Hope for a different kind of pedagogy in Greece in times of crisis

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Abstract

This paper is based on a study conducted in 2014 that aimed to learn more about teachers' experiences of the recent political and economical changes in Greece and the new challenges that stem from these, as well as teachers' perceptions of the possibilities for the future. This study attempted to seek out possibilities of hope, particularly those possibilities which are articulated by teachers. Specifically, it attempted to explore how we can build on the strengths of the present education system in order to transform it and create a different system that will suit the current major societal changes and face the challenging circumstances. Throughout this study, it is not assumed that teachers have solutions, nor that they are solely responsible for reconstruction, but rather that they have a worthwhile contribution that may offer possibilities, and which should be heard. As a result, this research study endeavoured to give voice to teachers' concerns, anxieties, commitments, and hopes. This paper focuses on teachers' views about the possible role of the Greek education system in the reconstruction of society and political life in post-crisis Greece, and on teachers' hopes about the creation of an education system that will suit the current major societal changes and face the challenging new circumstances.

Keywords: economic crisis; education; pedagogy of hope

Introduction

The most recent global economic crisis began in 2008. As Gamble (2009) points out, we can judge this crisis as the product of deep flaws in the global governing philosophy that followed the crisis of the 1970s and underpinned the neo-liberal hegemony of the past 30 years. This crisis, due to the current globalised economy, influenced economies across the world. Ball, Maquire and Goodson (2012) explain that, in autumn 2008, the financial system appeared to be on the point of collapse, threatening potentially huge disruption to the international economy, to public order and to political stability. In Europe today, the financial crisis has evolved into the eurozone crisis, a multi-year <u>debt crisis</u> that has taken place in several eurozone member states since the end of 2009.

The countries hit by the crisis have responded by borrowing under harsh terms (with the backing of the European Central Bank and the European Commission), and by turning to austerity. After years of this crisis, it has become apparent that borrowing under such harsh terms was not a rational policy. The countries in crisis have been and are spending most of their money repaying their creditors instead of supporting their economies and expediting recovery (George, 2010). Moreover, the developments of recent years have shown that austerity measures do not work in practice, as they rely on the poor to pay for the mistakes of the rich (Blyth, 2013, p. 10).

It is worth pointing out that this crisis is not simply a financial crisis but a multiple and plural crisis. Beyond the concerns of finance, we should recognise that democracy is under siege and citizens are gradually being impoverished: 'inequality within and between countries and citizens has reached unsustainable levels in both developed and developing countries, poverty is spreading and

deepening, food and water scarcities are worsening, conflicts thrive in increasingly stressed societies, and catastrophic climate change looms over the whole' (George, 2010, p. 17).

These multiple crises can give rise to fear, but they can also be received positively, as an opening towards different solutions, providing the foundation for an alternative scenario, for remedies and for hope (George, 2010). The extreme events of the past several years should encourage us to carefully examine our own countries and to consider what would alter them for the better. There are both negative and positive possibilities. The combination of an alternative scenario to the recent socio-economic situation, and hope could ripen into reality if popular forces were to begin to organise into alliances with political weight and clear purpose (ibid).

In my research study, part of which I present in this paper, I uphold the view that it is not only necessary to explore thoroughly and insightfully the negative implications of the socio-economic crisis; it is also vital that we learn to recognise the core values of the current era and the crucial issues that may become opportunities, as well as driving forces, for reflection and change. That is why I choose to take a deliberate and systematic stance of hopefulness and I see this crisis as a one-of-a-kind opportunity to redefine our life goals. As I explain later I take up a position of standpoint epistemology; a standpoint of hope, over and against the dire and self-defeating discourse of despair which dominates the current context of Greek public life and try to embrace a different way of thinking about the crisis, and explore my data for traces, glimpses, and possibilities of hope.

In the aforementioned context, my research study focused on education, particularly the Greek education system and its need to respond to the

challenging and ever-changing circumstances of Greece's socio-economic crisis. The main objective of this study was to learn more about teachers' experiences of the recent political and economical changes in Greece and the new challenges that stem from these, as well as teachers' perceptions of the possibilities for the future. Thus, the aim of my research study was not simply to analyse and report but to seek out possibilities of hope, particularly those possibilities which are articulated by teachers. Throughout my research project, I did not assume that teachers have solutions, nor that they are solely responsible for reconstruction, but rather that they have a worthwhile contribution that may offer possibilities, and which should be heard.

In this paper I focus on one of my research questions that deals with teachers' views about the possible role of the Greek education system in the reconstruction of society and political life in post-crisis Greece, and with teachers' hopes about the creation of an education system that will suit the current major societal changes and face the challenging new circumstances. If, as Giroux (2004) argues, education always presupposes a vision for the future, in this paper I focus on today's vision for the future articulated by some teachers in Greece.

The paper consists of six parts. In the first part, the introduction, I refer to the rationale and the context of the study. In part two, I briefly present the conceptual-theoretical framework of my study. In the third part I integrate relevant literature and theoretical insights on the role of education in times of crisis. In part four, I discuss the ontological and epistemological assumptions of my study, and I describe the methodology that I used for my empirical work. In the fifth part, I continue by discussing teachers' views on a different kind of pedagogy in Greece. Lastly, in part six, I concisely summarise my conclusions.

