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The influence of the critical approach on the development of adult education in Greece

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Introduction

We believe that the two principal currents of thought and action in the field of adult education which developed within the framework of the critical approach are:

- a. The theory and practice of Paulo Freire which developed mainly in the countries of Latin America. Freire's basic idea is that 'The educational process is a process of problem – posing the contradictions of the oppressed's situation for reflection and action (Brookfield & Holst, 2011, p. 176). The perspective that Freire supports is that adult education contributes to the transformation of the social structure (Freire, 1972, p. 47), encouraging learners to participate in dialogue and to problematize reality (Jarvis, 1995, p. 150). Freire's approach is the social-emancipatory view of transformative learning (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 130).
- b. The theory and practice of transformative learning which developed mainly in North America (Kreber, 2012). According to Mezirow, who is considered to be its founder, 'Transformative learning has both individual and social dimensions and implications' (2000, p. 8). Nevertheless Mezirow's theory is characterized as a psycho-critical approach (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 132). Cranton points out that discourse is central to transformative learning and explains that Mezirow defines discourse as dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings and values (2006, p. 24).

Both of these approaches have one of their starting points in critical theory, as it was developed by the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Habermas) and they place emphasis on dialogue and critical thinking.

In Greece, the more important institution of adult education in the 1980s was the General Secretariat of Popular Education (GSPE). At the same time, and in close co-operation with the GSPE, the Studies and Self-Education Center (SaSEC) which published the journal "Self-Education", was in operation.

Twenty years later, in the decade of 2000, studies in adult education, mainly within the framework of the Hellenic Open University (HOU) were developed. At the same time, the Hellenic Adult Education Association was created by professors and tutors from the HOU, by members of the sectors active in this field, and adult educators. The Hellenic Adult Education Association (HAEA) publishes the journal "Adult Education", which is the only scientific journal in this field in Greece.

Our paper is concerned with the contribution of the critical approach to the development of adult education in Greece.

More specifically, we will examine articles from the journals: *Self-education (Aftomorfosi)* and *Adult Education (Ekpedefsi Enilikon)* in order to investigate the influence of the critical approach on adult education as it is depicted in the two basic journals published in Greece in this field, in two different time periods.

1. The historical and institutional context

After the election victory of the socialists in 1981, the following year the non-governmental institution *Studies and Self-Education Center (SaSEC)* was established. The SaSEC had the following aims (Vergidis, 1991):

- To participate in people's education, particularly for lower social classes, with modern pedagogical methods.
- To develop the creative potential of its participants and their active participation in all levels of social activity.
- To study and analyze social issues.
- To eliminate monologue and the authoritarian methods in adult education, and to promote self-education

In 1983 the *General Secretariat of Popular Education (GSPE)* was established and general education for adults was developed with the support of SaSEC (Karalis, 2010).

We should point out that the rapid quantitative increase in adult education activities in the 1980s, which was due to funding from the *European Social Fund*, created a need for more educators (Karalis & Vergidis, 2006). As a result, 'The lack of educators with appropriate skills created the need to organize suitable training programmes'. (Vergidis, 1992).

The SaSEC 'financed by the GSPE, undertook the responsibility to supply the institution of popular education with ideas, theoretical support, texts and materials...The members of the center more inspired by the ideas of the *School of Frankfurt* but mainly by *Freire's* ideas...' (Kokkos, 2012). It should be highlighted that the paradigm of self education in the 1980s underwent an important development and it is claimed that it is equally close to the notion of *transformative learning* (Beille, 2011). In addition, Vergidis maintains (2011) that self-education constituted an early naming of *lifelong learning*

One of the SaSEC's activities during its period of operation (1982-1987) was the publication of the journal *Self-education*, along with the organization of international conferences and the publication of books and educational material (Kokkos, 2010; Karalis, 2010).

We believe that the texts that were published in the journal *Self – education* express the dynamics of the five year period 1982-1986, during which the development of *critical theory* was attempted for the first time in Greece, within the context of adult education (Karalis, 2010; Kokkos, 2012).

In 1987 education priorities and policies changed. Huge emphasis was placed on professional training and a significant turn to the private sector was noted (Karalis & Vergidis, 2004). The SaSEC discontinued its operation and the educational activities of the GSPE dwindled. Quite a few of its most active and

highly educated staff members became professors at various Universities around the country.

