THE INITIAL EDUCATION OF ELEMENTARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS IN GREECE: CRITICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

In the present study the evolution of the initial education of Elementary and Early Childhood Educators will be briefly presented. From the 2-year studies in the Academies in the beginning of the 20th century, to the 4-year University degree programs in the last decades, initial education appears through a kaleidoscope of premises and university courses’ contents. All this time run a big route from total state dependency to total autonomy, which led to a fragmented configuration of the initial education of educators. Taking into consideration that the model of the educator – researcher seems to respond better to nowadays demands, and that, at the same time, there is a call upon educational reform where the common basis on the initial education of the teachers is strongly recommended, it is proposed how we could benefit from the experience of the past by achieving a common consensus on what initial education of teachers should consist of.

Key words: initial teacher education, professional role, Pedagogical Departments, Educator–Researcher

Introduction 1

There is a great focus on interest in teachers’ education (initial and continuing) nowadays. From the 1980’s, there were many attempts by the Greek Governments for critical reforms concerning primary and secondary education and teachers’ education, as a part of broader plan towards a more liberal, democratic, modern and reconstructive society, which

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2 The word “primary education” entails elementary and early childhood teachers.
could correspond better to the future challenges and follow the international advances and developments (Kaldi & Konsolas, 2002). It’s a fact that all the competent bodies of educational policy accept that the educator holds a key position within the economic, social and cultural development of his/her country. Despite this common belief, even in nowadays in Greece the teachers’ education is still tormented by structural inadequacies: elementary and secondary education are seen in a disintegrated way and not as sequentially complementary each other, and not conceptualized in a unifying way that would enable the continuity between the initial and later on training (Xochellis, 2002).

In the context of the present study, we will focus only on the initial education of primary school educators (elementary and early childhood level), as secondary educators’ education (students’ age 12-17) is restricted mainly to their subject’s studies and they don’t get adequately prepared for their teaching role (Xochellis, 2002).

**History of teacher training in Greece**

From the official foundation of the Greek state to present, the initial education of primary teachers has succeeded in a back and forth way, pacing along with the newly emerged country which was taking its first step towards independency (Antoniou, 2009; Xochellis, 1989).

More specifically, in 1829 the first Greek Governor, Ioannis Kapodistrias founded in Aegina (the first Greek Capital City of the newly founded Government) a kind of a training seminar for elementary teaching candidates. This seminar was three months lasting, and was promoting the peer-teaching method, which consisted a common teaching practice at that period of time. After these, specific education structures were founded, called Didaskalia (from the Greek word didasko = teach), and in the middle of the 20th century (1933) Pedagogical Academies were founded for elementary Teachers, and the Kindergarten teachers Schools were to follow, in 1959. Their academic program lasted two years with emphasis on educators teaching role, and the only prerequisite for admission was the graduation from the sixth grade of secondary school (Xochellis, 1989). The short period of studies (one to two years), the lack of their autonomy and their academic dependency from the state, along with the emphasis on empirical practices, affected the quality of their practices to an extended degree. For a long period of time, the curricula remained static, without deepening scientifically. This fact had a profound impact on teachers’ education. If we consider the
social dimension of the educators’ role, the consequences were more evident in their inadequacy to respond to the pace of a society which was taking its first step towards development and democracy (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009). There was uniformity in the curricula concerning Pedagogical Academies as well as Kindergarten Educators Schools, as all of them were developed under state’s control, with emphasis on Psychology, Pedagogy, General Didactic, Aesthetic and Physical Education (Stamelos, 2000).

Since 1974, there was a steady and consistent demand from educational societies for upgrading the level of the studies of teachers (Xochellis, 1989) a trend which was in accordance with other similar claims in most countries of Europe and USA. The upgrade to the University level of the Pedagogic Academies and the Schools of Kindergarten Educators was decided by the first socialistic government of Greece (1981-1985) with the establishment and foundation of the Educational (Pedagogic) Departments in Universities (Law 1268/82). But we have to point out that according to Xochellis (1989, p. 91), “a historical opportunity was lost for establishing Pedagogical faculties within the already existed Universities, where future teachers of all education levels could be equally trained”, a condition that probably could have had enabled the foundation of unification in all teachers’ education. Doubtless, this “universityfication” was an important first step towards optimizing teachers’ education in early childhood and elementary level, as it placed their education within a scientific framework. Specifically, it contributed to the “scientification” of the educators’ profession, to the increase of the years of study from two years to four years, and, the most important, to the autonomy in their operation – a common condition in all university departments and faculties in the country (Stamelos, 2000).

