

# Challenging Normative Influences in Refugee and Migrant Language Education: Reflections of a Trainee Teacher Cohort

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# Challenging Normative Influences in Refugee and Migrant Language Education: Reflections of a Trainee Teacher Cohort

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## Challenging Normative Influences in Refugee and Migrant Language

### Education: Reflections of a Trainee Teacher Cohort

This study reports how participants in an MA course on language education for refugees and migrants in Greece engaged in meaning-making during their teaching placements. The reflections of 33 trainee teachers (elicited in 2021-2022) were thematically analysed using ecological theory. These show how participants negotiated the transition between the 'ecologies of ideas' of the postgraduate programme and the locus of their teaching placement. When placed in challenging teaching environments, participants reverted to 'safer' practices and performative teaching, which satisfied course requirements. However, growing confidence helped some participants to challenge normative expectations and develop more empowering ways to teach.

**Keywords:** *language education; refugee education; teacher education*

# Challenging Normative Influences in Refugee and Migrant Language Education: Reflections of a Trainee Teacher Cohort

## Introduction

This study reports on how a cohort of language teachers, who were enrolled in a postgraduate teacher education programme, engaged in meaning-making about language teaching and learning. Specifically, the study draws on the recorded reflections of participants in the *Language Education for Refugees and Migrants* (LRM) postgraduate programme offered by the *Hellenic Open University* in Greece, and it tracks their evolving thinking during the teaching placement (practicum) that took place during the final stage of the programme. These reflections, which were elicited in the 2021-2022 academic year, show how the theoretical input of the course was re-appropriated by the participants during and through their practical classroom-based work.

The study is informed by an ecological perspective (Bateson, 1987; Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021; van Lier, 1994), which considers how various contextual influences shape individual understanding and action, highlighting how teachers re-connotate theoretical knowledge when they move from university-based learning to diverse professional contexts. In doing so, the study aspires to make a substantive and a conceptual contribution to education scholarship. On one level, it seeks to add to the description of the Greek educational setting as it relates to the education of people with refugee and migrant

backgrounds. Such a description could inform ongoing debates about language education policy and the education of marginalised groups and linguistically-othered students globally (e.g., Çelik & İçduygu, 2019; Li & Sah, 2019; Taylor & Sindhu, 2012).

However, and more importantly, the description of the trainee teachers' experiences serves an instrumental purpose (Stake, 1994) as a conceptual stepping stone towards a nuanced understanding of how meaning is generated in language education. The use of an ecological perspective builds on a growing corpus of scholarship in language education studies, which is informed by complexity and ecological theories (e.g., Chong et al., 2023; Kramersch, 2008; Pinner & Sampson, 2020), and further extends it to the domain of teacher meaning-making. Existing work in this area has provided multiple useful insights into aspects of language education, including the nature of language (e.g., Douglas Fir Group, 2016) and the processes of language development (e.g., Verspoor et al., 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2017). Less effective attempts to use ecological perspectives in language teacher psychology have tended to produce inventories of influences that shape the teachers' experience, without always successfully accounting for their interaction. What this study contributes, then, is a phenomenological account that produces insight into how teachers synthesise meaning in context.

### Teaching Students with Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds in Greece

The migration flows that followed the destabilisation of the Middle East and North Africa region and the proliferation of conflict globally have prompted an urgent need to rethink the ethics, goals, and practicalities of educating linguistically-othered minorities (Shapiro et al., 2018). This is often a challenge for education systems where practice is shaped

by ingrained institutional habitus (e.g., Tarrabini et al., 2017). To better understand how teachers negotiate the multiple influences that shape their practice, this study looks into how a cohort of trainee teachers in Greece experienced their placements in education programmes for refugees and migrants in Greece, during the spring semester of the 2021-2022 academic year.

In the Greek national setting, the educational response to the learning needs of people with refugee and migrant backgrounds appears to be still nascent. Although various initiatives for the educational and linguistic integration of people with diverse cultural backgrounds were developed in the past (e.g., in response to the population movements following the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s), the massive influx of asylum seekers and other migrants from 2015 onward seems to have created considerable strain on the education system (Palaiologou et al., 2019). In broad terms, children with a refugee and migrant status attend classes in segregated educational structures (Reception Facilities for Refugee Education and Reception Classes), and adults typically only have access to informal learning facilities run by Non-Governmental Organisations (Simopoulos & Magos, 2020). A persistent challenge faced in all these settings is the limited availability of teachers with experience and theoretical expertise for teaching students with limited Modern Greek proficiency and, sometimes, limited overall literacy and disrupted schooling (Papapostolou et al., 2020).

