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# Mediating the Learning of a Student with Dyslexia in a Greek Supplementary School in the UK

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## Abstract

This paper's aim was to investigate a second language teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning and her practices in relation to a student with dyslexia from a sociocultural perspective. It first referred to studies on teachers' beliefs and practices, then the concepts of mediation, scaffolding and zone of proximal development were defined and studies on mediation and scaffolding were reviewed. The data from the interview with the teacher and the classroom observations were analyzed and compared. The study illustrated that the teacher's practices were not always consistent with her beliefs of how students with dyslexia learn better. Her teaching practice did not always have a theoretical concept behind it either. The observation of her lessons demonstrated though an effective use of multisensory methods, actions, objects and scaffolding to mediate a student's with dyslexia learning. In the end of the chapter suggestions for teachers of students with dyslexia in similar settings are given based on the data.

**Keywords:** teacher's beliefs, teacher practice, dyslexia, zone of proximal development, mediation, multisensory methods

## 1. Introduction

This paper's aim was to investigate a second language teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning and her practices in relation to a student with dyslexia from a sociocultural perspective. It first referred to studies on teachers' beliefs and practices, then the concepts of mediation, scaffolding and zone of proximal development were defined and studies on mediation and scaffolding were reviewed. The data from the interview with the teacher and the classroom observations were analyzed and compared. Although it was a small scale study and the conclusions cannot be generalized, the observation data along with the interview data demonstrate the usefulness of multisensory methods and collaborative learning for teaching foreign languages to the specific student with dyslexia and other students in similar settings.

### 1.1 Research on teachers' beliefs and practices

According to Borg (2015), teachers' beliefs influence teachers teaching practices, their actions and reactions to educational changes such as inclusion [1]. For this reason, this article investigates the relationship of a teacher's beliefs with her classroom practice in relation to the inclusion of a student with dyslexia.

After the 2000's research scholars begin to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices through the lens of the sociocultural theory focusing on beliefs as a complex system, and the connections between beliefs and change or actions [2]. Studies on teachers' beliefs and practice on dyslexia have been conducted with a variety of methods: surveys, interviews, narrative life history interviews, focus groups, observations.

Nijakowska (2000) conducted a survey study with 38 language primary and secondary teachers in Poland on teachers' knowledge and the support they offer to students with dyslexia [3]. Among other issues investigated whether teachers were familiar with the notion of multisensory teaching, if they apply any special methods of work with students with dyslexia and, if they give more time to students with dyslexia to complete a task when they need it. The findings showed inconsistencies between what teachers believed and knew and what they actually practiced: while 20 per cent of the teachers were familiar with multisensory teaching, only 15 per cent claimed that they had applied special methods and techniques with dyslexic students and even though 76 per cent admitted that children with dyslexia usually need more time to carry out an activity than other students, not more than 66 per cent allowed their dyslexic students more time when they need it to complete a task and only half of them did it during exams [3].

Kormos and Nijakowska (2016) conducted another survey study in order to investigate whether language teachers' self-confidence, self-efficacy and attitudes to using inclusive educational practices with dyslexic students are different before and after participation in an online training course. The study showed that EFL teachers tend to feel unable to use inclusive practices with students with dyslexia without training but after the training teachers' attitudes were more positive towards inclusion and their concerns were lower than before [4].

Nijakowska et al. (2018) conducted a more recent survey study in order to compare across different countries the beliefs of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) about their preparedness to include dyslexic learners in mainstream classrooms in Greece, Cyprus, and Poland and identify the training needs of teachers. The study showed that the teachers who had direct contact with students with dyslexia felt more prepared to include those students. There were similar findings among countries regarding the need for training which was indicated in the previous studies as well [5].

Tzanni (2018) also conducted a survey study exploring Greek EFL teachers' beliefs and practices related to differentiated instruction using an online questionnaire and quantitative analysis [6]. The study showed that although the EFL teachers had positive beliefs towards differentiation, in practice, they differentiated less than we might have expected which may happen because of lack of training or lack of preparation time [6]. This finding is similar to the inconsistency in teachers' beliefs and practices shown in Nijakowska (2000) [3].

Arapogianni (2003) conducted a small scale survey study with a different method than the previous studies, interviews with 8 secondary school teachers in Patras in Greece investigating the approaches used by teachers to support students with dyslexia in the classroom as well as their knowledge and training on dyslexia and their collaboration with other professionals [7]. Her study showed that the majority of the teachers did not know what to do to support students with dyslexia in the classroom as they did not have any training on dyslexia and had a lack of understanding about the nature of the students' difficulties. Because of their lack of knowledge they felt that they were not responsible for providing intervention. In this study I investigate a teacher's beliefs, knowledge and practice of teaching methods for dyslexia using interviews as Arapogianni (2003) did [7].

