

RESEARCH REPORT

TEACHERS AS TRAINERS: THE CASE OF TEACHING REPATRIATED ADULTS IN GREECE

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Abstract – This article examines the teaching profession in the context of the learning society where learning is considered as a lifelong process and is supported by various educational provisions. In the first part it is argued that the role of the teacher has to be redefined in order to be aligned with the principles of lifelong learning and encompass the role of adult trainer as well. In the second part, empirical data on the profile and training needs of teachers teaching repatriated adults are presented and discussed in terms of the implications their new role raises regarding their training and certification.

Towards a learning society

In a fast changing world, the learning society is a visible reality, while strategies to support it involve many factors and require re-examination of roles and responsibilities. Today, lifelong education and continuous training appear as the corner stone of economic and social prosperity. Astronomical sums are spent to organise adult education programmes of any kind, while contemporary technology inundates persons with knowledge and information everywhere. The idea that prevailed until the 60s, namely that with the completion of formal education one has enough knowledge and skills for the rest of his/her life, has little purchase today.

The classic ideal of lifelong education was born in ancient times, and was developed at the beginning of our century. The starting-point in lifelong education is the understanding that learning occurs during the life span. A person gets information about the world – natural, historical, artificial – as well as the skills which make participation effective in the environment. One also forms views on oneself and on his/her relationship with the society. Gradually, persons form their self-image and define their relationships with others, and – at the same time – they become familiar with the values and the culture of society. The main idea is the principle that a person should not remain without help during this learning process, but should instead be supported by the development of the necessary

attitudes and skills during the school years, and also by the offer of educational opportunities all over his/her life span.

Today, the ideal of lifelong learning is not only a wish for those who dream of a better and more fair society, but has also become a pressing need. Indeed, the educational policies of several countries recognise this need and international organisations take the initiative to realise lifelong education for all, with the purpose to improve the quality of life of individuals and of social groups as well (OECD 1992, 1996).

The main characteristic of lifelong education is time continuity: lifelong education has a life-time range. The school, then, is no longer the only educational institution, but a part of a complex educational network, that works either next to the other sources of learning, or following educational activities that come after the school years. Everyone lives in an educational continuum, more or less structured, more or less standardised, inside and outside school, before or after school.

Continuous education is expanding today at a quick pace to respond to this pressing need, and includes all those educational opportunities that follow initial education, and which are placed among a wide spectrum of topics, from general education to specific professional training subjects. Regarding its organisation, continuous education includes a number of educational activities, from the more non-formal forms, such as 'self-directed learning' or incidental learning, to the more systematically organised ones.

Therefore continuous education does not appear as a set of new aims for education, but, on the contrary, as an all-embracing conception of educational procedures, a conception which poses the problem of the strategy that has to be followed to achieve these aims.

A critical question is whether it is sufficient to organise some forms of continuous education, so that people are better able to profit from them. Wide discussion and research on the discipline of adult education supports the idea that a person should have some core dispositions and skills to be able to exploit the educational possibilities that are being offered (Cropley and Dave, 1978; Cross, 1981). Firstly one needs to have psychological readiness for – and openness to – learning, one also needs to be disposed to get satisfaction out of knowledge achievement, and to be motivated by an intrinsic drive to learn. A person also needs to have a self-image as a 'lifelong student' with imagination, flexibility and self-confidence in his/her abilities.

But willingness to learn should be supported by the ability to do so. One needs to have the essential general intellectual skills, and the ability to conceive the structure of knowledge, to pose questions and take the steps that lead to answers. 'Knowing to know' is a basic aptitude, a precondition for the development of the

educational potential of the individual. In addition, familiarity with using learning means, such as libraries, files and the means that modern technology provides, is a precondition for profiting from the educational provisions that are available.

Such a broad range of skills, dispositions and aptitudes have to be sown throughout childhood and adolescence. Schools therefore share a large part of the responsibility for people to profit from the educational provisions they are offered throughout their lives. In practice, such a principle leads logically to the need for the re-examination of the educational philosophy that informs schooling, and to the way the latter is organised.

Re-defining the role of the teacher

What, then, is the role of the teacher, given this new situation? Obviously the teacher cannot be held solely responsible for the re-orientation of schooling in line with the needs of a learning society. Teachers, however, have much to contribute. Firstly, they need to adopt the principle of lifelong learning themselves and to adjust their pedagogical action according to the new demands, being supported by the appropriate training. It could be said that lifelong education – as an ideal and as practice – is a challenge to teachers, who have to broaden their views about schooling in the direction of lifelong learning for the benefit both of the students and of their own professional development.

