Transitional school-based program of teachers' professional development in Greece: the role of the Teachers' School Assembly and the School Advisor

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Μεταβατικό πρόγραμμα επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης των εκπαιδευτικών σε επίπεδο σχολείου στην Ελλάδα: Ο ρόλος του Συλλόγου των εκπαιδευτικών και του Σχολικού Συμβούλου

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Abstract

The educational conditions in Greece are not ripe for fully participatory training models for teachers' professional development. According to the educational legislation, Greek teachers are not entitled to adequate training time. In addition, because of the past wrong programs of teachers' professional development, they have not acquired the necessary training culture. The main disadvantage of these centrally planned programs is that they do not take into account the real needs of the teachers. Therefore, the teachers' professional development proposals, that I analyze in this article, have a transitional character, combining international bibliographic standards and realistic capabilities of the Greek educational system.

Key words: teachers' professional development, communities of practice, action research, School Advisor

Περίληψη

Οι εκπαιδευτικές συνθήκες στην Ελλάδα δεν είναι ώριμες για πλήρως συμμετοχικά επιμορφωτικά μοντέλα επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης των εκπαιδευτικών. Σύμφωνα με την εκπαιδευτική νομοθεσία, οι Έλληνες εκπαιδευτικοί δεν δικαιούνται επαρκή χρόνο επιμορφωτικής κατάρτισης. Επιπλέον, εξαιτίας των προηγούμενων λανθασμένων προγραμμάτων επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης, δεν έχουν αποκτήσει την απαραίτητη κουλτούρα κατάρτισης. Το βασικό μειονέκτημα αυτών των

κεντρικά σχεδιασμένων προγραμμάτων είναι ότι δεν λαμβάνουν υπόψη τις πραγματικές ανάγκες των εκπαιδευτικών. Ως εκ τούτου, οι προτάσεις επαγγελματικής ανάπτυξης, που αναλύουμε σε αυτό το άρθρο, έχουν μεταβατικό χαρακτήρα, συνδυάζοντας τη διεθνή βιβλιογραφικά πρότυπα και τις ρεαλιστικές δυνατότητες του ελληνικού εκπαιδευτικού συστήματος.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη των εκπαιδευτικών, κοινότητες πρακτικής, έρευνα δράση, Σχολικός Σύμβουλος

1.   Introduction

The issue of teachers' professional development is one of the most difficult problems of the Greek educational system. Despite of the many efforts that have been made, over the last twenty years, by the Greek State to train the teachers, the results are not seem to be very satisfactory. The main disadvantage of these centrally planned programs is that they do not take into account the teachers' real needs. So, the problem with professional development for teachers in Greek educational system is complicated (Mavroyiorgos, 1999; Xochellis&Papanaoum, 2000; Chatzipanagiotou, 2001; Bagakis, 2005; Doukas, et al. 2008; Mavrogiorgos, 2009; Bagakis, 2015).

2. Why to apply a "transitional" model?

The educational conditions in Greece are not ripe for fully participatory training models. According to the educational legislation, Greek teachers are not entitled to adequate training time during their professional service. In addition, teachers have not acquired the necessary training culture because of the ineffective and big scale programs that organized periodically by the State.

Therefore, the teachers' professional development proposals, that I present in this paper, have a transitional character, combining international bibliographic standards, the realistic capabilities and limitations of the Greek educational system, the conscious participation of teachers and the possibilities of the School Advisor (Graikos, 2014; 2015).

3. The institution of School Advisor in Greek educational system

The institution of School Advisors starts in the Greek education system in the beginning of the 80s. The main tasks of School Advisors are: the scientific and pedagogical guidance of

teachers, the innovative educational programs promotion, the in-service training and the evaluation of teachers (Skia, 2016).

The School Advisor occupies a position at the top of hierarchy in an educational region together with the Director of education who has administrative duties. The last years, a discussion about the redefinition of School Advisor's role and the change of some of her/his tasks has been started.

The training opportunities, provided today by the Greek educational system to teachers, are limited (Vergidis, 2016). The majority of further education programs are taking place when new curricula and textbooks are promoted. According to the Greek educational legislation, the School Advisor can use two working days per year for teachers' training and some more days for short time training. However, the Teachers Assemblies don't have an essential part in the selection of training topics, which, in the majority of times, are being selected by the School Advisor or the State (Antoniou, 2011).

4. The program

The proposals for teachers' professional development, analyzed in this paper, have been resulted from my need to organize professional practices during my capacity as Primary School Advisor at the first educational region of Pieria (Macedonia, North Greece).

In this paper I will present subsequently: the goals and the main features of my proposals, the educational principles on which my proposals are based, the stages of the training procedures, and the debate about their effectiveness.

5. Goals and educational features

The main goal of my proposal is the establishment of school-focused educational communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Partial goals are the promotion of reflective processes on the overall role of the teaching profession and on the socio-cultural meaning of educational processes.

The main characteristics of my proposals are related to long-term educational processes (Collins, 1991) which take place within a particular school context and which are based on the close cooperation of the teachers with the School Advisor, under real school and classroom conditions. Teachers are conceived of as reflective practitioners who act collaboratively in their own school (Schön, 1983; Papanaoum, 2003). Therefore, schools are transformed into

communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999) and teachers' School Assembly is transformed into professional community (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1994; MacBeth, 1999; Altrichter, 2005) and community of learners (Avgitidou, 2014).

