

**Evangelia Boutskou**

(Department of Educational and Social Policy, University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece)

***Teachers' aspirations for their role and their training on special education in Greece*****Abstract**

In Greece despite the stated legislation about inclusion and the continuing dialogue on special education teachers' professionalisation, teachers were not asked about their perceptions for their role. Forty experienced mainstream teachers who registered at a School of in-service teachers training course on special education answered an open ended questionnaire about their aspirations for their training as well their future role. Teachers' aspirations revealed a confusion, contradiction and complexity about their role. Their motives for attending the course were identified as mobility, idealistic and materialistic motives. Teachers' needs were expressed as theoretic specialisation, practical skill acquisition and shared experience. Their views echo the dichotomy of special versus inclusive education and reflect the existent indecisive enacted educational policy. This paper aims to present the data from a research project and at the same time to put forward a critical framework of inclusive education policy and practice in the Greek educational system.

**Key words:** inclusion; teachers' role; in service training

**Introduction-setting the scene**

In the Greek educational system there are contradictory issues concerning special education and inclusion. Although educational legislation is in favor of inclusion, there are practices that reinforce segregation. Vlachou (2006 p.54) claims that in Greece "special teachers participate in a system that divides and separates teachers in the same way that it isolates and categorizes children" based on division of roles and responsibilities (mainstream teachers for mainstream children and special education teachers for special children). Bachelor degrees on primary education have optional modulus in special educational needs. So the prevailing feature is that Faculties of Education prepare mainstream teachers who can get a permanent position as special education teachers only if they attend a relevant Master's course or a 2 year in-service teacher training course. The Schools of in-service teachers training have also established a distinction between mainstream and special education specialisation since 1976. This distinction implies that although educational policy uses the rhetoric of inclusion, enacted educational practices imply division.

Disability Studies have not been connected with educational provision in many countries around the world (Armstrong, Spandagou, Armstrong, 2008). Recent exhaustive research (Karagianni, Eytyhiadou, Boulgaridou, 2008) of the programmes of studies of all the Greek Schools of in-service teachers' training courses revealed that these programmes had a clinical, medical orientation and an absence of sociological orientation. Distinct modules usually have the name of a distinct disability eg. blindness, autism and they focus on diagnosis as well as the acquisition of special skills and tech-

niques by teachers. The module of Inclusion is taught as a separate module in few mainstream and special education courses. This fragmented professionalism and division of responsibility for children (Tomlinson, 1996) is an obstacle of achieving inclusion at schools and society (Carroll, Forlin and Jobling, 2003).

Greek teachers' views about inclusion and their role are presented in few studies (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006; Boutskou, 2007). However, there is no research about in-service teachers' motives for attending the course on special education and their aspirations about their future role. Teachers' aspirations are important because postgraduate studies for experienced teachers try to reshape and transform their existing knowledge. Qualified teachers enter training courses on Special Education having different and usually contradictory views about what they should be taught or what they need to learn. This is due to their different life histories and professional experiences as well as the contested area of special education.

The aim of this study is to explore teachers' motives for attending the course on special education and reveal their aspirations about their training and their prospective role. This study addresses trainee teachers' views acknowledging them the fact that they are social agents and they have certain ideas and preconceptions about special education. Our intention is to present the preconceived teachers' aspirations and use them as a base line for questioning, arguing and contemplating their future role during the course. Teachers are not deemed as consumers or users of the training courses but as citizens and professionals that their views could be expressed and influence their training. We try to develop a participatory consciousness (Heshusius, 1994) among teachers that departs from exploring who we are and what we wish to know.

## **Methodology**

The forty teachers who registered at a School of in-service teachers training course in Greece were asked to complete an open ended questionnaire about their motives of attending the course and their aspirations for their training and future role. This questionnaire was designed by the writers of this study, it was anonymous and was distributed to (40) teachers during the first week of their attendance. There were 10 male and 30 female teachers aged from 27-50 years old coming from different areas of Greece. Teachers' previous mainstream teaching experience varied between 3 to 20 years.

