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Training Greek Teachers in Cultural Awareness

A Pilot Teacher-Training Programme – Implications for the Practice of School Psychology

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ABSTRACT   The recent dramatic changes in the makeup of the student population in Greek schools pointed to the need for designing and implementing new educational and teacher training programmes that would incorporate the educational needs of newcomers. Such a teacher training programme aiming at developing Greek teachers' cultural awareness and empowerment was designed and implemented as part of a greater research project. The scope of this article is to present the specifics and some of the results from the evaluation of this teacher training programme. The programme consisted of three thematic units, which were based on experiential learning. Five groups of both primary- and secondary-school teachers from three cities of northern Greece participated in it. Teacher training modules were designed to meet the training needs of the programme as well as for future use in other teacher training programmes. Teacher evaluation of the training programme indicated that it was an interesting and pleasant experience for the majority of the participants, which provided them with knowledge and skills necessary to function in a diverse school environment. The implications of this particular training programme for the practice of school psychology are also discussed.

KEY WORDS: cultural awareness; cultural diversity; teacher training

Introduction

The continually changing composition of both school and the general population all over the world has presented schools with a great

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148

challenge, that of service delivery to racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families (Rogers et al., 1999). Cultural diversity in schools has created new needs and problems for all parties involved. Teachers are burdened with the enormous responsibility of educating students with whom they had no contact before, while at the same time they lack proper training (Gonzalez, 1993). School psychologists appear to be the professionals best suited to assist schools and teachers with their effort to re-define their role and function in this matter.

Greece provides us with an excellent example of a country where school psychologists must meet the challenge of providing services to racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families. In Greece, school psychology is an extremely new field, still in the process of determining its role (Gavriilidou and Psalti, 1998; Hatzichristou et al., 2002; Nikolopoulou and Oakland, 1990; Paraskevopoulos, 1992; Psalti, 1995). Until 2002, there were no positions for psychologists in regular education state schools, only in special education state schools and in private schools. This changed with the founding of Centres for Psychological Assessment, Diagnosis and Intervention in various regions of the country, which resulted in the opening of positions for psychologists (Jimerson et al., 2004). Through these centres, Greek psychologists work with students as well with families and teachers.

Furthermore, during the last decade of the 20th century, there was an influx of children of both repatriated Greeks and new immigrants in Greek schools. This has dramatically changed the composition of the student population in Greece (Damanakis, 1997; Drettakis, 2003; Nikolaou, 2000; Psalti, 2000). According to data from the Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies, in the school year 2002–2003 the percentage of students from immigrant and/or repatriated families amounted to 8.9 percent of the total student population, while the percentage rose to 10.6 percent at the primary school level. The vast majority of those students attended schools in the two largest cities of the country, Athens, the capital, (54.13 percent) and Thessaloniki (8.16 percent) (Nikolaou, 2000). There is no doubt today that classrooms in Greek schools have become multicultural.

In light of the aforementioned data, Greek school psychologists not only have to acquire the necessary competencies to work in multicultural settings, but they must be prepared to assist and train Greek teachers to meet the challenges of the multicultural classroom as well. In Greece, as most educational attempts have focused on culturally diverse students' assimilation rather than on their cultural integration, similarly teacher-training programmes focused mainly on how teachers can teach new curricula tailored to the special needs of specific

149

groups of students and not on teachers' becoming sensitive to the needs of a multicultural classroom (Sakka, 2005; Sakka and Psalti, 2004b).