Moreover, beyond this evolution of the teaching profession in the context of the new role that school education plays in a learning society, the development of various forms of continuous education offers teachers new opportunities for professional employment. Traditionally, such fields of employment are literacy programmes and language courses addressed to special groups of adults, such as immigrants, refugees and so on. These programmes are relevant to specific groups of teachers, and their range is limited. A real challenge for the teaching profession is the extending demand in adult and continuing education for trainers who have received training in education.

The question of 'adult educator' as a discrete professional role is often posed in the discussion about the presuppositions and the training adult educators need in order to accomplish their role effectively. One of the primary issues that confront adult and continuing education practitioners is their lack of a common identity. It is a confused role, diverse and fragmented, reflecting the diffuse nature of adult Education as a field of study and practice (Papanauou, 1994). In many countries the educators of adults may be members of other occupations and professions and act as educators within the framework of those other professions, or they may be part-time tutors who are members of other occupations (Jarvis,

1991). Adult and continuing education provisions generates a 'self-employment sector', offering new professional opportunities to unemployed higher education graduates.

Many writers, however, argue about the need for professionalising the adult educator's role as a mean for upgrading the field. Besides, they consider that the acquisition of core competencies is a necessary prerequisites for anyone working in this field (Monasta, 1989; Galbraith and Zelenak, 1989; Duke, 1989; Papanoum, 1989). Few Universities or colleges offer pre-service or in-service training for teachers of adults.

As to those that do offer such training, questions and controversies abound regarding the content that should be offered, and the extent to which teacher education for adult education should be integrated with general teacher education (Duke, 1989). Those who argue that adult education is a distinct discipline, representing as it does a broader conception of education than that of schooling, seem both to overlook the central principles of lifelong learning and to restrict the function of educating to its technical dimension.

In this account, the ideal of lifelong learning stresses the continuous character of education and the need for cohesion between different educational opportunities and providers. Thus, an analysis of the whole educational system from a perspective of lifelong education suggests that its fundamental objectives have to be served throughout the whole educational process, starting from the early years. On the other hand it is generally accepted that there are specific teaching strategies suitable to the learning needs of adults, a view that is supported and documented by the development of the field of andragogy. A crucial question at this point is whether or not there is a separate 'adult' version of education or, to put it in another way, the degree to which the 'education of adults' is an extension of more generalised concepts of education.

Education, considered in its core dimensions, is a single human process which serves fundamental ideals, irrespective of age and specific contexts. One can therefore agree with Lawson that 'underlying the various manifestations or forms there is some fundamental set of notions and values which make up a concept of education that goes behind or underlies the specific aim and content.' (Lawson, 1979). Formal and non-formal educational provisions as well as initial and continuing education, irrespective of content, are therefore encompassed in the broad concept of 'education'. Continuous education does not introduce a new philosophy of education, but serves the ideal of lifelong learning, being an all embracing conception of education, a conception that poses the problem of the strategies that one has to follow to fulfil this ideal.

Not only is education a broad and complex process in a technical sense, but it is also one which has crucial ethical and socio-political dimensions. Every

educational activity is imbued with an ideological orientation based on political, social and ethical values. Our adult education views then derive, as do our general views on education, from political, moral and philosophical views. That means that even a short educational activity, which transmits knowledge, has an ethical dimension as it influences the whole person. Besides, it has a sociopolitical effect as it serves latent interests. If one were to follow this line of thought, it would seem obvious that every person who exercises an educational function has to be aware of the transformative role the education can play in society (Collins, 1991).

The analysis so far may suggest that every person involved in teaching has to be trained in educational theory and its relationship to the practice of teaching. Such a training contributes to the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in general, to cultural and educational areas, and to a recognition of the civic and social responsibilities of teaching (Frank, 1989). Such a view encourages closer interaction between school-oriented and adult teacher education in the near future. This tendency it is likely to be reinforced by demographic changes which are evident in many countries and which lead to a shift in the demand for appointing teachers in adult education settings rather than in the primary or secondary school sectors.

