



Applied Political Neoliberalism to Greek Education throughout the Economic Crisis Era: Social Deregulation in the Policy of Rights

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The Greek educational legislation throughout 2008-2013 is the focal point of the present study. More specifically, special reference is being made to the political practice tied to the functional liberally-based educational structure while the economic constraints resulting in social inequalities and social classes' gap are also emphasized. Contrary to the 1981-2008 period, when lower social strata were given opportunities to access higher education, and consequently, improve their social and economic living standards, a new educational setting has emerged due to the economic crisis. This is based on the educational designs and legislative derivatives implemented throughout 2008-2013. As a result of the elaborately communicated vague political discourse, all educational grades have been gradually enfeebled. Furthermore, concentration is placed on the educational legislation emerging from the economic crisis period and the educational policy model underdevelopment is being interpreted based on the analysis of the related legislation tied to: a) school elimination/merging, b) instruction fields' elimination and c) technical fields' elimination (e.g. graphic designers, beauticians, plumbers etc.). The specific legislation points at the economic crisis educational policy and the overturning of the previously created opportunities for broader social mobility. Past gains have been torn down due to the economic measures and the subsequent merging resulting in the broadening of lower social strata. This new setting is characterized by

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limited social mobility and opportunities as well as privileges deprivation that reflect contemporary demands for social and political rights. By analyzing the educational legislation, the pertinent laws are perceived as commands of an economic fetish cancelling the social subjects' established rights.

Keywords: Economic crisis; educational legislation; social deregulation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is concerned with the Greek educational legislation throughout 2008-2013 with emphasis on the political practice of an operational structure of education in neoliberal terms [1]. The confinement of the educational policy is depicted in the economic paradigm in which social compositions of inequality are reinforced by the acute differentiation of social classes. The formulated educational conditions are conceptualized as a co-articulation of political intentions and abstract educational schemata which cancel the principles of the policy of rights.

Laws are perceived as declarations which contain the fetishism of the economic policy [2] by the analysis of the educational legislation throughout the economic crisis period. Concentration is placed on how guidelines about forming an educational model are dictated by the economic standpoints in which normative frameworks of the social subjects' rights are gradually deconstructed by its implementability.

The "political brutality" effects are emphasized as the educational policy management culture is naturalized and legalized through underpinning the public interest and the neutralization of political choices. In this framework, "realistic" educational models are schematized in which the guile of the educational policy [3] is traced in concealing social hierarchy, exclusion and marginalization tied to people from lower social strata.

The role of education is investigated within an established political situation in which the content of educational regulations are interrelated with social effects regarding the formation of social subjects within an educational setting of disfigurement or disorganization of education. In this framework, the elite are reinforced by the new theoretical dimensions of the educational policy. As a result, education is theoretically disengaged, as a concept, from democracy and social justice.

The operationalistic educational policy is correlated with the removal of humanism and

political moral through the institutionalization of acute social inequality. Consequently, new social experiences are formed among people, towards the ratification of rationality of economic choices in education.

New labor models and levels of authority and communication are formed within a political relativism in which education cannot apparently operate as the imposed policy desynchronizes and disorganizes its operational structures. At the same time, it is degenerated, as an institution, since it becomes part of the decaying setting. Society becomes more and more competitive as political choices correspond to figures and evaluation is appraised in economic terms of effectiveness. Thus, the issue is whether education, in this specific political paradigm, can readjust its objects, redefine knowledge, bring the discussion about the policy of rights back, and reconnect the technical-scientific advances with individual success-creativity and social harmonious co-existence.

2. THE ECONOMIC PARADIGM IN THE GREEK EDUCATIONAL POLICY THROUGHOUT 2008-2013

Mechanisms for shrinking public expenditures were activated by the economic crisis. These included reduced expenditures in all educational grades. In Primary and Secondary Education cost curtailments were implemented by the corresponding legislation which focused on abolishing basic educational structures. More specifically, Primary and Secondary Education schools and services were shrunk or abolished. At the same time, various educational courses were limited in Vocational and Technical Schools; that is, various fields of Secondary Technical Training were abolished.

