Case Study template

A) General Part

General	
Case Study Title	**Research Based Learning and Guidance (RE.BA.LE.G)**
DIALOGUE thematic group	Learning and Guidance
Date of the case study	24.09.2011 – 30.12.2012
Contact Information	
Name of the institution	**Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH),** Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy
Location/country	Thessaloniki/Greece
Size of the organisation/ Number of academic/research and non-academic/administrative staff	The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is the largest university in Greece. The University Campus covers some 23 hectares close to the centre of Thessaloniki. It comprises 7 Faculties organized into 33 Schools, 5 faculties with only 1 school each, as well as 4 independent Schools (a total of 42 Schools). Some educational and administrative facilities are located off campus for practical and operational reasons. More than 81.500 undergraduate and postgraduate students study at the Aristotle University, 72.140 in undergraduate programmes and 8.360 in postgraduate programmes. • The Teaching and Research Staff numbers 2,207 people (767 professors, 452 associate professors, 618 assistant professors, and 370 lecturers); • the Scientific Teaching Staff numbers 65; and • the Special Laboratory Teaching Staff numbers 259 people. This is further supported by: – the 240 members of the Special Technical Laboratory Staff for teaching services; and – the 961 members of administrative staff.
Website	http://www.auth.gr/home/index_en.html
Abstract	
Key words	Research-based learning, action research, targeted guidance
Please provide a short abstract of the case study	The aim of this case study is to analyze and solve a series of problems faced by secondary school teachers in their daily practice. The case study is conducted in three phases as follows: 1. A team of teachers approaches the research team at the University for help and guidance. The research

team initially analyzes the problems teachers face and then proposes some innovative pedagogical practices that is backed by relevant literature, educational and other material, which operate as a medium for self-directed learning.

2. Then, because the problems were not resolved, the team conducts research in the school and the classroom in which the teachers operate in order to understand the problems and to provide targeted guidance. This phase serves as a learning process for the members of the research team, particularly for graduate students and doctoral candidates.

3. The research team designs and develops an action research plan which involves the majority of the teachers who teach in the school and the director of the school. The members of the research team from the University take the role of the critical friend and provide guidance on issues of research methodology, analysis of materials and of their use in school practice, while the whole process functions as a learning process for all participants (teachers and researchers).

B) Specific Part

The following part depends on each thematic group, outlining strengths and weaknesses of the chosen situations.

1. Context:

Please present the general background ("landscape of experience") of the activity and in which institutions, organisations, units or sectors the case took place.

Two agencies were involved in this case study, the university (represented by a **research team**) and one multicultural secondary school unit (represented by **its director, its teachers and its students**). The case study was formed as part of the Master's programme of the Department of Pedagogy (Faculty of Philosophy) in AUTH. It took place both in AUTH and school premises. The general background of the activity has as follows:

The starting line of action on one side was to steer reflection of the team of teachers working in a multicutlural secondary education school. The teachers reported to the research team that their teaching in the third grade of the multicultural high school in which they worked (the 65% of students were of foreign origin) could not raise the interest of their students. As they reported certain students were mis-communicating creating agitation among other students, many of them did not know Greek language very well and they had difficulties in comprehending what they were taught, whereas others expressed verbal aggressiveness, and some of them were isolated. They also stated that they could not apply the innovations proposed by the national programme in effect (interdisciplinary and thematic programs of study, multiple themes programs of study, constructive practices, authentic evaluation) because of their incomplete pedagogical training, but also because they were facing problems related with the structure and operation of the Greek secondary education as a whole. The case study was structured as follows:

A) **Firstly**, the research team and the teachers discussed at great length the problems the teachers were facing. They sought, they recorded and they studied Greek and international research, that was relevant to those issues that constitute the teachers' problematic situation. Two researchers and one a doctoral candidate in Peadagogy presented in own research and their proposals in order to construct relevance to: 1) with the forms of violence reported in the Greek secondary school, 2) with the opinions of teachers for the innovations of national programme in effect and the possible application of these

innovations and 3) with the training difficulties of foreign students in the Greek school.

