

Basic features of the educational policy in Greece: Discontinuity and Inconsistency

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the discontinuity and inconsistency, features that are dominant in the educational policy practice in Greece. The Basil Bernstein conceptual system is being adopted by using the concept of pedagogic device as a theoretical basis, as a system of related rules constituted by distributive rules, recontextualising rules (official and educational field) and evaluative rules. The educational field is an arena for confrontations and sometimes even heavy conflicts between social agents, trade unions, political parties. The educational policy's failure is, among others, the result of the lack of funding, the absence of consensus among the political actors, the ministry-centred character of exercising educational policy and the frequent changes, the absence of a fixed administrative structure, the unjustified changes in the timetables and schedules of schools. The only optimistic note in this hopeless framework is the ascertainment and acceptance of the problem.

Key Words: *educational policy, pedagogic device, consensus*

INTRODUCTION

The current crisis is based not only on the economic dimension, we do not have to face just the economic crisis but we face a crisis of values, crisis of meanings, a social crisis, a cultural crisis, "... The crisis is deep mainly because the value code has been tarnished: All kinds of facilities and clientelism have been legitimized morally ... " (Papoulias, 2009). The entanglement between dominant groups of Greek politics and the field of the economy leads to the defence of the status quo with bold elements of corruption and nepotism. The rigidity of the market, the distortions of the tax system and many government interventions resist any kind of reforms (Mitsopoulos & Pelagidis, 2011), «Never before in the history of culture was so much pressure brought on education to become more productive according to exclusive criteria of the financial market" (Karapostolis, 2011: 199). The data we have up to this moment do not indict an interjectional crisis, "the immediate but also the long-term impact on poverty and social exclusion may be deep and long-lasting" (Mpalourdos, 2011: 165) and those who fail to adapt will be marginalized (Lygeros, 2011: 342-349). Similar crises have taken place in many economies in the past and when trying to justify the wrong decisions that preceded, one could interpret them by adopting the following five main reasons:

- Society was unable to make the right predictions due to lack of previous experience
- Inability to understand the problem
- Conflicting interests did not allow the problem to be solved
- The values system, the stereotypes and the rigidities hindered the solution
- The size of the problem exceeds all possibilities for finding a solution that social agents have (Petrakis, 2012).

In regard to education it is well known that each elected government implements or at least attempts to implement its programme. Although the fragmentary approach of the section

concerning educational policy contains a number of risks, when analyzed solely without taking the wider social reality into account, in this paper an attempt will be made at a critical approach on some data related to exercising educational policy in our country in recent years (Daropoulos, 2010). Hundred and more years later it seems extremely apropos to say that: "There is almost no solid, continuous, well studied Greek educational tradition that gives us the main guidelines and details of future development and the foundations for a new creation" (Glinos, 1912: 203).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The pedagogic device is a system of "three interrelated rules: distributive rules, recontextualising rules and evaluative rules" (Bernstein, 2000: 28; Bernstein, 1990), "The distributive rules regulate the relations between power, conscience forms and practices" (Lamnias, 2002: 297), even though they are defined by the state, changes are attempted and take place by various contestation forces. The recontextualising rules regulate the conversion of scientific knowledge into school knowledge, as mediation between the primary and secondary field. The primary field, is the field in which the primary contextualisation, which refers to the procedure of development, production, configuration of ideas and the particular knowledge take place. The second field is multilevel and the field where the tertiary, secondary, primary and preschool education are distinguished, where each level has its own specialised competent bodies. Finally, the field of recontextualisation acts as a mediator between the primary and the secondary field (Bernstein, 1990; also see Lamnias, & Tsatsaroni 1999). There could also be a distinction between the Official Recontextualizing Field (ORF) which contains the official education policy and the Pedagogical Recontextualizing Field (PRF) which encompasses university departments, scientific educational journals, research centres, educational institutes etc. (Bernstein, 2000: 33). Knowledge from some groups has the legalisation of transmission to future generations of students, thus it has the privilege to become formal knowledge. So education as an institution produces and reproduces a "compromised" knowledge (Apple, 2000: 64). The special attention given to school knowledge, its relation to scientific and experiential knowledge, which have different levels of "conceptualization of reality" and the way in which it becomes familiar are a critical junction (Alexiou, 2009). Finally, the evaluative rules build the pedagogical practice by defining the criteria (Bernstein, 1990, also see Lamnias & Tsatsaroni 1998-1999). In each of these arenas there is an ongoing struggle of (pre)dominance since the field of education is an area for confrontations and sometimes even heavy conflicts between social bodies, trade unions, political parties. The main objective is control and finally enforcement.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

