

The Education of Adult Educators in Greece

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SUMMARY

The majority of the 14.000 educators teaching in vocational training programs for both unemployed and employed people do not possess the necessary qualifications. In order to resolve this situation, the Ministry of Employment and Social Security has initiated the realization of a, unique to Greece, educational program for these educators. A basic element of this program was that, in 2003, 250 educators were trained to educate their colleagues using the same syllabus and methodology with which they had been trained themselves. This article presents the professional characteristics of the Greek educators, the methodology followed in their training, as well as the results of this attempt.

1. The educators' training in the European Union

In recent years, within the framework of continuing vocational training programs realised by state members of the European Union, there has been an ever-increasing need to involve educators that can fulfil the modern requirements posed by contemporary adult training. The Lisbon Assembly Memorandum regarding lifelong education requests that the educators' profession undergoes radical changes and that they become "guides, counsellors, and intermediaries" (European Commission, 2000). In other words, educators should act not only as carriers of knowledge but as coordinators and inspirers of the educational process that encourage the route to knowledge and to motivate the people they teach to actively process their knowledge and experiences, to seek new sources of learning and to learn through their actions.

In order to embrace these features, educators must develop a series of credentials, the nature of which has been dealt with by many scholars. Characteristically, Peter Jarvis (2000:183) suggests a triple foundation of the adult educator's knowledge, skills and attitude, and it is quoted here:

- "Knowledge and understanding of: relevant academic discipline(s), psycho-motor elements, interpersonal relations, moral values.
- Skills to perform the psychomotor techniques and interact with members of the role set.
- "Attitudes that result in: a knowledge and commitment to professionalism, a willingness to play the role in professional manner".

Dimitris Vergidis (2002a: 5-6), reflecting the ideas held by many European researchers, believes that adult educators must be able to:

- Understand the needs and expectations of the trainees
- Define the aims and context of the teaching material
- Balance education with the needs of the social-economic environment
- Utilise appropriate educational techniques and teaching resources
- Coordinate and support the trainee group
- Evaluate the educational process
- Perform self-evaluation

Paul Demunter (2003:92) divides into four levels the knowledge and capabilities an adult educator needs:

- a) Understanding of the knowledge of the syllabus
- b) Pedagogical knowledge and abilities that ensure propagation of knowledge and stimulate interest
- c) Technical knowledge to use teaching resources, including personal computers

- d) Social and political awareness, appreciation of the socio-economic mechanisms and ability to relate the education to the ongoing social processes

In many European countries the concept of educating educators has been already developed, in specialized institutions, and aims at helping educators to gain necessary skills. In Portugal, for example, candidate educators attend a 90-hour program at the Institute of Employment, which is supervised by the Ministry of Labour. In Germany, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce trains educators of in-work training programs for personnel, with programs of 120 hours. In Spain, candidate educators must attend 380 hours of educational programs in order to obtain the national teaching certificate.

There are several common features among the subjects of the various educational programs for educators. For example, in all three aforementioned countries' programs, common core subjects are contained, which include design and evaluation of vocational programs, communication and relationships between educators and trainees and strategies and methodology of adult training. Additionally, in Germany, the syllabus also includes the methodology of trainee selection whereas in Spain it includes the continuous upgrading of teaching abilities.

2. Educators in Greece

The majority of educational programs for adults in Greece consist of vocational programs for unemployed and employed people; most of these programs are co-funded by the European Social Fund. The number of educators working in such programs reaches 14.000 – all of which are enlisted at the National Accreditation Centre (E.KE.PIS.) Registry. According to a study (Georgiakodis F., 2004), that used a sample of 505 people, 61% of these educators were men and 39% women. The average age was 42 years and 2/3 of the sample population were between 30 and 45 years old. Furthermore, 24% had postgraduate study degrees and an overall 88% had a university degree. According to another study (Vergidis D, 2002b: 101), the geographical location of these educators follow in general the geographical distribution of the Greek population: 33% lived in the Prefecture of Attica (where Athens is), 12% in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki and the rest were spread at the remaining 49 prefectures of Greece.

As far as the teaching abilities of Greek educators are concerned, a series of studies (Vergidis D., 2003, 2002a, 2002b, Galata V. et al. 1999, Ziomas D. et al. 2000, Kokkos A. and Christofilopoulou E., 1995, Kokkos et al., 2002, Baloti X. 1996, Chalas G. 2002) have shown lack of important qualifications. The lack can be related to: a) the ability of utilising modern teaching techniques (such as teamwork, case studies, simulations, role playing, brainstorming, problem solving techniques), b) the ability of managing relationships and difficulties that arise within groups of trainees and c) the ability of designing integrated teaching modules.

Additionally, according to the E.KE.PIS records, around 40% of the Greek educators lack computer literacy.