The teachers kept a journal and reflected on the information they received, they discussed in detail with the researchers and they gradually transformed their learning to educational action, by differentiating their pedagogical practices and addressing their problems on a pedagogical basis (interesting face-to-face teaching, use of ICT, less miscommunication among the students, adaptation of cross-cultural content in their teaching and conflict management).

B) **Secondly**, the research team recorded and analysed the situation in the school by conducting ethnographic research. The researchers made participatory observations, they kept records of teaching events in a particular order, they reported all the material and technical infrastructure, they portrayed the social climate with a sociogram, they described the mode of administration and operation of the school, they took interviews from the school's head-teacher, from the teachers and from the students, and they also organied three foci-groups, one with the teachers and two with the students. Researchers and teachers analysed together the recorded material and after elborate discussions they made a proposal for improving the school's climate and the teaching process with an action-research project that was implemented by teachers themselves with much guidance by the researchers (study of the relevant literature, theory of instructive methodology, differentiation of school work, constructivistic practices, production of linguistic material for foreign students, use of ICT in the teaching process and application that they learned in their daily school practices).

C) **Thirdly**, the proposed method for dealing with the problems the teachers were facing was action-research. In the frame of research of action (cf. Annex) the teachers recorded the opinions of their students for the teaching they provided to them and they also took into account their proposals for the way with which they would wish to be taught, they conducted interviews and group discussions, they approached the isolated students and the students that expressed verbal aggressiveness using biographical method, and they also video-recorded themselves during their teaching and they reflected on that. After some discussions among themselves and with the researchers and following the study of the relevant literature, the teachers collaborated and developed inter-disciplinary and cross curricular themrs, but they also developed thematic curricula with cross-cultural content by incorporating various elements from the cultures of all the students participating in this action-research project. Finally they reinforced the teaching of Greek language as second for foreign students, they improved the social climate and they used authentic evaluation.

2. What are the objectives and purposes of the concrete action?

1. To document the problems faced by the teachers in a particular urban educational setting in an inner city secondary school,

2. To diagnose and analyze the various parameters involved in generating certain problems in order to guide teachers through the educational and teaching process and resolve the problems.

3. To create the appropriate research and educational conditions (which themselves constitute a self-learning process and training for all participants) in order to update the knowledge, skills and promote critical reflection among the participants (teachers and researchers).

3. How does this activity combine insights from research and practical hands-on experience?

This activity combine insights from research and practical hands-on experience in many ways, as follows:

1. **(QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE) RESEARCH ⇨ PRACTICAL HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE**: The research team presented to the teachers Greek and international research, relevant to the subjects that constitute the problems the latter were facing. The teachers studied the results of various research projects and they contemplated in regard to the relation of inquiring specific results and ways of proceeding towards a solution to their problems, by keeping a day-to-day journal. Researchers from the department of Pedagogy in AUTH has conducted relevant research many times and presented this research to the teachers by explaining the process, the methodology, the results and the proposals tot he teachers for conducting their own action-research in their own school unit. The reasearch team and the teachers discussed thoroughly the ways of transfer the possible results to their daily school practice. The teachers applied their learning and the experience they acquired in their daily practices.

2. **(ETHNOGRAPHIC) RESEARCH + PRACTICAL HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE ⇨ SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT ACT**: The research team conducted ethnographic research in the field of action. Researchers and teachers jointly analysed the information that were collected with interviews, observations and discussion groups and they proposed pedagogical practices that could improve the teaching practice.
3. **PRACTICAL HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE + (ACTION) RESEARCH ⇨ IMPROVEMENT ACT - THE PROBLEMS OF**: The teachers, with the researchers acting as critical friends, developed an action-research project. They initially determined the problems that were to be solved and they reflected on that → they drew alternative activities to be applied → they applied the proposed activities in order to improve their daily teaching practices → they observed and evaluated the alternative activities → they reflected based on these observations, they analysed their experience and redetermined their professional identity and their pedagogical orientation.