The LRM MA programme was launched by the Hellenic Open University in 2016, responding to this need. The design of the programme took into account national agendas for refugee integration, the socio-political context, the readiness and pedagogical expertise of local language teachers, and the particularities of pre-service teacher education in Greece

(Kitsiou et al., 2019). The programme is based on four foundational principles. Firstly, it endorses a critical orientation towards language education, which challenges dominant linguistic hierarchies (Phillipson, 1992) and interrogates the role of the curriculum as an ideological artefact (Sayer, 2019). Secondly, it reflects a commitment to empowering marginalised language learners (Ruiz, 1992), by broadening their intercultural communicative repertoires (Ganassin & Young, 2020) and by valourising their language through inclusive teaching practises (Cummins, 2019). Thirdly, it disrupts dominant scholastic flows that prioritise Western models of (language) education (Edge, 2006), by adopting a post-method orientation to language teaching, which involves a pragmatic combination of approaches and techniques that are consistent with the teachers' values (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Finally, the programme is firmly grounded on praxis, understood as a meaningful fusion of theory and action in language education (Edge, 2011). In more practical terms, the programme comprises theoretical modules on teaching languages to adults and minors, Arabic culture, international refugee law, a dissertation and a semester-length teaching placement in a setting that provides formal or informal language courses. The last of the components in this list (i.e., the teaching placement or 'practicum'), forms the backdrop of this study.

### Understanding Language Teaching through an Ecological Perspective

The theoretical perspective that frames this study (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021) draws on a growing corpus of literature that uses complex systems theory (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and ecological thinking (e.g., van Lier, 2004) to explain how meaningful action is generated in language education. In this perspective, language teaching and learning is situated within an 'ecology of ideas' (Bateson, 1987), or 'meaning-structures' (e.g., beliefs,

policies, routinised practices etc.) which pertain to language, education, social order and more.

Although the term ‘meaning-structures’ might privilege cognitive constructs, it also refers to affective phenomena and shared practices. To avoid this potential misconception, the terms ‘intentionality’ and ‘intentional structure’ have been borrowed from the philosophical thinking of Franz Brentano (1874) to designate whatever “in presentation [...] is presented, in judgment [...] affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on”. As used here, intentionality refers to the directedness, or ‘aboutness’ of our thoughts, feelings, and mental states (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021). In its original formulations, it was seen as a purely intrapersonal phenomenon, although more recent work in the philosophy of mind (e.g., Searle, 1984) has expanded the definition to include processes and actions that are collectively generated and experienced. Seen through this perspective, intentionality is the link between the teachers’ phenomenological experience and the shared world (ecology) of teaching.

Stelma and Kostoulas (2021) suggest that teaching ecologies are stratified, and we distinguish between individual, shared, derived and sociocultural intentional structures. Individual intentionality refers to aspects of intentionality such as beliefs, feelings, personal routines etc. Shared intentionality refers to meaning-making that is generated by intersubjective interaction (cf. Tomassello & Carpenter, 2007), such as classroom interactions. Derived intentionality is the potential for meaning-making that is ‘assigned’ or ‘sedimented’ in cultural artefacts (Searle, 1983; Stelma, 2014), such as language textbooks or syllabus documents. Finally, sociocultural intentionality refers to meaning-making potential that is

present in sociocultural beliefs, ideologies, policies and other 'rationalities' (Tudor, 2001) about language and learning.

Acting collectively, intentional structures specify the actions that are possible in a given time and place (or, in technical terms, they create an 'affordance' for action), and they may also indicate a preference towards a specific course of action (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). However, the interaction between teachers and the ecology in which they are embedded is not unidirectional: by engaging with intentional structures, teachers can shape the ecology: beliefs can be challenged, practices might be routinised, feelings may be managed. Seen from this perspective, the university-based teacher education programme and the locus of the teacher placement represent two different configurations of intentional structures (two different 'ecologies'), and the programme participants need to navigate their way through these differences through active meaning-making. This has the potential to disrupt the ecology of the teaching site (ideally by triggering positive, sustainable change) or –alternatively– to re-connote intentional structures that were generated through previous learning.

In the absence of specific empirical data about each specific teaching placement, it would be injudicious to attempt a description of the intentional ecologies that they represent. With this caveat in mind, it might still be possible to draw two broad-strokes prototypical sketches, which might act as touching stones against which specific examples might be compared (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021). On one hand, there is what might be called a 'transformative' ecology, which is mostly shaped by critical understandings of language, education, and society. Such understandings, which are often shaped by scholarship in the

fields of education and applied linguistics, call into question existing social orders, standard language and monolingualism (e.g., Edge, 2006; Kostoulas, 2019; García & Li Wei, 2006). As a paradigmatic counterpoint, Stelma and Kostoulas (2021) described a ‘transactional’ paradigm of language education, which brings together intentional structures such as a ‘technocratic’ rationality of teaching (Giroux, 2019), a prioritisation of standard and hegemonic language varieties, a reliance on transmissive teaching methods and an emphasis on standardised testing and certification. These two notional paradigms schematically represent the mode of language pedagogy that the MA programme aspires to foster (see previous section) and the mode of pedagogy that seems dominant in the Greek educational context (Kostoulas, 2018).

