

**Enhancing Students' Critical Awareness in a Second Chance School in  
Greece: Reality or Wishful Thinking?**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is about a case study investigating into a Second Chance School in Greece as an institution for raising students' social awareness along the principles of critical pedagogy. Through the prism of symbolic interactionism, students' and teachers' negotiated perspectives formulating school and classroom culture reveal that students' political and social empowerment is weak while regarding most social issues the Second Chance School under investigation simply follows the 'policy of equal distances' from every student's views. Moreover, by applying critical discourse analysis the study reveals how power relations operating in the school produce this relatively poor outcome.

## **1. Introduction**

Existing research in the realm of mainstream secondary education in Greece reveals a problematic situation. It is widely accepted by all educational stakeholders that the aim of teaching is transmission of knowledge while the development of critical thinking, necessary for knowledge generation, is undermined. This kind of education cannot be characterised as meaningful but rather as '*education of non-learning*' (Katsikas and Therianos, 2006).

Second Chance Schools (SCSs) in Greece were created under the auspices of the European Union with the aim to educate adults who dropped out from compulsory secondary education. According to policy, these schools operate without pre-specified curricula, use innovative teaching methods based on collaboration with the aim to render students active learners and critical thinkers along the principles of critical pedagogy. This paper is based on a research project that investigates whether an SCS promotes '*meaningful learning*' which is defined as comprising two vital components: namely collaborative pedagogy aiming at making students active learners and critical pedagogy aiming at empowering students so that they become critical thinkers. The aim of this paper focuses on the second component of meaningful learning, in other words it limits itself to investigating whether critical pedagogy is evident in the SCS under investigation.

## **2. Mainstream education culture in Greece**

Among many studies, Hopf and Xochelis (2001) and Konstantinou (2001), conclude that mainstream education in Greece is characterised by a non-critical traditional pedagogy which focuses on the transmission of knowledge and moral values in a rather conservative direction thus undermining the development of critical thinking through a pre-specified curriculum. As Coulby (2000) states, in Greece as in few other European countries, it is taken for granted that school curricula should be controlled by the state, so that Greek schools operate their curriculum through pre-specified textbooks.

According to Zambeta (2000, 2003, 2005), Greek curricula are steeped in preserving the national identity which is based on a national myth – the supposedly unperturbed continuation of ‘Greek-ness’ through the centuries within the framework of ‘Hellenic-Christian civilisation’. Additionally, they reflect an entrepreneurial culture, thus conveying the capitalist ideology and the social inequalities it entails as a natural fact of life (Zambeta, 2001). Consequently, centralised school curricula in Greece are saturated with capitalist ideology coupled with nationalist and religious values. This conservative triptych constitutes the hegemonic ideology in Greece under the norms of which students are socialised in school. It can, therefore, be argued that knowledge acquired in Greek education cannot not be considered as fostering critical ends since it accustoms students with social inequalities engendered by capitalism and traps them emotionally within the construction of the national and religious identity.

This type of education was characterised by Gramsci (1971) as ‘instruction’, which is something ‘wholly distinct from education’ since instruction converts students into ‘mechanical receivers’ of abstract notions (p. 35). This is what Freire (2006) calls the ‘banking’ concept of education which turns students into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by teachers (p. 72).

### **3. SCS and meaningful learning**

Following the proposal of the European Commission (1995) which is contained in the White Paper on Education and Training, the aim of which was to fight social exclusion, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (GMERA, 1997) established SCSs which were organized and operate through the Ministerial Decree (MD) 1003/22-07-03. According to the MD, SCSs offer accelerated compulsory education to people older than 18 years old who have dropped

out of ordinary compulsory secondary education. Students in SCSs can obtain a qualification equivalent to that obtained in mainstream education after just 18 months (two school years) of study.

According to the SCS guidelines published by the Institute for Lifelong Learning (IDEKE), knowledge generation should be based on the principles of student-centred pedagogy as well as those of critical pedagogy (IDEKE, 2003). Literacy constitutes the cornerstone of knowledge production in the SCS. According to IDEKE (2003) literacy is considered to be multidimensional and related to social institutions as well as individual's everyday practices. Emphasis is given to student-centred pedagogy as well as to critical literacy which not only makes individuals capable of participating in cultural, political and economic life in society but also enables them to change it. In other words being literate means politically emancipated in a broad and meaningful sense. It is evident that these guidelines seem to make space for a more progressive potential towards a more emancipating pedagogy that does not exist in mainstream education.