Schumm et al. (1994) have conducted research on general education teachers' beliefs, skills and practices in planning and making adaptations for mainstreamed students with learning disabilities. They first conducted a survey, as the studies mentioned before did, with sixty teachers in the U.S and then they conducted semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with twelve from the first sample. They investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs, skills and practices and they found out that there are gaps between them. Although the teachers in this study were skilled in adapting course content and they considered adaptations as useful they did not actually do so because they were not practically able to do so because of lack of time [8]. This study showed inconsistency in teachers' beliefs and practices as in [3, 6] but unlike other studies, it used multiple methods of data collection.

Del Rosario (2006) also used a series of narrative interviews focusing on situations and events in order to investigate a high school English teacher's beliefs about teaching learning disabled students [9]. The study shows the importance of persistence and compromise in developing relationships with students.

Woolhouse (2012) conducted a qualitative study investigating the influence on teachers' identity of the training that they undertook in order to support students with dyslexia. The data were gathered through focus groups and narrative life history interviews conducted with teachers on a Specialist Dyslexia Training for Teachers Programme. The data suggested that the teachers who received training on dyslexia viewed themselves as distinct from other teachers in their schools and identified with the pupils they supported [10]. Aas (2019) conducted another qualitative study using content analysis of audio recordings of elementary school teachers' team meetings in order to investigate teachers' beliefs about student needs and teacher role and how these beliefs can challenge development towards a more inclusive practice. The study showed a general positive attitude of the school teachers towards inclusion but there were some aspects of teachers' beliefs that may prevent the development towards inclusive practice. These beliefs were: a limited view on learning focusing only on students' academic skills and not social skills, the idea of teacher centering disregarding learning that comes from collaboration and individualization which means that student needs were understood as individual problems that require time consuming adaptation [11].

This study investigated a teacher's beliefs and practices from a sociocultural perspective, using both interviews and observations as in Schumm et al's study (1994) [8] in the context of a Greek as a second language class with a student with dyslexia. The concepts of mediation, scaffolding and Zone of Proximal development which guided the analysis of the data in this study will be defined next.

## **1.2 Sociocultural theory**

According to sociocultural theory, 'students need to be actively involved in the co-construction of knowledge through participation in a dialogue with teacher, texts and peers ...' [12]. Sociocultural theory is opposed to the empiricist idea of knowledge according to which students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge [12]. According to Vygotsky and Feuerstein, learning takes place through interaction with other people [13]. Therefore, it is through language that thinking develops and learning occurs [13].

According to Vygotsky and sociocultural theory, the human mind is mediated by symbolic tools, the most important of which is language [14]. Therefore, for Vygotsky, mediation is the use of symbolic tools in order to organize and control mental processes such as voluntary attention, problem-solving, planning and evaluation, memory and intentional learning [15] or to establish a relationship with

others and with ourselves [14]. Language can be used to help learners move into their zone of proximal development [ZPD], that is to the layer of skill or knowledge which is beyond the learner's abilities [13].

Bruner expanded on Vygotsky and used the concept of 'scaffolding' to refer to this idea of a teacher or an adult supporting a child through dialog so that the child can carry out a difficult task [16]. Scaffolding can be done by checking what the students know and what they can do first and then by incorporating what they know and say into the discourse in order to move to the next level [16].

Mercer (1995) points out that in the scaffolding process both the teacher and the learner are actively involved in the construction of knowledge [16]. Therefore, the difference between the idea of mediating and the traditional idea of teaching as disseminating information is that mediation is concerned with empowering learners and helping them to acquire the skills that they need in order to learn more, to solve problems and become autonomous learners and independent thinkers [13]. Mediation, according to Feuerstein also involves sharing, co-operation among learners but also recognition of their own individuality and uniqueness [13].

Co-operation among learners can take place with collaborative dialog which, according to Swain (2000) is 'problem-solving' and 'knowledge building' dialog [17]. 'Through saying and reflecting on what was said new knowledge is constructed' [17]. Mercer (1995) also claims that collaborative learning is very important because explaining something to a friend and arguing with someone helps you improve and revise your understanding [13].

