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Educating the Adult Educators: Implementation and Evaluation of the first National Adult Educators Education Program in Greece.

The development of adult education and educators' education in Greece

A periodical analysis to study the development of adult education in Greece has been attempted in several studies (Karalis & Kokkos 2008; Karalis 2005) based on the periodic levels of development and special characteristics of the field. We will shortly refer to those periods emphasizing adult educators' education.

The appearance of first activities: End of 19th century – end of 1950s

We could briefly state that until the end of the fifties there are no records about the need for educating adult educators as adult education itself is considered substantially as a mere extension of primary education aiming to combat illiteracy. During the sixties and seventies a number of activities were developed by a small number of institutions, and therefore some first references on the role of adult educators can be traced. But there are still no systematic references to the need of a structured education of educators.

The evolution of Adult Education in Greece: Beginning of the 1980s – end of the 1990s

During this period many changes taking place contributed both in the quantitative, but also, in a certain degree, in the qualitative growth of the field of adult education in Greece. Those developments are to a great degree due to the important surge of Community funds, but also in the support of the State to several institutions and organizations, mainly via legislative regulations. The milestones of this process in relation to the issue of the education of adult educators are the following:

1. The reorganization of the Network of Popular Education (that has been upgraded to General Secretariat in 1983) and the reorientation of its activities (mainly towards the structured learning groups). This led Popular Education to become the most extensive network of adult education in the country. In this frame several, mainly short term programs are organized for educating the educators, while for the first time the need for educating the educators is clearly expressed, in the evaluation study of Demounter, Varnava – Skoura & Vergidis (1984) and in the study of A. Kokkos (1987).
2. In the same period other institutions, such as the Hellenic Centre for Productivity (ELKEPA), the National Bank, the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government, the Hellenic Banking Institute, the Hellenic Association for Administration of Enterprises, the University of Patras, the Labour Institute of Trade Union of Greece, as well as a small number of Vocational Training Centres (KEK), implement Training of Trainers programmes.
3. We should as well mention here, the growth and academic recognition of Adult Education in our country that took place at the beginning of the 90s, but also the



foundation and operation of the Hellenic Open University that contributed in the recognition of distance learning as an appropriate, valid and effective form of education.

4. The need for a systematic education of educators is addressed in the European Commission decisions for all the three Community Support Frameworks (CSF). In 1997 the National Accreditation Centre for Continuing Vocational Training (EKEPIS) was founded. The qualitative upgrade of the continuing vocational training system revealed the next necessary intervention; the Education of Educators.

In brief, during this period the demands for the educators' education matured as different sources (executives of institutions, researchers, national and Community bodies) stressed the need for upgrading the qualifications, education and accreditation of adult educators. In this time frame, the first training for trainers programs mentioned above are organised, however, these interventions were fragmentary and limited in the implementing institutions. The demand of an intervention in national scale is still imperative in the end of this period, being now more important and mature than ever.

The development of the first National Adult Educators' Education Program

The call for proposals

Given the above mentioned circumstances, namely lack of an education and accreditation system for the Training of the Trainers of Vocational Training and the relative provisions of the National Action Plan, the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance launched the call for proposals in 2002 for the "Development of a methodology and training material for the education of educators" (call 2/2002). The completion of two preparatory studies that EKEPIS assigned to an external expert preceded the call. The two studies developed by D. Vergidis (2002a; 2002b) are: "Study on the content specifications for the program of education of educators" and "Study on the determination of the profile of the initial team that will train the trainers of trainers and the profiles of the trainers per category".

In the call for proposals two major difficulties of this intervention were highlighted: the extremely high number of educators (estimated to 10.000) and the difficulty the educators had to overcome in order to participate in a conventional 300 hours program, as the majority of them were employed. For these reasons, the specifications of the program anticipated that the education of the first 250 adult educators, as well as the education of the remaining of them, should be based on a mixed method of delivery (face to face, assignments and distant learning). The distribution of training hours was planned accordingly (225 training hours distant and the remaining 75 in meetings).

