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The Consequences of the Financial Crisis in the Educational Praxis: A Content Analysis in the Light of Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the repercussions of the current financial crisis on the educational system of Greece. It is gradually becoming apparent that the symptoms of crisis affect education not only in financial terms, but also in a more humanistic dimension. Our research focuses on the teachers' beliefs and attitudes and allows them to produce their own "voice", to express their opinion regarding the financial crisis, the ways that this crisis affects them and their own role in the current situation. Hence, the interview was regarded to be the most appropriate methodological tool. The data are analyzed through a qualitative content analysis, in the light of an ideology-critical discourse. The combination of the qualitative content analysis with the critical analysis allows a more thorough insight into the underlying causes of what the teachers seem to believe.

Keywords: *Financial Crisis, Education, Teachers' role, Ideology-Critical Discourse.*

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Introduction

Undoubtedly, financial crisis affects education, which constitutes a social institution in a perpetual interaction with society. The educational system seems to be a field of social contradictions and conflicts, as it is the boundary between the contesting forces and the forces of urban modernization. From this perspective, the teachers' rights and needs cannot be separated from the constant conflicting forces that govern the social and political life. In parallel, the development of social and educational struggles is inextricably linked to the work of teaching and is shaped by the aspects of modern life. Gradually, it becomes apparent that the symptoms of crisis affect the educational practice through the long-term austerity policies, the reduction of the teachers' recruitment, as well as the dramatic reduction of wages. The education provided to young people lags behind international standards. After finishing with their studies, young people face difficulties in entering the labor market, while the restrictive regulatory framework discourages investment and job creation. If Greece does not directly alter the financial system, there is a risk that a lot of the new generation will migrate abroad (Vayanos, Vettas & Meghir, 2010). At the same time, the merging of schools and the increasing class size create a highly unfavorable school environment, which consequently affects the educational quality. However, the assumption that the current financial crisis complicates the job of contemporary education in Greece would be a rather trivial and effortless position, which does not include the complex dimension of this situation.

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of the current financial crisis on the educational system and mainly on teachers and the general educational process. Exploring the impact of crisis on the educational work requires a thorough investigation aiming to the examination of the teacher's attitudes, perceptions and prejudices towards the current financial, political and social situation. In a next step, this study aims to investigate the practical consequences of the economic crisis that hinder the educational process, whether that means the reduction of the teachers' willingness and motivation or the impact on the students' behavior.

Theoretical Background: Critical Theory as the “key” for the Constructive Connection between Society and Education

The term critical theory contains a wide variety of attitudes, behaviors and perceptions in order to achieve an ideological and critical review of all aspects of life, from economics and politics to education and all social events. In the area of pedagogy, it is vital to seek for the foundations of the critical - emancipatory scientific paradigm (Kritische Erziehungswissenschaft) (Bonidis: 2009). The importance of this critical theoretical paradigm can be seen in the fact that it can be regarded as a “tool” for the thorough examination of reality and of what is being represented as reality. It is a neo-Marxist theory, which attempts to explain social events based on the conditions through which they emerged: “Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer felt that they had to reconstruct the logic and method of Marxism, in order to develop a kind of Marxism on late capitalism in the twentieth century” (Agger, 1991: 22). What interests us in this context, is the teacher's and scientist's empowerment from any kind of coercion, materialistic or other, aiming to maturity and empowerment (Bonidis, 2009), and self-determination (Klafki, 1976; 2000).

In this theoretical context, it is identified why critical theories criticize traditional theories of science, which focus on understanding, describing and interpreting data, but are not interested in changing them. For this reason, critical theory differs from empirical sociological theories in the sense that it appeals more to the repressed members of society in order to achieve self-knowledge and liberation (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 140). For critical theory, anything that is recorded in mind as experience is shaped by cognitive categories and concepts, which in turn depend on the language and forms of life of society and thus can be differentiated. Therefore, there is an essential difference between the concepts that are based on critical theory and perceptions that are based on positivist examples. This primarily means that critical theory perceives that nothing can be seen as ideologically neutral: “Both knowledge and human experience are created within a framework of specific economic and socio-cultural factors and thus should be treated” (Bonidis & Hodolidou, 1997).