Conceptual-Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, my study was underpinned by an approach built on the concept of hope. Hope, as Halpin (2003) suggests, has a creative role in encouraging the development of imaginative solutions to difficulties that give the impression of being uncontrollable – and it can be a vital resource and a theoretical tool for education. The philosophy of hope is a promising theoretical approach that has the potential to become a productive conceptual tool (te Riele, 2010) for exploring a politics of possibility (Giroux, 2003) in education. Hence, entering the field of my research, I adopted hope as my main conceptual basis, the framework that informed my study, as well as a tool for exploring a politics of possibility in education (Giroux, 2003).

Within the social sciences, conceptions of hope have only recently gained significant attention. In education, they have been used in many variations, from 'hope theory' in psychology (Snyder, 2002) to social transformative pedagogy (Freire, 1994; McInerney, 2007) via pragmatist (Shade, 2006) and critical (Biesta, 2006; Giroux, 2003; Halpin, 2003) philosophy (te Riele, 2009). The concept of hope employed in my study is closer to the critical approach to hope that focuses on social transformation. I agree with the conceptualisation of hope proposed by Kitty te Riele (2009): that, for hope to be a practical and critical conceptual tool in the social sciences, it needs to be robust, attainable and sound. Hope should recognise the difficulties of the present situation before being able to come to an alternative positive vision; it should be located between wishing and planning, it should assume that the difficulties can be overcome, and it should be ethically evaluated (Biesta, 2006) and questioned in terms of its 'soundness'.

From Crisis to Change: The Role of Education

In the context of the current crisis, some politicians, policy makers and stakeholders consider education a necessary response. Education, it is argued, can develop human resources, provide skills, and make the nation state more globally competitive, thereby allowing it to overcome the effects of crisis more rapidly and with fewer side effects (Brown et al, 2008). This belief that education could play a critical role in lifting a nation out of the global crisis resulted in many governments from 2008 onwards attempting to reform their education systems in radical ways, with the aim of increasing efficiency and effectiveness (Van Damme, 2011), and the intention of addressing the challenges arising from the global economic crisis (Turner & Yolcu, 2014; Ball et al, 2012; Hargreaves et al, 2010).

This view of a more effective education may be seen as part of the 'pedagogisation' or 'educationalisation' of social problems that is so often encountered in contemporary literature. It usually refers to the phenomenon of an immoderate burden of social issues – that schools are expected to address – combined with a concomitant withdrawal of the state from policies that could responsibly solve those problems (Bridges, 2008). For example, effects of crisis such as increases in unemployment or poverty are addressed not as structural phenomena that result from the failures of capital in global economies, but are presented as the consequences of 'miseducation'; of the lack of a proper relationship between the outputs of schooling and the demands of the job market (Szkudlarek, 2014). As a consequence, the unemployed and the poor are perceived not as those who need income, but rather as those who need 'additional learning' (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 405); the education system is perceived as the institution which will solve this problem.

Education does have a very important role to play in changing the current precarious economic and political context, but it is not that which is described above. Drawing on Fielding & Moss (2011), I argue that education and schools are a necessary but 'not sufficient condition for a good society' (p. 36). We have to accept and recognise what education can and cannot achieve – and what must, therefore, be dealt with by other means (Ball, 2013). Schools must be sites where social problems such as social and economic inequalities are addressed, but not ones where they can be solved, as current thinking about social mobility naïvely seems to suggest (ibid). Schools cannot solve the problems of a society alone; they cannot 'solve the problems of a society unwilling to bear its burdens where they should properly be shouldered' (Noddings, 2005, p. 42). Schools must be part of a more general set of responses to social problems (Bell, 2013).

Moreover, it can be argued that schools are necessary for society, not only for training engineers or stonemasons, physicians or nurses, dentists or machinists, educators or mechanics, farmers or philosophers, but also as a means of empowering people to understand themselves as historical, political, social and cultural beings, and teaching them to comprehend the workings of society (Freire, 1994). If we want education to address some of the consequences of the crisis, we need first to understand that this crisis is not an accident along the path of progress of an economy that is fundamentally in good health (Hirtt, 2013, p. 116). This crisis is the symptom of a system that is profoundly 'sick'; it is a symptom – that is, the visible product – of the deep and turbulent contradictions of the capitalist economy (ibid).

If education is to address the structural, social and economic problems that led to the crisis, it cannot not be placed solely at the service of business. We have to question whether companies should be able to dictate, directly or indirectly,

what is taught in the classroom, and the implementation of goals and values which serve a neo-liberal ideology need to be opened up for debate, as it is precisely these issues which have led to the current crisis of inequality, poverty and lack of democracy (Canadell, 2013). Education policy has become *de-politised* and is now

> typically presented by politicians and policymakers as matters of technical efficiency rather than normative choices. As a consequence, their political nature, including the deep implication of these discourses with issues of socio-political power, is effectively backgrounded (Clarke, 2012, p. 298).

