AN ANALYSIS OF EQUALITY, LEGISLATION, ATTITUDES AND VALUES IN EDUCATION: THE CASE OF GREECE

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Abstract – *This paper analyses teachers' attitudes, socio-educational values and educational legislation in Greece, using as starting-point the notion of equality. It seeks to investigate how teachers' attitudes toward equality relate to the Greek educational legislation and to socio-educational values. The basic hypothesis to be tested is that there are various conflicts between teachers' attitudes, socio-educational values and educational legislation regarding equality. Teachers try to resolve tensions created within the educational legislation when meeting different pupils' needs in class. This affects in turn the accommodation of socio-educational values into school practice. It is argued that investigating teachers' attitudes within the context of socio-educational values and educational policy can: (i) help the state clarify the aims of education in its legislation; and (ii) help teachers in applying a critical-reflective approach on their work.*

Introduction

What occurs within the classroom is mainly dependent upon academic-based types of learning abilities. Pupils' learning ability is shaped by a variety of factors – hereditary, socio-economic, cultural, developmental, as well as combinations of them. Each pupil also brings into the classroom a personal set of attitudes and expectations regarding the teacher's role and the role of his/her schoolmates. When dealing with pupils from unequal backgrounds, a teacher must decide how best to distribute his/her care. What model of educational equality guides his/her decision? Three models suggest themselves:

1. Equally, irrespective of pupils' abilities and disabilities (a strict egalitarian model);
2. Proportionally, according to the abilities of their pupils, that is, the higher the abilities, the higher the educational provisions (a liberal egalitarian model);
3. Inversely proportional to the abilities of their pupils, for example, the lower their abilities, the higher the educational provisions (a fair inegalitarian model) (Rawls, 1993).

While taking these models into consideration, there are further adverse factors that influence teachers' conception of equality models. The following are among the most significant:

- Mainstream versus special schoolteachers (Martlew & Hodson, 1991).
- Background factors such as: (i) teachers' age and experience (Soodak, Podell & Lehman, 1998); (ii) teachers' gender (Anderson & Anderson, 1995); (iii) school region (Cox & Jones, 1983); (iv) national context (Archontakis & Kyriakou, 1994); and (v) teachers' ethnicity (Chazan, 1994).
- Complexities of classroom life (Smith & Laslett, 1993).
- Use of integration, inclusion and grouping (Ireson & Hallam, 1999).
- Use of pupils' motivation methods (Covington & Omelich, 1985).

In this paper I argue that the factors influencing teachers' equality model are formed by the educational policy of the state and the values of the society to which teachers belong. Teachers facilitate the process of transforming social values into educational policy. Policy and values are related in such a way that a country's educational system will reflect the broader values of the nation. Ifanti (2007) refers to Lawton (1989) and argues that:

> 'Curriculum, in turn, is defined as a selection from the culture of a society, whereas the process of curriculum planning is not an automatic exercise; it always involves values.' (p. 72)

How then do teachers engage in the transformation procedure of social values into educational policy and which, in turn, affect the accommodation of educational equality in a society such as Greece? In order to answer this question, I argue that there is a need to: (i) examine what teachers believe about their pupils in an international and Greek context; (ii) analyse the conflict of socio-educational values in teachers' attitudes toward educational equality; (iii) describe the Greek compulsory educational legislation and examine the extent to which it manages to accommodate different educational equality models; and (iv) examine the accommodation of socio-educational values within the contemporary Greek society. What follows these analyses is that contemporary western societies – including the Greek society – are facing ideological impurity, a situation which affects the provision of education and raises concerns over educational equality. In the final section of the paper, I argue that teachers should develop a critical-reflective approach in their work in order to deal with ideological impurity. This critical-reflective approach may enable them to analyse the values, examine the degree of accuracy and appreciation, and consider alternatives when responding to issues around educational equality.