Moreover, we are dealing with the important context of critical theory's concept of *false or reversed consciousness*, where we accept something as correct, but we do not have a deep look at the messages that are hidden and usually have to do with the ideology of the hegemony. Under the inverted consciousness (*camera obscura*), we know that the dominant ideology, as an inverted representation of reality, is not leading its force in the slave classes of society in a direct way, but by a mediated transformed form. One of the basic concepts of early Marx thought in the “German Ideology” is ideology. Marx states that ideology is a “camera obscura”, which converts the image of reality in the person's head, representing an opinion or idea that derives from the common belief as a common logic. In other words, Marx argues that ideology reflects an inverted image of social reality, which is distorted and false. This implies that the truth of reality and reality itself is opposed. In this way, Marx binds the function of ideology in material reality with the course of development of human material. According to Marx, ideology is the product of material reality and the distorted image of reality represented by the ideology due to social and economic conditions (Marx, nd: 76-88; Marx & Engels, 1947). As Agger states, critical theory aims to ways in which the various discourses¹ of the political, economic and social organizations become “vehicles” of hegemony within an advanced stage of capitalism (Agger, 1991: 153-154). In the same context, Boltanski uses the phrase *social domination* in order to refer to “the various ways of placing power in the service of politics (...), but also serves to identify and condemn manifestations of power deemed extreme and abusive” (Boltanski, 2011:1). For Boltanski, domination seems to be a synthetic procedure that is mainly constructed by power relations.

Especially Habermas stressed the dangers lurking behind the technocratic ideology, where science and technology “wear the cloak” of neutrality, as if they are separated from economic and political interests (Morrow & Torres 2002:55). Man is eventually unable to determine his action and only through emancipation can someone realize the “underground” authoritarian and culturally alienating

¹ The concept of discourse in critical theory is associated with a critical dialogue, constructive, democratic, with the aim of exposing the false consciousness of the dominant ideology. This is a political dialogue aiming to a different interpretation of the world (see Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; Agger, 1991: 7, 174-196, 66-70).

relationships (Habermas, 1975)². In addition, another important aspect of critical theory is praxis, a concept important in the liberating theory of Freire, which is a theory about knowledge and learning. Freire presents the processes by which we can achieve awareness of the interests of the dominant ideology. This awareness can gradually be converted into a form of political empathy, where we can reconcile theory with practice, in order to systematically be released from the nets of false consciousness. It is a complex process, where "the acquisition of critical perception of the world, knowledge about the process of knowledge and knowledge itself and recognition of themselves as contemplating and assets, humanizes them, while helps them to form the mental components of social reality (Freire, 2009:13). Based on the above, we can understand why critical theory is inextricably linked with the liberating act. This is because the process of emancipation and liberation leads to disillusionment and revelation of reality, free from artificial consciousness that can dazzle and distort facts. However, this process requires an understanding of the world, what Freire calls "reading" of the world. For Freire, critical reflection can lead to a continuous emancipation and it presupposes the discovery of the world around us, it means that we should conquer the importance of an object, however in connection with other objects, placing them in a network of relations, connections and controversies. In this context, "students must be willing to risk and get into adventures. Otherwise, they cannot create anything neither recreate" (Freire, 2009:107-109).

Focusing on the educational field, according to Apple, the institution of education is not neutral, since the teachers participate - consciously or not - in a political act. Therefore, there is an internal connection between the construction of knowledge and symbols organized and selected by educational institutions and the principles of social and cultural control in a stratified society. Schools reproduce important aspects of inequality, the most important of which is the economic and cultural capital they hold and distribute, creating and recreating forms of consciousness that allow the maintenance of social control (Apple, 1986:13-18).

From this point of view, we should examine the concept of hegemony as presented by Gramsci, and then represented by Apple. This concept is particularly important in the Marx tradition and reflects the continuous efforts of sovereign power to maintain its legitimacy. This is essentially a state of constant conflict and compromise to maintain this hegemony, since the dominant power sees and realizes her limits in the other social classes. For Apple, leadership is not something self-existent, but something that is associated with the state. We realize the concept of hegemony not as a normative acceptance of the dominant ideology, but as the result of a perpetual confrontation and resistance, where the ruling classes aims to achieve the active consent of those who are dominated: "Near to the views of Marx and Engels, the thought of hegemony in Gramsci meant the ideological dominance of values and the norm of the bourgeoisie upon the lower social strata" (Apple, 1982:86).

The Research Analysis: Aim and Objectives

² It is significant that Habermas locates in the position of laissez-faire, that characterized the early capitalism, the scientific and technological ideology as the new authoritarian power of the modern era (1970a).

The research is conducted via the use of 25 semi-structured interviews, while the sample derives from primary as well as high school teachers from the area of Thessaloniki. The location constitutes a significant criterion, since there were chosen schools from different locations, as far as the socio-economic status is concerned. For instance, there were chosen schools from the areas of Eleutherio-Kordelio and Kalamaria. Those two areas are considered to be opposite not only in terms of geographical features, but mainly in terms of the socio-economic status of the population, depicting the wider picture of the broader agglomeration of Thessaloniki. The West of Thessaloniki is mainly represented by Eleutherio-Kordelio, since the majority of schools and the general population is located there. This area is identified as more aggravated-environmentally and financially-while it attracts many foreign families. It is characteristic that schools have the higher proportion of immigrant students than any other area in Thessaloniki. Kalamaria, on the contrary, belongs to the East of Thessaloniki and is considered to gather all of the features of the middle and upper urbanism. Schools in this area have small proportions of foreign population and are quite representative of the average schools of the east side of Thessaloniki, offering an excellent field for comparison between the two areas selected for the survey. Two areas that are regarded to be “in-between” are Triandria, which is near the centre of Thessaloniki and the centre itself. Also, interviews were taken in Axioupolis, which is a suburban area outside of Thessaloniki, considered to be of low socio-economic status.