## **Insert Table 1**

The fact that the teachers had not attended a course module before the questionnaire completion makes us think that their aspirations could reveal more or less the "common sense" that exists in the educational settings and in society as well. Their aspirations could also echo "the professionally correct" view of special education of the previous decade favoring the division between special and mainstream education. Due to the explorative nature of the questionnaire the questions were open allowing space to the teachers to express their views in particular aspects. Teachers' answers were examined by the two authors using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The answers to the open questions were codified and analysed by the two researchers. Each of the researchers worked individually and they came up with results that were contrasted and compared for data triangulation and validation. The analysis of

the questions of the questionnaire revealed distinct categories of teachers' answers about the motives of attending in-service training course on Special Education, teachers' expectations of the course and their aspirations for their prospective role.

## Results

### *Motives for a professional career*

The question "why did you decide to attend a Special Education course" is difficult to be answered since teachers' teaching experience as well as their chronological age is quite various. There are different motives for different teachers which are not mutually exclusive; the same teacher mentioned more than one motive. Two broad categories are identified as: the mobility motives and idealistic motives. Few teachers (4 out of 40) mentioned materialistic motives e.g. a money bonus in their salary and getting a job position near their home.

#### Mobility motives

Teachers think that after their training on special education they will acquire a new professional identity in new spaces; the identity of an expert at a specialized place that will allow them to have a horizontal mobility and change positions at Special Schools or inclusion Units.

*"I want to become an expert on special education", "I want to become a specialist on autism", "I want to move to an Inclusion Unit", "I want to work at a special school".*

In-service teachers' training course is seen as a way of "producing" experts who want to work either at Special Schools or Inclusive Classes. The vast majority of the teachers (32 out of 40) prefer to work at an Inclusive Unit rather than at a Special School. This may be due to the fact that most of the teachers have not visited Special Schools and the working conditions are unknown to them. On the other hand Inclusion Classes exist in mainstream schools where the working conditions are more or less familiar. Teachers' answers imply that special educators are «organizational professionals» (Laursen, 1996 p.179) who carry out their professional activities within the confines (Tomlinson, 1996) and their role depends on the settings.

Some teachers think that their training will give them the opportunity of vertical mobility and the possibility of climbing up the hierarchy for instance becoming head teachers or taking administrative positions.

*"I plan to use it for climbing up the hierarchy ladder", "I think I can get Access for promotion one day", "Hopefully it's a chance to get a way out to other positions" "There is a possibility to use the certificate in order to get extra points for my promotion in future"*

Special education training is deemed as an extra qualification for elaborating the Curriculum Vitae. Teachers' intentions are to get out of the mainstream classroom, get some distance from their role as mainstream teachers and acquire new roles and responsibilities.

#### Idealistic motives

Some teachers think that in-service training is an aspect of life long learning since they have no intention of changing their working environment. They are interested in becoming more effective as mainstream teachers who teach mixed ability classes.

*"I think that after the studies I can cope better with the problems of learning difficulties and behavioral problems that exist in mainstream classes", "I think that I will be a well prepared teacher that I can handle different problems in my mainstream class after the course attendance"*

The fact that these teachers think that the mainstream classroom is a place where people with differences meet and that children's differences (abilities, disabilities and difficulties) are welcomed in a mainstream classroom reveals that these teachers think towards inclusion.

Personal development and critical thinking is important for some teachers. Their training is viewed as a way of enquiring and questioning "who am I and where am I heading for?"

*"It is a chance to reposition my self generally speaking", "I will have the time and the possibility to develop critical stance about things happening around", "it's a chance to become better human", "I think it's an opportunity to reposition myself in the depth and possibility of the educational process"*

These motives reveal that teachers try to expand and diversify their role as mainstream teachers and try to connect their pedagogy and teaching with broader issues of education.

Mobility motives seem to take advantage of the dichotomy of special and mainstream education, while idealistic motives seem to underline inclusive arguments.

