

GREEK TEACHERS' CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS AND THEIR VIEWS ON CLASSROOM CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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Abstract: The present study aimed at investigating Greek teachers' cross-cultural awareness and their views on cultural diversity in the classroom. These issues become important given that the mainstream classroom under the present conditions in Greece is becoming multicultural and, as the existing literature suggests, teachers have not been adequately (if at all) prepared to teach in such a classroom. Participants in the study were 100 teachers of elementary and secondary education; of them, 57 were females. Quantitative data were collected through the Cultural Awareness Inventory and a structured questionnaire exploring teachers' views on cultural diversity and their role in a culturally diverse classroom. The results showed the contradictory and dilemmatic character of teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity and point to the need of implementing new teacher training programs that would incorporate not only strategies for teaching new curricula but teachers' needs as well, as these emerge in today's multicultural classroom.

Key words: Cultural diversity, Mainstream classroom, Teachers' cultural awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Questions regarding teachers' views on cultural diversity in the classroom are of special importance because there is continuing increase of migrants across Europe during the last decades; the increasing number of migrants has changed the composition of student population, and schools face more and more the great challenge of meeting the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse body of students (Gonzalez, 1993; Lucas & Schecter, 1992; Rogers, Ingraham, Bursztyn,

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Cajigas-Segredo, Esquivel, Hess, Nahari, & Lopez, 1999). At the same time, teachers are called to teach populations whose culture they know only a little. On the other hand, whereas a lot of theoretical discussion has been going on about teachers' new roles and the need for training on cultural diversity management (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Taylor & Quintana, 2003), there is very little systematic research exploring the various aspects of the process of change in primary and secondary schools as they adapt to cultural diversity. Moreover, data on how teachers perceive the changes taking place in the mainstream classroom, as this becomes multicultural, is rather limited.

The present study focused on teachers in Greece and explored their cross-cultural awareness and their views on cultural diversity in the classroom. The data was part of a teachers' needs-assessment program that was carried out in the context of a pilot action research program aiming at the empowerment of in-service teachers so that they become able to deal with the culturally diverse classroom.

Migration in Greece

Greece in its contemporary history and with respect to migration has been mainly a sending rather than a receiving country. This has changed, however, since the 1970s when Greek migrant workers from the countries of Western Europe started returning in the country. Furthermore, in the end of the 1980s, due to the political changes and the collapse of the political system in the former Soviet Union and the other communist countries, economic immigrants and repatriated Greeks from there arrived in Greece. Moreover, recent military conflicts in the Balkans during the 1990s forced high numbers of migrants to move to many European countries including Greece. As a consequence, all this migration has changed the composition of student population in Greece. In the year 2002-2003, for example, the percentage of repatriated or migrant children comprised the 8.9% of the total student population, whereas the vast majority of these students attended schools in the two largest cities of the country, namely Athens (54.1%) and Thessaloniki (8.1%) (Νικολάου, 2000; Σαγκιά & Ψάλτη, 2004; Χρηστίδου-Λιοναράκη, 2001).¹

¹ The above data do not include students whose Greek citizenship families are Muslims, as well as Muslim or Christian Orthodox Romas. Students of these groups attend schools mainly in the three Prefectures of the area of Thrace, Greece, as well as in Athens and Thessaloniki; according to Χρηστίδου-Λιοναράκη (2001) their number in the year 2000 amounted to about 19227 students.

Greek educational system and migration

It should be noted at this point that cultural diversity is not related exclusively to the phenomenon of migration. It does exist, although it is ignored by the educational system of a country, since the ideology of national homogeneity usually predominates. The Greek educational system has been mainly monocultural. As Dragonas, Fragoudaki, and Inglessi (1996, p. 19) have pointed out «... historical continuity (albeit the ahistorical use of history) and cultural homogeneity constituted the two main axes the educational system is based on for the construction and representation of an ever-lasting, unchanged and undifferentiated national self.» Consequently, as far as the education of children who do not belong to the dominant group² is concerned, changes have aimed mainly at the students' school assimilation rather than on their cultural integration.

It was only in the year 1996 that a new law was enforced dealing more thoroughly with the issue of the education of culturally different student populations. Law 2413/96 refers to both the education of Greeks abroad and “intercultural education” in Greece. In principle, according to Law 2413/96, the aim of intercultural education is to guarantee equal opportunity in education for every student in the country. In practice, however, the situation is different. As several writers have pointed out, the recent educational policy does not seem to be dictated by the ideology of intercultural education since all measures aim at the integration and/or assimilation of the nondominant population of students and, even more, do not challenge the monocultural nature of the mainstream schools (Ανδρούσου & Μάγος, 2001; Ασκούνη, 2001; Μάργου, 1997). Moreover, all measures taken by the Greek State have been addressed to classes with high numbers of students of minority groups leaving out the mainstream classroom (Σακκά & Ψάλτη, 2004). On the other hand, it has only recently been taken into consideration by the Greek State and the educational community that, given the changing demographics, all educators must face the reality of culturally and linguistically diverse students in today's classrooms. This reality, however, creates the need not only for changes in the educational system

²The term “nondominant” is being used in order to describe primarily children of other than Greek Orthodox cultural background (including children whose parents are of Greek nationality and Muslim). It is also used, however, as in this case, in order to describe children of Greek nationality who have lived abroad together with their migrant parents and have returned back to Greece. This term was chosen instead of the term “minority” since the latter is being used in Greece only for the Greek Muslim community. In the present article, the term is used interchangeably with the term “different” (i.e., other than Greek Orthodox) or “children of minority groups”.

but for new programs for the training of teachers as well. What has actually happened towards this direction?