The data are analyzed through a qualitative content analysis, in the light of an ideology-critical discourse. On the one hand, the qualitative content analysis, based on the scientific Paradigm of Mayring (1983), is considered to be a qualitative methodological “tool” that aims to the systematic analysis of a given text, taking into consideration certain units of analysis. In our analysis, we used the content structuring (Strukturierung), “which aims to demonstrate specific aspects of the material, the placement of a cross section in the material, as well as the analysis of the material based on certain criteria and is distinguished in: the phenomenological content structuring, the descriptive standard structuring and the linguistic formal structure” (Bonidis, 2012: 3). On the other hand, the critical-ideological method constitutes a reflective practice that dates back to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. The combination of the quantitative content analysis with the critical-ideological was discussed already in the 1970s, within the methodological dualism suggested by Habermas, Ritsert and his colleagues (Ritsert, 1972). In a “neat”, however, qualitative “Paradigm” the definition of the critical-ideological is possible to join the qualitative analysis, “since the analysis will now aim to the self-identification of individuals and the democratization of society” (Bonidis, 2009). Thus, the researcher, after following the steps of qualitative analysis and after analyzing the material with the structuring content analysis and standard construction, will attempt to analyze each sub-category through a series of questions regarding the creation of false consciousness.

The combination of the qualitative content analysis with the critical analysis allows a more thorough insight into the underlying causes of what the teachers seem to believe. And this insight can lead to the exposure of the teacher’s false consciousness on the political, economic and social fragments of the current situation in our country. The important aspect is the fact that we have a combination of macro -and micro- level analysis of the ideologies of the

dominant social groups and the specific interests they serve. In this context, starting with the content of the material (what is stated, how it is stated and more importantly what is silenced), approaches the last in the light of a continuous review compared with the wider social and financial context.

From this point of view, the pedagogical discussion is mainly focused on the responsibility of teachers not only towards the current situation in education, but in a wider essence, that goes beyond the materialistic aspect of the crisis. This responsibility can be detected in what Gramsci identifies as the intellectuals' role. Gramsci reckons that the role of the intellectual is rather crucial in the context of creating a counter hegemony. He identifies two types of intellectuals, the traditional and organic one. Traditional intellectuals are those who identify themselves as rather autonomous and independent from the dominant social group and are regarded as such by most of the population. That means that they “seem” to be independent and autonomous, but this is usually a myth, since they sometimes end to be a part of the hegemony. Organic intellectuals, however, are those who are indeed a part of the ruling class, as an important aspect of the maintenance of the hegemony. As he states, “the mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence ... but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, “permanent persuader” and not just a simple orator...” (Gramsci, 1971:10). His question in his *Notebooks* “Is it better to “think”, without having a critical awareness, ... or, on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one’s own conception of the world?, can be identified as the most crucial question that a teacher can ask to himself, since “the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is ...” (Gramsci 1971: 323).

At the same time, however, it should be taken into account that beyond the theoretical inquiries, the quality of teaching depends on certain external factors beyond the teachers' control, such as schools and classrooms, the social composition of the student population and the socio-economic background, as well as the perceptions and actions of the others who are involved in the learning process (Grollios, 2012). And most importantly, all the above factors are in a perpetual interaction with the social and economic reality of the European welfare state, dominated by the so-called logic of post industrialism, which "puts in the center of the social dialogue the increasing income inequality and the instability of the labor markets, factors that have exacerbated the problems of poverty and social exclusion” (Petmetzidou, 2011: 90). From this point of view the aim of this study is to enable one to consider these factors in the light of critical education , in order to understand how individuals - in this case teachers - react against this context of economic and social “pathology”.