### ***Aspirations for teachers' training***

What teachers expect from their in-service training is quite versatile. Teachers' aspirations can be grouped in three axes: Theory, Practice and Shared Experience. These axes remind us of the question "Is Pedagogy Science, Practice or Art?" (Kompf, Bond, Dworet and Boak, 1996).

#### *Science/Theory: Knowledge as specialization*

Teachers want to be specialized in specific categories of special needs and disabilities. They try to find and acquire a new identity through specialization exactly as secondary teachers who perceive themselves as Maths experts or Literacy experts (Ball and Goodson, 1985). They wish to become the "subject specialist, the subject expert" for example they mention "I want to be a dyslexia-specialist", "I want to be the autism expert". Each professional wants to become an expert in order to gain the respect and appreciation of the colleagues (Cohen cited in Woods, 1990). However, professionals should develop critical consciousness (Grollios, 2005) and be able to know what exactly they are doing in a wider context at the particular time and place.

Teachers are interested in learning about the "sociolinguistical construct" of Special Education through terminology and legislation.

*"I want to learn about the international terminology of the science of special education", "I anticipate studying the specialized knowledge of special education", "it is interesting to be taught the legislation of special education so that I can be well-informed"*

Even though legislation declares that Special Education is a part of mainstream Education, teachers perceive it as something different. Teachers want to learn the "esoteric knowledge and techniques" that create a professional mystique and a way to assert their views. This "treatment language" is deemed both as tool and as a right to define problems and find solutions (Habermas, 1974; Troyna & Vincent, 1996, p.131).

Teachers' aspirations follow the medical model of special education with an emphasis on the categories of special needs where difference is deemed as deficit and pathology that legitimates different treatment and curricula:

*"I would like to be taught about the symptoms of the sickness", "I would like to be taught the characteristics and the manifestations of each special need", "I want to acquire the principles of psychology for different special needs"*.

There are very few cases (only three) where the difference is viewed in a positive and not in a negative way and teachers refer to their differentiation:

*“I want to learn about the abilities of these children”, “I want to know how these children learn”, “I want to be taught about the positive aspects of these children”, “I would like to know how to change my attitude and make the children learn”.*

Theory is viewed as a mirror of reality and as an objective description according to teachers’ aspirations. Practice is deemed as an applied theory (Carlgren, 1996) and thus good practice is based on theory. Specialisation in particular disabilities and specific modulus implies that the school is a neutral site where the knowledge and the skills are transmitted from teachers to learners (Hartnett and Carr, 1995). However the school is a contested area and education is a complicating procedure.

#### Practice: Skills’ acquisition

Teachers want to be taught the “know-how”, a technology of methods and teaching activities. They mention that they want to *know* “techniques”, “strategies”, “formulas”, “teaching methods”, “Braille”, “Sign Language”, “coping methods (of children)”.

Teachers usually want to follow compliance routines and they do not articulate their own beliefs in action. They use a discourse of tricks, methods, tools and skills in the absence of enacting personal beliefs and understandings of disability and inquiries about what are they doing and who they are. Teaching packages are deemed as magical, neutral and teachers’ role is diminished into the role of a passive executor (Liabas, 2006). The packages are seen as the means of effectiveness and the pedagogical relationship between teacher and students is silenced. The emphasis on the technologies of teaching underestimates what is actually taking place in the classrooms between the teacher and the children. Teachers’ decisions are not the outcome of the pedagogic reasoning based on theories of learning and behaviour. Teachers’ decisions are affected by the context they live and work, as well as their values. Many years ago Lortie (1975) revealed that teachers’ training in packages and methods have little impact on the way they teach. Teachers usually use their personal experience as students and their teachers’ models. Even though teachers want their professionalism they actually tend to prefer technologies and methods that confine them (Popkewitz, 1991).

