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Hellenic Pedagogical Cosmos

A Periodic Kaleidoscope on Education and Pedagogy in Hellas

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Hellenic Pedagogical Cosmos

A Periodic Kaleidoscope on Education and Pedagogy in Hellas

Editor

Dr Leonidas C. Bombas

Contributors (this issue)

Dimitra Gouva
Venetia Koiliari
Anna Koraki
Christos Costarelos
Elli Papadimitropoulou
Efie Pitterou
Katerina Tolou

Assistant to the Editor

Kleoniki Bombas

Hellenic Pedagogical Cosmos (HPC) is an informative, rather unusual, periodical on educational and pedagogical issues and developments in contemporary Hellas. It is not an academic review in the traditional sense by which such reviews have become known throughout the international academic community. The format is different, the contents as a whole are presented differently. Notwithstanding this, HPC seeks, primarily, to serve the needs of all those Anglophones whose access to the esoteric educational atmosphere of Greece is limited due to the Greek language barrier. Throughout the contents of the periodical, the non-Greek speaking reader may find a number of highly synoptic presentations of a variety of educational and pedagogical themes from a wide spectrum of 'originators' (e.g. academics, researchers, teachers, parents, students, journalists, politicians, etc) that rarely cross Greek borders via the medium of a 'foreign' language. In that sense, the heterogeneous panorama of the synchronous Hellenic pedagogy analyzed in this 'Cosmos' may always be of both theoretical interest and practical use to all those involved in the field of education.

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to: Dr Leonidas C. Bombas, 24 Efthimiou Papa Street, 17342 Agios Dimitrios, Greece.
Tel: 697-4433234
Fax: 210-9927659
e-mail: bombas@hpcosmos.gr
www.hpcosmos.gr

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The valuable assistance of "Nea Ekpaideftiria – G. Malliaras" in
realizing this HPC project is greatly appreciated

Greek Federation of Secondary State School Teachers (OLME)

OLME is one of the most dynamic Civil Servants' Federations; it consists of 91 local unions and is the only secondary state school teachers union in Greece with more than 55,000 members. OLME was established in 1924 with the purpose to secure teachers' working rights and to promote Greek culture.

Nowadays OLME focuses on:

- The co-ordination of all local unions it consists of, aiming at the moral, social and professional development of teachers while defending their rights.
- Its contribution to the development of Greek culture.

OLME is an affiliated member of ADEDY, the Civil Servants Confederation, and a member of ETUCE and Education International. So far, OLME has developed significant union work and has been on the forefront of all struggles defending social rights and claims. OLME supports a public, free-for-all education without discrimination, and is fighting for an increase of the state budget on education.

Moreover, OLME is closely related to and cooperates with teacher trade unions across Europe and around the world.

Editor's lexis

This most recent six-month period since the publication of the May 2014 "ceremonial" issue of the "Hellenic Pedagogical Cosmos" reminding and celebrating (in a way...) the tenth anniversary of this review (2004-2014), the pedagogical and the educational arena over the contemporary Greek horizon -as always and as expected- continued its traditional course of 'action and inaction'. And this has been so, of course, in the midst of the well-documented (by now) economic crisis permeating the entire Greek society and hitting every single individual/family in many and catalytic ways. This is, in short, a synoptic lexical description as an informative prologue to the overall picture at hand.

Proceeding to more specifics as far as the actual content of the prevailing educational issue is concerned, one may reasonably point to the following (very well-known and much discussed) theme as a kind of potential stimulus for thought and dialogue to/with the interested reader:

The controversial and 'touchy' -in many respects and on the part of all those directly concerned- issue of the evaluation of the Greek system of education as a whole and the assessment of primary and secondary education teachers, headteachers and all regional state educational officials, appears to occupy the central scene of our "educational affairs" well up to the present day. The Ministry of Education insists and moves on as planned with this overall evaluation at all levels of the educational pyramid, while the vast majority of teachers strongly oppose such a "measure or policy" on the grounds that such an evaluation lacks objectivity, may lead many classroom teachers to unemployment and that another 'kind/type' of assessment is needed. Time and again and in different occasions, the elected representatives of all state and private education teachers as well as most local associations of teachers at the school level have already made their 'position' known to the Ministry of Education and their refusal to co-operate and take part in this evaluation scheme/procedure. On its part, the Ministry continues to claim that the said evaluation proceeds as originally planned, despite all the above mentioned objections and that the evaluation will be carried out and completed in due time.

We shall see...

Leonidas C. Bombas

Comparative Educationalist

Director of Studies, "Nea Ekpaideftiria – G. Malliara"

Athens, November 2014

Anthology of educational/pedagogical issues as presented via the press

The Greek educational landscape changes

With the formal adoption and the eventual implementation of the Law 4186-2013, the entire landscape of the Greek education as known up to the present changes in its most basic aspects. More specifically, as has been emphasized by the Minister of Education himself Andreas Loverdos, the Law brings substantial changes in primary and secondary curricula, in the different school subjects taught, in the way and the requirements for student promotion from one grade to the next, as well as to the tertiary education entrance requirements and examinations. It should be stressed that the proposed changes in senior high school do not apply to the last two grades (B & C of Lyceum), but only the students starting their grade A attendance in order not to 'upset' the course of studies of the students already in grades B & C.

Emergency exercises in schools

The ministry of Education has sent a circular to all state and private schools asking the respective headteachers to organize a number of special Emergency Exercises in their schools aimed at developing anti-seismic awareness/conscience and behavior on the part of both the teachers and the students. As known, Greece is one of the specific countries around the globe where earthquakes (strong or relatively weaker) are not that uncommon. Thus, the Ministry asks from the headteachers to pay the attention needed in carrying out at least a couple of well-organized such anti-seismic exercises, so that the teachers may know exactly what they should do in supervising and leading their students to safety in case of a real earthquake and the students themselves be aware of the dangers from such phenomena and cooperate with their teachers in case of a real emergency within the school premises.

For the teachers

From now onwards, primary and secondary education teachers in Greece who wish to participate in the procedure of the Ministry of Education for selecting and employing substitute teachers and teachers paid by the hour, they will be asked to submit an official paper (certificate) issued by the regional Attorney General of the geographical area that each of those teachers had served. This 'clearance paper' should testify that the teacher in question had never been accused or prosecuted for felonies/crimes related to sex freedom and the like.