Consequences of Financial Crisis on School as an Institution

A main element is the impact of crisis on the material and technical state of schools. The teachers’ responses can divide them into two distinguished categories. On the one hand, there are those who give greater emphasis on the financial crisis. On the other hand, there are those for whom austerity effects on resources are rather minimal. In the first category, the answers emphasize the consequences of financial crisis on the logistics of school. It is characteristic that the majority in this category are found in schools of the low socio-economic areas of Thessaloniki. In the teachers’ quotations, we identify issues such as the

existence of ancillary rooms or the availability of equipment, such as interactive white boards. The respondents indicated the difficulty of the school to cover even the cost of adequate heating. It is evident that teachers express a feeling of disappointment for the hostile environment of the educational process. Nevertheless, many of the responses are characterized by a certain extravagance, which is inextricably linked to the broader economic and political context of our country. And indeed, the quality of the educational project appears to be respectively proportional to practical issues, such as heating:

“Certainly we feel stressed, heating is a very important issue, and it thoroughly affects us. When we do not work in normal temperature conditions - the educational process requires 18 to 22 degrees Celsius-we cannot create a productive educational environment. In our school we do not face such problems, of course, but from what I hear from other schools, which are cold, it is impossible not to be affected both physically and educationally by such conditions (teacher of fifth grade in a primary school in Axioupolis).

On the contrary, there is a second category of teachers that do not accept that materials are such an important aspect. These teachers give emphasis on the school as an institution, rather than as a result of logistics and materials:

“We cannot depend the quality of teaching on inanimate materials, machines and computers. I mean what did teachers do in 1950? What is really required is the desire of the teacher, the pride and love, the willingness of the true educator”.

The above statement is derived from the words of a professor that teaches religious in an experimental high school in the centre of Thessaloniki. This teacher highlights the importance of the human factor in the educational process. Throughout the interview, she outlined the moral dimension of education and the fact that the actual consequences of financial crisis are mostly found in the demoralization of the educational quality. The same opinion was expressed by other 2 professors in this specific school, of Mathematics and history respectively. We should bear in mind, however, that this specific school is located in a rather privileged area. And most importantly, this school is experimental, which means that the professors are highly qualified and the general orientation of the school is characterized by a scientific interest, having the financial support of the state.

Another important topic was the role of the school in the era of crisis, where a lot of conflicting views are to be found, with the general criterion of the political and ideological background of the teachers. A few teachers (7) reckon that school, as an institution, has dramatically changed, since it has shouldered responsibilities and burdens, which, under other circumstances, would constitute an obligation of the state. Many were those who argued that school is now required to support students both materially and psychologically:

“Undoubtedly, education is a strong social network, both in a material and psychological way. Certainly, we are able to help students financially, this is possible if there is an organized community of teachers, and if we consider that this is the concept of school, why not?” (Physical education teacher in Kordelio).

Our school collects clothing, food, stationery and we discreetly give them to some families of the school (headmaster in a primary school in Axioupolis).

The above responses highlight the financial support that school can offer to pupils, whose parents are facing financial problems, so that they can participate in the entire school life. And indeed, it is emphasized that this process should be done

with discretion, owing to the fact that financial crisis is still considered to be a taboo subject. This idea seems to be an evidence of false consciousness, since teachers convey the common belief that we should face crisis with discretion, but at the same time they seem to search for ways to deal with its consequences in the educational environment. Nonetheless, this procedure requires a more powerful As Giroux states, the educational process is considered to be a social process. Thus, teachers are required to show sensitivity and discretion towards the financial and social background of each student (Giroux, 1988:159). In each case, school is regarded as an organized community of teachers, where the cooperation among teachers is of great importance, especially in times of difficulty. In this context, teachers should search for a scientific way of dealing with the daily tasks at school, as part of a process of social transformation and overthrow of the current socio-educational reality (Bonidis, 2009; Agger, 1991; Horkheimer, 1937; Jay, 1973), a process which is possible especially in difficult times, when conditions require social change (Derrida, 1974).

Financial Earnings and the Quality of the Educational Work

18 of the 20 participants mentioned the inextricable link between reductions in wages and the quality of the educational work:

“The salary is not in line with the effort of everyone to improve the profession. In general, a frustration occurs, wages have dropped, and these are “starvation” wages. And a large part of teachers is unable to cope even with the basics. You may even reach the point that you feel blessed even for the fact that you still have your job, there are many unemployed, unemployment reaches 30% today” (teacher of physics in Triandria).

“Personally, my willingness was not reduced, because now that I have been pleasantly doing my job after 31 years in the classroom, I have a certain comfort to handle the various situations in the classroom, both the given knowledge and the materials. Nevertheless, I can see that the majority of my colleagues are not handling it very well. This precariousness and insecurity is a major issue, much more intense in my opinion than the purely logistical infrastructure of schools” (teacher of history in a high school in Thessaloniki).

Moreover, it is evident that the majority of the teachers express a rather “on-earth” and realistic point of view, reckoning that in every educational effort, we should always bear in mind the practical conditions:

The assessments, project and theories are fine, but when I enter the classroom and there is even one kid that is starving, then I do not manage to see things optimistically, every hope is lost "(mathematics teacher in a high school in Axioupolis).