From 1984 to 1990, nine Pedagogical Departments for elementary teachers and nine for Early Childhood educators (eighteen totals) were established, whereas the Pedagogical Academies and Preschool Educators Schools were permanently closed in 1990.

**Teacher training system overview and curricula**

In Universities the initial training of elementary and early childhood educators has been established to 4-year studies, eight semesters (Law 1268/82) in which practical training is included. This legislative regulation was a very important step towards the upgrading of the level of their studies and it promoted their social and scientific status. All university teachers must hold a PhD degree, with studies in Greece or abroad and are appointed to their positions
according to a hierarchy that has already been established in all Universities of Greece and abroad (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009).

On the other hand, the curricula of those newly founded 18 Departments have been developed and enriched without the state’s intervention corresponding to modern scientific evidence, (although the political factor played an important role in the foundation of the Departments as well as in the early appointment of University teachers). We could claim that this period of time highlights the establishment of the total autonomy of the Pedagogical Departments and the establishment of the University Education (as in all university faculties and Departments of the Country). This parallel institutional development has resulted in profound differentiations among Pedagogical Departments, including among others (Chatzopoulou & Kakana, 2008; Stamelos, 2000):

- Their philosophy and their orientations,
- Their curriculum (sciences, didactic, art),
- The number of lessons and the prerequisite number of subjects and ECTS for graduation,
- The content of the lessons,
- The allocation of subjects as obligatory, selective or obligatory selective,
- The duration of the Practical Training
- The prerequisite or not of the graduation dissertation

In the afore-mentioned variations, a very important role played the synthesis of the academic personnel with its multiplicity in scientific and research orientation. It’s a fact that in Pedagogical Departments the presence of University teachers employed from a wide variety of sciences and specialties is very common, with variations in proportions and density across Departments.

There are, for example, academic educators with different research orientation (such as museum education, environmental education, intercultural education, preschool education, school education, special needs education, health education, adults education), psychologists (cognitive, social, developmental, school, etc), sociologists (specialized in education, in childhood, etc), scientists in basic studies (Biologists, Mathematicians, Physicians, Linguists, Historians, etc) specialized in subject didactic, or epistemologists. This contributed to the
multi-selectivity within departments which was reflected in the curricula. However, it also led to the unique profile configuration of each Department.

As a result some Departments placed a greater emphasis on the professional role of the educator, which is closer to the model of School Educators’ Education, whereas others were developed closer to the model of the Departments of Educational Sciences, emphasizing more on the scientific and less on the teaching role. More specifically, there are departments where the content of their curriculum is more oriented towards the social sciences, others put more emphasis on sciences education, or inequality issues, human rights and racism, or adults education, special needs education, and, finally, there are some others with more traditional orientation. Those differentiations contribute to the proliferation of teachers with different theoretical background (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009; Ravanis, Balias, Karalis, & Komis, 2010; Stamelos, 2000).

So it appears that in many University departments, the teaching aspects of the teachers’ profession are not an end in itself, but instead the preparation of the researchers in the broader context of educational studies becomes the target. The development of Master Programs and the proliferation of PhD dissertations contributed to this. In all eighteen Department were established postgraduate degree studies on subjects which belong to the broader spectrum of Pedagogy and Education, a fact that contributed to the redefinition of their professional identity (Ravanis, Balias, Karalis, & Komis, 2010). In this context there was the tendency in many departments, of early education mainly, to change their name from Departments of Preschool Education\(^1\) to Departments of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences.

**Critical Overview**

Today, 28 years after the admission of the first students in the Educational Departments in Greece, and 24 years after the first graduation, we can pinpoint the following as are reported from literature review (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009; Pantazis & Sakelariou, 2008; Papanoum, 1994; Stamelos, 2000; Xochellis, 1989).

On the basis of the all aforementioned, one first comment would be that the teachers’ education in Greece is characterized by structural inadequacies (Xochellis, 1989), namely:

a) Segregation between levels of education,

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\(^1\) In Greek a term that is also used for preschool educator is “nipiagogos” from the word “nipio”, a child aged 4-6 years old.
b) Incompatibility between scientific and teaching (didactic) preparation of the prospective teachers,

c) Loose connection between theoretical and applied knowledge,

d) Lack of awareness among educators about professional development issues.

