

Reconstructing the Everyday Classroom Practices in Greek Primary School Between 1977 and 1982

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Abstract – The present study is focused on the reconstruction of the historical context of Greek primary education from 1977 to 1982, interpreting the inspectors' essays by the theoretical framework of *classroom history* and the theory of *educationalization*. The curriculum of the time as a tool of ideological orientation is classified and evaluated relative to its use as transformational mechanism within the educational process. The conclusions of the study indicate that the above theoretical framework is corroborated and the everyday classroom practices were an after-effect of the dominant role of teachers in the school culture.

Keywords – Classroom History, Curriculum, Educationalization, Inspector's Essays.

I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper under the title “Reconstructing the everyday classroom practices in Greek primary school between 1977 and 1982” has been produced after a careful review of the relevant Greek literature, which revealed the lack of research approaches related to the culture of education.

Thus, the paper tries to re-write the educational history in Greece under a new research approach that is centred on the reconstruction of the everyday practices in schools. In order to achieve this, this study gathered the Education Acts and ministers' circulars that play a crucial role as they define the regulations and the functioning of the classroom practice and also systematically collected the inspectors' observations and essays the examined period.

Namely, the study contextualizes 30 inspectors' essays which are held in the Archive of the Administration of Primary Schools of Ioannina, Epirus, in Greece. These texts were part of retired teachers' personal files, and as the number of files was very large we used those that belonged to teachers who were in service between the years 1977 and 1982. We collected essays that were representative of different geographical regions in Greece and from teachers who received an assessment of “very good” or “excellent” for their rich observation. The numbers used in essays are related to the Archive numeration and classification. In 1982, the institution of the inspector was abolished along with the conducting of evaluation essays, and, subsequently, the teachers' assessments became a historical event. The school advisers had another official role to serve: to help and to support teachers in the classroom with their scientific advice.

As the study is part of the historical inquiry we attempt to interpret the findings by the main insights that define the theoretical background and which are presented. Also we focus on the examination of the curriculum's characteristics, effects and implementation in everyday classroom practices.

II. THE CLASSROOM HISTORY

A thorough branch of sociological research which keeps up with the historical inquiry claims that the research object has to be studied from inside, where “the facts of history are never simple objects but human actions that historians observe to determine the thought that is hidden within them” [1]. This micro-level interpretive approach recognizes in the core of each social phenomenon the *human action* and the meaning that individuals contribute to their actions, borrowing theoretical perceptions from Max Weber [2]. The goal for further research will be achieved, according to Michel de Certeau, if *everyday practices*, “ways of operating” or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them. The examination of such practices does not imply a return to *individuality*. His purpose is “to make explicit the systems of operational combination (*les combinatoires d'operations*) which also compose a ‘culture’, and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term ‘consumers’. Namely, he states that “everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others” [3].

The everyday action of classroom participants affected the interest in the educational processes that occur in classrooms and spawned the theory of classroom history. In order to analyse the base concepts of this theory, we will return to a question that was posed by Tyack and Tobin relative to the educational innovations introduced and their destiny: “Why have the established institutional forms of schooling been so stable and why did most challenges fade or become marginalized?” [4]. They observed teachers' interventions in classroom practices that affected the implementation of the educational reforms. They called this phenomenon the *grammar of schooling*, which means the entire regular structures and rules that organize the work of instruction.

Their theoretical framework is based on Larry Cuban's book *How Teachers Taught* [5], which covers the years between 1890 and 1980. Cuban analyses the instructional formalities that have persisted during the past years considering teachers' behaviour to be the main parameter of improving education.