The above opinion is vital in the context of critical education, since, as Apple states, we should always seek for organized action and we should try not to be lost in the utopian dreaming. Of course, such a utopian dreaming can provide a starting point, but our first and main duty as educators is to educate in relation to these very conditions (Apple, 1988).

Another topic that is linked with the issue of teacher’s quality is that of the teacher’s evaluation. This issue has been rather ambiguous in our country, causing various controversial reactions. The teachers’ responses show certain contradictions, dividing them into three distinguished categories. First of all, there

are those, who reckon that the evaluation of the teaching work is acceptable, and an excellent opportunity to examine the teacher's performance.

"I think that the teachers' assessment was a great opportunity for our field to define the criteria that are required, but there is a sterile denial. I believe that the evaluation has to do with the evaluation of the whole school unit, not only with the individual presence and work of the teachers" (teacher of history in a high school in Kalamaria).

Moreover, there are certain responses that follow the general public opinion, viewing the concept of evaluation from the perspective of the Memorandum of Understanding, leading to the dismissal of teachers. The above response is a characteristic example of the public opinion about evaluation: "The concept of evaluation, in the era of the financial crisis, is connected with layoffs, is an excuse for dismissals" (Primary teacher in Triandria)

Another contradicting point in the teachers' responses is the fact that some of them connect the necessity for doing a master or a further education with the fear of dismissal. Thus, there are teachers that confess that they had never considered of doing a master or a PhD before, but they feel obligated, under the "threat" of an evaluation:

"Evaluation has created a great amount of stress among teachers and creates an attempt to gather as many educational "guarantees" as possible, seminars, educational programs. On the other hand, once we obtain a university degree, I do not understand why we should be judged".

Effects on Teacher's Psychology and Emotional State

All 20 interviewees mentioned the impact of the economic crisis on their psychological condition. This is a topic that depends on several factors such as prior experience, endurance and adaptability to new situations as well as the existence of characteristics, such as educational readiness and the ability to leave negative experiences outside the classroom. According to Johnson et. al., 2005, teaching is one of the most stressful procedures worldwide, with possible repercussions both to teachers and students. Especially the concept of stress was a term that began to be associated with the teaching profession since 1972 and gradually began to be used more frequently in the subsequent literature (Kyriacou, 2001).

A recent study sought to investigate the stress levels of teachers of primary education after the outbreak of the economic crisis (Kalyva, 2013). In fact, the research findings show relatively low levels of stress, a result which is consistent with other similar studies (Kyridis et al., 1996; Pomaki & Anagnostopoulou, 2003). The author attributes the results of the research on issues such as the fact that the teacher's profession is characterized by long holidays, flexible hours and a steady job, although the reference in the absence of external evaluation is no longer relevant. Moreover, the author states that teachers may be somewhat accustomed to the new situation, which is consistent with many responses in this research, such as the following:

"I could say that it is mostly a psychological issue, not only for the children, we try to keep all the negative thoughts outside the classroom, but it is sometimes very hard to do so, when everything around us changes"(teacher of fifth grade in Axioupolis, a suburb area of Thessaloniki).

"I feel this insecurity about the future, I do not know what my future holds and I

am certainly more willing to volunteer, to help people in need, this is something I do (pause). I do not allow myself to be depressed by the crisis and I try not to think about it permanently. I am a person of action. I only speak personally for me though, because I see people at school who suffer psychologically” (L., Assistant Director in an elementary school).

There were also certain responses suggesting that stress and anxiety are two elements that have started to prevail among teachers in the era of crisis. We observe that each teacher develop different defense mechanisms against this situation. The question, however, at this point is what kind of values and ideals can be transmitted in an environment of political corruption, as it is at this point in Greece, and especially in what ways the modern educator can allow students to share their personal experiences of the economic crisis. To make this possible, of course, certain skills are required. These skills cannot be limited purely to the educational field, but they should be developed throughout the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. For instance, M., professor of religion, reckons:

We teachers have forgotten that we are not just transmitters of knowledge, but also a “light” of hope for children. We cannot enter the classroom and behave as if we were public officials. What we do requires a part of our soul, a part of our self.

Also, another major issue is the case of suicides that have been dramatically increased in the financial crisis. The majority of the answers indicate that it is totally different to be informed about suicides only on the level of numbers and percentages and completely different to experience one. The fact is that cases of suicides have been increased by 26.5% compared to 2011 and 43% compared with 2007, according to the Hellenic Statistical Authority. It is noteworthy that this is the highest increase recorded in Greece in the last 50 years, since the official record for suicides in the country has begun. In a related study (Kontaxakis et. al: 2013), it was found that during the economic crisis (2008-2011), there was an overall increase of approximately 27 suicides, 2%, while there was a statistically high rise among ages 50-54 ($t = 3.43$, $p = 0.007$). The same survey indicates that in absolute numbers, in the year 2011, the total cases of suicide were 477, of whom 393 were male suicides. The above represent the highest number of suicides that have occurred in Greece during the last decades.

