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Academics and practitioners: Partners in generating knowledge or citizens of two different worlds? ☆

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Abstract

The research reported in this paper explores aspects of the relationship between academics and practitioners in the context of a professional development programme. It is illustrated by qualitative data from a case study of university teachers' and secondary teachers' experiences and perceptions of a university-led in-service training course in Greece. Three antithetical pairs: *theory versus practice*, *propositional versus procedural* and *knowledge producers versus knowledge translators* are used heuristically to guide data analysis and presentation, seen as constituting a continuum between two poles. It is indicated that rather than focusing on the 'gap' between academics and practitioners, the discussion should be about 'space' between the two groups, and that both should inhabit this space and work mutually its boundaries and its purpose, so that a vital partnership will emerge, which in turn can assist university-provided in-service training.
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1. Introduction

The question of whether academics and practitioners are partners in generating knowledge or citizens of two different words is one that is pertinent to all higher education systems. The debate reflects and links to aspects of the wider discourse about the teaching/research relationship (Badley, 2002; Brew, 2003; Deem & Lucas, 2006; Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Huberman, 1999; Kennedy, 2002; Robertson & Bond, 2001; Rowland, 2000),

with educators who see a marital relationship (Rowland, 2000), a holy alliance (Barnett, 2000a), a really useful link (Badley, 2002) between the two, and those who believe that what school teachers do is very much different from what researchers do (McIntyre, 1997).

The research presented in this paper attempts to shed light on the academic/practitioner relationship, its context and its occasions in the course of a professional development programme in Greece, with particular reference to the universities as in-service providers for school teachers. It seeks to unveil the dynamics of learning in the course of the sessions and endeavours to capture the ways in which different forms of knowledge interact. Its ultimate purpose is to contribute to the discussion regarding academics and practitioners as

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collaborators in producing, disseminating and using knowledge rather than as aliens and 'divorced' partners, a topic that has been very little explored in relation to the Greek context. In doing so, the study uses the experiences and perceptions of both academics (university teachers) and practitioners (school teachers) as they embarked on a university-led professional development course. It aspires to extract from the findings those practices that suitably adapted could pave the way for effective professional development in universities though strengthening the bond between professional teachers and various research communities.

2. University-led professional development programmes: notes on the context

A professional development programme for secondary school teachers organised by Greek universities provides the context for this study. The programme was one of the projects included in the framework of the Action: 'In-service Teachers' Training' of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. It was aimed at a small number of secondary teachers of different specialisations, the main purpose being to update their subject knowledge and professional skills while simultaneously informing them about developments and reforms in education. Its other purpose was more strategic in that it aimed to bring secondary schools and universities together (ΥΠΕΠΘ, 1997, 2000a).

The programme was implemented in two stages. The research reported in this paper focuses on the second stage of the programme's implementation entitled: 'Annual programme of in-service training for secondary teachers'. It started in December 2000, under the Third Community Support Framework, on an annual basis within the context of 21 university departments. Overall 736 subject teachers of different specialisations attended the programme. In particular, the study is located in two in-service training programmes organised for philologists based at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. These were the: 'In-service Training for Philologists' organised by the Department of Philology-Section of Classics, and 'Professional In-service Training for Philologists' organised by the Department of Philosophy and Education in co-operation with the History and Archaeology Department. This decision was made on the grounds of the characteristics of the settings. The programmes organised in the above settings, first, they were addressed to

teachers of the same subject, philologists; and second, they were organised by two departments which, although they train teachers of the same subject, were driven by different philosophies, therefore they allow instant comparisons between them. In addition, the decision to set the study in this context was made on the grounds that the researcher was familiar with both contexts and persons, as she had been an undergraduate student in these departments for 5 years. This allowed her ease of access, the ability to surmount any problems relating to the establishment of a meaningful rapport and the gaining of confidence.

The programme in the Philology Department offered 420 h of in-service training in Ancient Greek Philosophy, Tragedy, Rhetoric, Latin Literature, Latin Language, Modern Greek, and Teaching Methodology of Ancient and Modern Greek. Training in Information Technology (IT) was also offered to 30 experienced philologists from different parts of Greece. The latter had to attend all the courses offered. Ten university teachers were involved in teaching the above subject areas. The programme was addressed mainly to those teaching in upper secondary schools, the primary purpose being to up-date their subject knowledge in both Classical Languages. The participants in the programme, after being assessed through a written essay in one of the ten courses attended and taking examination in the IT course, were awarded a Certificate of In-service Training. The characterisation 'Excellent', 'Very Good' and 'Good' was written upon this, according to the teachers' performance (ΥΠΕΠΘ, 2000b).

In the Department of Philosophy and Education, the 420 h of in-service training were divided between teaching hours—305 h—and hours spent on private tutorials with teachers—105 h. The latter aimed at supporting them doing their final projects. The following subjects were taught: General History and History of Civilisation, Ancient and Modern Greek, Linguistics, Educational Theory and Research, Teaching Methodology of History, Greek Language, Ancient and Modern Greek Literature, Developments in the Socio-Cultural and Economic Context, as well as IT. Overall, 47 university teachers were involved in teaching 29 philologists who attended the programme (ΥΠΕΠΘ, 2000c). Again, the course was aimed at updating their subject knowledge, informing the teachers about educational theory, research and teaching methodologies, and making them aware of recent