The project included:

- (a) a study for the exploration of trainees' level of knowledge and skills
- (b) the development of the methodology and the specifications of the training for trainers programs,
- (c) the development of educational material for the training of trainers ,
- (d) the training and accreditation of the first 250 educators, who would later undertake the education of all educators included at the EKEPIS register.

An International Open Call for Tenders has been announced and the project has been awarded to a partnership constituted by the following institutions:

- Hellenic Open University (leader), with Professor of Adult Education A. Kokkos in the role of scientific responsible,
- Labour Institute of Trade Union of Greece,
- Greek Banking Institute
- "Mentor Training"- Vocational Training Centre

The objectives of the Program, as already mentioned, were to upgrade the profile, knowledge and skills of the Vocational Training Trainers, based on the principles of Adult Education and on practices that can increase the efficiency of the modern adult trainer in his exigent mission accordingly. Active participation and respect of adult educators, educators' commitment for the achievement of the objectives set by the participants, cooperative and critical spirit, substantial communication and spirit of initiative were the leading principles for the Education of Educators and they have determined the implementation strategy that was based mainly on experiential approaches and on the fulfilment of participants' needs.

The educational material

As it has been pre-mentioned, the Program was implemented with a mixed method and the educational material used was not simply assisting the work done in classroom, but was a constituent element of the learning process itself. In order to develop a highly interactive training material, the experience for the development of the Hellenic Open University material and the principles of adult education were exploited. Factors supporting the interaction between trainees and training material, apart from the writing style that should be clear, friendly, simple but not simplistic, are those creating a 'dialogue' between material and trainee, for example:

- Use of shapes, diagrams, examples.
- Use of orientation notes (aim, expected results, key-words, introductory comments).
- Exercises and practical applications, for the majority of which answers are given in the end of each chapter and feedback to the trainees.
- Use of abstracts and additional notes (synopsis, reference to other books, annexes with additional material).

The chapters of the printed educational material were:

1. Socio-economic and cultural dimensions of adult education
2. Theories of learning and adults learning
3. Characteristics of adult learners and conditions for an effective learning
4. The inaugural meeting
5. Educational techniques
6. Educational techniques per thematic field
7. Educational techniques for vulnerable social groups
8. Educational equipment and space
9. Planning of an educational unit
10. The practical exercise
11. The role of the educator for the connection of vocational training and employment
12. Utilising the group dynamics in the educational process
13. Evaluation of the educational work
14. The role of the "new" adult educator

The importance given to the individual chapters resulted from the trainee's needs, as those were recorded in the relative study.



It was as well foreseen to provide trainees with three extra books, from the international bibliography, translated in Greek. These books were however incorporated to the overall educational material throughout quotations in the individual units. The printed material was accompanied by videotapes and DVD's, that were not only related to the general educational material but constituted part of the practical exercises as well. Microteaching sessions and material related to other topics such as group dynamics were included in the audiovisual tools.

Thus, with the term educational material in the Program we mean the following:

- Specially created original and interactive printed material (1.000 pages).
- Three specifically selected books (750 pages).
- Study guidelines and manuals for the trainers and the trainees (100 pages).
- Audiovisual material (more than two hours).
- Additional CD-ROM with reference materials and all the educational material in electronic form.
- Practical exercises material for the educators (400 pages).

We would like to point out that the study of all these material was not compulsory for all the trainees. It was foreseen that each adult educator should study the chapters relevant to him according to his experience and level of and specialisation. In this way, every hour of distant training corresponded to the study of almost three pages. 29 writers and 3 critical readers participated in the development of the training material, while the scientific responsible of the program edited the final outcome.

Written exercises

During the implementation of the Program and in defined times, the trainees had to produce three written exercises. These exercises were a vital part of the Program as their subjects were directly connected with each phase of the program. The exercises served concrete objectives of the Program such as the development of critical reflection in relation to trainers' practice and the preparation of the microteaching sessions.

Analytically:

- The first exercise was related to the reflection on some of the microteaching sessions included in the audiovisual material. The trainees after studying the chapters about the educational techniques were asked to evaluate the videotaped microteaching sessions.
- For the second exercise, trainees were asked to reflect upon their first exercise and the comments of their educator, but at the same time to diagnose their lacks, developing their personal plan for the continuity of the Program. At the same time the aim was to develop participants' critical reflection on their assumptions, based on which they had shaped their first exercise.
- The third exercise essentially concerned the design of a microteaching session, which they would perform during the last meeting.