4. Does the institution/sector/unit provide instruments (e.g. ICT or human resources) for the implementation of the concrete action? Which tools were applied?

The research team was formed by young researchers and doctoral students as part of a Master's degree programme in Pedagogy in AUTH. The team includes both postgraduate students and doctoral candidates. The team uses the department library for researching and studying the relevant literature as well as planning the research. For the same purpose the team uses the computer laboratory and the laboratory for experimental pedagogy that consist part of department's infrastructure.

5. Best practice/ Bad practice:

What kind of results were obtained? What do you consider to be the innovative or interesting part of this concrete action?
What are the barriers (potential and effective) to the full implementation of this action and what are its benefits?
In which sense can this action be useful for DIALOGUE?

As it was demonstrated in the internal evaluation report compiled by the research team in AUTH and the teachers, the research that was conducted:
1. Involved teachers in a process of self-directed learning, experimentation and continuous training within the profession.
2. Improved primarily the teaching process in adjusting it to the interests of students, and in improving the climate in the classroom. Some students however were indifferent and they were not involved in all creative activities, while in one case only one student joined an activity.
3. Created useful links between secondary and higher education, by informing the relevant pedagogical theory and teaching practice with new knowledge that derives from research.
4. Allowed the research team and the teachers to use various research methods and techniques.
5. Enabled the investigation and analysis of various educational events within the framework of the school context as it operates in inner city environment.
6. Furthermore, the research process and results of research so far show that the case-study has stimulated the development of a new form of in-school training for teachers in this particular school and this was welcomed by al teachers. This is promising in the sense that the teachers who are already involved in the process could possibly influence other teachers as well.
7. The research process and the discussions among participants yielded important recommendations for the reform of school curricula, teaching methodology and general operation of the school organization.

The **difficulties** encountered during the process include:
1. The difficulty of teaching in the first phase, as how to use in practice the results of previous relevant research, especially quantitative, and how to modify established teaching practices.
2. The long hours demanded in working within the research team for negotiating the plan for providing guidance to teachers and conducting the research.
3. Serious lack of funding, as this case study was entirely conducted on voluntary basis by both the students and the researchers as well as the teachers who had to use transportation and pay for

themselves for it.
4. Specific problems associated with some limitations that arose because of the Greek institutional framework (allowing access to school and conducting research, etc.)

This action was **useful** for DIALOGUE because it showed:
1. The dynamic relationship between two organizations (university / research / theory – secondary school / impact of research / practice) in the process of research-based mentoring and learning.
2. The importance of researching an organization, as a school unit, and its members, by providing research-based guidance through understanding in depth the problems faced within it and by contributing effectively to their resolution through action research.
3. The possibility of supporting the members of an organization by conducting action research, which serves as a medium for self-guidance but also as a self-directed learning mode for university researchers in the capacity of becoming critical friends.

6. Are researchers and practitioners directly linked in this activity?
- If yes, how are they linked and what are the communication and interaction processes?
- If they do not communicate directly, how are findings from research connected to practical activities and vice versa?

Researchers and teachers are actively and directly involved in all activities. Meetings were arranged for providing guidance, for planning the research and for the collection and use of relevant research and literary materials both in the University and in the school unit. Working together in the university library (both the researchers and the school teachers), resulted in developing friendly relations among some of them.

7. Which elements would you identify as easily transferable to other institutions in different regional and national contexts?

Academic departments and their research units or laboratories, independent research centres and institutes or even, at a local level, structures that support teaching professionals can be benefited by this experience, in the frame of relevant financed programmes and corresponding work (research based learning and guidance).
Moreover, participating institutions can constitute „experience banks" for inquiring precious information, by organising relevant fora and by becoming accessible sources for those interested professionals, and by supporting educational structures that would organise trainings and provide help to professionals either by participating in person or with the use of ICT through asynchronous tele-education, but also by conducting more research in the field of action or even support the research of the teaching professionals.
Within universities structures that will provide research-based learning can be created. These structures could be targeted to learning and guidance for academic teaching staff or even support action researches within the university.
Last but not least, this relation between research and practical hands-on experience could be transferable to any lifelong learning structure and could become relevant to any professional team.

