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“I felt and learned!” Education on Human Rights through Drama: A Research on Primary and Secondary Education Teachers

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“I felt and learned!”

Education on Human Rights through Drama: A Research on Primary and Secondary Education Teachers

Athanasia Choleva, Antonis Lenakakis

Abstract

This research attempts to investigate the extent and the parameters through which a drama training workshop may influence teachers on how they teach about human rights issues. The research was implemented in three phases, between February 2015 and October 2017. The first two phases involved 941 teachers who attended a twenty-hour drama training seminar¹ (before and after the seminar), while a sample of 375 of them participated in a supplementary third phase, after at least one school year. The data were collected through anonymous questionnaires and analysed quantitatively, highlighting, on the one hand, significant shifts of teachers in human rights awareness and broadening of their teaching repertoire, as well as a sense of readiness to implement educational drama approaches to their class, immediately after the training. On the other hand, the research findings record the main drama elements which teachers considered as most useful and actually applied, as well as the factors that facilitated or hampered their efforts in the implementation.

Key words: *drama training workshop, in-service teacher training, human rights*

1. Introduction

Both in Greece and internationally, teachers, as education professionals, are today expected to cope with very complex, rapid and multi-layered sociopolitical developments. The requirements appear multi-faceted and require constant revisions and updates of their teaching and methodological repertoire. Adequacy of teaching tools is proved in practice, both inside and outside the classroom, where the heterogeneity of the student population experiences puts teachers' interpersonal and intercultural stamina, their flexible and creative spirit, and its pedagogical effectiveness in general, to test. The essay focuses on the teacher of today, who is called upon to monitor and manage the new sociopolitical changes, especially those that have arisen since the spring of 2015 with the great refugee wave in Greece.

The subject of this research resides in the general unity of the drama in education field and focuses on its use mainly as a laboratory process of transforming teachers' views, perceptions and teaching choices, both before and after applying the new methods in which they are trained. The research carried out attempts to capture the ways in which educational drama practices can contribute to enriching the methodological repertoire of teachers today in their attempt to teach human rights.

2. Theoretical background

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, in order to become a globally accepted document. Numerous documents, conventions and laws have been created based on it since then, on national and international levels. Today, however, even 71 years later, both securing and respect for human rights is anything but facts, in different parts of the world. It is indicative that after 2015, when the Millennium Development Goals were assessed and re-examined, the United Nations' agenda for sustainable development globally continues to bring forth issues of equality, human rights, justice and education. More specifically, the 4th sustainable development goal concerning education focuses on procedures where all learners are ensured to:

Acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (United Nations Organization, 2018)

It is interesting, though, that only one of the numerous indicators to this goal is traced on teacher education.

Within the current sociopolitical and economic developments of the last decade, which are constantly and rapidly changing on local, national and global levels, Greece once again faces a refugee flow that crosses its borders. Research findings of as early as 2006 indicate that Greek school as an institution is unable to adequately decode the cultural capital of outlander pupils in terms which will allow it to evaluate it positively (Delikari, 2006); additionally, in the recent events, mainly during the two-year period 2015-16, with about one million people looking for refuge in Greece and through it, contradictions in social reactions and rhetoric seem to be even more intense (Racist Violence Recording Network, 2018). In a society that appears to become increasingly multicultural and at the same time intolerant to diversity (Zoniou, 2016), there has been a great deal of research over the recent decades of inadequate teacher training, both during pre- and in-service, in related subjects; teachers, however, are required to respond effectively to an ever-changing educational environment at the level of the student population.

Educational drama in itself contains by default a rich combination of educational and aesthetic parameters, which encourage intercultural dialogue, stimulate sensory expression (Lenakakis, 2015) and allow the cultivation of intercultural skills of students and thus the principles of inclusion. In recent decades, the benefits of the use of drama in an educational context, especially in exploring social issues and human rights, has been illuminated in numerous studies internationally (namely: Flemming, 1998; Gallagher & Freeman, 2016; Heathcote & Bolton, 1998; Mavrokordatos, 2009; Unstundag, 1999). However, the vast majority of research is referred to students' benefits and not teachers'.