Teachers' attitudes toward their pupils

The school, as a congregation of pupils, reflects the section of society from which the pupils come. In an ordinary compulsory school pupils tend to be distributed according to their social origin, physical condition, abilities and school attainments. Being in the same school, all pupils are supposed to receive equal access and opportunity to the educational benefits offered by that school. Educational equality is set in practice on the condition that all pupils are treated according to their own needs. What then do teachers believe? Do teachers have positive attitudes toward pupils with difficulties or not?

In this paper the term 'attitude' is defined as teachers' tendency to evaluate something by agreeing or disagreeing to a statement or stating their preference to a given option. It acknowledges the evaluative dimension of attitudes and focuses on attitudes' cognitive element (Baker, 1992; Oppenheim, 1992; Richardson, 1996). On the other hand, the term 'pupils with difficulties' is based in this paper on teachers' interpretations of pupils with learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties in classrooms. This definition is individual class and teacher based and excludes pupils with severe learning difficulties. In the UK, pupils with severe learning difficulties are referred to as SLD (i.e., Severe Learning Difficulties) or PMLD (i.e., Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties) (Croll & Moses, 1985; Norwich, 1990).

Various research on teachers' attitudes toward pupils indicates that: (i) when teachers begin to believe that some of their pupils have 'difficulties' it becomes difficult for them to change their attitudes resulting in the creation of 'self fulfilling prophecies' (Babad, 1993); (ii) teachers may have good intentions concerning the education of pupils with difficulties, but they are rather pessimistic about the progress of such pupils depending on the nature and severity of the pupil's difficulty and they also feel that they are not adequately trained to work with them (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002); and (iii) teachers' training at both pre-service and post-service levels is a significant factor in the development of teachers' support for inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000).

Greek research revealed that the majority of teachers were concerned with this issue because they experienced it daily in the classrooms (Pirgiotakis, 1992). Though they were generally positive toward teaching both pupils with and without difficulties in the same class, they were sceptical about the practicality of such teaching mainly because of lack of appropriate training (Riga, 1997; Hopf & Hatzichristou, 1999; Poulou & Norwich, 2000). In that sense teacher training becomes crucial as a process of adopting patterns of thought and strategies for responding to pupils with difficulties (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007).

Conflict of socio-educational values in teachers' attitudes toward their pupils

Bearing in mind the conflicting nature of attitudes, especially teachers' attitudes, I want to explore the way differences between pupils are treated (Lunt & Norwich, 1999). Norwich (1996) argues that in a mainstream school classroom there are different pupils' needs that require accommodation by the teachers. These needs arise from individual needs (characteristics different from all other pupils), exceptional needs (characteristics shared by some pupils) and common needs (characteristics shared by all pupils). The main question is how to deal with these needs.

This question raises further questions concerning educators' attitudes (Lunt, 1997). First, there are pedagogic questions that deal with: (i) the type of curriculum offered to pupils (i.e., 'common curriculum question' – whether different pupils would have the same learning content or not); (ii) the identification of pupils (i.e., 'identification question' – whether and how to identify individual pupils as different or not and treat them accordingly); and (iii) the integration and inclusion of pupils (i.e., 'integration and inclusion question' – whether and to what extent different pupils would learn in regular classes or not) (Norwich, 1993). Educators not only have different opinions about each question, but their answers often conflict with one another. This becomes more explicit when the questions are transferred into a specific situation referring to different pupils. For the 'common curriculum question', the situation would be whether offering the same to all pupils leads to the promotion of equal opportunities. For the 'identification question', whether identifying pupils with difficulties and treating them accordingly will help them or not. For the 'integration and inclusion question', whether teaching pupils with difficulties in special or ordinary schools will be better for them.

Each question refers to educational and social values. These values are equality, individuality and a sense of belonging (Norwich, 1994). Equality presupposes that all pupils should be treated with no discrimination of any kind. Individuality presupposes that every pupil is a unique individual with special interests that need attention. A sense of belonging presupposes that each pupil should be a participating member of a valued social good, relating with other pupils in schools and classes (Osborne, 1997).

