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Mina Starida

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Issues of Quality in Greek Teacher Education

MINA STARIDA

1. Conceptions of quality in teacher education

Tracing the meaning of the term quality one would refer to the Greek word 'peoteta' which was used by Plato and Aristotle to single out certain characteristics that were considered to be distinctive of a thing. In other words, quality of a thing is associated with certain attributes that distinguish it from other types, it is its essence. In a more general way, the term is also related to specific attributes of peoples' mind or character-like kindness and honesty—usually taken to be "good qualities" (Peters, 1977). Within the framework, quality becomes a multi-value concept depending on situation (different definitions of quality in different historical and social contexts) and also a multi-level concept involving different frames of reference in which it can be analysed (Mills, 1984). However, instead of trying to identify the essence of quality it would be more appropriate to define the term as the means to attain set aims (Ball, 1985).

Locating our interest in quality in teacher education, the possible question someone could ask is: who sets what aims? Knowing that teacher education is an area where different interest groups are involved (students, teaching staff, government, teachers' unions) and that it also relates to many different aspects, the more specific delineation of what constitutes quality among teachers and their education becomes a very complicated issue; in fact there are as many definitions as the number of the involved interest groups.

The view which is widely shared in official documents in Greece is that the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession must be raised if its critical role to contribute to the well-being of the Greek contemporary society and economy is to be fully realized. From a range of policies currently being implemented in Greece aiming at the improvement of teacher education and teacher quality, it can be safely concluded that at least teachers' organizations do not regard resourcing and salary levels the only elements constituting the whole of the quality story. The nature and the extent of the pre- and in-service teacher education and training, alternative forms of career structuring, improved career opportunities, other conditions of service and benefits have also been identified as aims of current reform or for potential improvement. Since mid-1980s, the idea of quality in teacher education—especially in teachers' views—has been related to classroom practice and pedagogy as well as to curriculum issues, assumed to contribute in this way to the strengthening of teachers' professional identity. Although

the government has appeared to be more closely defining quality in teacher education than any other interest group in education, there have been discrepancies or omissions between definitions. It is sometimes not clear (at least in scientific terms)—although some explanations of a partisan nature can be found—why one view is taken rather than another and the definitions sometimes appear expedient. There are also tensions between the ideological view of the teacher and the practice and between the dominant definition of the “good teacher” and the teachers’ definition. Therefore, a review of different criteria of “good teacher” over the years should conclude that different conceptions of “good” have prevailed at different times. Surprisingly, in Greece the dominant conception that has survived since Second World War coincides with the view that good teachers are civil servants who are expected to fulfil a role prescribed by the national guidelines, as these are firmly set by the Ministry of Education, although in reality teachers are expected to play a wider range of roles.

2. Quality in teacher education as a topic of national debate

Behind the question what is quality in teacher education lies the debate about the purpose of education. One of the clearest examples of the changing topics of debate has been the unprecedented prominence of the explicit aim of improving teacher education as a means of enhancing quality of the teaching profession. Of course, the pursuit of excellence and the concern for raising teachers’ performance and students’ achievement levels are long-standing. Quality as such has not become a matchword for policy strategy in Greece, but rather its constituents. However, quality in teacher education cannot be effectively discussed if it is defined reductively, ahistorically or in an essentialist manner. It has been a contested concept among the interest groups and as such, it is certainly not neutral or self-evident. Definitions within the Greek context have not just emerged or been accepted. Particular social and political circumstances and dominant employer–employee versions have shaped the idea and given it specific forms in Greece.