According to Kokkos (2010, 2012), the situation in the field of adult education began to change again in 2003. Adult Education Centers and Schools for Parents were in operation throughout the country and the institution of the Second Chance Schools was developed. Post graduate courses in the field of adult education started operating at the Hellenic Open University as well as at other Greek universities. In 2004 the Hellenic Adult Education Association (HAEA), which publishes the peer-reviewed Greek journal *Adult Education* (thirty-one volumes until today), was founded.

As Karalis (2010) has pointed out, the establishment of the HAEA contributed to the development of ties between the academic world and professionals in the field, as well as to their familiarization with the basic theoretical currents in adult education and with the most well-known theoreticians in this scientific field.

In Greece, the journal *Adult Education* constitutes the only scientific journal in the field of adult education and we believe that it portrays, to a great extent, the theoretical inquiries and questioning of the greek scientific community, as well as the research work in this field, which can influence the practice of professionals working as members of staff in adult education institutions or as adult educators.

2. Objective and method

Kokkos (2012) maintains that ‘the only theoretical tradition of adult education that ever existed in Greece, arose in 1980s, derived from Freire’s idea of conscientization and the critical theory of the School of Frankfurt...after almost fifteen years...Mezirow’s ideas...were welcomed with enthusiasm by Greek adult educators...’

As we mentioned above, in Greece, the journals which express theoretical inquiry and research in the field of adult education are, in the 1980s, the journal *Self-education* and later, in 2004, the journal *Adult Education*.

The objective of our research is to investigate which area of adult education the texts published in those two journals belong to, and to what extent those texts refer to the critical approach in the field of adult education.

The sample of issues we will examine is the total number of issues of *Self-education* which were published between 1982 and 1985, when publication of the journal stopped, and 30 issues of *Adult-Education*, from the first to the thirtieth, which were published from 2004 until 2013 (three annually).

The two journals’ published texts were grouped according to their content by thematic areas and categories, which were constructed by Karalis (2008) based on the international bibliography. In addition, this grouping rests on the view of adult education as a social system, which is analyzed on a micro-, mid and macro- level (Mouzelis, 1991), together with the epistemological and theoretical foundations of the field. This choice was made as, on the one hand it concerns thematic areas which emerged from a review of the international bibliography (Karalis, 2008), and on the other because we can move on to make comparisons between the content of the texts which were published in the period 2001-2005 (ibid) in international journals and the content of the texts which were published in the journal *Adult Education* in the period 2004-2013. We believe that although the two periods are consecutive and don’t coincide, strong indications may still emerge from the comparison. Each text was included in one thematic area only, and in one category.

We should make clear that from the journal *Self-education*, which wasn't strictly scientific, all the texts that were published were examined (apart from brief comments and small informative texts), in total 41 texts from the six issues that were published. From the journal *Adult Education* the papers published in the section *Articles – Studies – Research* were examined, as well as the texts that were included in Special issues, with the exception of interviews, book presentations and publications without a bibliography. In total 111 texts were included in the sample.

We also examined the gender as well as the status of the authors, as the authors themselves refer to it. Quantitative content analysis was used to categorize the texts and qualitative analysis to identify the papers which belonged to the critical approach.

3. Findings and discussion

From table 1 it emerges that the texts in the journal *Self-education* concerned for the most part the macro-level of adult education (17 texts, 41% of the total), which contains five categories. It appears that emphasis is placed on the social, economic and cultural dimensions of adult education (6 publications).

In the thematic area of the foundation of the field of adult education, 10 texts were listed (24.4% of the total) of which 5 were on the epistemological framework of the field.

In the thematic areas mid-level and micro-level, 7 publications were listed in each (of which 6 were on the evaluation and 5 on group dynamics).

From the qualitative content analysis of the publications, it appears that the writers have been influenced more by the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School rather than by Freire's theory. In any case, the writer with the most texts is Anagnostou (3 texts), who had studied in the School of Frankfurt and whose objective was for the SaSEC to become a cradle for the formation of critical thinking following in the footsteps of Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas (Kokkos 2010). Anagnostou's texts belong in the domain of the epistemological framework of the field.