Teaching hours...lost

Once more the phenomenon of shortage of classroom teachers in both primary and secondary schools across Greece has come into the forefront through the respective figures presented in the press by the elected representatives of the teachers. Every single school year it has become almost a well-established tradition the very fact of 'missing' classroom teachers. Even two or three months after the formal beginning of the school year in September, a number of schools operate with fewer teachers needed based on the number of the students attending the school and the corresponding classes. Thus, until quite recently the teachers have been voicing their concern for the thousands and thousands of teaching hours that are lost in many schools due to the shortage of teachers. In short, as argued by the teachers' representatives a grand total of approximately 7,000 primary and secondary classroom teachers are still 'missing' from the schools, 5,000 of whom are primary school teachers.

On the teacher's evaluation front

Over the last few years, a lot has been said and written about the evaluation of the Greek primary and secondary education teachers. Among others, the indisputable fact that these teachers have never been evaluated in a systematic and objective (as much as possible) way, seems to hold a prominent position in this on-going controversy and dialogue within the educational community and the different political entities all over Greece. Nonetheless. The issue of the evaluation of the Greek teachers, which 'somehow' and in the midst of all heated discussions and controversies seems to have started moving back and forward from case to case in question, has come again at the forefront of the educational arena. The Ministry of Education has published the so-called 'seven points' on which the overall philosophy and the actual practice of this long overdue evaluation will take place and be completed during the current school year onwards. Despite the fact that the Minister of Education has stated times and again in all imaginable tones that the evaluation will not lead to layoffs of teachers, the Federation of Greek Teachers as an organized representative body and the vast majority of the teachers themselves do not believe this. The fear of losing their (state) teaching employment is there for several hundred (if not thousands) of teachers.

Special Committee for school violence

With a recent decision of the Ministry of Education and within a climate of more and more public interest/dialogue and concern in Greece (as has been the case, of course, in many other European –and not only- countries over the last few years) about this phenomenon of so-called bullying in schools, a special "Central Committee Dealing with School Violence and Bullying" has been institutionalized. The main task of this Central Committee is the scientific support of the organizations concerned/dealing with these phenomena and continuous coordination of the specific actions planned and implemented towards the effective handling the crucial issues of school violence and bullying in Greek primary and

secondary schools. University professors of criminology and other experts on those issues have been appointed as acting members of the Committee which has as its president Mrs V. Artinopoulou (prof. of Criminology, Panteion University)

The Hellenic Open University

The comparatively new institution of tertiary education in Greece, The Hellenic Open University (HOU), with its successful operation for several years now has established itself as one 'alternative' and 'convenient' route of university studies for thousands of Greek adults. Thus, as announced by the registrar of the University for this academic year, the applications by those interested to follow one of the many course of studies offered may be submitted from November 1 until December 10, 2014. The total cost for each module (thematic unit) registered is 550 euro. It is, also, noted that the university offers a number of scholarships to all those eligible each academic year. According to the decision of the Ministry of Education, the total undergraduate number of students that the HOU will accommodate for the academic year 2015=2016 will be 4,790.

Apotheosis of a dialectic epiphenomenon

CERN & the TEI of the city of Kavala

Over the last few years, one may take note of the fact that more and more initiatives and joint projects are underway at the level of tertiary education in Greece. It seems that most of the Greek universities and TEI have already stated to establish international co-operations with foreign universities and renown research centers, in their concerted efforts to improve their overall academic and research status in the highly antagonistic arena of tertiary education worldwide. Indicative of this 'trend' is the latest collaboration of CERN and TEI Kavala, a collaboration that, as a first step towards that direction, appears quite encouraging and promising for the future. Thus, the computer school of the European Organization for Nuclear Research, better known by its French acronym CERN, will set up at the Kavala Institute of Technology (TEI), bringing together 60 students and 10 foreign professors from around the world. According to the TEI officials this specific initiative gives the Greek Institute a prestigious 'international flavor' which, undoubtedly, brings additional value to the overall operation of the TEI in the city of Kavala.

Some further details on the very specifics of this joint endeavor as presented in the press recently, are quite informative for that matter. To encourage students to register for the two-week program, it has been mutually arranged by the two partner institutions that the TEI is offering two meals a day to participants, contributing to a unique exercise in educational mobility that more than 20 higher education institutions in Europe have hosted previously, notably at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus, last year. Thus, the TEI in Kavala and its academic community has the opportunity to experience first-hand all the benefits from such a challenging mobility scheme within the European tertiary education sector.

And this is not all. Cooperation between the TEI and CERN does not stop at summer school – an ultrafast datalink has come online in last September, enabling the Greek institute's computers to help the Swiss facility's supercomputer crunch the prodigious data output from the accelerator in which the existence of the elusive Higgs boson or so-called "God Particle" was recently confirmed, earning scientists Peter Higgs and Francois Englert the Nobel Prize in Physics. The inauguration of the data connection to Kavala was attended by CERN's director-general, Rolf Dieter Heuer, and distinguished Greek and Swiss scientists.

Polychromatic symbols in the pedagogical marathon

A new plan by the police for the security of school units

From the beginning of the current school year 2014-1015 the Greek Police has implemented a new comprehensive program concerning the crucial issue of security all around and inside the school buildings of the country, with particular emphasis on protecting the entire student community through a series of preventive initiatives. Within this framework of concerted action, the Police Chief has already sent to all regional services of the Greek Police a set of very specific orders and directions concerning:

- = the continuous and very careful supervision of all schools in their area (especially so those school buildings/units that are located in isolated communities) on a twenty four hour basis. Particular attention should be paid during the night and those days that schools do not operate. This constant supervision aimed at preventing any illegal act and activity will be carried out by police men and women working on both foot patrols and on cars/motorbikes.
- = the systematic 'checks points'(control) by police officers in the areas surrounding school buildings, so that suspects (persons and/or vehicles) are taken for questioning and further investigation –as the case may be.
- = the implementation of intensive control/examination of the school canteens so that existing laws concerning all aspects of their operation within the school units are strictly observed.
- = the carrying out of checks/examination on all shops (café, food, etc) operating in the vicinity of the schools, as well as on similar shops operating in areas where students go for their yearly excursions.
- = the supervision of squares, playing grounds, sports venues, etc, places that is where many students visit and play.

From the history of the neo-Hellenic education system: a didactic nostalgia

The transmission of mathematics into Greek education...