Teacher-focused research on the use of drama as a methodological tool depicts the slow procedure through which teachers actually make changes in their views, their risk taking levels, as well as their perception of their own identities and the identities of their students (Dawson, Cawthon, & Baker, 2011). Teachers often appear timid on trying out new methodologies in their professional development, especially using drama, and require more time and ongoing mentoring in order to finally bring about change in their teaching methods (Bainbridge Edwards, & Cooper, 1996). At the same time, the vast majority of research evidence concerning teachers' preparation is drawn from qualitative, small scale researches; literature review of teachers' use of drama as an educational method shows a gap in quantitative data, lacking strong metrics and evidence deriving from large scale research (O' Masta & Snyder-Young, 2014; O' Toole, 2010).

3. Research objectives and focus

The purpose of the present research is to analyse and discuss the extent and levels of impact that a human rights-based drama training workshop can have on educators. In particular, the following questions were investigated:

- In what ways can a drama training workshop contribute to the work of teachers, in teaching human rights/refugee rights?
- Can a drama workshop be enough to shift teachers' perceptions of teaching and to enable them to implement alternative educational drama strategies in their teaching?
- Which elements of the drama workshop are more useful for teachers to implement directly? Which elements did they actually implement and which factors facilitated/hindered their implementation?

The broad sample and the duration of the present research allow for data collection with quantitative tools in an attempt to quantify the findings in a large-scale research within the context of Greece.

4. Methodology

4.1. The research framework

In order to tackle the above research questions, the research team used a 20-hour teacher training workshop, addressing issues of human rights and refugees, with the use of theatre and educational drama techniques and tools. This 3-day workshop was offered to in-service teachers of all disciplines and grades, by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama and Education Network and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Greece, as part of their educational DiE programme "It could be me – it could be you; an awareness raising project on human rights and refugee related issues" (Choleva, 2017). Participation in both the training workshop and the research was optional and admission-free. The training workshop was implemented 33

times in 20 Greek regions between February 2015 and May 2017, by the programme's training teams. One of the authors of this article was initial co-designer and co-trainer and delivered over half of the training workshops.

The structure of the workshop is drawn from Bruner's spiral learning model (Bruner, 1960), moving repeatedly between three main stages: creation, sharing, feedback. The participants were consecutively asked to work individually, in subgroups and as a plenary, depending on the nature of the activity. The three days followed a general scheme of warming-up games, creation of team spirit activities, image theatre techniques of the Boal arsenal (1992, 1995), initiation of human rights related issues through games and documents (statistical data, photographs, images, testimonies, poems), theatre (Govas, 2003) and educational drama techniques (Choleva, 2010), to deepen the groups' research, such as role playing, thought tracking, hot-seating etc., a simulation game (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2013), extract activities from educational materials (UNHCR, 2014), as well as a reflection session where the participants individually raised questions on implementation aspects, and formed groups to deliver draft schemes of work related to human rights, based on specific curriculum units or looser school life related events (performances, world days etc.).

4.2. Data collection tools

The data of this research was collected through questionnaires, which were filled in by the teachers on an anonymous and voluntary capacity, in three phases:

- i. The 1st questionnaire (printed) was distributed to and filled by the participants before the beginning of the training workshop. It consisted mainly of demographical and needs-assessment questions, where multiple choices were available. It also included questions consisting of affirmative suggestions through which the participants were asked to assess the level of their information/knowledge regarding human rights conventions and refugee rights (namely: 1. Insufficient, 2. Limited, 3. Average, 4. Good, 5. Very good), as well as educational drama techniques and methodology (namely: 1. Not at all, 2. Not really, 3. Kind of, 4. Very good).
- ii. The 2nd questionnaire (printed) was distributed and filled right after the completion of the training drama workshop. The participants were asked to assess the content and new knowledge they acquired on human rights/refugee rights and the use and appropriateness of the theatrical pedagogical techniques used during the workshop, and allowed for five-point scale answers (namely: 1. Not at all, 2. Minimum, 3. Average, 4. Enough, 5. Very much). Additionally, affirmative suggestions were included, through which the participants were asked to assess a) their readiness to focus on human rights issues with their students in two phases (before and after the workshop); and b) their readiness to approach these issues using drama practices, in two phases (before and after the workshop); their responses were given through a five-point scale (namely: 1. Not at all confident, 2. Not too confident, 3. Almost Confident, 4. Confident, 5. Very Confident).
- iii. The 3rd questionnaire (online) was distributed after the completion of school year 2016-17. The questionnaire included demographic questions, closed type assessment questions with the 3-point Likert scale (1=not at all, 2=medium, 3=totally), as well as questions where multiple answers were available. In this phase, teacher participants provide information on how useful they still considered the workshop elements to be in real life conditions, which ones they actually applied, the application framework, as well as the factors which enabled or banned the implementation of the workshop elements.