At the same time, there has been an ongoing amount of expenditures done by families to support their offspring education. Teachers are economically enfeebled and deprived of any training or provision of supporting educational material resulting in their being passive observers of a deregulated and disorganized

educational condition because no concentration has been placed on the effects of this educational policy. The direct economic outcomes and the annual concentration on cost curtailment seems to be disorientating from the major issue which is emphasis on educational planning towards a more effective education that can support citizens' real economic development and prosperity.

The economic crisis has resulted in a continuous situation mainly affecting lower social strata; that is, the majority of the population that address state structures. Instead of being protected, these population groups are hard hit because of the deregulated education, schools merging or abolishing, enfeebled libraries and cost curtailments in all educational grades. The unprepared planning and uncontrollable policy about schools merging or abolishing points at poor effectiveness of schools while the educational work is disorganized and the social structures are ruptured.

Schools merging or abolishing is conducive to increasing the number of students per classroom resulting in further problems for teachers in a setting lacking opportunities structures both for them and their students. During the period prior to the economic crisis the limited number of students per classroom, the creative educational setting and the increased expenditures on education were conducive to the lower social strata's extending attendance in all educational grades. Greek families invested in education and received benefits from an evolving public school. At the same time, their increased income contributed to increased family expenditures on education in the form of tutorials and extra-curricular activities [4].

As regards Secondary Education, a larger cost curtailment was observed in Technical and Vocational Schools which are mostly attended by lower social strata. Technical fields were limited resulting in a smaller possibility of shaping an educational capital that would consist of both technical and general knowledge. Abolishing specific technical fields is irrational, especially when economic development is underpinned in terms of technical expertise. More specifically, reference is made to the Primary and Secondary Sector organization so that people acquire knowledge and skills that would enable them to work there. Education is presented as an isolated process and, consequently, questions arise about the educational capital on the basis of

which the Primary and Secondary Sector would develop. Instead, education in technical fields should be reinforced and laboratories should be established. This way, teachers specialized in certain fields could be recruited.

Furthermore, prior to the economic crisis, a form of social mobility [5] was observed and lower social strata people were particularly benefited from it as they were given the possibility to define themselves in different terms. In other words, they were able to benefit from opportunities structures conducive to their individual development. The political system benefited from the acknowledgement of the institutional operation of democracy while the social whole was reinforced by individuals of a higher educational capital.

The investment of former years in education does not seem effective now because during the economic crisis young people cannot benefit from a single-side economic system concentrating on cost curtailment and they are either unemployed or travel abroad job searching [6]. At the same time, young people being educated in different institutes of all grades are faced with an enfeebled education. In addition, their families cannot afford to further invest in education as they are entrapped in increased unemployment and economic uncertainty [7]. Thus, lower social strata mainly are marginalized even more and young people will result in a lower educational capital, limited professional opportunities and an explicit or implicit cancellation of their political rights to life and work.

Education becomes a typical process which is apparently ineffective and a nation-state's expectations aiming at reforming its structures are cancelled. The deprived right to an effective education leads to increased social inequality while social exclusion expands. Moreover, Greece becomes poorer in young people of high educational capital that could eventually prevent the negative economic conditions, social decay and political deregulation [8,9].

3. EXPANDED SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN DIRECT ASSOCIATION WITH THE CANCELLED POLICY OF RIGHTS

As foretold, in Primary Education, schools have been abolished in areas where there are a few students. These are actually schools in villages and small towns. This fact has been actually

silenced and underestimated within the highlighting of economic measures, reduction of salaries, clerks' being laid off and ongoing unemployment. School merging, particularly in small towns, has been silenced as the humanistic criteria for evaluating educational measures have been gradually lost. Human societies have been overshadowed by the economic paradigm and contact with vivid communities in rural areas has ceased given that schools were not merely perceived as educational institutions but rather as the reference point of an entire collectivity. The traditional buildings in villages and small towns are haunted, deprived of dynamics and without destination. They simply stand there to remind educational policy researchers of the limiting economic discourse to formulate policy as that of having effects on citizens' everyday life.

