The teacher as a leader in educational project management in Second Chance Schools.

Perceptions of Greek Adult Students.

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Abstract— **During 2010, within the frame of Lifelong Learning, 57 Second Chance Schools [SCSs] operated across Greece, with over 800 teachers who educated almost 5800 adult students on Greek and English language, mathematics, environmental, it, social, aesthetic studies, technology and physics, and provided, in addition, career and vocational counselling. The present study examines Greek SCS students' views about their educator as a leader during project carrying-out. Six hundred and seventy seven students from twenty four SCSs across Greece provided relevant information by filling in a corresponding number of questionnaires with eighteen close-ended questions. Data elaboration and statistical analysis was performed. Factor analysis was used to pinpoint five main factors relevant to students' views regarding the leading role of their educator during project carrying-out. The results of the study showed that Greek SCS students highly believe that their leader has a guiding role, that s/he also intervenes during project implementation in various ways and that s/he is capable of clearly explaining the aims and targets of project. In addition, the project leader successfully handles learners' involvement and finally, s/he has a defining role in all project-team activities. The leading role of the educator has to be further developed and strengthened so that education in SCSs becomes more effective and meaningful.**

 Key words: Second Chance Schools, project method, educator, leader, Greece

I.   INTRODUCTION

During the 90s, all EU members adopted participation as a key component of social learning in order to ensure a better quality of life, involve citizens in decision-making mechanisms that affect their lives, and, in particular, provide personal and social freedom. Innovative forms of education were necessary with flexible curricula, combined services and a re-organization of the educational process. Therefore, in 1995 a proposal for implementing a major program was drafted in the White Paper on EU Second Chance School (SCS). Such schools were established in Germany, France, Spain and England. In 1997, Greece legislated SCSs (Law 2525/1997, in [1]). The first SCS was founded in Peristeri in 2000 [2]. From 2004 until 2009 the institution grew enormously with 39 new SCSs and 60 sub-divisions across the country, covering the entire geographical area. Today 57 SCSs - 6 of them in prisons- and 60 annexes operate (Laws 2525/1997, 2909/2001 in [1]).

Graduates of SCSs are provided with an equivalent title of the Junior High School leaving certificate, recognized by law. Attending a SCS is free, and until now more than 15,000 adult citizens have been trained nationwide [3].

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The Second Chance School is an innovative school of Adult Education. The training program is different from that of formal education in content, teaching methodology and assessment of learners. The duration of the training program is 2 years [4]. The curriculum is taught over 25 teaching hours per week. Twenty hours are devoted to teaching subjects and one hour in consulting. The remaining four hours are used for a fixed project-day.

Second Chance Schols can be attractive to citizens only if they are trained in alternative, flexible and interactive methods. The main method which is used in all SCSs (by law) is project, which actively contributes to the active participation of learners in adult education and helps to develop a substantial interactive form of communication between learners. During project work, learners express their opinions freely in a spontaneous exchange. The fact that all the work is done collectively, frees the participants from the fear of failure, a spirit of reciprocity is developed and the participants help each other rather than compete [5].

The project method refers to the way of learning or teaching that emphasizes active student participation in planning, implementation and task assessment. Students interact with the environment; they learn according to their interests and needs [6]. The definitions of project are summarized as a teaching approach that starts from the students' questions, promotes group-work and focuses on getting knowledge through experiential methods [7]. In class, this teaching practice constitutes of group-work in which all class members are involved [8]. The design of the course is the groups' responsibility; the aim is to complete a project and / or create a final project/product. The basic principle of SCS philosophy is to move from teaching to learning and both learners and teachers to discover knowledge. Based on this educational principle, project is an effective method that serves the purposes of SCSs, which "teach learners how to learn" and "guide them to exploit the acquired knowledge and experience"

[9]. It also aims at metacognitive knowledge acquisition, detection, familiarization with IT, connecting with the local community, cooperation and an ideological approach to knowledge [10].