The above facts can be rationally explained; until now there has not been systematic training for educators in Greece and only a few educating bodies were implementing “ad-hoc” educational programs for educators. Besides, adult higher education is a relative young concept in Greece, with only 2-3 universities offering such courses in the last few years. Further more, and despite the efforts made by educators individually to change the current education status, the manner with which the Greek education system functions is still based on traditional teacher-oriented methods (see OECD report, 2000).

Finally, and as far as the lack of computer literacy is concerned, results published by CEDEFOP (2003:11) show that two years ago only 37.2% of the Greek citizens were able to use a computer, while the average in the European Union (with 15 members) reached 59.4%. It must be added here that in 2004 only 8% and 29% of the Greeks living in rural and urban areas respectively knew how to access and use the Internet; the corresponding levels in the European Union (with 25 members) were 35% and 49% (report published in the Greek newspaper TA NEA 08/06/2004; source of information: the European Institute for the Improvement of Living and Labour conditions).

3. The Greek educational program for educators

In order to upgrade educators’ qualifications, The Ministry of Employment and Social Security started implementing for the first time in Greece a national educational program for the 14.000 educators registered with the E.KE.PIS. Emphasis was decided to be given so that educators would gain knowledge and skills to:

- Apply modern and innovative teaching methods
- Effectively communicate with the trainees
- Contribute to the design and evaluation of vocational programs
- Align the educational targets with the overall programs’ goal (employment, social integration etc.)

(Hellenic Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 2002)

Educators’ further specialization in their own field was not included in the above targets, probably due to the high educational standards they had to meet upon entering the Registry (see section 2).

The national program’s specifications, as laid out by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, set the total duration of the program to 300 hours, 75% of which will take place through

distance learning and 25% in classrooms allowing, thus, all the educators interested in the program to have the opportunity to attend.

At an initial phase of the program's implementation, following an international competition, the Ministry assigned to a sympraxis¹, the design of the program and the selection of the syllabus of distance learning, as well as the education of 250 educators, who would act as the educators of the remaining program participants. The Ministry strictly prescribed that if it was found appropriate to introduce electronic material for the distance learning part of the educational program, this would have to be only complementary to the hard copied syllabus and that those not familiar with the electronic material would receive equal education (2002). This directive was clearly considering the high percentage of computer illiterate Greek educators; besides, it is in the Ministry's short term plans to introduce a special computer educational program for educators.

In order to devise a detailed educational program and syllabus, it was decided to adopt the basic principles of distance learning, the way these have been defined by scholars such as Holmberg B. (1981), Keegan D. (2001), and Race Ph. (2003), which are already applied by the British, Spanish and Greek Open Universities.

These principles include the following points:

- Learning takes place mainly through private studying of the provided learning material, the context of which satisfies the needs of distance learning and can be accessed by the trainees interactively.
- A trainer - educator supports the trainee - educators attending the program. The trainer's duties are to provide scientific guidance, to support throughout the program and to help so that trainees make the best of the given educational material. The trainer is also in regular contact with the trainees, meets them in seminars, and promotes cooperation among them; additionally, during the program's course, the trainer has the opportunity to comment on essays given to him/her by the trainees. It has been found that, in the practical part of the aforementioned Open Universities, the process of submitting written essays and receiving them back with comments significantly helps the trainees to take up the syllabus of the educational course and maintain their interest in it.

However, it is frequently observed that the above principles of distance learning are not adequate to achieve the desired learning results. Phil Race claims (Kokkos A. 2002a) that a distance-learning model is more effective if it is enriched with characteristics originating from adult training schemes, such as emphasis in face-to-face communication between program participants, collaborative learning within teams, and experiential learning². The idea of

¹ The sympraxis was coordinated by the Hellenic Open University and scientific advisor was the author of this article.

² Experiential learning refers to the process whereby trainees either simply share their experiences or participate in the re-enactment of a true or imaginary situation introduced by the trainer in the form of an incident (i.e. role playing or simulation exercise). By sharing their experiences, program participants, have the opportunity to understand their

combining principles taken from distance learning and adult learning schemes has been used by a few pilot programs that have taken place in the last decade. The University of Surrey organised one-year courses, where every month the students, split into groups, spent a whole week participating in seminars enhancing their ability to interact, performing common tasks and learning through life experiences. The University of Athabasca (Canada) organised distance-learning studies, during the first week of which students worked together and developed team spirit; this helped them later on when each one had to study individually. The results from both these programs were outstanding (Spencer B., 1995); additionally, recent studies (Mulder M. and Verburch A., 2003, Veerman A., 2000) have shown that within the framework of distance learning, emphasis to guidance and assessment by the tutor, both principles of adult training, is of crucial importance. Learning becomes more collaborative and deep when the tutor can frequently and creatively stimulate the learning activities of students.