A pilot programme
It appears that there is a pressing need for the development of teacher training programmes that can be used by school psychologists to prepare teachers to provide culture-sensitive services to an increasingly diverse student population. In an attempt to fill the existing void in educating culturally and linguistically diverse students and in teacher training, a pilot programme titled 'Integrating Culturally Diverse Students into the Greek Educational System through In-Service Teachers' Empowerment and Systematic Training in Cultural Awareness' was designed and implemented in Greek schools. The programme was financed by the European Social Fund and the Greek Ministry of Education and was carried out by the Department of Primary Education, Democritus University of Thrace in Greece between 2002 and 2004. It was based on action research and its main objective was to empower in-service primary and secondary education teachers so that: (a) they would acquire the necessary skills and abilities to manage the culturally diverse classroom and (b) they would actively support the diverse students' integration into the regular classroom. The programme includes three phases: (a) *needs assessment* of all involved parties (teachers, students, parents) and exploration of the ways culturally diverse groups of children or parents 'talked' about each other; (b) *teacher training* in cultural awareness and (c) *intervention* in the classroom (for more information about the programme see: Sakka, 2005; Sakka and Psalti, 2004a, 2004b).

The scope of this article is to present the second phase of this action research programme, that is, the teacher-training programme. First, the main objective and underlying assumption of the training programme will be introduced, followed by a brief discussion of the educational model on which the training programme was based. Next, the training modules designed and used for the training of the participating teachers along with the whole process of the implementation of the training programme and its evaluation will be presented. The article concludes with the description of the products and outcomes and some closing remarks on the implications for the practice of school psychology.

Objective
The objective of this training programme was two-fold: (a) to develop teachers' *cultural awareness* and (b) to *empower* teachers so that they can function effectively in a culturally diverse classroom. Specifically, through their training, trainees would: (a) acquire greater awareness

of their own cultural tradition as well as of the interdependence of their own with other cultural traditions, including the respect of differences; (b) appreciate their own cultural tradition as part of a wider world in such a way that it would allow them to understand, adapt and finally accept the different cultural and personal realities of their culturally diverse students; (c) acquire new views, knowledge and skills and (d) work to overcome the traditional models of managing diversity (assimilation) and develop strategies and practices that would take into consideration the diversity of school classrooms in the 21st century (All Different All Equal, 1999).

Rationale

This teacher-training programme is based on the *comprehensive multicultural education* approach, which 'focuses on reform of the classroom and entire educational systems with two ideals: equal opportunity and cultural pluralism for all' (Taylor and Quintana, 2003: 521). In this approach, teachers should possess and properly implement specific competencies to cope with the demands of a multicultural classroom. In other words, teachers need to acquire *cultural competence* (Banks, 1994), that is, they should be able to function in cross-cultural settings and harmoniously interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Chisholm, 1994). Cultural competence goes beyond awareness and sensitization and emphasizes the idea of effective functioning in various cultural settings. This constitutes the ultimate objective of this particular training programme.

By participating in this training programme, teachers are allowed to examine their own beliefs and values regarding cultural background, race and social class, to acquire knowledge about matters of cultural differences and to understand how their knowledge, beliefs and values determine their behaviour towards their cultural diverse students. With the knowledge and new perspective they acquire, teachers will be in a position to further re-define the ways in which they perceive their culturally diverse students and to develop new teaching and classroom management practices (Jenks et al., 2001; Taylor and Quintana, 2003). On this account, the training programme revolved around three concepts:

• Cognition;
• Emotion;
• Action.

ASK training model

The training of the participating teachers was based on *ASK*, a widely used model in teacher and other related professional (counsellors,

151

psychologists, etc.) training (Sue, 1991; Sue et al., 1982, 1992; Wittmer, 1992). *ASK* is an acronym that stands for: *A*wareness, *S*kills and sensitivity and *K*nowledge.

The first component of the model (*A*wareness) refers both to self-awareness and to awareness of others. According to Appleton (1983), multicultural education should begin from the point where people currently are. This means that each individual should first deal with his/her own cultural identity and cultural background. The concept of self-awareness involves acquiring awareness of one's identity and cultural frame of reference along with an appreciation of one's cultural heritage as unique and worthy of care and respect (Chisholm, 1994; Cochran-Smith, 1997; Zeichner, 1996). An individual who is aware of who s/he is adopts neither a condescending nor a paternalistic attitude towards individuals from different cultural groups (Wittmer, 1992). In the context of this particular training programme, this means that teachers have the opportunity to examine their values, perceptions, stereotypes, beliefs and way of life closely (Sanchez et al., 1995) and attempt to realize how all these have been constructed and shaped by their race, social class, cultural background, ethnicity, language and gender. This involves deep changes in a person's beliefs and worldview. By widening their view of themselves and of others, teachers will be able to move forward toward the appreciation and respect of cultural differences (Sue, 1991). As Nieto (1996) states, in order to become a multicultural teacher one should first become a multicultural individual.