8. Recommendations for dissemination:
Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for other ULLL managers and practitioners – these may include risks as well as benefits.
Please formulate some recommendations for the dissemination on the basis of the case study addressed to the working group and other partners.

The most **important points** in the case study are the following:
- The connection of theory and research with pedagogical action.
- The practitioners but also the research team were involved in a process of experimentation, self-

directed learning (or „automorfosis" as self-transformation) and permanent learning with direct consequences in the perception of their role and their research and teaching practices. Simultaneously practitioners learned empirically (from experience) the processes for resolving their problems within their workspace.

- The case provided a possibility for examining already researched phenomena (problems) from many different perspectives.
- The case also provided a large variety use of methods and techniques for teaching and researching.
- The case finally contributed tot he improvement of the school's social climate, a fact that had immediately positive consequences in the operation of the organisation (school unit), as well as the the relations between its members (administration, teachers and students).

About the **risks** of the case study:

a. Ensure that that the institutional framework allows the unhindered growth of the actual study.
b. Financing of all research work needs to be ensured. This includes the material and technical infrastructure and the wage of researchers, so that the researchers do not see themeselves as being on the fringes of the process.
c. Be comprehensive and accessible from the very beginning for the practitioners but also for the research team that must have an advisory and instructive role and not provide ready solutions professionals' problems.

Finally, ethnographic research could have been avoided as part of the actual process and be directly incorporated in the action-research spiral. However, since practitioners, had not previously conducted any such research and did not know all the inquiring techniques and methods, they could not have conducted action-research unless the ethnographic research was carried out first.

9. Additional information. E.g. bibliography, website, publications, reports

Literature used by the researchers and the practitioners before and during the action research process (literature is in Greek, English and German languages).

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We are intending to put your case study on the website.
Please tick here ☐ if you do **not** wish to see your case study published on the project's website

ANNEX: The action research process step-by-step.