### Transforming Teaching Through Reflection

To help LRM participants navigate the differences between the ecology of ideas represented in the postgraduate programme and the ecology of their teaching placement (and, ideally, between the transactional and transformative language education paradigms, see previous section), participants are encouraged to engage in systematic reflection in, on and for their practice (Farrell, 2022). While acknowledging the criticism about ‘forced’ reflection (Beauchamp, 2015), this requirement is premised on the belief that systematic reflection has the potential to drive professional development (Freeman, 2019; Korthagen, 2001), and to bring about positive change to professional practice (Walsh, 2009), especially when it has a critical slant (Brookfield, 2009).

Although it seems hard to think of teaching unencumbered by any form of thinking, the idea of teaching reflection is traced to Dewey, who defined it as an “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds

that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (1933, p. 9). Typically, reflection is triggered by some kind of practice-related observation, such as a critical incident (Tripp, 2012) or ‘disorienting dilemma’ (Mezirow, 1990), which brings to the fore a dissonance between previously held assumptions and what is perceived. This is followed by a series of more or less structured steps that aim to raise awareness of the, possibly implicit, assumptions that frame practice, subject them to critique from different perspectives and through different theoretical lenses, compare them against alternatives and, ultimately modify one’s beliefs and actions based on the new, more informed understanding (Brookfield, 2009; Farrell, 2015; Korthagen, 2001).

A useful distinction can be drawn between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ forms of reflection (Farrell, 2022). The former tends to be more perfunctory, and usually limited in effectiveness. This might happen if teachers limit themselves to superficial descriptions of their context and practice (Jay & Johnson, 2002) or if they restrict their focus to more technical aspects of teaching (Smyth, 1989). Atkinson (2012) notes that a lot of teacher reflection seems to not move beyond this threshold, and laments that “[t]he agentic reflective practitioner may be more of a fiction created in teacher knowledge scholarship and professional pedagogy than a reality experienced by practising teachers” (p. 189). On the other hand, ‘strong’ forms of reflection bring into more explicit focus the ideological and socio-historic influences that are entangled into practice and they engage in sustained critique of dominant ideologies. It is this commitment to “uncovering and challenging the power dynamics that frame practice and uncovering and challenging hegemonic assumptions” (Brookfield, 2009, p. 293) that has the most potential to transform unjust orders in education.

## Methods

To understand how the MA programme participants reflectively engaged with the differences between the intentional structures of their taught modules and the ones that in the locus of their teaching placement, a small-scale qualitative study was implemented. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What aspects of the teaching ecology are most salient in the participants' reflections?
2. How do participants reflectively engage with the ecology to shape their teaching?

### Research Setting and Participants

As stated in the introduction, participants in the study were enrolled in an MA-level teacher education course in Greece. The two-year course is internationally oriented and delivered in English. At the time of the study, participants were in the final semester of the programme. Table 1 shows that most participants were female (which is common in language education in Greece), between 22 and 45 years old. With few exceptions, they had undergraduate degrees in various education disciplines and were practising teachers.

[Insert Table 1 approximately here]

### Data Generation

Three main sources were used to generate data for answering these questions. Firstly, a questionnaire survey was used to elicit demographic data and the perceptions that the participants held before commencing their teaching placement. A selection of open-ended questions is reproduced in Table 2. The questionnaire also included more focused (closed)

questions, intended to track longitudinal development for purposes of accountability. These data have been excluded from analysis as they are not directly pertinent to the research questions. The questionnaire was answered by 31 participants, which represented slightly under 47% of the teaching cohort (N=66).

[INSERT TABLE 2 APPROXIMATELY HERE]

A second source of data came in the form of extracts from the reflective journals that participants were required to keep during their teaching placement. The participants were asked to write an entry at the end of every lesson and longer summarising entries at irregular intervals. English, the language of instruction in the programme, was encouraged, but participants were free to write their journals in Modern Greek if they preferred. No specific instructions were given regarding the length or content of these entries, in order to discourage routinisation (Beauchamp, 2015). However, many participants were familiar with Gibbs's (2013) reflective cycle, and less confident ones were advised to follow this model and record various stages of the reflective process. At the end of the course, participants were required to submit six sample journal entries, and permission was obtained from 30 participants to use 169 entries, each ranging in length from approximately 100 to 750 words.

Additional reflective comments were extracted from two written assignments. Participants had to submit a detailed teaching report on a selected lesson, which contained a section reflecting on their experience, typically ranging between two and three paragraphs. This was intended to record reflection *in action*, that is, ongoing reflection in the action-present of teaching (Schon, 1983). At the end of the course, participants submitted a portfolio which included an extended section reflecting on the teaching placement as a whole. These

reflections, which typically ranged between 1,000 and 1,500 words, recorded retrospective reflections on teaching, or reflection *on* action (Schon, 1983). Permission was obtained at the end of the course to analyse and share 32 and 33 of these texts respectively.