In the early 19th century, a number of Greek communities developed a remarkable education in mathematics. The subject matter for this instruction was drawn mainly from French textbooks, although some teachers displayed a preference for Prussian mathematical sources. These efforts, however, were thwarted by the religious conservatism of the Greek establishment of the time, which did not favor the emergence of a Greek mathematical discourse. As a consequence, the reception of mathematical knowledge was a fragmented, random process lacking cohesion, collectivity and transitivity. The situation radically changed during the second and third decades of the 19th century. The Ionian Academy in Corfu, and the Military School in Nafplio, founded in 1824 and 1828 respectively, created the first institutional frame for a Greek education in which post-revolutionary French mathematics was established as the basis of Greek mathematical discourse. The French background of Greek mathematical education was further reinforced after 1837, subsequent to the institutionalization of secondary education, and to the founding of the University of Athens in 1836-1837.

At the same time, along with this French infusion into Greek mathematical discourse, some noteworthy translations of Prussian textbooks were promoted as well. The first half of the 19th century also witnessed the transmission of the respective epistemological trends of that era, i.e. of the analytical model, of the positivism dominating French mathematics, and of the combinatorial "paradigm" of Prussian mathematics, to the historical setting of Greek mathematical education.

.....

At the beginning of the 19th century, the traditional Orthodox education¹ of the Greek communities in the Ottoman state took on the major challenge of developing innovative schools, which promoted and sustained certain social groups. Two very characteristic examples for that were the establishments of the Academy in Kydonies (Ayvalik, in Turkish) about the year 1800, and of the * Department of Computer Science, University College London, United Kingdom [e-mail: j.kastanis@cs.ucl.ac.uk, Department of mathematics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece [e-mail: nioka@math.auth.gr] The education provided by the Orthodox Church.² Philological Gymnasium in Smyrna (Izmir in Turkish) in 1808. It is worth noting that these innovative trends were not exclusively confined to the two aforementioned cities of the Eastern Aegean. Several well-established Greek educational centers updated their curriculum, or occasionally presented some relevant revisions of the latter. Four schools to restructure their curriculum during this period were those of Ampelakia, at the end of the 18th century, the

Gymnasium in Chios, and the School in Milies, Pilio during the second decade of the 19th century, and one of the two educational institutes of Ioannina, in 1805. At the same time, progressive attempts were also made at the Patriarchic School in Constantinople5 (Istanbul in Turkish) and at the Academies of Bucharest and Jassy. The common goal of these schools was to enhance their curricula with scientific subjects, with advanced mathematics, and with current philosophical theories. To achieve this goal required an effort at superseding, to a certain degree, the established system of education, which focused on religion. This effort at revision was neither accepted nor even tolerated by certain traditional circles of Neo-Hellenic education intent on impeding, and in some cases even thwarting, its implementation. In this inauspicious environment, it was difficult to attempt; let alone effect any spontaneous, utopian changes regarding orientation, subject matter, and teaching staff involved in Neo-Hellenic education. In short, initiatives and activities in this direction called, as conditions of their realization, both for novel intellectual and social ideals, demands and expectations to emerge, and for strong economic and political forces in their support. In the late 18th century, infrastructures and perspectives conducive to such conditions indeed developed within a number of Greek communities, which happened to flourish because of their booming industry and commercial shipping. It is noteworthy that the new educational trends emerged primarily within two geographical areas: Thessaly (i.e. mainland Greece) and the Eastern Aegean.

Iason Kastanis & Nikos Kastanis

Pragmatism in the abyss of educational unorthodoxy

'Preparation cost' for University entrance

It is well known phenomenon among all members of the Greek society at large that students and families with expectations of attending a university or a technological educational institute (TEI) in Greece is a definite effort that requires sacrifices from all the family. And this particular characteristic of the 'Greek case' in that respect has been going on for years and years, despite the many public declarations for changing this whole situation to the immediate benefit of all those concerned – candidates and their families. The usual rhetoric on the part of most –if not all- Greek politicians, especially so when they serve in the opposition benches of the Greek Parliament, very little has done so far to improve this "pan-hellenic characteristic" of moving from secondary education to tertiary education.

As reported throughout different reliable sources, it is estimated that the preparation of a student for the forthcoming entrance examinations to pursue Greek higher education is setting the family at least €14,000 back. Despite going through a harsh financial crisis, offering adequate preparation for children remains a top priority for Greek parents, as the highly competitive entrance examinations for higher education lead parents — not wanting to risk the future of their children — to spend as much money as necessary. Interestingly enough, one may observe that in 2013, Greek households spent €1.05 billion for their children to attend middle and high school tutoring, with the amount being decreased by only 5.4% compared to 2010. There is no doubt that this grand total amount spent by all Greek families in question each academic year, represents a very significant percentage of the annual income of those families.

Without claiming that we "re-discover America" with this reminder on the money spent for securing a place in tertiary education, it is interesting to take a look at the particular tutorial fees required. One of the most recent publications concerning the money spent for this 'preparatory enterprises', is quite illuminating. Thus, according to data from the Association of Educational Tutors of Attica, annual costs for extracurricular programs for students in middle school (Gymnasio) start at €1,200 for six hours a week for nine months. Students attending the last grade of high school (Lykeio) have to deal with annual costs of around €3,700, if they choose to apply for the top-ranking medical and polytechnic schools that require special intensive preparation.

This 'extra tutorial tradition' almost inherent into the Greek education system and the daily lives of virtually all Greek families with children aspiring to become 'university inhabitants', does not stop here. Clearly, the expense of getting into higher education are not the only ones, as it has become a standard for parents to

invest in foreign language tutors for their children. Unfortunately, for its greatest part, the teaching/learning of foreign language in the regular state education system is far from adequate and effective.

In spite of the fact that foreign language teaching (the teaching of English claiming the lion's share in this respect) constitutes an integral part of the official school curricula, the well-documented flourishing of private lessons claims a long lasting and highly persisting tradition. The vast majority of Greek children attend private language schools (Frontistiria) which operate all over Greece with hundreds and thousands of primary and secondary education students. Monthly costs for those private classes in foreign languages range there from €30 to €170, depending on the number of hours, the students per class and the level. For example, obtaining a medium-class certificate in English –like the FCE offered by the University of Cambridge– can cost up to €120 per month, while the higher-class CPE up to €180 per month. Based on research, Greek parents spend an overall amount of roughly €859.29 million on foreign language tutoring annually.

Exodus

A new program called “Kid’s Athletics”

It seems that this present Ministry of Education Andreas Loverdos has a particular and comparably more intense inclination towards athletics and sports. Several more recent initiatives of the Ministry of Education at the level of primary and secondary school level, may surely be taken as direct and undisputable indications of this ‘athletic trend’. Now, concerning the extent and the frequency that all these athletic initiatives and proposals of the Minister of Education are actually being implemented by each single school of the country, this is rather an open question for many and different reasons. Nonetheless, here is a brief description of the most recent proposal of this type of school activities.