#### Art: Shared Experience

Teaching is an emotional involvement and includes emotions (Tom, 1984). Some teachers think of training as a possibility of emotional and personal development through the exposure to real experiences and empathy:

*“I want to combine theory with practice» ,«I would like to acquire knowledge in real settings or as it is expressed by teachers who lived that”, «I want to live situations with children with special needs”, “It’s ideal to connect theory and practice”, “I want to come closer to the problems of the children...to experience things trough experience sharing”.*

#### **Special education teacher’s role**

Teachers’ aspirations about their role are various. The most cited aspirations are the diagnosis of special needs, coping strategies, intervention and research.

#### Diagnosis

According to teachers’ aspirations about their role, diagnosis of difficulties is a major part of their role. A previous study conducted with special teachers by Vlachou (2006) revealed that the initial assessment and identification of difficulties was perceived as one of their major responsibilities. Diagnosis is thought to include the solution of the problem or at least a part of the solution (Solvang, 2007).

*"I should be able to diagnose", "I need to know how to categorise children", "I want to be able to assess the abilities of the children", "it's important to learn assessment techniques- diagnostic techniques so that I can interpret the various difficulties and differentiate my teaching"*

According to the medical model of disability teachers' role is to confront students' needs because of their medical condition (Dyson, 1991). Special education is used as a sorting mechanism (Barton, 1987) to make sure that education is preserved for some children and controlled for some others.

#### Coping and Control

Training in special education is deemed as training in ways of control, coping and imposing discipline.

*"I should learn how to handle special situations", "to manage with", handling of children and managing of their personal problems and class problems", "coping with 'difficult' cases in the classroom so that I can ease the inclusion of these children", "to cope with situations and behaviours efficiently in my classroom", "to organize things", "classroom management"*

Discipline is an important issue for the teachers who teach 25-30 students (all the subjects/lessons) at the same classroom, 5 hours per day and there is dependence on the National Curriculum. The aspirations are around the stereotype of a given teacher role where "the ideal" teacher is the one who can control the children (Grumet, 1988).

#### Intervention

Professional action as effective intervention suggests that professionals do something; they intervene somehow and bring about certain effects. Intervention is seen as cause and outcome, and results are seen as effects. However being a student is not the same as being a patient and education is not cure but education is a process of symbolic or symbolically mediated interaction (Biesta, 2007, p. 8).

Teachers' intervention concerns the Curriculum adaptations and students' inclusion.

*"My intervention will help them develop and be included in the classroom", "I want to learn how they (children with special needs and disabilities) are adapted better to the class", "I want to support these children", "I want to be taught how to adapt and differentiate the materials"*

Curriculum differentiation is a prerequisite for the students' inclusion concerning communicative and cognitive goals. Many students experience failures at school and teachers' role is to identify and reduce these barriers to inclusion (Booth et al, 2000). There are serious questions that are not addresses and are not answered. What does differentiation mean? How often should it happen? How should it be organized? Whose responsibility is this differentiation? Is differentiation an alternative approach to the contents and methods of teaching so that all can participate or is it an individual diet reduction to goals? (Karagianni, 2005)

#### Research

Special education following the medical profession is seen as an evidence-based practice. The question "what works" is dominant and it is in search of the effective method or strategy. The evidence based teaching is the attractive framework that is supposed to bring theory, practice and research closer (Biesta, 2007). However the question is whether a method is a neutral framework that can be applied to all schools and students. Some teachers try to connect their training with research:

*"I want to be taught how to conduct research and work on it at schools", "I want to learn how to think critically and challenge things", "I think it is a chance to widen my pedagogical and scientific knowledge"*

Teachers' aspirations are to become the producers and not the consumers of knowledge (Devaney and Sikes, 1988). What we are taught and how we are taught has to do with

who we are and what is our broader view of life. Teachers are citizens, employees and parts of community (Hartnett and Carr, 1995) that shape society and are shaped by society (Apple, 2001). Teachers' role is widened as long as they widen their role.