Project is the main alternative educational strategy, along with case study and role-play [11]. It is considered to be highly appropriate for adults, since it implies that learners take initiatives, it involves discovery learning, group work, individualized instruction, extension of work beyond one lesson, final presentation and the reversal of teacher roles, from instructor to coordinator and a facilitator of the process, since project is based on two very important principles: that of social interaction and collaboration and that of interdisciplinarity [4]. Since the establishment of the first SCS, coordinators have spent many sessions suggesting alternative educational techniques including projects [12]. Teachers were not very familiar with either such educational techniques or project management and had reservations as to whether they could support them. Later, however, the same concept of learners developing these innovative methods gave very little incentive to collaborative working methods. Additionally when project and other methods were used in class, groups gave feedback and the results were discussed for possible improvements, which was a whole new experience – then - as regards teaching methods. Student assessment, due to the innovative nature of the programme and their adult life, focuses on involvement and thus alternative assessment methods are needed, such as student project participation. The half yearly work reports and science projects, drama performances and other events can be considered examples of a long-term project. It usually requires extensive research, bibliographic and group work. By that way, students try to find solutions to improve questions, discuss and argue about ideas, predict, plan, experiment, collect and analyze data, draw conclusions, communicate their ideas and results to others, and pose new questions [13]. This technique requires detailed assessment criteria to highlight the skills for presenting their work. The effectiveness of this long-term work is often assisted by the use of diaries and other record keeping methods [14].

During project management, students are divided according to the project they belong to and work in small groups. All teachers, the psychologist and career counselor do not work with students individually [10]. All groups function according to a strictly student-focused framework and all educational goals are explained step by step [15].

The purpose of this research is to investigate both the theoretical and research role of adult educators as leaders' during project management, according to the perceptions of learners. The survey is carried out on learners of SCSs for two reasons. Firstly, due to the specificity of these schools as they offer their graduates a diploma equivalent to that of secondary school and secondly because there is no extensive research on the use of alternative teaching methods in SCSs.

III.   METHODOLOGY

The present research was conducted during the academic year 2009-10. The methodological approach that was used was questionnaire completion of a sample of 677 students that attended 24 SCSs and their annexes throughout the country (with a response rate of 70.9%). All results of descriptive and factor analyses among the variables are presented and a comment analysis of key results has been made, with some additional proposals.

IV.   ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

A.   *Participants' profile*

The Female learners' percentage was slightly highly than that of males. It is worth mentioning that most of the respondents belong to the most productive age group (31-44) and were married and employees.

B.   *Special questions*

Students report [Table 1] that their leader was often/very often aware of all project procedures (93.8%). The selection of project topic was made after the teacher took into account their prior knowledge and their interests at a rate of 90.0%. Then, s/he often/ very often (90.4%) assigned responsibilities in collaboration with the coordinator. However, almost half of the students (47.7%), sometimes freely chose for themselves what to do in the team. Furthermore, the research revealed that the project leader at a very high percentage (92.0%) did not control but coordinated and guided the process.

In the case of non-participation of a student during the project, his/her classmates replied that the leader lectured the student in question (80.1%) to try to make him/her actively participate through alternative teaching techniques (87.0%).

The leader was thought to have a guiding role (83.3%) for the class, appeared to encourage learners to use their knowledge (97.1%), fostered student self-motivation and initiative taking also often/very often (82.0%). During project implementation, the trainer had a clear role according to the results. S/he intervened often to very often (63.7%) when s/he thought so, gave feedback to the groups also very often (84.7%), changed student roles (63.7%) and acted appropriately when something was not working properly (79.5%) so that the project could continue.

C.   *Factor Analysis*

After the descriptive data analysis, a chi-square ($\chi2$) independence test was implemented, in order to find out the correlation degree among the factors of the questionnaire. Therefore, eighteen variables were chosen with the highest statistical reliance (p-value $\leq$ 0.01, a=1%). All these 18 variables refer to the educators' role as a leader during the implementation of the project for the 677 participants in the survey. All the above 18 variables, with a=1% used in the factorial analysis (Principal Component Analysis) were ordinal numeric ones, representing 5 distinct categories (e.g. 1=not at all, 2=slightly, 3=moderately, 4=often, 5=very often). By applying factor analysis, it was attempted to minimize the high number of variables and next to categorize them in groups and rename these new variables according to their meaning relevant to the main factors that describe the educators' role during project implementation. The value 0.830 of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure for sampling adequacy as an indicator of

comparison in the observed values of correlation coefficients to the partial correlation coefficients, implied that factor analysis of variables was acceptable as a technique for analyzing the data. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity showed high statistical significance of the statistic   (zero p¬-value), rejecting the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity one, and consequently factor analysis was adequate [Table II].