If education is to have an active role in overcoming the crisis, we need to think seriously about the definition of education, its meaning and purpose, and our own interpretation of knowledge and learning, and of the child and the school – that is, *repoliticise* it. We need to consider the fundamental values of education, its aims, and its content in the current historical, political and social era in which we live.

In order to rethink education in relation to our social needs and economic problems while keeping detached from 'uneducational' economic approaches, we must return to basics and seriously consider the purpose of education – what it means to be educated, what schools are for, and who should decide these things (Ball, 2013). Such a complex rethinking needs to move beyond the views of self-proclaimed 'experts', policy entrepreneurs and those with established interests (ibid). We need to embrace a more human-centered, more democratic approach to education, and hear what teachers, students and parents have to say about what education should be for, and what it might be, rather than what it has become (Coffield & Williamson, 2011).

To do this, we need to release the innovative potential of schools, teachers and communities, build and exploit a proper sense of 'democratic fellowship' (Fielding & Moss, 2011), and rebuild trust in students and teachers. We need to give teachers opportunities to speak, and develop the capabilities of students, parents and other local stakeholders to participate, to discuss, to challenge and critique (Ball, 2013). We need, as Evers and Kneyber (2016) argue, to 'flip the system', by placing teachers exactly where they need to be – at the steering wheel of educational systems worldwide. We also need to put students at the center, rather than treating them like 'products on an assembly line', and create schools that honour the individual strengths and abilities of both teachers and students (Nazareno, 2016). Moreover, we need to build a new democratic professionalism based on the fundamental values of social justice and democracy, with teachers' professional agency at its core (Stevenson & Gilliland, 2015).

Greece has entered a long period of challenging transition, during which the economic and humanitarian crisis is reshaping the way we think about our society and ourselves – and the role of education could not be more pivotal. Despite the vast number of studies that focus on the current crisis in Greece and its implications, little is known about what might be the role of education in addressing some of the devastating consequences of the socio-economic crisis. Indeed, we know little about what teachers, students and parents think and say about what education should be for in post-crisis Greece.

Most of the work that has been done concentrates on the impact of the Greek socio-economic crisis on health, and medical and primary care (e.g Economou et al 2014; Kentikelenis et al 2014; Mallianou & Sarafis, 2012; Ifanti et al 2013; Lionis & Petelos, 2013; Baranouski, 2014; Kondilis et al 2013), on the quality of life of Greek people (e.g Frangos et al 2012; Dimoschakis & Kouthouris,

2013; Economou et al 2011; Maltezou & Pomerou, 2013; Matsaganis, 2011), the subjective experiences of Greek people during the crisis (Chalari, 2014; Chalari, 2015), as well as on the implications for employment opportunities among Greek people, especially the young, and on the increased 'brain drain' as a result of unemployment (Papadopoulos, 2014; Pelliccia, 2013; Mokos, 2012; Labrianidis, 2011; Palmer, 2011). There are also studies on the effects of the socio-economic crisis on Greek entrepreneurship (Pantirma, 2012; Malli, 2014), and on schools and young people (Charamis & Kotsifakis, 2015; Greek Ombudsman for Children's Rights, 2013).

Perhaps, given the proximity of the event, it is still too early to speak of a lack of existing research. Nonetheless, my intention in undertaking the research reported here was to attempt to redress this lack. As Kneyber (2014) and Stevenson & Gilliland (2016) argue, the 'voices' of teachers, students and parents should be given a meaningful place in research. That is why, in my attempt to rethink education in relation to Greece's current social needs and economic problems, I chose one of the above three important 'voices' and gave sixteen teachers, through a series of qualitative interviews, the space to share their beliefs about what education encompasses, how they understand knowledge and learning, and about what the fundamental values of education should be in the midst of the Greek socio-economic crisis. I also gave them the opportunity to reflect on the possibilities for the future of Greek education.

Methodology

The core ontological assumption of my work is that social meaning is not fixed but fluid, and is involved in an ongoing process of creation and recreation, either to maintain or change it. My epistemological position is that we can only see the world through a specific lens, formed and developed in society. There are no facts about the world which are not, in some way, socially produced or

dependent upon social conventions. Theoretically, the hermeneutic/interpretive perspective and symbolic interactionism inform the methodology and the research process of my study.

Moreover, in my study, I chose to move away from an orthodox research report and follow epistemological perspectives informed by the standpoint theory (Collins, 2008). Standpoint research and its various underlying epistemologies may be understood simply as a move towards local, contextualised, situated knowledge that draws upon the viewpoints and experiences of subordinate groups, away from universalised, value-neutral knowledge. Standpoint epistemology provides ways in which researchers can think about questions, raise awareness, find new ways of knowing (Skeggs, 1994). Through this strategic stance, I intended to look for 'ways out' of the crisis by giving voice to teachers' concerns, anxieties, commitments and hopes.

