New Directions for Greek Education in the Diaspora: Teaching Heritage Language Learners in Canada

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Abstract Modern Greek is taught in Canada primarily as a heritage language (HL) through a semi-official education system that involves both public school boards and immigrant communities. The institutions responsible for administering HL programs, as well as the participating teachers and students, are faced with several organizational and educational challenges. This study follows a community-based research (CBR) approach to investigate aspects of Greek heritage language education (HLE) in Ontario. Centered on the findings of a series of research projects that took place between 2014 and 2017 with the collaboration of researchers, educators and community stakeholders, the article examines various aspects of teaching and learning the Greek language at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels and suggests new directions for HLE in Canada and the Hellenic diaspora at large.

Keywords Heritage language education · Modern Greek teaching and learning · Greek community in Canada · Greek diaspora · Community-based research

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1 Theoretical Framework

1.1 Heritage Languages

In recent years, the term Heritage Languages (HLs) has prevailed in bibliographies of works on bilingual education and other relevant academic fields over many other terms that are used worldwide "to identify the non-dominant languages in a given social context" (Kelleher 2010: 1). Jim Cummins points out that in Canada the term HLs was introduced and came into broad use in the 1970s and 1980s in particular reference to the immigrants' languages[1] which are now referred to as international languages (Cummins 2014). In educational environments, a HL is understood as "a language spoken in the home that is different from the main language spoken in society" (Bilash 2011, para. 1). According to Polinsky and Kagan (2007), while HL is rooted in the home, it is not learned deeply, since it is soon subject to language shift—that is, the first and second-generation immigrants' shift to the language of the mainstream society. As Cho, Shin and Krashen (2004) contend, HL can be defined as a language that is used by individuals who came to live in a new land at a young age or who were born in a country to which their parents immigrated. The discussion around HL terminology includes an ongoing debate regarding who the heritage language learners (HLLs) are, what their profiles are, and why it is crucial to distinguish them from native, second or foreign language learners (Valdes 2001). Maria Carreira (2004) categorizes the definitions of HLLs according to three criteria: (1) their place in the community linked to the HL, (2) their personal connection to a HL through their family background, and (3) their proficiency in the HL. Polinsky and Kagan (2007) formulated a broad and a narrow definition of HLLs which recognizes a distinction between those who have a familial or cultural connection with the HL without an actual ability to use the language (broad definition) and the ones who acquired the language to some extent but did not completely learn it before switching to the dominant language (narrow definition). Many HL specialists stress the element of identity negotiation (Swann and Bosson 2008) on the part of learners whose decision to be part of the HL community and its culture is not necessarily linked to their language proficiency. For Van Deusen-Scholl (2003), HLLs learners are those individuals who "have been raised with a strong cultural connection to a particular language through family interaction" and have thus developed a "heritage motivation" (p. 222). Several studies have identified distinct language acquisition and development characteristics of HL learners who have the potential to develop their HL skills almost at the level of native speakers given that certain cultural, social, political and educational conditions are met (Montrul 2010; Polinsky 2007; Valdes 2005; Fishman 2006; Oh et al. 2003). Identifying HL learners as a diverse group of language learners is essential, not only to teachers but also to parents, school administrators, policy makers and individuals responsible for curriculum and teacher development.

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[1] In Canada, the indigenous/native languages and the languages of the deaf community are not labelled as Heritage/International languages (Cummins 2014).

1.2 Greek as a Heritage Language

In the context of Greek language education in the diaspora, the term HL is mainly used in the United States and Canada, whereas educators and researchers who investigate the teaching and learning of Modern Greek in bilingual settings outside Greece, refer to Greek as a "second language", "foreign language" or "mother tongue" and refer to Greek Heritage Language Education as Education for the Greek Diaspora[2] (Damanakis 2007). This approach undermines, to some extent, the concept of identity which is central in the definition of heritage language learners (HLLs) as individuals with distinct educational needs, personal motives and cultural characteristics. In addition to their connection with family members through the heritage language, HLLs tend to identify themselves as members of an ethnolinguistic community. One of the distinct features of the Greek community structure in the diaspora, and particularly in Canada, is the development of many different types of organizations (Liodakis 1998; Chimbos 1986). Hence, Greek HLLs could be also identified as descendants of Greek immigrants who participate in various religious, cultural, educational, professional, social or political associations that constitute the polymorphic Greek map of the diaspora.

