

## **Inquiry Based Learning as a recommended approach for controversial historical issues teaching. Action research with pre-service teachers in Greece**

**Papadimas Lampros**

PhD Candidate, Teacher, Department of Primary Education, University of Thessaly  
lampapad@uth.gr

**Stavrianoudaki Alexandra**

PhD Candidate, Teacher, Department of Primary Education, University of Thessaly  
Alexia\_stavr89@yahoo.co.uk

**Smyrniaios Antonios**

Professor, Department of Primary Education, University of Thessaly  
smirniaios@pre.uth.gr

### **Abstract**

Controversial past, besides its importance for historical education, raises a set of questions unknown to teachers' teaching-pedagogical reference model. For this purpose, collaborative investigation is expected to be a suitable reference model for teaching Controversial Historical Issues. This current research refers to a suggested approach to educate pre-service teachers on teaching controversial issues through modern collaborative teaching practices. A six-month program based on the basic principles of Inquiry Based Learning, related to Occupation-Resistance-Civil War thematic, has been implemented with fourteen pre-service teachers. Data qualitative analysis showed that participants get familiarized with strategies and learning tools that help children draw valid conclusions, learn to source practices, and conduct their own enriched narrations about the controversial past. The major benefits and potential difficulties have also been recognized. After all, this training experience strengthens their perceived self-efficacy since they acknowledge that collaborative investigation is an effective approach to organize your own learning.

**Keywords:** Controversial Historical Issues, collaborative investigation, pre-service teachers' education.

### **Introduction**

A major interest in the historicity of the present (Gadamer, 1998) characterises contemporary societies. The Present constantly reframes narratives about the controversial events of the past, through "symbolic wars" of ideology (e.g.). The 20th century was full of events that bequeathed conflicts and rifts to emerging societies, which contemporary historians are trying to incorporate into a historiographical narrative. Time has been re-signified by those traumatic memories inherited from the "short" 20th century (Hobsbawm, 1995), confirming once again that "*The past is never dead, it's not even past*" (Faulkner, 1960).

In this research, the Occupation-Resistance-Civil war (OCCRESCIV) period had been selected as it is a historical framework in which divided and conflicting memory has been a predominant component. We usually approach the historical period of Occupation, both at the level of the public sphere and at the level of school textbooks, focusing only on the suffering caused to the Greek society by the triple occupation (Germany-Italy-Bulgaria). Future-teachers should be able to offer a vetted alternative to the superficial approaches that have been implemented all those years regarding the OCCRESCIV period and other controversial historical issues.

### **Controversial historical issues and relevant teaching approaches**

Controversial historical issues (CHI) are those about which many people argue, without reaching an indisputable conclusion (Kokkinos & Mavroskoufis, 2015). According to Stradling, controversial issues divide societies, while significant groups within them support conflicting interpretations based on different values (e.g....). These topics on which there is no consensus, that express conflict, and divide society, since different groups produce different interpretations, explanations, and/or solutions (Cotton, 2006; Hess, 2005, 2009). In a pedagogical approach, a controversial event is this in which students and teachers feel unready and uncomfortable to deal with pedagogically, as its approach raises a set of questions unknown to their teaching-pedagogical reference model (e.g.).

The historical period defined by the events of the OCCRESCIV period is of particular interest, as it consists of issues that are usually approached within a conflicting context either at the level of the public sphere, or at the level of scientific and/or school historiography, but also at the level of their teaching approach.

Educational authorities, schools and teachers usually avoid the teaching of controversial historical issues, because they are demanding for students. Preparing the teaching of CHI is considered as a time-consuming process. Apart from this, teachers lack training in this context and often face the fear of reactions or misunderstandings that their teaching can cause. This fear probably has its origin in the fact that teachers being part of a society that, as Lechner (2002) indicates, is afraid of conflicts that stem from a lack of social consensus (Iglesias et al., 2017). Finally, the inflexibility of the curricula makes teaching CHI even more difficult (e.g.).

According to Barton and Levstik (2008), the teaching of controversial issues is the backbone of democratic education, since dealing with these issues enables students gain a respect in democratic principles, such as the right to dissent or the right to equality (Wasserman, Francis & Ndou, 2008). In addition, they are encouraged to assess situations and lead to valid conclusions (Byford et al., 2009). Critical thinking skills, such as information-processing, reasoning, enquiry, creativity, and evaluation, are also strengthened (e.g.).

The above-mentioned findings reinforce the demand for a pedagogical approach of controversial events in Greek history, through a comparative analysis, where the aim will not be a mix of moral and historical disciplining and reduction, but the enhancement of historical knowledge in preventing social ambush concerning contemporary events.