"...educational policy has been understood as a rational plan, consciously articulated by an authoritative body, usually a government or governmental agency, codified in text such as law or regulation which articulates clear expectations for behaviour and explicitly or implicitly reasserts the formal authority of government in requiring that behaviour" (Bascia, et. all., 2005: xii) or "a set of specific principles and actions on education issues, which will be followed or should be followed and which are designed to bring about desired goals" (Trowler, 2003: 95). However, it is impossible not to bear in mind that educational policy is a dynamic process with contradictions and conflicts, a process in which questions such as the following dominate:

- What are these desired objectives of education?
 - Who determines these objectives?
 - In what ways and with what means can these objectives be achieved?
- Educational policy is "... the institutional arrangements and social practices that define and are defined by the constitution of educational discourse, the structure of education and pedagogical practices. It is the field where power and social conflict clarify the educational affairs and, through social control, convert it into society. It is also the field in which the educational system,

partially or as a whole, constitutes its balancing and reproductive character "(Kontogiannopoulou-Polydoridi, 1995: 11).

The reciprocal relationship of policy and educational system is given, according to others there is absolute dependence, however no one can ignore the elements of autonomy of the educational system and the gradation of interdependence, sometimes stronger sometimes weaker, depending on the historical and social context that is being examined.

A common finding for the Greek case is the lack of consensus in exercising educational policy, since it makes sense that the ideological differences, the different philosophical-sociological starting points and approaches, create contrasts. Various choices, opinions, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours are adopted. However this point of view differs from the complete absence of a common basis for dialogue, partial consensus and developing a policy, at least regarding issues that constitute a minimum field of national and European options and any changes towards differentiation will be made only after much thought and with caution. The person responsible for the implementation of the educational policy and responsible for this is the each time Minister of Education and Religious Affairs. Let's look at the changes made in the leadership of the Ministry of Education in recent years, from the regime change and thereafter in the following table (Table 1).

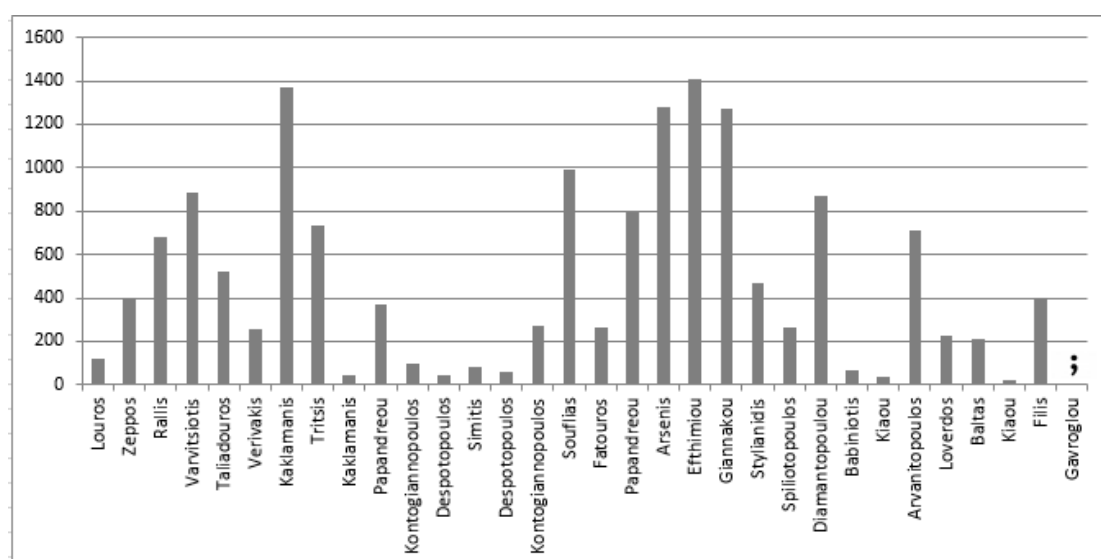
Table 1. Ministers of Education and their terms in office from 1974 to today