In trying to making a synthesis out of the above mentioned all, two basic issues could be emphasized.

The first and more important according to our opinion, is the confusion that is created by the differences in the orientation of these departments, where the only common thing seem to be the starting point of the education of elementary and early childhood educators. As a result there are 18 Educational departments (nine elementary & nine preschool) who prepare bachelor degree graduates according to a wide variety on studies and subjects. A closer look to the curricula shows that the 4-year studies in the Educational Departments have evolved quite independently in each Department from another (Chatzopoulou & Kakana, 2008). In a study about Early Childhood Education Departments (Pantazis & Sakelariou, 2008), it is reported that the number of subjects and the importance which is placed upon specific subjects varies so much that in some cases in curricula are not included subjects which are consider of vital importance in teachers’ education. More over is evident a fragmentation in the contents of a variety of different subjects which doesn’t allow the in depth study of the subjects. These findings are also valid for the departments of elementary education.

The other important issue is that in many departments the practical training is quite limited. The educational departments trapped in the goal achievement of becoming more “scientific”, actually they foster theoretical knowledge and although they improve the level of the general knowledge of the future to become teachers, this constrained their methodological – practical training.

With no intention to exaggerate, is a common belief that the curricula of the educational departments are characterized by a poor connection between theory and practice, with the absence of “clinic pedagogical” experience. As a result, the new in job teacher faces the “shock of practice” with serious and long-term negative impact (Xochellis, 2002). Of course the grounded on theory education is of great importance, but it shouldn’t be one-sided and against the practical training. A good argument for this claim is the tendency that is recorded in the brands of social professions, that more practical training is demanded and the students raise regularly the issue of practical training availability (Pantazis & Sakelariou,
2008). The importance of the praxial\(^1\) knowledge in the education of professionals in applied sciences, such as the physicians, the architects and the teachers was highlighted by Schöen (1983), whose views had an impact in the formation of the curricula in the educational departments. It’s not by chance that although in most curricula is acknowledged the need of the education of the self-reflective educator, there is, unfortunately, no equal representation in the content of their studies (Chatzopoulou & Kakana, 2008).

The second major problem is the unreasonable dichotomy of the initial education of the teachers of elementary and early childhood education. This didn’t result only in wastefulness in scientific personnel, in structures and in equipment, but also it fomented the breakup of the common pedagogical mission of all educators (Xochellis, 2002). It also shrunk in theory and in practice the width of the pedagogical knowledge, by having limited it to horizontal arbitrary artificial technical age cut-offs. But teachers’ education should comply with the unity and continuation that are interwoven in children’s development. The unification of teachers’ education is also a subject of critical importance, which would be in the agenda of the discussions in the immediate future, in the context of the new law implementation in the Universities, which entails aggregations of similar departments into Schools, so as to facilitate research and teaching (Law 4009/2011).

\section*{Conclusion}

In conclusion, and according to writer’s opinion, the most important week point on which our criticism is focused is the emphasis on the dilemma concerning professional or scientific orientation. From our point of view, this could also evolve to a beneficial condition for the education, since multidimensionality lies within the educators’ role. It’s a common belief that there is a call upon the educator more than ever before, to perform in the context of a multifaceted and complicated role which goes beyond to be considered as his/her personal matter. In modern literature there are many references to the educator’s role, as the Pedagogic Educator, the Self-reflective Educator, the Educator Researcher, the Educator Professional (Calderhead, 1989; Day, 2003; Kalaitzopoulou, 2001; Xochellis, 1991). According to the needs and the demands of the modern society, the Educator – Researcher seems to be more adequate prepared to deal with the new challenges effectively. In addition, a consensus should be reached on the issue of what initial education of a teacher should be consisted of, so as to

\footnote{Praxial come from the Greek word “praxis” which means action, practice.}
set the basis of a corpus of basic subjects common in the curricula of all Pedagogical Departments. This will enable a condition where the academic staff will be appointed according to curricula and not the opposite (curricula adjusted to academic staff). Apart from this, there should be a common basis in the education of early childhood and elementary teachers (specialized later on according to subjects) in accordance with the continuum of childhood development.

It’s of vital importance for every department which educates the prospective Educators, to decide upon the roles that the Teachers will be asked to offer their services. This decision should be reflected in the selections on the subjects that are going to be incorporated in the curricula. This decision will also ensure the first precondition in education, which is a solid base in initial or basic training. The other precondition is interchangeably connected with a target that should be achieved, that is an educational process that will be scientifically based and application driven. The educational research along with the theoretical reflection could contribute on this profoundly.