Both Williams and Burden (1997) and Mercer (1995) argue that co-operation and sharing are ways of interacting that need to be taught to learners [13, 16]. According to Mercer (1995) learners should not be expected to make the rules they are expected to follow themselves. They need to know the rules, the rationale and principles of a collaborative activity [16].

### **1.3 Examples of the use of mediation/scaffolding in the literature**

Beynon (2004) used the idea of mediation with non-reading adolescents in a multilingual and multicultural class of English as a second language in Johannesburg [18]. Beynon (2004) used the Multiliteracies approach to help these adolescents read. This is a way of mediating literacy by using a range of modalities - written and spoken language, sound, images, gestures and action - in order to make it accessible for each learner. Beynon (2004) argues that this approach allows both the teacher and the learner to be actively involved in the learning process and the construction of meaning. According to this approach, the teacher also 'mediates' her practice, adapts the curriculum and her instruction to meet the needs of each child and she takes into account the pedagogic history of each child. The students form collaborative groups in which the stronger students help the weaker. The students have to retell a story using their preferred modality, acting it out in small collaborative groups or drawing and painting it on paper and then they move on to learning to read the words they met in the story by using flashcards, games, dough. The fact that they have already met and acted out the words they try to read on flashcards and in the text of the story gives them meaning and a purpose for reading [18].

Donato's (1998) study addresses the role of collective scaffolding in the learning of French. Participants' knowledge of language such as the compound past tense formation of reflective verbs in French has been acquired through the process of collective scaffolding by all the participants [19]. Both Ohta (2000) and Swain (2000) also investigated the usefulness of collaborative dialog between adult learners of a foreign and a second language [20, 17]. Ohta (2000) found out that the collaboration and sensitive assistance from another learner can help a language learner

become more independent and is useful for the internalization of L2 grammar while Swain's (2000) study has shown that it is useful for learning strategic processes as well as grammar [20, 17]. It would be interesting to investigate whether this can work with L2 learners.

De Guerrero and Villamil (2012) have also investigated peer revision scaffolding in an ESL writing classroom using qualitative methods and analyzing the interaction. The study showed that both students can be active partners and provide mutual scaffolding to each other [21].

Another study that investigated peer scaffolding was Lin and Samuel's (2013) qualitative study. The study examined the types of scaffolds used by students during peer response sessions and investigated how scaffolding facilitates learning. It was a case study that involved a group of six mixed-proficiency level students from a secondary school in Malaysia. Multiple methods were used; observation, interviews and fieldnotes. The study showed that the correction of errors in vocabulary and grammar as well as the use of questions were both effective scaffolds that helped weaker students progress in their writing skills. The implication of this study is that peer scaffolding can benefit students in the teaching and learning of writing [22].

Similarly, Khaliliaqdam (2014) conducted a case study based on Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding in the ZPD [23]. This case study attempted to examine the role of scaffolding via communicative activities in terms of development of basic speech on foreign language adult learners of EFL. The six students who participated in the study were asked to create the sentences with the help of the teachers. Then a series of pictures were given to them and they had to tell a story based on the pictures. During each scaffolding session, the adult experimenter negotiated meaning by asking questions and provided them the vocabulary needed in order to help them describe the pictures or illustrations. The analysis of this quantitative study shows that expert-novice group work created more learning opportunities than unassisted group work. This study also demonstrates the importance of purposeful interaction in making language scaffolding an effective tool for language development among adult foreign language learners [23].

Middleton (2004) investigated the ways in which teachers scaffolded and mediated the learning of children with specific learning difficulties in a special school. The researcher observed and analyzed qualitatively Mathematics and Guided Writing lessons. She found out that the teacher used tools to mediate students' learning: she used mathematical shapes like a cuboid and objects like a book or an A4 paper, and pointed to parts of them to demonstrate their properties and differences. She used her hands and some glasses to demonstrate the concept of symmetry. She also pointed to the board to elicit an answer and she gave a student a chart containing the answers in order to avoid giving him the answer [24].

The present study investigated the issues of mediation and scaffolding in the context of both a foreign language class and with a student with dyslexia, a combination which has not been addressed a lot by the literature.

#### **1.4 Multisensory teaching**

The teacher's knowledge and use of the direct multisensory structured approach is examined in this study. It is considered effective for teaching reading and spelling in the native language to children with dyslexia. The multisensory structured learning (MSL) style has been found effective for foreign language instruction as well [25–28]. The MSL approach teaches elements of the foreign language (the sound and spelling system, vocabulary and grammatical structures) through the auditory, visual, tactile and kinaesthetic pathways [29]. The presentation of new language with the use of as many modalities as possible benefit individuals with dyslexia.