## Data Analysis

As a preliminary pre-analytical step, data that had been written in Modern Greek were translated into English to facilitate cross-referencing. Data were anonymised, minor linguistic standardisation took place (e.g., obvious typos were corrected and punctuation was standardised), and extended passages were divided into paragraphs using criteria of thematic coherence. Other than that, however, deviations from standard academic English were generally preserved. The resulting data corpus, which was subsequently subjected to analysis, was 75,121 words long.

A combination of inductive and deductive methods, broadly informed by thematic analysis, was used to analyse the data. Preliminary codes, questions, and the researcher's reflexive thoughts were recorded as marginal comments during a preliminary reading. Following that, a coding scheme was developed drawing on Stelma and Kostoulas' (2021) intentional dynamics model, which was modified to fit the initial reading of the data. The coding scheme was applied to the corpus at sentence and paragraph level, and analytical memos were drafted, which recorded remarks on emerging patterns and the coding scheme. Using a process of 'constant comparison' (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), a refined coding scheme was then generated, which focused more narrowly on the research questions. In the revised scheme, the literature-derived codes were re-connotated and synthesised to better reflect

the insights from the data. The revised codes were re-applied to the data to identify broad themes that are presented below.

## Findings

The findings that emerged from the data analysis are presented below in a linear way that roughly reflects the chronological development of a typical LRM teaching placement. This arrangement involves a loss of nuance and detail present in the diverse trajectories of each placement, but it can helpfully highlight common themes and concerns.

### *Starting the Practicum*

According to their reflections, the participants tended to begin their teaching placement with a very strong sense of purpose regarding how they wanted their lessons to develop.

Participant 1's views are typical:

The main goal [...] was to develop the communication skills of the [...] students of the school and to strengthen their self-confidence. So, the basis was the development of [their] social life at school. For this reason, I tried to conduct acquaintance and presentation dialogues of students and their habits (e.g., creating avatars, comics, role-playing games with puppets, dramatization, storytelling, etc.). (P1)

These initial statements often included both linguistic and social aims (e.g., "realizing that everybody has equal rights" [P25]), which were consistent with the participants' personal values and the aims of the programme. They also often reflected the participants' impressionistic or empirically informed perceptions of the students' needs, as shown below:

According to a needs analysis that I conducted [...], one of the students' weaknesses was found in their communicative skills and their competence in

using the Greek language. For this reason, I chose to include role-playing tasks in my intervention... (P7)

Such statements, which varied in detail and specificity, are examples of what Stelma and Kostoulas (2021) describe as 'purposeful activity', and they have the potential to initiate and sustain change in teaching and learning ecology.

Before long, however, the challenges of teaching in a demanding setting made a visible impact on the participants' thinking. The first lessons were described as "quite intimidating" (P30), even by experienced teachers, and many reported being self-conscious of everything "from the tone and loudness of my voice to my body posture" (P9). This anxiety was often exacerbated by concerns about time pressure, classroom management and occasional organisational problems. Several participants mentioned their lack of teaching experience as a worry (e.g., "Given the fact that I am inexperienced as a teacher and I don't know the curriculum, added more challenge and stress to my work" [P4]). Although not all participants described equally intense anxiety, and some even claimed that pressure drove them to be more prepared, others found that stress could be debilitating and forced them to unintentionally modify their teaching:

Today, in my first lesson I was very stressed (although I have been present in the class for many days). So, I did not proceed with personal questions or discussions. I started the lesson at once. (P22)

Although Participant 22 managed to recover and proceeded to familiarise herself with her class later in the same lesson, in many cases the aftermath of the initial lessons tended to be more longer-term.

## Struggling and Conforming

Many participants often struggled, at least in the initial stages of their teaching placement. They reported that irregular student attendance often rendered their lesson plans irrelevant. Also, abrupt relocations or deportations of their students had a frustrating effect, as one of the participants noted: “That could be more difficult for me because I didn’t have time to say goodbye. Sometimes all we got was a message on the messenger group. [...] Their lives are full of unsaid goodbyes” (P1). Some participants struggled with student indifference: “unfortunately, I also noted that when we did this exercise, not all students participated with most of them not responding to my questions” (P10). Others found that younger learners, who might not have fully assimilated school expectations, can be very challenging:

A notable incident which took place during the lesson was that a matching exercise involved the word “Pakistan” and this word triggered some students who erased the word and wrote “Afghanistan” instead. The boys who did this action started talking to me in a mixed language between Dari and English and the only word that I understood was “terrorists”. (P31)

It is likely that such instances also index the trainee teachers’ still developing capacity to effectively deal with challenging behaviour. The cumulative effect of such incidents was that many participants felt that they had to revert to more transactional forms of teaching in order to exercise better control of their class, and/or to performative pedagogy in order to satisfy the expectations of the programme.

### *Going Back to Basics*

The ‘transactional’ modes of language education that many participants enacted were shaped by strong normative influences in the context of Greek mainstream education. These

included prevailing beliefs about language, as well as policies and established practices connected with learning.