Quality in teacher education as a topic of national debate since the early 1980s has not focused on how the image of the “good” teacher has changed recently, but instead new patterns of teacher education have emerged in which the necessity to develop new images of the “good” teacher resulted from the effort to redefine the purpose of state education. Teacher education, then, seen as a social construction is a contested process; initiatives have been taken in response to acute problems (like the need to universitize primary teacher education) or have emerged out of particular political and social conjunctions (the need to democratize and reform education system expressed by the Law 1566/1985 of the socialist government) which are then, in turn, responded to by teachers. Within this framework, quality has become a relative term suited to teachers’ employer purposes and contested by organized teachers who have taken a consistent line on protecting themselves from any attack on scientific knowledge and relative autonomy (expressed as professionalism). Likewise, the quality in teacher education should reflect the match of their skills and knowledge they receive during their initial education and training courses to the teaching situation they are placed in as well as their personal capacities to deliver to a high standard. Although these professional standards of performance might be characterized as entirely idiosyncratic, the Government is committed to a strategy of tight central control of education which includes the external imposition of performance criteria on pupils, teachers and schools. Demands for institutional accountability in an era of economic stringency and educa-

tional scape-goating make the Ministry of Education now more responsible than ever for the establishment of control schemes regarding recruitment policies, employment tenure, job responsibilities and even aspects of teachers' social existence. In a strong centralized education system, like the Greek one, with a nationally-determined curriculum, teachers as civil servants become the educational workers who have little control over the content of their work and who have to accept the judgements made by their managers. The effect of such bureaucratic appraisal is probably at the opposite of that intended by organized teachers. While the real aim of the current government policy is to improve the overall standard of teachers and teaching in schools, in reality it is likely to simply weed out the incompetent and lower teachers' professional commitments as their morale gets low. However, teachers' commitment to both individual and collective self-appraisal and self-improvement aims at improving the performance of the majority within the unique context in which they find themselves working. Consequently, there are competing images of the teacher in these approaches mirroring not only the conflicts embedded in the process of establishing the aims of the teacher education but also societal changes and ideological perspectives on the role of the teacher.

3. Quality in initial teacher education and training

There has been a clear differentiation in initial teacher education establishments between primary and secondary school teachers. Until 1982 the former accomplished their initial education after having successfully attended a two-year course in post-secondary establishments called Pedagogical Academies, while the latter had to attend a 4-year course at the University. Acceptance into Pedagogical Akademies was based upon the system of nation-wide exams, the school certificate and a judgement as to suitability for teaching, according to intellectual capacity and physical condition. The judgement then was used to develop the common idea of the standard required of a qualified teacher. Selection for initial teacher education represents an important aspect of the issue of quality in teacher education, as it is the interface between the teaching profession and its future members. The 'numerous clausus' system being applied to all university entrants—including secondary school teachers and also to primary school teachers since mid-1980s—has been considered to be an adequate means of establishing the criteria for assessing quality of student teachers.

Pedagogical Akademies graduates received adequate pedagogical training and obtained teaching practice experience but did not acquire knowledge of specific scientific fields. The fact that their education was not of university level affected determiningly their social status. Hence, university level initial education was one of the most crucial demands of the teachers' unions in order to elevate the quality of the teaching profession in Greece. Nevertheless, despite the anticipated outcome of the reform being its relevance to school life, the emphasis on the academic knowledge is still very strong in the content of the teacher education programmes of the Pedagogical Departments. Secondary school teachers as university graduates acquire adequate education concerning their subjects of specialization but they do not have the pedagogical and didactical grounding required for their school performance. Their education is focused on specialized scientific knowledge and it is completely divergent from school reality. More pedagogical training for secondary school teachers and specialization of primary school teachers is considered to be, in teachers' views, the means to teacher education improvement.

Nevertheless, any effort to improve teacher education can no longer ignore the

severe problem of teacher surplus which at present places a major critique upon the aims of teacher education and presses for new images of quality in teacher education.

4. Quality in in-service teacher education and training

Improvement in the quality of education is a concern shared by all interest groups in Greece. The in-service education of teachers is a determining factor in the pursuit of this objective. Rapid changes in Greek society (social, economic, technological and cultural) increasingly mean that teachers are constantly faced with new syllabuses and the need for new teaching approaches. There is, however, little new blood entering the profession, as teachers in post are in middle age and there are almost no vacancies because of the falling birthrate and the high unemployment rate of graduate teachers.