However, this emphasis on the enhancement of students' critical awareness in order that they will be able to intervene and change society (ibid) is not found in the accompanying Ministerial Decree. The MD sets as aims of the SCSs 'personal and social development' as well as 'improvement of students' employability'. Apparently, there is a mismatch between the school guidelines invoking critical pedagogy and the MD which has a distinct human capital flavour. Despite this incongruence the SCS context seems to be more favourable to a more progressive pedagogy than mainstream education and the central question is what the school does to enhance students' critical awareness and how it manages to ease the tension between formal policy and practice.

## **4. Research Strategy**

### 4.1 Methodology

The study is a synthesis of two constructionist perspectives, the micro-social and the macro-social one. From the micro-social constructionist perspective and within the framework of symbolic interactionism, school practice was researched along the conceptual lines developed by Blumer (1998) according to which, organisations as arrangements of people interlinked in their specific actions have to be

studied and explained in terms of the interpretations in which acting participants are engaged as they handle situations.

From the macro-social constructionist perspective teachers' and students' perceptions and actions were analysed through the socio-cognitive approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA) according to which, social actors involved in discourse do not only use their individual experiences and strategies but they also rely upon collective frames of perception, called social representations (Van Dijk, 2009).

#### 4.2 Data collection

The SCS under investigation is situated in a low/medium income area in Greece. A substantial part of its inhabitants are repatriated Greeks from Russia, Roma as well as families of foreign workers. It had 96 students at the beginning of the school year 2006-07, 40 male and 56 female, but in the meantime one male and two female students dropped out. 38 students were below 30 years old, 43 between 30 and 44 and the rest over 44 years old. 27 students were unemployed. Finally, 13 of the students were repatriated Greeks from Russia, 3 of foreign origin whereas only one was Roma. The teaching staff comprised 11 full time teachers originating from public mainstream education, and 2 part time teachers. Additionally, a psychologist as well as a career advisor worked part time.

Data used for the purposes of this paper were collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 students and 10 teachers and the head teacher as well as observation of 47 teaching sessions. Students are grouped according to age into two broad categories: the young ones up to 35 years old and the older ones. Teachers were selected with a view to fully covering the main literacies. Interviews were preceded by informal friendly talking and participants were interviewed twice. All interviews took place in the school and were recorded. For reasons of confidentiality pseudonyms are used in place of participants' real names. Questions asked were not fixed but they all focused on investigating students' and teachers' perceptions on various socio-political issues as well as on the extent to which these issues were part of school practice. The first series of interviews aimed at investigating the interviewees' level of critical awareness whereas the second one focused on actual pedagogy and school practice as well as on how it matched their conception of meaningful learning and the need for critical pedagogy.

Teaching and classroom culture were also observed and data was collected through '*informal observation*' in the form of in situ field notes which were introduced in an electronic archive as elaborate texts. The aim of observation was to find out what constituted school praxis and to what extent it mirrored the data taken from interviews. It should also be noted that interviews and observation took place interchangeably so that feedback could be used from one method of investigation to the other.

## **5. The Findings**

In this section the SCS will be approached from a symbolic interactionist perspective so that school praxis can be understood through the interpretations of teachers and students as acting participants at the micro-level, while at the macro-level through CDA trying to explain how school praxis at the SCS is formulated through power relations and hegemonic influence.

### 5.1 An interactionist view

According to Woods (1983), a symbolic interactionist approach to viewing schools is focusing on students' and teachers' perspectives, in other words on the frameworks within which they construct their realities. Perspectives derive from cultures and are linked to action through strategies under continuous negotiation between participants.

#### 5.1.1 Critical awareness and empowerment

##### *Critical awareness*

Not all students in the SCS are in a desperate situation from a financial point of view. Some of these students have jobs, others are unemployed while others are retired and some women are not interested in working. All of them, however, are disadvantaged from an educational point of view not only in labour market terms but also culturally.