### **Occupation - Resistance - Civil War**

In this research, the OCCRESCIV period had been selected as it is a historical framework in which the divided and conflicting memory has been a predominant component. **Greek Resistance** is a period full of conflicting interpretations and historical narratives. The acceptance of Resistance as a unifying factor throughout the Greek society (which is also reproduced through the current school history textbook of the 6th Grade), in its conciseness, conceals and silences the specific ideological differences of the guerrilla groups and their rivalries (and their future political aspirations), the Collaborationism, the actions of Security Battalions (romanized: Tagmata Asfaleias) and the actions of quisling governments. The **Greek Civil War**, finally, is also an event of prime interest for Greek and world history, while considered being the first episode of the Cold War. Since the fall of the Regime of the Colonels (Greek Junta), and especially since 1982 and the legal recognition of the National Resistance, there has been an explosion in literature on Civil war in the fields of academic and public history (Kokkinos & Mavroskoufis, 2015). However, this historical event has not been substantially approached in its pedagogical perspective. The Greek state applied a policy of oblivion for these controversial memories (according to Ricœur: "obstructed memory"), which may once have served the purpose of healing the trauma in Greek society and political sphere (Buschoten et al., 2008), However, this policy prevented society by confronting dark events of the past and has also now led in the presence of two rival memories of the Civil War - as in Portelli (1997) there are two official memories - the Left one and the Right one (Voglis, 2007).

### **Inquiry Based Learning Approach (IBL)**

The value of inquiry-based learning (IBL) approaches is often associated with the work of Dewey (1938) and Bruner (1966) and Social Constructivism. IBL is commonly described as an interactive, student-driven process, where knowledge is constructed rather than transmitted (Bacon & Matthews, 2014). The theory of "social construction", with Vygotsky as its principal representative, emphasizes the importance of the social context in building and understanding knowledge. Social Constructivism declares the idea that the interactions with the social context of the student enable man to create his own ideas, cognitive schemes and beliefs which arise because of collective consciousness (Kwan & Wong, 2015).

Inquiry, according to Piaget (1948), is understood as a pre-systematic form of "curiosity" (Bacon & Matthews, 2014). IBL is a strategy based on the student's natural curiosity, organized around questioning, and driven by the attempt of students to interpret the world and the interactions that take place in it. Through investigation, learners construct their own concepts and ideas and link the gained knowledge to their personal experience (e.g.).

To address the main aim of configuration of a framework for teaching CHI in primary education, we developed an educational program based on this theory, as it is considered by the researchers to respond to peculiarities that are enhanced to conflicting issues and are capable to enable students choose the information, construct their assumptions, and configure their own "learning path".

As concerns the Historical Thinking in particular, collaborative investigation fosters the structure of historical knowledge based on personal and group-investigation processes and not on the unilateralism of a textbook or teacher. This approach is also an important step that brings students in touch with science thinking and historical thinking (Barak & Shakhman, 2008). Through the involvement of students in these processes, they mobilized their natural desire for the discovery of new knowledge (Hoepper, 2014).

The orientation in these practices is related to the effort to empower students in their ability to deepen historical knowledge and discover, through a critical look, the fundamental principles and relationships that govern historical events. In addition, however, the exploratory approach is also chosen as a democratic method of teaching history through the provision of multiple historical texts, learners study issues that are often absent from school textbooks (Smith, 2018). Thus, schools should adopt active learning processes to educate students to construct their own ideas and assumptions (Van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018).

Even nowadays, history lessons are being taught via the so-called "traditional" method, an antiquated practice which causes students' indifference to the course of history. The lack of coordinated education of future teachers is a reality that stokes this problem. This study returns to pre-service teachers to understand how they see themselves as future teachers who are going to teach the conflicting accounts of OCCRESCIV, a historical period that divides the Greek society. Indeed, there is no denial that a structured training and experience on teaching CHI, either to prepare future teachers or in the level of feasibility in the classroom, is absent from the Greek educational system (Kokkinos & Mavroskoufis, 2015).

The principal purpose of this research is to challenge and implement a model of educating pre-service teachers on the Teaching of History and on issues of conflict, which is based on inquiry based learning and collaborative approaches. The proposed research aims to generate useful knowledge through the preparation and support of pre-service teachers on the teaching of conflicting issues through modern collaborative research practices. The following research questions drive this study:

1. What are the views of pre-service teachers on the value of adopting modern collaborative IBL approaches in the history course?
2. How do they define Controversial Historical Issues (CHI)?
3. Which are their beliefs about CHI teaching?

