thematic units that are appropriate for this aim since a very good preparation is required in advance from the side of teacher and a good collaboration between at least two teachers.

The feedback which teachers receive from their students when they apply the above is absolutely positive. Students present more interest for the course, they participate and are involved actively in the activities, and they learn and work in teams, something that they did not use to do in the past. Of course, the less active and with minimum participation students are involved, since they are given individualised or team work assignments according to the abilities and skills of the team members.

It is worth mentioning the case of a student with attendance disorders who through team work he became more acceptable from his classmates and improved his communication ability.

Teachers have observed that the students who participate in a project to produce a final product, they also seek to have a satisfactory result wishing to present it to their classmates. Moreover, a teacher reported that through the visual literacy the course becomes more comprehensible, thus, the real time of study for students at home is decreased significantly.

All teacher participants reported that they sought further information through the Internet or scientific books in order to implement the weekly activities. Four teachers sought information after the end of the seminar in order to enrich what they learned and to increase their knowledge on the differentiation of teaching. Three teachers sought more information mainly on the conceptual maps and on the ways of their integration during the courses of the junior high school.

On the basis of an assessment, most teachers consider that they improved their specific skills, like the methodical preparation and organisation of the course, the collection of appropriate educational material, the familiarization with the Technologies of Information and Communication and the way of approaching their students. Moreover, it was reported that they changed, to the extent they could, the teacher-centred method and they tried to apply more student-centred methods. Of course, they pointed out that this required enough until they familiarize themselves with this method as well as their students.

Also, two teachers reported that their self-confidence was improved and they felt more safe during teaching. A teacher reported that the seminar was a new field that motivated her for further thoughts but also an action

offering to her more teaching options. In other words, all teachers consider that they developed in various domains not only professionally but also personally.

All teachers expressed a wish for attending similar seminars associated with differentiated instruction in the future, since they teach in mixed type classes. Also, they expressed a wish to be informed about new techniques on this field as well as on training programs that focus on their field of expertise.

In addition, some teachers reported that the training would be more preferable to take place at the beginning of the school year so that they would have more time to implement what they learn. A teacher reported that due to the fact that the seminar was implemented during the period of school's exams, he had more time to organise his own learning.

Regarding their assignments, the teachers reported that even though creating teaching scenarios was a demanding task, which means that they had provided enough personal time, their effort was of catalytic significance for a deeper comprehension and a practical application of the theory they had approached.

Some teachers felt proud that they managed to accomplish the requirements of an e-learning seminar, as this was the first time that they participate in such type training and they feel more familiar with the use of ICTs. More specifically, two teachers said that in future they would prefer to participate only in e-learning training programs rather than to the traditional programs they participated in the past, while the rest expressed their wish for training on both types of programs, since in this way they could combine the advantages of the two types of training.

All the teachers who participated were very satisfied by the seminar for two main reasons: (i) for the educational content and the knowledge that was offered to them, (ii) for learning the possibilities of a flexible learning.

Despite the fact that, at the beginning, teachers had difficulties to adapt to the requirements of the seminar (like video conference or weekly assignments), finally all of them seemed to be pleased with the knowledge and experiences they acquired on the distance e-learning education.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study is focusing on a functional part of an art-informed visual narrative inquiry aimed at investigating to what extent the teachers having attended a distance e-learning seminar for the differentiation of teaching managed to put into practice what they had learnt: to create teaching scenarios for their socio-culturally diverse students based on multimodal texts, with a view to engaging them in visual literacy processes and giving them the opportunity to construct personally meaningful knowledge. Thus, the teaching scenarios constituted the vehicle for the differentiation of teaching, while the posters constituted the tools for the construction of the scenarios. Further analysis of this data will shed more light on comprehending the role teaching scenarios played in the whole procedure, as well as their significance concerning the essential enrichment and renewal of intercultural teaching in the contemporary school.

The poster offered information for a framework concerning the time and space in which spatial and temporal indicators are fused (Herman, 2009, 131) and set the scene for the teachers' knowledge creation on how to apply visual literacy practices in the classroom. Taking under consideration the photography techniques, such as framing, distance, lighting, or focus ('photogenia', Barthes, 1977, 23), the teachers built their scenarios mainly on the connotations emerging from the indicative units of the poster. Since they used qualities that are yielded by the grammar of visual design, several analytical categories of a semiotic inventory could fall under headings of visual analysis, such as modality (image and text), demands and offers (the stare of the refugees), social distance (the photographic shoot), coding orientation (reality), centre-margin (the location of the boat), vector (the mast) (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Moreover, a discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) could be applied to the captions included in the poster in order to highlight the effect of the dovetailing of word and image into a unified whole.

All the above procedures are compatible with the fundamentals of social semiotics (Van Leeuwen, 2005) and symbolic interaction theory (Bernstein, 2000) and have as a

prerequisite that the teacher is capable of interpreting events related to specific socio-cultural frameworks, encourages students to cultivate communication skills and interact with other cultures, cultivates a critical cultural outlook in students and enables them to overcome prejudices and stereotypes towards diversity by using a variety of pedagogical approaches and the ICTs (Palaiologou, 2012). Furthermore, what is of greater significance is that the teachers are given the opportunity to focus on themes of social justice prompting students to respond to the crucial questions put forward by Gorski (2009, 89): 'to whose benefit and at whose expense'?