Students' critical awareness in this study is investigated from two perspectives, namely their 'political consciousness and religious affiliations' as well as how they approach 'otherness' regarding gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity.

*- Political consciousness and religious affiliations*

Regarding **political consciousness** not only older students but also very young ones are conscious of the social class they belong to. Most of them recognise themselves as unprivileged while some say that they belong to the middle class. Almost all argue that society is unjust but some view it in a fatalistic way, as a natural fact of life. According to Marcuse (1964), society has the power to whittle down opposition to the status quo and silence the individual's critical power of reason by turning it into submission to the facts of life. Anna, a first-year student who is unemployed and supported by her family, says:

We cannot all be rich or poor. There's a kind of balance in society.

Along the same line Alexandros, a second-year student who is a self employed electrician, alleges:

It's not possible for all Greeks to be rich. It is just not possible.

Most students think that unemployment is a major problem. They blame politicians, who they completely mistrust, for this and for all bad things in society. Younger students like Alexandros detest politics and, as Dimitris and Panos, both unskilled workers in the first year of studies, say that they are not going to get involved as long as they live. Petros, an unemployed first-year student, states characteristically:

I'm looking for a job right now. I have no time for politics.

Older students, however, are of different view. Georgia, an older nurse in the second year of studies, has always been involved in politics, while Hara, a retired unskilled worker in the second year of studies who participated in trade unions, alleges:

Politics is not boring but they (politicians) make it seem so.

Nikolaos, an older bus driver, also a second-year student, along the same line argues:

One should be involved in politics. Some fought for our own good. You can't just say it's over now.

Younger students have no idea what globalisation is but older ones like Hara can feel its consequences:

I don't know exactly what it means but I feel that a few big companies will accumulate all wealth.

These responses from students suggest that older students have a higher level of political consciousness than younger ones interviewed in this study. This finding is not surprising, being something of a global phenomenon (Fahmy, 2006), but given the overt critical pedagogy focus in the SCS guidelines, students' perceptions suggest that even if critical pedagogy is enacted it does not impact on younger students. Political instability and ideological confrontations of the past not only in Greece but also worldwide have possibly contributed to enhancing older students' political awareness.

With very few exceptions the students in the SCS, and particularly the younger ones, expressed **religious affiliations** and beliefs. For instance, Dimitris makes the sign of cross every time he goes past a church and is furious against Pentecostals because, as he argues, they have falsified the Bible. Panos believes in miracles and Anastasios, an unskilled 29 year old worker in the first year of studies, still goes to Sunday school. For many students Orthodoxy is a structural element of 'Greekness' and, therefore, adherence to religion has a nationalist nuance. Petros supports:

A person useful to society would be her/him who has many children. You know, for Hellenism and Orthodoxy.

Most of them cannot even countenance the idea that their children could marry a person of different religion, especially a Muslim. On the other hand, however religious they may claim to be, most students have lost their trust in church as an



institution, disapprove of the priests' conduct, question their intentions and deem that the interests of church are intertwined with those of politicians. Panos says:

Some priests go with prostitutes..... I saw it on TV. Still, I believe in miracles. Religion is different from Church.

Hara claims:

The church has made a fortune. You have to pay in order to get married or be christened..... They had a piece of land in the centre of Athens. They wanted to build a big hotel there against the people's will to turn it into a park.

Finally Dimitris contends:

I trust neither the politicians nor the church. The only thing they really care about is making money...

The scepticism expressed by students regarding the clergy and politicians of bourgeois political parties is also a local variant of a global phenomenon (Djupe and Olson, 2007) constituting a potential field for a more critical and radical politicisation with the right curriculum and pedagogy.

When students were asked whether they have ever thought of taking action in order to change society, they all expressed pessimism and resignation. Dimitris even expressed fear:

If you go to a demonstration you might be characterised as troublemaker.

Anna, a first year student who is unemployed, believes that she shows her discontent to politicians when she votes against them and confesses:

I've never thought I could react in another way. I think it would be ineffective.

Nikolaos says:

We cannot react because they (politicians) have made us feel like that... disappointed, at home watching TV.