A person with dyslexia learns how to read and spell words by hearing, seeing and pronouncing them [29]. When learning a new word, students repeat the word several times after the teacher (auditory channel), draw a picture to help memorization (visual channel) and act it out (kinaesthetic channel) [30].

## **2. The study**

### **2.1 Aims**

This study investigated a teacher's beliefs about how dyslexic students can learn better and compared her reported beliefs with her teaching practice, that is, the way she presented the new language and the way she mediated and scaffolded students' with and without dyslexia learning. The study also discussed her views on collaborative learning in relation to students with dyslexia and in relation to her practice.

### **2.2 The context**

The study was conducted in a Greek Community school in the UK. There were seven students in that class aged 8–13 years who were bilingual in Greek and English and had Greek or Greek-Cypriot parents. The class was mixed ability and included two levels, five students at pre-intermediate level which is called 1B and two students at upper-intermediate level which is called 5A. The class was chosen as I was informed by the teacher that there was a student with an assessment of dyslexia aged 10 at the 1B level. The teacher had 11 years of teaching experience and was from Cyprus. She had a BA in primary Education from Cyprus and an MA in Inclusion from the UK and had attended two seminars on dyslexia in Cyprus.

### **2.3 Methods**

I chose the approach of a case study, that is, a research strategy where the focus is on a case in its own right and taking its context into account and which involved multiple methods of data collection because I was interested in an in depth analysis of a teacher's views on pedagogy and her classroom practices [31]. I used two methods of data collection in order to compare between what the teacher said she believes and my perception of what she does: I first observed two of lessons in the same class and then I interviewed the teacher after the observations. The data were audio recorded and transcribed. Both the observations and the interview with the teacher were part of a wider study. I transcribed the questions from the interview which had to do with the teacher's beliefs about the teaching and learning of students with dyslexia and her ideas about collaborative learning which is a feature of mediation on which I would like to focus. I chose and transcribed one extract from the first lesson I observed and some extracts from the second lesson which show the scaffolding the teacher does with the student with dyslexia and other students in the class and how her ideas about teaching and learning are practiced. The interviews with participants were conducted in the Greek language and they were transcribed and translated into English. This process involved construction of meaning and interpretations by the transcriber and translator [32].

The selection of the schools was guided by convenience, that is, the accessibility of the school and the availability of individuals in them due to professional contacts [33, 34]. The headteacher had also given the researcher the information that there was a pupil with dyslexia in the class that was chosen. The teacher selected was the one who had a pupil with dyslexia in her classes and who agreed

to participate in the study after being informed about its aims and procedure. The criterion for choosing the pupil was a dyslexia diagnosis and the parents' informed consent to participate in the study.

Since the student had not reached the age or maturity to be able to give informed consent I asked for the consent of her parents following BERA's guidelines [35]. The parents of the student with dyslexia were informed through a letter describing my study and their child's role in it and were asked to sign a consent form. The researcher made sure that the student with dyslexia did not suffer any psychological harm from the research [35]. For this reason the researcher did not sit near the student with dyslexia during the observation in order not to embarrass her and her diagnosis was not disclosed to other students in the class. Furthermore, in order not to identify the school and the participants, codes were used for the pupils (P, S1, S2) and the teacher (T) and the name of the name or location of the school was not disclosed.

Considering this was a small case study there is no generalizability of the conclusions as in quantitative studies. The findings can be applied in order to understand another similar situation [36]. The applicability of the findings from this case study to other foreign language classrooms depends on how far the case shares similar features with other foreign language classes, their teachers and other students with dyslexia. Such features may be class size, age of the students and the difficulties and abilities of other students with dyslexia [37].

## **2.4 The lessons**

The first lesson I observed included the following activities for the pre-intermediate level: spelling from the previous lesson, students' reading the text from the previous lesson, exercises from the previous lesson, the teacher reading the new text and practice with exercises from the book and writing sentences with the new vocabulary.

The second lesson I observed included the following activities: spelling from the previous lesson, students' reading the text from the previous lesson, the teacher reading the new text, the teacher checking students' understanding of new vocabulary, the teacher reading the text again and the students repeating and translating the sentences and practice.