Table 1: Texts by thematic area and category (journal *Self-Education*)

	Thematic areas and categories of texts	Number of texts	%
1	FOUNDATIONS OF THE FIELD	10	24.4
1.a	Epistemological framework	5	12.2
1.b	Relationship between informal and formal education	1	2.4
1.c	Education and learning as continuous	2	4.9
1.d	Theories of learning	2	4.9
2	MACRO-LEVEL	17	41.4
2.a	Social, Economic and cultural dimensions of adult education	6	14.6
2.b	Analysis of institutions and policies	6	14.6
2.c	Historical factors	-	-
2.d	Characteristics of adult learners	3	7.3
2.e	Social gender	2	4.9

3	MID-LEVEL	7	17.1
3.a	Investigation of educational needs	1	2.4
3.b	Participation of learners	-	-
3.c	Course design	-	-
3.d	Evaluation	6	14.6
4	MICRO-LEVEL	7	17.1
4.a	Teaching methods and techniques	2	4.9
4.b	Group dynamics	5	12.2
	Total	41	100

We should point out (see table 2) that most of the writers (12 individuals) were members of the SaSEC and 9 texts were signed by SaSEC without the name of the writer being mentioned. Among the writers there were also employees from county council boards of popular education (7 individuals) and employees of GSPE. In addition, 6 of the writers were specialists from other countries. It is obvious that in Self-education approximately half of the writers were members of the SaSEC and almost 30% employees in the central and regional structures of popular education. There does not appear to have been any connection with the country's universities nor is a connection with other educational institutions, at least as far as the status of the writers concerned.

Table 2: Status of authors and number of texts whose authorship they have contributed to (journal Self-education)

	Status of author	Number of authors	%
1	Members of the SaSEC	12	27.3
2	SaSEC	9	20.5
3	Employees in the General Secretariat of Popular Education	6	13.6
4	Employees in the County Council Boards for Popular Education	7	15.9
5	Foreign authors	6	13.6
6	Other	4	9.1
	Total*	44	100
	*Some texts have more than one author		

Popular education appears to have been a matter for members of the SaSEC and for some of the popular education employees' office at central and county level. Documentation of the field was attempted based on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School; however emphasis was placed for the most part on the macro-level and in particular on the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of adult education and on the analysis of institutions and policies.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to highlight the emphasis placed on evaluation (6 texts) and on group dynamics (5 texts). Taking into consideration school practices educational that was applied to popular education until 1981 (Demunter P., Varnava-Skoura G. & Vergidis D., 1984, pp. 48-50) it is clear that a reversal was attempted, a break with the past, as well as a systematic effort, on the one hand, for the theoretical

foundation of the field of adult education and the practices in learning groups, and, on the other, for the evaluation of teaching activities. Nevertheless, we should note that no text on empirical research was published in Self-education. In any case, until the 1980s, educational research was very limited in Greece and almost non-existent in the field of adult education (Vergidis, 1997).

According to the data in tables 3 and 4, the number of female authors in the journal Self-education was limited. Only two out of ten authors were women.

Table 3: Authors* by gender journal Self-education)

	Gender	Number of authors	%
1	Men	22	78.6
2	Women	6	21.4
	Total	28	100
	*Each author is listed only once, even if he/she has contributed to the authorship of more than a text		

Table 4: Participation* of male and female authors in the total number of texts (journal Self-education)

	Gender	Number of texts	%
1	Men	29	82.9
2	Women	6	17.1
	Total	35	100
	*Each author is listed as many times as he/she has contributed to the writing of a text.		

From table 5 it emerges that in the journal Adult Education, emphasis moves from the thematic area macro-level (26 papers: 23.4% of the total) to the thematic area foundation of the field (43 papers: 38.7% of the total).

In addition, the proportion of papers on the mid-level and micro-level increases (20.7% and 17.1% respectively), in comparison with the texts in the journal Self-education.

Most of the texts are included in the categories:

- Epistemological formation (18 papers)
- Theories of learning (14 papers)
- Teaching methods and techniques (14 papers)
- Analysis of institutions and policies (11 papers)

What is clear is the effort and the interest in epistemological and theoretical foundations of the field of adult education, something that is strengthened by the Special Issues of the journal Adult Education and by the international conferences

organized by the HAEA. Analysis of institutions and policies reaches just 10% of the total.