4. Do pre-service teachers feel more self-efficacy to teach CHI after their participation in a 6-month training program?

### **Methods**

#### *Methodology paradigm*

**Action research** has been selected as an appropriate ground to understand teachers' thinking about their practices (McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead, 1996). Specifically, we seek to produce research data about the change in pre-service teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceived self-efficacy to teach CHI, after their participation in a relevant laboratory course. We also aim to interpret their transformation in aspects like sharing of ideas and teaching practices in relevant issues.

**Semi-structured interviews** have been used to investigate the initial and subsequent students' perceptions regarding collaborative approaches, conflict issues and their teaching value, IBL collaborative approaches and the perceived self-efficacy to handle CHI.

The researchers, possessing the role of critical friend, take part in all phases of the research process. They also hold the role of instructors in CHI content and relevant teaching practices. More information about the seminars is mentioned in the following unit.

### **Phases of the research project**

This section presents the individual phases of the research project. The main phases are the Preparation, Workshops & Laboratory courses, and data analysis.

#### *Preparation*

Preparation of laboratory courses and collection of archival material. The initial phase of the research includes the preparation of the seminar's researchers. In more detail the collection of documents and archival material, preparing seminar/laboratory courses.

#### *Workshops & Laboratory courses (historical seminars and pedagogical seminars)*

Through this phase, a group of 14 student-participants (9 female and 5 male participants) have been selected to attend the educational program after their response to an open call for participation by the research team. The sampling was random but to some extent targeted (purpose sampling). Participants share certain common characteristics, such as their affiliation to the Pedagogical Department of Thessaly and their special interest in History.

**Historical seminars** (content knowledge) aim to provide pre-service teachers with the essential historical and epistemological background, both on the historical period of reference (OCCRESCIV), and with the Theory of History and Historiography.

**Pedagogical seminars** aim to the awareness of IBL framework in history, which meets the modern needs of the historical education. Pedagogical seminars included topics related to collaborative approaches, co-creation of collective visual works, modern history teaching approaches (i.e., Doing history/Reading like a historian), feasibility within the IBL framework.

**Preparation of teaching students:** After the ending of laboratory courses, participants were invited to choose a topic related to the investigated historical period (OCCRESCIV) and to the local history of Magnesia. Participants were expected to collaborate with one of their mates and consider their planning pedagogical issues which have been taught through the pedagogical seminars. The participants worked in pairs and confronting the following historical events: a. The Occupation in the city of Volos, b. Resistance in Magnesia, c. Shoah and the Jews of Volos, d. The Occupation and Resistance through the testimonies of children, e. Civil War and Pedopolis of "Agia Sophia" Agrias. Through this process, pre-service teachers received feedback from the researchers and the whole class community.

**Data Analysis:** Data are mainly derived from semi-structured interviews (before the beginning and after the end of the program). This material has been transcribed and content analysis has been supported by the software ATLAS-TI. Using this software only contributes to organizing the data, since the creation of thematic categories derived from the primary data

and related to the purpose and questions of the research. Coding followed the scheme of comparing pre and post beliefs.

### **Findings**

#### *Pre-service teachers' beliefs about modern collaborative practices in the history course*

This Unit presents the change in students' initial beliefs for modern collaborative practices in the history course, after their participation in the educational program. As concerns to the initial positions that students maintain in relevance to the IBL, we notice that there are two major categories. The first one is about students' beliefs about the History Lesson and Historical Thinking and the second one describes students' beliefs about the value of collaboration. As concerns to prior students' beliefs about the History Lesson and Historical thinking, they include their beliefs towards History and their future teaching aims for teaching History.

All the students taking part claim they hold a positive stance towards History because of previous experiences of history lessons at the university. Most of them mention they enjoy watching historical documentaries and they find it pleasant to deal with History. One group of the participants consider that they have a limited and general historical knowledge. Also, as concerns to teaching approaches, most of the participants feel that they have limited sense. Also, only two of the participants had previous experience of participating in a history lab.

Content analysis shows that participants hold a main idea about what is important for students to learn during the History Lesson. A group of participants expressed beliefs about stances and skills which are significant to be cultivated and another group expressed beliefs in relevance to the handling of the History content.

Concerning stances and skills, a group of participants perceive that collaborative teaching within the framework of teaching History support students to develop their own questions and consequently be engaged in self-directed investigations. This group of future teachers aims to achieve this goal in their future class. Another group of pre-service teachers mainly aims to make students love History. It was also argued by many participants that they aim to rote memory practices avoiding.