## **3. Analysis-discussion of data**

### **3.1 Use of visual modality**

The teacher believed that in the presentation of grammar it is better to show students with dyslexia a grammar rule with examples and signs like a smile under -o to show the letter omega ( $\Omega$ ), as this picture will remain in their mind:

T It is better to do, let us say what I imagine instead of telling them that the verbs that end in -o are always written with omega, it is better to show it to them ... to make many verbs and in the end the -o to do it with a smile and tell them look. I think that this picture will stay in their mind more than the rule.

Extract 1: interview with teacher.

As extract 1 illustrates, the teacher believed that the use of the visual modality is particularly helpful for students with dyslexia in the presentation stage as she thought that it helps their memory. She said that she tries to use the visual modality, in the form of drawings in the activities they do as well. For example, in the second lesson I observed she asked the pre-intermediate level students to draw a picture of the sentences they wrote because she believed that they experience the new language better:

T Like two days ago ... that we learnt the in, under, on [that they had to] write a sentence but write next to it the picture as well, so that afterwards when they see it, let us say they had to write 'the glass is on the table' and make a picture, a table with a glass on it. I think that in this way they experience it better.

Extract 2: interview with teacher.

She also believed that this is useful for all the students not only the students with dyslexia:

Extract 3: interview with teacher.

T	And this is so for all the children, not only the dyslexic students=
M	=Yes
T	I mean the other children as well learn better in this way

The next extract from the second lesson I observed showed that she actually asked the students to make a picture of the sentences they would write:

Extract 4: lesson 2.

T	... I'm gonna write these words that, in, on, in front of ok? And then you have to make your own sentences, for example what can you say about μέσα?
S1	Το μωρό είναι μέσα στο κρεβάτι ( <i>The baby is in the bed</i> )
T	Ok and then when you write these sentence which (**) you have to make a picture of the baby in the bed

This section demonstrated that the teacher believed that the use of the visual modality is helpful for students with and without dyslexia for memorizing new vocabulary which is in line with multisensory teaching [29]. She also practiced this idea in the second lesson when she asked the students with dyslexia to write a sentence in Greek and then draw a picture of it.

It should be mentioned though that in the first lesson the students were asked to make sentences with the new words they met but the teacher did not ask them to draw a picture which means that this kind of exercise may not be done consistently. Maybe the interview with the researcher lead the teacher to practice her ideas in the second lesson observed.

### 3.2 Use of multisensory methods

I also investigated whether the teacher used multisensory methods because they have proved to be effective with students with dyslexia learning foreign languages [25–28]. Ganschow et al. (1998) have suggested that the teacher should accompany oral language in the foreign language with a visual example when teaching students with dyslexia, for example, writing the foreign language words on an overhead [38].

I noticed in the first lesson I observed that the teacher corrected a student's pronunciation by saying a word correctly and writing it at the same time, that is, by using two modalities as Ganschow et al (1998) suggest [38]. I asked the teacher why and she said that it helps them:

M I saw that in phonology when you wanted to say that something is pronounced somehow you wrote it as well

T Yes because mm it helps them to see as well as to hear it

Extract 5: interview with teacher.

It seems though that she has not realized that this is multisensory teaching as earlier in the interview she said that she has not used multisensory methods:

M I say about multisensory methods that is do you use many [senses], apart from visual, to listen or first to listen then to see, then to write

T I think this would work but I have not used it

Extract 6: interview with teacher.

This section showed that the teacher in this study uses different modalities in her lesson for example, the visual modality along with the auditory one. She does not realize that this is multisensory teaching though as in the interview she said she does not use this method.

### 3.3 Use of actions

The teacher also used another modality, the kinesthetic one when she presented the new vocabulary: after she read the new text, she asked the student with dyslexia (P) and then two more students (S2 and S3) to do some actions in order to check if they and the rest of the class knew some words including the new vocabulary (on, in, in front). This is in line with multisensory teaching [30].

Extract 7: lesson 2.

15	T	P μπορείς να φτάσεις πάνω στην καρέκλα; ( <i>P can you get on the chair?</i> )	<b>P gets on the chair</b>
16		Πού είναι η P; ( <i>Where is P?</i> )	<b>To the rest of the class</b>
17	S1	Πάνω καρέκλα ( <i>on chair</i> )	
18	T	()	
19	S1	Πάνω από το καρέκλα ( <i>on the chair</i> )	
20	T	Πάνω στην καρέκλα ( <i>on the chair</i> )	S2 stands in front of the chairs
21		ευχαριστώ κατέβα ( <i>thank you get off</i> )	
22		S2, μπορείς να φτάσεις μπροστά από εκείνες τις καρέκλες; ( <i>S2 can you get in front of these chairs?</i> )	
23			
24		S2 μπροστά (4 δευτ) Ευχαριστώ ( <i>S2 in front 4 secs. Thank you</i> ).	
25		S2 τι σημαίνει μπροστά; ( <i>S2 what does μπροστά mean?</i> )	
26	S2	In front	
27	P	In front (*)	