My intention in undertaking my research was not to make generalisations but to attempt to shed light upon the perceptions and beliefs of some teachers and to produce possible explanations and arguments. I focus on the voices of teachers because they offer an important range of insights into the current restructuring and reform processes in education (Goodson, 2000). The nature of my research problem and my purpose suggests an emphasis on the investigation of ways in which individuals interpret their social world – a purpose that led me to select the methodology of qualitative research (Gillborn 2010).

As my area of study is relatively new, at the strategic level of my research design – in conformity with my epistemological and ontological perspectives – I chose to conduct individual interviews with a small number of teachers so as to approach my area in an open way and instigate in-depth conversations. Specifically, I chose semi-structured interviews with questions open enough to permit amplification and expansion by teachers, in order to better explore their

worldviews. This method is both enabling and limiting – a fact that I kept in mind in order to use it to its full effect (Rapley, 2001).

For this research study, I asked interviewees about relatively sensitive issues, some of which may have been 'politically incorrect' or with a stigma attached. I tried, therefore, to consider the many aspects of the interview context and to take into account variables concerning location, relationships and the assumptions brought into the process.

Accepting the imperatives of symbolic interactionism, I kept in mind that data obtained from interviews are determined by the specific local interactional context, which is produced in and through the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Rapley, 2001). Social actors present themselves differently in different settings. Thus, the setting in which an interview takes place is like a warehouse, full of available meanings which the interviewees draw on when giving their answers (Scott, 2012).

Furthermore, I strove to take into account the fact that all participants of an interview, including the interviewer, are engaged in the mutual construction of meaning (Mills, 2001), and work together to present themselves as certain types of people in relation to the topic of the interview and, reflexively, within the interview itself (Rapley, 2001). For this reason, I decided to view interviewees' statements as personalised accounts or versions, not as authentic reports of attitudes or perceptions, nor as genuine reflections of life outside of the interview context (Back, 2010).

For the study in question, in order to ensure access to a sufficient number of interviewees for the purposes of exploring my research questions, I employed the 'purposeful sample' technique (Patton, 2002). I started my fieldwork by

approaching several teachers who happened to be acquaintances of mine. With their help, I located four schools in Athens: two primary and two secondary schools which constituted suitable venues for my research study. The schools I chose for my study were typical inner-city schools; two were located in a neighbourhood of Athens (north of its historical centre), the population of which consists of working-class residents, immigrants but also of middle and upper middle-class residents, and contained large percentages of students from immigrant and working-class Greek families, and two were in a southern suburb of Athens the population of which consists mostly of middle class residents, and catered mostly to students from middle-class Greek families, with a small percentage of immigrant students.

I first made contact with their respective head teachers who, in turn, identified for me potential participants for my study from among their colleagues. They also provided me with names and contact details. I purposively sampled teachers from these schools on bases of gender and teaching experience (in years of teaching), and I finally chose sixteen participants (eight women and eight men) who had between them a considerable diversity of experience (Some of the teachers had worked in the Greek education system for around twenty-five years, others for around eight.)

In the question of ethical research, my thesis was guided by BERA – The Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) and The Statement of Ethical Practice of the British Sociological Association (2002). I chose these particular ethical guidelines because they seemed best suited to enable me to weigh up all aspects of the process of conducting educational research and to reach an ethically acceptable position in which my actions would be considered valid and reliable.

My dual role within the research constituted a particularly ethically sensitive aspect (Smyth & Holian, 2008). I was the researcher, but also a teacher myself. As researcher, my interest was in understanding and analysing the Greek education system and its need to respond to the challenging and changing circumstances of Greece's socio-economic crisis – and in evaluating Greek teachers' experiences of austerity within the school environment. As a teacher, my interest was in incorporating this knowledge into my own personal career, in order to enhance my professional teaching abilities and deepen my understanding of the situation. My dual role is sometimes obvious, for example in the conclusions where I speak both as a social scientist who conducted research with teachers and presents their views and beliefs, but also as a teacher who attempts to explore what we need in Greece today.

Teachers' Views on a Different Kind of Pedagogy in Greece

In many teachers' points of view, in the current historical, political and social era in which we live, education could surely play an important role in the reconstruction of Greek society, and many believe that it could certainly address some of the problems behind the crisis. However, the way individual schools function, their management and financing, the content of the curriculum and the textbooks, as well as, the overall learning system and its objectives, need to undergo serious change in order to meet the new challenges that have arisen in recent years.

<u>Changes to the management, financing and function of schools</u>

Specifically, as far as the ways in which schools function are concerned, teachers suggested that schools should have fewer students in the classrooms. They should also be open for fewer hours, especially in the warm months, and active and meaningful learning should replace rote learning.

> We need bigger schools, more classrooms, and fewer students in each class. We
> would be able to work better with fewer students in the classroom.
>
> (Helen)
>
> Our teaching methods should aim to encourage critical thinking and cooperation, and
> we need to teach democratic values and fair practices.
>
> (Litsa)

It is very important to the teachers that the national education system incorporate teaching methods which encourage the development of astute critical thinking skills, peer-to-peer cooperation, and which instil in students democratic values and the virtue of fair practice. In general, they believe that the learning system should become more flexible and adaptive to students' capabilities and interests, and that there should be vocational guidance and counselling for students.