Consequences on the Teacher's Role

All of the responses indicate that in the era of crisis, teachers deal with new responsibilities, which develop a more complicated profile. These responses could be combined with what Giroux and Aronowitz defined as the role of the intellectual reformer, who uses the pedagogical act in order to direct the political sphere (Gounari & Grollios, 2010: 179). The term was originally used by Gramsci, who analyzed the social function of intellectuals around the following categories of teachers: the reformers intellectuals, the critical intellectuals, the ensconced intellectuals and the hegemonic intellectuals. In this context, we are interested in the reformers intellectuals, because they are the ones that lay the foundation for a critical pedagogy, perceiving school as a continuous struggle for what is perceived as legal and what is seen as marginalized knowledge. From this point of view, what is required is an ongoing reflection in combination with the appropriate action, so that the students realize that they themselves are part of this struggle. Above all, the intellectual reformer enables students to develop their own

voice and system of beliefs, in order to be able to share their personal experiences and personal history (ibid: 180). This procedure requires a great deal of knowledge, given the fact that “If our aim is to produce a new stratum of intellectuals ... from a social group which has not traditionally developed the appropriate attitudes, then we have unprecedented difficulties to overcome” (Gramsci 1971: 43).

F., a teacher of disabled students, believes:

“Teachers should express his/her beliefs regarding the political parties, but it is advisable to create an air of doubt, so that students will be able to develop a critical way of view. Students should start asserting within school. For instance, we have no heat, what should we do? No need to do anything? Should we force parents to bring oil? Children should develop these doubts, movements, reactions ”

In the context of the teachers' role, the interviewees were asked to express their political beliefs and whether they should be expressed or not. The contradiction between the interviewees is evident at this point. Teachers that were presented more conservative expressed their skepticism towards the political role of the teacher. The following teacher in a primary school in Triandria, stated that she belongs to the right-wing political area. When asked about the political dimension of the teacher' role, she responded:

“Our job is not to discuss about politics, but about training and educating students. When a teacher deals with issues and problems, such as racism, violence and aggression, he/she expresses a political position in the broader sense. In no case can we lead students towards a specific political orientation”.

On the other hand, a teacher that stated to be left-wing reckoned that it is his duty to raise issues, such as political corruption of certain political parties:

“I am not afraid to talk about politics in the classroom. We are often discussing about specific politicians and their actions. I am trying to convey to my students the idea that expressing our specific political beliefs is not something that should be frowned upon”.

However, in general, the majority of teachers seemed to reckon that the educator must express political beliefs, but not about specific political parties:

“I believe that children should be told the truth, that there should be special attention and flexibility, a teacher should not be a “mouthpiece” of a specific political party. Moreover, today the general idea is that students should develop a critical thinking. I urge children to think about the various political problems in the era of crisis, such as corruption and nepotism. Children should gradually get used to taking responsibilities and thinking in a critical way. Whatever happened to our country has been created by incompetent, non-critical people”.

At the same time, some teachers reported the moral dimension of the teacher's role:

“When we mean economic crisis, we must think that it is not only economic, but also political, social and moral. Crisis means recession, means that something "goes down". The teacher has an outstanding debt against it, which most do not understand”.

From the above answers, it is evident that teachers are making an effort to empower their students, but their responses depict that they have a rather vague idea of the ways to achieve so. They claim that they help students to develop a critical thinking. However, they do not seem to search for specific pedagogical ways, which would lead to the students' empowerment and resistance. This

contradiction between what they claim and what they actually do can be connected with the intellectual's role in Gramsci's theory, whether they would choose to be part of the hegemony, as organic intellectuals, as "simple orators" of the status quo, or whether they would make the option to be original intellectuals, having the courage to guide their students.

In this context, teacher is now required not only to convey knowledge to children, but also to empower them. And this empowerment does not only mean helping students to cope with the world around them, but also transmitting the comparable courage to change the social order (McLaren, 2007). Thus, schools should not only be classrooms but also cultural fields, where teachers are invited to actively contribute to the personal and social empowerment of students (Gounari & Grollios, 2010: 282).

Impact on Students

Most teachers recognize the fact that the economic crisis has a tangible impact on the economic and family background of students, reckoning that in many cases, families of a high or middle socio-economic stratum have suddenly lost their jobs and therefore their high social status. In this context, the analysis of responses has a very interesting sociological perspective, because many concepts such as cultural capital, equal opportunities and social mobility have been used.