The action research process was as follows:
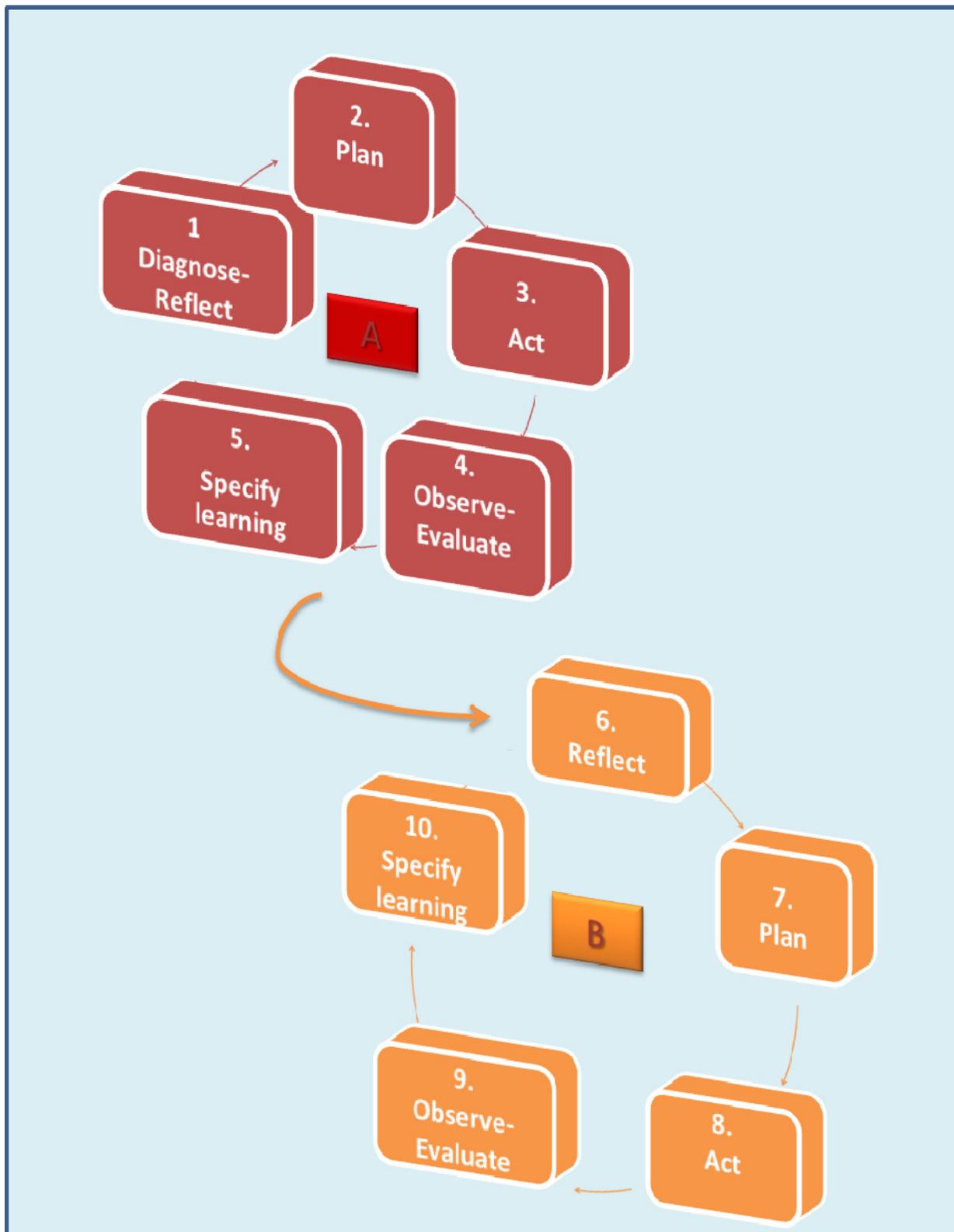
More analytically the action-research project as based on the following ten (10) steps:

1. The teachers discussed the results of the ethnographic research and reflectd on that. Then they asked from their students to formulate their opinions and their proposals for the teaching subjects with regard to their school life the operation of their school and the possibilities of improvement of the programme of study and the pedagogical practices that are applied by their teachers. As inquiring techniques they used the interview-discussion, foci and discussion groups, and students' journals.

2. After a brainstorming teachers and students recorded the programme that they wished to be developed. Based on the students's interests, teachers developd a trans-discilpinary programme of study with a cross-cultural content (learning the "other" and the "otherness" through dieting habits).

3. At the growth of this program they differentiated their teaching and used various constructivist and cross-cultural practices. Simultaneously they organised a Greek language course for the students that had difficulties.

4. Teachers and researchers evaluated the process and the products of the programme they developed of by video-recording and observing themselves during the process. They kept notes and they finally performed an authentic evaluation.

5. Teachers and students specified the learning they acquired in th course of program. The research team discussed with the teachers in regard to the actual experience of this process.

6. The teachers (based on steps 4 and 5) reflect on the results of their action in relation to their initial problems. They note that a student still remains isolated, while certain students' still are in conflictual terms with other schoolmates and with certain teachers. Using the biographical method and with face-to-face discussions with their parents they collected information for these students.

7. They organised their next activity in order to experiment on the development of a new thematic curriculum and finally resolve the problems the had with those students.

8. They developed therefore a new thematic curriculum that focused on the meaning of "democracy", in the frame of which students rtook important roles. The isolated student and the students that previously expressed aggressiveness during the teaching process were involved in a thematic activity called "solving conflicts with democratic processes". In practice they solved the conflicts using the model "Student Conflict Mediation".

9. Teachers and researchers evaluated the process and the products of the programme of study they developed with observations and with keeping notes on the video recordings and with authentic evaluation.

10. Teachers and students specified the learning they acquired at the course of the programme. The research team discussed with the teachers the experience gained from this process and evaluated the process in total with the participation of teachers and the students.