> The learning system should be more flexible (…) you cannot do the same things with
> everyone (…) some students are at different levels, and they have different interests,
> so we should have the flexibility to change our programme to accommodate different
> students.
>
> (Alexandros)
>
> The education system should bring out the potential in every student. Some students
> may be good at Greek [language] or Maths, others at Art or Physical Education; we
> should give them the chance to bloom (...) We should try to support students in
> finding their talent and making it bloom; everyone has a talent for something, and we
> should value every kind of talent – not just the ones that relate to academic
> knowledge.
>
> (George)

The aforementioned teachers' views about what needs to be done in Greek schools align with what Fielding and Moss call 'the common school and the school of diversity'. That is: schools committed to 'a recognition of singularity, a resistance to working with pre-defined categories and outcomes, support for

the construction of identities and solidarities, and a desire to experiment in learning and other projects' (Ball, 2013, p. 29); schools committed to finding new ways of valuing diversity and building inspirational and reflective identities within a pedagogic community (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013).

Teachers also explained that the school year schedule should become more stable. If there were a fixed schedule from the beginning of the year, they reasoned, then both teachers and students would feel less uncertain and would find it easier to prepare their work. Instead, if the school schedule continues to change constantly because of the endless and unpredictable reforms during the school year, then teachers and students will continue to feel instability, anxiety and insecurity.

> We need a fixed schedule; we need to be aware of what our school programme will be from June – not find out at the last minute. If we know it from the beginning, we can prepare our work and our lesson plans. This year, I only found out which school I would be working at, what level of students I would be teaching, etc, a few days before the beginning of the school year. I couldn't prepare anything.
>
> (Anna)

A few teachers posited that an increase in the government's annual education budget was needed. The Greek education system, they explained, needed better buildings and libraries, better books, new technology and equipment, and more teaching staff.

> The government's annual budget for education needs to be increased. It has been reduced so much; we need more schools, more resources and more teachers.
>
> (Kostas)

> The state should give more money to the education sector. I don't think that this will happen anytime soon, even though some attempts are being made; maybe because of the upcoming elections[i]
>
> (Sofia)

> Last year the Ministry of Education decided to abolish some specialisations at the Technical Professional/Vocational Lyceum. They said that they [the specialisations] were dead-end subjects. In my opinion, if something is not working properly, you should not abolish it but try to improve it. These abolitions happen all the time, because of the repeated cuts to the annual budget. It has to change.
>
> (George)

Public education expenditure in Greece has always been particularly low compared to other EU countries (between 3-3.6% of GDP in the last two decades). In the last few years, spending on education has been reduced even more, placing Greece third from bottom in education spending in the European Union (Zambeta & Kolofousi, 2014). The many cuts to public education funding, according to the teachers, have caused serious problems and gravely hindered the ability of the Greek education system to function. The funding deficit has even led to the abolition of some specialisations at the Technical Professional/Vocational Lyceum and the teachers believe that this, along with many other problems, needs to be rectified.

Furthermore, teachers recommended that students should have more free time to play, get bored and become creative. For this to happen, they should not spend all their time at school, at 'frontistiria' (schools offering a form of private group tuition, designed especially for those students who plan on taking the national higher education entrance examinations, which are prevalent in Greece), or at language schools.

> The school system should be changed at all levels, from nursery school to secondary school (…) For example: in the all-day schools, where students stay till 16:15 in the afternoon, they should do their homework at school. Then, when they go back home, they can rest and do other activities, like play or chat with their parents. You can't

have students staying at school till 16:15, then doing homework, going to 'frontistiria', language schools etc. Kids need free time to play and get bored.

(Nikos)

The syllabus must change; there is no time to cover everything in it, and it is very stressful for us and for our students. It is too demanding, and this does not help students develop. Students need quality time with their family and friends, not just knowledge. If they spend all their time at school and then at the 'frontistiria', they lose the best years of their lives running around for no reason (…) The 'frontistiria' should be abolished; they cause families unnecessary expense, and they steal precious time from their students (…) In addition, I think that it is very important for teachers to attend training seminars.

(Amalia)

While students lose their precious free time to the 'frontistiria', their families lose large amounts of money. Private spending in the sector of shadow education ('frontistiria', lessons in foreign languages, art education and extra-curricular activities) is unusually high in Greece (3.3% of the average household budget) compared to in other EU countries (Zambeta, 2014). This 'shadow market' absorbs more than a billion euros yearly, and corresponds to 0.5% of Greece's 2010 GDP (Educational Policy Development Centre 2011, p. 473), at a cost to not only Greek families but also the Greek economy. According to the teachers, this happens because of the deficits in public spending on education and the problems that these deficits have caused.

Teachers also suggested that the education system should allocate more time for teachers and students to discuss school issues. They also recommended letting students take the initiative more, and further encouraging teamwork and promoting different values.

In teachers' opinions, Greece needs a fundamental shift from a system of education driven by economic and other necessities to one which gives priority to social and political necessities. This might also result in society turning away from scientism and economism and towards the recognition that education is, above all, a political and democratic issue (Ball, 2013).