This is what Freire (2005) calls 'domestication' (of critical faculties through which individuals are 'manoeuvred by mass media' (p. 30, 31). In general, students, mostly younger ones, despite mistrust against politicians and the clergy live in apathy by accepting socio-political reality as a natural fact of life. They are trapped in inaction through a sense of futility of action against a hegemonic status quo. However low students' actual level of political consciousness might be and however reluctant students are to take action to change society, the SCS context despite its vagueness and complexity could open them paths to fight against fatalistic and distorted ways of viewing life.

- *Otherness*

Regarding **gender equality** younger male students regard gender roles rather as unequal. For instance Dimitris claims:

Men and women are equal as human beings, but women are weak by nature....As far as I know, it's the man who goes to work to support the family.....

Panos argues:

Big decisions are made by men .....I can't think of me staying at home and my wife going to work.

Even Anna thinks in a similar way:

We women have lost our nature. We think we can dominate men but a man has another role by nature and we should give in.

Christina, an older first-year student used to work but as soon as she got her first child she quit:

A mother's place is with her children. It's the best role for her....Man is for work.

Some students expressed counter views. For instance, Nikolaos and Sonia, a working couple, claim that sharing work at home is a nonnegotiable reality.

From what younger students say, it seems that they perceive gender roles and identities as fixed and determined by nature rather than flexible and socially constructed. Given that talking about gender equality in Greek society is no more a taboo matter the SCS could prove to be an ideal site for fighting against gender stereotypes through adopting the appropriate pedagogy.

Regarding **sexual orientation** everybody thinks that being gay is a choice. While younger students are negative towards homosexuality, older ones adopt a milder stance. Anna says:

I accept gay people but I wouldn't like my own children to be gay.

Panos claims:

I do not accept gays. It is not natural, since nature made men to match women.

Anastasios argues:

Since God made you to make love with a woman you don't have the right.... This is devil's work. Such marriages shouldn't be allowed.

On the other hand, Christina is more open:

Some people are particular and we should respect them...They've made their choices.

Given the conservative nature of Greek society, it is obvious that students and especially younger ones influenced by the prevailing social representations view sexuality under a conservative prism. This issue, however, is of high priority for critical pedagogy and the SCS could at least challenge students' stereotypical perceptions about sexual diversity.

Regarding **ethnicity**, stances do not vary considerably with age. Some younger students are open towards ethnic minorities but this is not the case with all of them.

Anna criticising discussions made at school regarding stereotypes related to ethnicity contends:

People accuse me for not liking gypsies, but they haven't experienced what I have. We live close to a gypsy camp for 35 years and I know better....They are human beings too but they cause problems.

Petros says:

I dislike Albanians and Turks. Many Albanians have got Greek nationality but in case of war against Turks they wouldn't fight on our side.

Although not all older students are open to ethnic diversity such a stance is rare among them. Sonia argues:

I don't mean they should be sent away, but there should be work for everyone. Greece was not ready to accept so many people.

Finally, Hara alleges:

I don't think foreign workers cause damage to the country. On the contrary, they have helped our economy.

In conclusion, what is most striking about students' levels of political consciousness and emancipation is the disappointment they feel concerning the political reality and their reluctance towards active involvement to change society. Most of them could be said to be in a state which Freire (2005) calls 'naïve transitivity' (p. 14), in other words in a state characterised, among others, by lack of interest in investigation, fragility of arguments and priority of polemics over dialogue. The situation becomes more alarming with younger students who see life from a

rather conservative perspective and adopt a relatively hostile stance towards diversity, suggesting that they have internalised the bourgeois notion of fixed identities (McLaren, 1995).

The central question is, however, what, if anything, the school does in order to transform students into critically thinking citizens and make them capable of acquiring what McLaren (ibid, p. 106) calls 'border identities', in other words of becoming individuals who challenge the inevitability of the familiar and accept diversity. From the data presented so far the SCS does not seem to have taken advantage of the existing guidelines, at least to a considerable extent, so as to enhance students' critical awareness.

### *Empowerment*

McLaren (2005) speaks of critical revolutionary pedagogy and alleges that teachers should become reflective practitioners whereas Giroux (1988) speaks of teachers as transformative intellectuals who should make 'the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical' (p. 127). In other words teachers should insert schooling directly into the political sphere and at the same time use forms of pedagogy that treat students as critical agents by giving them active voice in their learning experiences (ibid).

