

Chapter 71

E-Learning Training Courses on Multicultural Education: An Example from Greece

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the blended learning model is one of the most flexible and effective ways to organize teacher training courses since it combines contact learning and distance learning. Furthermore, differentiated instruction is the solution of Modern Didactics to the teachers' needs concerning their response to the challenges of the multicultural school. In this chapter, a teacher training seminar combining cultural diversity issues with e-learning methods is presented. The participant teachers were asked to use posters illustrating human and citizenship rights issues in order to create teaching scenarios promoting Multicultural Education. Thus, they were expected both to meet the challenges of differentiated instruction and to be familiar with e-learning approaches. The study points out the significance of the practice of education when developed within e-learning environments, a method which enables the production of collective practice-based knowledge. The authors' main aim is to highlight the importance of the usage of media tools in an e-learning training course.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers differ with regard to the learning patterns they adopt, the quality of their learning and their professional development. These elements, in turn,

are associated with the obvious and non-obvious learning activities teachers develop (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011). All the aspects mentioned above have advanced due to the integration of the Web into the education system. The reason is

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that this integration has caused a shift from centralised classroom-based education to distributed e-learning courses that can be taken anytime and anywhere (Alonso, López, Manrique & Viñes, 2005, p.234).

Teachers' beliefs, practices and attitudes, and the relationship between these factors are strongly related to the challenges teachers face at work today. With regard to the perspectives of good teaching, contemporary teachers are expected to keep up with developments related to their own skills, knowledge and pedagogy, as well as their students' learning readiness and diverse backgrounds (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011). As a result, teacher-training practices seem to have shifted from traditional, lecture-based procedures to active, self-regulated initiatives. In addition, teachers' pedagogic role demands the ability to differentiate their instruction, to apply student-centred learning approaches, to promote meta-cognitive regulative strategies for students, to design assignments, to coach project groups and to monitor and reflect on students' learning and thinking strategies (Bakkenes, Vermunt & Wubels, 2010). Moreover, due to the rapid development of computer science and the popularisation of the Internet, modern educational technology has enhanced education ability and efficiency, changing the traditional education model and the ways of acquiring knowledge (Palaiologou, 2006).

In this chapter, first, we provide some useful background on the educational framework in which our study was developed and implemented. Then we present the context of our study, give our perspective on the issue and support our position. Finally we refer to the conclusions of our study.

1. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The issue of teacher education and the training programmes the teachers follow during their studies in order to become effective in multi-

cultural classrooms, that is to be able to provide 'culturally responsive teaching' to their pupils (Gay & Howard, 2000), has been a core topic in international teaching literature (Banks, 2011). Along the same line, at the international level, especially during the last ten years, there has been an increasingly global focus on online and distance education programmes, as new innovative approaches in teacher multicultural education and training programmes.

Taking the above into consideration, the objective of this study is to set a framework for teacher-training, e-learning courses, focussing on issues of multicultural diversity. Specifically, during an e-learning, teacher-training course incorporated into a Multicultural Education project, teachers who participated were asked to create teaching scenarios in congruence with their specialisation. Posters about the issues of human and citizenship rights issues were used as an inspiring tool for the participants. The scenarios served as an arts-informed, narrative inquiry aimed at investigating the teachers' knowledge on how to exploit meaning-making resources as multicultural storytellers through media texts (Dimitriadou, Nari, & Palaiologou, 2012). In other words, story-telling was used both to inspire teachers and motivate diverse students as learners in order to maximize the potential of their critical thinking and expression of their views.

It is worth mentioning here the main characteristics of e-learning procedures as training methods for individuals whose knowledge needs to remain current and competitive (Starr, 1998). Distance learning or e-learning or long distance programmes all constitute an extension of traditional teaching with the use of ICT, 'where learning opportunities can be provided in asynchronous, self-paced formats or in synchronous virtual classes' in keeping with the needs of those being educated (Zahner, 2002, p.12; Keegan, 2001). Thus, what is achieved is the dispensa-

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