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Teacher's perspectives regarding project implementation within the school community

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Abstract

Existing literature on the European Union (EU) and policy making, mainly concentrates on the way that policy is formulated at the EU level in specific domains, such as gender equality, and less on the ways that member states conceptualise and actually implement these policies in their respective territories. Inasmuch as these policies need to be implemented at the community level, however, it is also important to look at the role the community plays. In the context of our study the community in question is that of teachers in schools. Our research examines gender mainstreaming guidelines for action, from their beginning at the EU level to their implementation in the Greek educational system, and focused on the 'Sensitization of Teachers and Intervention Programmes towards Gender Equality' project. This project was funded by the EU through the structural funds and by the Greek Ministry of Education. The responsible body for the implementation and the administration of the programme was the Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI). Qualitative methods were used and 13 semi-structure interviews were conducted with educators that participated in the project in the Prefecture of Achaïas. The aim of the paper is not to describe the specific study but to concentrate on some interesting findings that are related to teacher's perspectives with regards to project implementation within the school community.

Keywords: *gender mainstreaming, teacher perspectives, project implementation, school community*

European gender equality policies and the case of Greece

European policies on gender equality have their origin in 1957 under Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome. Since then, different approaches to the design and implementation have been followed. There are three key approaches: "equal treatment of men and women" (equal treatment perspective), the consideration of women as a "disadvantaged group" (women's perspective / specific action) and "gender perspective / gender mainstreaming in all policies" (gender perspective / gender mainstreaming) (Booth & Bennet, 2002). These specific perspectives are complementary (Daly, 2005), and use different tools for the implementation of policy, such as legislation, positive actions and gender mainstreaming strategy.

The gender mainstreaming strategy, (gender mainstreaming in all policies) which plays a key role internationally in the design and implementation of policies, is a derivative of an international network of academics and political supporters of state feminism. The perceptions of this network were popular in the 4th World Conference of Women of United Nations in Beijing in 1995 where the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted by the participating countries (and EU) (Woodward, 2003). According to Daly (2005), the relevant literature focuses on the concept of G.M. as a political strategy that complements and does not replace the previous equality policies, of the legislation on equal treatment and positive actions (Stratigaki, 2005). According to Booth & Bennett (2002) regarding EU the perspective of equal treatment of women is promoted through the issuance of Directives, to which national laws are obliged to harmonize. The

perspectives of women as a “disadvantaged group” is applied in the implementation of positive actions, grant of programme and its official structure. Finally, the gender perspective is promoted through gender mainstreaming into all policies. Its application results from the integration of gender mainstreaming policy as a horizontal action within “soft” adjustment methods such as the European Employment Strategy and the Open Method of Coordination.

Since 1996 onwards, EU adopted the so-called Dual Approach namely that the gender mainstreaming into all policies and the parallel implementation of specific actions for women, recognizing the gender policy as a field of horizontal action. Member States were invited, following guidelines, to develop policies to achieve the objectives of the Union.

The adoption of gender mainstreaming into all policies (GM) did not follow the same development, neither had the same effect in all Member States. According to researchers, the application of GM in Member States differs in many cases from the objectives of EU, as well as the meaning attributed to the concept of GM differs (horizontal strategy, tool, objective) (Woodward, 2008, Van der Vleuten, 2007, Pantelidou-Malouta, 2007, Zippel, 2006, Rubery, 2002). The adoption of the strategy by the Member States can be viewed as a positive development regarding gender policies, but according to Verloo (2005: 12) many problems arise by implementing such actions at EU level but mainly at national level.