The majority of teachers reported the inextricable link between the family context and the students' performance, saying that there are cases of students, who have totally lost their interest, due to various problems in their family:

"It makes perfect sense, children who do not have heating, adequate heating and have no food, they are often sick, how can you anticipate a good performance in the classroom? When you do not have the basics, how can have the ability to read and do well in school?" (physical educator in Axioupolis).

In contrast, some teachers argued that family context has always played a role in student performance and is not a matter of the current financial crisis:

"I do not see any particular impact on performance, children perceive some things from home and their school performance has always been affected by other factors, but I can only say that financial crisis is not the only and exclusive factor. There were always times where a student had some financial problems and this affected his/her school's performance. Also, parents may be separated or divorced".

Apart from the above, teachers were asked about the changing role of the school in providing equal opportunities to students. Most concluded that school should- especially in these conditions of economic instability- provide opportunities for students, in order to equalize the deficient economic and social backgrounds, a process that is usually not plausible:

"I believe that while the purpose of school is to give equal opportunities, I do not think that this happens. Indeed, if it happened, children would not need private lessons. Besides, we should consider that school as an institution aims at some specific students, those who are said to have good school performance. They have adapted or are consistent with the method of school, but there are many other things which are not examined, for example the evaluation of teachers. Especially in the times of crisis, the gap among students seems sharper" (teacher of fifth grade in Kordelio).

In the above insight, we can detect certain sociological elements of great

importance regarding the subject of equality of opportunities among students from different social strata. As McLaren states (2007), critical education deals with the various ways and processes that lead to the reproduction of the social and financial status quo. This reproduction legitimizes the current financial and social stratifications of the wider society. Nonetheless, social reproduction is not just a matter of financial state or social strata. It constitutes a field that creates and recreates certain patterns of behavior and cognition that allow the maintenance of the social control (Apple, 1968: pp. 13-18). Apple specifically uses the concept of hegemony as the result of constant conflicts and resistances in the educational environment, where the ruling classes seek for the active consensus of the lower social classes: "Close to the views of Marx and Engels, the thought of hegemony in Gramsci meant the ideological dominance of values and the norm of the bourgeoisie to the lower social strata" (Apple, 1982: 86).

According to Bourdieu, schools reward students based on their cultural capital, defined as "means of symbolic capital of wealth" (Bourdieu, 1977). Teachers allegedly communicate more easily with students from the upper classes, treating them as more "gifted" than the students from the lower or middle classes. Bourdieu noted, however, that financial barriers are not sufficient to explain the differences between the educational attainments of children from different social classes. Above and beyond economic indicators, cultural habits and dispositions (*habitus*) that are inherited by the pupil are essential for success in school. These cultural habits and dispositions consist of resources able to generate profit for owners, because they tend to be regarded as more capable in the community, as they have greater access to cultural heritage. Bourdieu finds that the legalization of inequality in cultural dimension should be shown in a way that is very different from that of the economic inequality. This is because economic inequality can be addressed by providing financial grants, but the inherent inequality is largely subjected to cultural predisposition and family heritage which is hereditary, because frequent interaction between parents and child creates a complete way of life, an entrenched behavior, a "custom", which is legitimized within school. This lifestyle includes visits to exhibitions, engaging music and literature, reading books from the market and not from any form of borrowing, monitoring classics of cinema, visits to museums and places of great historical importance. All this create a certain frame of mind, action and ownership of the historical and cultural heritage. Bourdieu states: "School requires a certain behavior. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural capacity and the relationship between family and culture, a relationship that can only be produced when the family transmits the dominant ideology (Bourdieu, 1974:80). Of course, for the acquisition of such cultural heritage, not only the right environment is required, but also the comparable ability of the student to internalize all those standards and norms that contribute to a better integration in the norm of school (Dumais, 2002: 44). In fact, the question that arises is whether the educational credentials are simply "... one internalisation of cultural 'capital' that turns into school knowledge." (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1981:145). Moreover, it is apparent that the simple connection between two variables does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between them. Finally, Bourdieu also presents evidence that both social class and educational attainment are closely linked to participation in cultural activities such as reading books, cinema, theater, concerts and museum participation. However, these data are not sufficient to support the theory of Bourdieu, because the data are not adequate to

support the fact that cultural events and participation in cultural events guarantee school success.

