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## **Assessing and developing teacher's multicultural competence as a dimension of global citizenship**

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### **Introduction**

Today's meta-modern society is influenced by the characteristics of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism comes as a result of population and cultural migration and brings with it the dilemma of balancing acceptance, tolerance and openness to cultural pluralism with fear that traditional ways of life will be eroded (Lestinen, Petrucijová & Spinthourakis, 2004, p.4). Immigrant, migrant, and other non national cultural groups in the EU member states are often forced to play a 'game' called 'assimilation' in an effort to match the social representations which come into being in communication within groups (Elliott, Adams & Sokalingam, 1999; Moscovici 1976, 1981). As research has shown, we can learn to understand and appreciate the values, expectations and communication styles of other traditions without giving up our own (Lestinen et al, 2004; Samovar & Porter, 1994), that is, we can develop what is referred to as intercultural competence and by extension, multicultural competence.

Teachers, as well as other professionals, can be helped to develop their multicultural competence so that they can be more effective in their work environment (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Hains et al, 2000). Contact with another culture modifies cultural identity, consciously or unconsciously (Gudykunst et al, 1977). Evidence suggests that there is a need and demand for appropriate in-service training and education in developing intercultural competence. Although in the last years several in-service and continuing education training schemes have been implemented in Greece, the issue of multicultural and intercultural competence of educators has not been robustly investigated.

The aim of this study is to assess the multicultural competence of a sample of Greek primary school teachers. We use a specially adjusted tool based on Bennett's Inventory on Intercultural Sensitivity (1986). The results of the assessment will form the basis for further statistical analysis on the interaction/influences of variables such as gender, age, place of employment, the length and type of in-service training, in an effort to draw conclusions useful for the planning and development of more focused in-service training.

### **Background of the research**

Greece has traditionally been one of the most ethnically and religiously homogeneous countries in the Balkans. The country has a population of approximately 10.9 million (Statistical Services of Greece, 2004). By comparison, Greece's ethnic and religious minorities are barely 250,000 (2.3 percent of the population).

According to the 2001 Census, the largest group of immigrants draws its origins from the Balkan countries of Albania (57.5%), Bulgaria (4.6%), and Romania. People from these countries make up almost two-thirds of the total 'foreign population'; common

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borders with these countries facilitate a cyclical form of immigration. Migrants from the former Soviet Union (Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, etc.) comprise 10 percent of the total; the EU countries approximately six percent. A heterogeneous group of people from places such as the United States, Canada, and Australia (mostly first or second-generation Greek emigrants returning home), also account for around six percent. Finally, a residual group from a wide variety of countries makes up 13 percent. None of the individual countries included in this last group exceeds two percent of the total 'foreign population' (Ibid, 2004). The foreign born school age population has increased dramatically over the last 15 years (see Damanakis, 1997; Delthanasi, 2006; Markou, 1996; Nicolaou, 2004).

One of the ways in which to prepare teachers to deal with this changing reality is the development of multiculturally competent educators. The underlying goal of a multiculturally competent educator is for teachers to take on the dual responsibility of: a) engaging in a critical and continual process of professional advancement and b) employing personal reflection as a means of transforming their teaching. It is believed that when this is put into practice, teachers are in a better position to positively affect the educational experiences of their students. Commensurately, when they have a sense of how their life experiences play a role in developing their own perceptions, they can understand the world around them, relearning how their own identities affect their students' learning experiences and effectively help their students develop social and critical awareness (Henze & Hauser, 2000; Holliday, 1999; Sorti, 2001). We posit that to make multiculturally competent teachers a reality necessitates employing an appropriate and effective paradigm to help teacher trainees as well as professional teachers acquire the requisite skills, knowledge and competencies (Barrera & Kramer, 1997; Taylor, 1994; Weaver, 1986), but to do so requires that we know the degree to which they have developed intercultural sensitivity.

In Greece, special educational measures have been undertaken within the last decade in order to support the education of the students with cultural and language differences (see Damanakis, 1997; Nicolaou, 2004). A major sector of policy intervention has been in the areas of teacher initial education and in-service training. Intercultural education has been incorporated into the canon of several university departments responsible for initial primary and secondary school teacher training. In-service training seminars have also been organized by agents of the National Ministry of Education for teachers involved in programs of intercultural education (on a mandatory basis) or for teachers interested in the topic (on an optional basis). Studies have been undertaken on the issue of teacher education and multiculturalism (see Lynch & Hanson, 1993, Petrucijova, & Meciar, 2003; Spinthourakis & Katsillis, 2003). Most indicate that teachers have an understanding of a multicultural society that varies and depends on the area they work, their training and their experiences with minorities. Teachers that seem to have a deep understanding of multiculturalism, appear to embrace and utilize intercultural communication more effectively. Furthermore, they seem to have acquired this from participating in long-term in-service training experiences, exposure to media and readings, teaching in schools with immigrant children or other experiences (i.e. participating in European projects, traveling abroad, etc) (Baumgrantz, 1993; Mattheou, Karatzia-Stavlioti & Spinthourakis, 2001; Spinthourakis & Papoulia-Tzelepi, 2001).