Teachers training repatriated adults

The new role the teachers can play in contemporary learning societies was the starting point of the research which is described shortly in this part of the paper. Firstly, it is generally accepted that the quality of adult education provision depends largely on the systematic training of adult educators on education. On the other hand, there are today new opportunities for teachers in many countries to work in educational settings other than formal schooling. However, while the tendency for merging the basic training of adult educators with that of school teachers seems a reasonable development, the relationship that should be fostered between the training of adult educators and that of school teachers still remains unclear.

The main objectives of this small-scale research endeavour were (a) to describe the professional profile of teachers working as adult educators in the Hellenic context, (b) to investigate the problems they were facing during the courses and (c) to document their views on their training needs. It was expected also that there would be differences between the views of those who had been trained in education and the views of those who had not received such training.

Traditionally in Greece, the school teachers have been working as adult educators in literacy seminars addressed to adults who never attained or who failed to complete their basic education. During the past decade, following the events of 1989, impressively large numbers of people of Hellenic origin left Eastern European countries in order to be repatriated in Greece.

Despite their Hellenic roots and a strong national identity and consciousness, these migrants had not received a Hellenic education, and were thus alienated from Hellenic culture and mentality. The majority of them have had to overcome the problems of settling down, integrating themselves in a new community, and finding employment. In all this, it is obviously crucial to have a fluent command of the language of the host country. As can easily be imagined, the process of integration of repatriated people is a complex one, sharing common challenges faced by such groups as immigrants and refugees, but with additional issues as well.

Confronted with such large numbers of repatriated families, the State has had to accord their integration and education a top priority. There is indeed an increasing demand for teachers qualified to teach the Hellenic language, and the main provider of such courses is the Popular Education Secretariat, which belongs to the Ministry of Education and has branches all over Greece at prefectural level (N.E.L.E.).

The post-1989 situation led to the need for a major research project aiming to (a) provide research data on the problems teachers are facing during the teaching of repatriated adults, both with reference to the teaching methodology as well as to the social integration of these categories, and to (b) develop a training programme for teachers who work in this field, to implement it experimentally on a small scale, and to evaluate the service with the aim of improving it. The underlying principle is that professional training is the main vehicle for the empowerment of teachers, without underestimating, of course, other constraining factors. Particularly in the case of teaching repatriated adults, the role of teachers is considered very important, as they 'represent' the Hellenic society.

The present report addresses an aspect of that larger research project, and focuses on teachers who work or have worked as trainers in Hellenic language courses for repatriated adults, provided by the General Popular Secretariat during the last four years, in four Prefectures of Northern Greece (Macedonia and Thrace). 35 out of 53 teachers – i.e. 68% of the total number of teachers working in the selected Prefectures since 1995 – filled in a written questionnaire which included three groups of questions. These questions were developed on the basis of interviews carried out with three teachers who were not included in the research sample, and on a thorough perusal of the relevant literature. The questions investigated:

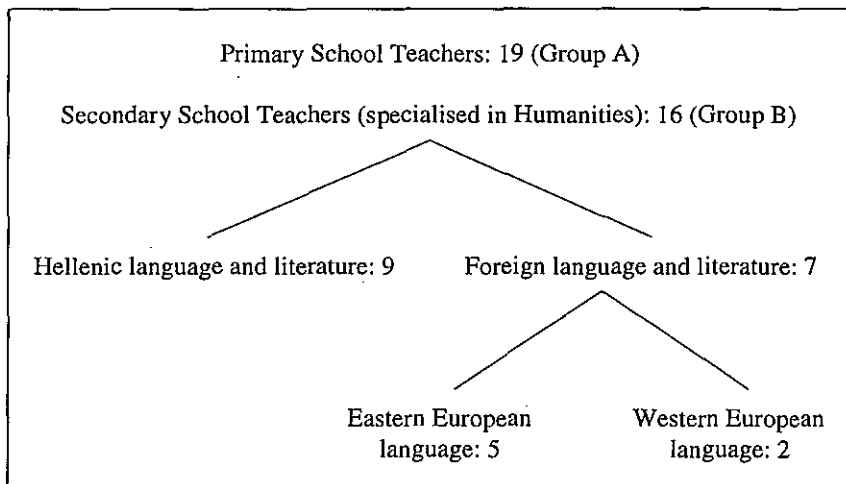
- a) the adult teachers' professional profile (training, employment, working situation, etc)
- b) the courses for repatriated adults they delivered as trainers (regarding the content, methodology, teaching material and their views on the problems they faced),
- c) their views on the training needs of teachers who teach repatriated adults (presuppositions of effectiveness and training needs).