TABLE I.

	Educators' role during projects' implementation	Never/ Rarely	Sometimes	Often/ Very often
1	Explains the objectives in each group	4.5	6.7	88.8
2	Explains all groups' targets	6.6	14.3	79.1
3	Selects topic according to prior knowledge	8.3	31.8	90.0
4	Selects topic with students through assessment	16.8	34.3	48.9
5	S/he sets responsibilities to the group by his/ger own	1.0	6.1	93.0
6	Sets responsibilities with the coordinator	3.1	6.5	90.4
7	Free choice of roles without leading intervention	4.7	12.3	83.0
8	Ensures awareness of projects' steps & stages	1.6	4.6	93.8
9	Coordinates and does not control	1.6	6.4	92.0
10	Lectures those who do not participate	7.6	12.4	80.1
11	Engages the non-participants	3.1	9.9	87.0
12	Fosters self-motivation and initiatives	4.7	13.3	82.0
13	Promotes self-discovery of knowledge by the learners	18.3	35.6	46.1
14	Intervenes & changes roles	11.8	24.5	63.7
15	Feedbacks group members	3.8	11.5	84.7
16	Guides to proper thought construction	16.7	32.6	50.7
17	Encourages the students to exploit knowledge	2.8	10.6	86.5
18	Acts appropriately in a problem, stops project if needed	9.4	11.1	79.5

TABLE II.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.830
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3253.338
	df	153
	Sig.	0.000

To determine the group of 18 previously mentioned variables that finally took place in the Factor Analysis the following criteria were applied: Eigenvalues >1, the interpretation of new factors and the amount of factors in proportion to the amount of explained variables [16],[17]. Items belonging to a factor had to have a factor loading 0.50 at the minimum. Since performance of principal component analysis (PCA) from the eleven components explained the 57.821% of the total variance and that only the first seven

components had eigenvalues greater than 1, we proceeded by using PCA with Varimax rotation extraction method in seven components. The results are presented in [Table III].

TABLE III.

Rotated Component Matrix						
Variables	Component					Communalities
	1	2	3	4	5	
1.	0.116	0.088	**0.817**	-0.099	0.101	0.710
2.	0.196	0.107	**0.767**	0.045	-0.003	0.640
3.	0.027	-0.043	-0.162	0.458	**0.516**	0.506
4.	0.315	-0.157	0.201	-0.071	**0.560**	0.483
5.	0.127	0.143	0.332	**0.597**	-0.112	0.516
6.	-0.190	0.327	0.064	0.039	**0.745**	0.704
7.	0.152	-0.253	-0.026	**0.662**	-0.019	0.526
8.	**0.664**	0.078	0.129	0.111	0.070	0.480
9.	**0.703**	0.078	0.032	-0.039	-0.019	0.504
10.	-0.282	-0.034	-0.255	**0.624**	0.198	0.575
11.	**0.622**	0.119	-0.072	-0.116	0.227	0.471
12.	**0.687**	0.128	0.321	0.095	-0.014	0.601
13.	**0.748**	0.185	0.206	0.085	-0.145	0.664
14.	0.288	**0.729**	0.080	-0.003	-0.074	0.624
15.	0.532	**0.579**	0.161	-0.104	-0.089	0.663
16.	**0.542**	**0.510**	0.182	0.090	-0.132	0.612
17.	0.189	**0.627**	0.355	-0.033	0.073	0.562
18.	-0.029	**0.661**	-0.124	-0.173	0.289	0.566
Percentage of total variance explained	Rotation sums of squared loadings	18.644	12.617	10.440	8.369	7.751	

Based on the results of the Factor Analysis, the five (5) main factors are the following:

Factor 1: Teachers' leading role

Variables with significant positive influence between them and with the Highest Factor Loadings [VHFL]: [8], [9], [11], [12], [13] and [16] have the highest factor loadings and they identify the first main factor. According to the results, a significant positive influence appears among these variables: the boost given to adult learners in utilizing their knowledge, the educator's leading role rather than control of the project, supporting thus all learners, and the fostering of self-motivation and initiative taking. Also, the teachers' influence generated from a belief that s/he is aware of all steps and procedures in the project, and finally the ability to guide them to proper thought construction.