Changes in the content of the curriculum and textbooks

As far as the curriculum and the textbooks are concerned, teachers argued that, although their content is better now than in previous years, they are still outdated, and are in need of review and change[i]. According to the teachers, the curriculum should become more independent from state control, and should aim to create free and well-rounded men and women, who will go on to become responsible citizens.

> I believe that the new books are much better than the old ones, but they are still a bit outdated (...) they should be updated; they need to be adapted to fit the current needs of Greek society.
>
> (Maria)

Teachers raised concerns that the textbooks, as well as the curriculum, did not include any content relating to contemporary issues; topics which could help students in their understanding of the economic crisis or the crisis of the Greek family today. Instead, they explained, the current books only dealt with issues of general knowledge. In the view of many teachers, the curriculum and the textbooks needed to be adapted to fit the new-found needs of Greek society and to give a new perspective – perhaps a sense of hope that Greece will overcome its problems.

> The textbooks and the curriculum did not foresee the economic crisis or the crises of Greek families (...) I think they should include texts about the current situation in Greece and – why not? – present a new perspective, a new sense of hope.
>
> (John)

Of course, we cannot assume that the content of the curriculum and the textbooks is the same as the content of the lesson (Brindle, 1996). Even in Greece, where the education system is highly centralised, teachers are able be active in responding to the content of the curriculum and textbooks (McCulloch, Helsby & Knight, 2000).

Changes to schools' learning systems and objectives

Moreover, teachers argued that the Greek education system should move away from the neo-liberal paradigm as soon as possible.

> Schools should be changed radically if we want them to act as a remedy for the crisis, but I don't know which government will do that, I don't know which government will dare to turn its back on the neo-liberal paradigm.
>
> (John)

Although, as mentioned in the literature review, the implementation of neo-liberal education policies has been opposed and delayed in Greece, politicians in recent years, in an attempt to 'treat' the socio-economic crisis, have passed emergency measures and educational reforms that accelerate the rate of neo-liberal change (Traianou, 2013). This, according to some teachers, has to change if we want to reconstruct Greek society and Greek political life.

According to many teachers, the fundamental values and objectives of education, and the purpose of the school system overall, constitute the most important elements of the education sector – and those which, if fostered, could

form a remedy to the crisis. Particularly, almost all the teachers agreed that it was imperative to consider the purpose of education, and change it in order to fit Greece's real social needs and economic problems.

In the view of the teachers interviewed, the purpose of education should be versatile. They believe that education should be about knowledge, language, identity, culture, socialisation and ethos but, mostly, that it should promote social development, cultivate respect, and teach students to be responsible and active citizens who participate in the wider social context, and are sensitive to environmental issues. It should produce perceptive individuals who can think, discover, hope and strive for a better future.

> School is a miniature society; it is like a government. Each classroom is a community, and the students have to comply with the norms of that society (…) I think that the most crucial purpose of education is to cultivate respect; respect for ourselves, as well as respect for others: our neighbours, our friends, our society in general (…) Students spend more time with their classmates and teachers than with their parents, so I think that one of the most serious responsibilities of the school is to teach students to be good citizens, to be interested in common welfare, and to respect each other.
>
> (Maria)

Most of the teachers suggested that the education system should encourage equality and promote human rights and democratic values. They also believed that it should teach students respect for others and themselves, solidarity, conciliation and peace, and promote an understanding of identity and diversity.

> The purpose of education is clearly to educate and nurture students, to teach them our national and cultural identity, to make them responsible and active citizens who can be decisive and express an opinion without fear, who respect others, show dignity and tolerance towards diversity (…) our schools have got many immigrant students, and we have to teach our students to live peacefully with them.
>
> (Nikos)

> Sterile knowledge will not change the world. We need informed individuals who think, who discover, who hope and who strive for a better future. That should be the purpose of education.

(Aris)

What teachers say here is that schools should become sites of, as Fielding and Moss (2011) call it, 'prefigurative practice'. Through their processes, the experiences they offer, and their expectations, schools should aim to prefigure, in microcosm, an equal, just and fulfilling society. Schools should become responsible for ensuring that they are sites of anti-racist, -sexist, -homophobic and -transphobic practice, and that they tackle bullying of all kinds and do not tolerate practices that exclude students with disabilities (Ball, 2013, pp. 31-32).

Teachers continued by suggesting that Greek education should aim to broaden students' horizons, help them build well-rounded personalities and characters, and learn how to behave. For most of the teachers interviewed, knowledge should come second after personality and character.

> We need to start by building students' characters, and then move on to knowledge; our students first need to learn how to behave, how to cooperate with other students. Then they can learn History, languages and Maths.

(Efie)

Some teachers expressed the view that, in order to fit Greece's real social needs and economic problems, the main objectives of the Greek education system needed to become more humanistic. The system should also aim to provide equal opportunities for all.

> Of course the system should change; we must change its objectives and aims. The objectives of the Greek education system should become humanistic, and they should

include developing children's self-esteem and their abilities to set and achieve appropriate goals, and their development towards their full potential.

