



## Teaching Greek as a Second or Foreign Language through Peer-Mentoring at Second Chance School of Mytilene (Greece)

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to point out how an adult learner, through his studies in an educational programme, can improve his or her speech and also social position. The establishment of Second Chance Schools is a part of the European Union for Lifelong Education. Greece is consistent with this policy, as the Greek society recognizes SCS as a necessity. Within the SCS, especially in Mytilene, not only Greeks attend but also foreigners, economic migrants who came to our country 10 or 20 years ago, repatriates as well as refugees and asylum seekers from the recent conflicts in the Middle East. SCS of Mytilene confronts 'difference' as a challenge in a constant search for appropriate methods of providing knowledge and for creating conditions that ensure the smooth co-existence and respect of the diversity of cultures. A powerful weapon here is to learn a common language, Greek. Innovative techniques are adopted such as peer - mentoring. Peer-mentoring means assistance from one person to another in order to make significant improvement in knowledge, ways of working or thinking. Sharing wisdom, skills and experience with others, to help them grow and learn. An equal relationship where the mentors and trainees learn from each other, trust and respect each other. The trainer in the workshop of language takes the role of facilitator, utilizes the potential of the group, defines roles and coordinates. Thus reinforcement and peer-mentoring is applied. Adult learners with a very good performance in Greek language, the "mentors", undertake to train a person or group of co-learners with weaknesses in the subject. The purpose of mentoring is not to provide solutions or answers to problems, but to be available at all times to advise and explain how learners could achieve their goal. In an attempt to explain the technique for good practice in language learning within multicultural environments, and how the whole idea got started, it will be presented here.*

### 1. Introduction

Peer mentoring is considered to be a good teaching practice for adult learners. Since 2011, it has been applied to cross-curricular units. In the Second Chance School (SCS) of Mytilene, this practice is applied to different learning environments and more specifically when it comes to teaching Greek as a second or foreign language, as the Greek language appears to be - among other things - a necessity to foreigners and immigrants who want to co-exist in the Greek community. In adult education, trainees have the pre-existing knowledge and experience in various fields, which can be really helpful in the peer-mentoring procedure. Peer mentoring is a complex educational process, during which one person, the mentor, encourages and helps one - or more - less experienced individuals, the mentees, to develop their skills based on a common field of interests [1]. It is a mutual and dynamic relationship, through which both parties have the opportunity to develop personally, evolve and gain new experience. The mentor has in advance received or still receives guidance and training by another tutor who supplies him/her with guidelines or feedback on how to be a successful mentor. The peer tutoring teaching technique was promoted during the '60s by the educational theorist Paulo Freire. He underlined the need for trainers who would act as mentors, allowing for the autonomy, personal freedom and ability of every individual mentee to evolve [2]. Since then, peer mentoring has been applied to various educational settings: schools of all grades, universities, adult education centers, firms, associations, organizations, or anywhere there might be need for typical or non-typical training. The idea for peer mentoring in the SCS of Mytilene came up in 2012, when the European program called H.E.L.P (How to Educate Learners through Peer-mentoring) was approved, and the SCS of Mytilene was a partner. This attempt was part of the larger Grundvig European adult education program. During the years 2012-2014, while the program lasted, the SCS of Mytilene (representing Greece) cooperated with partners from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Spain [3]. This paper presents some examples of peer mentoring in the SCS of Mytilene, in the workshops for learning the Greek language. The purpose of this paper is to point out the peer mentoring technique as a good teaching practice in the educational procedure, which was suggested, studied, applied, evaluated and given feedback during the European program HELP, and is applied in the SCS of Mytilene. A further aim of this paper is to become a guide to everyone interested in including peer



mentoring in the educational procedure of teaching a second or a foreign language, as examples of the application of this method are given below. As the evaluation of the technique indicates, the benefits are important both for the mentor and the mentee and they greatly enforce the learning process. They also help adult learners improve their speech and social status.

## **2. Applying peer mentoring to language learning**

The application of peer mentoring at the field of learning Greek as a second or foreign language, as designed and applied in the SCS of Mytilene [4] follows the categorization described below:

### **2.1 Peer mentoring workshops**

In these workshops, adults mentees migrants who can speak Greek fluently, and have good receptive, understanding and productive skills both in oral and written language, volunteer to be responsible for a language workshop. Those are the mentors who are willing to spend some time organizing the mentees and then start the workshop. A workshop can include one or more mentees who have difficulties in Greek and it can adapt to the needs and wishes of those who attend it (learning contract) [5]. The mentors are mostly people who have lived in Greece for years, love the language and are students of the SCS because they also love learning. Many of them have taken exams and hold certifications on their competency in the Greek language. They are those who can mostly understand the needs of their fellow compatriots and recognize the difficulties of the language, since they have already been there themselves. Moreover, they have plenty of instructional material, printed or digital, because they are students of the SCS, but also from the free material that the Ministry of Education provides for the exams on Greek literacy. Moreover, the mentees trust and ask for the help of their mentors because communication with them is easier and questions can be answered in their own language, especially if they are newcomers to Greece, if they are beginner language learners or if there is no common language between them and the teacher of the school. Mentors, mentees, and teachers of the school gain a lot from this experience.

