

## ***Report for the Pestalozzi short seminar «Promoting Gender Equality in Schools. The role of headteachers». (Nicosia, 3-5 December 2009)***

The Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus has organized a short Pestalozzi Seminar (CoE 2009 1203-1205 Cyprus) entitled: «Promoting Gender Equality in Schools: The role of school headteachers». The seminar took place from 3-5 December 2009 at Cleopatra Hotel in Nicosia with the participation of 31 headteachers from Primary and Secondary Education. 20 headteachers were from Cyprus and 10 headteachers from Finland, Montenegro, Slovenia, Romania, Italy, Lithuania, Germany, Croatia, Greece and Slovakia. The languages used at the seminar were Greek and English.

The aim of the seminar was to empower headteachers in order to face everyday situations met at schools which are related to gender roles and equality. The seminar included: presentations by specialists on the sociology of gender and educational leadership, speeches by representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the European Union Office in Cyprus and the Ombudsman's Office, workshops and a school visit.

According to the seminar's post, participants were committed to act as multipliers to their school unit and to be actively involved in the implementation of the principles of gender equality in educational practice, in class, as well as in school level.

The particular training activity was assessed through a structured questionnaire which was given to the participants and, according to the results, it can be regarded as very successful.

### **SEMINAR BACKGROUND AND AIMS**

The main aim of the seminar was the enhancement of gender equality in schools with emphasis on the role of the headteacher. This was the first seminar of the Pedagogical Institute addressing to school headteachers. The content of the seminar focused on the role of the headteacher in the leadership and development of a school unit, as a medium of change regarding stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes related to gender, through the raise of awareness of the senior management team, the staff and the pupils.

In the schedule of the above mentioned seminar emphasis was given:

- To the familiarization of the participants with the terminology, the legal framework and the priorities of the state organizations and NGOs, local and international regarding the issue
- To the fostering of the issues regarding gender equality, and
- To the practices and skills that a headteacher/school leader should develop within a school unit,

so that the participants could reinforce essential changes in the micro-system of their school.

In the schedule of the seminar much time was given to the realization of workshops which aimed at the exchange of ideas between the participants regarding gender and the role of the headteacher in a school.

---

## **SEMINAR CONTENT**

The seminar was focused on the negotiation of the subject of promotion of gender equality and the role of the school Head teacher.

The first main speaker, Mrs. Efi Becou, arose the importance of social stereotypes and predetermined social roles that sub-consciously influence the head teacher's role and the teachers. The interfering role of the school and the effect of the school should not repeat the stereotypes. She was led to the conclusion that the promotion of equality is necessary for the quality and equality is the outcome of a democratic school. She also formulated proposals that concern the re-designing of the educational policy.

The second main speaker, Dr Andreas Kythreotis, negotiated the question whether there is a serious problem of gender inequality in the level of the school unit as an official and as an informal organisation. He also reported that the culture of the school with its 3 levels (unwritten expectations, values and tacit admissions) requires change. The Head teacher of the school unit has as the facilitator of change, the role and the responsibility for the change. The process of changing the culture, in a participative model of leadership with training and devotion of all in the success of the objectives of equality is considered as necessary.

Afterwards, the following presentations took place: Dr Athena Michailidou, acting director of the Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation(KEEA) presented the research results from a research considering gender equality in education, Mrs Maro Varnavidou, Secretary General of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, analyzed the role of the National Plan of Action of National Mechanism for women's rights, Mrs Eliza Savvidou, Head of the Equality Department Office of the Commissioner for Administration, presented the role of the Ombudsman in Cyprus regarding the management of complaints concerning social gender and Mrs Manouela Mavroudi, representative of the European Committee developed the policies of the European Union with emphasis on social gender and violence.

During the seminar the participants had also the opportunity to attend the presentations of the European participants who presented the way the educational environment of their countries handle the question of gender equality and they also visited a Public Primary School where they watched samples of good practice of applications considering gender equality in the school unit.

Finally, through workshops, the participants discussed the issue from the head teachers' point of view as the facilitators promoting change in the school unit regarding the relationship each headteacher develops with the managerial team, the personnel of the school, the students, the parents and other partners, as well as the management of incidents of violence related with gender inequality.

## **EVALUATION**

The participation of the participants during the conference, the discussions and the workshops was energetic and fruitful. The seminar gave the opportunity to the participants to work towards preparing an action plan regarding gender equality, which will be fully developed in due time and which will contribute in the growth of collective action inside the school unit. This work

---

was based on the exchange of ideas and experiences, as well as through personal reflection aiming at the analysis of needs and possibilities (SWOT Analysis) of the particular school units.

The evaluation of the seminar was initiated by means of a questionnaire which included 22 Linkert Scale Questions (scale 1-5) and 4 open questions. The questions referred to the various dimensions of the topic under investigation, as well as the whole conduct of the seminar. The results emerging from the evaluation of the seminar by the participants were very positive, particularly regarding the fulfilment of their expectations ( $x= 4,57$ ), the opportunities given for the exchange of ideas and experiences ( $x= 4,21$ ), as well as the growth of a critical attitude regarding the particular subject and the role of the head teacher ( $x= 4,42$ ). The development of a critical stance towards the issue of gender equality within school units was one of the basic aims of the seminar, since it relates to the headteachers' stereotypes regarding the issue. Participants asserted the thesis that the seminar helped them to critically perceive gender inequality in relation to school violence ( $x= 4,50$ ), in school level ( $x= 4,46$ ) and , generally in the educational system ( $x= 4,54$ ).

With regards to the conduct of the seminar participants' comments were particularly positive in relation to its context ( $x= 3,75$ ), the organisation of workshops ( $x= 3,75$ ) and the school visit ( $x= 3,83$ ).

Participants' suggestions for further improvement, as they were expressed in the open questions, referred to the increase of the seminars' duration to 5 days, the increase of the time in workshops and in school visit and the inclusion of more social activities.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The organizing committee hopes that the seminar will be a starting point for the development of a fruitful dialogue and the application of relevant actions in the participants' schools, as they will function as distributors of results by informing their school staff and developing co-operations with other school units in the framework of European programmes.

In addition, the content of the seminar can be included in the compulsory training programmes organized by the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus for school leaders in primary and secondary education, as well as in the non-compulsory seminars for classroom teachers.

---