Researchers argue that in Greece there is a policy model driven only by the guidelines of EU (EU-Driven model). Specifically has been argued that is “forced” to deal with policy fields where there was no previous experience in design and implementation of actions, such as “gender equality” (Pantelidou-Malouta, 2007, Stratigaki, 2006, Braithwaite, 2005, Stratigaki et al, 2004). The new provisions of the Treaty of Amsterdam¹ and especially the establishment of positive actions by Article 141, created the conditions for the legitimization and promotion of actions by Member States. In Greece this development was marked by the revision of Article 116 of the Constitution in 2001, when the positive actions were established in favour of the under-represented gender in order to achieve substantive equality (Greek Republic, 2005, Papayannopoulou & Paparouni, 2005, YPESDA, 2004). This legislative development brought Greece to an alignment with the international and European community (Greek Republic, 2005, YPESDA, 2004). In the context of developments in the EU, the economic and political aspect of gender equality was promoted in Greece due to the adoption of the European Employment Strategy in 1997, but mainly due to the objectives of the Lisbon Process in 2000 (increase of female employment up to 60% by 2010) (YPESDA, 2004, Greek Republic, 2005, Papayannopoulou et al, 2008).

The Greek governments, following the guidelines of the EU², planned action programme related to gender equality. In particular two, the “National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2001-2006)” which was implemented until the change of the government of the country in 2004 and the “National Policy Priorities and Axes of Action for Gender

¹ The gender mainstreaming into all policies (GM) is guaranteed in the Treaty of Amsterdam by Articles 2 and 3. Also in Article 141 equal treatment and promotion of special actions for women are also guaranteed.

² The medium-term planning of policies is one of the tools used by the EU for designing policies for gender equality.

Equality (2004-2008)” (Greek Republic, 2005). These texts didn’t simply follow the objectives outlined in the relevant European, but specifically adopted the dual approach. From the actions and measures announced in the period under review, only few followed the gender mainstreaming approach. The gender mainstreaming approach is not integrated within a national policy for gender issues but in the relevant texts was referred to as a target at distinct areas such as education and employment. In these areas there has been some effort to implement programme with features of a dual approach (but mostly of positive actions), a fact which was influenced by the relevant Community funding through the Third Community Support Framework and especially the EPEAEK II (Stratigaki, 2006, Brathawaite, 2005).

The Third Community Support Framework has a central role in the development of gender policies in Greece, since led to funding and implementation of programme of positive actions. The funded areas were employment, unemployment, entrepreneurship and education in a smaller proportion. All the planned interventions and programme were directly or indirectly connected with the labour market in relation to female employment, which is also a central axis where the objectives of the European Social Fund (ESF) are structured. In order to achieve these targets a specific percentage (11.8%) of the ESF funds was defined in order to be invested solely in activities related to equal opportunities for men and women (Papayannopoulou et al, 2008, EYSEKT, 2003). The Ministry of Education was motivated by this adjustment in order to include in EPEAEK II the Priority Axis 4 “Improving the Access of Women in Labour Market”, which included programme for training teachers on issues related to gender, vocational training for women and education in general (Delligianni-Kouimtzi & Ziogou, 2008). The actions for women and the whole EPEAEK were transpired by the direct link between education and labour market.

Description of the research study

The study of developments in education in relation to gender policies can provide information on how the Community policies influenced the Greek reality. Gender equality is offered as a case study since it wasn’t a priority of the Greek educational policy (Delligianni - Kouimtzi & Ziogou, 2008, Papadiamantaki, 2004).

Taking into consideration the above we conducted a research study in order to examine the course of gender mainstreaming guidelines for action, from their beginning at the EU level, to their implementation in the Greek educational system.³ As it was mentioned above, the programme that are designed and implemented in Greece that deal with gender inequalities, derive from European initiatives and are a part of EPEAEK. One such programme is the “Sensitization of Teachers and Intervention Programme towards Gender Equality” (2002-2008) funded by the EU through the structural funds and by the Ministry of Education. This specific project is analysed through the study we conducted.

The responsible body for the implementation and the administration of the programme was the “Research Center for Equality Matters” (KETHI) in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Education. The target group of the programme included: teachers of secondary education, educators of professional training and students. The basic objectives of the programme were as follows:

³ Lempesi G.E., 2010, European Educational Policies for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Schools: the example of the “Teachers’ Awareness and intervention programmes to promote gender equality”, Faculty of Primary Education, University of Patras.