The Greek Ministry of Education established a network of in-service teacher education centres (PEK) in 1985 in its effort to increase and disseminate knowledge of developments in the field of in-service education and to reform the education system. PEK were to replace the 1-year in-service training courses SELME (for secondary school teachers) and SELDE (for primary school teachers) and they have become responsible for all professional activities. They have been offering two types of training:

- (a) *Introductory training*: It is a 3-month course held at the beginning of each school year and it aims to inform all new teachers about teaching methodology and school life. The significant role of this type of training is justified on the following grounds: new teachers are for a long time away from school reality until they get appointed to vacant state posts; the probationary period is crucial in the professional life of the teacher.
- (b) *Periodical training*: This 3-month course is usually aiming at providing the experienced teacher with updated information about specialist knowledge and teaching methodology and it is attended by teachers chosen on the basis of their past training experience, place of origin, length of service.

As pointed out above, the government in its effort to serve the rapidly increasing needs realised that a radically different educational approach appeared to be required. Teachers sought for changes and pressed the government to satisfy their demands. Amongst them in-service training was given first priority. However, all in-service training types have been formulated by the state, the offered education has been under the control of the ministry, while any other initiatives directly or indirectly involving in-service training activities have not been supported by the ministry. Within this administrative context teachers' unions have reacted against the state monopolization of in-service activities considered on the basis of the absence of teachers' participation and being formulated and implemented as a passive procedure. Additionally, the prevailing theoretical training as to the practical one has permeated through both the initial and in-service teacher education courses and emphasized the offer of mere knowledge.

5. Quality control and assessment

Teachers unions believe that there should be provisions for developing and demonstrating teaching skills, whatever the level of service and that important ways of maintaining quality in teaching involve teacher self-assessment and involvement in on-going professional development and school based control procedures. However, each of these

approaches is not an isolated one, but part of a total process. Techniques of self-assessment should be practised and learned in context with others.

Within this context teachers unions fit recommendations that teachers should regularly (every school year) review their practice and compile a picture of their strengths and weaknesses while plan also the activities of the next school year. These reviews would lead to further professional studies, collegial and inspectorate support, and school based development activities. Head teachers and school advisors should be a central part of the on-going teacher assessment and the follow-up review. This process of assessments cannot be as loose as it is at present, and it can produce at best a very precise assessment of the quality of teaching collectively and individually. Within this framework, school advisors' current role in quantity control has been eroded by teachers' views. The status and responsibilities of the position demands an appointment based on objective rather than on political criteria. As such, their judgements are regarded as too isolated and their workload rather confused because of their dual responsibilities as educational advisors and inspectors (the latter advocated mainly by the ministry of education). These roles conflict and compete for priority and worktime. Teachers are suspicious of the dual roles and this undermines the effectiveness and credibility of school advisors.

Assessment in teachers' view should not be geared to promotion or salary increments, because it is simply undesired as a measure. At present, as the system of quality control is currently operating, inspection and assessment of teachers' work is very weak. There is strong need expressed by teachers that the issue of teacher assessment must be reputable and credible, able to provide needed balance and to restore public confidence. With regard to the last point, for the profession to have responsibility, there must be some re-establishment in the eyes of the public, in the sense that the profession is the best judge of its own. Teacher must work in conducive supportive environment and have the time and the opportunity for professional renewal, retraining or other career options. In addition, the outcomes of teaching also must be examined. A range of measures need to be developed by people with expertise in teaching practice and evaluation to measure both practice and outcomes. All these suggestions for quality procedures will positively recognise the good work of teachers and go some considerable distance to solving problems which currently undermine the quality of teaching.