## Discussion

There is a rise of "a therapeutic ethos" and a growth of the therapy industry in education which produces an unquestioned acceptance of professional intervention as support based on dysfunction. The assumption is that behaviours can be explained psychologically and resolved or controlled therapeutically. The positive individualism as an interest turns out to be a negative individualism which creates a "diminished self" (Ecclestone, 2004, p.119) based on weakness and deficits. The focus on individualism and personal development denies the chance for individuals to locate themselves in broader social and political contexts. "Students are seen as vulnerable and fragile thus passive and at risk" (Ecclestone, 2004, p.119). Teachers anticipate from the In-service teacher training course to transform them into experts on student defectiveness. They want to acquire "a traditional curriculum of defectology and the technology of culturally laden diagnostic testing" (Slee, 2003, p. 220). However Inclusive education is education of cultural politics (Slee, 2001) so that teachers can recognize the benefits of differences into curriculum and pedagogy. Therapeutic education and therapeutic professionalism undermines aspirations about education for meaningful knowledge and skills in a critical way.

Teachers' aspirations revealed a confusion, contradiction and complexity about their role. As long as academics and the state are confused about teacher identity, teachers would be confused and difficult to acquire a collective identity (Hausstätter and Takala, 2008). Teacher professional identity is blurred and reflects the complexity of the dialogue. We have to come to an agreement concerning the teacher role and the teachers' education. We have to be clear whether children need therapy or education. Teachers find themselves in confusing and demanding contexts of practice and they are striving within contexts of great diversity. Teachers need to see "the big picture" of special education and education in general and address the question of what it is important and appropriate for the children's future.

The aim of this work was to explore teachers' aspirations and re-examine them as a way of de-constructing special education. We found out that teachers' aspirations echo both the dominant discourse of disability and the existent indecisive enacted educational policy. We underlined the way that the binary system (special vs inclusive education) is legitimated through the in-service training courses influence teachers' views and practices.

## References

- Allan, J. 2003. Daring to think otherwise? Educational policy making in the new Scottish parliament. In *Inclusion, Participation and Democracy: What is the Purpose?*, ed. J. Allan., 179-194. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Apple, M. W. 2001. *Educating the "right" way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Apple, M. W. 1982. *Education and Power*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Armstrong, D., Spandagou, I., and Armstrong, A.C. 2008. One Nation Globalization and Inclusive Education. SPA08682. ocs.sfu.ca/aare/index.php/AARE\_2008/AARE/paper/viewFile/682/141. 19.02.2009
- Armstrong, F. 1999. Inclusion, Curriculum and the Struggle for space in school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 3, no.1: 75-87.
- Ball, S. J. and Goodson, I.F. 1985. Understanding teachers: concepts and contexts. In *Teachers' lives and careers*, ed. S.J. Ball and I.F. Goodson, 1-26. London: The Falmer Press.
- Barton, L. 1987. *The politics of special educational needs*. Lewes: Falmer.
- Biesta, G. 2007. Why "what works" won't work: evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory*, 57, no. 1: 1-22.
- Booth, T., Ainscow, M., Black-Hawkins, K., Vaughn, M. and Shaw L. 2000. *Index for Inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*. Bristol: CSIE.
- Boutskou, E. 2007. The role of special education teachers in primary schools in Greece, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 17, no.3: 289-302.
- Carroll, A. Forlin, C. and Jobling, A. 2003. The impact of Teacher training in Special Education on the attitudes of Australian preservice general educators towards people with disabilities. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Summer, 65-79.
- Devaney, K. & Sikes, G. 1988. Making the case of professionalism. In *Building Professional Cultures in schools*. Ed. A. Lieberman., 3-22. Teachers College: Columbia University.
- Dyson, A. 1991. Rethinking roles, rethinking concepts: special needs teachers in mainstream schools. *Support for Learning*, 6,no.2: 51-60.
- Ecclestone, K. 2004. Learning or therapy? The demoralization of education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 52,no.2: 112-137.
- Fragou, A. 1989. The presentation of A. Fragou. *Epeidi he Diafora Einai dikaioma*, 6/7: 62-64.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. 1967. *The Discovery of the Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Grollios, G., Liabas, T. and Tzikas, C. 2002. Issues about the history of teacher's assessment. In *The Assessment in Education: who, whom and why*, ed. C. Katsikas, G. Kavvadias., 113-135. Athens: Savalas.
- Grollios, G. 2005. *Paulo Freire and the Curriculum*. Thessaloniki: Vanias.
- Grumet, M. 1988. *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Habermas, J. 1974. *Theory and Practice*. London: Heinemann.
- Hartnett, A. and Carr, W. 1995. Education, Teacher Development and the Struggle for Democracy. In *Critical Discourses on teacher development*, ed. J. Smyth., 39-53. Cassell: London.
- Heshusius, L. 1994. Freeing ourselves from objectivity: Managing subjectivity or turning toward a participatory mode of consciousness, *Educational Researcher*, 23, no.3:15-22.
- Hausstätter, S, M. and Takala, M. 2008. The core of special teacher education: a comparison of Finland and Norway. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 23, no.2:121-134.