There appears to be a tension between these values, which raises another point (Lindsay & Thompson, 1997). Equality can be combined with a sense of belonging only when there is the sense that all belong equally in the same group. Is it possible to combine these values with individuality? Behind the notion of equality there is a notion of democratic ethos and principle, which seems difficult

to combine with the notion of individuality (Kim et al., 1994). According to Labaree (1986), this is the paradox of the modern educational system, exemplified by the US educational system: although schools were founded with the aim of promoting equality and democratic ideals, they also functioned in an environment 'dominated by markets and the ideology of possessive individualism' (p. 40).

Individualism is a characteristic that dominates the structure of modern western societies. It involves liberty, excellence and quality. Liberty is an individual's right to choose among different courses of action. Excellence and quality involve producing a high quality product, not necessarily at the lowest cost (Labaree, 1986).

It seems that the simultaneous fulfilment of these values is difficult. Husen (1975) has identified another kind of incompatibility between the identified values, especially between individualism and equality. On the one hand the notion of individualism includes liberty, which implies an individual choice concerning education and leads to different and unequal educational outcomes, while on the other hand the notion of equality involves reducing differences in educational outcomes.

Riley (1994) argues that excellence, quality and equality are interconnected and inseparable features of any good educational provision. Acknowledging a tension between them due to competing values and pressures from different social groups, Riley believes an adequate educational system must resolve the issues. According to Riley:

> '… through the exercise of their discretion – based on values and judgements – key actors in the system can influence quality and equality outcomes in favour of different groups in the system.' (p. 13)

Moreover it seems that, at a general level, the exclusive pursuit of one value violates or eliminates the other. Attention to balance is difficult due to multiple variables generating dilemmas (Bierlein, 1993). As Labaree (1986) argues, the balance required of US schools is one that balances conflicting but highly valued ideals promoting the good of society. Accommodating the demands of an egalitarian ideology (which, for example, values equality and a common good) with the demands of a capitalistic ideology (which values individualistic choice) is often unattainable. Cohen & Neufeld (1981) noted paradoxes concerning the provision of educational equality in a competitive society like that of the US:

> 'In the schools America seeks to foster equality – and individual Americans seek to realise it. But in the market, Americans seek to maintain or improve their economic and social position, thereby contributing to inequality even if they individually wish the reverse.' (p. 70)

We see that, once again, values pull against each other giving rise to genuine dilemmas.

Greek educational legislation concerning compulsory education

Greek education has followed a course parallel to that of other advanced and modern European countries with certain particularities and differences (Mouzelis, 1996). In the post-war period, with the exception of the junta interval (1967-1974), Greece enjoyed its most stable parliamentary democracy. It voted for a new constitution in 1975, signed the accession to the Common European Market in 1979 and saw some significant statutory reform measures, particularly the updating of the educational system. It is important to note that there has been a widespread demand by Greek society for education. This demand that has been adopted by all political parties, yet the states' response has not always been effective (Dimaras, 1978).

The basic statutes of the post-war period on education are the Legislative Decree 4379/1964 (Greek Ministry of Education, 1964), the Law 309/1976 (Greek Ministry of Education, 1976), the Law 1566/1985 (Greek Ministry of Education, 1985), as well as some other relative provisions, plus the separate statutes for special, technical-vocational, and higher education. Three statutes for general education followed and expanded the basic principles and directions of the educational reforms of 1917 and 1929. Both the 1917 and 1929 educational reforms were guided by *Ekpedeftikos Demotikismos*, a renovating linguo-educational movement that sought to end a chronic intellectual and educational debate about the language problem of Greece (Charis, 1976); and have, consequently, a distinctly progressive orientation, which is increasingly progressive from statute to statute, at a minimum level. These statutes, which have both common characteristics and divergences, were propounded and passed by three successive and politically different governments – Central Union (EK), New Democracy (ND) and Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) – one of which, ND, held a politically conservative ideology (Persianis, 1998).