Although knowledge of Greek is not per se a prerequisite for membership in those networks, preservation of the HL and culture is at the core of most Greek community mission statements (Aravossitas 2016). Thus, subsequent generations of Greek Canadians, Greek Americans or Greek Australians face the challenge of preserving their language and cultural heritage not only as a matter of personal identity but also to perpetuate community organizations that were founded by their ancestors. Michalis Damanakis argues that HLE has influenced the notion of identity among Greeks in the diaspora and, to some degree, has drawn a line between two groups: (a) individuals of Greek descent who participate in community life and in various forms of Greek-language education, and (b) individuals and families of Greek origin who have distanced themselves from the Greek communities and have more or less been assimilated into the host country's society (Damanakis 2005: 58). Inevitably, the role of Greek schools in the diaspora—apart from their educational/language learning focus—is also linked to the sustainability of "ecumenical Hellenism" (Venturas 2009).

1.3 The AIM Framework

The analysis of Greek language education in the diaspora presented in this chapter, draws on the theoretical framework AIM (Access, Innovation, Motivation), (Aravossitas, 2016). The model was developed as part of community-based research in Canada that investigated the status of Greek HLE (see Sects. 2.1 and 2.2). The

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[2] The most frequently used term is "Paedia Omogenon" (i.e. Education of Greeks in the Diaspora").
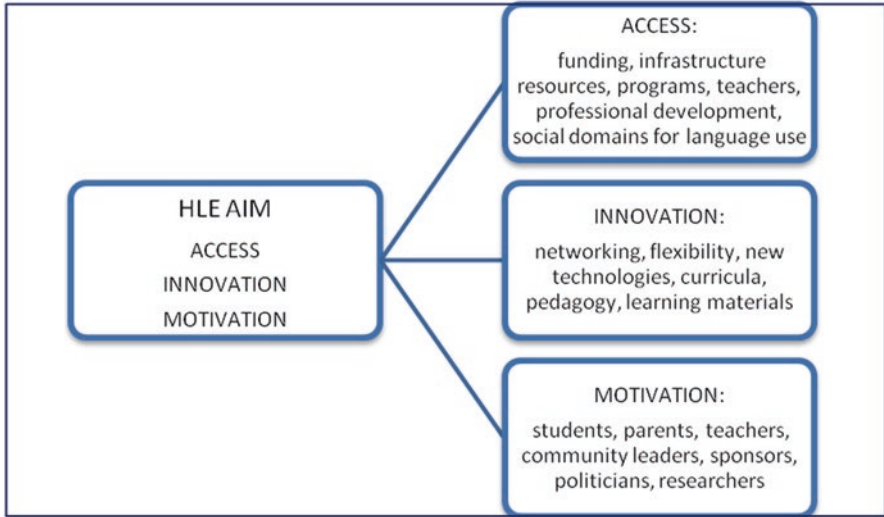
Fig. 1 The AIM parameters in heritage language education

study explored the existing Greek language programs across Canada and assessed educational data (i.e., students, teachers, resources) and challenges based on three pillars: Access, Innovation and Motivation (Fig. 1). These three axes contribute to the mapping of assets and factors that influence educational work and priorities in relation to the state and the perspectives of HLE in a specific context (i.e., teaching and learning Greek in Canada).

Access entails provision of the necessary means and assets that any education program and system need in order to succeed: everything from teachers to classrooms and textbooks. These elements are the first prerequisites for HLE. Moving from the periphery into the second circle of the framework (Fig. 2), we find the concept of *Innovation* which involves the need for constant adaptation to changes in the conditions under which HLE operates. Innovation requires acceptance of new ideas, new media and new practices in the HLE field and in the surrounding environment that affect the teaching and learning of heritage languages (e.g., new generation of learners and new laws introduced by the host country).

The core circle is *Motivation* which is the synthesis of identity negotiation on the learners' part and inspiration on the part of educators, administrators and community leaders. This framework emerged from a systematic investigation of Greek language education in Canada between 2011 and 2016 which involved approximately 10,000 students, 300 teachers, 70 organizations and more than 100 programs available to learners of various age groups (Aravossitas 2016).
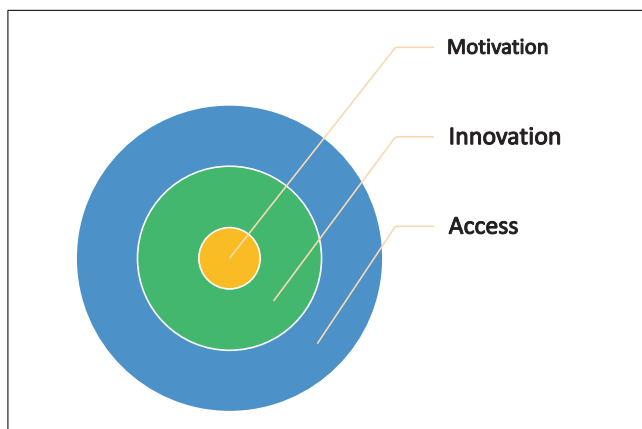
Fig. 2 The three pillars of AIM: access, innovation, motivation