Table 5: Texts by thematic area and category (journal Adult Education)

	Thematic areas and categories of texts	Number of texts	%
1	FOUNDATIONS OF FIELD	43	38.7
1.a	Epistemological framework	18	16.2
1.b	Relationship between informal and formal teaching	5	4.5
1.c	Teaching and learning as continuous	6	5.4
1.d	Theories of learning	14	12.6
2	MACRO-LEVEL	26	23.4
2.a	Social, Economic and cultural dimensions of adult education	6	5.4
2.b	Analysis of institutions and policies	11	9.9
2.c	Historical factors	3	2.7
2.d	Characteristics of adult learners	5	4.5
2.e	Social gender	1	0.9
3	MID-LEVEL	23	20.7
3.a	Investigation of learning needs	2	1.8
3.b	Learner participation	5	4.5
3.c	Course design	6	5.4
3.d	Evaluation	10	9
4	MICRO-LEVEL	19	17.1
4.a	Teaching methods and techniques	14	12.6
4.b	Group dynamics	5	4.5
	Total	111	100

Comparing this data with Karalis' findings (2008) for the period 2001-2005 (see table 6) – if we acknowledge that international trends don't change significantly over the following years, in other words in the period 2005-2013 – we discover that there is strong indications of significant differences between the interests of the international scientific community and the greek in the field of adult education. The international scientific community seems to be mainly interested in the thematic area: macro-level and in particular the category: analysis of institutions and policies. The greek scientific community seems to be mainly interested in the thematic area: foundations of field and in particular in the epistemological framework and in theories of learning. In addition it appears that in Greece there is greater interest in adult education at mid and micro-level and in particular in teaching methods and techniques and evaluation.

Table 6: Texts published in international journals by thematic area and subject matter category (2001-2005)

	Thematic areas and subject matter	Number of references	%
1	Foundations of field	204	36.5
1.a	Epistemological framework	76	13.6
1.b	Relationship between informal and formal education	26	4.7
1.c	Teaching and learning as continuous	47	8.4
1.d	Theories of learning	55	9.8
2	MACRO-LEVEL	260	46.5
2.a	Social, Economic and cultural dimensions of adult education	82	14.7
2.b	Analysis of institutions and policies	119	21.3
2.c	Historical factors	13	2.3
2.d	Characteristics of adult learners	13	2.3
2.e	Social gender	33	5.9
3	MID-LEVEL	62	11.1
3.a	Investigation of teaching needs	9	1.6
3.b	Learner participation	30	5.4
3.c	Course design	20	3.6
3.d	Evaluation	3	0.5
4	MICRO-LEVEL	33	6.3
4.a	Teaching methods and techniques	28	5.4
4.b	Group dynamics	5	0.9
	Total	559	100
	Source: Karalis, 2008		

We stress that 7 out of the 18 texts which contribute to the epistemological framework of the field of adult education make mention of the critical approach (see table 5). In addition, 10 out of the 14 texts which refer to theories of learning make direct mention of the critical approach. In total, 4 out of 10 texts in the thematic area: Foundations of field, concern the critical approach. It would appear that the journal Adult Education constitutes a forum for discussion and dialogue on the critical approach.

We should add that almost 1 in 4 of the sample texts is a text of empirical research. It is clear that the scientific community in the field of adult education in Greece has broadened and produces on the one hand research, and on the other theoretical texts with emphasis on the critical approach. In addition, a part of the texts refer specifically to the practices of adult educators (15.3% of the total), which in any case constitutes a huge target group of HAEA.

From table 7 we find out that quite a few of the authors of texts in the journal Adult Education are professors in tertiary education (14.7% of the total) of whom some are either professors at the Hellenic Open University (HOU) or are its associates, working as tutors at the HOU.

The authors that are tutors at the HOU, without being professors in tertiary education, are 15.5% of the total. The percentage of foreign authors (20.7%) is significant, as is the percentage of authors who are members of staff in educational institutions (13.8%). Some of the authors are teachers, postgraduate students and PhD candidates and adult educators.

From the evidence above the strong contribution of the scientific academic staff of the HOU to the development of the field of adult education emerges, as does its co-operation with the greek and international scientific and academic community, the active participation of members of various adult education institutions as well as educators in the development of the field.

