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Το πρόγραμμα ITAP-PD και η ελληνική συμμετοχή: συνεισφορά στην εγχώρια πρακτική της ισότιμης συνεργασίας εκπαιδευτικών-καλλιτεχνών και στη διεθνή έρευνα

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# The I-TAP-PD project and the Greek participation Contribution to local practices of equal collaboration between teachers and artists and to international research

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## Abstract

This paper presents the International Teacher-Artist Partnership – Professional Development (I-TAP-PD) programme, framing the definition and methodology of Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP) and presenting the structure and content of this programme as implemented by organisations working in the field of education and the arts in 4 countries (Ireland, Serbia, the Netherlands, Greece) in the period between 2020 and 2023. The main characteristics and general research findings from the implementation of the methodology by 6 pairs of artists and teachers in four regions in Greece are then described. The authors outline the steps followed to design, coordinate and implement the international research conducted in the four countries as well as the actions taken so far to disseminate its results.

**Keywords:** *Erasmus+ project, arts in education, Teacher-Artist Partnership, equal collaboration, professional development, qualitative research*

## Introduction: Collaborations between artists and teachers and the practice of their equal cooperation in Greece

Collaborations between artists and teachers are not new in Greece. There are numerous examples of cooperation, usually taking place within the school timetable or in the context of school programmes or groups. One category includes short-term theatre educational programmes that visit schools, and with the help of visiting groups of artists/teachers, student populations deal with various issues, mainly social (Giannouli & Potamoussi, 2011; Govas & Zoniou, 2010; Koukounaras-Liagkis & Potamoussi, 2016). In

this case, the presence of teachers usually plays a secondary and supportive role, continuing the work done by the visiting group. Another group of such programmes involves professional theatrical performances for children and adolescents, with materials for processing provided by the teacher or visiting artists/teachers at the school. Most of the time, these collaborations lead to the creation of artistic products aimed at the school community itself or at inter-school networks (Bekiaris & Choleva, 2015; Potamoussi & Mologousi, 2011). In another category, this collaboration may start with the training of teachers by the artists themselves or the organisations with

which they will collaborate (Choleva, 2009, 2021; Paizis, 2000). In all these cases, the roles between artists and teachers are more or less distinct, while the initiative and initial planning are often proposed by one side and followed by the other. In recent years, a marked effort has been made by the National Theatre of Greece with the programme "Theatre in the New School", where participating teachers and artists are jointly trained (National Theatre of Greece, n.d.). Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP) programmes began in Ireland in the 2000s, with the aim of developing pedagogical work scenarios with artistic characteristics that would be beneficial for both student populations and the involved teachers and artists. Since then, programmes have been implemented with the support of the Ministries of Culture and Education continuously. The TAP methodology in international educational practice has been the subject of criticism and research, elements that have dynamically led to its improvement. Some initial research results have emphasised the need to strengthen the position of the teacher, as there have been times when teachers felt marginalised in the process compared to their artist collaborators (Christophersen, 2013; Kind et al., 2007). This resulted in downplaying their role and reducing their ability to improve their professional skills. As a result of these reports, the TAP methodology now focuses on the equal presence and contribution of both sides. Artists and teachers are trained together and create a safe, neutral field of cooperation on equal terms. They undertake a joint project with pedagogical and artistic characteristics, devoting time and space to bring and convey their technical knowledge, express themselves, accept alternative approaches, understand and negotiate their roles (Blomgren, 2019; Kenny & Morrissey, 2021). As evidenced by international literature and research as well as the findings of research in Greece, both teachers and artists participating in such a working and collaboration framework recognise positive results on a personal and professional level (Choleva et al., 2023; Holdhus & Espeland, 2013).

### **The I-TAP-PD programme: Structure and framework**

The International Teacher Artist Partnership – Professional Development (I-TAP-PD) action plan was implemented during the period 2020–2023 as part of the European Erasmus+/KA2 - Strategic Partnerships programme, with partners from four countries: The Education Centre Tralee (Ireland – coordinator), Stichting Kopa (Netherlands), Centre for Drama in Education and Art-CEDEUM (Serbia) and the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (Greece).



The aim of the programme was to create opportunities for professional development and provide innovative tools to the participants that would help them review, improve and potentially transform their practices for the benefit of students and school communities. The programme aimed to enable educators and artists to explore together the educational value of collaborations that enhance arts education and arts through education.