This way the exercises were not isolated from the development of the Program, neither were theoretical or abstract; they aimed at the development of critical reflection skills and attitudes and at the constant repositioning of the educated educators in relation to the new program elements. It should be highlighted that an important function of the exercises was the written feedback sent by the educator to the trainees and the discussion in working groups on the different topics, during the face to face meetings.

Finally, we should mention that even if the completion of the exercises was an evaluation asset, emphasis was set mainly upon their pedagogical value.

Face to face meetings

One of the structural elements of the Program were the four face to face meetings (75 training hours) during which emphasis was given at the elaboration of various parts of the educational material and at the development of skills, and the cultivation of attitudes related to the role and practice of the adult educator. The content of all the meetings was developed in relation to the Program aims and it was included in the educator's manual. The meetings were carried out every about 1,5 month during weekends and lasted for 15-20 hours. The first meeting aimed basically at the setting of the group, knowing each other, establish the educational contract, introduce the logic of the Program. The next two meetings were focused in the conduct of pilot microteaching sessions by the trainees, while the last meeting was dedicated in the performance of the final microteaching session. It should also be mentioned that every meeting had pre-arranged time for:

- Study the themes of the exercises.
- Discussions for both the Program and the trainees' progress.
- Analysis of critical points of the educational material.
- Comment on the microteaching examples in working groups.

Microteaching

Microteaching is among the most efficient tools for educating educators and is used in various training for trainers frames, accordingly adapted to the aims of the different programs. Microteaching is one of the basic elements for the training and accreditation of trainers in most of the European countries. In this particular program the final microteaching (20 '), was substantially a micrograph of an educational unit, and was also the basic element for the evaluation and the accreditation of the trainees. The trainers were considered to have successfully completed the Program when they could manage a record of at least C, in an A to D scale. The evaluation was done by the educator of the group based on an evaluation grid and afterwards the videotaped microteachings were given to another Educator for a "blind evaluation" in order to ensure the transparency of the process.

However even when microteaching was used as an evaluation asset, emphasis was still put on its educational value: in the final meeting, trainees in working groups analyzed all microteaching sessions, and in collaboration with the educators, identified the points in which they could improve. The objective was to decrease - the justified - stress of the trainees in view of their accreditation process and to use all the meetings for the improvement of their practices. However, this element of the Program was only valid for the first 250 educators of adult educators. Even if the adjustments made later by the State disturbed this function of the microteaching, they accentuated its evaluation dimension. It must however be pointed out that thanks to the efforts of the 250 educators , as well as the trainees themselves, microteachings functioned to a great degree positively, giving the opportunity to the educators to use participative educational techniques and develop their interventions taking into consideration the needs and the interests of their trainees.



Role and contribution of the Educators of Educators

The educators of educators were the most important and crucial factor for the achievement of the objectives and the smooth flow of the Program, and finally the basic lever for the transformation of the trainees attitudes. We will attempt to mention the basic elements of the educators' role:

For the distant training program, the role of the educators was similar to those of the tutors of the Hellenic Open University, focusing mainly at giving feedback to the trainees during the implementation of their exercises, encouraging them to complete the program and support them for a fruitful study of the training material. However, their role was of a critical importance during the face to face meetings. In these meetings the educator had the role of facilitator and mentor so that the trainees could develop a positive attitude towards the program and at the same time to create a safe environment where active participation could flourish.

Through the educators, referring here both to the initial 13 and the following 250, it was possible to change the initially negative attitudes and predispositions of the educated educators. Given that we do not refer here to inexperienced educators, but to trainers having in some cases, vast and long experience, it was expected to meet with objections and prejudices concerning the reasons of their participation to the program and the benefit that they could acquire from this. Overcoming this, justified in a certain extent, negative attitude was one of the basic concerns in the planning of the program. The initial team of 13 educators worked systematically on this question, in order that the objections of the educated educators were taken into consideration in a creative approach for the achievement of the objectives both of the program itself and the educators.