### Theoretical and methodological considerations

Research in the field uses concepts that are often confused and used alternatively. We believe that intercultural communication may be treated as an umbrella concept which is comprised of *cognitive*, *affective* and *behavioural* ability of interactants in the process of intercultural communication. The cognitive aspect of multicultural communication competence is represented by the concept of intercultural awareness and the affective aspect of intercultural communication competence is represented by the concept of intercultural sensitivity that refers to the 'subject's active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate and accept differences from other cultures' (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 21). The behavioural aspect of multicultural communication competence is represented by the concept intercultural ability.

The identification of these concepts clearly impacts the evaluation and planning of multicultural and intercultural education/training programs. The inability to clarify the ambiguity among the three concepts has led to failure in developing valid and reliable measures for evaluating the effectiveness of intercultural training programs in helping participants develop an appreciation and understanding of cultural differences and acquire abilities of awareness and sensitivity towards cultural stimuli and interactional skills (Chen & Starsota, 1998, p. 4; Taylor, 1994).

Intercultural sensitivity is the ability to recognize multiple perspectives on an event or behaviour, to recognize one's own cultural values and those of others, and to pick up on verbal and nonverbal signals. Thus, intercultural sensitivity is necessary in order to understand that one's own preferred way of doing things is but one of several possible approaches and that other cultures may have different perspectives and preferences.

As described below, Bennett (1984, 1986) treated intercultural sensitivity as interactants' ability to transform themselves not only affectively but also cognitively and behaviourally from denial stage to integration stage in the developmental process of intercultural communication. The primary goal of the outlining of these descriptors of Bennett's stages is to point out that staff need to be at stages 4 and 5 of intercultural sensitivity, since development to this level is necessary for successful cross-cultural collaboration.

**Table 1: Bennett's Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity**

1. *Denial*: Does not recognize cultural differences
2. *Defense*: Recognizes some differences, but sees them as negative
3. *Minimization*: Unaware of projection of own cultural values; sees own values as superior
4. *Acceptance*: Shifts perspectives to understand that the same "ordinary" behaviour can have different meanings in different cultures
5. *Adaptation*: Can evaluate other's behaviour from their frame of reference and can adapt behaviour to fit the norms of a different culture
6. *Integration*: Can shift frame of reference and also deal with resulting identity issues

Source: Elliott, C., Adams, R.J., & Sockalingam, S. (1999)

We use the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale Instrument (ISSI) that was developed and validated by Chen & Starosta (2000), to evaluate the intercultural sensitivity of a sample of teachers and study the way that the evaluation results may be related to the personal characteristics of the individual teachers, and mainly to the amount and quality of culturally sensitive training they had received. The items that are included in the ISSI are grouped into five factors that represent the major parameters of intercultural sensitivity:

- Factor 1.* Interaction Engagement,
- Factor 2.* Respect for Cultural Differences,
- Factor 3.* Interaction Confidence,
- Factor 4.* Interaction Enjoyment,
- Factor 5.* Interaction Attentiveness.

### **The study**

A sample of eighty (80) teachers was randomly chosen out of a population of 200 servicing teachers that participated in a two year in-service training at the University of Patras. We took the following steps in this research:

- The ISSI was translated into Greek and given to colleagues to comment on its validity in order to have it adjusted accordingly.
- A small sample of 20 people was asked to complete the ISSI so that we could time them and also use them again to test the reliability of the instrument in our Greek setting.
- We distributed the adjusted ISSI to the participants together with a questionnaire that included the personal details that were of research interest to us and asked them to complete it, in no more than 15 minutes.
- The responses were coded appropriately (i.e. some items in the inventory were coded in a reverse manner) and inserted into an SPSS file.
- We isolated the items that formed that five factors of intercultural sensitivity and formed a separate variable for each of them.
- We applied statistics (i.e. descriptive statistics, tests of significance etc.) using the SPSS program, in order to investigate our research questions.

### **Analysis and results**

The gender distribution of the participants was 75% female and 25% male; a finding representative of the whole primary school teacher population in Greece. Most of them (60%) had teaching experience of six to fifteen years and the rest (40%) had from sixteen to twenty five years. All the teachers in the sample were placed in schools that had more than six classes (large schools), but the geographic location of their school situation varied: 70% of the teachers were teaching in areas with more than a population of 10.000, 15% from 1.000-5.000 and the rest (10%) from 5.000-10.000.