The predominant features of the Greek compulsory educational policy regarding the treatment of pupils are the following:

- The Greek school education system has been centralised at the level of both planning and implementation. Curriculum contents and timetables, textbooks, and teaching methods, are totally controlled by the Ministry of Education in state schools and to a high degree in private schools (Eurydice, 2005).

- The development of pupils' creative and critical abilities and their appreciation of collective effort and co-operation, so that they can undertake initiatives and contribute through responsible participation to the social welfare and the development of their own country. Among the conditions toward this end are respect of each pupil's personality, and the fostering of the necessary pedagogic climate that favours the development of friendly interpersonal relationships among pupils (Greek Ministry of Education, 1985).

- Education for all pupils without discrimination. The Law 4379/1964 legislated the extension of compulsory education from six to nine years, a provision that was included in the Greek Constitution of 1975 and was implemented from 1976 onwards. Pre-primary education was also gradually extended, having become compulsory quite recently but only in theory, since no relevant measures have been implemented yet (Greek Ministry of Education, 2006).

- Education became more accessible for all pupils irrespective of their socio-economic status and geographic region. To achieve this end a series of provisions were enacted, such as: (i) free state education; (ii) gradual reduction of the number of pupils per class; (iii) establishment of new secondary schools all over the country; (iv) gradual incorporation of one-teacher elementary schools into larger units; (v) transportation to school, at state expense, of pupils residing a long distance; and (vi) abolition of the examinations from grade to grade within compulsory education (Greek Ministry of Education, 1985). Law 2525/1997 founded *oloimera* primary and secondary schools, that is, schools whose timetable was extended till afternoon and their curricula and teaching methods varied (Greek Ministry of Education, 1997). Despite these schools proving helpful to pupils and their parents, lack of funding has tended to be problematic.

- Reorganisation and advancement of special education for pupils who are physically, mentally or psychologically challenged in either separate schools or on a part-time basis in classes or groups within ordinary schools (Greek Ministry of Education, 1985, 1996). For pupils with mild learning difficulties in compulsory education, a form of teaching called 'reinforcing' was instituted in 1991 (Greek Ministry of Education, 1991). Pupils were expected to attend additional tutorials in some of the basic subjects, language, mathematics and science in primary and secondary schools. The responsibility for the 'reinforcing' and the tutorial groups was handed over to the teaching staff of the school. Remedial programmes were further developed and implemented in Greek education by the Law 2817/2000

(Greek Ministry of Education, 2000) which founded 'KDAY' (Child Services/Support Teams) to support and help pupils with special needs. It is worth noting that Law 3194/2003 first introduced a category of pupils with special needs as the ones 'with exceptional mental abilities and talents who need proper educational care and attention' (article 2, paragraph 7). This category was added to the rest of the categories of pupils with special needs described in the Law 2817/2000 (article 1, paragraph 2) regarding special education.

- The evaluation of pupils' progress in learning is estimated in school marks. It is here that the oscillations in educational policy have been more pronounced. In 1980, under a conservative government, the numerical marking was replaced in primary schools by the letters A, B, C, all of which ensure promotion (Greek Ministry of Education, 1981a). In the 1980s, under a socialist government, the marking with A, B, C was maintained, but was removed from the certificates that were then issued with only a 'he or she is promoted to next class' (Greek Ministry of Education, 1985). In 1991, under another conservative government, the numerical scale 0-10 was reinstated in the four higher classes; while in the first two classes the letters were raised to four: A, B, C, D (Ministry of Education, 1991). Finally, in 1995, under a socialist government, the marking was fixed as follows: (i) in the first two classes descriptive evaluation replaced all marking; (ii) in the middle classes marking was replaced by the letters A, B, C, D; and (iii) in the last two classes marking was replaced by the numbers 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, and 'Scarcely good' for those pupils receiving under 5, pupils who present various difficulties (Greek Ministry of Education, 1995). Marks on the certificates were only maintained in the last two classes. In lower secondary schools the marking scale remained unchanged – from 1 to 20 – over a long period. In primary schools evaluation does not refer only to the pupil's performance, but also to characteristics such as effort, interest, initiatives, creativity, co-operation, and respect for the rules of the school. Above all, the evaluation of primary school pupils should not lead to antagonism or be used for selective purposes. Pupils with difficulties within ordinary classes are not evaluated, nor given marks in those subjects where they have severe learning difficulties. In separate special education classes, ordinary schoolteachers in co-operation with special education teachers will evaluate pupils with difficulties.