The programme's goal was to propose an international I-TAP-PD model, for which the following components were designed and implemented: a) training programme and applications in schools, b) digital materials and c) evaluation and research. The practices and methodology followed focused on equal partnership and interaction between educators and artists, the needs of students, inclusive practices, and cooperation and creativity. In the initial phase, each partner explored the "State of Arts" (SoA) in their educational system. Based on their findings, partners collaborated to identify "best practices" and sought common ground for designing educator and artist training. Before the training, it was deemed necessary to complete a SWOT analysis tool to identify strengths and weaknesses by country and allocate tasks among partners before taking on the coordination of programme activities and outputs. Simultaneously, focus groups were established for each different sector of the project.

The five-day training programme prepared educators and artists for their collaboration in schools. It operated through the lenses of challenge, disagreement and agreement, elements expressed directly in the evaluations of participants and trainers during and after each meeting. After the five training sessions, an innovative five-day training programme was created, pushing the partners toward new ways of working and developing collaborations for their professional growth and the learning process of their students.





The "action research" methodology – planning, action/application, reflection – was followed at all stages of the programme: the SoA report, the training actions, the implementation of collaborations, the creation of digital materials and research, with the contribution of all partners.

### **The Greek participation: Implementation of I-TAP-PD in Greece**

The implementation of the I-TAP-PD programme allowed for the first application of the TAP methodology in Greece. With coordination from the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (hereafter the Network), six educators and six artists were selected to create TAP pairs in different parts of the country: Central Athens, Western Attica, Northern Athens, Athens District G, Kalamata, Serres. The pairs participated in at least one of the five training sessions of the I-TAP-PD programme, which took place from July 2021 to March 2022. They then designed, organised and carried out their interventions from March to June 2022.

In the six TAP implementations, the pairs utilised various arts such as theatre, dance, movement and visual arts, including augmented reality. Themes that engaged the groups included identity, acceptance of diversity, the body as a conduit for self-perception and communication with the environment and others, and art that interacts with the environment. Triggers for the action plans developed included one or more subjects from the National Curriculum, such as language, history, environmental studies, social and political education, and a combination thereof.

The applications were implemented in two pre-school groups and four groups from various primary school grades. The use of the arts was combined

with lessons and units from the National Curriculum, addressing social issues or interdisciplinary activities. A total of 106 students participated in the applications.

Before implementing the programme in schools, both educators and artists expressed some initial concerns. From the artists' perspective, there was apprehension regarding managing a student group, while educators expressed uncertainty about the substantive utilisation of art within the curriculum and time constraints. During the applications, participants in the research process engaged in reflection through journals they kept and interviews they gave. Both sides reported improvement in creative and critical thinking, communication and collaboration skills, trust and honesty that worked in pairs, flexibility in decision-making, self-observation, self-esteem, self-reporting and resilience (Choleva et al., 2023).

Both educators and artists expressed their absolute satisfaction with their participation in this shared journey of personal and professional development. Some even expressed concern about whether this methodology could be supported in the future. Educators and artists with varying levels of experience in the educational process or the use of art in it emphasised the importance of their participation in training for communication and collaboration, even if they had previously worked together. Finally, it is worth noting that it was a common observation that students responded with enthusiasm, enjoyed the process and participated in creative ways, while in many cases, they eagerly awaited the artist. The six schools developed an equal number of creative expression and learning workshops. In most cases, student groups shared artistic products of their process with other members of their student communities and/or with parents.

The themes of interest for the groups included identities, acceptance of diversity, the body as a conduit for self-perception and communication with the environment and others, and art that interacts with the environment.

### **The design and implementation of the international research of the project**

In addition to the coordinator, Ireland, a country with experience and a rich research and published work, the TAP methodology was applied for the first time in the three partner countries (Greece, Serbia, Netherlands). Thus, apart from the training actions in the interests of the project team, documentation and research were included from the beginning, implemented by forming research focus groups and conducting parallel research in each country with coordination from the Greek research team. Educators

and artists of the project were informed and invited to participate in the research.

The research questions focused on (any) elements of personal and professional development of educators and artists, the challenges expected or arising along the way, the characteristics that constitute a successful, equal collaboration and the response of student groups, as observed by the participants themselves. Under the responsibility of the Greek team, data collection tools were created, and the methodology for their analysis was proposed. After collaboration and agreement between the research teams, these tools were translated and used to allow for the identification of common elements, patterns and differences among countries. The research teams met at each stage of the research to maintain the smooth progress of the research, address questions and deal with difficulties that arose in each country's implementation context and agree on the next steps. The research was conducted in 19 preschool and primary education units in the four countries, involving 654 students.