Bearing the above in mind, the design of the educational program was decided to be based on distance learning principles, enriched with elements from adult learning schemes, especially those relating to social and communication skill development among the trainees, to the role of the educator, to learning through active participation and to utilising the trainees' experiences (see Brookfield St. 1986, Jarvis P. 2000 and Knowles M. 1998). Consequently, the following points were adopted for the educational program for educators:

- A. Initially, 250 educators would be trained to be their colleagues' educators; their training would be based on the same teaching material and methodology with which they, in turn, would have to educate their colleagues. This is an essential part of the educational program, since it will allow them to experience by themselves all the processes involved in program and understand the demands of their work.
- B. All program participants have to study a 600 pages learning material according to guidance and schedule given to them³. The learning material is specially designed to allow the trainee to interact with it and provides incentives for thinking, reviewing, and deeper understanding. Every chapter of the learning material includes targets, expected outcomes, references to other documents, examples and numerous exercises, which the trainees carry out individually.
- C. The learning material is supplemented with two videotapes that include parts from teaching sessions. The trainees when studying chapters regarding the usage of educational techniques and means, as well as those regarding group dynamics systematically use these videotapes. Based on instructions provided, the contents of the videotapes are analysed and correlated with the theory they currently study, with the prospect of a deeper

thoughts, emotions, and reactions about different situations; then with their trainer's help they process their experiences thus obtaining deeper realization of the parameters involved in the specific module.

³ This learning material includes a CD-ROM, which is not compulsory to use and is complementary to the aforementioned learning material, as requested by the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

understanding. Besides, the videotapes also help the trainees to prepare for their own mock teaching sessions (see bullet point E).

- D. Each trainee - educator participates in teams (20 people) each one of which is coordinated by a trainer-educator. The trainers get in regular contact with the program participants and stimulate and maintain their interest in the course; furthermore they assess and comment on 3 essays, which are sent to them during the course of the educational program. Finally, they ensure that collaborative relationships are developed among the trainee-educators (work groups, team support, communications networks).
- E. The interaction between trainer-educator and trainee-educators reaches its peak at three 3-day long meetings, which take place during the educational program. The higher goal during these meetings is to develop participative and experiential learning (exercises, team work, sharing experiences, example processing) as well as to develop a learning environment characterised by cooperative spirit, open communication, and mutual trust. A very important part of these meetings are the mock teaching sessions. Mock teaching sessions involve simulating teaching, where one of the trainee-educators assumes the role of the educator and the rest of the trainee-educators become the students. Each trainee - educator gives two mock teaching sessions, during which the opportunity is given to learn through practice and implement theoretical knowledge; comments are then passed from both the trainer - educator and the rest of the program's participants.
- F. Trainee-educators assessment is based on their second mock teaching session, as well as on three essays, which are commented on by the trainer-educator.

4. Looking ahead

The educational program for the 250 educators has been completed in 2003. The next stage involves the education of 14.000 educators and will start in the last months of 2005. This is a big endeavour, whose implementation is expected to face methodological and technical difficulties, especially as most of the trainees are not familiar with distance learning methods. It is also anticipated that some educators may oppose participating in the program. They will probably claim that they already have the experience or that they have already attended educational courses or seminars regarding adult training and some of them may be right arguing so. However, as mentioned in section 1 and 2, the majority of the educators do not have the necessary skills and an educator's abilities are not only based in certified qualifications but (mainly) in proven capabilities.

There are two possible alternative suggestions regarding an educator's request to be exempted from this educational course:

- They could be assessed from a video recorded teaching session of theirs to adults (of at least two hours) as well as by written examination and an interview with an expert committee, or
- None is to be exempted, however it is explained to the objecting experienced educators that the educational program can only enrich their knowledge and abilities, while giving them the chance to interact with less experienced colleagues, offering them their expertise.

Following the idea of continuous development for educators, it should not be considered that the 300-hour program is exhaustive for a vast issue such as educators' education. In the future it will be necessary that the trainees attend seminars of continuous education and/or 'self-education' programs aiming to further develop their skills and an awareness of the rapid changes that take place in the field of educational methodology and technology. This is even more applicable for the 250 skilled trainee-educators, who, in order to perform their vital tasks and consequently to be able to adequately support all the educators involved in adult training, will have to continuously develop their skills and learn, becoming the role model for the other educators.

The route to form a competent group of educators in Greece will be long; there will exist many creative moments but, obstacles will arise as well. Nevertheless, it is hoped that, at the end, a high level of professionalism will have been reached in the area of adult education. In other words, the Greek society will have recognized the existence of a core of specialized knowledge and capabilities regarding adult education, which, through specially trained educators, will be propagated to their adult students.

In order to follow this route, everybody involved, will have to confront aspects of their character, and perform self-criticism and self-assessment. If this challenge is faced creatively, people will be developing their personal strengths and at the same time will be forming a society willing and able to learn.

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