The data of the 1st and 2nd phases was collected by 941 participating teachers, between February 2015 and May 2017. The data of the 3rd phase was collected by 375 of the above participants, between July and October 2017; that is 2 to 25 months after the teachers had participated in an actual drama training workshop.

4.3. The sample profile

The profile of the research samples resulted from questionnaires no1 (Q1) and no3 (Q3) and is very similar: Participants were mainly women (89.2%, and 91.73% respectively), roughly divided between primary (including pre-school) and secondary education (primary: 48.13% and 46.4% respectively; secondary: 45.68% and 51.73% respectively), with the remaining percentage of the sample working either in combination of both grades and/or administrative training positions, within local educational offices. The majority of the participants in all phases are over 40 years of age (62.48% and 78.4%), while all other age groups were represented. As for professional experience, the vast majority of the participants have over 11 years of service (71.87% and 81.07% respectively) [cf. table 1].

Phase 3 participants had undergone the training mainly within the school year 2016-17 (66.43%), where only 24.27% were from 2015-16, and 9.3% from 2014-15.

Table 1. Sample profile

Factors	Q1	Q3
Percentage (%) of women	89.2%	91.73%
School type	Primary: 48.13%	46.4%
	Secondary: 45.68%	51.73%
Age over 40 y.o.	62.48%	78.4%

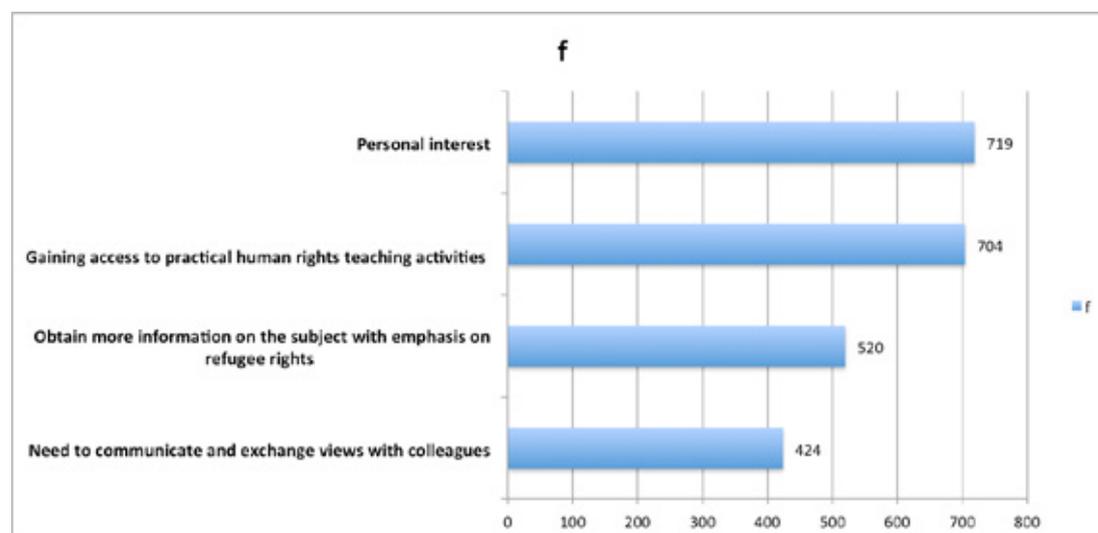
5. Research data analysis

The very large sample of our research allows for categorisations and assumptions according to the model of the ex-post survey (Cohen & Manion, 1997). The data collected was processed with the use of the SPSS statistical analysis programme, according to which the reliability of the questionnaires is very good (Cronbach values: A = 0.762 - 0.819).