2   Methodology of the Research

2.1   *Community-Based Language Research in HLE*

The study of Greek HLE in Canada follows a community-based research (CBR) approach as an investigation that includes only community members. CBR is viewed not as a set of methods, but as a set of underlying beliefs and principles about the ways in which research ought to be conducted (Wallerstein and Duran 2006). It aims at gathering knowledge about a phenomenon or a problem of significant value to a community. Knowledge that emerges from this type of research informs the design of actions that benefit the community. CBR is a bottom-up research approach with the following set of values and principles: It recognizes the community as a unit of identity; builds on strengths and resources within the community; facilitates collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research; integrates knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners; promotes a co-learning and empowering process addressing social inequalities from multiple perspectives; involves a cyclical and iterative process, returning to renegotiate planning and strategy throughout the process, and disseminates to all partners the findings and knowledge in an accessible way (Israel et al. 2003).

Applying the above principles to address linguistic issues is described as Community-Based Language Research (CBLR). Attributed to Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) and following the work of Cameron et al. (1992), CBLR refers to research conducted to produce knowledge concerning a community language.

The merits of CBR in language and linguistics-related inquiries are debated by the scientific community on specific questions as to how community-based research fits within linguistic research (Rice 2016).

As CBLR originates and occurs within a community, it requires the involvement of its members as active researchers themselves rather than as passive subjects to be studied (Rice 2011). Thus, CBLR participants work within their communities, leading the way to the establishment of specific language related goals and the development of realistic strategies to achieve those goals. In the HLE context, such a research approach can result in a series of ongoing, planned steps that immigrant communities can take to ensure that they provide evidence-based programs, among other actions, in order to preserve their language in a dynamic political, economic, cultural and social environment.

2.2   Research Actions

Based on the above theoretical background, we focused on the particularities of teaching and learning Greek as a heritage language in Canada at three levels of education: elementary, secondary and tertiary. Our data were derived from studies that took place between 2014 and 2017 involving three groups of participants: (a) Greek language program administrators (Aravossitas 2016), university students (Oikonomakou et al. 2017) and teachers in the primary and secondary panels (Aravossitas and Oikonomakou 2017, 2018). Various challenges emerged from these three studies. However, for the purpose of this paper, we focus on two salient ones: (a) the teaching of mixed classes which are composed of students of different age groups and language proficiency levels in elementary education and by heritage and foreign language learners in tertiary education, and (b) the distinct professional development needs of the educators involved in Greek HLE, as they are confronted with a complex synthesis of learners. In the next section, we present aspects and practices of Greek language education at all three levels, linking them to the professional development needs of teachers and suggestions for the future direction of Greek HLE both inside and outside the classroom.

3   Application in Greek Language Education

3.1   Teaching and Learning in Elementary Programs

Greek language education in the diaspora is carried out by different institutions that constitute a semi-official system of education characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity. A basic parameter of our research approach is the mapping of the educational needs of a particular student population: heritage language learners. By definition, this group is complex, since it consists of learners with diverse educational needs and expectations. Recent studies involving Greek language learners in Canada indicate that most of them are members of the third generation (Aravossitas 2016; Oikonomakou et al. 2017). This category includes children born in Canada of

parents who are the children of Greek immigrants. It also includes children of inter-ethnic marriages in which only one of the two parents is of Greek ancestry. The relationship of the above learners with the target language varies. Some of them are isolated from the Greek community altogether, while others have a network of relatives and friends of Greek origin and attend Greek social, cultural and religious activities regularly. Consequently, these learners are socially exposed to the HL outside the classroom. Also, attitudes toward the HL range widely. Some learners appreciate and take pride in their cultural and linguistic background, while others are estranged from their Greek heritage for their various individual reasons.

In the shaping of the HLL's language learning motivation, the family environment plays a pivotal role that supports, more or less, this process. The supportive nature of the family framework is determined by the relative position that the HL occupies in the personal journey of the family members. In some cases, Greek may be only a minor part of their linguistic and cultural background. Thus, depending on the experience of the parents with the country of origin, only some of the students are afforded the opportunity to visit Greece on a regular or non-regular basis and to gain a primary understanding of the Greek reality (Oikonomakou et al. 2017). It follows that the more opportunities learners have to speak Greek regularly, the more they engage naturally with the language and feel comfortable in doing so, not as a schooling process but as a social necessity where rewards for the acquisition of the HL are embodied in communication with beloved friends and relatives (Valdes 2001). Furthermore, if the family visits the "home country" often, then the motivation factor is reinforced for the HL learner. The language is upgraded from a tongue related to family tradition to a very useful communication tool. Conversely, if the HL is not exercised by the child's social cycle or if she/he is not expected to become fluent, then the motivation is absent, and the chances for a positive attitude towards the HL are fewer (Cummins 1993). In this case, the learner feels that there is no need to spend time and effort to study the language. Hence, she/he will likely remain on the surface of the HL without pursuing academic fluency.