The Ministry of Education (Directorate of Physical Education) in close collaboration with SEGAS (Association of Hellenic Gymnastic & Athletic Organizations) has decided to extend the implementation of the innovative program “Kid’s Athletics” to all schools across Greece. The aim of this initiative, which constitutes an integral part of the thematic topics of the Social School, is to underline and promote the multifaceted benefits offered to all children when actively participating in the different athletic activities and sports/games organized within the daily school program.

More specifically, this innovative program aims at offering (to) all Greek students a well-developed and systematically organized athletic program in the form of “playing”, while at the same time these students will have the opportunity to get to know the most popular sports (agonismata) of track and field. The program of the World Federation of Tracks & Field (I.A.A.F) “kid’s Athletics” comprises a number of movements and functional skills that have been adapted in such a way as to correspond to the age of each children’s group and includes three groups of agonismata: racing, throwing and jumps.

The School Councilor of each local district in close collaboration with the Regional Director of that District will have the responsibility for developing and overseeing the good implementation, while the Physical Education teachers of each school will also play an active part in all phases of the program.

Ephemeral hedonistic hydration in the morphology of the system

Let us give “reading” the priority it deserves

Within the existing framework of the storming (negative) developments characterizing our daily schooling reality, questions and discussions like: Do all children learn how to read? Can we help ALL children so that they acquire the reading skills needed? Which are the most appropriate and effective methods? Why should I know the best approaches related to reading? Should we wait until our children begin formal schooling/reading in order to provide the necessary support to all children?

Yet, the skill of reading constitutes a life skill and formal schooling has the responsibility to adopt and practice the most effective teaching in that respect, although -quite often- this responsibility of the school is ‘transferred’ to the family of the child in order to find a solution to the ‘reading problem’ outside the school. A reality for many Greek families that, among others, comes as an additional economic burden in the middle of the harsh crisis affecting all of Greece.

It is well known, by now, that the skill of reading and -more generally- the development of the skill of writing is not an innate skill as is the case with the oral speech. Thus, the skills of reading and writing are not intuitively acquired but only through teaching. Of course, it is estimated that approximately a percentage of 70% of all Greek children do acquire the skill of reading without particular difficulties. The rest 30% of the children who face various types of difficulties in their reading skill, however, constitute a very significant student population that we should pay special attention and teaching care.

Thus, the University of Thessaly, through its Center for Professional Training, organizes a 500 hours program aimed at providing certification and qualifications in the area of Reading Difficulties. The duration of this program is a full academic year aimed at the systematic training of interested teachers. The thematic units/topics of this innovative training program provide very specific answers to all questions/concerns mentioned above with regard to the important skill of reading by all children. The program gives particular emphasis in ‘preventive intervention’ as far as the reading skill of all Greek pre-school children is concerned.

Pseudonyms & sarcasms: Hypocrisy as exegesis

English language in Greece

Anyone familiar with the contemporary Greek society would readily attest to the fact that, as far as foreign languages are concerned, English dominates all over Greece. As a matter of fact, this perennial predominance of English among Greeks – especially so among the younger generations- appears to persist as of today, even if one may observe some noticeable gains of several other foreign languages in the Greek teaching/learning arena. No doubt, stating the obvious in other words, Greece is not the only country where English holds the very first place as a foreign language. Quite the opposite. For its greatest part, the world as a whole has become a kind “Anglophone village” –with everything ‘positive and negative’ consequences of such a present-day reality of ours. Having said all that, let us come back to Greece and its foreign language situation. English is the first foreign language Greek students learn from an early age. Among others, all official comparative figures released by national and international organizations concerning the ‘foreign language issue’, are very clear in this respect. Thus, one more confirmation of this apparently persisting trend has lately come through Eurobarometer.

Official data released by the Eurobarometer Special Surveys shows that, when it comes to people being able to speak English, Greece reaches 51 percent. Greece stands in the middle of the list of countries included in this survey. Greece also stands quite higher than Italy, which reaches 34 percent. In Spain only 22 percent of the population speaks English, while in Portugal 27 percent. Stating the obvious, English appears to predominate the overall Foreign language scenery across Europe (and, of course, not only, for that matter).

From this survey, we can conclude that almost every European can say at least a word or two in English, but this doesn't mean he can speak well enough in order to be able to communicate in an adequate level, or to hold a decent conversation. In the case of Greece, one may convincingly claim that the vast majority of Greeks (especially –as expected- among the comparatively younger generations) do manage to communicate in English.

For political and historical reasons however, Cypriots, speak better English than Greeks, with their rating reaching 73 percent. Surprisingly enough, the same survey reveals that five percent of Great Britain's population and 6 percent of Ireland's population doesn't speak English at all. And, no doubt, this very finding is not only an apparently surprising fact but –more than that- a rather worrisome one for the people involved.

Bridging the metropolis of Hellenism with the Greeks in diaspora

Assistance from the Arcadians living abroad

Throughout the rather long Greek migration history, it is a well-known fact that, traditionally, Greeks living abroad have always been 'present' (one way or another) and promptly responsive to calls for assistance on the part of the metropolis of Hellenism. Numerous concrete examples of this persisting 'trend' may readily be recorded from virtually all around the contemporary Greek Diaspora. A more recent case in point is the latest initiative taken by the Arcadians, for that matter.

Thus, as reported in the press, Arcadian members of the Greek Diaspora have offered computers and an air conditioner to special-needs schools in Tripoli, southern Greece, after raising money in a fundraiser dance which took place during the International Pan-Arcadian Conference, proving once again that Greeks abroad are always responding to their homeland's need.

During a modest ceremony in Tripoli's old town hall, in the presence of Mayor Dimitris Pavlis and the President of Pan-Arcadian Federation of Greece Vasilis Giannakakos, the President of the World Pan-Arcadian Confederation, Christos Tsimogiannis, delivered the computers and air conditioner to teachers of the special-needs school in Tripoli and the Special Education Vocational and Training School of Kapsia.

Tsimogiannis noted that Arcadian expats believe it is their duty to make a donation to their homeland and that is why the confederation board had decided to donate to the schools. He also added that at this time it was all they could offer and said he hoped that their donation would help the students who need all the support they can get.

Pavlis noted that the donation was necessary for the two schools and it would be very important for the education of children with special needs. He also thanked the Arcadian expats, who have always found a way to help their homeland.

Finally, teachers of both schools received the donation, thanked the expatriates and stressed that the equipment was necessary and it would not go to waste.