For Marc Depaepe, probably, the organizational structure framework explains the teachers' behaviour rather than the cultural legacy and social function in education [6]. Working in a broader perspective, Marc Depaepe completes the *grammar of schooling* to a

grammar of educationalization or, even better, to a *grammar of educationalizing* [7]. He argues that this emerged from the paradox of emancipation suggested since Enlightenment times by the French philosopher of education Jacques Rancière: “It would suffice to learn to be equal in an unequal society”, where there is only one way to achieve this: “the integral educationalization of society, that is, the general infantilization of the individuals that compose it”. In other terms, this is called *continued education* which overlaps the co-extensivity of the explanatory institution and society [8] [9]. Thus, the *grammar of educationalizing* contains the design of an *eco- or ethno-history* of education in which ecological, ethnological and anthropological principles occupy a central position. Depaepé suggests that the school climate should be reconstructed in its historical and social context on the basis of *informants*, which includes the experiences of teachers and students. Historians should study, interpret the available documents (such as novels, letters and essays) in terms of discourse analysis and reconstruct the past experience [10].

In order to reconstruct the everyday pedagogical relationships within schools and classrooms, Depaepé used pedagogical periodicals which he ascertained allow *thick description* and “enable us to take a look behind the scenes at classroom practice and gauge to strategy, ulterior motives, reservations and hidden meanings behind pedagogical and didactic practice”. However, he advises that the researcher should study them without “an unquestioning faith in the periodicals and a one-sided interpretation of them” [11]. Nevertheless, he suggests for “the analysis of the ‘evaporated’ educational relations” the use “of the sediment left behind in diaries, letters, novels and biographies, on photographs, in copybooks, examinations, lesson preparations, inspection and visitation reports, school prospectuses and regulations, articles in educational journals, alumni newsletters, school newspapers, descriptions and remnants of school furniture and teaching material”, all of which until recently was not included in research and remained the “black box” of education [12].

This theoretical approach of classroom history is used in the present study to understand the educational process within classrooms and the culture that was developed within schools in Greece between 1977 and 1982.

III. THE CURRICULUM OF 1977

In Greece, the state operates a central control educational policy the main feature of which is ideological-religious neutrality while the Ministry of Education organizes teachers’ training and the curriculum is a closed type, smothering any incentive for innovation by pupils and teachers [13]. The education is mainly public (95%), [14] and there are no private tertiary educational institutions although Greece has been fined by the European Court of Justice in 23.10.2008 due to its failure to integrate Directive 2005/36/EK on tertiary education and diplomas.

The importance of the school curriculum is appreciated by Arno Bellack who accepts the relationship between the triad of curriculum history, cultural history and intellectual history, suggesting that the curriculum is a highly significant artefact of our culture [15].

As from that the historian it is imperative to record the intentions of a curriculum and capture all the different approaches that are developed in classrooms. We may refer here to two dimensions of curriculum, the *intended* and the *enacted* [16]. The *intended* curriculum comprises the educational policy, purpose and content of education and its change is connected with the internal educational reform. Ivor Goodson asserts that historians should enhance studies over *intended* curriculum. In his later studies, Goodson refers to the *pre-active* potential of curriculum and the *present* potential. The *pre-active* potential is presented as the written curriculum and the aspirations and intentions that are established within in the formulas of rules and criteria. It includes the past intellectual and political settlement as these are embedded in the written curriculum. The *present* potential is defined as the interactive realization of curriculum by the subjective interventions and actions of teachers and students. In the other hand, the research about school effectiveness, efficient teaching and better schools leads to the study of the *interactive* curriculum and the exploration of the individual school or classroom practice [17].

The emergence of teachers’ subjectivity in implementing the curriculum intentions, during everyday classroom practices, led to the detection of the pedagogical climate and the parameters that present a more *educationalized* environment [18].

Coming back to the Greek problem, the curriculum of 1977 was introduced by the Presidential Decree of 1977 P.D. 1034/4-11-1977; this was the first structural change that had occurred during the previous 70 years. There had been some mini-changes affected to the curriculum in that interval involving additions to or removal from passages in school books. The implementation of radical change was however postponed as it was assumed that such change would require statutory intervention.

The curriculum of 1977 followed the ideological patterns of education policy of 1976, of which the epicenter was – for all the inserted innovations – textbooks in and teaching through the Modern Greek language. However, reading the curriculum we observe that its content differed significantly from the aspirations as set out; the aims of the curriculum reflected the goals of the educational system at that time.