S/N	From	Since	Name
1	24/07/1974	21/11/1974	Louros Nikolaos
2	21/11/1974	05/01/1976	Zeppos Panagiotis
3	05/01/1976	28/11/1977	Rallis Georgios
4	28/11/1977	10/05/1980	Varvitsiotis Ioannis
5	10/05/1980	21/10/1981	Taliadouros Athanasios
6	21/10/1981	05/07/1982	Verivakis Eleftherios
7	05/07/1982	25/04/1986	Kaklamanis Apostolos
8	25/04/1986	09/05/1988	Tritsis Antonios
9	09/05/1988	22/06/1988	Kaklamanis Apostolos
10	22/06/1988	02/07/1989	Papandreou Georgios
11	02/07/1989	12/10/1989	Kontogiannopoulos Vasilios
12	12/10/1989	23/11/1989	Despotolpoulos Konstantinos
13	23/11/1989	13/02/1990	Simitis Konstantinos
14	13/02/1990	11/04/1990	Despotolpoulos Konstantinos
15	11/04/1990	10/01/1991	Kontogiannopoulos Vasilios
16	10/01/1991	13/10/1993	Souflias Georgios
17	13/10/1993	08/07/1994	Fatouros Dimitrios
18	08/07/1994	25/09/1996	Papandreou Georgios
19	25/09/1996	13/04/2000	Arsenis Gerasimos
20	13/04/2000	10/03/2004	Efthimiou Petros
21	10/03/2004	19/09/2007	Giannakou Marietta
22	19/09/2007	08/01/2009	Stylianidis Evripidis
23	08/01/2009	04/10/2009	Spiliotopoulos Aristovoulos
24	04/10/2009	07/03/2012	Diamantopoulou Anna
25	07/03/2012	17/05/2012	Babiniotis Georgios
26	17/05/2012	21/06/2012	Kiaou Aggeliki-Efrosini
27	21/06/2012	10/06/2014	Arvanitopoulos Konstantinos
28	10/06/2014	25/01/2015	Loverdos Andreas
29	25/01/2015	28/08/2015	Baltas Aristeidis
30	28/08/2015	23/09/2015	Kiaou Aggeliki-Efrosini
31	23/09/2015	05/11/2016	Filis Nikolaos
32	05/11/2016	?	Gavroglou Konstantinos

Source: General Secretariat of the Government, <http://www.ggk.gov.gr>

The duration of a minister of education's term in office (from 1974 until today) can be calculated according to the data of table 1 (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Ministry of Education terms in office in days



Source: Based on calculations from the General Secretariat of the Government data, <http://www.ggk.gov.gr>

The average term in office of a minister of education is 491 days!!! The change in persons does not necessarily mean something negative. However, if we take the person-centred operation of ministries in Greece, the simultaneous changes of Secretaries-General, special secretaries, advisors, etc. into account it is understandable that when changing a minister of the same government is not possible for one to be informed thoroughly and in detail, to create/improve the (sub)structures and conditions that will form the base in order to build a reliable educational system in such a short time. All the attempted interventions are selective measures, fragmented actions and activities which are not embedded in a systemic approach of a strategic plan. The failure to implement a long-term planning, the lack of continuity and consistency are the key parameters that are lacking in order to ensure the necessary qualitative characteristics of an educational system with a perspective.

DATA OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Weak and insufficient funding of education and research programs contributes to maintaining a vicious circle between the fields of economy and education. The old ascertainment mentioned above (Pematzoglou, 1987: 14) is valid even nowadays. Education in Greece is not (contrary to official pronouncements) one of the important priorities of the Greek state. Constant underfunding is irrefutable evidence thereof. The following table lists the paid public expenditure in relation to education and the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product, GDP (Table 2).

Table 2. Paid Public Expenditure for education during the 2005-2013 period

Year	Paid Public Expenditure for education	GDP Percentage
2005	6.344 m. €	3.19 %
2006	6.645 m. €	3.12 %
2007	7.034 m. €	3.16 %
2008	7.702 m. €	3.30 %
2009	7.623 m.€	3.30 %
2010	7.026 m. €	3.16 %
2011	6.340 m. €	3.04 %
2012	5. 800 m. €	2.99 %
2013 up to 30/09/2013	5.524 m. €	3.02 %
2014 (forecast)	5.090 m. €	2.78 %

Source: Centre for the Development of Educational Policy (2014:13)

From studying the data one can conclude that the expenditure for the 2005-2014 period ranged from 2.78% of the GDP for 2014 and 3.30% of the GDP for the years 2008 and 2009. The awaited target for spending 5% of the GDP (about the EU average) once more remains unattainable.

Funding any attempted actions relating to education, as a rule, only refers to those programs that are implemented through the NSRF (National Strategic Reference Framework). The total budget of the NSRF for the 2014-2020 period amounts 373.4 million Euros and concerns the following actions: New School-School of the 21st century, Digital School, Actions for Special Education - Parallel support of the Disabled, development and/or upgrading curricula - provision and production of educational material, etc. (European Commission, 2014). These programmes make a positive contribution in the field of implementation of educational policy but one cannot deny that these fragmented attempts that are not connected to each other, not integrated into a broader central planning, have a limited implementation time frame and without any feedback since there is no continuity once they are completed.

The absence of a firm administrative structure, both regarding the central administration of the ministry of education and the regional directorates, education directorates with obvious consequences of this deficit, since the annual secondments of teachers in administrative posts to meet relevant requirements create a framework of inefficient operation (Circular, 06.26.2015, Ref. Nr.: 102030 / E2).