Apnea in the educational galaxy

Evaluating the Greek system of education

Once more, when reading the comparative data assessing different systems of education on the basis of certain standardized criteria, the Greek education system appears to lag well behind in all respects. Unfortunately so, this situation continues to perpetuate itself for decades and decades, despite the series of reforms and changes that have been implemented into the system. Thus, According to a recent report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Greece ranks very low in education. According to the report, Greece ranks in 27th place out of the 30 countries in the list.

Specifically, Greece scored 60.04% in terms of efficiency, lagging behind countries such as Turkey, Portugal and Italy. This ranking of Greece along the comparative list should not go unnoticed by all those responsible for developing and proposing educational policies in Greece.

The specific focus on the overall efficiency of educational systems today is of paramount importance in the era of globalization and the so-called information society of ours. Data published by "Eleftheros Typos" newspaper are referring to a report conducted by GEMS Education Solutions and specifically to the education system's efficiency in relation to the money each country allocates for education, the teachers' salaries and the student-teacher ratio per class.

One additional finding reported here bears its own significance for the countries directly concerned. Interestingly, (as expected?) all Mediterranean countries had low scores in terms of performance, while the report also presented a list of students' performance at the PISA 2012 contest.

The present data shows also an apparent 'deterioration', as far as the Greek system is concerned. In three different subject-courses (mathematics, reading comprehension and science), which were examined in 15-year-old students of all OECD member countries, the performance of Greek students among 65 countries dropped to 42nd place and 26th among the 30 OECD member countries, down from 25th in 2009.

...and (a little) more on the same issue

The ‘picture’ concerning the Greek education system and its comparative performance within the global education arena, does not seem to be better when reading (yet) another publication on these crucial pedagogical and educational issues. And here is why: A recent survey conducted by the U.K. research and analysis institution *Economist Intelligence Unit* for the British publishing house *Pearson*, found that the Greek education system ranked last across Europe, and 33rd in the world ranking.

Greece’s ranking is the worst compared to all other European countries, and the same compared to last year’s ranking, while on a global scale the Greek education system ranks among countries considered to be “developing” ones, like Indonesia, Mexico and Brazil.

The survey, which was conducted across 39 countries and Hong Kong SAR, China, is the result of a quantitative and qualitative analysis entitled “The Learning Curve,” which examines the performances of several education systems around the world. Although one may have a number of (legitimate) reservations as to the exact criteria and the methodology employed in carrying out this specific survey, the fact of the matter is that the problems and the comparative inefficiencies of the Greek education system cannot and should not be overlooked.

As explained by the experts who had the responsibility for completing this international survey, the analysis aimed to develop an effective education policy, both with economic and social outcomes. The evaluation was based on the performance of students and graduates in higher education, the U.S. TIMSS and PIRLS education studies, as well as on the PISA test, the international education evaluation program by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

According to the final outcomes of the survey, the world’s best education system is found in South Korea, followed by Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong. According to the survey, the great increase for education systems in countries across Asia is a result of the close cooperation between families, students and teachers, as well as the respect shown towards education staff in those countries.

The education system of Finland, which for years ranked first on a global scale, has been downgraded to the fifth place, however it remains first across European countries. Poland’s ranking in 10th place is a surprise, as the post-communist country has achieved great advancements in education since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Syndromes of lethargy and apocalypses of our schooling in Greece today

On the school violence issue...again

For one reason or another and regardless whether one agrees or not with the rather more recent development in the realm of the public concern/dialogue, the so-called issue of school bullying seems to have gained a dynamic and ever increasing momentum world-wide. Greece and Greek schools as a whole have not been exempted from this newly emerging 'discussion tie' of school bullying at all levels. The pertinent publications are quite informative in this respect. Thus, data released recently, reveals that Greece holds the fourth place among European countries, on school bullying. In fact, it was revealed that one in three secondary school students has been a bullying victim by his classmates and one in two students has witnessed such incidents.

The first scientific conference of the European Anti-bullying Network (EAN), entitled "School bullying and cyber-bullying across Europe," was held in Athens with the participation of experts from different countries whose presentations covered a wide range of issues pertaining to this rather more recent phenomenon among students..

More specifically, psychologists, sociologists, researchers, teachers and school counselors from different EU countries exchanged experiences and statistical data focusing on the importance of awareness, information and participation of parents, students and teachers in order to effectively address and solve the problem of school bullying. They also discussed the issues of violence and aggression, both within families and society.

According to the overall data presented during this conference, most victims are vulnerable children, with low self-esteem who are often sentimentally or physically weaker than their peers. The bullies on the other hand, appear aggressive, even towards their teachers. They have authoritarian tendencies towards their peers, they get easily irritated, while they don't appear to have confidence problems. It should be kept in mind that, although there are (expectedly) noticeable differences from 'case to case', the above mentioned 'typology' –so to speak- may legitimately claim its relative validity across socio-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, an additional observation concerning this phenomenon of bullying is of interest. A third category consists of children who are both the victims of bullying and bullies themselves. On the whole, this specific sub-population of children appear to share a number of concrete characteristics which may be summarized as follows: These children tend to be hyperactive, insecure, and

antisocial, usually unloved by their peers and their teachers. These children have low self-esteem and they try to react to the violence they receive, but not always effectively, as psychologist and researcher, Dan Olweus stated.

Among others, one should also take particular note of the point made by several experts when discussing these issues from a researcher's perspective. Thus, a research by the University of Cambridge showed that children who suffered from bullying are at a greater risk of developing depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies later in their life.

Finally, one indicative piece of information from the Greek participants in this important conference sheds additional light by presenting concrete figures on the part of a well-known and active organization. The "Smile of the Child" (Hamogelo tou Paidiou) organization which participates in EAN, received 500 calls and 31 e-mails on bullying in 2013, noted its president, Konstantinos Giannopoulos. He also mentioned that members of "Smile of the Child" made 378 visits to 10,720 children from schools throughout Greece in order to prevent bullying last year alone.

The central theme of this issue

Similarities and differences in the 'learning style' of boys and girls

Expectedly, the pertinent literature on both the similarities and the differences that traditionally have characterized the 'learning style' of boys and girls, has already furnished a voluminous body of theoretical and empirical studies internationally, with the analogous emphasis from case to case. At the same time, this same body of literature has never stopped formulating and posing new and 'fresh' questions concerning many interesting parameters of this ever challenging topic.