Within the context of the new measures taken by the Greek State in order to deal with the issue of cultural diversity in the classroom, very little care has been given to teacher training/education although this issue has been considered as one of the major steps to be taken by the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Intercultural Studies and the Education of the Greek Diaspora (Ινστιτούτο Παιδείας Ομογενών και Διαπολιτισμικής Εκπαίδευσης, 2006). Thus, no attempt has been made for teacher lifelong education regarding the teachers who work in the intercultural schools (Ανδρούσου, 2005; Μιχαλοπούλου-Βείκου, 1997; Χρησιτίδου-Λιοναράκη, 2001). Moreover, programs for the training of these teachers were designed and implemented either at a pilot level (Γκότοβος, 2002; Δαμανάκης, 1998; Δικαίου, 2004) or within the context of four intervention programs financed by the Ministry of Education³ (Δραγώνα, 2004; Μάρκου, 1997; Μιχαλοπούλου-Βείκου, 1997). These attempts focused mainly either on how to teach Greek as a second language or on how teachers can teach new curricula tailored to the needs of specific groups of the student population (Δαμανάκης, 1997). Some programs, however, have even reached the point to suggest the change of the role of the teacher (to that of the reflective teacher) and to focus on teachers' personal development as well as on the growth of their communication skills or to concentrate on issues of conflicting identities and identity development in the classroom (Ανδρούσου, 2005; Δικαίου, 2004; Κοσμίδου-Hardy, 1997; Μάρκου, 1997). The above interventions, therefore, have given to the teachers involved the opportunity to reconsider their teaching methods and to reflect upon them. They have also allowed researchers to draw interesting conclusions on teacher training on multiculturalism and the teachers' defences to change (Δραγώνα, 2004).

Several researchers have already pointed out, however, the limitations of the above interventions. Specifically, it has been suggested that one of the main

³The Special Secretariat for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies along with the European Union, acknowledging the fact that different minority groups have different needs (Μιχαλοπούλου-Βείκου, 1997), financed, among others, four innovative intervention projects which were designed and run by four different universities concerning the Greek diaspora education, return migrant and foreign students in Greece, as well as Muslim and Roma students. The aims of the above programs, among others, were the following: (a) migrant and foreign students' smooth integration to the Greek educational system, (b) reduction of their school failure, (c) production of new courses of studies as well as of new educational material, and (d) education of teachers who teach in schools with students of the above mentioned cultural background (Ινστιτούτο Παιδείας Ομογενών και Διαπολιτισμικής Εκπαίδευσης, 2006; Μάρκου, 1997; Μιχαλοπούλου-Βείκου, 1997; Χρησιτίδου-Λιοναράκη, 2001).

limitations is the monocultural ideology of the Greek educational system. As Ανδροπούσου and Μάργος (2001) pointed out, the multiple institutional constraints that maintain and reinforce the monocultural, ethnocentric, and homogenized function of the Greek educational system, pose limits to teachers' everyday action. These constraints, furthermore, lead to personal and/or interpersonal explicit and/or implicit conflicts.

Another limitation is the ideology that seems to be adopted by the various agents of the Greek State. A lot of authors agree that this ideology is rather mixed (Ανδροπούσου & Μάργος, 2001; Dragonas et al., 1996; Μάργου, 1997; Ψάλτη, 2000). As Ασκούνη and Ανδροπούσου (2001) point out, the Greek school system seems to have been caught between two contrasting poles. One views school as a mechanism of cultural homogenization, whereas the other values the heterogeneity of the school classroom. It seems that the measures taken by the Greek state, in so far as the education of the nondominant groups of students is concerned, are not really based on the principles of intercultural education since they are addressed only to those schools/classrooms with high numbers of students of the above groups (Γκότοβος, 2002; Μάργου, 1997; Ψάλτη, 2000) and not to the mainstream classroom. Consequently, as we have pointed out elsewhere, mainstream schools are called to manage the cultural diversity of school classrooms, and teachers are being placed in the position to teach students whose cultural background they do not know and for whom they have not been adequately prepared (Σακκά & Ψάλτη, 2004; Sakka & Psalti, 2004).

Additional limitations, which, however, have not been discussed thoroughly, are the following: (a) Teacher education has been narrowed down to training only those teachers who are working in classes with very high numbers of children of a specific cultural background other than Greek and has not included teachers of the mainstream classroom. (b) Moreover, teacher education has involved mainly primary school teachers and not teachers of the secondary level of education. These limitations imply that specialized teacher education is necessary for both teachers who work in classrooms with high numbers of students of a cultural background other than the Greek and for teachers of the mainstream classroom. One might argue that selective intercultural training of teachers reinforces the "victimization" of students of a nondominant culture in mainstream classrooms and presupposes that they will eventually assimilate to the dominant culture and ideology. The above approach, therefore, does not take into full consideration one of the major principles of intercultural education, namely that teacher education on cultural diversity should focus on *all* teachers, that is, on teachers of both levels of education working in classrooms with either high or low numbers of students of a different cultural background (Γκότοβος, 1997; Μάργου, 1997).

It can be concluded, then, that although during the last decades there is gradual recognition by the Greek State of the necessity for inclusion of the students of minority groups in the school system and for teacher training programs aiming to meet the needs of a culturally diverse classroom, one cannot talk about “real” intercultural education. The latter presupposes “dialogue” and exchange of experiences between two or more cultures. As several researchers in Greece and other countries suggest, the operation of the mainstream classroom should be based on the principle of equality of cultures and the need for taking advantage of the cultural experiences of people of different cultural backgrounds as well as on the provision of equal opportunities to all children (Ασκούνη, 2001; Gonzales & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Γκότοβος, 2002; Nieto, 1991). Moreover, as Μάρκου (1997) points out, multicultural education as an approach is opposed to any assimilative or compensative ideology and practice and points to the need for change of all groups involved (i.e., dominant and minority groups). Within this context, teachers are called to become active agents of an educational movement that aims at the acknowledgement and validation of cultural diversity in schools as well as in the wider society (Gonzales & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Research questions – Hypotheses

How do teachers of the mainstream classroom perceive the co-existence of students from diverse cultural backgrounds in it? How ready do they feel they are to work with the culturally diverse classroom? These questions have not become a research issue in Greece probably because teachers' views on cultural diversity have been considered self-evident or probably because the research concerning teachers' views was carried out within the context of the various intervention programs which the Greek State has financed and of which the aim was mainly the design and implementation of new curricula and educational material. Since, however, interculturalism presupposes changes for all of the parties involved, including the teachers, it is necessary to understand the ways they use to negotiate cultural diversity in the mainstream classroom.