The role and strength of teacher and school evaluation is being reappraised and changes can be expected in the ideology and practice of assessment at all levels. Both teacher training and the work of teachers in schools are to be subject to more surveillance and to the application of more specific criteria for the assessment and evaluation of competence. Perhaps most significant of all these are suggestions that teacher education and teacher deficiencies are at the heart of the "education problem" today. Constructs of teacher competence are again high on the agenda in education in Greece as are principles and procedures for determining such competence. Nevertheless, suspicion has been cast on any argument that has tried to suggest that bureaucratically-inspired assessment of teacher performance can be carried out objectively or successfully. The role of the Ministry of Education in teacher assessment, and the attack on teacher professionalism that this implies, have also been central issues. The precise outcome, however, is likely to depend on how far teachers as a group, rather than as individuals, are prepared to institute self-imposed quality control procedures. The constructive approach being advocated by teachers both primary and secondary to improving the quality of the teaching should come from within.

6. Research on quality in teacher education and teacher quality

Since quality is such a central issue in improving various aspects of teacher education, evidently, research on quality in teacher education represents the means of investigating ways of thinking about the meaning of quality and the teachers' role in promoting it. The aim is to establish a clearer view of the criteria on which quality in the area should and could be defined. In valuing quality in teacher education, assessment of what pupils know, understand and can do become interrelated issues and reflect the contemporary perspective shift. More specifically, the curriculum is the vehicle for the development of a range of skills—practical, social, personal and according to the stated aims of the Greek education system it represents the means for the creation of the creative citizen able to respond adequately to the opportunities presented in modern society. A key idea is “learning to learn” in a world of rapid and increasing technological and social changes where, the media—one universally accessible source of knowledge and ideas and work-based learning—is just beginning to be recognized as a valid source of certifiable competence which by-passes traditional routes to qualifications. In addition to all those considerations research cannot be seen independently of resources. As the latter are being squeezed research has to monitor practice to demonstrate that value for money is being obtained. Moreover, resources are only a good investment if they are used; in other words, if their use is evaluated to establish how far teachers can prove to be effective with pupils and if the evidence so obtained is fed back into school, so that all teachers can learn how to exploit their potential. Hence, the purpose of researching quality is to understand it better, to clarify how it may be attained and to channel resources so that all teachers are helped to improve on their current level of performance and so to realise public expectations of the investment in the education system.

Furthermore, in researching quality in teacher education and teacher quality as well there are two questions to consider: which aspects of teacher education to focus on and which aspects of teacher behaviour to collect evidence on. Focusing on teacher education, research is likely to clarify issues like the programme, content, duration, orientation, objectives, methods of studies and several other aspects. Special interest has been given lately to issues concerning the development of European and international perspective in teacher studies, like educational problems of migrants' children; comparative aspects of adult education programmes in E.E.C.; trends in educational policy changes in European countries; international perspectives of educational statistics; Greek version of EUDISED and EUROVOC; vocational education in Greece and in other member states; environmental education in the Community; distance learning; foreign language learning in the Community context.

The relevant questions concerning teacher quality involve asking what evidence, collected by what means, by whom and for what purpose. In Greece, these multiple viewpoints are essential in reviewing the range of evidence which has been collected in the process of evaluation. This task has been undertaken almost exclusively by the university departments so far, although teacher unions, the Ministry of Education and other scientific committees have also been involved to a lesser extent.

Nevertheless, in talking about quality we should consider the quality of judgements and judgements of quality are interrelated. The former will reflect the extent to which the principles of collecting evidence have been observed, the training provided to those who make judgements and their skill in weighing up and interpreting the available evidence. The latter also is likely to highlight strengths and weaknesses and to provide a spur to individual development. On a broader canvas, these judgements, if collected

at appropriate points in the career cycle of teachers, could help define standards for initial teacher education and for levels of competence. In short, they can aid managers of the education service to understand the quality of the teaching force and where resources might be best invested to improve teachers' skills and knowledge.

Correspondence: M. Starida, Department of Primary Education, University of Crete, Perivolia, G-74100 Rethymnon.

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