- the promotion of the philosophy and of practical issues concerning equality and democracy,
- the inclusion of gender issues in the curricula of the elementary education system, and
- linking of equality matters with the process of professional counselling and women's position in the labour market (KETHI, 2003-2004; Spinthourakis et al, 2007).

Some of the specified aims of the programme referred to in the Guide for the Implementation and Administration of Training Programme (2003-2004) with respect to teachers and students were respectively:

Teachers:

- Comprehension of the causes that create and sustain the dominating relations among men and women
- The development of the ability of self-improvement
- The development of research and organizing skills
- Training in equality issues
- Development of new educational methods

Students:

- Enrichment of knowledge of gender issues
- Fighting gender stereotypes,
- Participation in the programme design
- Development of their abilities to: make important decisions, take up responsibilities, and solve problems.

Qualitative methods were used and specifically 13 semi-structure interviews were conducted with educators that participated in the project in the Prefecture of Achaïas. The interviews were conducted in the period from November to December of 2009. The content analysis of the interviews was guided by the methodological strategy of Grounded Theory, as it is described in the Strauss & Corbin's book (1998), "Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory". Our aim in this paper is not to present the specific study but to concentrate on some interesting findings, related to teacher's perspectives with regards to project implementation in the school community.

The project involved two separate actions, the "awareness-training programme" for teachers and "intervention programme". The objective of the training was: a. to provide knowledge and guidance to teachers in order to implement the intervention programmes and b. to inform them on how good practices for promoting gender equality can be incorporated into the educational system (Deligianni et-Kouimtzi et al, 2007).

The development of intervention programme is the key action of this programme. The Intervention Programme were structured, designed and implemented in the form of small project (action plans). According to the application guide, are divided into two types, from which teachers could choose which one to implement. Intervention Programme (1) of teaching intervention and (2) intervention activity. The teaching interventions aimed to enrich the teaching of specific courses on issues related to gender equality. The intervention activities were implemented outside the curriculum in the form of project. The selection of the subject and the implementation method belonged to the discretion of

the teacher under the guidance of the trainer (ibid, 2007). The programme objectives are part of the policies promoted by the EU for equality between men and women.

In this paper we will focus on those results related to the perception of teachers in relation to the implementation of the programme and the conclusions of the research related to the existence of a distinct group of teachers, a distinct community in schools who undertake the development of such programme.

Based on the above considerations, the research focused on:

- The process through which the KETHI programme and therefore policies for the promotion of gender were integrated (or not) in everyday practice of the school community.
- The teachers' perceptions on the implementation of this programme and educational policies for equality in general
- The role of the teacher

The conclusions drawn from the data analysis can be partitioned into two separate forms. Initially, this related to the programme under study and secondly this related to the teachers' perceptions regarding the function of the programme as an "optional" programme, regardless of its target.

Perceptions in relation to the programme

Obstacles in good implementation and effectiveness of programme

Teachers reported that, concerning this programme, they didn't realize any problems to its application. However believing that there were no problems, is a superficial and one-sided interpretation of the data. In topics related to the long-term effects of the programme, there were evidence for their perception regarding the difficulties that impede the implementation of programmes within the school context, both regarding themselves and the school population.

Apart from problems related to bureaucracy, the more reported problems are related to the operation of the educational system and more specifically how they manufacture their daily professional lives. According to the teachers, the inadequacy of educational programmes is due to the failure to take into account in the design the daily life at school, without suggesting that something has to change in education itself, but that programmes must be designed so as not to disturb the student life. Programme design must be consistent with the operation of the school.

The interviewees also referred to difficulties encountered by those who undertake educational programmes. These perceptions were expressed in an attempt to justify the failure of some programmes and the lack of interest of the majority of teachers to undertake them. Key obstacles reported are lack of time and money, workload, or as stated: the pressure of the system "do not leave you much room".