Concerning the History content, a sizeable group of the participants argue they aim to enable their students to connect, transfer and apply their knowledge from one history issue to another. Connection making is described as a situation that makes students think critically about the past and estimate nowadays situation based on the knowledge of the past. This kind of thinking, according to the participants, enables them to form a view. Connection making is described as a fruitful approach into which teachers could discuss with pupils the different ways of communicating their findings, ideas, views, and opinions. According to participants, students could make connections by writing or by participating in discussions, debates, and role-plays.

*P14: I hope that my learning approach will differ from my teachers' (when I was a student). I would like students to link historical events to the present so as to understand how history affects the present and then configure their own opinion.*

In this section, we are also going to present initial students' beliefs about collaboration. All the participants believe collaborative approaches are expected to be appropriate for teaching CHI and they hold a positive stance towards them. Some participants claim that this method fosters pupils' participation. In relevance to pupils' participation, collaborative investigations are recognized as a facilitator that supports pupils to be active, participatory learners, and to take greater responsibility for their learning.



*P12: Students learn to work with their classmate. A culture of cooperation and solidarity is cultivated. The competitions are smoothed, and maybe more pupils feel motivated to take part in a classroom activity.*

Others claim that collaborationism strengthens the process of team argumentation. For example, when students disagree, they learn on the point of the other and finally they come to conclusions and learn about their conversations and disagreements.

*P2: The students would conclude themselves. They'd understand it's not all black and white.*

Another point of view expressed is that through group collaborative work, students can rethink the history lesson. They can appreciate contemporary social phenomena such as migration or understand the cultural qualities and origins of their own family.

*P6: Perhaps, students could understand more about migration by learning from relatives and friends who had experience this situation. They will feel more empathy concerning immigrants' thoughts and feelings.*

After their participation in the educational program, participants revised their beliefs about History Lesson and Historical Thinking and their beliefs about the value of collaboration. What has changed after their participation is that they had a clearer view about pedagogical approaches and strategies that may lead them on their aims and vision for teaching History. Most of the participants also acknowledge collaborative investigation as a union, so they do not differentiate their views about historical thinking and collaborative processes. Participants' education on a framework that advocates the cultivation of historical thinking via collaborative investigations enables them to recognize the benefits of this framework, which are mainly: better understanding of historical text, drawing valid conclusions, training in sourcing and enriched narrations making. These benefits are analyzed below:

Participants believe collaborative investigations strengthen children's better understanding of historical events because of tools providing. Historical head and Note Cards (Percoco, 2001) are reliable tools whose utilization enables students gain a better understanding of a historical factor issue. The main explanation is that these tools help students organize the process of information seeking, processing, and reasoning.

*P9: The primary goal for me is gaining a better understanding of historical events (...) I think I'd use the two tools you gave us, the "Note Cards" and the "historical head", because these tools changed my view and made me think about a child-centred and collaborative framework that helps children organize their information seeking.*

One major benefit recognized by the participants is that students learn how to draw valid conclusions about historical events. These conclusions are mainly based on the processing of substantive questions into the inquiry community, which increases the validity of the conclusion making.

*P13: I think the essential thing is the consolidation of the various aspects that may exist in a historical event. The principal thing is how to draw conclusions. How students draw historical conclusions from a historical event? We achieve this through substantive questions to understand what was really going on. To draw conclusions and truths (...)*

An interesting point of view expressed by a minority of participants is that students are educated to sourcing practices who are capable to motivate historical conversations into the

classroom. These sources could make it easier for some students to express and state their own position.

Another benefit stated by few participants is that collaborative investigation often offers students the opportunity to come to interpretations and explanations and present them through enriched narrations. According to this group of participants, enriched narrations may help students gain basic historical knowledge and remember significant events.

In congruence with the purpose of this study, which was to investigate pre-service students' beliefs regarding the value of implementing collaborative investigations approaches, and their mindset transformation after their participation to the program, we observed that thematic categories have been differentiated. Participants initially hold a main idea about their potential aims, but after their participation in the educational program they can purposefully express their beliefs about the potential benefits of IBL approaches. Some of them acknowledge the importance of utilizing sourcing and making enriched narrations to historical thinking' cultivation. They recognize the importance of gaining interpretations of what students have gained from their attempt to investigate a historical issue or event.

Some participants expressed their view about having lived difficulties in implementing collaboration schemes. Specifically, they claim IBL may cause some classroom management problems.

*Pre-service teachers' beliefs about CHI*

As concerns to pre-service teachers' ideas about Controversial Historical Issues, most of them had initially an unclear/confused insight into this issue. After the ending of the 6-month program, most of the participants were ready to describe more attitudes of CHI. Most of the participants initially claimed that they had heard nothing about CHI. Thus, they didn't have any idea about the content and the theoretical background of CHI.