Changes to timetables of primary schools with a reshaped programme, variations in teaching hours of a course, which are not based on design-planning but based on available teachers who have not been appointed to a position, pressures of respective social groups (on legislation, Law 4310 of the year 2014, G.G.G. 1327 of 2011, G.G.G. 804 of 2010, etc.). The design of the curriculum of the schools according to a set time rather than the real time of the classroom (Siganou, 2007). The conformist and one-dimensional approach of a single teaching manual for each course throughout primary and secondary education. The preparation of new curricula and writing new textbooks without evaluating those which are already being implemented or have been implemented.

Another issue in this field is concentrating on the "educational reform" methods to enter higher education and the frequent changes of the content of examinations as a main topic (Kassotakis & Papageli-Vouliouri, 2009).

February / March of the year 2015 (chronologically we are in the middle of the school year) and teaching staff is still being recruited in order to cover fixed needs (Press release, 13/02/2015 & Press release, 17-03-2015).

The absence of central planning and implementation in the field of teacher training, planning and abandoning pilot training programmes that have been successfully implemented, such as the Major Program Training (Pedagogical Institute, 2011).

Regarding the integration of Information Technologies and Communication (ICT) in the educational systems of developing countries, our country among them, which is ascertained to have taken place with time delay (Beqiri & Tahiri, 2014), despite the efforts being made (Kollias, Daropoulos, Davaris & Zaganas, 2014), the state could utilise the previous experience other countries gained. Unfortunately, retractions in this field, such as the introduction and immediately after the abandonment of the integration of the laptop in the gymnasium (lower secondary education), postponing integration of interactive whiteboards, hesitating in adopting the model of introduction of ICT, are some of the examples of lack of planning, organising and scheduling.

Choosing education managers is based on a different legal framework every time, e.g. Law 2043 of 1992, Law 2188 of 1994, Presidential Decree 398 of 1995, Law 2986 of 2002, Law 3467 of 2006, Law 3848 of 2010 and the recent law 4327 of the year 2015. These frequent changes, with different conditions each time, deprive candidates of a fixed frame of reference, an element that complicates both the functionality and efficiency of the system.

The lack of evaluation of teaching and educational work (Papagueli-Vouliouris, 1999) the serious implications of this deficit and the inconsistency of governments (Chrysos, 2000) cannot be seen and justified only as a result of a "time lag" compared to the policies in other Western European countries" (Georgiadis, 2005). The lack of accountability (Sirotnik, 2004) both to parents of students and members of the wider society are elements that reduce the credibility of the educational system. However it remains the basic deficit of an evaluative framework, mainly due to the reactions of the trade unions of teachers, partly justified, due to the heavy past of the institution of the inspector, with many documented cases of abuse of power. These dominant characteristics of the applied educational policy aggravate the reproduction of educational inequalities and the expansion of the Greek family's private expenditure in the field of education (Kassotakis & Verdis, 2013). This generalized devaluation of education, the widespread denial of the education system could be lifted by broad-based strategic planning with actions aimed at all levels of education. A crucial factor that needs to be overcome is the lack of consensus, even the discrepancy in the conceptual content of the term. Is consensus considered as the "... de-ideologisation and conjunction in practices of power and dominant groups that perpetuate an unfair and unequal system?" (Frangoulis, 2010: 150) or will it be appreciated as an element of social cohesion in a framework that is not characterised by egocentric points of view but where achieving common objectives according to the circumstance is dominant.

CONCLUSIONS

The field of education is an area where various social groups try to gain a privileged position thus resulting in heated debates. The main feature of the educational policy in our country is the lack of planning, organisation and consistency but also the existence of a confrontational framework within which decisions are made but not according to consensual characteristics as an element and parameter of social cohesion. Furthermore, inconsistency, discontinuity and chronic conflicts are among the main reasons for the reproduction of educational inequality and the expansion of private expenditure for Greek families to meet basic educational needs. An additional element that burdens the situation as a whole is the lack of trust, as a major structural feature of the social capital. The failure of educational policy cannot

be seen as just a failure of one parameter of the broader field of politics, but as a failure of broader dimensions and consequences, it is a failure of the entire society. The only optimistic note in this hopeless framework is the ascertainment and acceptance of the problem/problems. This by itself contains a note of hope, which can act as a starting point for future action. The indication that the educational field, as field of ideological conflicts, creates such "glitches", due to the prospective ideological differentiations, does not justify the deficient action of the state as a coordinated entity with purposes, objectives and prospects. Having faith that particularly at this time of this multifactorial crisis which plagues the Greek society, institutions, entities, people who have a role and a say, will take action and will avert the further degradation of public education.

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¹ G.G.G.: Greek Government Gazette

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² P.D.: Presidential Degree