Regardless if one adheres and supports one or another view which -perhaps- underlines either the primary importance of existing similarities or the persistently reported differences in the way (s) that boys and girls learn, the fact of the matter is that this perennial discussion appears to have gained additional significance and momentum, nowadays, that both informal and (principally) formal learning has become the order of the day in the so-called 'learning society' of our era. Interestingly enough, this on-going dialogue and multifaceted debates across socio-cultural and economic/political contexts have apparently been intensified within the framework of the different so-called feminist movements, and the continuous concerns/efforts on the part of most contemporary societies to achieve pragmatic and substantial improvements concerning the ultimate goal of consolidating equality of both sexes at all levels and domains of personal and collective life.

No doubt, despite the highly noticeable progress that has been recorded world-wide on the 'similarities/differences' front

and the seemingly overall consensus with regard to the ever increasing importance and relevance of this dialogue at both the theoretical and the practical/schooling levels, a lot more remains to be actually done in approaching, understanding, appreciating and -eventually- dealing with the similarities and the differences pertaining to the learning style of boys and girls today.

As has been the 'tradition' of this very review of the "Hellenic Pedagogical Cosmos", and more specifically concerning the "Central Theme" section of the journal since its first publication in 2004, 'actual' classroom teachers are called upon to write down in an informative and concise format their personal views and classroom experiences on each specific topic (central theme), using their daily school praxis as the starting point of this public discussion though the pages of the HPC. Accordingly, continuing this interesting and quite challenging tradition with a number of classroom teachers always at the forefront of our constructive dialogue of pedagogical and educational issues/concerns, the short papers that follow discussing both the similarities and the differences on the learning style between boys and girls from a 'classroom teacher's perspective' aspire to make their valuable contribution felt across all interested readers. At the same time, these same 'personal writings' presented in public view look forward and -as always- expect the antilogos needed for new synthesis and further understanding and progress on this central theme at hand.

The horizon, as always in this public terrain, is widely open with no asterisks whatsoever.

L.C.B.

The issue of similarities and differences from the perspective of an English teacher

We, as teachers, sense that the girls and boys in our classroom learn in gender-specific ways and have noticed that the differences appear to be greatest among the youngest children.

In the 1960's-70's and even the 1980's it was fashionable to assume that gender differences were 'socially constructed'. On the contrary, a report from the National Institute of Health (NIH) found that gender differences in personality were remarkably robust across all cultures: gender differences were most pronounced in European and American cultures in which traditional sex roles are minimized.

As educators, we have been somewhat intimidated in recent years by the complex nature of gender. We now have the scientific evidence to prove our intuition that boys and girls do indeed learn differently. Neuroscience research has expanded rapidly over the past decade with the use of more sensitive imaging techniques to study the brain. This research has led to increased understanding of how brains function and how they develop. Despite advances in knowledge, the diffusion of brain study finding into the field of education has been slow, impaired by a lack of interaction between the hard sciences and the social sciences. Within the teaching population, the awareness of brain research and its possible implications for pedagogy remains low.

In 1996, the Gurian Institute, an organization that administers training in child development, education and male/female brain differences, coined the phrase 'nature-based approach' to call attention to the importance of basing human attachment and education strategies on research-driven biological understanding of human learning. The institute became especially interested in nature-based approaches to education, when scientists concluded that there are differences in male and female brains resulting in different performance in both academic and behavioral areas.

On some parameters, such as the attention span, the sex differences are larger than the age differences.

Girls demonstrate a focus on verbal-emotive processing, while boys show spatial-mechanical strengths.

Girls are more likely to be good listeners, a trait that serves well in a language-rich classroom, while boys do well when using mathematical-logical thinking.

Girls demonstrate strength in multitasking, while boys are hardwired to be single-task focused.

Girls print neatly and follow directions carefully, while boys produce disorganized work or messy handwriting.

Girls sit calmly while boys spread out their materials and move around that space.

Girls gather facts before they draw conclusions, while boys deduce conclusions from general statements, often arbitrarily.

Girls need to talk about their subject before beginning a writing project, while boys spend little time talking about what they plan to write.

Girls cope well with boring parts of the school day, while boys disrupt the class when bored.

Girls cooperate well with others in groups, while boys prefer to work alone and argue over who will take the leading position in a group.

Girls tend to discuss problems with a teacher, while boys prefer to isolate when they are confused or frustrated.

Girls tend to have higher standards in classroom and often outperform boys. Paradoxically, girls are more likely to be excessively critical in evaluating their own academic performance. Conversely, boys tend to have unrealistically high estimates of their own academic abilities and accomplishments.

There are also fundamental differences in the factors motivating girls vs factors motivating boys. Girls are more concerned than boys with pleasing adults, such as parents and teachers. Most boys, on the other hand, will be less motivated to study unless the material itself interests them.

Educational psychologists have consistently found that we should foster some instructional strategies: for instance, it is clear that boys are highly geared toward the physical universe and engaging in kinesthetic activities, such as building a model or map-sketching, using symbols, diagrams, charts to supplement verbal and written instructions is enhancing their perception and understanding. Verbal instructions should not be too long or too complex for boys, because they lose track of meaning: teachers should be directive, concise and brief. We also have to ensure that boys have enough physical space and avoid external distractions, we should provide visual means of learning and build 'competition'. Teachers also have to provide opportunities for boys to relate to male role models.

On the other hand, it is of particular importance to girls to bond with their teachers, as most of them will not take intellectual or emotional risks before those relationships are established. We should avoid stressful situations in class and be consistent and even-tempered with girls, seeking privacy when confronting them for behavior. We have to support cooperative learning as it is essential for them and provide opportunities for girls to relate to female role models.

Gender sensitivity might also require different discipline techniques for boys and girls. When girls have behavioral problems, it is typically a successful course of action to ask them to express their feelings; in contrast, boys need physical activity to calm them down and allow them to articulate their thoughts.

Sex-based cerebral differences are real and permanent, directly related to perception and ability. While boys and girls have equivalent general IQs, there are certain processing variations that contribute to inherent gender –based strengths and, when taken into consideration, can improve the quality of learning experience for both boys and girls.

Effie Pitterou

“Marrying” theory and actual school praxis on a very interesting theme

In a new study which was carried out in 30 countries all over the world, among those the USA, Norway, Hong Kong, Turkey, Malaysia, Australia, Sweden, Canada, Estonia, and Serbia among others¹, it has been found that at all educational levels and in every subject (yes, even in physics and/or mathematics), girls universally achieve better marks than boys.