- Karagianni, P. 2005. Educational practices for integration of children with special needs in mainstream school. In *Contemporary Integration approaches*, ed. A. Zoniou-Sideri., v.2., 233-250. Athens: Ellinika Grammata.
- Karagianni, P., Eytyhiadou, E., and Boulgaridou, O. 2008. Programmes of Study of in service teachers' training courses on Special Education in Greece. Unpublished diploma dissertation. School of Primary Education, Aristoteles University. Thessaloniki.
- Kompf, M., Bond, W. R., Dworet, D, and Boak, R.T. 1996. *Changing research and practice: Teachers' professionalism identities and Knowledge*. Falmer: London.
- Laursen, P.F. 1996. Professionalism and the reflective approach to teaching. In *Changing research and practice: Teachers' professionalism identities and Knowledge*, ed. M. Kompf, W. R. Bond, D. Dworet, and R.T. Boak., 48-55. Falmer: London.
- Liabas, T. 2006. *Paulo Freire: Ten Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*. Athens: Epikentro.
- Lortie, D. 1975. *The Schoolteacher*. Chicago:University of Chicago Press.
- Oliver, M. 1996. *Understanding disability: from theory to practice*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- Popkewitz, T. 1991. *A Political Sociology of Educational Reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Slee, R. 2001. Social justice and changing directions in educational research: The case of inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 5, no.2/3:167-177.
- Slee, R. 2003. Teacher education, government and inclusive schooling: the politics of the Faustian waltz. In *Inclusion, Participation and Democracy: What is the Purpose?*, ed. J. Allan., 207-224. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Solvang, P. 2007. Developing an ambivalence perspective on medical labeling in education: case dyslexia. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 17, no.1-2:79-94.
- Tom, A. 1984. *Teaching as a moral craft*. New York: Longman.
- Tomlinson, S. 1996. Conflicts and dilemmas for professionals in special education. In *Disability and the dilemmas of education and justice*, ed. C. Christensen, and F. Rizvi., 175-186. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Troyna, B. and Vincent C. 1996. "The ideology of expertism": the framing of special education and racial equality policies in the local state. In *Disability and the dilemmas of education and justice*, ed. C. Cristensen and F. Rizvi., 131-144. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Vlachou, A. 2006. The role of the special support teachers in Greek primary schools: a counter productive effect of "inclusive" practices, *International Journal of Inclusive education*, 10, no.1: 39-58.
- Ware, L. 2003. Working past pity: what we make of disability in schools. In *Inclusion, Participation and Democracy: What is the Purpose?* ed. J. Allan., 117-138. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Woods, P. 1990. *Teacher Skills and Strategies*. Falmer: London.
- York-Barr, J., Sommers, J., Duke, K., and Ghere, G. 2005. Special educators in inclusive education programmes: reframing their work as teacher leadership, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 9, no.2: 193-215.

Zoniou-Sideri, A. and Vlachou, A. 2006. Greek teachers' belief systems about disability and inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10, no.4-5:379-394.

**Table 1:** Teachers' experience

Teachers with	Men	Women	Total
3-10 years of experience	3	8	11
10-20 years of experience	7	22	29
total	10	30	40