- Evaluation also includes pupils' behaviour and exceptional achievements. In lower secondary education pupils should comply with the rules set by the school and with the principles of the social environment in which they

live. Accordingly, their 'conduct' is characterised as 'excellent', 'good' or 'reprehensible' and is marked on their certificates. If their behaviour deviates from the accepted one, the school may inflict a punishment upon them. The punishments assigned are: admonition, reproof, removal from class for one hour, expulsion from school for three to five days and change of school environment. On the other hand, pupils who have done particularly well in their school duties are awarded certain distinctions: progress distinction, progress prize and public praise. In primary education the labels for the 'conduct' of the pupils were removed from their certificates in 1981 (Greek Ministry of Education, 1981b). With regard to the pupils who come first in scholastic achievements, they are bestowed to be the flag-bearers and the flag-attendants (Greek Ministry of Education, 1986).

We may conclude that the Greek education system reflects in theory the principles of modern democracy and educational equality by providing a democratic setting for treating all pupils according to their own needs. Educational provisions include a mixture of strict egalitarian, liberal egalitarian and fair inegalitarian principles. Strict egalitarianism is expressed by providing all pupils access to education and by providing the same curriculum contents and textbooks; liberal egalitarianism is expressed by the use of awards and distinctions for talented pupils and the repetition of classes for pupils who do not perform well; and fair inegalitarianism is expressed by emphasising on pupils with difficulties and compensating for their difficulties.

Furthermore, we have seen that educational statutes or parts of the educational equality model were legislated by a series of governments of different political ideology. For example, the measure of the automatic promotion from class to class for all pupils in the compulsory educational stage was enacted by a conservative government. We have seen that this measure has had an interesting 'history' in the hands of the various Greek governments: the conservatives first introduced it (Greek Ministry of Education, 1981a); the socialists preserved and advanced it (Greek Ministry of Education, 1985); the conservatives then abolished it (Greek Ministry of Education, 1991); and the socialists never bothered to resurrect it (Greek Ministry of Education, 1995). It seems that those responsible for the Greek educational policy regarding pupils' evaluation have not always had clear views about the model of educational equality they wish to set in practice. The most plausible reason for this is that there is no continuity in the changes set by the educational reforms. The Greek governments introduced new legislation, yet some items contradicted each other or did not follow the previous governments' measures. There was no clear guide to determine where the focus should be placed.

Tensions between teachers' socio-educational attitudes and educational legislation

Teachers' attitudes toward educational equality – whether fair inegalitarian, strict egalitarian or liberal egalitarian – often face obstacles set by the Greek educational legislation. Teachers who espouse one of these models may have problems with the statutory provisions for marking, repetition of the same class and public acknowledgement for those who come first in scholastic achievement. These teachers may also have problems providing sufficient attention to pupils with exceptional mental abilities and talents (Greek Ministry of Education, 2003). On the other hand, teachers who espouse liberal egalitarianism tend to have problems with the statutory provisions for compensatory teaching of pupils with difficulties (Greek Ministry of Education, 1991, 2000). There are also more ambiguous provisions built into the statutes, such as fostering the 'necessary' pedagogic climate inside the classes (Greek Ministry of Education, 1985). It is not clear, for example, whether the use of competition and marking are among the constituents of the pedagogic climate. In such cases the teachers interpret the provisions as they wish if they think these contradict their attitudes.