An overview of the findings

Professional profile

The sample investigated tended to be qualified either as primary school teachers or as secondary school teachers with a specialisation in the Humanities. Table 1 demonstrates the different sub-categories of the latter group.

TABLE 1



It is interesting to note that only the primary school teachers (group A) have been trained in educational theory and practice, as a certificate on education training is not a prerequisite for someone to be appointed as teacher in Humanities in secondary schools. The majority of all teachers followed a varied range of training courses after their graduation.

TABLE 2

Title	F	%	Total
Second diploma	2	5.71	35
Postgraduate Studies	9	25.71	35
Seminars*	21	60	35

* Additional to the short seminars offered by NELE to all of the teachers before starting teaching

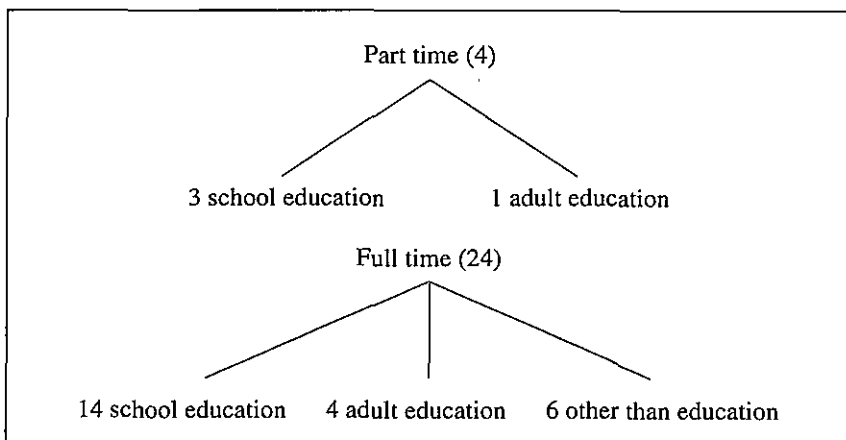
Employment situation and teaching experience

A few of the sampled teachers were unemployed at the moment the research was carried out. The majority were employed on a part or full-time basis (Table 3).

TABLE 3

	F	%
Unemployed	5	15.15
employed	28	84.85

TABLE 4



The picture of their professional profile is enriched by the finding that the majority have worked or are working with children or adolescents (85.71%) (Table 4). Five persons work in adult education programmes but only two of them exclusively teach repatriated adults.

A remark deriving from the above data is that the teaching personnel in language courses for repatriated adults seem to neither have a clear professional profile nor permanent status as adult educators.

The teachers' views on their competency in teaching repatriated adults

Teachers' views on the three broad areas of competencies, namely knowledge, skills (personal and social) and attitudes, are varied. According to a general estimation of the findings, they have a global and multifaceted view of the competencies needed to act effectively in this specific educational setting. They conceptualise their role more as a social service than simply in terms of teaching a language. Regarding the teachers' attitudes, the majority (80%) consider respect towards these people and their culture, as well as having an open and positive attitude toward their problems, as very important aspects of their work. They also stress the willingness to help them in their social integration.

TABLE 5

	F	%
on the subject	24	68.57
on education and psychology	14	40.00
on repatriated people, culture, history and mentality	13	37.14
on hellenic history and culture	7	20.00
on adult learning	5	14.29

The finding that they emphasise the teachers' personality more than his/her subject knowledge does not mean, however, that they do not also stress the importance of training and experience in helping them to be effective in their work. They consider as very helpful: (a) their various training activities and (b) their knowledge in broader areas (Table 5).

Concluding comments

The examination of the teaching profession in adult educational settings, such as in teaching repatriated adults, leads me to make two critically important

reflections. The first concerns the initial and in-service education of adult educators. It seems to me important that, given my arguments about lifelong learning and the development of a learning society, and given the challenges that are currently being faced by mobile communities in a number of countries, the core curriculum for the training of the teachers in general should offer opportunities for training in adult learning and teaching strategies. In this way, prospective teachers graduate with competencies that address lifelong education in an effective manner. Over and above this, it seems imperative to me that accreditation and licensing systems are developed in order to guarantee the professional profile of teachers who work in educational settings other than, and beyond formal schooling. It is only when the lifelong learning ideal has a real impact on systems of teacher education and training that we can be sure that educators will be well equipped with the knowledge, skills, dispositions and aptitudes to respond effectively to the challenges of the learning society.

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