One of the most salient normative influences came from the beliefs that underpin language teaching and learning in mainstream education in Greece. For example, the view that language is an abstract system of grammatical rules that have to be learnt before they are applied in communication seemed to resonate in the way many participants talked about their lessons. The following quotes, by Participants 5 and 8, are typical of such discourse:

... in the previous lesson I had detected that students need more grammar activities in order ... to improve their speaking skills, [so] this lesson plan ... focused more on adjectives and their use of them to describe a person. (P5)

This specific lesson focused on enhancing students' grammar knowledge. The main aims [I] wanted to be achieved would be for students to understand, recognize and remember the verb "have got" in the affirmative, negative, and the interrogative form, by developing all the appropriate skills, and enhancing their writing, oral, listening and cognitive capacities. Henceforth, this teaching would present a more traditional methodology, with the theory of the verb "Have got" being introduced to the learners and grammar drills being prepared for students to work on them... (P8)

Another salient view related to the primacy of the written forms of the language, which led many teachers to prioritise teaching the Greek alphabet and engaging in reading comprehension. Participant 10 describes such a lesson, which seems to be premised on the importance attached to learning how to accurately write and read, even at the risk of derailing the rest of the lesson.

I distributed this worksheet I made on my own because in previous lessons I noted that some students were still confused about the sounds of the Greek alphabet that were unfamiliar to their language, like /h/ of χ which is not common in French .... I also wanted to do exercise 2 (with sounds and circling the right word from the worksheet of lesson 2), so as to be sure that pronunciation would no longer be a blur spot. Due to the fact that most students hadn't brought the worksheet of lesson 2 and the fact that I could

photocopy my worksheet, I wrote the words of the exercise on the board so as everyone to see them, but this caused a great delay and I went out of schedule completely. However, at the end of the lesson, we managed to read the text about Alexander (I insisted on pronunciation and reading). (P10)

This quote also showcases another common normative influence associated with mainstream language education: the emphasis on accuracy. Similar statements were found in many reflections, such as the following succinct lesson description: “we conjugated nouns in their notebooks [which] was not fun for the children, but I believe that activities of this kind are necessary too, because they need to be familiar with the correct spelling and conjugation of masculine nouns.” (P2)

Another set of normative influences that seemed to shape ‘transactional’ thinking in many participant reflections connected to mainstream beliefs about teaching and learning. For example, many participants enacted teacher-directed activities such as the following: “The younger students [...] didn’t remember the conjugation of the verb ‘to be’ so I had to revise it and write it on the board again” (P7) or “most of the students answered the vocabulary drills” (P8). Although most participants realised the pragmatic reasons why students could not effectively engage with homework, many felt that they had to justify why they did not assign homework tasks (“It would undermine me if I were to say ‘do this’, and then nobody did it, because of the real-world challenges they face”, P31). Others, like P9, mentioned their frustration that assigned tasks were not completed:

...they kept on neglecting their homework. None of them wrote two simple sentences describing their morning routines, as I had asked them to do. However, when I reminded them [of] the task, two of them were eager to write the sentences. The rest three claimed they did not know how to fulfill the task. Therefore, I placed them on adjacent desks and I sat next to them; to my surprise, they immediately responded and completed the sentences with considerable ease. Where is the problem then? (P9)

The washback effect of school exams and citizenship tests (which include an examination in Modern Greek) was also discussed as another normative influence which shaped the participants' thinking. As Participant 2 notes, developing communicative competence would be a low priority for her student, because:

...the communicative skills are not at all assessed at the examinations she will face in the next years. Most of the assessments and the exams are targeted to examine the level of accuracy and proficiency in [the] Greek language by pre-made tests and not by dialogue and communication. (P2)

Together, these influences generated an understanding of language education pedagogy that comprised delivering theoretical input, systematic practice, and examination preparation, and thus conformed to prevailing expectations in the schools where participants were placed.

### *Performative Pedagogy*

Another way in which participants adjusted to the challenges of their teaching placement, usually in parallel with transactional teaching, was by developing a kind of 'performative pedagogy', which involved activities with game-like characteristics, the extensive use of digital media, identity texts (Cummins, 2006) and token references to literature recommendations.

Many participants quickly found that it is easy to generate and sustain student motivation using game-like activities (e.g., "There were activities such as games and other multimodal ones that attracted their [i.e., the students'] attention, whereas there were others such as more traditional ones that did not seem to be preferred", P19). Though game-like, these activities usually conformed with transactional forms of teaching, as they involved doing things such as scoring points for grammatically accurate answers or "finding the correct

word” (P20). Extensive use was made of digital technology, such as videos and online resources, even though the pedagogical rationale was not always described with clarity, as seen below:

Students watched two videos and read a text concerning the parts of the house, in order to obtain new knowledge. Activities on a tablet, drawings, and one multiple-choice activity were selected by the teacher, in order for students to exercise the new vocabulary. (P5)

In their reflective comments, participants tended to appraise these activities very positively, often describing them as ‘creative’ and making extensive references to their high ‘fun’ value (e.g., “Students really liked the video”, P12; “fun activities and online material should be used whenever possible”; P19).