Tensions between teachers' attitudes concerning socio-educational values

Teachers try to avoid tensions between attitudes in favour of values of equality and belonging, individualism, liberty, excellence and quality. Practically, teachers may do this in two ways:

1. By including all pupils in the same school and differentiating according to their needs (especially pupils with difficulties). Here, the value of liberty is most restricted, since it does not involve stakeholders' options, like parental school choice.
2. By separating pupils according to their abilities, thereby providing the same opportunities and expecting that the more able pupils will advance further. Here the value of belonging is most restricted, as it does not involve the inclusion and integration of pupils with difficulties.

Teachers' attitudes toward educational equality may combine the fair inegalitarian, strict egalitarian and liberal educational equality models in the following ways (Vouyoukas, 2002):

- By focusing on the needs of pupils with difficulties and eventually reducing pupils' differences. This is an expected combination of models of educational equality. Conceptually, we would expect to find associations between the fair inegalitarian and strict egalitarian educational equality models. However, the tension created when treating all pupils the same and focusing on pupils with difficulties remains.

- By stressing the liberal egalitarian principles with strict egalitarian principles. This combination of educational equality models favours the more able pupils, since it presupposes that all pupils should be treated the same, but at the same time the structure of the school should be hierarchical so the more able pupils can be motivated to achieve their potential.

Reconsidering educational equality within the Greek context

There has been a great deal of debate over the appropriateness of educational equality models in western states like the UK (Lunt & Norwich, 1999). This debate is reflected in the UK's educational legislation, which tries to combine and meet conflicting values (Lindsay & Thompson, 1997). The Greek educational legislation presented so far gives an example of a western state that includes conflicting strict egalitarian, liberal egalitarian and fair inegalitarian educational principles in its legislation. However, the Greek educational equality model has the peculiarity of being based not only on conflicting educational legislation, but also on an inconsistency between the compulsory educational legislation and the current views of Greek society. We have seen that the Greek compulsory educational system gives emphasis to egalitarian educational principles (nine-year compulsory education and use of the same curricula, textbooks and teaching approaches in all schools), whereas evidence suggests that contemporary Greek society tends to favour liberal egalitarianism with all its particulars (priority to individualistic values, emphasis on academic achievement and result, and increasing use of private schools) (Georgas, 1989; Katsikas & Kavadias, 1994; Gari & Kalantzi-Azizi, 1998; Hopf & Hatzichristou, 1999; Schwartz, 1999). There is greater diversification in UK schools and the US than in Greece; however, public opinion and parental pressure in Greece is progressively conducting an assessment of education primarily from pupils' academic results and there is pressure on teachers by parents for results starting from the compulsory educational stage (Pigiaki, 1999). Under these conditions, pupils' working hours exceed those of adults, and their right to leisure time is restricted.

Greek middle class parents place much emphasis on their children's education, since education is traditionally believed to be something that is 'socially beneficial' and the best means of developing self and family (Gari & Kalantzi-Azizi, 1998). Many aspiring parents consider the option of sending their children to private rather than state schools (Katsikas & Kavadias, 1994). The perceived connection between scholastic achievement and social elevation places pressure on both parents and pupils, with many Greek parents paying for private tuition or coaching in extra curricular subjects, such as foreign languages, piano, ballet and gymnastics (Hopf & Hatzichristou, 1999). In accordance with these trends, the majority of Greek teachers in the compulsory state schools may apply liberal egalitarian principles in their classroom practice, despite the fact that they may have opposing theoretical views.

What kind of values should be adopted in Greek compulsory educational legislation?

We have seen there exists an ongoing debate over the appropriateness and utilisation of social values within a society's educational system. Every society, according to its particularities and characteristics, adopts and practises certain values. As societies develop and change, the importance given to certain values changes as well. Greek society follows a similar trend. It was shown that contemporary Greek society tends to give more emphasis to liberal values such as individualism, liberty and excellence at the expense of egalitarian-collective values such as equality and belongingness (Georgas, 1989; Schwartz, 1999).