The second important parameter that defines the educational work is the profile of the teachers (Aravossitas and Oikonomakou 2017) who also form a heterogeneous group with different personal and educational paths. Their professional profile is shaped by a number of factors, including whether: (a) they are native speakers of the target language; (b) their background education is relevant in terms of familiarity with teaching Greek as a first, second or foreign language; (c) they are certified to teach a particular age or language proficiency group; and (d) their professional status in relation to teaching Greek (i.e., full-time, part-time or volunteer service), and so on. Accordingly, educators with professional recognition in Greece based on their qualifications (i.e., graduates of Greek universities' education departments who are certified to teach in public schools in Greece at the primary or secondary divisions) coexist in Greek language classes with educators who have completed a teacher education program at a Canadian university instead, and also with others who do not hold a university degree from Greece or Canada (or another country) or who provide unpaid services to Greek schools (usually volunteers in community settings) with varying levels of Greek language proficiency and pedagogical credentials.

Greek language programs cannot offer sufficient hours to educators seeking full-time employment. Therefore, Greek language teaching is the main occupation for only a small proportion of HL teachers, whereas the majority of them teach Greek only sporadically or on a part-time basis. Usually, HL instructors who are simultaneously mainstream teachers find it difficult to retain their HL program positions for many years due to family or other obligations. Also, pay rates for Greek language instruction, chiefly in community-based programs, are significantly lower in comparison to the earnings of mainstream Canadian teachers. Teachers' qualifications constitute another parameter to consider in analyzing the situation of Greek HL educators in Canada. According to research conducted in Ontario for the Hellenic Heritage Foundation (2016), among the main concerns of Greek language program directors is that many of their teachers either do not have sufficient pedagogical training (particularly teachers of the first generation), or they are not proficient enough in the Greek language to be able to teach it. This situation concerns primarily teachers of the second or the third generation.

The profiles of the teachers and students reflect, to a large extent, the particularities of Greek language education at the elementary level in Canada. The student population consists of learners who study the language—either voluntarily or under the pressure of the family and their social environment—in programs that frequently involve classes that are mixed in terms of age groups and proficiency levels (Kagan and Dillon 2009). Contact with the HL occurs in different phases (National Heritage Language Resource Center 2009). The process of Greek language acquisition for HLLs usually begins at an early stage under the influence of family members, often Greek-speaking grandparents serving as caregivers. When the children enter mainstream schools, the learning process of the HL is gradually disconnected as a result of various factors: inclinations, interests, peer pressure or simply daily workload in the dominant language. As the family focus shifts toward success in the day school, young learners do not have the opportunity to form a clear picture of their expectations and motivation regarding the HL. Attending after school HL programs challenges many learners. Extra schooling can be particularly stressful when it conflicts with other extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, music, and dance).

Furthermore, there is limited time to study the HL or receive support in the home and limited opportunities to use the HL for daily communication. At the same time, students often experience difficulties in comprehending the complex Greek grammar-syntax phenomena and there are significant differences between the day school and the Greek school curriculum (Chatzidaki 2015). Also, as most Greek elementary programs are not certified by the Ministry of Education of Greece or the Canadian authorities, their curricula do not have the same qualitative features or a common assessment framework since their components vary considerably. The learning materials are often produced in Greece (Aravossitas and Oikonomakou 2017) and do not necessarily speak to the needs of HLLs who have difficulties in appreciating texts designed for native learners in Greece. Many students also feel overwhelmed by the explicit teaching of unfamiliar grammar rules, including items such as the inflected system (cases and genders) and the plural of courtesy. Students' personal

goals are also heterogeneous, as they are essentially related to the development of communicative rather than academic skills, which puts cognitive limitations on the learning process. In addition to the above, Greek programs face infrastructure challenges. For example, some courses take place in the basement of churches and community centres or in rented rooms without access to auxiliary spaces or the Internet.