Project results

Regarding the results, teachers focused their responses to students. Teachers are particularly pleased with the mobilization of their students. Most of them did not deal only with the results in relation to awareness about equality issues, but mostly with the

student motivation and participation. The effectiveness of the programme is perceived as being independent of its thematic (i.e. gender equality), since the results are associated with the pedagogical and educational role of education. Teachers can describe differently how they understand its results, but their central conclusion is that the students through this process are troubled in relation to gender stereotypes and recognized that the “obvious are not obvious”.

It is particularly interesting that the interviewees insisted not to correlate the results with the objective of this project despite the incentives of the researcher. Teachers evaluate the results compared to the hard work of students, their motivation, their relationship between teacher - student, the discovery of knowledge and the application of alternative learning methods. The pedagogical dimension of such actions is the common element of all optional programmes that these teachers tend to undertake, meaning that they have a similar experience.

As shown by the data analysis for the implementation of programmes within the school context, interviewees have not included the promotion of gender equality in their daily practice and have integrated the implementation of programmes into their daily practice. This culture (that these teachers share) is not associated with practices such as a specific theme as e.g. the promotion of gender equality, but generally with the application of “programmes” that are understood as a whole (for example Health Education programmes, Environmental Education, etc.). There is no integration of the promotion of equality within the school context, but a culture of programme implementation in the school context as something “else from the school” that contributes to the pedagogical role of education and because of this it is necessary in the school context.

The interviewed teachers who implemented the programme did not express any sense of moral commitment of their profession in relation to the official objectives of the programme, i.e. the diffusion of gender equality. There were elements based on which it can be argued that they consider as a part of their role to raise awareness and trouble their students in relation to gender stereotypes. However it is not the same with the other objectives of the programme: awareness of the broader educational community (colleagues, student population), parental awareness, integration of gender equality in teaching and curriculum. Teachers are delineating their role in the pedagogical context of their relationship with students.

Emergence of a distinct community of teachers (community of practice)

Data analysis showed some features similar to the majority of teachers interviewed: consensus on the role of education and perception about teaching, experience from programmes’ implementation and participation in training regardless of theme.

The element that stands out and appeared more frequently in the group is that of common perception of learning and teaching. The specific teachers, who undertake programmes, emphasize on their pedagogical role and consider as an important benefit of all optional programmes (for teachers and students) the fact that allow teachers to use experiential and participatory teaching methods, which do not belong in “standardized” education. Optional programmes work occasionally alongside the educational process, but relatively disconnected, “outside classroom”, “as something else from the school”, in order to serve the needs of its members for the implementation of alternative methods of learning and communication.

These common cognitive contexts through which the specific teachers understand the educational process, justify the fact that they perceive the results of the programme under study, which are related to their educational role, as particularly significant even if aren't directly related to the promotion of equality. They consider as interesting those results related to the motivation of students, the special relationship developed with their students and the discovery of knowledge in contrast to the sterile transfer of knowledge. These data characterize the majority of optional programmes that these people tend to undertake.

In an effort to group these characteristics, we can say that the majority of teachers who have undertaken this programme:

- have experience in programme implementation and tend to undertake programmes regardless of their thematic;
- share some common perceptions about education and teaching that go beyond the “*standardized*” education;
- have been involved either in postgraduate studies or in training on the issue of gender equality, research issues and with alternative teaching methods;
- accept, at least occasionally, to work more hours, and act “outside” the school programme and;
- have a direct or indirect relationship with trainers and with structures that inform them directly about programmes.

These indicate that a distinct community of teachers has been formed who have undertaken a specific role in the school system, integrating in their daily work routine the implementation of programmes, a fact that differentiates them from their colleagues.

Three types of concerns arise from the qualitative survey, an abstract of which was presented in this document. Firstly, to see if each educational programme implemented serves its original objective (i.e. the elimination of gender stereotypes into the school community) or not. Secondly, if it is an opportunity for a community of teachers with a common will to produce new good practices in order to serve their pedagogical role, and thirdly how this informal “community of teachers”, which have the characteristics of a community of practice as Wenger (1998) calls it, can be used in designing and implementing the educational practices the Greek educational system needs.

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