*P10: I believe that conflicting discourse relates to opposing views, to their analysis and comparison, but I know nothing more.*

Some participants consider CHI as issues that express conflict and divide society, since different groups produce different interpretations, explanations, and solutions. These issues are considered as politically sensitive events that may provoke disagreements within society.

After their participation in the educational program, participants enriched their beliefs about what a CHI is. Specifically, to their way of thinking CHI, could be:

Historical events that people are divided into two/or more groups because of reading conflicting sources:

*P5: A historical issue that divides people (...) two different groups advocate different aspects based on different arguments. Their views have been carved by reading conflicting sources. They do not reason their views based on their own beliefs or ideas.*

Historical issues that are difficult for a society to handle:

*P11: These are controversial issues whose handle usually causes tensions. Usually, these issues are presented and taught differently depending on political reasons. It is difficult to approach them in depth as a society.*

Historical event related to OCCRESCIV:

It is very important that OCCRESCIV is recognized by most pre-service teachers as a controversial issue. In initial interviews, most of them could not name any specific period or event as controversial. Participants also recognized that the nomination and handling of CHI affects not only the society, but also historians with different accounts of background knowledge disagreement.

*P3: I changed my mind as concerns to controversial issues have changed (...) I have learned that these are issues on which society is divided, even the modern historians are divided. There are not all of them in agreement with the formal narration about these issues (e.g., civil war).*

*Pre-service students' perceptions of teaching controversial issues*

Participants' initial perceptions of the didactic approach of controversial issues are characterized by incomplete or limited expression of positions and perceptions on controversial issues. Most participants stated they do not have any kind of education on teaching similar issues. Despite their limited experience, there are many interesting responses regarding issues related to their views on school history textbooks and curricula or about teaching controversial issues. Hence, participants express their personal aspects of the problems or the benefits that may arise from the teaching of controversial issues.

Regarding the potential problems that may arise, participants referred to objections and reactions from children's families, as well as to the cognitive conflict that implies a contrast between historical knowledge and the entrenched perceptions that students may bring. Reactions may also arise and into the classroom environment. Participants referred to disagreements that may arise between students, which may affect classroom climate.

*P4: Some sensitive issues that are more recent may have made me particularly concerned about how my teaching would be perceived by parents.*

Some participants stated that teacher's personal perspective should be another problem, since expressing teachers' belief should be contained when teaching a historical, controversial event. Thus, teachers should have the obligation to learn and be able to present all the recorded conflict accounts of an issue.

The deficient historical training of teachers is considered as another difficulty since teachers must learn on their own how to approach these issues pedagogically. It is claimed that teachers should enter to deeper epistemological level to approach CHI.

*P5: There would certainly be [problems] at first, especially if the controversial issue has not been well studied, but along the way, the situation will improve. Teachers may not be aware of the historical context, and this could be a problem, (...) teachers need to study more and be educated in these issues.*

In addition, some participants also mentioned the time constraints of school timetable and curriculum, which makes it difficult to teach controversial issues and often acts as an excuse to avoid them. They have complained about what extent CHI can indeed be taught considering all these restrictions. Regarding school textbooks and curricula, there was essentially unanimity among the participants who expressed their opinion. The answers we received characterized History school textbooks and curricula, inadequate regarding to the teaching of controversial issues. Thus, participants considered them as a potential difficulty. Specifically, they reported that, even when controversial issues gain space in school textbooks, this space is often limited and there is no possibility of dealing in depth with these issues. According to some participants, textbooks and curricula promote and reproduce a one-dimensional, conservative perspective on the teaching of history, so they avoid the didactic approach of issues that require another modern perception of the content and teaching.

Regarding the potential benefits of teaching controversial issues, participants referred to the cultivation of critical thinking, since students can learn and compare contradictory sources. Thus, it is possible for them to think critically about the context of the source or the motives of the writer and to avoid the acquisition of stereotypes.



*P11: Students gradually enter a process of critical thinking. They understand each author writes in his own opinion, and it is possible that in different studies, events are attributed differently. They also can learn to avoid stereotypes.*

Other participants said that the framework of teaching controversial issues is capable to cultivate a respect for different views, because students have the learning opportunity to understand the complexity of historical truth/objectivity. In this way of thinking, students are gradually learning to be open to dialogue.