“The curriculum formulates the targets of the educational system. It impels the students’ education through the teaching of grammar and literature. It emphasizes humanitarian breeding that is fulfilled with the knowledge and the familiarizing of the classical writers’ distinguished context. Understanding the values of the ancient Greek world and civilization, students offer the Greek legacy to the global civilization and realize the responsibilities that emerge from this rich national inheritance” [19].

These aims remained a simple phrasal statement due to the teachers' focus of interest on grammar and syntax of texts during the instruction of the subject language [20].

A book entitled *Special Instruction* was published with the permission of the Ministry of Education [21] and was provided to students in all Pedagogical Academies in the country in order to facilitate their acquisition of special teaching skills. The author Constantinos Kitsos described the concept, history and importance of Special Instruction throughout school procedures. During their studies in the Pedagogical Academies, students would have assimilated the diagram of the instruction course that was proposed by this book. The diagram presented six phases of implementation [22] (see table I):

TABLE I. The phases of instruction

The phases of instruction	
a.	The theme selection. The teacher selected many themes through history, social phenomena, closer environment, and season events and asked one of the pupils to select one.
b.	The observation. The pupils observed the event, the phenomena or the object as a unit and as part of a whole.
c.	The interrelation and the elaboration of the data in time, place, people and universe.
d.	The abstract and concrete expression
e.	The repetition of the main ideas
f.	The synthesis of data from different lesson units

As we may deliver from all these guidelines imposed mainly by the curriculum, in the *pre-active* curriculum were embedded the aspirations and the intentions that were established within the formulae of rules and criteria. In that regard, the *pre-active* curriculum of 1977 is identified as *traditional* and *fragmented* [23]; in other words, the *traditional* curriculum is a result of a mismatch of knowledge and reality and also fragments the subject area. This curriculum demonstrated the persistence of traditional forms and strong boundaries between the subjects while it contained no exhortation to the teachers to adopt collaborative teaching or any suggestion that an inter-disciplinary approach should be followed: thus, teacher-centered approaches were dominant within classrooms.

IV. DEPICTING EVERYDAY CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Participation by teachers in training courses necessarily meant that they would be evaluated through written exams in designated towns; however, the requirement of attending exam centers precluded the possibility of certain of their number partaking in such courses. In addition, teachers were evaluated on an annual basis by school inspectors; their performance in such evaluation impacted on their careers.

The inspection of teachers was an important issue in the educational system in Greece. Act 309 divided the country into 15 educational areas that were under the authority of a Supervisor who had administrative and disciplinary power. The areas were divided into 240 educational peripheries that were staffed by inspectors; inspectors 'A' (54) were assigned to the capitals of the prefectures, inspectors 'B'

(186) to areas outside of the capital, and a special category of inspectors (2) to Special Needs Education. (Articles, 18-24). The majority of inspectors were teachers from secondary schools, a state of affairs that was unacceptable to primary teachers. The *Scientific Step of Primary Teachers* [24] reported on this issue: "it is easy for everyone to understand how they were confronting the primary school teachers". Such observation implied the existence of friction between secondary and primary teachers.

Inspectors evaluated mainly teachers' performance within schools. Article 60 of the title "Essays on essential qualifications", defined standards for evaluation the most important of which were "essential qualifications and any weaknesses or imperfections". Within this framework, specific criteria for evaluation were elaborated: a) scientific (training, mental qualifications, writing, diplomas); b) instructional (pedagogical skills, teaching skills); c) administrative (administrative skillfulness); d) level of conscientiousness; and e) active and behavioral role within or outside of school (ethos, character, socialization). Every qualification was graded as follows: a) excellent 10-9; b) very good 8-7; c) good 6-5; d) mediocre 4-3; e) unsuitable 2-1 [25].