A further characteristic of performative pedagogy was the high visibility of activities and statements that were considered ‘expected’ due to their salience in the pedagogical materials of the programme. For example, most participants used variations of ‘identity texts’ (Cummins, 2006) in their classes. As seen below, the discussion of identity texts often made references to LRM course content:

Another strong part of the lesson was the creation of an identity text assigned as homework, which has the ability to build on students’ existing knowledge learnt in their mother tongue, without them having to start from a zero level (Cummins & Early, 2011). This way, students are not just passive learners, but they are given the opportunity to present themselves in multimodality (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013), in this case with both writing and drawing. In the next lesson, where students had to present their work, they were very eager to present their drawings, talk about them, share their experiences and feel more accepted. The “openness” of the task let students’ imagination take action, the identity texts functioned as a bridge with their background and students moved a step towards becoming more independent learners. (P12)

However, and interestingly, such activities were often re-interpreted in lines that were more consistent with transactional pedagogy, such as language practice and the reproduction of

linguistic structure. In a typical example, it was suggested that the production of identity texts helped students “gain some confidence in writing in Greek by providing them with structure and examples and offering them the opportunity to employ well-known words” (P18). Similar performative moves were encountered in many reflections, where frequent mention was made of activities that employed multimodality, translanguaging and group-work, as in the following example: “Multimodality and identity texts, translanguaging, peer collaboration (García & [Li] Wei, 2017), Task Based Pedagogy (TBLT) and the focus on meaning approach (Ellis, 2009) proved to be very effective” (P13).

### Growing and Challenging

Some participants remained in the transactional and performative modes of language education throughout their placement, but this was not a universal experience. In many cases, as participants began to develop more confidence, they experimented with more creative modes of teaching. An example of this process of growth is described below:

What I realized after the end of the lesson, is that teaching refugee students is a challenging, but not a terrifying experience. Although, there may be cases with children carrying more difficult personalities, learning difficulties and other important circumstances, in my point of view, the most important thing for a teacher, is to believe in himself and his capacities and try to deal with every discipline problem quickly and effectively. (P28)

With increasing confidence and competence in solving many of the ‘survival’ issues, the participants steadily became more alert to teaching opportunities and more deliberate in their actions, which led to more creative and purposeful teaching.

One of the noticeable changes was the re-emergence of the teachers' purposeful decision-making. Participant 8 explains the rationale behind one of her 'later' lessons as follows:

This time I wanted to conduct a lesson with humanistic impact on students. Throughout my working experience as an English teacher, I choose every year to conduct a lesson devoted to the basic rights of children, since I believe that it is of utmost importance for them to know from their young age which are their rights. [...] Thus, my main aim was for the students to be able to learn, understand and remember the basic rights of the children and the related knowledge, while simultaneously enhancing their linguistic, speaking and listening skills, as well as, their pronunciation, through interactive videos and collaborative creative activities. (P8)

She went on to describe that she was "really amazed" by the outcome, including especially the way the students had cooperated to create a multilingual poster, and that she "left the classroom with a feeling of fulfilment". Elsewhere in the data, another participant talked about how she noticed that some girls in her group seemed reluctant to speak and provided them with extra practice:

I have noticed that the girls do not talk much. I have encouraged them to participate, but they seem to have difficulties. One of them admitted that she finds it hard to sustain a conversation in Greek. So, I thought that in today's lesson I would give her the chance to prepare dialogues and practice them on her own. (P4, translated)

Both these examples, and similar instances in the data, suggest that the participants were eventually able to become less reactive to classroom events and normative influences and that they began to experiment with affecting change.

Another characteristic that became more visible in the data was a more meaningful interaction with the students. At a minimum, this involved investing time and effort in learning about them: one participant noted that although she had been given background

information about the students by their class teacher, throughout her placement she “found out things not even she [i.e., the teacher] knew, especially concerning their wishes and their goals” (P24). It also meant that participants became more flexible in negotiating the students’ needs, strengths, and interests with them and accordingly adjusting the learning experience (e.g., “...having completed the main vocabulary corpus that is set for this class level, it seemed useful to ask the students what other words they would like to learn”, P6).

These changes seemed to be associated with more flexible pedagogy. A common demand among students was for activities that had a real-life resonance, which was translated in class into a more extensive use of communicative language teaching. For instance, Participant 11 described how an authentic interaction with a student inspired a role-play activity:

S. had asked me where to go, in order to buy a needle and how to ask [for] it; he needed to mend his trousers. Thus, his requirement inspired me and I found it was an excellent opportunity for the students to learn how to ask and buy basic products that might serve their primary needs. To be more specific, the activity I designed [was a] simulation of a super-market, where students interchangeably played the roles of the consumer and the seller. Most of them enjoyed it. (P11)

Another feature of this more flexible pedagogy was the use of inclusive linguistic practices, such as bilingual materials and translanguaging (García & Li Wei, 2006). For instance, Participant 21, an experienced language teacher, describes how she read a story (*Elmer the Patchwork Elephant*) with a group of toddlers who lived in a refugee camp.