Table 7: Number of authors (journal Adult Education)

	Author's status	Number of authors	%
1	University professors	17	14.7
	(Of whom from HOU)	(5)	(4.3)
2	Tutors at HOU	18	15.5
3	Adult educators	7	6
4	Teachers	15	12.9
5	Members of staff in educational institutions	16	13.8
6	Postgraduate students and PhD candidates	10	8.6
7	Researchers	3	2.6
8	Foreign authors	24	20.7
9	Other	6	5.2
	Total*	116	100
	*Some texts have more than one author		

Table 8: Authors' status and number of texts the writing of which they have contributed to (journal Adult Education)

	Author's status	Number of texts	%
1	University Professors	29	20.2
	(Of whom from HOU)	(16)	(11.2)
2	Tutors at HOU	26	18.2
3	Adult educators	7	4.9
4	Teachers	16	11.2
5	Members of staff in educational institutions	23	16.1
6	Postgraduate students and PhD candidates	11	7.7
7	Researchers	3	2.1
8	Foreign authors	24	16.8
9	Other	4	2.8
	Total*	143	100
	*Each author is listed as many times as he/she has contributed to the writing of a text.		

From Tables 7 and 8 it emerges that university professors, HOU tutors and members of staff at educational institutions publish more frequently and, consequently, are more active contributors to the journal Adult Education.

As we can see in Table 9 the authors of the texts in the sample from the journal Adult Education are 51.7% men and 48.3% women.

Table 9: Authors* by gender (journal Adult Education)

	Gender	Number of authors	%
1	Men	60	51.7
2	Women	56	48.3
	Total	116	100
	*Each author is listed once, even if he/she has contributed to the writing of more than one text		

It is clear that in comparison with the 80s, the number of women who study adult education issues and publish related texts has increased very much and approaches the number of men.

However, equality between men and women in the field of adult education is tempered if we take into consideration (table 10) the number of texts written by male authors (57.3%) and the number of texts written by female authors (42.7%). It would appear that male authors publish more often than female authors.

Despite that, the strong presence of women in the development of research in the field of adult education is evident.

Table 10: Participation* of male and female authors in the total number of texts (journal Adult Education)

	Gender	Number of texts	%
1	Men	82	57.3
2	Women	61	42.7
	Total	143	100
	*Each author is listed as many times as he/she has contributed to the writing of a text		

We should note that in the field of adult education a significant number of women are active, nevertheless men constitute the majority of adult educators on a national level (Kokkos, 2008, p. 20).

4. Final observations

We attempted to refer to the influence of the critical approach on the field of adult education in Greece, in two time periods:

A: The beginning of the 1980s and in particular the period 1982-1985, as is depicted in the texts which were published in the journal Self-education and

B: The decade 2004-2013 as is depicted in the texts which were published in the 30 first issues of the journal Adult Education.

From the data we cite, the following emerge:

- a) In the 1980s an attempt at a reversal and a break with the past was made as far as popular education is concerned. Emphasis was placed on the evaluation of educational activities and on the analysis of the intervention potential of adult education
- b) The SaSEC and the journal Self-education supported the attempt at improving and re-orientation of the adult education service.

The theoretical framework of the SaSEC's activities was inspired mostly by the Frankfurt School. However, emphasis was placed on the macro-level and in particular on the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of adult education and on the analysis of institutions and policies. Nevertheless, none of the texts had emerged from empirical research in the field of adult education.

- c) The authors of the majority of texts were members of the SaSEC and employees at the GSPE and the regional services of adult education. In addition, the vast majority of writers were men.
- d) From the journal Adult Education it would appear that an attempt is made at another break and reversal. Emphasis is focused on the area of the foundations of the field, (mainly in the categories: epistemological framework and theories of learning) and on the micro-level (mainly in the category: teaching methods and techniques). There would also appear to be differences between the interests of the international and the greek scientific community. The international scientific community places emphasis on the analysis of institutions and policies, while the greek scientific community places emphasis on the foundations of the field and teaching methods and techniques.
- e) A significant number of the authors of the texts in the journal Adult Education are university professors and tutors at the HOU. The scientific academic staff of the HOU contributes decisively to the development of the field of adult education, while the presence of foreign specialists – mainly university level – among the authors of the journal Adult Education, is marked
- f) A large number of the texts in the thematic area: Foundation of field, concern the critical approach in adult education. The journal Adult Education constitutes, then, a forum for dialogue on the critical approach. In addition, 1 in 4 texts in the sample is empirical research and a number of the texts in the sample concern adult educators.

As appears from the above, at the level of scientific discussion, the contribution of the critical approach is very important in Greece.

Obviously, study of the educational work within learning groups is needed in order to find out how far the critical approach has influenced the work of the educational services and educators.

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