In extract 7 the teacher asked P in Greek to stand on the chair (line 15). In this way she checked if P understood the meaning of ‘πάνω’ in order to discover her ZPD and start the scaffolding process [15, 39]. Once P did what she was asked to do proving that she knew the word, then the teacher asked the rest of the class where P was in order to check if they could say ‘Πάνω στην καρέκλα’ (on the chair), checking their ZPD. Therefore, she tried to discover what the learners could do without help [40] A student attempted to answer (line 17) but she missed the article and in her second attempt she used the wrong article (το, line 19) so the teacher gave the correct answer in line 20. Then, she asked another student (S2) to stand in front of some chairs (line 22–23), she repeated μπροστά (line 24) and after he did it, she checked if he understood what μπροστά means. After this scaffolding process both S2 and P realized what μπροστά means (lines 26–27). The fact that the students were asked to act out the new vocabulary engaged them to think what it means and gave it meaning as happened in Beynon (2004) [18].

This section demonstrated the scaffolding process that the teacher in this study followed in order to help the student with dyslexia and the other students in the class understand and memorize the meaning of new vocabulary. She used the kinaesthetic modality that made the lesson more interesting and memorable for the student with dyslexia and the rest of the class.

## 3.4 Use of tools/objects

Extract 8: lesson 2.

Line	Speaker	Words said	Comments
1	T	Try and do sentences like you did here=	
2	P	=Yeah	
3	T	With these πάνω (.) What does πάνω mean? (4 sec)	The T writes the word in P's notebook
4	P	Is it she?	
5	T	Άκου (.) η κασετίνα είναι πάνω στο τραπέζι (Listen. The pencil case is on the table)	The T puts the pencil case on the table
6	P	Em (3 sec) πά-	
7	T	Πάνω	
8	P	Oh on	
9	T	Ναι (3 δευτ) Κοίτα (.) Ο μαρκαδόρος είναι	The T puts the pen in the pencil case
10		μέσα στην κασετίνα. (Yes (3 sec) Look. The	The T writes the words in P's
11		pen is in the pencil case)	notebook. She puts the pencil case
12		Μέσα, κάτω. Η κασετίνα είναι κάτω από το τραπέζι (in, under. The pencil case is under the table)	under the table
13	P	Underneath	

In the dialog in extract 8 the teacher explained to the student with dyslexia (P) what she had to do during practice. She confirmed that the student knew what the words she had to use to make sentences meant. In line 3 she asked her what 'πάνω' (on) means and when she found out that the student did not know, she used objects as tools to mediate her learning and avoid giving the answer to the student as the teacher in Middleton's (2004) study did; she put the pencil case on the table while saying η 'κασετίνα είναι πάνω στο τραπέζι' [the pencil case is on the table] (line 5) [19]. The result of this process is that the student managed to give the correct answer in line 8. Then, the teacher went to the next word, μέσα (in), and demonstrated its meaning by putting the pen in the pencil case while saying 'Ο μαρκαδόρος είναι μέσα στην κασετίνα' [the pen is in the pencil case] (line 9). Then, she showed the meaning of 'κάτω' [under] by putting the pencil case under the table while saying 'Η κασετίνα είναι κάτω από το τραπέζι' [the pencil case is under the table] (lines 11–12). In this way, the student was able to give the meaning of 'κάτω' (line 13).

At the interview I mentioned to the teacher that I found the use of actions and objects effective and she answered that they knew those words but they needed to see what they heard in order to remember them (extract 9):

M I saw that, what I liked [was] that you showed them with actions=.

T A the 'on, under' yes because only in this way they can understand, because they know them but you have to connect what they listen to see it visually as well in order to remember it more.

Extract 9: interview with teacher.

Furthermore, the teacher avoided giving the meaning of the new words immediately and elicited them instead by asking the students to perform actions and by giving them visual examples with objects because she thought the students knew the words already as she said that she did in extract 10:

T ...if it is something they know I may not do it so explicitly, if it is something that I know that it is the first time they are taught it would be moore=

M = Then you have to tell them.

T Yes

Extract 10: interview with teacher.