In the case of the SCS under investigation Spyros, a maths teacher, would not intentionally discuss in classroom anything other than maths or school issues because he does not think he could talk with students on an equal basis. Various comments are made by teachers on political and social matters like the case of Koralia, the science teacher, who told students that according to science the world was created through the big bang indirectly challenging the dominant religious view. Vasilis, another maths teacher, is not open to discussions like Antonis, a computer teacher, who does not mention delicate issues in classroom also because students do not like discussions and prefer practicing computers. Alkisti, a Greek language teacher, expressed a commonly held view that she should not impose her own views on her students, because she is not sure they are the right ones:

I insist they should never be absolute in viewing things. There's a lot of space between black and white.

She wants to emphasise volunteerism and the message she wants to give students is that they should move from 'I' to 'we'.

To Maya's view, who also teaches Greek language, a teacher should have her/his ideology but s/he should be open and flexible. She plans to talk about gender equality while she has already mentioned homosexuality within the context of stereotypes. She does not go deep into politics and she does not intend to speak against religion.

Pavlina, a sociology teacher, believes that a teacher's ideology becomes obvious from what he says in classroom. The main issue she deals with every year is stereotypes regarding ethnicity. As she confesses, she is deeply disappointed at students' reactions who demanded they stop dealing with stereotypes as this kind of knowledge did not match their conception of useful school knowledge:

We had very strong reactions. We shouldn't forget that they are of low cultural level. Most of them are very conservative and they clearly state that they are racists. It's very difficult to convince them.....Now they say they're bored.... Sometimes I wonder whether it's worth trying.

Pavlina is an atheist but she never discusses religion in classroom. However, she occasionally talks about politics and issues regarding sexual orientation. Last year she dared tell students that Alexander the Great was gay and faced students' hostility.

Maria, another sociology teacher, believes that in social sciences nothing is given and, thus, she is open to others' views. She has her own ideology but she does not try to impose it on students. She stresses:

I feel I'm a professional, so I shouldn't pass my own beliefs to students without mentioning all aspects an issue might have. My religious and political beliefs are my own business.

She argues that their school focuses on stereotypes concerning ethnicity because this is the main problem nowadays but she also makes reference to gender equality and sexual orientation. However, these issues, as she claims, are not of high importance. When she talks about politics and religion she tries to do it in a dialectic way and leave space for everybody's views. She claims that the school tries to socialise students but the situation is difficult:

I don't believe that within two single years we could see inactive and apolitical young students become fighting people.....We mention things but

maybe we should also be more active and mobilise them. Maybe we are disappointed too....

As we observe, students' empowerment is mainly in the hands of teachers who teach Social Studies and Greek language while other teachers might occasionally refer to some political or social issue. Relativism seems to be the main ideological line of the SCS with the only exception of stereotypes regarding ethnicity. This kind of pedagogy, however, does not challenge what McLaren calls the internalised bourgeois notion of fixed identities and does not introduce students to 'critical transitivity' (Freire, 2005, p.14), a state in which preconceived notions are rejected through dialogue and sound argumentation (ibid). As one could infer, students' empowerment is very weak in the SCS. Not only students but also teachers are disappointed and reluctant to take action in order to change society as the latter is characterised by an all-pervasive disappointment and no action. However, hope lies only in the hands of teachers who as transformative intellectuals should enhance students' critical awareness by speaking out against economic, political and social injustices and by creating the conditions which will encourage students to struggle against the existing status quo (Giroux, 1988).

## 5.2 A Critical View

According to Luke (1995), CDA views discourse in institutional life as a means for the naturalisation and disguise of asymmetric power relations for the production and distribution of symbolic and material resources.

### 5.2.1 Dominant discourses in the SCS

According to Foucault (1980), the establishment of power relations and the production of discourses of 'truth' are interconnected. In the case of this SCS power produces and is sustained at the same time by three dominant discourses which influence the critical aspect of meaningful learning: 'empowerment is not necessary', 'students are conservative' and 'no one should drop out' operate at the level of critical awareness.

*Empowerment is not necessary*

In section 5.1.1 it became obvious that students' level of critical awareness is low as well as that students' empowerment by the school is weak. As it will be shown teachers do not really believe that students need empowerment.