The second component of the model (*S*kills and sensitivity) refers to acquiring sensitivity and displaying the willingness to know and understand the 'other', as well as developing 'culturally sensitive', flexible coping strategies and services in general (Sanchez et al., 1995). Throughout this training programme, teachers develop their sensitivity and willingness to know and understand the 'other', which constitutes the key to an effective communication with culturally different individuals. In order to be able to effectively communicate with others within the multicultural classroom and school, teachers should be aware of others' thoughts, feelings and worldview, always taking into consideration the influence of the cultural background (Wittmer, 1992). Furthermore, they develop the suitable, 'culturally sensitive' strategies for the provision of services to students, parents and the wider school community (Sanchez et al., 1995).

The last component (*K*nowledge) involves the acquisition of knowledge and information regarding the values, worldviews and social norms both of one's own cultural background and of that of the 'others'. It is of great importance to know the history, experiences, cultural values and way of life of various cultural groups as well as the

socio-political, historical and financial context in which the groups live and act (Sanchez et al., 1995; Sue, 1991). In this training programme, teachers are asked to get to know who the 'others' are and where they come from, what their participation and contribution to Greek society is, and what obstacles racism and prejudice set in the way (Sue, 1991).

Training modules
Taking into consideration the three components of the training model presented (*A*wareness; *S*kills and sensitivity; *K*nowledge), three training modules were developed:

(A) 'Who Am I?' – Cultural Self-Awareness;
(B) 'How Do I View the "Others"?' – Stereotypes and Prejudice;
(C) 'Who Are the "Others"?' – The Reality of the 'Others'.

The objective of training module A was the exploration of trainees' own cultural tradition and its role in the formation of their perceptions, assumptions and the discovery and acceptance of themselves as cultural beings. This first module revolved around the axes of the self as a cultural being and the development of each individual's social and cultural reality, while the training activities allowed teachers to collect information about their own cultural identity (see Appendix 1).

Training module B aimed at providing trainees with the opportunity to explore their personal beliefs and ideas regarding their contact with culturally different individuals, to examine the history of the development of their views of 'difference', and to clarify the way in which those views affected their teaching practices. This module's axes included prejudice and stereotypes that exist in our society in regard with other societies and cultures and the training activities contributed to the discovery of trainees' perceptions and beliefs toward 'difference' (see Appendix 1).

The objective of module C was the knowledge and understanding of: (i) the factors that affect the adjustment of immigrant students in Greek schools and their academic success; (ii) the experience of immigration and of the stages of uprooting and adjustment through which immigrant students go; (iii) the meaning of the concepts of acculturation and assimilation and their influence on individual development and (iv) the role that teachers are called to play taking the reality of 'others' into consideration. The axes of module C included the reality of 'others' and its influence on their behaviour and reactions along with the role that teachers play in this particular reality. The training activities were about getting to know 'difference' (see Appendix 1).

Here it is deemed necessary to briefly present the rationale on which the choice of the various training activities was based. Recent research studies on teacher training programmes indicated that these

153

programmes should be oriented toward the reinforcement and thorough examination of teachers' understanding of the teaching/learning process and of their students (Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond, 1997). In particular for training teachers of culturally diverse students, the mere provision of information about these groups or the presentation of statistical data or even the mere exposure of teachers to these groups' crafts and artefacts (e.g. food, music, dance) are not considered sufficient. It is essential to provide teachers with opportunities to examine their personal beliefs and ideas regarding their interactions with their culturally different students and their families and to work on their knowledge, emotions and experiences (All Different All Equal, 1999; Gonzalez and Darling-Hammond, 1997). Based on information from the international scientific literature, the training activities that were implemented in the context of the three training modules were based on experiential learning. This means that they were designed in such a way that they included action on the trainee's part and focused on learning new behaviours and un-learning others that were no longer appropriate (Barrett, 1993).