Psychology professors Daniel and Susan Voyer analyzed the data from 369 studies concerning the school grades of over one million students and the results revealed an impressive consistency throughout all countries: the girls performed better in all subjects, even in those where boys have traditionally been considered “better”, subjects such as physics, chemistry and mathematics. Claire Cameron Ponits² from the Center of Higher Studies in Teaching and Learning of the University of Virginia in the USA is involved in assessing children’s readiness to enter school. She explains that girls succeed more often because they are more capable at forming long-term plans, setting goals and endeavoring to achieve them. Within the framework of her study Ms. Ponits has noted that, for a child to be able to deal with modern-day school requirements, he/she should be skilled at “self-regulation”. This term refers to such disciplined behaviors as being able to put up his/her hand and waiting for his/her turn before speaking out in class, listening carefully, following the teacher’s instruction, and keeping in check his/her impulse to shout out the answer. These skills are prerequisites in today’s educational system, and in today’s life, as well. It seems that upon entering school girls possess more of these “self-regulation” skills than their male counterparts. From the relevant studies of Ms. Ponits and her co-workers one can conclude that five year old boys are a whole year behind girls of that age as far as the development of such skills is concerned. Thus, boys must wait until the end of their kindergarten year in order to start mastering the prerequisites for learning, while their female classmates already had these skills fully developed at the beginning of that school year!

Girls maintain this advantage during the elementary school years and beyond. In a 2006 research carried out by Martin Seligman and Angela Lee Duckworth³, professors of cognitive development at the University of Pennsylvania, it was noted that elementary school aged girls were far more disciplined than boys of the same age. As a result, because this skill influences them in many ways, girls achieve higher marks in all subjects. For example, girls are more likely to carefully read and understand the wording of a question on a test before they attempt to answer, they are also more likely to do their homework and to persist at it even if it is difficult or

¹ The Internet, September 2014

² The Internet, September 2014

³ The Internet, September 2014

boring, despite the fact that they may want to watch TV. Furthermore, girls are quicker at beginning their homework than boys, who require nearly twice the amount of time to complete their work.

One might wonder why I mention all of the above. Perhaps to stress my point, which is that I believe that it is all related to what the specialists call "self-discipline". This skill is innate in humans while it is not distributed equally among all people. As I approach twenty years of service in primary education, I am certain that, in this respect, women are **usually** more gifted **at the beginning of their school life**. Certainly, there are exceptions but these only serve to prove the rule. Our contemporary school system is no longer based on achieving good results on a crucial exam at the end of the school term or the school year, but demands constant effort and diligence, thus favoring girls, who can depend on their innate abilities. If school marks were based only on final exams, boys would have more distinctions, since the process of test taking is better suited to their competitive instincts. Specifically, last year one of my very good (male) students, whose school performance, however, had not always been the most consistent, announced his success in the entry exams of the Experimental High School stressing the competitive nature of these exams as an incentive, and actually comparing them to his beloved sport, tennis. On the other hand, one of his female classmates, who possessed a wide variety of academic knowledge and who had assisted me greatly throughout the school year, failed at these very same exams. I feel sure that this picture will change as these students grow and mature. She will always rely on the sturdy nature of the foundations of her knowledge, while he will always experience risk due to his temperament.

In outlining my class and my "small heroes", there is much I could say to demonstrate and support my point of view. However, I will try to stress the points which will help my readers understand some similarities and differences in "learning styles" between boys and girls. These points have been extracted from over fifteen years of teaching experience and observations in the same school. **I will not restrict myself to cognitive learning only, because the whole school experience signifies a lot more.**

School: I do not believe that boys and contemporary teaching methods "agree" with each other. The fact that they are restricted to a classroom, where they may participate by listening and seeing only while it is in their nature to be active, is torture for boys. Last year one of my students had difficulty in cooperating at all levels, whether this was in group games or within the framework of group work. What resulted were daily disputes concerning self-evident things. It is more common to find such a situation among boys rather than among girls (quite unlikely), thus confirming a common saying in schools: the quietest boy is equal to the noisiest girl.

Performance: As boys mature over the years, one observes them performing better in subjects such as mathematics, though they do not particularly outperform the girls. The girls, on the other hand, also do well in subjects related to language and show a greater inclination towards reading, and even literature at times, a finding that is rare among the boys. In recent years, it is increasingly common to

find the girls excelling in school performance; they take the “lion’s share” in being flag-bearers in the parades of the national holidays.

Reading: Here the girls clearly have “the upper hand”. Even when they do encounter difficulties, they will listen to the teacher’s comments and they will improve on imperfections. For many of the boys, reading is definitely a chore.

- Dimitri, I believe you could read better, try coloring you voice.
- I can’t do better, Sir!!

Discipline: Difficulties are found mainly on the part of the boys, who will be sent to the director’s office more regularly than the girls. I repeatedly observe a certain recurring difficulty in “hearing” among the boys.

Communication: I believe that the girls are more interested in communicating with you, while the boys are interested in action. As the recess bell rings, I always find 2-3 girls who want to discuss “something” that has happened. Visual contact is more common. This, however, is also a disadvantage, because from this great ability to communicate and analyze also derives the ability to nag and gossip, something that is not found among the boys.

- Sir, Konstantina is bothering me!
- Why Konstantina, what happened?
- Me, Sir? Maria is bothering me!

How many of us have not found themselves faced with such a problem?

Safety: Come to think of it, who is it that visits the nurse’s room more often? Surely one does not need to be clairvoyant to answer this question.

Self-confidence: I have something more than a hunch that our girls grow up with more insecurities. I cannot easily find the causes of this. It may be due to the “status” that they are accorded in our society; that girls must always grow up to be models of kindness and courtesy so that they will be likeable to others. Often this may also have an impact on cognition, this without being absolutely sure.

Emotions: School means learning on many levels and not only for our students but for us as well. I believe that boys are actually more emotional than girls, but they simply learn to skillfully hide their emotions very early in life. Again, I believe it is the society we live in that, within the framework of a traditional relationship between the genders in the family, has had its impact on all those concerned. “Act like a man...”

These different “roles” are connected **mainly** with different “learning styles”. The situation is more difficult for boys. Their “role” demands behaviors that may easily lead them to deviate into areas which are not considered acceptable. In closing, though, I should say that I believe the teacher’s role to be the most difficult of all: he must constantly endeavor to offer equal opportunities to all his young “wards”, regardless of gender or inclination and to discover the treasures hidden in the tender soul, so as to offer to each child exactly what he/she needs.

Christos Kostarelos (in Greek)

Similarities and differences in the “learning style” between boys and girls: an on-going dialogue/food for thought

Different theories on the issue of learning styles, in other words “the characteristic and preferred way of approaching learning and processing information” (Hedge, 2001), have been developed through the years. Several researchers have established different categorisations or even titles to capture one plain reality. The fact that students are different but at the same time so much alike in the way they acquire and the way they want to acquire new knowledge.