Small towns decay is responsible for the weak development policy in the Primary Sector. During the economic crisis another necessity emerged, that of people going back to small towns as an outlet to ongoing unemployment which is dominant among the young population. In this respect, people's concentration was placed on the Primary and Secondary Sector development. It seems that there is no connection among the different political choices or proposals between economy and education. Within a period of limited welfare policies, schools in small towns are shrunk or abolished while there are corresponding regulations for medical services, too. No motives to go back to a small town are actually created. Young people are not able to define their life and work, while insecurity and uncertainty are being generated because of the existing conditions. Teachers, students and the broader community are put to the test by the imposed educational policy which focuses exclusively on cost curtailment.

One of the main aspects of the educational policy (2008-2013) effects is that lower social strata have no access to any educational settings resulting in their gradual marginalization from choices and preferences for professional and social growth. A general despair condition seems to be shaped and this is the outcome of an educational planning poor in setting objectives about economic development and in reinforcing democracy and citizens' prosperity [10]. Lower social strata students' educational capital is confined within a setting lacking incentives to create interests while there is no focus on educational challenges. In other words, within a

globalized setting the number of marginalized people rises not only in terms of a nation-state but also in terms of an international setting. This is so because their educational capital is insufficient to help them shape their professional perspectives and set personal objectives aligned with the rapidly changing conditions in all levels. Lower social strata are gradually excluded and marginalized by the typical and limiting educational system. As a result, more citizens will be found living at the fringes of towns, structures and systems.

Therefore, the issue here is how to connect the educational capital with democracy [11]. Every citizen has a right to education and this must be protected as a functional prerequisite to organize their life. Given the established 9-year old obligatory education, which is divided into 6 years in Primary and 3 years in Secondary Education, the organization and operation of an effective educational system becomes imperative. This way, the right to education and obligatory education is meaningful and valued. Otherwise, it becomes a procedural situation that puts institutions and the political system under question, especially when there is no adherence to proper service organization for citizens to address to.

Thus, it seems that the democratic system is unable to operate and democracy is put to the test due to the general uncertainty and insecurity. At this point, the rise of extreme right political parties [12] cannot be regarded as accidental. In psychological terms, citizens are driven to desperate behaviors due to insecurity and uncertainty, namely committing suicides, which are the outcome of the socio-political pathology. Former neoliberal systems were based on an artificial redistribution of rights by reinforcing justice and democracy was explicitly or implicitly protected. Education was an ingredient of that model through educational capital distribution which was a significant supplementary resource to social rise, especially for lower social strata. In other words, education supported further social mobility and, consequently, it created more expectations to people who were the supporters of democratic institutions.

All in all, the educational policy that has been chosen is ineffective because economic development is not reinforced. No expectations are created by providing educational capital towards innovation and development. Teachers and students' possibilities are confined within an enfeebled educational system and they cannot

achieve personal development, express their preferences and choices that could be realized in a dynamic society.

Lower social strata are entrapped because they are gradually marginalized both on national and international levels due to their poor educational capital. The social structure is being ruptured because of the rising number of socially excluded people. As a consequence, they become gradually part of a larger group of people who define their identity based on reference points off the dominant culture. This issue has become a major concern for the political system and will be intensified in the years to come.

Young people with poor educational capital cannot benefit from opportunities structures and are placed in a setting characterized by unemployment while they are being deprived of the right to education and work. Education is not reinforced and the political system does not focus on young people's rights within an ageing population. The features of juvenile strength, imagination and desire for life are expressed neither in the social nor in the professional arena resulting in the shaping of a society lacking young people. Contradiction is being escalated, democracy is being disdained as a political system and extreme right policies are reinforced through naturalizing violence and delinquency [13] due to the ongoing social inequality and weak welfare policies.