Implementation

A total of five groups of both primary and secondary education teachers ($n = 70$) participated in the training programme. Participating teachers worked for primary and secondary state schools in three prefectures of Northern Greece: the prefecture of Thessaloniki in the district of Makedonia and the prefectures of Xanthi and Evros in the district of Thrace.

Specifically, there were:

- Two groups ($n = 17$ and $n = 11$) of in-service primary education teachers working for state schools in the city of Alexandroupoli and the surrounding area (prefecture of Evros, Thrace)
- One group ($n = 16$) of in-service primary education teachers working for state schools in the city of Xanthi and the surrounding area (prefecture of Xanthi, Thrace)
- One group ($n = 16$) of in-service secondary education teachers working for state schools in the city of Xanthi and the surrounding area (prefecture of Xanthi, Thrace)
- One group ($n = 17$) of in-service secondary education teachers working for state schools in the Greater Metropolitan Area of Thessaloniki (prefecture of Thessaloniki, Makedonia).

The total duration of the training programme amounted to 48 hours. Eight six-hour sessions took place between February and May 2003. There were two coordinators in each session: the Trainer and the Assistant-Trainer. The Trainer was responsible for the presentation of

the various activities, the orderly function of the group and the co-ordination of the discussion. The Assistant-Trainer was in charge of various procedural issues such as: filling out the observation forms and taking notes on everything that went on in the group. Each session began by welcoming the group, reminding them of the group rules and dealing with unfinished business. Next, the Trainer presented the agenda of the day and began with the presentation of the training activities on the agenda for that particular session. The group moved on to the performance of the activities and concluded the session with a recap of everything that took place during the session along with a reminder for the next session and the assignment of homework. Before the group left for the day, they filled out an evaluation form in which they rated the activities of the day and offered comments and suggestions.

Evaluation

There was an internal evaluation of the teacher-training programme, which was carried out in two ways: (a) evaluation of the training activities and (b) evaluation of the training programme. All 70 teachers (41 women and 29 men, 41 primary school teachers and 29 secondary school teachers) who participated in the training programme contributed to both types of the evaluation phase. A detailed description of both the questionnaires used and the statistical analysis of the collected data is beyond the scope of this article (more information is provided in Sakka and Psalti, 2004a).

Evaluation of the training activities

At the end of each training session, participating teachers were asked to fill in an evaluation form in which they provided information about: (i) whether the objectives of the training session were met; (ii) whether the training activities facilitated teachers' participation in the group and the acquisition of knowledge and experiences and (iii) the interest and effectiveness of each training activity.

In brief, the majority of the teachers reported that the objectives of each training session were actually met. More than half of the participating teachers stated that the training activities facilitated both their participation in the group and the acquisition of knowledge and experiences. Specifically, the most helpful and effective activities were those that aimed at the exploration of teachers' personal views regarding the integration and the exclusion of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and teachers' biases and stereotypes.

155

Evaluation of the training programme

Participating teachers were also asked to fill in an evaluation question-naire designed by the research team at two distinct phases: (i) before the onset of the training programme, and (ii) after the completion of the training programme. At the 'before phase', teachers presented their expectations regarding the training programme, while at the 'after phase', they evaluated the results of the training in terms of its objectives and the degree to which it met their expectations.