This section demonstrated the teacher's use of objects as tools when she tried to explain the meaning of the words used during the practice stage of the lesson. The teacher used the visual modality (showing the meaning with objects) along with the auditory one (listening to a sentence) in order to help students remember the meaning of the words she had already taught. It has to be mentioned though that in the first lesson observed there was no use of actions, tools or the visual modality. One reason may be that the new vocabulary of the second lesson (words for location) was easier to demonstrate visually or kinesthetically, with actions and objects.

### 3.5 Collaborative learning

The issue of collaborative learning for dyslexic students will be discussed next because paired learning, with spelling partners and peer tutoring have been reported by SENCOS to be effective in assisting dyslexic students [41]. Working on speaking tasks in small groups without having to worry about making errors, and without the pressure of having to perform in front of a large audience is advisable for students with dyslexia who also need a lot of planning time before they start a task [30]. Collaborative dialog and peer scaffolding between L2 learners has also been proved to be useful [17, 19–23].

The teacher told me at the interview (extract 11) that she would place the student with dyslexia next to a good student in order to help her which means that she thought that the collaboration between the student with dyslexia and another student would be beneficial.

T I would put her to sit with a child who first of all would not make fun of her and would help her that is with a good student, so that s/he would give her some help and I do not think that there would be a comparison, only to help her.

Extract 11: interview with teacher.

In practice though she did not interfere about where the student with dyslexia would sit and with whom in any of the lessons I observed and in the first one she stressed that the students should do an exercise by themselves (extract 12). She encouraged them to ask questions only to her:

Extract 12: lesson 1.

Speaker	Words said	Comments
T	You have to do (the reading) by yourselves. Thirty eight. Each one will do this exercise alone. Ok? You have to read (*) and write. You have an example. So (.) check you know the colors. If there are any words you do not know ask me	<i>Stressed word</i>

At the interview I asked the teacher to explain why she asked the students to work alone (extract 13, lines 39–40) and she answered that in the specific class I observed the work was sometimes done only by one student and the rest copied (line 42). For this reason, she did not consider collaboration useful if it meant copying. She preferred them to do the exercise by themselves so that she knew they have all understood it (lines 42–43). This is in agreement with Aljaafresh and Lantolf's (1994) argument that help from the expert to the novice should be contingent, that is, it should be offered only when it is needed, it should be kept to the minimum and should be withdrawn when it is not needed any more [39]. Therefore, this teacher probably thought that the students were able to do the task independently. This teacher may have been influenced by the idea that it is more important that students acquire academic skills than social skills found in Aas' study [11].

She mentioned though that in some other cases she encourages collaboration by asking students to help a weaker student or to listen to a ‘good’ student (lines 45–46).

Extract 13: interview with teacher.

39	M	=When you did exercises you told them do the exercises by yourselves which means that you did not want them to help each other
40		
41	T	Ah because in some cases one person does it, in the specific class I have, and then all the others copy. You know in order to know what each one has understood=
42		
43		
44	M	=Mmm
45	T	There are cases though that I say help let us say this person or listen for what let us say S4 will say who is the best [student] but there are cases that I know that they will copy from each other so there is no point, is there?
46		
47		
48		

I observed though that even though the teacher did not encourage the students to help each other in the first lesson, the student with dyslexia (P) asked the student sitting next to her for help in the same lesson; she asked what a word meant. I mentioned this to the teacher Line 49 who asked me whether S3 told P the answer or whether she helped her Line 52 which means that she distinguished between giving the answer and students helping each other.

Extract 14: interview with teacher.

49	M	Perhaps with P, I just saw that she worked with S3 and that this helped her.
50	T	S3 with P yes
51	M	Perhaps sitting together helps
52	T	Mmm You saw that she didn't tell her [the answers] she helped her
53	M	I saw that she worked alone but when she wanted to ask what does this mean=
54	T	Yes
55	M	She asked her let's say instead of being ashamed of asking you=
56	T	=Mmm
57	M	It is better to ask the other student=
58	T	=Yes
59	M	Of course you should know=
60	T	=yes yes
61	M	Not to copy, to watch what's going on
62	T	Yes yes

One could argue though that this teacher chose the easy solution of not letting the students work in pairs or groups instead of training them on how to do so. Both Williams and Burden (1997) and Mercer (1995) argue that co-operation and sharing are ways of interacting that need to be taught to learners [13, 16]. Mercer (1995) argues that learners should not be expected to make the rules they are expected to follow themselves [16]. They need to know the rules, the rationale and principles of a collaborative activity [16].