### **2.2. Supportive peer mentoring**

In this kind of mentoring, adult mentees with really good performance in the language field, foreign immigrants or Greeks, organize classes for those interested in sitting A1 or A2 level exams, under the supervision and support of the language teacher of the school. The mentees can be one individual or a group of co-mentees of the mentors, who face difficulties in the subject. The aim of the mentors is not to provide the solutions or answers to the exercises, but to be available to provide advice and explanations to the mentees for them to achieve their goal. As a reward to the effort of the mentor and the mentees for their participation in the workshops, we created our own special certificates of attendance. This idea was given to us by Portlaoise of Ireland, where supportive peer mentoring was also taking place, but not in the language field. When the mentees feel ready they can sit exams of Greek literacy that take place regularly, and attain an A1 or A2 certificate.

### **2.3 Peer mentoring between students of 1st and 2nd year**

Here, the mentors are the students of the second school year, who are highly competent in the Greek language and become the mentors of the 1st year students. In the workshop, the mentor and the language teacher of the school organize the lesson plan that the mentor has already attended as a mentee and so is able to present. The language teacher steps back and the mentor becomes the "teacher". Thus the abilities of the mentees are boosted. The mentors improve their oral and written speech, get a deeper understanding of the Greek grammar and syntax, and the mentees gain from the workshop attendance and can easier adapt to the school and participate in the other kinds of literacy as well. They become more confident in using the language and have the older students as an example that encourages them to move on.

### **2.4 Discovery peer-mentoring**

In this kind of mentoring, a group of mentees becomes responsible for a discovery project with a subject of common interest, works on it and finally presents it. The group makes research, focuses on what is most important and re-constructs it into a final product that is useful and unique. The immigrants, who are parts of the group, receive help by the most experienced members, as far as the language goes, in achieving specific goals and creating the final product. In the SCS of Mytilene such a discovery project was organized in the form of a debate. Its title was: "Internet. Friend or Foe?". There were two groups of three members each, who worked on the subject from two different perspectives: one in favor and one against the use of the internet. The mentees had to make research and present their arguments during a pre-set time. Four "jury members" had to decide about

which group had analyzed its arguments in the most convincing way, but they were not able to reach a decision. Their final conclusion was that we should all use the internet responsibly to protect ourselves from its various threats.

## 2.5 Peer mentoring using a checklist

A checklist with clear instructions is given to a group of mentees immigrants so that they create a final product. The checklist is in Greek. With peer mentoring and other available tools, like dictionaries and computers, the mentees understand the list and proceed to fulfill the goal following the steps. The mentees interact with each other to complete their work, using whatever prior knowledge they have. Peer mentoring with a checklist is the only occasion when learning takes place among equal learners, as there is no need for someone with a more advanced level to be there. Of course it is not prohibitive that such a person exists or comes up during the process. In the SCS of Mytilene we worked on a Greek, traditional cooking recipe, written in Greek. The mentees had to use it and follow the instructions. At first, they all read the recipe carefully, discussed about the materials and tried to understand the specific cooking instructions. What was really difficult and challenging was that they had to translate the recipe in a precise way. Those who were more experienced in cooking advised the others on how to cook – we improvised to create a cooking area and there the mentees exchanged ideas. They cooked and we all shared the meal.

## 3. A peer mentoring guide

Peer mentoring is one of the most innovative methodological approaches applied currently in the field of adult education. We quote a guide on how to apply peer mentoring at school. That was really helpful in teaching Greek at the SCS of Mytilene: we first define the goal of peer-mentoring. In our case the target was immigrants with little knowledge of Greek. We either invite the students to express their interest in becoming mentors or we spot those who we think are fit for receiving training to be mentors. As soon as we appoint the mentor and the mentee (or mentees), we describe to the mentee the expected benefits of the educational process. Then assess the mentee's needs, which is definitely to start communicating in Greek and develop a mutual plan of working. We set time limits and define a deadline. We adjust the project to the personal style of the mentees and try to be flexible. Every time a workshop on the Greek language or a project was completed, we stepped to the evaluation part. We discussed it with everybody involved and noted our opinions. We often used questionnaires during or at the end of the workshops – which have been a useful source for gathering information. The questionnaires were, of course, in Greek and had to be answered in Greek as well!

## 4. Conclusion

Peer-mentoring means caring for your co-mentees and making use of your knowledge and experience to help them evolve and learn. Peer-mentoring means being willing to listen to and learn from the experience of others. Applying peer mentoring on learning a foreign language has miraculous and reliable effects. All of the mentees of the Greek language workshops of peer mentoring in the SCS of Mytilene developed linguistic abilities in less time than their co-mentees who did not participate in the workshop. The benefits were many both for the mentors who were proud of their ability to speak Greek, a difficult language as they say, and for the mentees who could see themselves progressing day by day in their communication with the locals. This progress of the tutees was also considered a satisfactory achievement for the school itself. What's more, the method costs nothing, spreads information, boosts the team spirit and builds on mutual trust.

## References

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For the "H.E.L.P." programme you can visit:

<https://sites.google.com/site/peersedu2011/empowering-of-learners>

For the S.C.S. of Mytilene: <https://www.sdem.gr>