In most Greek HL programs in Canada, teaching is structured around thematic units that draw on the experiential reality of children (Ur 1996; Chatzidaki 2014) and therefore have as a point of reference the community and its activities. Since classes are generally heterogeneous, the selection of educational material and teaching methods addresses the need to integrate all learners. To motivate individuals of wide-ranging ages and proficiency levels, teachers tend to organize many group projects that require a collaborative effort and focus on differentiated teaching strategies (Tomlinson 2014). Where infrastructure permits it, multimodal and authentic texts (Curto et al. 1995; Gee 2000; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001) are used (e.g., YouTube videos, articles from online sources, films, etc.) with emphasis on cultural and intercultural elements, and dialogue is encouraged through dramatization. Additionally, learning is supported by community-based events, such as traditional dances and school concerts where communication in the target language is developed and promoted simultaneously with intercultural, artistic and social skills.

Given the difficulty of comprehending complex structural or grammatical phenomena, grammar teaching occupies an important place. It is part of a context of linguistic awareness in which the knowledge of different languages is activated. Through a variety of exercises and pedagogical tasks (Bygate et al. 2013), the functional use of phenomena and experiential contact with different communication environments is sought (Halliday 1985). Teaching vocabulary serves the need of interconnecting English and Greek (as both languages are used interchangeably by the community), while familiarization with the written form of the language is pursued through root words and groupings based on semantic fields. Due to the heterogeneity in most of their classes, teachers rely on a repertoire of strategies to enhance the learners' vocabulary competence (Anastasiadi-Symeonidi et al. 2014). Frequently, Greek programs emphasize elements of Greek history and geography as well as the Greek Orthodox tradition which act as a vehicle for the students' contact with specific places of origin of the members of their families and their cultural environment.

The cultivation of language receptive and productive skills evolves in parallel through the study of various genres and their textual features. Thus, students are presented with assumptions about both the subject and the type of text, and their previous experiences are highlighted. Aspects of situational teaching are also used to promote the functional use of the language supported by an array of techniques or learning strategies (Oxford 1990; Psaltou-Joycey 2010; Cohen 2011). Summative assessment is not generally practiced in most HL programs. Teachers use mainly formative assessment strategies such as observation, student conference, exit cards, self-assessment techniques as well as peer-assessment approaches for teamwork and group projects (Varlokosta and Triantafyllidou 2003).

3.2   Teaching and Learning in Secondary (Credit) Programs

In secondary education, the teaching of Greek in Ontario is part of the *International Languages Program* which connects the study of international languages (any language other than English and French) with the official secondary school program of studies (Ontario Curriculum 2016). This program enables HLLs (students of Greek origin) who are the majority in the Greek language programs to choose Greek as their second language in high school. By attending a three-year Greek language course of 100 h per year (usually 3 h per week on Saturdays), students acquire some of the "credits" they need for their graduation from high school. An example of such a program is the credit school "Aristoteles" of the Greek Community of Toronto, which currently has an enrollment of approximately 250 students. In this program, the instructors are teachers certified by the province of Ontario, as well as seconded teachers from the Ministry of Education of Greece.

In comparison to elementary (K-8) students, the students attending secondary Greek language programs (GLPs) are considerably fewer. However, their attendance is more systematic. This situation can be attributed to the fact that the international language programs at the high school level are linked to the public education system through the Curriculum of the Ontario Ministry of Education that sets the objectives and the success criteria of the assessment parameters of the program (Ontario Ministry of Education 2016). Organizations that operate GLPs in the secondary division (in most cases Greek communities) are subject to a regular inspection by the Ministry of Education to ensure that the programs conform to the official policies of the Ontario curriculum, maintain standards for teachers' qualifications, keep accurate records of student attendance, adhere to school hours, and provide details for the assessment and marking process. Abiding by official education standards "legitimizes" Greek language high school programs and provides a certain education quality guarantee for students and parents who often complain about the level of studies at the elementary GLPs. As the K-8 international language programs are offered under the umbrella of continuing/supplementary education, they tend to be less systematic, resulting in a high absenteeism rate and shortage in appropriate teaching staff, curricula and infrastructures.

With its revised curriculum for International Languages, the Ontario Ministry of Education sets the vision and overall goals of the program as follows: "Students of international languages will communicate and interact in the international language with growing confidence in real-life contexts, and will develop an awareness of the multicultural and plurilingual nature of the modern world … will develop the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong language and to participate fully as citizens in Canada and in the world" (Ontario Ministry of Education 2016: 6).

For an effective learning of the HL, the official document focuses on (a) lifelong language learning, (b) authentic communication, (c) development of language learning strategies, (d) development of intercultural understanding, (e) critical and creative thinking skills and metacognition, (f) making real-life connections. The students are encouraged to make a genuine commitment not only to learning in the classroom but also to the pursuit of opportunities to use the target language outside

the classroom. Parents are asked to support their children's learning of their HL by (a) encouraging completion of homework and partnership with the school, (b) attending cultural events or joining community groups that provide language resources and cultural opportunities, and (c) demonstrating an overall positive attitude towards the target language at home and in the community.