Within this context, the present study aimed at exploring what teachers of both the primary and secondary level of education perceive as “classroom cultural diversity”.⁴

⁴ In the present study, the term “classroom cultural diversity” is used to mean the classroom that includes students of both dominant and nondominant cultural backgrounds. The term is being used interchangeably with the term “multicultural classrooms”.

The main hypothesis formulated was that teachers of the mainstream classrooms will be aware of classroom cultural diversity and of the positive aspects of multiculturalism (Hypothesis 1), since classroom cultural diversity has become an issue of debate in Greece both at an academic and at a school level since the 1970s and especially since the 1980s (among others: Dragonas et al., 1996; Μάρκου, 1997). Moreover, they will be aware that they do not have the skills to deal with the culturally diverse classroom (Hypothesis 2), since, as it was mentioned above, very little care has been given to the training/education and the support of teachers, especially of those who work in the mainstream classroom. Finally, differences between teachers of primary and secondary level of education (Hypothesis 3a) as well between male and female teachers (Hypothesis 3b) are expected to be found, since they have been observed elsewhere (Δαμανάκης, 1998; Μπόμπας, 1997; Ψάλτη, 2000).

METHOD

Design of the study

As it was mentioned above, teachers' views were explored in the context of a pilot action research program aiming at the empowerment of in-service teachers so that they become able to deal with the culturally diverse classroom.⁵ Thus, data was part of teachers' needs assessment that was carried out in the context of this program.⁶

For the purposes of the present study, only data concerning teachers' degree of cultural awareness in the classroom as well as their views on cultural diversity will be presented. Teachers' cultural awareness was explored through the Cultural

⁵The program was financed by the European Social Fund and the Greek State and it was carried out in 32 primary and secondary schools in Northern Greece during the years 2002-2004. (Sub-project titled "Integration of repatriated Greek and alien students through the systematic training of in-service teachers". General Project: "Education of repatriated Greek and alien students" ΕΠΕΑΕΚ II, Priority Axis A.1., Module 1.1., Action 1.1.1./Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs/ Main carrier: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens/ Sub-carrier: Democritus University of Thrace).

⁶The program aimed at the development of in-service teachers' cross-cultural awareness and at their empowerment so that (a) they acquire the necessary skills and abilities to deal effectively with the culturally diverse classroom and (b) they actively support the minority students' integration into the regular classroom. It involved three stages: (a) A needs assessment of all parties involved (teachers, students, parents) exploring the ways culturally diverse group of students or parents "talk" about each other as well as teachers' views on cultural diversity in the classroom, (b) teacher training in cultural awareness, and (c) intervention in the classroom (for more information see Psalti, 2007; Σακκά, 2004; Σακκά & Ψάλτη, 2004; Sakka & Psalti, 2004).

Awareness Inventory whereas their views on classroom cultural diversity were investigated through a series of questions concerning (a) the reasons of their participation in a teachers' training program aiming at addressing cultural diversity in the classroom, (b) their expectations from a program of this nature, and (c) the degree to which they refer to aspects of competence related to the management of cultural diversity in the classroom important.

Participants

Participants were 100 teachers of Greek nationality. Of them, 61 worked in primary education schools (61%) and 39 in secondary education schools (39%) in three prefectures of Northern Greece (Alexandroupolis, Xanthi, and Thessaloniki). Of the participating teachers 57 were women (57%). The majority of teachers (56%) were 35-45 years old whereas the rest were less than 35 years old (26%) or more than 45 (18%). The mean years of service was 11.38 ($SD = 7.85$). The teachers of primary schools were teaching the whole of the main body of the school courses. Of the 39 teachers of secondary schools, 36% taught Greek literature and language ($n = 14$), 23% Mathematics or Physics ($n = 9$), 18% Sociology or Theology ($n = 7$), 10% Informatics and New Technologies ($n = 4$), and 5% Physical Education ($n = 2$). The rest 8% gave no answer to this question ($n = 3$).

Instruments

Cultural Awareness Inventory (CAI). The construction of CAI for teachers and educators was based on existing instruments (Boehman, 1987. Ponterotto, 2000). A selection of 20 items from the above instruments were translated to Greek by the author, blindly back translated by a researcher and adjusted to the purposes of the present study. Teachers were asked to fill in the CAI by indicating their answer on a 4-point scale ranging from (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

The factor analysis of the CAI, using principal component analysis and varimax rotation, revealed six factors that explained 63.3% of the variance (see Table 1). These factors were the following: (1) *Cultural awareness as necessary and useful resource for both teachers and students* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$); for example, "It is important for all students to be culturally aware". (2) *Cultural awareness as responsibility of teachers* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$); for example, "It is the teacher's responsibility to know about the cultural background of his/her students". (3) *Cultural awareness as an enriching experience for teachers* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$); for example, "The teaching of students of a different cultural background satisfies me a lot". (4)

Cultural awareness as an issue demanding the redefinition of teachers' role (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$); for example, "It is necessary the teacher's role to be redefined so that the teacher fulfils the needs of *all* students". (5) *The necessity for language assimilation of students of a different cultural background* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .63$); for example, "Students *must* use only the Greek language when they communicate with others". (6) *Cultural awareness irrelevant to teaching practice* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$); for example, "My sensitivity on the issue of cultural diversity is not relevant to the content of the subjects that I am teaching".