The first phase of the program, education of the first 250 adult educators, was completed by the end of June 2003. Even if the time frame was extremely tight the evaluation results were very encouraging both for this first phase but also for the second expanded phase. As it results from relative data (Karalis, 2003) the educators of adult educators came up with an average score, raising between 3,4 – 3,8 (in scale 0-4), in the individual elements of the first phase of the program (sufficiency of meetings, evaluation of the 13 educators, educational material).

The implementation and evaluation of the program

The second phase of the program, implementation at national level, started in June 2006. Following a call for tenders Vocational Training Centers were awarded with 500 programs for the training of 8.000 adult educators. The substantial delay of the responsible State agencies, between the completion of the first phase (2003) and the generalized implementation of the program (2006) was an unfavourable development for the smooth implementation of this innovative action. Also the lack of concern and plan for the evaluation of this particularly innovative project from the side of the responsible government services, led the Program development team to organise without any governmental contribution or support, the evaluation of the National implementation of the program.

The evaluation was based on CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model, that is worldwide recognised as one of the most suitable for the evaluation of educational programs (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). A questionnaire, that was answered by a random sample of 386 educated educators was selected as a research

technique. The results of the evaluation were published in a special volume of the Hellenic Adult Education Association (Kokkos & collaborators, 2008). Brief, basic outputs of the evaluation of the implementation of the program at National level are presented.

Some questions were aimed to investigate the degree of satisfaction of the trainees in relation to various elements of the program. In all these questions the average score was 3,5 (in scale 0-4). Particularly positive is their opinion for the program (3,7), their opinion for the interest that it caused them (3,7), as well as for the usefulness that they consider it had for the exercise of their educational work. They were as well positive for the educational material (3,7) and theoretical content (3,7). Positive opinions were also expressed for the services of VTC training (secretarial-organisational support 3,8 and equipment 3,6). The chronological terms of the implementation of the program appeared to have created difficulties for the trainees, however not in an excessive degree (3,5). The final evaluation and the accreditation system that was institutionalized by the governmental institutions, had the lower average score (3,1), while the higher value (3,9) has the satisfaction from the work of the Educators of the Educators. This fact confirms what has been already mentioned, that the educators made great efforts and developed creative relations with the trainees.

In order to investigate the attitudes of the trainees, one and only question was selected: "How important is it (in the beginning of the program) or was (in the end of the program), for you, your attendance in the program of education of educators? ". The answers were given in a Likert type scale ("very important", "enough", "fairly", "little", "not important"). As it results from the answers given, in the beginning of the program those that considered "very important" their attendance were less than half (44,8%), however together with those that considered it "important enough", constituted the big majority of the trainees (86,8%). In the end of the program, there had been a big increase in those that considered their attendance "very important" (57,8%), while in total those that declared "important enough" and "very important" reached a percentage of 88,1%.

Finally, combining the above mentioned data, with the know-how that the trained adult educators acquired (as this resulted from the scores of microteaching sessions and exercises), their classification in four levels was attempted. In the first level ("very satisfactory level") is classified the 30,8%, in the next ("satisfactory level") the 38,9%, while in the "satisfactory enough level" are found the 21,8%. Only an 8,5% is considered to be in a "not satisfactory level" towards the requirements of the role of adult educator .

Concluding remarks

In this paper, the main points of design and evaluation of the National Program of Education of Adult Educators were presented. This Program constitutes a mile stone in the historical development of Adult Education in Greece, as it was the first time that an intervention took place for the education of educators in national level.

Nevertheless, after the completion of the Program, various governmental institutions created their own registers of adult educators, for the register of which once again the follow-up of programs of education of educators is demanded. Instead of valorising the important experience of the National Program and use it as the basic form for the education and accreditation of adult educators in various frames, an endless repetition of it in various versions is attempted – which results in the waste of resources and the down rate of these energies. Consequently, what should be done is the utilisation of this Program as the core program not only for the educators of Continuous Vocational



Training but in general for the education of Adult educators active in different institutions and types of programs.

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