**Extended Abstract in Turkish**

In the present study we are going to present briefly the evolution of the initial education of Elementary and Preschool Educators. From the 2-year studies in Academies in the beginning of the 20th century, to the 4-year University degree programs in the last decades, initial education appears through a kaleidoscope of premises and university courses’ contents. All this time run a big route from total state dependency to total autonomy, which led to a fragmented configuration of the initial education of educators.

From the 1980’s, there were many attempts by the Greek Governments for critical reforms concerning primary and secondary education and teachers’ education, as a part of broader plan towards a more liberal, democratic, modern and reconstructive society, which could correspond better to the future challenges and follow the international advances and developments (Kaldi & Konsolas, 2002).

Despite this common belief, even in nowadays in our country the teachers’ education is still tormented by structural inadequacies: elementary and secondary education are seen in a disintegrated way and not as sequentially complementary each other, and not conceptualized in a unifying way that would enable the continuity between the initial and the later on training (Xochellis, 2002).
In the context of the present study, we will focus only on the initial education of primary school educators \(^1\) (early childhood and elementary level), as secondary educators’ education (students’ age 12-17) is restricted mainly to their subject’s studies and they don’t get adequately prepared for their educational role (Xochellis, 2002).

From the very first moment that Greece set its way as an autonomous state in the middle of the 19\(^{th}\) century, the Governor of the first autonomous Greek Government established a kind of a training seminar (3 months duration) for elementary teaching candidates (Antoniou, 2009; Xochellis, 1989). After these, specific education structures were founded, called Didaskalia (from the Greek word didasko = teach), and in the middle of the 20\(^{th}\) century (1933) Pedagogical Academies were founded for elementary Teachers, and the Kindergarten teachers Schools were to follow, in 1959. The short period of studies (one to two years), the lack of their autonomy and their academic dependency from the state, along with the emphasis on empirical practices, affected the quality of their practices to an extended degree. For a long period of time, the curricula remained static, without deepening scientific (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009). Since 1974, there was a steady and consistent demand from educational societies for upgrading the level of the studies of teachers (Xochellis, 1989) a trend which was in accordance with other equivalent claims in most countries of Europe and USA. The upgrade to the University level of the Pedagogical Academies and of the Schools of Kindergarten Educators was decided by the first socialistic government of Greece (1981-1985) with the establishment and foundation of the Educational (Pedagogical) Departments in Universities (Law 1268/82). Doubtless, this “universityfication” was an important first step towards optimizing teachers’ education in preschool and elementary level, as it placed their education within a scientific framework. Specifically, it contributed to the “scientification” of the educators’ profession, to the increase of the years of study from 2 years to 4 years, and, the most important, to the autonomy in their operation – a common condition in all university departments and faculties in the country (Stamelos, 2000).

From 1984 to 1990, nine Pedagogical Departments for elementary teachers and nine for Early Childhood educators (18 totals) were established, whereas the Pedagogical Academies and Preschool Educators Schools were permanently closed in 1990. The curricula of those newly founded eighteen Departments were developed and enriched without the state’s intervention, corresponding to modern scientific evidence. We could claim that this

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\(^1\) The word “educator” will be equivalently used as the word “teacher”
period of time highlights the establishment of the total autonomy of the Pedagogical Departments and the establishment of the University Education (as in all university faculties and Departments of the Country) (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009). As a result, we can see many differentiations among the nine Pedagogical Departments of elementary teachers and the nine Departments of Early Childhood educators (Chatzopoulou & Kakana, 2008; Stamelos, 2000).

Very important role played the synthesis of the academic personnel with its multiplicity in scientific and research orientation. It’s a fact that in Pedagogical Departments is very common the presence of University teachers employed from a wide variety of sciences and specialties, with variations in proportions and density across Departments.

So it appears that in many University departments, the teaching aspects of the teachers’ profession are not an end in itself, but instead the preparation of the researchers in the broader context of educational studies becomes the target background (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009; Ravanis, Balias, Karalis, & Komis, 2010; Stamelos, 2000). The development of Master Programs and the proliferation of PhD dissertations contributed to this. In all eighteen Departments established postgraduate degree studies on subjects which belong to the broader spectrum of Pedagogy and Education, a fact that contributed to the redefinition of their professional identity (Ravanis, Balias, Karalis, & Komis, 2010). In this context there was the tendency in many departments, of early childhood education mainly, to change their name from Departments of Preschool Education\(^1\) to Departments of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences.