Reasons for participation. Teachers were asked to respond to an open question concerning the reasons of their participation in a teacher-training program addressing cultural diversity in the classroom.

Teachers' Expectations Scale. Teachers were asked to fill in the Teachers' Expectations Scale (number of items: 8) examining their expectations from the participation in a program on the management of cultural diversity in the classroom. They indicated their answers on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (absolutely not true) to 4 (absolutely true).⁷

The factor analysis of the Teachers' Expectations Scale using principal component analysis and varimax rotation revealed two factors which covered 65.3% of the total variance (see Table 2). These two factors were the following: (1) *Teachers wish to receive help* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) through their participation in the program in their teaching activities so that they improve their efficiency as teachers; for example, "The training program will help me to improve as a teacher". (2) *Teachers' wish for personal growth* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$); for example, "The training program will give me courage and strength".

Importance of Teaching Competence Scale. Teachers were asked to fill in the 36 items of the scale examining the degree to which they consider important the teaching competence related to the management of cultural diversity in the classroom. They indicated their answers on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all significant) to 4 (very significant).⁸

The factor analysis of the Importance of Teaching Competence Scale using principal component analysis and varimax rotation revealed six factors explaining 83% of the variance (see Table 3). The six factors were the following: (1) *Teachers' education and training* on issues related to culturally different (other than Greek

⁷For further statistical analyses, the values of the 4-point scale were recoded as follows: 1 = absolutely not true/rather not true and 2 = rather true/absolutely true.

⁸For further statistical analysis, the values of the 4-point scale were recoded as follows: 1 = not at all/little significant and 2 = significant enough/very significant.

Table 1. Factor loadings of the Cultural Awareness Inventory

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
- Teaching methods need to be adapted in order to meet the needs of all students, independently of their nationality, religion or language	.48					
- I can learn a lot from the students of a different cultural background	.54					
- It is necessary for a teacher to be culturally aware in order to be more effective	.40					
- Multicultural awareness training can help me work more effectively with a diverse student population	.62					
- It is important for all students to be culturally aware	.61					
- It is the teachers' responsibility to know about the cultural background of his/her students		.83				
- As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes more and more challenging		.53				
- It is necessary for a teacher to be culturally aware in order to be more effective		.59				
- Multicultural awareness training can help me work more effectively with a diverse student population	.41					
- The teaching of students of a different cultural background satisfies me a lot			.75			
- I frequently invite other adults (i.e., grandparents) from the families of the students of a different cultural background to attend parent-teacher conferences			.74			
- As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes more and more challenging			.45			
- I can learn a lot from the students of a different cultural background			.63			
- As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher's job becomes more and more challenging				.57		
- It is necessary the teacher's role to be redefined so that the teacher fulfils the needs of all students				.73		
- When dealing with bilingual students, some teachers may misinterpret different communication styles as behavioral problems				.56		
- Students must use only the Greek language when they communicate with others						.71
- I am aware of the diversity of cultural backgrounds in my classroom					.85	
- I don't like it when I see students of a different cultural background to communicate in their own language					.76	
- When dealing with bilingual students, some teachers may misinterpret different communication styles as behavioral problems						.44
- My sensitivity on the issue of cultural diversity is not relevant to the content of the subjects I am teaching						.76
- There is a problem of communication between students of the nondominant groups and the teacher						.54
Eigenvalue	4.64	2.05	1.60	1.27	1.24	1.16
% of variance explained	13.4	12.5	10.8	10.5	8.5	7.6

Note: F1: Cultural awareness as necessary and useful resource for both teachers and students. F2: Cultural awareness as responsibility of teachers. F3: Cultural awareness as an enriching experience for teachers. F4: Cultural awareness as an issue demanding the redefinition of teachers' role. F5: The necessity for language assimilation. F6: Cultural awareness as irrelevant to teaching practice.

Table 2. Factors loadings of the Teachers' Expectations Scale

Item	F1	F2
The training program		
...will help me to improve as a teacher	.89	
...will offer new alternatives in multicultural education	.86	
...will help me with teaching by providing practical guidelines	.93	
...will give me the chance to exchange ideas on the issue of cultural diversity in the classroom		.82
...will help me to improve as a human being		.84
... will give me ideas and stimuli		.63
...will give me courage and strength		.45
Eigenvalue	3.78	1.35
% of variance explained	33.5	31.8

Note: F1: Teachers' wish to receive help. F2: Teachers' wish for personal growth.

Orthodox) students' integration in school and society (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$); for example, "It is important that the teacher training program will offer knowledge on how ethnicity, religion and language influence". (2) *Teachers' sensitivity, attitude change, and improvement of communication skills* with culturally different students and parents (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$); for example, "It is important that the teacher training program will improve the communication between teachers and parents of a different cultural background". (3) *Teachers' acquisition of experience and knowledge* on how the cultural background influences the individual's occupational choices and on how to promote co-existence in the classroom (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$); for example, "It is important that the teacher training program will offer knowledge to the school on how ethnicity, religion and language influence one's occupational choices". (4) *Development of teachers' skills* concerning critical analysis and design of educational material (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$); for example, "It is important that the teacher training program will offer knowledge on how to understand "hidden curriculum" concerning the people who are of a different cultural background" (Snyder, 1971; Φλουριής, 1995) and "It is important that the teacher training program will offer knowledge on how to design educational material that fulfils the needs of *all* children". (5) *Teachers' acquisition of new skills* that support co-existence of students of a different cultural background in the classroom (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$); for example, "It is important that the teacher training program will provide information to me on issues concerning the co-existence of children of a diverse cultural background in the classroom". (6) *Teachers' acquisition of intervention skills* in the culturally diverse classroom (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$); for example, "It is important that the teacher training program will help me to develop appropriate strategies and methods of intervention in order to become more effective as a teacher in the culturally diverse classroom".