5.1. Phase 1: Assessment of needs & pre-existing feeling of preparedness

Regarding the teachers' motivation for participating in the drama training workshop, the 941 teachers report on average 3 to 4 reasons for joining this seminar, the most frequent answer being personal interest, followed by gaining access to practical human rights teaching activities and to obtain more information on the subject with emphasis on refugee rights. Other motives that have brought them to the training were the need to communicate and exchange views with colleagues, inactivity of their school in related issues, the fact that the subject is part of the curriculum and that they work with refugee children [cf. Table 2, where f=frequency].

Table 2. Participation motivations



About half of our research participants assess their level of knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as *average* and a good number (32.28%) as *good*, while with regard to the role of national policies concerning refugees, half of them consider their knowledge to be *average*, but quite a few (24.10%) say they have *insufficient* knowledge. In the question about the knowledge and skills that teachers have before the seminar in order to teach about human rights, a small percentage (8.09%) responds with confidence, while the overwhelming majority (88.27%) does not feel adequately prepared.

The Pearson Chi-Square correlation tests showed that motivation for participation in the workshop,

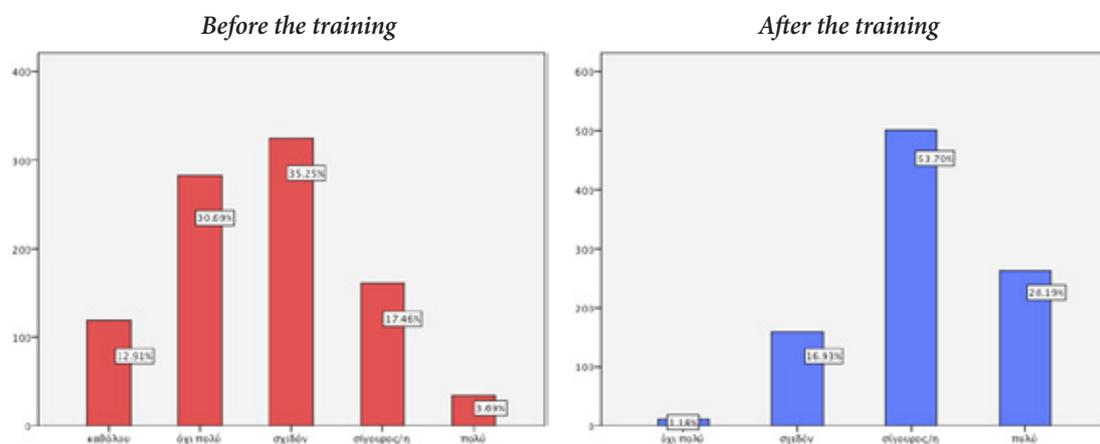
human rights knowledge and experiential teaching skills do not have statistically significant differences between men and women, nor appear to be significantly influenced by the participants' age or years of teaching experience (p value \Rightarrow 5%).

5.2. Phase 2: Training workshop and preparedness assessment

After completion of the seminar, the 941 teachers consider that their needs were covered *enough* and *very much* by a percentage of as high as 94.51%.