Upon completion of data collection, researchers used a common platform for their analyses, during which they communicated regularly. Due to the nature of the data and the way it was collected, thematic analysis was chosen as the most suitable method for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). While a more detailed report or analysis of these findings far exceeds the scope of this article, it is important to note that both from the discussions of the research teams and from the publications of the results, it emerges that the positive results of the TAP methodology are similar in the countries that implemented the programme (Choleva et al., 2023; Eland, 2023; Koruga et al., 2023; McGrath, 2023). This happens despite the different implementation framework, the diverse curricula of the countries that hosted the collaborations, the specialties and backgrounds of the participating teachers and artists, the arts and the thematic content of the workshops, etc.

### Dissemination of good practices and research data

The dissemination of good practices and research data from the I-TAP-PD project highlights the need for the continuation of similar programmes that will expand the practice of creative partnerships between artists and educators. This was the intention expressed by the partners as well as the desire expressed by the involved educator-artist pairs of I-TAP-PD for the dissemination of practices they engaged in. Since the TAP methodology was relatively novel for educators, artists and trainers in three of the four partner countries, the common goal of the research team was to disseminate the findings from the ex-



perience of equal collaboration between artists and educators in the four countries as widely as possible.

The methodology, the logic and the activity manual of the training were recorded in an electronic version of a special manual (Tralee Education Support Centre, Centre for Drama in Education and Art-CEDEUM, Stichting Kopa & Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network, 2023), which was made freely accessible on the project's website (i-tap-pd.net). The manual for training activities and educational materials can be used in various educational settings, incorporating best practices. Research reports with research data from each country were also posted on the website (*The research*, n.d.).

The Network contributed to the dissemination of I-TAP-PD through practical, hands-on presentations to the educational and artistic community: conferences and workshops held by the Network in various cities in Greece, a dedication to the TAP methodology at annual scientific conferences on the occasion of World Theatre Day in Education. From the fall of 2022, researchers began a series of publications, both nationally and internationally: local, national and international conferences, scientific conferences, roundtable discussions, podcasts, domestic and international scientific journals and lectures. Just before the end of the programme, an international conference was held in Athens titled "Sustainable Models of Teacher-Artist Partnerships (TAP) in 21st-century Education: Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Creativity". The Greek research team continues during this period to write and publish research results at conferences and in international scientific journals.

In the direction of disseminating the results of the use of the I-TAP-PD methodology, the Network contributes with the publication of this special insert that includes various texts. Specifically, the insert in issue 24 of the *Education & Theatre* journal includes: a) a research article from the application in Serbia on the benefits of TAP in the professional development of educators and artists, b) an interview about the experience of implementing the programme and how we can build relationships and collaborations with inspiration through art, from the Netherlands





and c) two texts that fall under the column of innovative programmes: one from Ireland regarding quality and equality in Personal and Professional Development in TAP collaborations, and finally, this text from the Greek team, concerning the Greek implementation and its contribution on a practical/pedagogical and research level.

## Conclusion

The I-TAP-PD project was organised in collaboration with four countries (Ireland, Serbia, the Netherlands and Greece) and followed the principles of equal partnership between educators and artists as well as inclusive practices, collaboration and creativity at all stages of its implementation.

The implementation of the I-TAP-PD project in Greece led to a set of positive results for all participants. The goal of the implementation was to enhance important skills of both artists and educators, which are crucial for personal and professional development. The research conducted revealed several skills that were cultivated through the programme, such as collaboration, critical thinking, decision-making, crisis management, flexibility, creativity, empathy, introspection and mental resilience. The improvement of these skills was a significant advantage in applying them in schools, as it inspired students to respond actively and creatively to the learning process. The student groups reacted with enthusiasm and active participation in exploring the topics of the implemented programme.

The reference to the research findings of the Greek participation goes beyond the scope of this article; therefore, it is summarised here, highlighting that the findings were common across all four countries. There is a recognised need for an educational framework in our country where the arts are integrated into the educational process and play a vital role as a means of collaboration, equality, professional and personal development for educators and artists as well as a factor of creativity and social awareness for students. From the implementation of I-TAP-PD, an international project, the findings are very encouraging for promoting similar efforts

both in Greece and internationally and could serve as a basis for further research and action on a larger scale in the field. This text, in convergence with a series of research and other texts that have emerged from this successful collaboration, seeks to contribute to the dialogue and the existing research on the outcomes that the TAP methodology can have.

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