Table 3. Factor loadings of the Importance of Teaching Competence Scale

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
It is important that the teacher training program will						
...inform teachers on issues concerning the coexistence of children of a diverse cultural background	.70					
...offer knowledge on how ethnicity, religion and language influence						
...one's family choices (age of marriage, choice of spouse, family role, number of children)	.62					
...one's behavior in the classroom	.78					
...one's communication with the teacher	.78					
...one's interaction with the rest of the students	.82					
...one's integration into the broader society	.79					
...one's integration into the classroom	.69					
...the ways people perceive others	.60					
...help <i>all</i> children to come closer and get to know each other better	.53					
...improve the communication between teachers and parents of a different cultural background		.55				
...improve my communication with parents of a different cultural background		.58				
...help teachers to become sensitive to the attitudes parents of a different cultural background have about the role of the school		.73				
...help teachers to become sensitive to the attitudes children of a different cultural background have about teacher-student communication		.56				
...help teachers to become sensitive to the school difficulties children of a different cultural background are faced with		.56				
...change or broaden teachers' attitudes towards children of a different cultural background		.63				
...provide knowledge and skills to students in order to treat similarly all their classmates			.63			
...provide knowledge and skills to teachers and the school in order to treat students of a different cultural background equally			.55			
...offer knowledge to the school on how ethnicity, religion and language influence						
...one's educational choices			.60			
...one's occupational choices			.63			
...one's social status			.80			
...one's professional /occupational development			.82			
...one's promotion into higher education			.84			
...offer knowledge on how to understand "hidden curriculum" concerning the people who are of a different cultural background				.78		
...help teachers to recognize easily the "hidden messages", which are given through the media and concern the people who are of a different cultural background				.73		
...offer knowledge on how to design educational material that fulfils the needs of <i>all</i> children				.61		
...provide information to teachers on issues concerning the co-existence of children of a diverse cultural background in the classroom					.55	
...provide information to me on issues concerning the co-existence of children of a diverse cultural background in the classroom					.81	
...help teachers to acquire new skills in order to deal more effectively with all students including those of a different cultural background					.70	

(table continues)

Table 3. (continued) Factor loadings of the Importance of Teaching Competence Scale

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
...help the school to acquire new skills in order to deal more effectively with <i>all</i> students including those of a different cultural background				.64		
...help me to acquire new skills in order to deal more effectively with <i>all</i> students including those of a different cultural background					.82	
...provide the chance for discussion on the issue of cultural diversity in the school and among teachers						.59
...help me to develop appropriate strategies and methods of intervention in order to become more effective as a teacher in the culturally diverse classroom						.66
...help me to learn how to design educational material that will cover the needs of <i>all</i> students independently of their nationality, religion or language						.60
Eigenvalue	26.27	2.52	2.19	2.11	1.42	1.16
% of variance explained	21.8	16.8	13.7	11.9	10.6	8.2

Note: F1: Teachers' education and training. F2: Teachers' sensitivity, attitude change, and improvement of communication skills. F3: Teachers' acquisition of experience and knowledge. F4: Development of teachers' skills. F5: Teachers' acquisition of new skills. F6: Teachers' acquisition of intervention skills.

Procedure

Participants were approached through an invitation letter mailed to all primary and secondary schools of the areas of Thessaloniki, Alexandroupolis and Xanthi, Northern Greece. Of all the teachers who responded to this letter ($N = 700$), 105 of them were chosen randomly to participate in a pilot teacher training program aiming at in-service teachers' empowerment so that they become able to deal with the culturally diverse classroom. The data for the present study were collected within the "needs assessment" stage of the research program during the winter of 2005, at the first meeting of the research team with the participant teachers in the cities of Alexandroupolis and Thessaloniki. Teachers were asked to fill in a booklet containing the above scales, before any information about the program had been given.

RESULTS

The factors of the questionnaires were used to construct respective composite variables based on the mean of the items loading each factor. Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine differences (a) between primary and secondary school teachers as well as (b) between male and female teachers. Finally, the χ^2 test was used in order to determine differences for the categories of answers to the open question.

Teachers' cultural awareness

As Table 4 shows, both primary and secondary school teachers agreed that cultural awareness is a necessary and useful resource for teachers as well as students and that it is teachers' responsibility to be culturally aware. In accordance with the above, teachers also indicated that cultural awareness is an enriching experience for teachers and that cultural diversity in the classroom is an issue that demands the redefinition of the role of the teacher. Teachers also indicated, however, that students of a different linguistic and cultural background should speak only Greek in school and that cultural awareness is irrelevant to teaching practice (i.e., to the content of the courses which are being taught or communication problems between teachers and students of the nondominant groups). According to the Mann-Whitney test, there were no differences between teachers of the primary and those of the secondary level of education. There was only one case of differentiation between male and female teachers: Women ($M = 3.822, SD = .39$) agreed to a greater degree than men ($M = 3.457, SD = .56$) with the notion that cultural awareness is a necessary and useful resource for both teachers and students ($U = 518.500, p = .001$).

Table 4. Teachers' cultural awareness: Means (and SD) per school level, and Mann-Whitney U test

	Level of education		U	p
	Primary N = 49	Secondary N = 35		
Composite variables	M (SD)	M (SD)		
1. Cultural awareness as necessary and useful resource for both teachers and students	3.60 (.54)	3.77 (.43)	691.500	ns
2. Cultural awareness as a teachers' responsibility	3.46 (.58)	3.49 (.56)	823.000	ns
3. Cultural awareness as an enriching experience for teachers	2.91 (.68)	2.93 (.63)	666.000	ns
4. Cultural diversity as an issue demanding the redefinition of teachers' role	3.21 (.54)	3.41 (.56)	666.000	ns
5. The necessity for language assimilation	3.04 (.76)	3.03 (.78)	853.500	ns
6. Cultural awareness as irrelevant of educational practice	2.67 (.84)	2.97 (.82)	656.500	ns

It seems, therefore, that teachers of both primary and secondary education hold potentially similar views on cultural diversity in the classroom. On one hand, they value highly cultural awareness and they indicate that teachers themselves are responsible for becoming culturally aware. On the other hand, they cannot see any connection between teachers' cultural awareness and the educational practice or more specifically, the content of the courses taught and/or the communication problems between teachers and students. Moreover, while they consider cultural

diversity in the classroom as an enriching experience, they strongly believe at the same time that students of a different cultural background should assimilate to the dominant language (i.e., Greek) especially when they are in school.