However, many problems regarding the behavior of inspectors were recorded, specifically in relation to their *modus operandi*. Evi Zabetta carried out research in the Archive of Attica reporting on the evaluation of teachers' qualifications and experience the results of which were subsequently published in *Inspectors' Essays*. We observe, however, confusion on the notion of the scientific character of instruction: 'according to the demands of the united-centralized instruction, the teacher passed from a course on language to a course on exploring the world, by reading texts in a natural way...' where there is not clear if the followed instruction is related to the proposed guidelines. On another page there is a further evaluative finding: "she is a perfect mother and wife and a good Christian, she goes often to church..." [26]

However, inspectors' observations between 1976 and 1982 are critical to any study and help to depict the classroom practices and record the atmosphere that prevailed. The inspectors' evaluation essays contribute to better understanding of the educational process although teachers were well prepared for the instruction and this might have altered their everyday relationships with students in classrooms.

The inspectors evaluated their observations according to the curriculum demands and also focused on the instruction procedure and classroom atmosphere. They were pleased to identify the prevalence of teacher-centered practices although students' participation was encouraged; however, this manifested itself as part of a process of instruction completion and not as an exploration of independent thought. An example cited by one inspector related to the mathematics courses. He observed "the teacher gave a problem to her students and this was solved under her supervision ... they solved two more problems and the ruler was formulated... two problems were assigned to them for homework..." E4/1979). The same

practices were identical in the History lesson: "...teacher narrates the new unit...students express their impressions, they judge the facts and actions and they characterize the heroes... they outline the personality of the hero Kolokotronis... they use the dialogue... teacher's narration is enthusiastic, graphic with simplicity in expression but also with language elements that advance students' expressions... details hold students interest and give birth to feelings of admiration towards the heroes..." (E6/1977). According to the inspectors' opinions, in the History lesson, the "right" atmosphere was cultivated within classrooms and was correlated to students' emotions and feelings: "...she elaborated students' queries and students articulated their impressions and characterized correctly Pericles and ended with conclusions..." (E4/1979), "...students' queries were answered by free dialogue, actions were criticized and persons and battles were characterized, the historical true and important elements for the revolution came out..." (E12/1979), "...the teacher narrated very impressively the first siege of Messolongi and with the appropriate tinge...persons and battles were being characterized...the historical truth came out..." (E13/1981), "...teacher's narration was excellent and his students listened to him with attentiveness..." (E16/1979), "... they expressed their will to act in the same manner as adults during the hour of need..." (E21/1979).

The same manner of instruction was followed in the Citizen's Guide and in relation to the subject of Religion where we detected a significant instruction relative to the prayer creation: "...there was mental contact and appropriate communication in favor of the transmission of knowledge...elaboration and expression with dialogue where the teacher gave the right direction... she used the historical map..." (E5/1980), "...he implanted religious faith in the soul of students with whom he had spiritual communication..." (E6/1977), "...narration natural and impressive, queries, impressions, critique and characterization of persons and actions, conclusions and perceptions...students understood the lesson and took some moral perceptions for their lives..." (E13/1981), "...the teacher brought up for discussion the theme about the farmer and his work and invited the students to put forward their opinions about the fields' cultivation... his students discussed politely and expressed themselves easily... during the discussion the necessity to pray to God to protect farmers and empower their work was highlighted...the students put forward their sentences and after certain corrections the final prayer emerged and was written on the blackboard... the students were reading it and at last a student was addressing it to God with crossed hands and in devout posture..." (E17/1980), "...the students discussed politely and with interest our country and the economic, social and cultural benefits likely to flow from membership of the European Economic Community...also the obligation that we as Greeks join the Community to limit our imperfections to develop our powers and abilities in order to be able to compete in progressing social works and in advancing civilization with the other peoples of Europe, not only as equals

between equals but as individual with superior capabilities..." (E21/1979).