(Dimitris)

Teachers' vision of a new education system for Greece involves a reworking of the relationship between education and opportunity, equity, and well-being (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). This vision could be enacted from the simple basic argument that education policy and the arrangements of schooling should be aimed at ensuring all children remain in the system, learning, flourishing and growing in self-esteem and confidence for as long as possible (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013).

Furthermore, teachers stated that the purpose of education in the current era of crisis should be to equip students with the basic principles and skills that they need to survive, flourish, and cope with the rapid social changes. Education should teach students how to learn, how to love and seek knowledge, how to behave, cooperate, and debate and, above all, how to be strong and prepared for any difficulties they may face in their life in the future.

> The purpose of education is to transfer to students the basic principles and skills that a person needs in order to survive and flourish.
>
> (Sofia)
>
> The purpose of education should be to make students happy, to teach them to pursue happiness, to be calm, to listen to their hearts and to follow their desires, their passions, their dreams.
>
> (Amalia)

Several teachers emphasised the importance of teaching students how to learn, how to express themselves, their emotions, how to manage their time, how to take care of their bodies, and how to behave. They also highlighted the need to

teach them to believe in their abilities, to fight for a better future, and to continue even if they fail.

> We have to teach students to listen to their emotions and teach them how to express them – this is very important. Academic knowledge is important too, but it comes second (…) social behaviour is, I think, key (…) Whenever I have the chance, I try to discuss different social issues with my students.
>
> (John)

In addition, what teachers believe that Greece needs today is an education system of hope, happiness, optimism and social renewal. One of the critical aims of the Greek education system should be the provision of hope; a hope that is not naïve or based on unrealistic goals, but rooted in an understanding of what is possible (Sawyer et al, 2007; Inglis, 2004).

> Optimism, self-confidence, to believe in their abilities, to continue even if they fail; to fight for a better future, to learn how to learn.
>
> (Litsa)
>
> We should try to inspire optimism for the future, positive thinking and hope.
>
> (Helen)

Teachers' belief about the importance of hope is congruent with my point of view about the need of an innovative pedagogy – a pedagogy of hope – in Greece which will fortify hope and give young people the wherewithal to act with competence, imagination and courage.

It is also very important for students to learn how to be good listeners and how to communicate with one another. This is something that, as Noddings (2003) maintains, creates and sustains democracy and hope, and is essential for ensuring a socially just education for all.

> How to learn, how to become good listeners, how to work in teams, to take the initiative, to manage their time properly.

(Anna)

Teachers argued that their role was very important in the transformation of the Greek education system, and considered that the quality of their teaching had a great impact on their students. Therefore, as they suggested, they should start by changing and improving themselves with training seminars, after which, the other changes would follow. As they stated, good teachers can transform a bad education system; hence, the government should focus its resources and efforts on improving teachers. The government should also seriously reconsider the criteria involved in becoming a teacher. A degree should not be the only criterion.

> If a teacher works in the best way they can, then they can transform a bad education system (…) of course, many things have to change – but first we should start with ourselves and see what WE can do to improve the situation.

(Amalia)

Finally, teachers argued that education could play an important role in addressing some of the problems behind the crisis, and in addressing some of the devastating consequences of the socio-economic crisis in Greece. They added, however, that education could not do everything on its own; the state should help.

> Schools cannot do everything alone, even if teachers have the best intentions; the state should help them.

(Maria)

Even if education clearly has a role to play in equipping future generations with the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to contribute to a more

sustainable future (Barth, 2015), it cannot solve all of society's problems on its own. Greek society should also be willing to bear its burdens and respond to its social problems (Bell, 2013; Noddings, 2005).

Conclusions

In Greece, in the last years we live in a reality that changes rapidly all the time, and we need more than ever to develop a more just, creative and sustainable democratic society. In this broader programme of social renewal, a different kind of pedagogy is needed, one that may lead to an education system able to serve the Greek people, tackle the problems of Greek society with sufficient breadth, and prepare young people for the future.

According to the teachers interviewed, one of the most important challenges for the Greek government and its policy makers is the organisation of an education system that will address the full implications of the recent political and economic changes in its policy and curriculum documentation. Such a system would meet the needs of teachers, learners, parents and the community (Bigelow, 2006), would inspire conciliation and peace and promote an understanding of identity and diversity, and would eventually construct a more tolerant conception of Greek national identity (Held, 2005; McKinnon, 2005; Tan, 2005).

Perhaps as Giroux (2004) suggests we should work towards an education system for 'dangerous times', which would continually change to meet the needs of a society in flux, forming an alternative vision of 'democratic education with its emphasis on social justice, respect for others, critical inquiry, equality, freedom, civic courage, and concern for the collective good' (p. 102). Perhaps we could aim for an open, democratic education, which would stimulate students to think critically, to question, to have a passion for

knowledge and a healthy curiosity; to feel the joy of creating, and the pleasure of risk (Freire, 1994).