Factor 2: Teacher intervention

Variables with significant positive influence between them and with the Highest Factor Loadings [VHFL]: [14], [15], [17] and [18] have the highest factor loadings and they identify the second main factor. According to the results, a significant positive influence appears among these variables: the educators' encouragement of learners in role play activities, as well as the option of stopping the project - when it cannot proceed - and starting a new one, and the guidance given in exploiting knowledge. Finally, an important influence appears in providing feedback during the project.

Factor 3: Explanation of project targets

Variables with significant positive influence between them and with the Highest Factor Loadings [VHFL]: [1] and [2] have the highest factor loadings and they identify the third main factor. According to the results, a significant positive influence appears among these variables, when an explanation was provided of the project objectives to the whole group and of the targets of each group.

Factor 4: Ways of ensuring student involvement in the process

Variables with significant positive influence between them and with the Highest Factor Loadings [VHFL]: [5], [7] and [10] have the highest factor loadings and they identify the fourth main factor. According to the results, a significant positive influence appears among these variables as regards student encouragement in choosing their responsibilities in the group and developing an active participation in the project. Also, an influence seems to appear regarding remarks on those who do not participate in the procedure and finally from teachers assigning roles to students.

Factor 5: Methods of topic selection and responsibility assignment

Variables with significant positive influence between them and with the Highest Factor Loadings [VHFL]: [3], [4] and [6] have the highest factor loadings and they identify the fifth main factor. According to the results, a significant positive influence appears among these variables for deciding upon a common set of responsibilities by coordinator and students but also through common selection of the topic through exploratory assessment. Finally, influence seems to appear through topic selection according to prior knowledge.

V. DISCUSSION.

The adult trainer appears to play a major leading role at all stages of the project. S/he contributes substantially to the topic selection of the project to be implemented, based always upon the knowledge of each group of students, their interests and needs. S/he influences the way students select the topic of the project, by proposing students topics to choose from, or sometimes, by choosing the topic with the coordinator or on their own. Their leading role is regarded as that of a coach and a coordinator of the process rather than an auditor. They also assign responsibilities to team members, aided sometimes by the coordinator of each group. The teacher tries with different communication techniques (e.g. active listening) to resolve a difficult situation so that cancellation of the whole evolution process of the project is avoided; as a result, students believe that they play a decisive role in ensuring the continuation of the project although stopping the project might sometimes be preferable but not pedagogically correct. Students believe that their teacher helps them in experiential discovery of knowledge through self-evaluation. They are often to almost always considered to be driver, supporter and a stimulus for students to utilize their knowledge.

An adult trainer in a SCS intervenes quite often when it is considered useful to give feedback to the team and to integrate the group of learners who have difficulties in cooperating and communicating with their classmates. By proposing role-play between groups of learners, he urges adult learners to take responsibility and initiatives and helps them along in developing empathy. By giving them the means to evaluate their work, the teacher makes them feel that they are responsible for their labour. In this way, they develop their individual characteristics and improve their professional profile, they are encouraged to become more confident and they cultivate the acceptance of diversity through alleviation of racism.

VI. PROPOSALS

In this last part of the research, after taking into consideration bibliography and research results, some proposals are put forward that could enhance the teachers' leading role through project implementation. More specifically, an increase in funds from the state budget towards adult education seems necessary. Frequent, targeted educational seminars in the educational potential of each SCS should be conducted, regardless of teachers' years of service in order to consolidate the knowledge base and provide feedback to the SCS educators, concerning the use of alternative educational techniques when teaching adult students, increasing benefits for the teachers' leading role.

All teachers should follow educational courses with an emphasis on alternative teaching and project management during their diploma studies, using innovative forms of teaching as such courses undoubtedly contribute to better adult school achievement. By supplying SCSs with complete audio-visual equipment, educators can assist projects with innovative materials and attract great interest from team members. A careful and targeted selection of effective SCS headmasters and teachers can achieve smooth and effective learning that contributes to a more effective school operation. Furthermore, Greek and foreign adult educators should also cooperate to exchange views and teaching methods concerning project management, thus increasing teacher effectiveness. All these would constitute positive and constructive steps towards a more effective educator that would produce a more stimulating, meaningful, successful and effective education.

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