Finally, the Ontario Curriculum asks teachers to (i) develop appropriate instructional and assessment strategies to facilitate achievement of the curriculum expectations, (ii) foster enthusiasm for learning the language and addressing the individual students' needs, and (iii) engage in activities that give students opportunities to relate their international languages skills to the social, cultural, environmental, and economic conditions and challenges of the world. Thus, teachers of international languages are expected to encourage their HLLs to participate in the larger community as responsible and engaged citizens pursuing lifelong learning. Teachers are also asked to act as role models for their students, both linguistically and culturally and to inform them about the benefits of learning additional languages.

In addition to all the above expectations, teachers who work in the Greek ILPs need to consider in their practice the diverse needs of their Greek heritage learners who differ widely in terms of language skills, their relationship with the HL community, the possibilities of using the language in their family and wider social environment, and their personal motivation for learning the target language as part of their identity negotiation process.

In the pursuit of innovative teaching practices to stimulate student engagement in the Greek International Language Program, particularly since most of the courses are held on Saturday, the leaders of the *Aristoteles Credit School* of the Greek Community of Toronto began to participate in an international e-Learning program developed by the University of Crete (Chatzidaki 2015). The program linked several Greek language classes of the Greek diaspora to form an interactive learning community through collaborative projects aimed at the development of both language and intercultural communication skills. The Centre for Intercultural Education and Migration Studies (E.DIA.M.ME) is a research institute affiliated with the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Crete in Greece which implemented *Greek-language Intercultural Education Abroad*, a project co-funded by the European Union and the Greek state. As part of the implementation of the project, teachers and students in Greek-language programs in various parts of the globe were invited to form an Internet-based Global Learning Network. This international network linked classrooms electronically through a special online environment created specifically for the project. Two or three classes of similar age group, language level and interests were joined. Each partner-group worked together for one or two school years. Teachers collaborated and led their classes in synchronous and asynchronous communication. More importantly, students became actively involved in collaborative projects involving aspects of the Greek language, history and culture, providing an environment for creative language use. Dozens of projects related to the life experiences and the interests of the students (e.g., my community, my city, my hobbies, and famous Greeks in my country) were presented among twinned classes.

An evaluation of the program's educational activities was carried out by both the participants and the researchers at the University of Crete. The action research that was conducted by the participant teachers and school administrators in Toronto through questionnaires, interviews and student reflections reveals that the online collaboration helped the students to develop their written and oral language skills, as the opportunity to present their work to a wider audience gave them additional incentives for effective language communication. Additionally, the participants found that the use of new technologies and the ongoing interaction between HL learners from different countries (a) made the Greek language classes more interesting, vivid and enjoyable, (b) developed the intercultural skills of the students who identified common and different cultural characteristics as they compared their experiences to the ones of their peers, and (c) facilitated the development of new international network of friendships that continued after the end of the program through social networking.

It is worth noting that this e-Learning program also enhanced the parents' interest in their children's HL learning and received recognition by the local community. Participants and community stakeholders agreed that innovative practices in Greek language education, contributes significantly to the intergenerational transmission of the Greek language and makes the ILPs more relevant to the needs, interests and learning styles of the new generation of learners who represent the future of the community.

3.3   Teaching and Learning in University Programs

At the tertiary level, Modern Greek in Canada is taught as part of Hellenic Studies' Programs in six Canadian universities. A study conducted at the Department of Primary Education of the University of the Aegean,[3] in Rhodes, Greece, examined (a) the learning incentives and learning characteristics of students who were enrolled in the Greek language and culture courses at the University of Toronto and York University and (b) prepared recommendations for the sustainability of the courses, considering the individual learning needs of the students (focusing on the different needs of heritage versus foreign language learners). The participants in the study consisted of 84 students of both universities who were enrolled in the Modern Greek language and culture courses in the first semester of the academic year 2015–2016. The students-participants comprised three distinct groups: (a) 42% second generation heritage language learners (HLL2s); (b) 36% third second generation heritage language learners (HLL3s); (c) 22% foreign language learners (FLLs) (i.e., students with no Greek background). Through a self-assessment placement questionnaire, based on the "I can do" statements of the Common European Framework, the students assessed

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[3] in collaboration with researchers as part of the Aravossitas' postdoctoral fellowship program funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC Canada) Marianthi Oikonomakou and Eleni Skourtou.

their sociocultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds and revealed the major motivating factors and preferences in relation to studying Modern Greek.