Teachers' expectations and reasons for participation in the program

With respect to the reasons teachers gave for their interest in participating in a teachers' training program that aimed at addressing cultural diversity in the classroom, five categories of answers emerged: (1) Coping with difficulties that children of the nondominant groups are faced with (i.e., difficulties with language or school work, or in general), (2) coping with racism either in the classroom or at school, (3) one's own further training and education, (4) improvement of educational practice, and (5) personal interest in the subject of cultural diversity. Intercoder agreement in the categorization of responses ranged from .78% to .92%.

Table 5. Frequencies and percentages of teachers' reasons for participating in the teachers' training program per school level

Categories	Response	School level					
		Primary		Secondary		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Coping with difficulties that children of the nondominant groups are faced with	Yes	29	59	18	55	47	57
	No	20	41	15	45	35	43
2. Coping with racism in the classroom/school	Yes	3	6	5	15	8	10
	No	46	94	28	85	74	90
3. One's own training and education	Yes	7	14	6	18	13	16
	No	42	86	27	82	69	84
4. Improvement of school practice	Yes	13	27	13	39	26	32
	No	36	73	20	61	56	68
5. Personal interest in the subject	Yes	7	14	5	15	12	15
	No	42	86	28	85	70	85

As Table 5 shows, it seems that teachers' main concern was related to the issue of coping with the difficulties they face in the classroom when dealing with students of a different cultural background. Most teachers indicated that they wished to participate in the program in order to find ways to deal with problems in the classroom and in order to improve their educational practice. Much fewer teachers also indicated that they wished to participate in the program in order to find better ways to cope with the existing racism in school and out of personal interest. According to χ^2 test, no differences were found either between male and female teachers or between teachers of primary and secondary education.

With respect to teachers' expectations from their participation in the program, teachers of both genders ($M = 1.838, SD = .37$ and $M = 1.823, SD = .39$ for male and female teachers, respectively) and of both levels of education ($M = 1.808, SD = .40$ and $M = 1.857, SD = .35$ for primary and secondary education respectively) stated that they wished, through their participation in the program, to get help in their teaching activities so that they become a better teacher, whereas they indicated (although to a lesser degree) that they would like to gain personal growth as well ($M = 1.563, SD = .50$ and $M = 1.686, SD = .47$ for male and female teachers, respectively; $M = 1.583, SD = .50$ and $M = 1.714, SD = .46$ for primary and secondary education, respectively). It seems, therefore, that teachers' reasons for participation in the program are congruent with their expectations. It also seems that their main concern has to do mostly with the improvement of their teaching practice rather than with their personal development and growth.

Teaching competence for management of cultural diversity

Interestingly enough, when teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which they consider important some aspects of competence related to the management of cultural diversity in the classroom (see Table 6), they indicated in their responses to the Importance of Teaching Competence Scale that all aspects are rather significant or very significant. Thus, teachers of both genders and levels of education considered it rather important or very important for them to be educated or trained on issues concerning culturally different students' integration in school and society, to be sensitized and change so that they improve their communication with culturally different students as well as to develop critical skills in teaching, to acquire experience and knowledge not only the teachers themselves but the whole school including the children of the dominant group, to develop critical skills as far as the analysis and the design of educational material is concerned, and, finally, to acquire new skills for supporting the co-existence of students of a diverse cultural background in the classroom and for designing and implementing interventions in the culturally diverse classroom.

Significant differences were observed only between teachers of primary and secondary schools in the factor "development of skills concerning critical analysis and design of educational material" (Mann-Whitney $U = 449.500, p = .02$). Specifically, teachers of the secondary level ($M = 2.000, SD = .00$) considered the development of critical skills in so far as the analysis and the design of educational material is concerned more important than the teachers of primary education do ($M = 1.850, SD = .36$).

Table 6. Teachers' views regarding the importance of teaching competence for management of cultural diversity in the classroom: Means (and SD) per school level, and Mann-Whitney U test

	School level		U	p
	Primary N = 49	Secondary N = 35		
Composite variables	M (SD)	M (SD)		
1. Teachers' education and training on issues related to culturally different students' integration in school and society	1.97 (.17)	2.00 (.00)	542.500	ns
2. Teachers' sensitivity, attitude change, and improvement of communication skills with culturally different students and parents	1.95 (.23)	2.00 (.00)	542.500	ns
3. Teachers' acquisition of experience and knowledge	1.98 (.16)	1.91 (.30)	610.500	ns
4. Development of teachers' skills (critical analysis and design of educational material)	1.85 (.36)	2.00 (.00)	449.500	.02
5. Teachers' acquisition of new skills (support co-existence)	1.88 (.33)	1.93 (.25)	615.500	ns
6. Teachers' acquisition of intervention skills in the culturally diverse classroom	1.82 (.39)	1.90 (.30)	635.500	ns

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore what teachers of both the primary and secondary level of education perceive as "classroom cultural diversity". The results seem to confirm the two first hypotheses that teachers will be aware (a) of cultural diversity and the positive aspects of multiculturalism in schools, as well as (b) that they do not have the skills to deal with the culturally diverse classroom.

According to our data, it seems that teachers of both primary and secondary education are culturally aware and hold views that show respect and acceptance of cultural diversity in the classroom. They also show an understanding of the specific needs of the individual students. Specifically, according to our findings, teachers believe that cultural diversity in the classroom is an enriching experience for both the school and themselves and that it is important for the teachers to be educated or trained on issues concerning culturally different students' integration in school and society. They also indicated that they would like to be sensitized and improve their communication with culturally different students as well as to develop critical skills in teaching.