4. DILEMMAS AND CONSIDERATIONS TO CONSTRUCT AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

The educational policy (2008-2013) constitution discourse has been generated on the basis of its structural organization and implementation. In this respect, any form of approaches brings meanings, choices and effects to the forefront and the dynamics of a policy is eventually determined by them. Today, the constitution and organization of education is being observed in the educational setting in direct reference to the political inclination in it. In other words, an organization and operation model has been presented by the educational policy in the form of proposals, which is conducive to forming social and space for people and in direct association with the economic paradigm.

An attempt is made here to present some proposals which are based on underpinning the

distorted recording of financial objectives as they have been set in the Memorandum and the educational policy. It has already been told that legislative regulations in the educational policy are based on a system of representations that clouds the political consequences and the issue of social classes. As a result, lower social strata are entrapped in a fruitless, ineffective and confining educational system.

The recently elected leftish government seems to be concerned with the issue of the educational system transformation or change. They may be able to manage the burdensome, internationally imposed economic terms in another way. The educational policy should not be piecemeal. Making good use of knowledge and power requires certain political forms in which the educational objectives should be established.

We are at a mature stage in which competitive discourse about education [14] is highlighted. Greece has been paralyzed by a number of political decisions and people, especially the young, are marginalized in the form of fragmentary political discourse. A conflicting setting is being formulated in which there is acute social inequality which is highlighted by the various social classes and is expressed on the basis of intensified differentiation of interests. Forms of political discourse have been constructed by the upper social strata and their meaning is associated with other people's exclusion; that is, lower social strata. Our proposals to the indissoluble rules of the political game are based on structural discourse highlighting opposition or resistance to the imposed policy about disorganizing education. A dialectical association of education with society is proposed to the economically-determined system with emphasis on the policy of rights. Ideas and discourse are composed into a different form of education beyond the impersonalized economic discourse.

As regards the practical issue of forming a flexible economic policy, theory and practice should be aligned by taking the economic crisis effects into consideration. Education should operate by taking the social element into consideration and by conceptualizing the abstract mapping of political discourse about educational transformations. Concentration should be placed on shaping a functional educational capital for broader population strata. This could be the answer to the request about organizing education to meet the economic

demands. Primary and Secondary Education should generate support structures for lower social strata students as their families are not able to provide further education either at schools or other extra-curricular settings.

Thus, the school setting has been formed to a place of exclusive educational capital, ideas and considerations transfer. The curriculum, the choice of subjects and the connection between theory and practice, acquires significance given the particular standpoint about the role of school to the socio-political construction of subjects. Multifaceted theories about knowledge will combine different cognitive fields. As foretold, certain priorities have been set to the cohesive framework about the operation of education: a) individual's satisfaction – right to life, b) integration into the labor market, c) social inequalities mitigation and d) democracy reinforcement. Various cognitive fields from various discourse-analytical scientific areas should be combined on the basis of these priorities.

In particular, the curriculum should include subjects conducive to reinforcing humanistic values such as Philosophy, Ethics and History of Civilization. It seems that knowledge that supports the formation of universal perceptions and identities based on a cohesive values framework is pivotal. Knowledge is perceived as a creator and reproducer of social processes towards the reinforcement of the social self and conducive to people's mutual collaboration. Social interpretations will lead to socio-political actions so that limitations and normalities, that have strengthened social inequalities so far, will be subverted by the young. The educational discourse is not the only one to change the conditions or lead to another paradigm. Yet, it could contribute to construct a new socio-political perception and dynamically gain a place among the forms of struggling competitive social discourse.