During story-telling alternating between English and Greek and at times French was not a problem and seemed quite natural to do actually. We started by the cover [of the storybook], though I had to skip a lot of parts of the story focusing only on key information (that’s when two of them started wandering around the container [i.e., the portable classroom which housed the kindergarten])

grabbing toys!) So, I had to change my tone of voice calling them back to see Elmer [...]. Eliciting their response by pointing to the pictures was effective, for example: “What is the problem with Elmer? “Τι βλέπετε;” [‘what can you see?’]” “Κυρία, Έλμερ colour, όλοι grey” [Miss, Elmer colour, everyone grey]. Moreover, it was strange and funny at the same time to hear the following: “Elmer you” laughing at me. (P21)

In a somewhat bolder case, a teacher tested the limits of the monolingual practices of the school where she was placed: she engaged her students, who were members of a minoritized linguistic group, in a debate about whether lesson outputs, such as posters with classroom rules or the rules of a boardgame that they were creating, should be written exclusively in Modern Greek or whether their native language should also be allowed at school.

These practices seemed to challenge the participants’ perceptions about linguistically-othered people. Although many reflections, especially at the beginning of the teaching placement, tended to describe students in deficit terms (e.g., “Two students display deficiencies in their mother language”, P15; “They hardly spoke any Greek or English, so it was hard to communicate”, P26), this thinking was challenged. This included awareness that adult students, who work while attending language courses in a foreign country, cannot possibly be judged against stereotypes of “good students” (P10), that everybody, “what his first language is, or what his background is, with the right guidance and support, can thrive through education” (P2), but that we should not take their readiness for granted as they may be processing difficult experiences (P15).

## Discussion

The reflections that the participants shared reveal that they were actively engaged in meaning-making that attempted to synthesise intentional structures (Stelma & Kostoulas,

2021) in the ecologies in which they found themselves. At the start of their teacher placement, the intentional structures that were most salient connected to themselves as individuals: these included a strong sense of purpose, as well as feelings of apprehension. To a certain extent, they also reflected the goals and views to which they had been exposed during the postgraduate programme, that is, meaning-making potential that was derived from the course content.

The pressures of teaching in a challenging environment, however, sometimes coupled with a sense of insecurity, seemed to erode this initial stance. The prevailing beliefs associated with language and teaching, which seemed salient in many of the schools where the participants were placed, appear to have exercised a strong normative effect on the participants' thinking. This effect, coupled with the residual influence of the 'apprenticeship of observation' (Borg, 2004; Lortie, 1975), may have been the driving force behind the emergence of a 'transactional' (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021) form of teaching and learning, which prioritised the efficient transmission of metalinguistic content and the accurate (re)production of a linguistic standard.

At the same time, the interaction between the participants and their students generated a kind of 'shared intentionality' (Tomassello & Carpenter, 2007), which prioritised activities that were considered pleasurable and innovative. Interestingly, these activities tended to retain the core properties of transactional learning (e.g., focus on grammatical form, accuracy), which meant that they did not truly disrupt the local ecology. Many participants also made an effort to ensure that these activities also had at least some superficial connection with LRM course content (e.g., through token references to

translanguaging, multimodality, and group work). The performative pedagogy that emerged appeared to be a product of an attempt to synthesise normative pressures from the LRM programme and the host school, as well as shared intentionality that emerged in the classroom.

The new configuration of thinking that emerged as the participants grew in confidence could be described as a re-emergence of individual and shared intentionality (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021). The former might be traced in teaching that reflected not just aspects of the language teaching syllabus but also a broad range of personal values and ideas about social justice. The increased salience, in the participants' discourse, of specific learner needs, and the references to joint negotiation of aims and methods, suggest the emergence of a shared intentionality. It is also interesting to note that many teachers made explicit reference to the differences between their way of teaching and expectations, which suggested that they were aware of how they seemed to be disrupting norms and –perhaps– leading positive change.

A secondary aim of the study was to trace how practicum participants reflectively engaged with the meaning-making potential that was present in their teaching environment. There was an initial expectation that it might be possible to trace a developmental trajectory from 'weak' to 'strong' forms of reflection (Farrell, 2022), and possibly that the changes in teaching might be associated with stronger forms of reflection. Such a pattern proved hard to trace in the data. An examination of the extracts presented above, which span the entire practicum, reveals that most of the reflections appear to be relatively descriptive in content, and that introspective or critical commentary was generally not present. Two notable exceptions are the frequent mentions of initial stress and occasional references to feelings of

loss associated with the departure of students or the conclusion of the practicum. One can only speculate as to why this would be the case, but one plausible reason might be that these notes were submitted as part of a package that would be assessed, leading many participants to self-censor. Alternatively, the relatively focused timeframe (six to eight weeks of teaching, plus a short follow-up period at the end of the semester) might have been too narrow for participants to develop more penetrative reflective styles.