The majority of the teachers considered their participation in the programme to be very important both at the 'before' and 'after' phases. They attributed the importance of their participation – more during the 'after' than during the 'before' phase – to their interest in the topic and to the programme's unique methodology as well as to the knowledge they acquired and the attitude change toward 'difference' they developed. In terms of their expectations from the programme, 81 percent of the participating teachers reported that their expectations were actually met. Their high satisfaction was mostly attributed to the fact that they could become sensitized toward cultural diversity issues through the development of self-awareness and the acquisition of knowledge. This is indicative of the great emphasis that teachers placed upon their sensitization and the awareness of their personal boundaries and views. Given that this teacher training programme aimed at the development of teachers' awareness through self-exploration, it is safe to conclude that this objective was achieved. This is also supported by the teachers' reports regarding their gains from the training programme.

Results showed that teachers' expectations regarding the acquisition of knowledge, the exchange of views and ideas, their encouragement and personal development as a result of their participation in the training programme were satisfied at a greater degree than expected. However, very few teachers were satisfied in terms of their expecta-tions regarding the acquisition of practical knowledge and the provision of assistance with their role in the classroom. This has been an expected result, since this evaluation concerned just the training phase of the whole project.

In terms of what teachers learned during this programme, most of them stressed the ability to effectively approach their culturally diverse students and deal with their difficulties, the ability to promote equal opportunities and the development of their critical abilities. Another gain from the programme appeared to be a significant change in their role in the classroom. According to the teachers, due to their participation, both their ability to communicate with their culturally diverse students and to effectively approach them were improved. In addition, the vast majority of the teachers (approximately 90–95

156

percent) appeared to be satisfied from the implementation of the training programme in terms of its objective and contents, its methodology and set-up as well as their work with the research team. Fewer teachers reported their satisfaction from the provision of teaching materials.

The training programme was described by most of the participants as interesting, important, informative, sufficient, necessary, useful and helpful; it was also considered a starting-point for debate and questioning. These views of the programme corresponded to teachers' initial expectations. Fewer teachers viewed the training programme as more demanding, tiring, difficult and boring than they had expected it to be at the beginning.

Finally, teachers reported on the positive and negative features of the training programme. The methodology, rationale and organization of the programme were included in the programme's strengths, while its weaknesses contained the lack of implementation, some organizational difficulties and the hard meeting hours.

Overall, teachers considered their participation in the training programme a unique and very useful experience, which offered them the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills to better and more effectively communicate with and approach their culturally diverse students as well as to exchange views and ideas on the subject with their colleagues. The experiential nature of the training programme and the collaboration with the trainers contributed to the positive evaluation of the programme.

Conclusion and implications for school psychologists

School psychologists all over the world are required to provide services to a constantly and rapidly changing school population. They are also responsible for preparing schools and teachers for meeting the educational and psychological needs of this diverse population. This means, that school psychologists should take into consideration the recommendations made by Rogers and her colleagues (1999) that 'psychologists working in schools educate school staff and personnel about cultural and linguistic factors significant in the development and success of children from diverse backgrounds' (p. 250).

Greece is one of those countries where a multicultural student body has recently become an indisputable reality that has created multiple necessities and caused many critical problems for students, families and teachers alike. In order to be effective in this context, teachers must receive appropriate education/training to acquire the knowledge, experience and skills necessary so that they can act as 'cultural interpreters' and as 'cultural brokers' (Chisholm, 1994). As 'cultural interpreters', teachers intervene between dominant group and minorities

157

and assist their minority students to understand, adjust and make progress within the academic and social context of the dominant culture. At the same time, by acting as 'cultural brokers', teachers help the school to understand, adjust and offer services to all students and contribute to bridging the cultural gap between dominant group and minorities. School psychologists require appropriate training materials to assist them in helping teachers 'to build bridges of understanding between the schools and homes of children' (Rogers et al., 1999: 250).