All of these suggestions could be possible, in the view of the teachers, if education were to become detached from the distortions of measurement and comparison, converting its institutions 'from exam factories to communities of discovery' (Coffield & Williamson, 2011). By re-connecting education with the lives, hopes and aspirations of children and parents (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013), and by re-establishing local democratic control of education and educational planning in ways that recognise diversity and local needs, reconnecting schools to their communities in direct and practical ways, much could be achieved. The education system could, in this way, be transformed into a democratic system where teachers would be trusted to exercise their professional judgment, working not individually but collegially in response to the perceived needs of their pupils (Ball, 2013).

Additionally, schools could become both centres of civic responsibility and educative institutions (Ball, 2013) by stopping the passionless transmission of inert information, and choosing instead to study both the crucial problems faced by our culture and potential procedures for considering and dealing with them (Thomas, 2012). Students need to understand real-world problems and learn to act collectively in order to find solutions through innovation (Ball, 2013). This would require the design of a curriculum or, rather, a means for curriculum design, based on the position that knowledge awakens for both students and teachers only when it can be related to something serious (Coffield & Williamson, 2011).

Teachers' vision of a new education system for Greece also involves the provision of hope. Therefore, based on this vision, we could argue that the new

Greek education system should rest on a pedagogy of hope, involving both teachers and students, and clarifying both hopes for the future and the ownership of these hopes (te Riele, 2009). As Hicks (2014) explains, clarifying hopes for the future can enhance motivation in the present and instigate positive action for change. Students need to explore their own hopes and fears for the future and learn to work creatively with them. While teachers cannot bring about all this on their own, they can apply their agency through learnt hopefulness. 'Hope can be mediated – perhaps even taught – within the educational context via the adoption of cultures of learning that accentuate the positive rather than the negative' (Halpin, 2003, p. 27).

An education of hope and social renewal would also require a new kind of teacher. Most of the teachers interviewed stressed the fact that teachers themselves need to change. The role of the teacher is a very decisive and influential factor in social change (van Driel et al, 2001), and no radical change in any education system can be realised without the involvement of its teachers (Johnson & Hallgarten, 2002). As Fullan (2001) states, any attempted change in society is strongly hinged on education and on what teachers think and do about it (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988), and this is exactly what the teachers interviewed believe.

Based on teachers' responses, what we need in Greece today is a teacher who can integrate a global perspective into the curriculum and teach in ways that encourage cooperation, critical thinking and democratic values and practices; a teacher who can help students deal with prejudice and value diversity; a teacher who can best engage young people for active citizenship in a changing world (Down & Smyth, 2012; Whitty, 2002; Steiner, 1996). Greece needs a critical educator who is committed to human rights, actively seeks to keep informed,

uses a range of teaching styles, and encourages students to be active participants in the wider societal context (Kiwan, 2008; Bigelow, 2006).

Now more than ever, we need teachers who are not only creative and adventurous but also passionate and committed. We need teachers who are well informed about education and society, and about children and the different ways in which they develop, as well as being aware of their diverse needs and capabilities. We need teachers who can help students make connections between the abstract knowledge associated with subjects and their own experiences in everyday life; we need teachers who can develop self-esteem, and who have a commitment to justice and sustainable development; teachers who make judgments in relation to principles rather than in relation to performance indicators. We need teachers who listen to both students and parents and take them seriously (Ball, 2013). We need teachers who have confidence in their own abilities, as well as high morale, self-esteem, positive energy and the motivation to innovate and develop practices that improve learning (Johnson & Hallgarten, 2002).

The need for an education of hope and social renewal requires a move towards forms of a new kind of professionalism (Sachs, 2001). It calls for a democratic professionalism that seeks to build alliances and meaningful collaborations between teachers and other members of the school workforce, such as teaching assistants, as well as with external partners, including students, parents and members of the wider community (Ball, 2013; Thomas, 2012; Bangs & Frost, 2012; Whitty, 2006).

All of these suggestions are options and possibilities, and form an agenda for discussion and an exchange of views. They are not single-use solutions, nor would they solve all problems. 'Democracy is not a terminus; it is something

that will always need to be struggled towards and fought for. There are many risks and costs to be borne, and there will be failures and dead ends, but the risks of not struggling for educational change and democracy are greater' (Ball, 2013, p. 40).

To conclude, this paper based on teachers views asks for education to be recognised as a political and democratic issue, to be re-politicised, and for schools to turn into 'centres of civic responsibility'. However, it does not fully explore whether or indeed where teachers see space for this, or whether this is already happening somewhere. Teachers spoke hypothetically about what education should be, and they re-imagined the Greek education system without talking about the mechanisms that could lead to an education system able to serve Greek people, tackle the problems of Greek society, provide hope, and prepare young people for the future. What we need to explore now is whether the change in the purpose of education that teachers suggest is possible. The authors of the 2016 book *Reimagining the Purpose of Schools and Educational Organisations* detail the considerable challenge of re-imagining schools today somewhat pessimistically. Ultimately, they argue that we will have to re-imagine ourselves in order to re-imagine the purpose of schools (Montgomery, Karagianni, Androutsou, 2016).

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] These interviews were conducted in October 2014. The 'upcoming elections' that the teacher was referring to were scheduled for January 2015.
[2] The textbooks in question were published in 2006-2007.

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