The findings suggest that university students who are enrolled in Greek language courses in Ontario have varied language skills at their entry level as well as different motivations for learning Greek. This variety depends on their ethnic origin and cultural profile as well as on their relationship with the Greek Canadian community and their education/academic path. Most of the students at the undergraduate level are majoring in humanities and social studies. While awareness of the importance of identity is associated with the desire of students in intermediate and advanced Greek language classes, the beginners seem mainly influenced by cultural values or personal choices. For HLL2s, the father's origin seems to be more influential in their decision to enroll in a Greek language course, whereas for HLL3s, it is the mother's origin that plays a more significant role.

The students of Greek descent demonstrate greater competencies in oral than in written use of language whereas their reading comprehension skills are more developed than the written production ones (they can read a text or understand a presentation but find it difficult to speak and write). Both groups of students (heritage and foreign learners) pursue the acquisition of the language mainly to improve their communication ability in their sociocultural surroundings. As important reasons for their enrollment, beginners note their contact with the Greek language and culture and the possibility to visit Greece.

Students in both universities expressed an interest in combining Greek language learning with content related to literature, history, mythology, geography, sports, cuisine, politics, religion and folklore. They also expressed a preference for learning the target language through films, music videos, books, online materials such as social media, websites or online articles.

Finally, on their recommendations to the course instructors, the students expressed a preference for a communicative learning environment with a variety of stimuli, within or outside the confines of the classroom. Following the students' suggestions in this study, the instructor considered modifications in his syllabus to include community outreach and experiential learning components, including guest speakers and class visits to restaurants, community festivals, concerts and Greek film screenings. The positive learning experiences of the students through the modified community-based curriculum were reflected in their course evaluations and in a significant increase in enrollment for all Modern Greek language courses in the subsequent academic year.

4   Teacher Development and Recommendations

In summarizing the research projects and the conditions involving teaching and learning Greek in the context of HLE in Canada, a series of conclusions are drawn regarding the entire range of Greek-language education in the diaspora at large that may inform future directions for interested stakeholders.

Starting from the factors that motivate HL students to learn Greek, we claim that this decision remains inexorably linked with the negotiation of identity and the personal "rewards" of using the language for communication in the family, the immediate social environment and the community. For primary education, this reality should inform curriculum and program developers in designing HL classes that focus on the students' communication needs and facilitate opportunities for community involvement and a real-life context for frequent language use.

However, in designing Greek language programs for the secondary and tertiary levels, where participation of more foreign language learners is expected, the needs of "non-heritage" students should be also considered. Many educators face the challenge of applying diversified teaching practices to address the cultural and linguistic differences in their complex "mixed" classes. Practically speaking, this task is not easy, since teachers and those responsible for their professional development, should find a way to merge two different language education approaches: (a) teaching Greek as a foreign language and (b) teaching the language for heritage learners. The two approaches are informed by distinct theoretical bases and require careful consideration in selecting learning material, teaching strategies and assessment methods to engage a broad spectrum of learners in terms of their cultural backgrounds, motivation levels, learning goals and success criteria. Given this heterogeneity, it is crucial to revisit the curricula that have been used in Greek language education in the diaspora and reformulate the existing learning material. In most cases, Greek language programs in Canada use guidelines and textbooks that are Greek-centric, static and thus not designed to reflect the complex reality that teachers confront in their classes. This challenge is intensified by the lack of teachers who are sufficiently trained to adapt the existing material to their students' expectations.

A new approach to the contemporary educational reality of Greek-language education in Canada—and more widely in the diaspora—calls for a creative use of "flexible" pedagogical tools offered by the information and communication technologies. One such example is the e-learning gateway developed by the University of Crete (Chatzidaki 2015; Kourtis-Kazoullis et al. 2014). Specifically designed for the Greek language needs in the diaspora, this portal can accommodate learners of different age groups and starting points. The language lessons are posted in distinct levels according to the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001). These lessons are enriched with multimodal cultural material (videos, songs, maps, games, etc.) and supported by an interactive environment for communication between students, teachers, administrators, parents and researchers who join an international learning network. Taking advantage of the enormous potential that this platform provides is clearly a way to overcome some of the main pedagogical challenges that we described in the previous sections: the management of mixed classrooms, the lack of continued support for teachers and the limited opportunities for language use in authentic communication environments.

Considering the hurdles encountered by Greek language teachers in the diaspora, it is clear that, while they are being asked to teach in conditions of heterogeneity and professional liquidity, they often do not have the appropriate means or

access to in-service support. At the same time, the secondment of teachers from the Greek Ministry of Education to community schools in the diaspora and the in-service training of teachers from the diaspora in Greek universities, which were formerly funded by the Greek state and European Community resources, have been limited by the severe ongoing economic crisis in Greece (Damanakis et al. 2014).