It is true that the growth of the middle class in many European countries (including Greece), and increased awareness of the importance of education for socio-economic success has raised the issue of perceiving parents as stakeholders and not simply as the recipients of education (Sliwka & Istance, 2006). Does this mean that educational legislation should adopt more liberal values because of parents' demands? This would imply, for example, that emphasis should be given to competition among pupils and schools, to academic achievement and to results. Interestingly, in Greece only a minority of parents are stakeholders of education, despite the emphasis they place on it.

Who then will decide on the utility of values in the educational legislation if the parents and various stakeholders do not participate? In Greece, according to Ifanti (1994):

> '… potential debate about government policies can come either through constitutional mechanisms of the parliamentary system or through specialised educational interest groups.' (p. 220)

It seems then that the Greek state through its Ministry of Education controls and generates the content and the organisation of the curriculum and decides on the values adopted. The specialised educational groups that interfere in this procedure are mainly teachers' unions, education officers or the Church, which do not always aim at the right direction.

Even if there was a wider participation of various interest groups and stakeholders regarding the formation of whatever social values were included in educational legislation, our question still remains: Is there a coherent set of values acceptable to all social classes, which can clarify attitudes and policy in education? Some might suggest that, at least in the compulsory educational stage, emphasis should be given to pupils with difficulties in order to help them compete with their more able classmates in the later stages of education. This would mean that society should reach a consensus on applying the values of fair inegalitarianism in the compulsory educational stage. Others might say that applying the values of fair inegalitarianism distorts equality values, since it neglects the more able and gifted pupils. The argument for increasing resources to talented pupils is based on the liberal educational assumption that these pupils will be able to make better use of what they get and, therefore, could be providing a strong argument for giving talented pupils all the educational resources they can use. A 'liberal-egalitarian' modern society gives opportunities to all of its members to promote them socially through meritocracy. Ideally, the notion of meritocracy is supposed to create an 'unequal but fair' society, in the sense that inequalities exist among people, but that all people are supposed to have a 'fair' chance to progress financially and socially. In practice, the application of meritocracy in society is problematic. On the one hand, meritocracy is a fair social mobility process because it promotes the highly able and motivated people regardless of class background and parental support. On the other hand, while meritocracy, defined in terms of ability and motivation, plays a part in determining individuals' social mobility and class destinations, the influence of class origin and parental support remains strong (Goldthorpe, 1996). In that sense, the educational systems of many western countries, like Greece, may lead to social inequality (Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006).

Both arguments have strong points and defend their values from their own point of view. According to Norwich (1996):

> '… there is no ideological purity in education. No single and exclusive value or principle, whether it be equality or individuality or social inclusion, can encompass what is commonly considered to be worthwhile. My stance is therefore for appreciating the benefits of ideological impurity and living hopefully with it.' (p. 100)

The need for critical-reflective teachers before the question of social values in education

Despite the ideological impurity in education, the state has an obligation to declare what kind of equality is adopted in its educational legislation. In the case of a synthesis of educational equality models, it is important to make sure that its components are as compatible as possible and inform teachers how they can apply the revised version into classroom practice.

One potential avenue is through reflection on teaching (Schön, 1987). Schön viewed teaching as an activity characterised by uncertainty, instability and value conflict. In this way, reflection helps teachers to analyse their attitudes, their prior knowledge and their experiences, and integrate them into teaching practice (Pigiaki, 1999). Research shows that reflective teachers tend to be more creative, something which becomes indispensable when implementing new educational measures into schools (Starida, 1995). Papoulia-Tzelepi (1996) argues that reflection on teaching can establish a conception of the teacher as a thinking, complex agent, rather than as an automation who simply puts the findings of research into classroom practice. Furthermore, as Everton, Galton & Pell (2000) argue, if research is to influence classroom practice, then it is vital that teachers are given extended opportunities for further professional study alongside those teachers who are already conducting research.