Focus on humanistic studies will also be conducive to reinforcing democracy by making a propos broader principles and standpoints that will represent and reflect the necessity for a more democratic social constitution. This way, social contracts will become meaningful and institutional interventions to reinforce lower social strata will be allowed. In economically-driven conditions of exclusion, knowledge will enhance the association between the individual and the democratic institutions through welfare policies

the content of which will be democratic verbal processes.

On the basis of this democratic recording school becomes a laboratory of democracy with individuals that acknowledge social issues and participate in collective problem-solving. The social setting composition is based on discourse with emphasis on the dynamic presence and integration into vindication fields. Humanist cognition will be connected to practical skills and techniques that will contribute to people's integration into the labor market.

Educational processes are determined and the signified is stabilized by the innovative organization of the economic field. This way, the educational discourse, through the curriculum and everyday life, will meet the requirement to form preferences and choices within a functional correlation of labor market and cognitive fields. It would seem that the individual would be fragmented between humanistic and practical knowledge. The combination of the two different educational structures to a unifying educational system is proposed. In this framework, the humanistic discourse does not compete with the technical one. On the contrary, it provides the possibility to construct personalities whereas the technical discourse provides the possibility to integrate into the labor market. In other words, people develop and define themselves in relation to others in a setting free of tension and conflict.

The afore-mentioned model points at an educational intervention which would be hegemonic to the Greek society being found in decay due to economic and political rigidity. Education addresses the young and the juvenile culture should be taken into consideration towards the construction of the educational setting. The educational discourse is significant to form fields of thinking conducive to socio-political practices to transcend crisis through the formation of symmetrical relations among education, economy and society.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to focus on the policy of 2008-2013 in order to highlight the conservative governments' policy of that period towards cost curtailments in education. Government choices were led by the economic paradigm and every economic regulation corresponded to the broader objective of further cost curtailment. During the Memorandum era

policies depended on European and international economic centers. The policy of rights against social inequalities was apparently cancelled by the Greek legislation about education.

Lower social strata are faced with unemployment or burdened with decreased income. Additionally, they are not protected against the cancellation of welfare policies. Education is entrapped among functionality-related dilemmas. Intervention to the deconstructing conditions through the educational capital that could eventually create new identities to social subjects-students and new interpretations about the social self-seem fruitless. A unifying discourse about success in the economic field seems to be formed whereas social division, exclusions and acute social inequality are not depicted in it.

The upper social strata seem to take advantage by the generalized deregulating conditions and invest in education to acquire knowledge that could enhance their hegemonic presence in the political, economic and social fields. Within ongoing uncertainty and insecurity, democracy is put to the test as exclusion and social inequality are maximized. Moreover, the political discourse does not include theoretical approaches about the state assuming the role of the protector.

The educational policy is developed as theory, methodology and practice in direct association with complex economic texts which are destabilizing to its structure and disorganizing to its objectives. As a result, in political terms, democracy is not reinforced and, in social terms, humanism is not supported by education.

Since the beginning of 2015 processes of cancelling economic arrangements and developing competitive discourse towards European and international centers have been observed. Perhaps new developments in education become meaningful by highlighting the democratic terms towards the reinforcement of political interventions in education on the basis of a reformed political discourse. Within a transitional period, education becomes weaker resulting in educational processes to be assumed by carriers not related to public schools, such as tutorials. The educational policy of the leftish government is of special interest to analysts of the corresponding field as political practices can be analyzed. They could probably form a new paradigm of an educational assumption in a different dialectical relation between education and society and which will

probably make policies about equality and democracy meaningful.

Education could operate as the basis on which a competitive contrasting discourse should be formed towards the domineering economic view and concentration should be placed on the individual and avoiding marginalization and isolation. Teachers could assume the role of intellectuals in order to form a theoretical discourse about an alternative form of development in which the economic paradigm effects, namely poverty, extreme right wing rise, diffused racism and the policy of rights cancellation should be taken into consideration. Teachers and their generated theoretical discourse are believed to contribute to shifting political interest, social, political and cultural effects of the economic crisis and, most important, canceling the policy of rights.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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