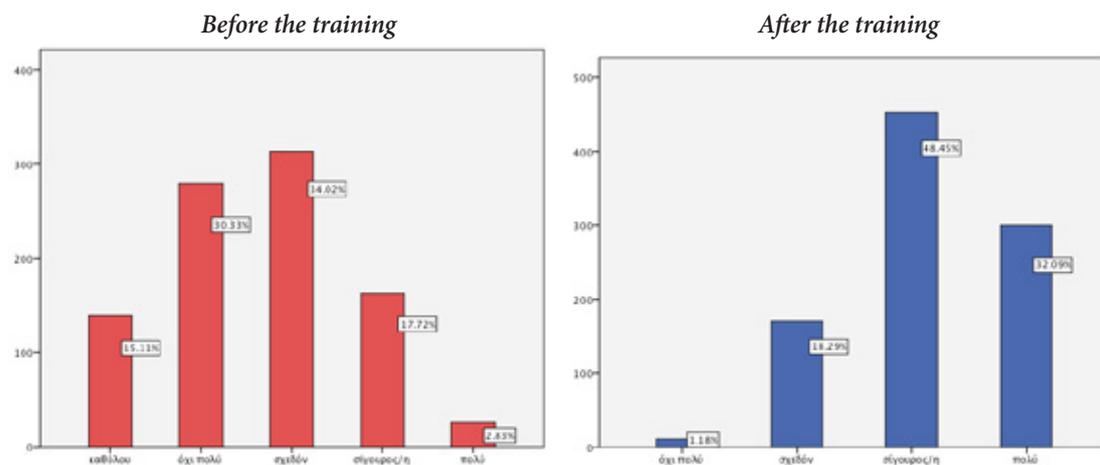
An important finding of the present study is the degree of shift observed after the seminar in relation to how confident the participating teachers feel about working in the classroom on human rights issues and, more specifically, the rights of refugees. Out of the 30.69% who before the seminar stated that they were *not very confident* and 12.91% *not confident at all*, 53.70% after the seminar stated that they were *confident* and 28.19% *very confident* [cf. Figure 1]. The non-parametric value correlation test (Wilcoxon test) shows that these differences are statistically significant (p value = $<$ 5%).

Figure 1. How confident do you feel about working on human rights, refugee rights in particular, in your class?



Similar shifts also occur regarding the sense of preparedness the teachers state to have in order to raise awareness about human rights to their students, namely the rights of refugees, using drama as a teaching methodology, before and after the training workshop: out of 30.33% who declare *not very confident* and 15.10% *not at all confident* before the training, after the training workshop participants declare themselves *confident* at 48.45% and *very confident* at 32.09% rates, eliminating the *not at all confident* point completely [cf. Figure 2]. The non-parametric value correlation test (Wilcoxon test) shows that these differences are statistically significant (p value = $<$ 5%).

Figure 2. How confident do you feel about raising awareness about human rights (namely refugee rights) to your students, through drama techniques and activities?



In the last question of the questionnaire participants were to respond openly, commenting on the training workshop in text. Comments made contained keywords such as inspiration for action, need for more training, very enthusiastically thanking the trainers for the experience. Another element rising from this section was the very well received combination of lived experience with new knowledge; the comment “Thank you! I felt and learnt!” was a very characteristic example.

5.3. Phase 3: Evaluation of drama tools implementation and sense of preparedness in real life conditions

The third questionnaire was distributed through the Internet between July and October 2017 to all 941 participants of the training workshops. As the workshops had taken place between February 2015 and May 2017, teachers were invited to participate in this additional research phase between 2 and 25 months after their training. A sample of 375 teachers responded (39.81% of the population), feeding the research with additional data concerning real life challenges, conditions and experimentations. A well sum of 332 participants (88.53%) stated that they actually implemented drama techniques, activities and tools in their work, they explain in detail which elements of the workshop they found more applicable, they assess the level of confidence/preparedness in implementation and give additional information on possible dissemination actions they overtook. In the meanwhile, the remaining 43 participants (11.47%) stated that they did not implement any, giving an insight into the factors that prevented them from implementing.

More specifically, with regard to the elements examined in the drama training workshop, in a question with multiple choices allowance, teachers consider of maximum application frequency (f) respectively: *warm up games* (301), *documents for introducing human rights issues* (277), *dialogue initiating games* (249), *team building activities* (239), *image theatre techniques* (200), *feedback techniques* (192) and *educational drama techniques* (176) [cf. Table 3].

Table 3. Applicable workshop elements

element	f
Warm up games	301
Games for introducing human rights issues	277
Dialogue initiating games	249
Documents for introducing human rights issues (statistical data, images, testimonies abstracts etc.)	225
Team building activities	239
Image theatre techniques	200
Feedback techniques	192
Educational drama techniques	176

It is interesting that the above data generally agree with those of the following question, in which teachers state which workshop elements they actually implemented in their work, following their training [cf. Table 4].