It has to be mentioned though, that pair and group work was something not very common in Greek primary school classrooms until recently as class teachers

considered behavior management more important than collaboration and they thought that learning should come from the teacher which are ideas that also were found in Aas study (2019) [11]. Previous research in a Greek state and a private school has shown that Greek teachers do not encourage group or pair work unless the exercise asks for it because they think it does not work [42]. This may be the case in Cyprus where the teacher in this study comes from and where she has worked for eight years.

When I suggested that it's better for the student with dyslexia to ask her partner what something means instead of asking her and being embarrassed (58–60), the teacher agreed (line 61). She also agreed with my suggestion that she should monitor them and make sure they do not copy (lines 62–65) but we cannot know why she agreed, because she was convinced or just to please me.

This section showed that the teacher in this study considered beneficial the collaboration between a student with dyslexia and a stronger student but in practice in the lessons observed she did not encourage collaboration between the students in this class. This happened because she did not want weak students to copy from stronger students and she wanted to know what each one understood. On the other hand, she agreed that the collaboration in order to ask for the meaning of a word would be useful for the student with dyslexia who would want to ask this question in front of the class. Asking for and providing information have been reported as scaffolds that peers use in peer scaffolding to help each other [22].

#### **4. Suggestions for teachers**

Multisensory methods have proved to be effective for the improvement of students with dyslexia skills in reading, writing, listening, phonology and spelling in a foreign language [25]. The teacher in this study also agrees that multisensory methods help students' memory and uses them without realizing she does so. Provided that there is lack of training and practice on dyslexia support in different countries [3, 5–8] and the right training on special educational needs changes teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and students with disability [4, 10] language teachers need to be trained on how to support students with dyslexia. For example, language teachers at primary schools or language teachers of young learners like the teacher in the study can be trained on the use multisensory methods, for example, the use of cards with vocabulary and pictures, color-coding, drawings in order to make practice more interesting and help memorization of new vocabulary and grammar [30, 43]. Language teachers can also use the kinesthetic modality by asking the students to move in the classroom or mime actions in order to help them memorize the new language or by using tools to demonstrate the new language as the teacher in this study did [29]. Collaborative learning would also be effective for students with dyslexia as they would not be ashamed to make mistakes in front of the class [29]. Pair or group work and peer scaffolding would be effective provided that the students are taught the rules they need to follow and they are monitored and assisted by the teacher in order to avoid cases in which the students with dyslexia copy the answer from their partners as the teacher in this study mentioned [16].

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper has investigated a foreign language teacher's beliefs about learning and teaching and the actual application or not of them in the classroom, that is, the way she mediated a dyslexic student's learning but also the learning of the rest

of the class. Although it was a small study including only two lesson observations which means that conclusions cannot be generalized, the study illustrated that the teacher's practices were not always consistent with her beliefs of how students with dyslexia learn better. She might practice what she believes but not in all the lessons as happened with the use of visuals and actions which may depend on the lesson taught. This finding is similar to Nijakowska's (2000), Tzanni's (2018) and Schumm et al's (1994) findings [3, 6, 8]. She also did things that she had not thought why or without having a theoretical concept of them like the use of multisensory methods. She also thought that collaborative learning is useful for students with dyslexia (extract 13) but she did not encourage it in all her classes and all the lessons if she thought it would not work. The lesson observations though demonstrated an effective use of multisensory methods, actions, objects and scaffolding that lead the student with dyslexia and the rest of the students to understand the new vocabulary.

These findings have implications for teachers' training. Language teachers of students with dyslexia may need to be trained on multisensory methods and on how to use them in class and on how to apply collaborative learning in the form of pair or group work and peer scaffolding in their classes.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the teacher of Greek at the Greek Community school as well as the students of this class for their participation in this study.

## Conflict of interest

“The author declares no conflict of interest.”

## Appendix

### Speakers:

T teacher  
M me

### Students referred:

P student with dyslexia  
S1 student 1  
S2 student 2

### Transcription conventions:

(.) brief pause (less than 2 seconds) (Graddol, Cheshire and Swann 1994)

(2 secs) timed pause (longer than 2 seconds)

---

M ... τι ξέρεις για τη δυσλεξία;

---

T Μμμ. Λοιπόν δυσλεξία,

---

overlapping speech (Graddol, Cheshire and Swann 1994).

- (\*) Inaudible one word
- (\*\*) Inaudible more than one word (Edwards and Westgate 1987)
- .... omitted speech
- = no pause between speakers (French and French 1984 in Edwards and Westgate 1987)

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