Regarding the first research question in this paper, we might say that from the distance e-learning seminar the teachers developed practices which are mediated by 'post-typographic' forms of text and correspond to a new theoretical and research paradigm for looking at literacy: the 'New Literacy Studies' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, 27-29). The teachers were involved in new and changing ways of producing, distributing, exchanging, and receiving texts by electronic means, they had access to texts of public communication and created teaching scenarios for multicultural classrooms. Having been familiarized with the theory and the application of visual literacy practices through e-learning, they incorporated posters as storytellers in embedded learning strategies within a framework of narrative enquiry, thus achieving the creation of educational knowledge which refers to content as well as procedural parameters, that is the 'know what' and the 'know how'. What is more, they integrated new forms of literacy to teaching, shifting the focus of the learning process from the teacher to the pupil and formulating the framework in order to introduce students to the practice of meaning making through narrative enquiry.

Generally, teachers responded to the request for 'multiple, dynamic and malleable' literacies, since they responded to a series of criteria essential to generate, communicate and negotiate meanings: they developed proficiency with the tools of technology; they cooperated and shared information and practices to meet differentiated instruction; they managed, analyzed, and synthesized multiple streams of simultaneous information; they put

together and assigned tasks that seek emancipation, taking the responsibility for the ethical responsibilities towards pupils in multicultural classes. In a word, they supported social learning which promotes the 'pull' models of education (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, 24-25, 226-229). This conclusion fits to the teachers' need for new approaches and new tools in order to explore issues against racism and promote multicultural education in their classes (Aragon & Kaminski 2012).

With reference to the second question, the visual literacy practices which pervade the teaching scenarios aimed at a series of representations of learning which shift the teaching towards the points of pupil readiness, interest and learning profile. Moreover, they can drive the existing official pedagogic discourse on the micro-level of classroom interaction to an innovative re-contextualization.

The teachers' visual literacy competencies are expected to enrich instructional environments so as to supersede traditional 'chalk and talk teaching', which is usually dominated by sterilized, shallow, superficial and controlling practices. In this way the educators are expected to be equal to a fundamental contemporary educational need: the superiority of quality over quantity measures in the educational process, as well as the critical approach and processing of knowledge as opposed to its mechanical, undifferentiated and standardized accumulation. The teachers will be able to depart from the informational character and stereotypical formalism of teaching, giving diverse students the opportunity to develop communication practices in order to interact with each other and reveal their ideas, attitudes and feelings (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen & Tsakou, 2011). More precisely, the poster photograph is expected to function as a tool which will connect pupils with other stories, bridging the gap of time by applying their senses, intellect, and emotions to a human commonality (Bach, 2007, 294). Thus the pupils, in their turn, will be able to express their connection in a narrative form, and formulate opinions, positions and values on the subject of migration from within a state of empathy.

Finally, with reference to the third question, the practices formulated by the educators during the exploitation of the poster as a visual narrative enquiry field text gave them the

opportunity to create an educational context aiming at personally meaningful knowledge and different learning outcomes from the pupil's aspect. The delivery of the tasks included in teaching scenarios invited students to use metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), and thereby perform interactionally significant personal and social narrative work. In addition, they aimed at encouraging the pupils to think hard about migration and human rights, recall and re-enact their related experiences, to recontextualize meanings from connections and comparisons, formulate their ideas, attitudes and sentiments, as well as develop alternative perspectives and critical implications concerning human rights.

All the above were primarily achieved due to the grammar of visual design, which is a vehicle for constructing personal representations of the world. We would have total justification in saying that the implementation of arts-informed visual narrative inquiry with the poster as 'an image of the real' offered opportunities for visual literacy, thus informing intercultural issues and collapsing the boundaries between 'in-school and out-of-school literacies' (Leander, 2001).

The capacity afforded to the teachers to exploit the specific poster is expected to have positive effects concerning social and communicational changes in favour of social groups which are excluded, manipulated or oppressed. The significance of these effects reflects the new arrangements and distributions of power which are linked to changes occurring at the social, political and technological level in the New Media Age (Kress, 2001, 54; Kress, 2003). Thus, the teachers give a satisfactory response to the request for equal educational opportunities following the epistemological choices of Critical Pedagogy, which promotes equality, emancipation and social justice at school and in public life (Ladson-Billings, 1999; McLaren, 2003).

The author's adopt the idea that the exploitation of meaning making resources as intercultural storytellers through media texts support a pedagogy of multi-literacies (New London Group, 2000) and contribute to a pedagogic discourse for emancipatory teacher education (Bernstein, 2000; McLaren, 2003). Intercultural teachers who struggle

for intercultural competency can promote their awareness, authenticity and effectiveness while creating a classroom climate open to critical considerations on equity and social justice (Gorski, 2009). Moreover, the engagement of both teachers and students in arts-informed narrative inquiry practices around issues of human rights can help them enhance their intercultural consciousness and 'act responsibly in contemporary late capitalist culture' (Elkins, 2008, 7).

This study emanated from the era of visual literacy as a complex and multidimensional entity that is embedded within a range of visual, cognitive, emotional and ethical dimensions, thus providing a framework for diversity. With the incorporation of the poster into the prospect of teaching through visual narrative inquiry it appears that two emancipatory objectives were achieved: the teachers were empowered in decision-making to involve critical considerations of human rights in the classroom; the students were called upon to have a voice presenting their ideological identity and tell their personal story from within an expanded, anonymous, global society, thus making a step towards critical consciousness of socially transformative education (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen & Tsakou, 2011). In future research the very same student texts could constitute field texts for narrative inquiry, and not that alone: their dialogues, the notes they retain commenting on the poster and the data they will incorporate in their texts could constitute the field texts for a subsequent narrative inquiry.

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