The head-teacher challenges the necessity of a school that drives students through more progressive paths:

We should try to make students more progressive if our society were progressive and looked ahead. But our society is extremely conservative and crypto-fascist regarding various social groups.....School shouldn't open doors but little windows....

It is true that the SCS under investigation tries to abolish students' stereotypical perceptions regarding ethnicity through the sociology and Greek language curriculum and this is probably what the head-teacher means by referring to the 'little windows' the school should open. However, this is relatively little considering students' low level of critical awareness and the scope the SCS context seems to offer for enhancing it even if the head-teacher and the teaching staff really believed in the need for critical pedagogy. The head-teacher further argues that free exchange of ideas is allowed in school but what is said depends absolutely on teachers' disposition. As she argues:

Moreover, teachers had been educated in a certain way and they also come from mainstream education....

By this statement she considers teachers as 'products' of a traditional education system and contests their ability and disposition to make students critical thinkers.

However, she does not seem very open minded either:

What I mean is that all ideas should be expressed, even those of marginal groups in society. For instance, I think homosexuality is not something bad. I would not mind if they talked about it in classroom.

The last sentence in this quote betrays lack of persistence in a consistent progressive pedagogy on the part of the head-teacher which is needed if students are to challenge their notions of fixed sexual identities. On the other hand, teachers think that it is not right to express their social and political stance to students and claim that one's ideology is obvious from the point of view he looks at things. If we accept this



allegation teachers should be very careful with what they say and do in classroom because their words and actions are bearers of ideology. During observation in classroom I became witness of two incidents which challenge teachers' awareness of this necessity. While Spyros, an open-minded person, was teaching geometry he asked a girl to draw something on the board. She joked:

Finally, I will become an architect

He answered:

Rather fashion designer, since you are a girl.

That moment Spyros gave a pro-sexist message to a group of conservative students.

While Maya, also an open minded teacher, was teaching, two boys came late into classroom from the toilets. All students started teasing them with sexual connotations and she made a joke:

You two should stop being friends.

Joking, however, can be as effective as talking seriously and what Maya told students that moment is that two boys in the toilet is something suspicious, a sign of homosexuality which in any case is bad. I do not mean what the two teachers said to be intentional, only that they are not totally free of stereotypes, no matter how progressive they might claim to be. Indeed, these two incidents reveal that critical pedagogy is not among their priorities.

Maria, on the other hand, expresses more conservative ideas. She thinks that gender equality is a fact in society and need not be discussed in classroom. When I told her that a female student thought that men should have a superior position in family she answered:

It's a matter of interpersonal relations. If she feels good like that then everything is settled. Things are of course different in case of violence.

However, by expressing this view Maria does not seem to share a belief in critical pedagogy since she overlooks that education, as Freire (2006) says, should liberate individuals who have internalised oppression as a natural fact of life by making them conscious of their situation and by encouraging them to take action.

Finally, Vasilis defends his view that students might not need to be empowered by drawing back on the fact that they are not financially disadvantaged:

Look, there's a view that people here are disadvantaged. This isn't exactly the case. They're not educated but they have families, build houses..... We shouldn't think they necessarily need empowerment.

Apparently, from what he says, Vasilis does not share an interest in critical pedagogy either, because he seems to overlook that financial robustness does not unavoidably mean critical consciousness.

The inconsistency between the SCS guidelines and the MD sets up inevitable tensions between formal policy and practice by limiting teachers' scope for action. On the other hand, the discourse in question reveals conservatism, latent or obvious and lack of belief in the need for critical pedagogy on the part of teachers. Freire (2006) believes that teachers have also been determined by a culture of domination. As a result they are 'afraid of freedom' (p. 158) and are reluctant to engage in humanising action (ibid). Teachers' conservative attitude has led to the policy of equal distances and respect for everyone's views, what Giroux (1988) calls 'pedagogy of normative pluralism' (p. 95). This kind of policy is against the principles of critical pedagogy which sees teachers as intellectuals capable of empowering students.

#### *Students are conservative*

This is also a dominant discourse among teachers. In section 5.1.1 it was made clear that students have conservative ideas that supposedly obstruct teachers' action towards offering them a more progressive education. The head-teacher is straightforward:

We shouldn't forget that students in this school belong to the most conservative groups of society.