*P10: History lesson gives the opportunity to convey to the children that whatever opinion may have will not be diminished by anyone in the classroom. It is necessary for everyone to express their own view (...).*

After the ending of the program, participants reported again the potential problems and benefits that may have occurred when teaching controversial historical issues. The change of their attitude towards expressing their point of view, is also related to the experience gained both during the courses of the research program and during their work in formulation History projects, on specific controversial issues related to the period of Occupation-Resistance-Civil War, in Magnesia. Even most of the codes created are like the initial, it is very important that participants acknowledge the importance of two main pedagogical issues. First, some of them recognize that teaching CHI should not provoke a cognitive confusion in their future students. That shows that participants gain a kind of maturity regarding their teaching profile. Second, another group of participants highlight the importance of students' autonomy, which is cultivated when they study contradictory accounts of the past and scheme their own perceptions about a historical issue.

Concerning potential problems, the participants referred to problems that could arise during the teaching of the project they had prepared, also generalizing their findings regarding the teaching of controversial issues. It emerged that there is an agreement between initial and final interviews, in some places, but also new findings raised. Some participants referred to the disagreement that may occur within the classroom when teaching controversial issues, mainly because of their sensitive content, and also because of cognitive conflict with students' pre-existing knowledge.

*P9: There would be a problem because these issues are also sensitive. We are talking about primary school children, and perhaps there would be disagreements they could not manage.*

Some participants also referred to the risks that may arise from how the teacher presents his personal perspective on the controversial issues. According to this opinion, teachers must be very careful in choosing sources, but also in expressing their own opinion. According to them, teachers - even if asked to express their personal position - should maintain a tolerant attitude towards interpretations based on historically substantiated arguments.

*P5: Everyone has their say. Children do not yet have a formed view on historical issues. Teachers should avoid a one-sided view of the issue and should not try to impose their own point of view. They must be open to interpretation.*

Another potential difficulty reported concerns to the risk of cognitive confusion among students because of the complexity of controversial issues. This issue could be treated by teachers if they are careful and educated enough.

*P11: There is always a risk of facing a brutal content while teaching controversial issues, but with the guidance of teachers, they can be taught more sensitively. Teachers must be*

*very careful when preparing lessons (e.g., choosing appropriate videos or sources) to avoid a negative climate in the classroom. Teachers should also be careful when they express their own point of view (...)*

Finally, after getting involved with history textbooks and curricula, the participants express opinions regarding their suitability or not for the teaching approach to controversial issues. As with initial interviews, participants agreed to an absolute extent that in-use school textbooks and the existing curricula are insufficient for the didactics of controversial issues. They relate their opinion to the content, the often-ambivalent approach of controversial events, but also to the methods proposed through the structure of textbooks and curricula. All this, in the stifling context imposed by the limitation of time and the set of courses and coursework that a teacher must teach during a school year, creates an inhospitable environment for the teaching of controversial issues.

Considering the potential benefits of teaching CHI, some of the participants' responses show they consider teaching CHI as a key factor to cultivate not only historical knowledge but also critical thinking skills for their students.

Other responses highlight the significance of building respect from the opposite view. According to this group of participants, collaborative investigations foster the exchange of different voices/aspects of an issue. Students can learn all the aspects before making their own conclusions.

Another group of participants argues that CHI learning through collaborative investigations cultivates students' "thinking autonomy" in historical research and study. This finding reveals that the greater complexity of CHI fosters students who collaborate each other to select one individual learning path on their own on the investigation community.

*P12: Teaching controversial issues requires studying of many aspects of an issue. There will be no room for prejudice, there will be the possibility for each student to learn the other side. They will understand deeper the conditions of each historical era. Children meet something that in the rest of their courses at school they may never meet again, developing their critical ability, think.*

#### *Perceived self-efficacy to teach CHI after programs' ending*

Students initially had a core idea about IBL and its applicability. Specifically, they have mentioned a range of benefits related to using IBL in CHI teaching, which have already been mentioned in the first unit of the results.

In the initial interviews, participants answered if the likelihood of having to teach a controversial issue gives them a particular feeling and what it is. Many participants expressed no emotion, and this was mainly the result of ignorance of the context. There have been cases of participants who expressed their feelings in the possibility's face of teaching controversial issues. These participants mainly spoke of feelings of anxiety, fear, and unpreparedness in the face of controversial issues, but expressed feelings of responsibility and the belief that it is their duty, as teachers, to be ready for the possibility of having to teach them.

*P12: I would be nervous about how I would teach them not to be for or against an issue. I would be afraid of the possibility that some children already have entrenched views and perhaps this would cause some tension (...)*

After the ending of the program, all the participants argue IBL is an effective approach to teach CHI because it provides students the opportunity to express their beliefs about them. IBL is characterized by most of them as a student-centered approach that enables students gain their own beliefs about CHI through exchanging mind with their peers. The significant one is that most of the participants feel ready-to-use IBL framework in teaching CHI.