### Limitations, Future Directions, and Implications

The usual caveats about small-scale qualitative inquiries apply in this case too. The nature of qualitative work means that findings are not intended for generalisation to broader populations or different settings. Similarly, readers should be aware of the limitations of self-reported data, especially when produced for assessment purposes. Such limitations suggest a need for future empirical work that can extend the insights generated in this study. Such research might include studies that aim to establish the local validity of the intentional dynamics model (Stelma & Kostoulas, 2021) in other settings, as well as studies that use different research designs to triangulate the findings reported here.

Turning to the implications of the study for practice, the findings appear to be relevant to the education of linguistically- and culturally-othered populations, language education in general, and teacher education. Concerning the education of refugees and migrants, the study revealed a degree of tension between normative beliefs that shape teachers' thinking and shared intentionality, which is generated from interaction with the learners. However, learners with a refugee and/or migrant background often lack the linguistic resources that can help them participate meaningfully in such interactions, and their experience of schooling

and ways to learn may be relatively restricted. In the teaching placements discussed above, this sometimes resulted in teaching that emphasised the delivery of content that was of peripheral importance to the learners, while more important priorities were perhaps neglected. It, therefore, seems important that teachers who work with such populations are either experienced in engaging learners in collaborative forms of teaching and learning, or that they are provided with adequate support to jointly develop lessons and learning sequences that reflect the learners' strengths, interests, and needs.

Turning to the question of language education, the teachers' reflections seem to lend credence to the 'appropriate methodology' argument (Holiday, 1994, 2016), which holds that teaching should be responsive to local circumstances. The participants' transition from the taught modules of the postgraduate programme to the locus of their teaching placement was also a transition between two very different 'ecologies of ideas' (Bateson, 1987). The participants' perceived need to conform to both sets of beliefs and practices led to the emergence of a theoretically incoherent performative pedagogy, which preserved the outward characteristics of pedagogical suggestions taught in the postgraduate programme, while maintaining conformity with the teaching ethos of the host school. Identifying this discrepancy should not be interpreted as an instruction for language teachers to avoid anything that might disrupt prevailing practice, as this would stunt the profession's ability to evolve. Rather, it suggests a need to help teachers negotiate these differences in more structured ways, and to encourage the development of teaching practices that meaningfully synthesise their own intentionality, as well as other forms of meaning-making potential that are present in the local context.

Finally, with regard to teacher education, the findings of this small-scale study seem to have implications for how theory and practice may be synthesised. The transition difficulties that many participants reported suggest that the mere addition of a teaching placement at the end of a teacher education programme may not be adequate to foster professional growth. The normative pressures experienced in the locus of the practicum may be such that they cancel out the effects of engagement with the theoretical content of the course, or they may lead to superficial conformity with 'best practice' recommendations while remaining fundamentally consistent with the status quo. It seems necessary that such placements are accompanied by a strong and purposeful reflective component, which could help to uncover tensions between individual intentionality, shared meaning-making potential, influences derived from the textbooks and curricula, and socioculturally encoded beliefs and practices. Although this study failed to find traces of how participants achieved such a personally meaningful synthesis, and how this led to more effective teaching, it may be helpful to continue to actively look for ways that might foster such growth.

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**Table 1***Participants' demographic information*

	N	%
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	29	97%
Male	1	3%
Non-binary	0	0%
Prefer not to disclose	0	0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>100%</i>
<u>Age</u>		
22-30	12	40%
31-45	16	53%
46<	2	7%
Prefer not to disclose	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>100%</i>
<u>Previous teaching experience</u>		
State Primary education	13	<i>(multiple responses per participant)</i>
State Secondary education	6	
State-run Inclusive Education services	5	
Non-state/Private Education	18	
Informal education providers (e.g., NGOs)	4	
Other	2	
<u>Pre-service teacher education</u>		
BA Pre-School Education	4	13%
BA Primary Education	7	23%
BA Greek language, literature or history	9	29%
BA Modern Foreign Languages (English, French or German)	9	29%
BA other Social Sciences	1	3%
Other	1	3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>31</i>

**Table 2**

*Sample questions from the pre-course survey*

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<i>Question</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In what ways do you think that your pre-service [i.e., undergraduate] teacher placement has benefited you?</li><li>• What was the greatest challenge you faced in your [i.e., undergraduate] teacher placement? How did you cope?</li><li>• In what ways do you expect the LRM practicum will benefit and empower you as a teacher?</li><li>• In what ways do you expect that the LRM practicum will be different from your pre-service teaching placement or previous teaching?</li><li>• What do you expect will be the greatest challenge that you will face during the LRM practicum?</li></ul>

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