Moreover, they seem to believe that it is necessary, not only for themselves, but for the whole school, including the children of the dominant group, to acquire experience and knowledge as well as new skills for supporting the co-existence with students of a different cultural background in the classroom. They also seem to believe that the role of the teacher should be redefined and teachers need to develop critical skills as far as the analysis and the design of educational material is concerned. Finally, they indicated that teachers themselves are responsible for becoming culturally aware and they need their attitudes to be changed.

It could be argued, therefore, that contrary to older studies (Ασζούνη & Ανδροπούσου, 2001; Gougeon, 1993; Ψάλτη, 2000) that maintained that teachers hold rather negative views about the students who are of a different cultural background, participant teachers in this study seem to highly value cultural diversity in the classroom and not to reject new ideas. To what extent could we suggest that teachers' views tend to reflect the «progressive discourse produced by academia» (Dragonas et al., 1996, p. 21) which has become quite well known for the last 5-10 years and which values highly interculturalism?

Our findings suggest that the answer to this question is rather more complicated and that teachers' views of this kind reflect only the one pole of contradictions which have been recently discussed in the Greek educational system such as “acceptance and integration vs. assimilation” or “cultural homogenization vs. cultural differentiation or diversity”. It is reminded that the majority of the teachers of our sample indicated that students of a different cultural background should speak only Greek especially when they are at school. In accordance with other studies in Greece and in other countries (Γκρότοβος, 2002; Costa, 1997; Ψάλτη, 2000), it seems that a rather high percentage of teachers consider rather “problematic” the fact that students of a different cultural background speak another language; therefore, students have to “correct” this by assimilating linguistically to the dominant language.

A tendency towards correcting ongoing difficulties in the school is also demonstrated in our findings regarding the reasons teachers gave for their interest in participating in the program as well as their expectations from their participation in it. Specifically, it was found that the major reason teachers gave for participating in the program was their need to learn how to cope with difficulties which they have when dealing with students of a different cultural background. Moreover, one of their major expectations was to be helped with their activities in the classroom by getting practical (i.e., hands on) experience and guidelines in order to cope with educational problems they are faced with in the classroom and in relation to the students of a different cultural background.

It is implied, therefore, in the teachers' responses that there are “problems” with the students of a different cultural background which are mostly educational and need to be solved. As it was found within the context of the needs assessment which was carried out in the first stage of the program with the same sample of teachers (Sakka & Psalti, 2004), these problems have to do with the poor performance of the children of a different cultural background in most courses and especially those related to language as well as with their indifference for school work. Teachers came to the point to suggest that these problems have to do with the children's lack of skills which, in some cases, happen to be cognitive, and, also, to associate lack of knowledge

of the Greek language, not only to low performance in school, but to low performance in their occupational life as well (Κωνσταντινίδου & Μπίμπου, 2006; Σακκά & Ψάλτη, 2004). As a teacher said:

«Lots of children quit, they quit. Lots of children quit even in high school. There are many. Well, those who quit in high school are those who are not being helped at all by their parents... There are children who cannot even write their name.»

And he continues:

«In my class they (i.e., students) have to do both, a project and a written essay, I combine both. I can see, let's put it this way, their talent as well. I can see whether they are weak in written language and most of them have difficulties in writing, in even finding the information needed... Some of them are interested and they do it (i.e., project). Some others, however, don't even bother. I don't know why this happens.»

(Σακκά & Ψάλτη, 2004, p. 78).

We may conclude, then, that teachers seem to hold views that show respect and acceptance of students of a culturally different background in the classroom as well as an understanding of the specific needs of the individual students; at the same time they hold views which support assimilation with respect to speaking the Greek language. In accordance with previous studies in Greece (Ασκούνη, 1997; Ασκούνη & Ανδρούσου, 2001; Κωνσταντινίδου & Μπίμπου, 2006; Σακκά & Ψάλτη, 2004), teachers seem to hold rather conflicting views that show intolerance along with respect and tolerance.

According to several writers, conflicting and contradictory views are expected as they characterize modern attitudes towards cultural diversity (Ασκούνη, 1997; Ασκούνη & Ανδρούσου, 2001) or “modern racism” (McConahay, 1986). Moreover, according to Billig, Gondor, Edwards, Crane, Middleton, and Radley (1988), they are based on and/or reflect ideological dilemmas that exist in the broader society whereas, according to Wetherell and Potter (1992), they comprise argumentative and rhetorical resources available to the individual.

Another dilemma shown in the responses of the teachers who participated in the study concerns the relation between theory and practice. In accordance with previous studies (Ασκούνη & Ανδρούσου, 2001; Μάρκου, 1997), a significant number of teachers indicated that they cannot see any relation between the theory they have

been or will be exposed to on cultural diversity with their everyday practice in school. It is reminded that the majority of teachers of our sample agreed with the view that cultural awareness is irrelevant to specific everyday teaching practices. This finding suggests that their sensitization on issues concerning cultural diversity is not related to the content of the subjects they are teaching and it does not help them in their communication with culturally different students. Moreover, teachers from both the primary and secondary education repeatedly indicated that they expected to get, through their participation in the program, specific guidelines which would help them in their everyday work in the classroom, implying, thus, that the theoretical knowledge which they will get from their participation in the program will not be enough for their everyday practice in classroom.

It becomes evident from the above that teachers themselves indicate clearly what it has been repeatedly inferred in the literature but not thoroughly documented through empirical data. According to Μάρκου (1997), one of the reasons why teachers hesitate to participate in teacher training programs aiming at intercultural education is that they cannot see the significance of such an orientation for the educational practice, whereas according to Νικολάου (2000), teachers are called to cope with "otherness" without having realized themselves what "otherness" is all about. As Ανδρούσου and Μάγος (2001) suggest, the connection between theory and practice is the *terminus* in the sense that teachers are called to find the ways to develop in the classroom a context where the dialogue as well as the exchange and challenging of ideas are promoted. Teachers are further called to place themselves within this context.