As far as their studies are concerned, 90% of the sample had a diploma from the two year Pedagogical Academies (an institution that was abolished in the 1980's) as their primary qualification to teach, of whom 80% had later also received a university degree

in a specially organized University program. Only 10% had completed a four year university degree (in the 1990's) as their first qualification to teach primary school. 20% were undertaking a post graduate course (Diploma or M.A.) and all of them spoke a foreign language (either English or French), with 60% indicating that they spoke it well and 40% very well.

The teachers in the sample were asked about the sources of information they had regarding multiculturalism and intercultural education (self-education, initial education, conferences, in-service training, educational counsellors' training), and also on how well they thought they were trained to meet their teaching needs in this field. The findings of the analysis are described in the two tables that follow.

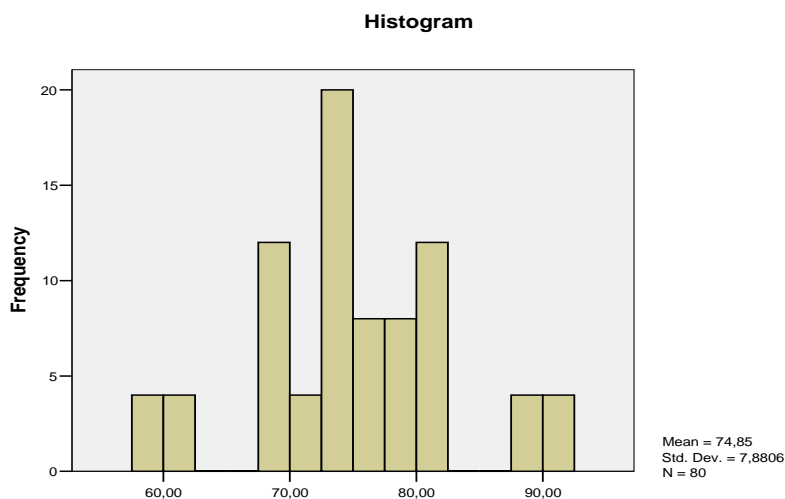
Table 1: Distribution of the answers to the question: "How well do you believe that you are informed on intercultural education issues?"

<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A little informed</i>	<i>Well informed</i>	<i>Very well informed</i>
-	70%	30%	-
<b>N=80</b>			

It is worth noticing that most of the respondents believe that they are not well informed. When the participants were asked to specify the contribution of the various types of information, some answered very positively regarding the contribution of the various 'types' of 'training support'.

Table 2: Distribution of the answers to the question: 'Which are the sources of your information?'

<i>Degree Types Sources of information</i>	<i>Not at all (%)</i>	<i>A little informed (%)</i>	<i>Well informed (%)</i>	<i>Very well informed (%)</i>
Self-education	20	30	35	15
Initial education	60	20	15	5
Conferences	35	20	5	10
In-service training	45	15	10	5
School Councillors	55	25	5	15
<b>N=80</b>				

**Graph 1: The distribution of the scores on the ISS**

As it may be observed in the Histogram, the mean of the value distribution is 74.85 and lower than the standard deviation, which means that most scores are above the mean. All the responses are above 60, which is the mean of the higher score (120). This finding reinforces the validity of the instrument and shows that Greek teachers IS are above average.

The cross-tabulations and the chi square test (Pearson chi square < 0.05) for the statistical significance of the results showed that:

- It is more likely that women who had undertaken special in-service training to believe that they are well informed on intercultural education issues.
- The teachers that held a University PTDE (Pedagogical Department of Primary Education) degree were more likely to feel that they were very well informed.
- The respondents that were mainly informed by conferences tended to be the ones that were attending a post graduate University program.
- The respondents that attend conferences on intercultural education seem to be the ones that consider the in- service training by the school counsellor very effective.

There is a high significance in the results of the IS evaluation regarding the following characteristics of the sample:

- Women teachers are more likely to have high values on the IS score, as well as on the score of the five factors.
- Teachers with 5-15 years of experience are more likely to have higher scores.
- Neither the type of school nor the place it is situated seems to give significant results in the cross-tabulations.
- The participants that were mainly informed by conferences are more likely to have higher scores.

## Conclusion

The multicultural competence of teachers is an important parameter in all efforts aiming to improve the ability of the teachers to deal with the complex circumstances of contemporary schooling that is increasingly impacted and influenced by diversity. The issues that we pointed out in the presentation of our results and referred to the factors that might be related to the ISSI score must be taken into consideration in any future study. We believe that it would be of a great research interest to continue and extend this research and expand it to other in-service and pre-service teachers in Greece and abroad in order to form a basis for a large comparative study on the issues that refer to the teacher intercultural sensitivity.

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