There is a course of action that could fill this gap: the organization of professional development courses for Greek language teachers in the diaspora through community initiatives. The advantages of this idea are partly financial, as the funding would come from the communities instead of Greece. Additionally, there are educational benefits, since communities have a deeper and more accurate understanding of the distinct needs of their learners and teachers. An example of a community-based professional development course for Greek language teachers in Canada is the *Effective Teaching* program that was developed and implemented at York University in Toronto with the financial support of the Hellenic Heritage Foundation (2016). The program provides professional development and certification in language teaching to educators who work in various Greek community schools, in Ontario, Canada. It is important to state that the design for *Effective Teaching* was based on data from a study on the needs of Greek language schools in Ontario. The study, in which the co-authors of this article were involved, was informed by (a) questionnaires and interviews with practitioners, and (b) a survey of community leaders and school administrators. The participants identified priority areas for the professional development of Greek language teachers in Canada and the findings were made available to the course developers (Hellenic Heritage Foundation 2016). *Effective Teaching* was offered in two cycles during the 2016/2017 academic years to 25 teachers who took lessons 3 h per week for one semester. As the HHF covered the cost of the program completely, it was free for the participants, most of whom teach Greek on a part-time or voluntary basis. Upon completion of each cycle, the participants submitted their reflections as part of the course evaluation. One of the key findings of this assessment process was that professional development courses for Greek teaching in Canada should focus on supporting both the language proficiency and the pedagogical capacity of the instructors.

Asked to suggest specific professional development units according to their needs, participants prioritized the following topics: (a) strategies for teaching in heterogeneous classes, (b) strategies for teaching very young learners, (c) effective long-term teaching planning to achieve the active involvement of students in the learning process and (d) strategies to utilize in their practice the pedagogical potential of the tools offered by new technologies and multimedia resources. Finally, it should be noted that the new modules of *Effective Teaching,* will be offered through online/distance learning settings to facilitate the participation of more teachers in remote regions. This option is particularly useful in Canada given the long distances between cities where Greek schools operate. Indeed, the new technologies can play an important multifunctional role. They are not only a tool for professional development and in-service support of teachers, but also a major tool and for teaching and learning purposes (as in the case of the learning communities described in Sect. 3.2).

However, given the diversity of the Greek programs in the diaspora and the myriad of resources that can be used for innovative practices, there is a question of coordination of actions which in the past was primarily a role attributed to the Greek Ministry of Education. Continuation of this practice is problematic because:

1. The economic crisis has limited the resources that Greece can provide for the education of Greek and non-Greek heritage students abroad.
2. The World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE) has been deactivated and without any successor in place, it becomes practically difficult to unite it for a pan-diasporic approach to Greek language education.
3. It is practically impossible to reconcile the different educational conditions prevailing in all centers of the Greek diaspora. In the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, there are more similarities, since Greek learners are English language speakers, whereas in other parts of the world, Greek language students come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
4. Even at the level of one country, different conditions are determined by complex legal and organizational issues. In Canada, for example, where the educational affairs are a provincial responsibility, there are regions with more systematic Greek-language programs in subsidized day schools (e.g., the case of the trilingual schools of the Greek Community of Montreal), while elsewhere Greek language courses are offered in continuing education settings and through afterschool programs held on weekday evenings or weekends (e.g., the schools of the Greek Community of Toronto, York Region, Edmonton, and so on), through the Greek Orthodox Church (e.g., the Metamorphosis Greek Orthodox School in Toronto), or through of the International Languages Program of the public School Boards (e.g., TDSB in Toronto). Thus, even if financial resources were available—as in the 1990s-when programs such as *Education for the Greeks Abroad* attempted to provide solutions to the whole of Greek language education in the diaspora—it is now extremely difficult and pedagogically questionable to consider that the Greek government should remain the centre of decisions and actions concerning Greek heritage language education.

The research and educational efforts presented in this article suggest that the teaching and learning of Greek as a heritage language can be sustained through the involvement of the Greek communities in the diaspora, with Greece playing a supportive role mainly through research programs and recourses produced through the collaboration of Greek and foreign universities. Understanding Greek-language education as a community responsibility and promoting community-based initiatives, such as the ones currently undertaken in Canada (Aravossitas 2016; Aravossitas and Oikonomakou 2017, 2018; Oikonomakou et al. 2017), underscores the diverse local needs of the Greek language learners instead of the one-fits-all approach which is unrealistic under the current conditions.

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