Table 4. Which elements did you actually implement in your work, following the training workshop?

elements	f	%
Warm up games	289	87.05
Games for introducing human rights issues	238	71.69
Image theatre techniques	194	58.43
Team building games	174	45.53
Educational drama techniques	163	43.16
Documents for introducing human rights issues (statistical data, images, testimonies abstracts etc.)	160	42.67

Being asked about the framework within which the teachers managed to implement the above elements, 256 of them (68.27%) state that they included them in special school projects (cultural, environmental, health education projects, Erasmus+ etc.), while 228 of them (60.8%) found time within their very subject teaching, during the morning curriculum. There were cases where teachers took advantage of school life events; national days celebrations, thematic weeks and school festivals proved a good opportunity for a good 211 of them (56.27%), whereas afternoon school hours of the all-day school proved handy for quite a few of them (108 – 28.8%).

Asked whether they proceeded to dissemination activities with their students, 168 teachers explain that they shared their work with another class/group within their school, 97 shared their work with the broader local community, including parents and other local community members, whereas 89 respond that they presented their work to the whole school community. There is also another interesting 61 sum who state that their group's work was shared in interschool festivals and events, regional school contests, school networks.

Teachers who managed to include drama elements in their teaching of human rights, also give insight of the factors which enabled them to proceed. In a relevant question where multiple answers could be selected, teachers most popularly selected *ability to implement [drama elements] within their own class/morning curriculum* (214), followed by *students' motivation* (189) and *pre-existing positive climate for similar actions in the school* (186). The potential of *collaborating with other colleagues and/or the school principal* proved important for 115 participant teachers, while the *availability for suitable space and equipment* seemed important for 99 of them [cf. Table 5].

Table 5. Which factors enabled you to implement drama elements that you were taught during the training workshop?

factor	f	%
Ability to implement [drama elements] within the curriculum/my class	214	57.07
Students' motivation	189	50.4
Pre-existing positive climate for similar actions within the school	186	49.6
Potential of collaboration with other colleagues and/or the school principal	115	30.67
Space and equipment availability	99	26.4

Respectively, the 43 participant teachers who stated that they did not implement drama elements into their teaching after the training workshop illuminate the factors that created difficulties or obstacles: 17 of them express their difficulty in finding the time to do so (4.53%), whereas 12 participants expressed their difficulty and lack of confidence in making use of drama elements in their teaching (3.2%). An interesting 11 sum (2.93%) was away from a stable/available student group in order to experiment, and smaller numbers blame lack of colleague collaboration, lack of suitable space and equipment and lack of positive attitudes towards similar actions in school. Out of the 43 participant teachers of this section, none of them considered the drama elements presented above as non interesting/non applicable, which was an offered choice [cf. Table 6].

Table 6. Which factors prevented you from implementing in your work drama elements that you were taught during the training workshop?

factor	f	%
I did not have the time needed	17	4.53
I did not feel confident enough to implement drama elements myself	12	3.2
I did not work in class this year / I did not work with the same class during the year	11	2.93
There was no potential of collaboration with colleagues and/or the school principal	9	2.4
There was no proper space/equipment	8	2.13
The school does not welcome similar actions	4	1.07
Non interesting/non applicable drama elements	0	0

Last but not least, in other sections of the questionnaire the participant teachers, more often than not, consider the collaboration with a drama pedagogue as an important factor in their development, as they seem rather hesitant in using drama elements themselves; moreover, they consider having a repetition or a second stage of drama training very important.