Additionally in full unanimity, in fact, they spoke positively of the evaluation of the research program, stating that it helped them both at pedagogical and historical level.

*P8: It is like I had to swim in a sea, but now I have flippers. And before I could also swim, but now I am going to swim easier.*

The main reasons that explain the improvement of pre-service teachers perceived self-efficacy to teach CHI are the sense of freedom they felt to expand themes that are not always included in the school textbook, their experience with using multiple sources and their training on collaborative and student-centred approaches.

A group of participants mentioned they felt a sense of freedom to expand themes and approach session/events/time periods that are not included in the school textbook or are approached superficially. Specifically, participants feel more ready to explore controversial issues with pupils through the key element of collaborative investigations. Following the completion of the research program, the participants declared themselves much more capable of managing, at pedagogical and teaching context of CHI

*P10: I feel like I am more capable. Now I have an insight into how I should plan my teaching. What matters is how you teach children. If you use the right methods, you can teach each of these objects.*

Their experience with utilizing multiple sources, such as images that enable children to perceive different things and activate their critical thinking, also explained participants' readiness. IBL approach may help to source from Images. The experience with this tool makes participants understand how to implement sourcing in their future classes by helping students identify the central information and afterwards detect and minor matter/secondary elements. Students' research projects, emerges as a central element of their responses, especially using multimodal tools (such as films, documentaries, images, primary and secondary sources) escaping from the restrictive context of the school textbook.

*P14: We can use diaries, newspapers, memoirs, and secondary source (i.e., new studies). It is important that we can use audiovisual material, documentaries, movies, testimonies.*

Another factor that fosters participants' perceived self-efficacy is their learning and teaching experience to strategies that are suitable for teaching controversial issues. Drawing on their responses, collaborative approaches, student-centered teaching model, student involvement, inquiry-based models seem to be the most common proposals. After completing the research program, participants stated that, although there are still things they could learn, they now feel more ready to manage the teaching of controversial issues.

### **Discussion**

After their participation in the educational program and having prepared one project based on the basic principles of IBL and related to OCCRESCIV thematic, participants not only value IBL for teaching CHI but also, they build their self-teaching profile through this framework. Specifically, they use strategies and learning tools that help children organize their own inquiry-learning path in History and this opportunity strengthens their perceived self-efficacy.

In relevance to *teachers' beliefs about modern collaborative practices in the history course*, participants acknowledge the major benefits of this approach. Specifically, they argue that collaboration enables students to gain a better historical understanding because of tools providing, draw valid conclusions, learn to source practices, and conduct their own enriched narrations. Processing of controversial narratives, according to the literature review, promotes a kind of democratic historical education and is considered as the backbone of democratic education (Wasserman, Francis, & Ndou, 2008).

Concerning *pre-service teachers' beliefs about CHI*, a significant finding of the study is the fact that after the participation in the program, participants acknowledge more aspects and attributes of CHI. Specifically, they recognize that these issues that divide society have a historical background and have always their roots to historians' disagreement. Participants also recognize OCCRESCIV as a controversial historical issue. Being able to describe why an issue is controversial could be seen as a very severe step in future teachers' education on CHI handling. According to Kokkinos and Mavroskoufis (2015) it is very important for them to gain an experience on teaching CHI, since until now there is no established pre-service teachers' preparation in the level of feasibility in the classroom.

The most significant finding is that participants underline the necessity of handling these issues at the level of society, at the school education. This is a very encouraging finding since the Greek state used to apply a policy of oblivion as concerns to OCCRESCIV thematic, which prevented society by confronting dark events of the past (Voglis, 2007). Hence, it is very severe that future teachers highlight the importance of giving prominence to OCCRESCIV as a CHI at the level of the public sphere and school education.

As concerns to *pre-service students' perceptions of teaching controversial issues*, the experience gained both during the courses of the research program and during their work in formulation History projects, on specific controversial issues related to the period of Occupation-Resistance-Civil War, in Magnesia, enables participants to think deeper and elaborately in relevance to CHI teaching. Some of them recognize that teaching CHI is potential to provoke a cognitive confusion in students and this situation should be avoided. Teachers always have this concern when they must teach issues not belonging to curriculums' thematic axes. This finding comes to an agreement with previous research which shows that in-service teachers have doubts about applying methods of critical inquiry because they may confuse their teachers (Doughty, 2017).

