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DOCUMENT 5**Albania's Kualida Program for the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers**

In the mid-1990s, Albania faced the challenge of providing professional development opportunities for teachers. An open and distance-learning program was developed using text resources and broadcast television.

Use Instrument 4 to discuss the existing context for CPD programs.

The Kualida Education Development Program is a pilot project for the in-service training of elementary teachers (Grades 5–8) in four districts of Albania, including Elbasan, Skodra, and Girokastra, encompassing rural as well as town communities. The piloted courses arose from a feasibility study of open learning in the Albanian context. The study was commissioned by the Albanian Education Development Project (AEDP) as part of the Ministry of Education's development strategy. In creating the Kualida Program, AEDP adapted an open and distance-teaching strategy using expertise from the Open University in the United Kingdom but based the program development entirely within Albania. The acronym "KUALIDA," which approximates the sound of the Albanian word for quality, derives from the linguistic written expression of Training (*Kualifikimi*), Distance, and Teachers (*Arsimitareve*).

Impetus for this three-month program arose from the urgent need for teacher retraining in Albania as described above. The course was designed for teachers of English, French, history, and geography—all curriculum areas identified by members of the National Pedagogic Institute and by teachers as most in need of in-service programs. The main focus of the written course materials, distributed to 815 teachers, was methodological issues. In particular the program responded to a need for a wider range of individual and group teaching strategies in Albanian classrooms.

The 815 teachers in the pilot project were assigned in groups of 25 to a subject-specific *ëformatorí* (advisory teacher), responsible for three tutorials at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. Formators visited teachers in their classrooms and assessed their notebooks according to set criteria. The course materials provided a common frame of reference both for teachers working together and for visiting formators. Although

formators have conducted impromptu visits in the past, the program team emphasized that visits must now be by teacher invitation and conducted on an equal platform between teacher and formator.

All formators were given extensive face-to-face training in open learning methodology, in the course materials, and in tutorial provision. They were also provided written guidance on their role and on planning and running tutorials. In tutorials, links between school activities and the course materials were explored: A vital opportunity for discussing new practice outside the pressures of the classroom. Members of the program team visited some tutorials to evaluate and review the program. The combination of countrywide training, written guidance, and tutorial monitoring formed an important component of quality assurance within the Kualida Program and comprised the first phase of the program's evaluation.

Key Themes

"A lot of work needs to be done. New steps are always difficult," (History formator, Skodra).

An external evaluation of the project, encompassing all the pilot districts, was carried out. The data that is drawn on here included a questionnaire to the 815 teachers in the project (95 percent return); interviews with the director of education, formators, and inspectors in the four pilot districts; meetings with teachers in three out of four of the pilot districts; observation of lessons in each district; and review of teacher notebooks and tutor-planning documents. Three key themes emerged related to the issues raised in the first part of this paper: theory and practice, forums for inquiry, and transforming frameworks.

Theory and Practice

"Under the old systems, students came into class, sat down, and stayed still. The teacher took attendance, checked homework, and recited or read the day's lesson. No questions. No independent thinking," (Science teacher, Shales).

The course is based on four short study texts, one for each subject area. The texts are designed around a common framework. A two-part introduction introduces distance education as a methodology. The first main section

focuses on methodologies that are new to Albanian teachers, such as teaching strategies (problem solving, brainstorming, and role playing), the use of questioning, and pupil assessment. The second section, Activities, provides teachers with exemplar material that may be adapted to their own teaching environments. Three 45-minute television programs, filmed in Albanian classrooms, complement the study texts and illustrate some of these teaching approaches.

These materials are innovative in two respects: The first is that they were written by academics from the National Pedagogic Institute and the University of Tirana in collaboration with practicing teachers in each of the four subject areas. The second is the way theory and practice are interlinked both within the study guide and in the program as a whole.

The teachers gave the course a good deal of importance. This was reflected in comments such as, “I worked for many hours to analyze the models,” and “Kualida has taken up a lot of teachers’ time.” Seventy-seven percent rated the course materials as very useful or quite useful. Sixty percent said it had been very useful or quite useful in improving classroom practice. The critical linkage between theory and practice was a constant theme during the interviews with regional directors and classroom teachers. The phrase “close to teachers” was frequently used to describe how the writing team’s knowledge of real classrooms had informed the materials. While the first month of the course allocated study hours solely to theory and tutorial time, from the second month onward, time for classroom-based activities ran parallel with time for text and tutorial study.

This approach has clearly had a major impact on the teachers in the project, with 53 percent evaluating the classroom activities as very or quite useful and 38 percent as useful. Some participants’ comments include, “Kualida is close to the teachers—the methodology is useful but the practical element invaluable”; “theoretically speaking the methods are contemporary and the teachers are keen, practically speaking the materials are helpful”; and “the combination of text and practical activities is very successful.”

Why are Albanian teachers interested in developing theoretical perspectives on classroom pedagogy? The interest may result from the inaccessibility of textbooks, media, or information technology; the teaching approach is all that is open to change. Furthermore, the experience of living under a totalitarian regime has also been a critical factor. “Kualida breaks the framework of the ex-regime”; “Kualida provides students with the opportunity to express independent thought and opinion...”; “...it

enables students to think freely for themselves”; “...teachers have gained more freedom, they are not forced into a framework”; and “...teachers feel more original.” Such commitment provides an interesting contrast with accounts of educational change in Eastern Germany. There, many teachers have easy access to resources and new textbooks. Nevertheless researchers found that:

Reforming teaching methods... is still on the back burner. This area is considered a deeply personal affair and indeed it hinges on a teacher’s personality and style to a much higher degree than content. Schools are aware of a new message from staff-development centres (sic) that the new state-of-the-art pedagogy is student centred (sic), but experimenting with new methods of instruction requires a personal involvement in reform, which many teachers lack. In addition, not all things can be changed at the same time, and instructional methods are an area where nobody at this point interferes or exerts pressure (Weiler, Mintrop, and Fuhrman 1996).

Undoubtedly the program itself has raised the level of dialogue and debate among Albanian teachers. The course materials combined with carefully chosen classroom activities and a dynamic support framework have enabled the successful interweaving of theory and practice and made the process more transparent for many teachers. Formators and inspectors frequently stressed that teachers had hitherto been familiar with new methodologies but lacked confidence to transfer them into practice.

Initially teachers thought that Kualida was not new to them. It was familiar theoretically in many ways, but in the long run the teachers were keen because of the practical aspects of the texts.

Teachers are good at method, but when it comes to application this is less easy.

Source:

Leach, Jenny. 1996. “Teacher Education in Change: An Intellectual Practice. Issues for Albania.” *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies* 1(2): 64–7.

Weiler, K., S. Mintrop, and J. Fuhrman. 1996. “Transformation, Teachers, Schools, and Universities in Eastern Germany.” *The Stratford Series on Education and Public Policy*. London: Falmer Press.