6. Discussion

The participants in our research were mostly female teachers, coming from 20 different regions in the country and serving in formal education, in primary and secondary school. For drama practitioners and researchers, this high percentage of female participation is rather common; what is not so common or expected, however, was that the vast majority of participants are teachers over 40 years of age, with teaching experience well over 10 years. The motivation for their participation in the drama training workshop was their personal interest in acquiring knowledge and learning about human rights, with an emphasis on the rights of refugees, however linked to acquiring knowledge and experience in incorporating drama elements in their teaching. Before participating in the training workshop, although initially they feel adequate to support experiential teaching methods to develop their active participation in the learning process, they do not, however, have the knowledge and skills necessary to teach on human rights and refugee rights (Choleva, Lenakakis, & Kritikou, 2019). This finding of lacking of appropriate education and training on intercultural skills is also found at national level (Gotovos 2002; Nikolaou 2005; Vamvakidou, Dinas, Kiridis, & Karamitroy, 2003) and internationally (Lamas, 2014).

The implemented 20-hour drama training workshop, which raises human rights issues (namely, refugee rights) through the use of educational drama, suggesting new teaching methodologies, appears to fully meet the needs of the participating teachers, providing them with material and familiarising them with relevant tools and techniques that they themselves consider to be applicable to their class/group. It is remarkable that, at the end of the seminar, a statistically important shift has occurred in the sense of confidence the participants have in order to work within the classroom on human rights issues and more specifically the rights of refugees, as well as raise awareness to their students around the issue through the use of educational drama as a teaching methodology. Most of the teachers feel very confident after the drama training workshop, unlike before, when most of them felt not at all confident, thus demonstrating a clear shift in their intercultural skills. An important factor of the workshop success is its experiential nature, where new knowledge derives from the multisensory use of body and the cultivation of empathy (Grant, 2017).

An important finding of our research was that a 20-hour drama training workshop is enough for teachers to step in action: after the completion of the school year, participant teachers in vast majority state that they actually implemented drama elements in their teaching of human rights. They consider the initial icebreaking games, the team building games, as well as educational drama (including Image Theatre) techniques and the use of appropriate documentation quite applicable and useful and they actually proceed to incorporate many of them in their work. Interestingly enough, they do not remain in their safety zone where ice-breakers and team building exercises can be done; they do proceed to use documents, image theatre and educational drama techniques in exploring issues of human rights. They give useful data about the framework of their work, explaining that not only did they manage to proceed with experimentation within their own class/subject, but it is due to this exact factor that they are able to proceed. However, they also seem to make use of a variety of occasions within school life, such as school projects, visits, interschool meetings, cultural/environmental/health education projects, to implement their new methodology elements. Moreover, many of them proceed to disseminate outcomes of their work to other members of their school, educational and/or local communities. The findings of our research come in agreement with evidence on the benefits of drama in the development of the self, and especially in the professional development of teachers (Alkistis, 2008; Bainbridge Edwards, & Cooper, 1996; Giannouli, 2014; Omasta & Snyder-Young, 2014).

Teachers who were not able to implement drama elements into their human rights teaching consider time, lack of an available student group, lack of collaborating partners and lack of available space the main reasons for which they did not proceed with experimentation. It is important, however, that regardless of their challenges, they do remain persuaded that the drama elements of the workshop are both interesting and applicable, implying that in future, perhaps given the circumstances, they would be willing to experiment.

Although the sample of the research is so vast that it allows for indications to be taken under consideration, the present research did not fail to meet both limitations and challenges. The available data allows only for generalised indications to be taken into account, as it is impossible to measure shifts in views, prin-

ciples and applications of each teacher individually, as a result of the training workshop. Furthermore, only limited opportunities for qualitative data were available, due to the nature of the research tools. It is important to proceed with a future research model which will combine both qualitative and quantitative evidence, strengthening not only the findings of the current research, but also illuminating more parameters of the ways drama as a methodology can contribute to an enriched teaching repertoire.

The research team, however, considers that the current study provides enough evidence supporting the positive impact drama can have in teachers' educational strategies, especially when teaching human rights. With the above presented data and analysis, it cannot be stressed enough that drama can and should be a methodology in teaching, thus advocating the incorporation of drama in teachers' pre- and in-service continuous professional development as a necessity, not as a utopia.

Notes

- 1 The training seminar was designed and implemented as part of the project "It could be me – it could be you; an awareness raising project on human rights and refugees, through theatre and educational drama", implemented by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama and Education Network and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Greece.

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