The fact that taking part in the program made participants think about a substantive/practical aspect of teaching CHI shows that participants have already gained a kind of maturity regarding their teaching profile. According to Lechner (2002) teachers often feel fear touching CHI because they are part of a society that is afraid of conflicts. The notion that this program makes participants think about practical aspects of teaching CHI without feeling the sense of fear probably shows that teachers' preparation concerning pedagogical and content issues is an important factor for a society to face any fear of reactions.

As mentioned above, this current research reveals interesting findings about the *perceived self-efficacy to teach CHI* after programmes' fulfillment. After completing the research program, participants stated that, although there are still things they could learn and on which they could reflect, they now feel more ready to manage the teaching of controversial issues. The main reasons that explain the change of pre-service teachers perceived self-efficacy to teach CHI are related to the sense of freedom they felt to expand themes that are not always included in the school textbook, their experience with utilizing multiple sources and their practical training to collaborative and student-centered approaches. Potentially, pre-service teachers' involvement in collaborative inquiry learning processes gave them a sense of how the natural desire for the discovery of new knowledge is mobilized (Hoepper, 2014). Hence, they feel adequate to mobilize their future students' interest concerning CHI and make them find their own learning path.

#### **Citations**

Bacon, K., & Matthews, P. (2014). Inquiry-based learning with young learners: a Peircebased model employed to critique a unit of inquiry on maps and mapping. *Irish Educational Studies*, 33 (4), 351-365.

Barak, M. & Shakhman, I., (2008). Fostering higher order thinking in science class: Teachers' reflections. *Teachers and Teaching*, 14 (3), 191-208.

- Barton, K. C., & Levstik, L. S. (2011). *Doing history: Investigating with children in elementary and middle schools* (4th ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Bruner, J. (1966). *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Van Buschoten, R., Vervenioti, T., Voutyra, E., Dalkamvoukis, V., Mpada, K., (eds.). (2008). *Memories and oblivion on Greek Civil war*, Athens: Epikentro.
- Byford, J., Lennon, S. & Russell, W. (2009). Teaching Controversial Issues in the Social Studies: A Research Study of High School Teachers, *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 82:4, 165-170, DOI: 10.3200/TCHS.82.4.165-170
- Cotton, D. (June 2006). Teaching controversial environmental issues: neutrality and balance in the reality of the classroom. *Educational Research*, 48 (2), 223-241.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan Company.
- Faulkner, W. (1960). *Requiem for a nun*. Penguin: London.
- Hess, D. (2005). How do teachers' political views influence teaching about controversial issues? *Social Education*, 69, 47-57.
- Hess, D. (2009). *Controversy in the classroom: The democratic value of discussion*. New York: Routledge.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1994). *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London: Michael Joseph.
- Hoepper, B. (2014). Planning for teaching through critical inquiry. In R. Gilbert & B. Hoepper, B. (Eds.), *Teaching humanities and social sciences: History, geography, economics & citizenship*, (5th ed.) (pp. 44-65). South Melbourne: Cengage Learning Australia.
- Iglesias, R., Aceituno, D., & Toledo, M. (2017). *Student Teachers' Understandings and Practices for Teaching "Controversial Issues" in the High School History Curriculum*. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 237. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2017.02.089.
- Kokkinos, G. & Mavroskoufis, D.K. (eds) (2015). *Trauma, Controversial Issues, and Interpretive conflicts in historical education*. Athens: Rodon.
- Kwan, Y. W., & Wong, A. F. (2015). Effects of the constructivist learning environment on students' critical thinking ability: Cognitive and motivational variables as mediators. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 70, 68-79.
- Lechner, N. (2002). *Las sombras del mañana. La dimensión subjetiva de la política*. Santiago: LOM.
- McNiff, J., Lomax, P. & Whitehead, J. (1996). *You and Your Action Research Project*, London: Routledge.
- Percoco, J. (2001). *Divided, we stand. Teaching about conflict in U.S. History*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Piaget, J. (1948). *The moral judgment of the child*. Free Press.
- Van Drie, J., & Van Boxtel, C. (2008). Historical reasoning: Towards a framework for analyzing students' reasoning about the past. *Educational Psychology Review*, 20(2), 87-110.
- Villalino, F. E. (2009). *Context Based Teaching in Science*. 8th Conference of the Philippines School Overseas. Davao.
- Wasserman, J., Francis, D. and Ndou, L., (2008). The teaching of controversial issues in social science education. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 6(4), 37-57.

### **Acknowledgement**

This research is co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund-ESF) through the Operational Programme «Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014-2020» in the context of the project "Inquiry Based Learning as a recommended approach for controversial historical issues teaching. Occupation, Resistance and Civil War in Magnesia. Action research with pre-service teachers of Department of Primary Education in University of Thessaly" (MIS 5052288).