The teacher-training programme that was the subject of this article constitutes a proposal for the training of in-service teachers by school psychologists so that teachers can effectively face the challenges of multicultural schools of today. It is a training programme through which teachers not only have the opportunity to redefine the way in which they treat their students – that is, the extent to which they accept and utilize what their students bring to school and allow the students to contribute to the wider society – but the way in which they perceive themselves as teachers (Cummins, 1999). In other words, through their participation in this training programme teachers acquire *cultural awareness* (awareness of self and of others) and work on the transformation of the relations that develop at school from coercive into collaborative ones. The end-product is the *empowerment* of everybody involved in this collaboration (students, family members, teachers), as they feel on one hand that their identity is accepted and on the other hand, that they now possess the power to bring about changes in their life and social situation (Cummins, 1999).

A package of training materials was developed and implemented throughout the training programme. This package can be used in continuous education programmes for in-service teachers to prepare them to effectively manage classroom diversity. In addition, the knowledge, skills and experiences that teachers acquire by participating in this training programme can be utilized as the basis for the development of interventions in the school community, which interventions would further contribute to the empowerment of teachers and of the whole community as well.

The uniqueness of the proposed teacher-training programme mainly consists in the fact that it aims at preparing teachers to cope with the reality of modern classrooms, which are culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms where students from both the dominant and various cultural/ethnic groups coexist. This agrees with the principles of multicultural education, according to which multicultural education is intended for all students and not only for minority, immigrant or refugee students (Govaris, 2001; Markou, 1997). In this context, the proposed training programme is a general education programme that takes into consideration the modern school reality. Furthermore, it is a

158

training programme that can become a very useful addition in school psychologists' repertory of skills and strategies that will allow them to 'give psychology away to individuals … who are integral to children's natural, everyday, and long-term environments' (Sheridan and Gutkin, 2000: 489).

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Appendix 1: Sample activities of training modules A, B and C[1]

Training module A

Activity 1:
Title: What's in a (last) name?
Objective: To become aware of their personal identity, by first realizing what their last name means.
Duration: 30 minutes
Materials: None
Procedure: (i) The group is divided into pairs and each person interviews the other about his/her last name using the following question guide:
   Where does your last name come from?
   What does it mean for you?
   How do others react when hearing your last name?
   Is there an incident related to your last name that you would like to mention?
(ii) The whole group reconvenes and discusses the following:
   What did you learn about yourselves?
   Any surprises?
   What happens when we hear a last name before seeing a face?
   What happens in our mind when we hear last names that do not 'sound' Greek?

Training module B

Activity 2:
Title: Ethnic groups
Objective: (a) to compare the various first impressions that each one of us

161

forms about the others; (b) to explore the way in which our personal experiences 'colour' our first impressions; (c) to develop greater awareness of the way in which our impressions affect our behaviour toward others.

Duration: 80 minutes

Materials: Worksheets

Procedure: (i) The Trainer passes out worksheets and asks participants to write down the first thing that comes to mind next to each ethnic group
(ii) Each participant reads what s/he has written (if s/he consents to do so). Otherwise, the Trainer collects all worksheets and reads those aloud.
(iii) Participants discuss the following:

   What did you learn about the group?
   Any surprises?
   On what did you base your first impression?
   Where does this first impression come from?
   How do stereotypes affect our relations? Why do we 'need' stereotypes?
   What did you learn about yourself?

Training module C

Activity 1:

Title: Let me tell you a story …

Objective: (a) to explore their personal views of culturally different students; (b) to develop awareness of the way in which these views affect how they view those students as well their expectations from them; (c) to explore their views regarding the social exclusion and integration of 'different' students in Greek schools and in Greek society in general.

Duration: 105 minutes

Materials: Worksheets

Procedure: (i) Participants are divided into groups of four to five people and given a worksheet containing the first sentence of the story they will be asked to write. Each group receives a story with a different beginning (there are four different beginnings)
(ii) Participants take the next 15 minutes to complete their stories any way they like. They work individually.
(iii) Each group discusses the stories that participants wrote and try to pinpoint differences and commonalities.

Notes

1. Activities were adapted from the book: All Different All Equal (1999) *Education Pack. Ideas, Resources, Methods and Activities for Informal Intercultural Education with Young People and Adults* Strasbourg: European Youth Centre, Youth Directorate.