In trying to making a synthesis out of the above mentioned all, emphasis could be placed on two basic issues (Komis, Karalis, Ravanis, & Balias, 2009; Pantazis & Sakelariou, 2008; Papanaum, 1994; Stamelos, 2000; Xochellis, 1989):

The first and more important according to our opinion, is the confusion that is created by the differences in the orientation of these departments, where the only common thing seem to be the starting point of the education of elementary and preschool educators. As a result we have eighteen Educational departments (9 elementary & 9 early childhood teachers) who prepare bachelor degree graduates according to a wide variety on studies and subjects. A closer look to the curricula reveals that the 4-year studies in the Educational Departments have evolved quite independently in each Department from another (Chatzopoulou & Kakana,

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2008). In a study about Early Childhood Education Departments (Pantazis & Sakelariou, 2008) is reported that the number of subjects and the importance which is placed upon specific subjects varies so much that in some cases in curricula are not included subjects which are consider of vital importance in teachers’ education. More over is evident a fragmentation in the contents of a variety of different subjects which doesn’t allow the in depth study of the subjects. These findings are also valid for the departments of elementary education.

The other important issue is that in many departments the practical training is quite limited. The educational departments trapped in the goal achievement of becoming more “scientific”, actually they foster theoretical knowledge and although they improve the level of the general knowledge of the future to become teachers, it constraints their methodological – practical training.

The importance of the praxial¹ knowledge in the education of professionals in applied sciences, such as the physicians, the architects and the teachers was highlighted by Schön (1983), whose views had an impact in the formation of the curricula in the educational departments. It’s not by chance that although in most curricula is acknowledged the need of the education of the self-reflective educator (see in Chatzopoulou & Kakana, 2008) there is, unfortunately, no equal reference in the content of their studies (Chatzopoulou & Kakana, 2008). The second major problem is the unreasonably dichotomy of the initial education of the elementary and early childhood teachers. This didn’t result only in wastefulness in scientific personnel, in structures and in equipment, but also it fomented the breakup of the common pedagogical mission of all educators (Xochellis, 2002). But teachers’ education should comply with the unity and continuation that are interwoven in children’s development. The unification of teachers’ education is also a subject of critical importance, which would be in the agenda of the discussions in the immediate future, in the context of the new law implementation in the Universities, which entails aggregations of similar departments into Schools, so as research and teaching to facilitate (Law 4009/2011).

From our point of view, this could also evolve into a beneficial condition for the education, since multidimensionality lies within the educators’ role. It’s a common belief that there is a call upon the educator more than ever before, to perform in a multifaceted and complicated role which goes beyond to be considered as his/her personal matter. In modern literature there are many references to the educators’ role, as the Pedagogic Educator, the

¹ Praxial come from the Greek word “praxis” which means action.
Self-reflective Educator, the Educator Researcher, the Educator Professional (Calderhead, 1989; Day, 2003; Kalaitzopoulou, 2001; Xochelli, 1991). According to the needs and the demands of the modern society, the Educator – Researcher seem to be more adequate prepared to deal with the new challenges effectively.

A consensus, also, should be reached on the issue of what initial education of a teacher should be consisted of, so as to set the basis of a corpus of basic subjects common in the curricula of all Pedagogical Departments. This will enable a condition where the academic staff will be appointed according to curricula and not the opposite (curricula adjusted to academic staff). Apart from this, there should be a common basis in the education of early childhood and elementary teachers (specialized later on according to subjects) in accordance with the continuum of childhood development.

It’s of vital importance for every department which educates the prospective teachers, to decide upon the roles within their context the educators will be asked to offer their services. This decision should be reflected on the selections of the subjects that are going to be incorporated in the curricula. This decision will also ensure the first precondition in education, which is a solid base in initial or basic training. The other precondition is interchangeably connected with a target that should be achieved, that is an educational process that will be scientifically based and application driven. The educational research along with the theoretical reflection could contribute on this profoundly.

Having in mind that the model of the educator – researcher seems to respond better to nowadays challenges, and that there is a call upon educational reform where the common basis on the initial education of the two professions is strongly recommended, we present a critical overview on these issues, so as to benefit from the past experience.
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