Looking at the international bibliography regarding reflection, we can identify three levels of reflection, with each one higher than the last (Yaxley, 1993; Harrison, Lawson & Wortley, 2005; Matsaggouras, 2005).

The first level is reflection on the technical aspects of teaching (application of technical skills, such as, practical management of classes and the production of tasks and resources). At this stage, reflection on teaching implies that teachers can reflect upon the effectiveness of their teaching strategies.

At the second level, reflection concerns the underlying assumptions and possible consequences of teachers' actions. Here, reflection focuses on how and why certain teachers' choices and actions are made and how these are influenced by institutional and social factors.

The third level is critical reflection with moral and ethical issues related to teaching, including issues concerning equality and justice. Reflection at this level argues for a teacher being a 'transformative intellectual' (Giroux, 1988) who critically reflects on how teaching contributes to a just and humane society.

Wellington & Austin (1996; cited in Day, 1999) propose five 'orientations' of teachers' reflective practice:

1. Immediate orientation focuses on the basic demands of teaching and aims at teacher's 'survival' in class.

2. Technical orientation focuses on applying teaching methodology and aims at efficient delivery of prescribed educational results.
3. Deliberative orientation focuses on discovering and assessing personal meaning in teaching and aims at autonomous teaching.
4. Dialectic orientation focuses on political and social issues regarding education and aims at critical questioning and revision.
5. Transpersonal orientation focuses on inner self development and aims at clarifying the multi-dimensional role of the teacher.

According to Liston & Zeichner (1990),

> 'When we reflect on our teaching, it is appropriate for questions about the students, the curriculum, the institutional setting, and the larger social role of schools to surface.' (p. 240)

These questions are concerned with teachers' attitudes. Critical reflection looks at the justification of these attitudes. As mentioned earlier, we do not argue for a coherent set of values absolutely free of ambiguity and contradiction. This may prove too difficult to accomplish. Instead, the goal is to analyse the values, to examine the degree of accuracy and consider alternatives.

Let us examine an example. Suppose that a state decides to give emphasis to the more able pupils in the compulsory education without neglecting the pupils with difficulties. The decision would become part of educational legislation and might be interpreted as a shift to a liberal model of educational equality. How will teachers respond? They might consider practising different teaching approaches. For example, ability grouping might be an option. This option may be analysed first on the grounds of teaching effectiveness *via*, for example, reflective questioning between teachers (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006). Secondly, teachers may reflect on why and how they practise ability grouping in their classes. Is it because of pressures from certain stakeholders, like parents? Which category of parents prefers ability grouping and why? Could it be that ability grouping does not always help the more able pupils, creating at the same time various constraints to pupils with difficulties? (Ireson & Hallam, 1999).

These questions lead to the third level of critical-reflective thinking. By reflecting on the previous issues, teachers can become aware that any teaching approach they choose, including ability grouping, has certain consequences regarding social justice and equality. So they need to be capable of examining their own situations, compare them with others, justify their options and be prepared to search for alternative and more justifiable methods should there be a need (Liston & Zeichner, 1990).

We can see that different levels of reflection introduce different perspectives on teachers' attitudes and values on certain issues. It should be noted, however, that for various reasons, not all teachers might be prepared to engage in all different levels of reflection. We have seen that the educational legislation and the values of the society where teachers live and work can prove to be serious obstacles for enabling critical reflection among teachers. According to Day (1999):

> '… no single form of reflection is necessarily 'better' than another … teachers must be involved in all during the course of a career. The different kinds of reflection may, therefore, be conceived as being parts of a continuum of reflective practice, rather than different levels in a hierarchy.' (p. 225)

The dilemma facing teachers is which level of reflection to choose and when. The example regarding the teaching methods illustrates the need for teachers to engage in critical reflection in order to reconsider their role in schools and their communities, and how to deal with the tensions created between attitudes, socio-educational values and educational legislation.

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