Pavlina claims:

Many students are repatriated Greeks from Russia who are very religious. I would not intervene in matters of faith....I am sure that being straightforward on these issues wouldn't help. A student told me the other day that she was very conservative and that she was not going to change.

Finally Maya says:

I make some reference to gay people. But if I insist on that this would cause reactions.

From what the head-teacher and the two teachers say students' conservative ideology is the reason why the school chose the policy of equal distances regarding students' views. In fact, what they claim to be the reason for non-action is for critical pedagogy exactly the reason for immediate action.

*No one should drop out*

Students in the SCS are seen as disadvantaged because they do not possess compulsory education certificate. As they dropped out from compulsory education in the past this school offers them the second and last chance to graduate and obtain a certificate so that they can improve their working conditions and evade marginalisation. So, it is the aim of the school and constitutes a dominant discourse among teachers that no one should drop out. This is allegedly the main reason, if not the only one, why the school does not implement critical pedagogy and follows the policy of equal distances from everyone's views. The head-teacher states most clearly:

If the school wanted to promote the abolishment of all kinds of stereotypes as well as try to influence students' political views and this was made clear to students they would all drop out.

In conclusion power relations in the SCS operate in such a way that political and social empowerment is very weak. No doubt, the contradiction between the MD

for SCSs and the SCS guidelines makes teachers work in a blur context thus discouraging them from taking initiatives towards a more critical orientation. Additionally, teachers use students' reactions against teaching on stereotypes regarding ethnicity as an example to support their view that students are conservative and not willing to change their views. In fact, teachers are disciplined by students since the latter demand a change in curriculum. However, at the same time teachers do not seem to consider students' empowerment as necessary except in the case of stereotypes regarding ethnicity and this is the reason they give for not taking any further initiative to make students more sensitive to otherness and mobilise them towards taking action to change society. In this way critical pedagogy remains empty words in the school guidelines.

## **6. Discussion**

The SCS guidelines which emphasise the enhancement of students' critical awareness seem to make space for a more progressive potential towards a more emancipating pedagogy that does not exist in mainstream education. At the same time the MD, through which SCSs were created, sets as aims of the SCSs 'personal and social development' as well as 'improvement of students' employability'.

The mismatch between the school guidelines invoking critical pedagogy and the MD which has a distinct human capital flavour may limit the space the guidelines open for a more progressive schooling under capitalism. Still, the SCS context seems to be more favourable to a more progressive pedagogy than mainstream education and the aim of this paper has been to investigate what the school does to enhance students' critical awareness and how it manages to ease the tension between formal policy and practice.

In the case of the SCS under investigation, data analysis showed that with the only exception of fighting against stereotypes regarding ethnicity the school follows a policy of tolerance and equal distances from all views and ideological stances, what Giroux calls 'pedagogy of normative pluralism'. In this way the SCS falls well short of what the guidelines proclaim and the potential site they offer for critical pedagogy while the question is how this weak outcome is obtained.

Teachers and the head-teacher present the interesting justification for not implementing critical pedagogy that students are conservative and their reactionary

even up to the point of dropping out. However, data analysis showed that teachers do not really believe in the necessity for critical pedagogy and the enhancement of students' critical awareness. Teachers themselves in large measure remain bearers of prevailing social norms and consequently they are not in a position to make, as Giroux says, 'the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical'. Additionally, the conviction that school should not break the vicious circle of social conservatism, lest it should lead students to utopia, keeps students in a state of 'naïve transitivity', as Freire calls it.

At the same time, most students, massified through 'domestication' of their critical faculties by hegemonic culture, do not appear to sense an urge to change their life. Moreover, since mainstream education is the only kind of education they have known, this is also the kind of education they consider as valid and consequently the kind of education they expect and demand from the SCS. As a result, they appear to be happy with what they are offered.

However, as Giroux (1988, p.127) claims, 'schools are not neutral sites and teachers, as transformative intellectuals, cannot assume the posture of being neutral either'. This is even truer for an SCS which educates culturally disadvantaged adult students without pre-specified curricula thus offering ground for a more radical pedagogy notwithstanding the contradictions of the official policy and the limitations students' conservative viewing of society might set.

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