The findings of this study seem to confirm only partly the third hypothesis about differences between (a) teachers of primary and secondary level of education as well as between (b) male and female teachers. According to our results, statistically significant differences were observed only in two cases. Teachers of secondary education considered the development of critical skills, in so far as the analysis and the design of educational material is concerned, more important than the teachers of primary education. Moreover, female agreed more than male teachers with the notion that cultural awareness is a necessary and useful resource for both teachers and students. Could we suggest that teachers of secondary education, as well as female teachers feel to be less prepared than the rest to cope with the multicultural classroom, valuing, thus, to a greater degree, cultural awareness and the acquisition of new skills?

This might be the case to some extent. As it was mentioned, until recently, all interventions aiming at teachers' multicultural training have been mostly addressed to primary school teachers, not only in Greece (Δαμανάκης, 1997; Μάρκου, 1997; Psalti, 2007; Σακκά & Ψάλλη, 2004) but in other countries as well (Gonzales & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Stevens, 2007). Moreover, it has been found that male,

more than female teachers, and especially those of the primary education, feel well prepared to teach children whose parents are return migrants from the former Soviet Union (Δαμανάκης, 1998; Ψάλτη, 2000). As Δαμανάκης (1998) and Ψάλτη (2000) suggest, this may be due to the fact that more men than women tend to attend teacher training seminars.

Besides, however, the above, one might argue that the differences observed in the present study are much fewer than those identified elsewhere. May this be due to changes in the attitudes of secondary education teachers, since the issue of educating the culturally different students is, more and more, becoming an issue of discussion in their schools? Or to what extent does lack of differences reflect stereotypes which teachers share (Becker, 1990; Gougeon, 1993; Ψάλτη, 2000)? These questions could become issues for further investigation in order to understand more thoroughly teachers' views on classroom cultural diversity.

Finally, it should be mentioned that a major limitation is that teachers participated voluntarily in the program in the context of which the data of the present study were gathered, and thus, they may be a highly motivated sample. Within this context, our results may have been influenced accordingly. Our finding, for example, that teachers hold positive attitudes towards the "other", is opposite to those of other studies (Ασκούνη & Ανδρούσου, 2001; Μάρζου, 1997; Ψάλτη, 2000), according to which teachers hold rather negative attitudes. Besides the differences due to influences by sampling methods and the locations in which research has been undertaken, this might reflect a variation in teachers' views over the years, as well.

Overall, however, the above results offer insight of how teachers of this particular group experience and reconstruct the social realities that they face. In this sense, we could suggest that, in future research, they are worth comparing with those of the general population of teachers.

Conclusions

What do the above findings tell us about the way teachers of the mainstream classroom understand the issue of cultural diversity and what seem to be the needs that are emerging?

According to our results teachers of the mainstream classroom want to be informed on issues related to cultural diversity and feel that this is their responsibility. At the same time, their main concern is to improve their everyday practice in the classroom when dealing with students of a different cultural background and find ways to help students to cope with their difficulties. Teachers of the mainstream classroom seem, therefore, to feel, as Gonzales (1993) has indicated, burdened with

the responsibility of educating students with whom they had no cultural contact before while at the same time they lack proper training. At the same time, they are burdened with the responsibility of fulfilling the curriculum requirements and keep the whole class going (Μάργου, 1997). It seems, therefore, there is the need for teacher training programs that will be addressed to the teachers of the mainstream classroom and will provide them with the necessary competences to work in multicultural classrooms.

Besides the above, our data also revealed the contradictions and the conflicting views of teachers. As it was mentioned, these views may reflect ideological dilemmas that exist in the broader society (Billig et al., 1988) or characterize modern attitudes towards cultural diversity (Ασκούνη, 1997; Ασκούνη & Ανδρούσου, 2001) or may reflect new racist attitudes towards the “other” (McConahay, 1986). It seems, therefore, that teacher training programs should take into consideration these conflicting views and provide the opportunity to the participant teachers to recognize and challenge them. As it has been mentioned elsewhere, lack of self-knowledge may limit teachers' ability to facilitate students' experiences in the classroom whereas self-realization and knowledge of one's own beliefs and ideas may lead to redefinition of the ways in which teachers view the realities of the minority groups, a process which will, eventually, allow them to develop new teaching strategies (Gonzales & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lucas & Schecter, 1992). Within this context, new approaches to teacher training in Greece and in other countries put emphasis to teachers' cultural awareness and their psychological empowerment so that they will be able to function effectively in a culturally diverse classroom (Adams, 1995; Arredonto, 1996; Psalti, 2007; Σακκά, 2004; Σακκά & Ψάλτη, 2004).

Finally, according to our data, and in accordance with previous research, teachers seem not to be able to connect theory and practice. It is reminded that, among others, the majority of teachers of our sample agreed with the view that cultural awareness is irrelevant to the content of the courses taught in the classroom as well as to the communication problems between teachers and minority students. It seems, therefore, that, on the one hand, there is the need for the curricula in both levels of education to be infused by the principles of intercultural education. On the other hand, there is the need for teacher training programs that will put emphasis on the connection between theory and practice and will help teachers to find their own ways in relating theory to the educational practice.

In the context of the above and taking into consideration that interculturalism is shown to be the goal of today's education in order to meet the needs of the contemporary (multicultural) Greek society, the present study, may, on the one hand, enrich existing knowledge on the needs of teachers within a multicultural classroom,

and on the other, it may offer insight for both the planning of educational intervention strategies aiming at the training of teachers as well as the satisfaction of their needs (Green, 1997; Pearce & Hallgarten, 2000).

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