Beyond the issue of financial resources, the economic structure raises questions of whether students of all social classes receive appropriate stimuli and incentives, in order to internalize performance incentives and continuous evolution. The poverty of inspiration is as devastating as the poverty of opportunities and it's time to replace a culture of low expectations for many with a culture of high standards for all (Brown: 2007). Such "low expectations" have been commonly reported as one of the most significant obstacles to the working class educational achievement by both researchers and makers of educational policy (Demie & Lewis: 2010). Children living in deprived communities face a cultural barrier that stands in very different ways than material poverty. It is a kind of cultural barrier, which includes low expectations and skepticism about education, a sense that education is for other people, and that is likely to leave someone who is standing in a low social position. Especially in Greece, private tutors and private schools for the preparation for school ("frontisthria"), are considered to be inextricably linked with the educational process:

"Not long ago, I had a conversation with my colleagues, and someone said: "At least high school should make a repetition of what children learn in the tutorial". So a lot come to believe that the educational system, especially the secondary education, does not work anymore. With this in mind, how can we believe that students of all social classes have the same opportunities?"

A general conclusion that could be made is that teachers of more left-wing beliefs criticized school, in a larger sense, claiming that students' performance has always been influenced by cultural capital and is not a new phenomenon of the economic crisis. The following response is also derived from a teacher who expressed left-wing political beliefs:

"The performance of students is connected with what we call the hidden curriculum, i.e. beyond the formal; we have to consider the informal. This has to do with the ideology and values that the teacher wants to convey. The question is whether teachers will choose to convey the dominant ideology or they will try to create skepticism in the students' mind"

Within the concept of ideology, all social practices and pedagogical approaches are important in schools. As McLaren states, certain pedagogical practices and procedures are presented as normal and are therefore not subjected to criticism (Gounari & Grollios, 2010: 311). This implies that the ideological basis of the course is not limited only to what students are formally taught, but especially in those who hide behind the official school knowledge, the hidden curriculum. Moreover, the whole process has to do with what Foucault describes as practical reasons, i.e. not only words, but practical institutions, behavioral patterns and forms of pedagogy. The important thing is that these practices speech shape and analogous relations of power, because they determine who can and cannot speak, while pointing who is in a position of power and who are the ones who obey (Foucault, 1972: 117). Also, according to Gramsci, "The individual consciousness of the overwhelming majority of children reflects social and cultural relations which are different from and antagonistic to those which are represented in the school curricula" (Gramsci, 1971: 35).

These positions in the current context of education in the years of crisis

can be connected with the ways and methods that each teacher will choose to defend against the existing difficulties. What is obvious from the teacher's responses is the fact that they perceive their role as more complicated and multi-dimensional in the era of crisis.

Conclusion

The analysis of the interviews indicates that the current financial crisis has created certain patterns of behavior among teachers. On the one hand, we detect the profile of the teacher who gives emphasis on the materialistic aspect of education. This insight was mainly expressed by teachers in schools of the West of Thessaloniki, where the socio-economic status of the area is relatively low. In those schools, the results of the financial crisis are more tangible in the area of the logistics and infrastructure. On the other hand, there occurs the type of the teacher, who perceives the financial crisis in a general demoralizing framework. This profile is to be found in schools of the Eastern Thessaloniki, where the financial background is considered to be high. As a result, the materialistic repercussions of the financial crisis are not so evident there, a fact that allows teachers to behold the further implications of the current situation. Another important factor that influences the teachers' beliefs and attitudes is their political beliefs. Those who declared to be left-wing, tended to criticize school as an institution, referring to the general deficiencies of the educational system in Greece, beyond the current financial crisis.

As a general assumption, the majority of the interviewees perceived the current crisis not only as a severe financial state, but also as a moral, social, political and educational crisis. Thus, they seem to believe that its repercussions on education should be examined in this multifaceted framework. A framework that is also shaped by the unique characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of the Greek society. Most of the teachers' responses indicate that whereas education should be regarded as a vital element, in the constant effort for financial recovery, it is in fact the sector that withstands the vast majority of the cutbacks of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Moreover, a general idea that was expressed- and is in correlation with critical pedagogy- is the fact that education should be more connected with the general financial and social context, as well as with the broader society. In this context, education can play a significant role in the empowerment and emancipation of students and teachers, in order to develop certain defensive mechanisms in the era of crisis. Especially teachers should develop a powerful role, in order to be opposed to the neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideology that is characterized by the constant effort to undermine the teacher's role. In the context of critical pedagogy, school process can not be a sterile procedure, neutral and detached from the political, cultural, economic and social spheres. According to theorists of critical pedagogy, teachers should consider education in the light of race, social class, power and gender. It is the role of the teacher, who wishes to impart what Habermas calls emancipatory knowledge, i.e. the kind of knowledge that will help students understand the relationships of power and privilege, which largely distort the perception we have of world and social relations (Habermas, 1975). In this context, teacher has the duty to talk about issues such as oppression,

irrationality, social injustice and structural violence. And most importantly, in the era of crisis, teachers should now -more than ever -develop their own critical voice and identity.

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