The dialogue between teacher and students was perceived to be a very important phase of instruction implementation and in a few essays we detected evidence of a dialogue between students and a learning through experience: "...students participated actively and the discussion took place in relation to the causal relationships..."(E15/1978), "...the lesson was being realized within a pleasant and creative atmosphere and the students expressed themselves freely, fluently and naturally..." (E20/1980), "...students self-activated and took active part in teaching..."(E11/1977), "...the teacher in order to teach the new material used a simple problem that derived from students' lives and he copied certain facts to the blackboard...he posed questions to his students and he motivated them to find solutions...students phrased the relative canon under the teacher's aide...they solved more exercises...the teacher deployed the material skillfully and he motivated the class methodically...". Another inspector observed: "...the teacher visited the neighboring fields with his students observing and discussing the wheat ..." (E17/1980) "...the students reported their experiences regarding the mother's feast..." (E29/1980).

Teachers' attitudes and postures were other elements that were appreciated by the inspectors of the time. We read "teacher exhibited exemplary behavior through his attitude and expression..." (E2/1979), "her tact was obvious from the first moment of instruction... also her deftness in moving through the classroom and generally the inductive way of her instruction..." (E3/1977), "...she made an impression on her students by her personal stature..." (E4/1979), "...she was distinguished for her modesty, fineness, courtesy, seriousness, calmness and initiative..." (E5/1980), teacher's narration was enthusiastic, graphic with simplicity in expression but also with language elements that advanced students' expressions... details held students' interest and gave birth to feelings of admiration for the heroes..." (E6/1977), teacher was very close to his students' souls..." (E7/1978), "...the teacher was calm when he taught and motivated his students creatively...he insured participation by all his students..." (E8/1979), his posture was natural and his expression excellent... he was methodical and efficient..." (E9/1980), "...he continuously occupied his students with implied work controlling and judging them fairly..." (E12/1979), "...teacher's posture and expression helped students to create and ensure their active participation during the lesson..." "...he commanded his class with skill..." (E14/1977), "...he created the necessary atmosphere in the classroom..." (E15/1978), "...teacher's attitude was correct and his expression encouraged students to find the solution...teacher's narration was excellent and his students listened attentively to him..." (E16/1979), "...the instruction was of interest and the atmosphere was friendly, free, creative and pleasant..." (E17/1980), "...the teacher was prepared and he taught using modern and efficient methods ..." (E18/1981), "...you may admire the teacher's talent with his

magnificent tact and great teaching ability...“...the class presented the image of a cooperative community...we observed the teacher buzzing like a bee from child to child, assiduously and dutifully controlling their work...” (E19/1977), “...the teacher’s posture and expression was encouraging their students to understand that the right prevails on subjects, that power lies in the people’s unity... they expressed their will to act in the same manner as adults during the hour of need...” (E21/1979), “...absolutely calm, self-confident, self-controlled, inspirational and experienced teacher...” (E24/1979), “...the teacher presented his material assuming a correct posture and using expression at the level of his students...he managed to reach his students mentally and to upgrade their speaking abilities to a greater extent than in the previous year...the teacher offered the historical material with a vivid and enthusiastic narration...” (E26/1981), “...we observed the warm atmosphere within the classroom... the teacher deployed a simple and understandable expression...all students were participating and the teacher gave equal opportunities of participation to everybody... her work was distinguished by comfort and calmness...” (E27/1979).

Summing up inspectors’ essays we observe mainly traditional atmosphere, teacher-centered practices, traditional classroom roles, inflexibility and constriction within tight boundaries. Further on the curriculum imposed a one-way teaching model which referred to teacher-led planning of classroom activities where students acted as mere executors. Teachers were the main authority within classrooms and this seemed to be easy for them to implement. Whilst teacher-centered approaches dominated all aspects of everyday classroom life, the roles of the participants were well defined. Teachers were unquestionably the purveyors of knowledge while students were passive consumers of it; students had no input to the planning process of instruction.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This depiction of classroom practices shows that such practices reflected the educational policy at the time as implemented by the conservative government. Although the Act was introduced by liberal contributors [27] the internal characteristics of the educational process undoubtedly remained traditional and untouched. On the one hand, it delineated the scheme of the educational system while at the same time failing to address the important factors of instruction at micro-level.

The study of teachers’ recorded statements and arguments, about the classroom practices of the time, might reveal their perceptions and the possible demand for modernization and for real changes in teaching procedures. However this important element can be a problem for further research and study.

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