6. Training procedures

6.1. First steps

The applications that I recommend start with the educational work planning, which according to Greek legislation is constituted by the Teachers Assembly at the beginning of the school year.

The procedures that are followed in this stage, it is very important to be free and conscious, so that the way and the training subjects can be determined by the teachers, according to the real needs of their schools (Hewton, 1988; Lieberman, 1994). That means that neither a commitment on specific criteria or "factors" based on which the Teachers Assembly choose the training subjects, nor the obligation to prepare standard "action plans" should affect them. Simply, a minute of in-service training is constituted, which will be part of the annual school planning, and includes the chosen training subjects and the teacher-team who will undertake the task coordination.

The final decision about the application or not of a school training program belongs to teachers, without caring any "rewards" or "punishments"; "a judicious mixture of push, pull, and nudge" (Hargreaves &Fullan, 2012). The only evaluation criterion is the usage of the training program, which can be judged with qualitative criteria at the end of the school year during the annual evaluation.

6.2. The role of School Advisor

The School Advisor takes part in the preparation of the annual training program, developing ideas and proposing actions. But the teachers are responsible to decide, after discussion, if their school will take part in the program and then about the optimum topics for their schools.

6.3.   Training actions

The training actions that are selected fall in three categories.

In the first category are the actions that are related to teaching problems that are arising in everyday school life (Baynham, 1995; Cazden, 1998; Christensen, 2008). These actions are based on the idea of collaborative teaching and on the common teaching experience of the teachers and the trainer who becomes "critical collaborator" with mentoring skills (McIntyre, et al., 1993; Stephens, 1996; Boreen, et al., 2000; Colley, 2001). For the teaching actions the voluntary participation of teachers is asked, who, along with the School Advisor, organize the teaching and prepare the in-service training program. It is essential, that the School Advisor should have an active and collaborative role in the teaching procedure. The practical involvement of the trainer in the teaching process is the basis for the development of a trusting relationship with teachers and Advisor, and the promotion of a collaboration culture at school (Tsafos, 2014: 32-33).

In the second category are the actions related to general organization and research of school life issues (Day, 1999; Trorey & Cullingford, 2002). For the organizational activities of daily educational work, action researches of the daily educational work are expected from the teachers themselves. That means that the Teachers Assemblies are activated and take crucial decisions for confronting and proposing solutions for specific school problems. The teachers investigate their daily educational work, based on the action-research (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993; Kapachtsi & Kakana, 2010; Tsafos & Katsarou, 2000; Altrichter, 2005), autoethnographic principles (Carspecken, 1996; Pelias, 2004; Leavy, 2009) and the historical-biographical approaches (Wertsch, 1991; Knowles & Cole, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2004). And in order these ideas not to stay as theoretical expectations, these actions should be organized in a voluntary basis and be focused on the cooperation between the "trainer" and the teachers. Indicative topics which have been developed in this way is for example: "Addressing bullying prevention and intervention plan", "School Regulation", "Actions for changes in the school space", "The educational importance of nutrition", "Informatics and communication technologies and school life organization" etc.

In the third category are included issues concerning the critical role of the teaching profession (Giroux, 1988; Grollios, 1999; Papanaoum, 2005) and the socio-cultural meaning of the educational processes, such as "The operation of the Teacher Assembly: present situation and future prospects", "School autonomy" etc.

During the school year apart from the multiple informal educational meetings, two-hour training and feedback meetings, presentations of the work carried out by the teachers' teams are taking place.

6.4.   Final collaborative assessment of training actions

At the end of the school year, school meetings are carried out for the evaluation of the applied training activities. The evaluation doesn't have the form of a formal report, but instead it is a substantive debate on the strengths and weaknesses of the tasks, but also on the specific commitments for the next school year. The process of evaluation is supplemented with the in and inter-school meetings, in which the teachers of different schools, who applied actions with the same topic, exchange ideas and experiences.

7. Discussion

The proposals, that I tried to analyze in this paper, are resulted from the need to organize my profession practices as a School Advisor. I believe that my basic advices are focused on practical involvement of the trainer into systematic teaching in the classroom, into tangible cooperation with the Teacher Assemblies for the voluntary planning of the in school training and the promotion of reflective processes on the overall role of the teaching profession and on the socio-cultural meaning of educational processes.

The evaluation of these actions can be based on qualitative and quantitative data.

The quantitative data is the increase, at least 50 % at the last five years, of voluntary teacher participation in the organization of training activities that are reported annually, and also, the gradual increase, at least 90 % at the last five years, of training topics, which are selected by the teachers in collaboration with the School Advisor.

The qualitative data is the development of the educational tasks that meet the real needs of teachers in a variety of fields, like the improvement of teaching practices, the better organization of school life and the improvement of school space and the reflective processes on the overall role of the teaching profession. It is also very important, the gradual development of training culture and the in-school and inter-school cooperation.

It is proven that in Greek education it is preferable the application of transitional further education models that are based on the conscious participation of teachers, rather than an application of massive and central organized programs which are not taking into account the

specific needs of each school (Papanaoum & Liakopoulou, 2014). However, in order to these processes to get established, the role of the School Advisor, who can coordinate and organize the procedures of the Teacher's Assembly work without playing the role of the evaluator but of the critical collaborator, takes a major part.

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