There is a growing debate on whether there are any distinguished learning styles, mainly due to the lack of scientifically proven basis. However, I will use one of the most well-known categorisations of different learning styles in order to structure my observations on the similarities and differences in the “learning style” between boys and girls. This categorisation divides the students’ preferable way of learning into seven categories; visual, aural, verbal, physical, logical, social and solitary.

Through my teaching experience I have observed and tried to analyse how my young and my very young learners try to cope with the new information provided, in order to adjust my teaching methods to answer their needs. The fact is that some students employ mixed learning styles, others have one or two dominant learning styles and others make use of different styles according to the circumstance at hand. In addition to this, boys and girls, especially in young ages, differ to a certain degree in their preferred way of learning. To that regard, there is a growing belief that boys and girls of the same age differ drastically in terms of their learning styles due to numerous factors; these differences are believed to be more prevalent the younger the children are. Trying to approach this issue with the greatest of caution, avoid generalisations and most importantly stereotypical gender preconceptions, I will try to present my own experience on this topic.

A glance from a window into a kindergarten or a first grade classroom can be extremely revealing. The most common sight among the core body of the students who are engaged in a certain activity is a boy fidgeting, another boy moving his legs to and fro, a girl chatting to a friend of hers, some other boy drifting off. If you are a teacher, it is not hard to accept that mostly boys are the ones to interrupt the lesson, the ones to find it harder to stay still for longer periods of time and pay attention. On the other hand, most girls tend to be quieter, less impulsive and good listeners. As a teacher, the above observation carries strong implications concerning the materials, the activities and the management of my classroom, since it is clear that the inner characteristics of boys and girls affect their learning experience and thus their learning styles.

Physical activities are essential to young learners. However, there are striking differences on how boys and girls react to them. By the sound of the phrase “Let’s play a game”, crazy screams come out from the little boys and girls’ mouths. But

some boys get really excited! They might start jumping up and down, move their hands and try to be the first to play a game that they don't even know what it is yet. The children's playful nature combined with the boys' hyperactive and competitive behaviour clearly indicates the need for kinesthetic participation in their learning and even though all children love playing, boys seem to crave for it. It is self-evident that by giving students the chance to stand up, leave their little chair, which sometimes may seem like a prison to at least some of them, and engage in a physical activity can only be beneficial to all of them and especially to boys.

Sometimes though, it is not that easy and straightforward to teach children through a fun activity; theory has to come into play. How do boys and girls react to verbal illustration lasting for a little bit more than ten minutes? I cannot really know what all the students think about. Whether they are bored, whether they truly listen and analyse or try to make sense of what they hear. The only real proof that I can employ is their eyes, their hands and their overall body language. Girls tend to be calm, pay attention, sit still and be focused. But most boys get agitated. They would quickly lose focus, try to disrupt the teacher maybe in order to make sense of what she's saying or just to entertain their boredom or to share a personal experience which is partly related to the topic. Hence, boys tend to have limited attention span, while girls are able to concentrate for longer periods of time and even if they might get tired or bored, they would still put a great effort not to show the teacher in fear that they might disappoint her. Once more, the boys' reaction needs a counter-reaction from the teacher's perspective. Such a reaction could be to keep theory and instructions to a minimum at least at the beginning. As time passes by and children learn to tame their tiredness and practice staying focused and still, then there is more room for longer theory discussions.

With regard to visual learning styles, it is apparent that all children love pictures that they can actually see or imagine. Flashcards, visual cues, real-life items, videos, even stories exercise their need for tangible information. I place tactile items in the same group as imaginary stories because it is my belief that little children's imagination, when put into play, is as real as an apple in their hands.

Boys and girls enjoy seeing pictures, holding a teddy bear when learning the names of their toys in English as proven in "show and tell". And stories intrigue their imaginative nature and bring to life, as if actually real pictures, the new information provided.

The situation is similar with aural learning stimulants. An acknowledged colleague of mine, in the field of music, insists on the importance of music to children and I couldn't agree more. It is the way for the more introvert children, the quieter girls and the hyperactive boys to work together and learn a new piece of information. The so-called aural or auditory way of learning is a prerogative to all children, boys and girls equally. All children love singing and they acquire new knowledge without even realising it.

The family, the culture, the temperament of each student and other factors can influence the learning styles of boys and girls equally. I find that Greek culture greatly influences the collaborative, social, style of learning negatively. In Greece, even though children get excited to hear that they are going to work with others to achieve a goal, in reality things are not as ideal. When assigned a group project,

both boys and girls tend to strongly disagree, argue for the responsibilities that each member is going to undertake and fight for the leadership of the group, although the latter is mostly a boys' characteristic. Such behaviours usually result in the group dropping the project or in an inadequate outcome for the real skills of the participating children. In the rare occasion that a collaborative project actually works, the outcome exceeds expectations. And this constitutes a huge implication for the teacher; i.e., enabling learners to cultivate their social learning attitude.

To conclude, boys are boys and girls are girls and only by keeping in mind both their differences and similarities will you be able to forge a multisensory approach to teaching that will encompass and facilitate their different learning styles. However, these differences are only a fraction of what a teacher needs to address. In a nutshell, I would say there is no magical recipe to answer all the students' needs, abilities and wants. Only by bearing in mind that all students, boys or girls, come from a different background, have special skills, needs, likes and dislikes, will you achieve to empower their learning, and to pass on knowledge that they will keep in their heart, their mind and use as a skill later on in their life.

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Venetia Koiliari

Pedagogical and educational symbiosis amidst similarities and differences in the classroom

We would be unrealistic if we claimed that there is not even a slight (weak) correlation between the gender of a person and his/her “learning style” in any school classroom. If we understand the biological, the familial, social and cultural factors which make their contribution felt in the process of acquiring the gender, the appropriate behavior that accompanies the roles and if we track down what exactly influences that process, then we will assess the relationship between gender and the way one learns.

The teacher, finding him/herself in the classroom, adheres to the principle of attempting to create the preconditions so that all boys and girls have the same opportunities for learning. However, the danger of stereotypes is always there. Stereotypes that, from the very early years of life, make us form ideas/attitudes as to how the two genders ought to be and behave, even if a rather optimistic view of those realities suggests that the traditional stereotypes concerning the two genders have been substantially weakened and diminished in our era. There is a probability that teachers may be influenced by the gender stereotypes with which they themselves have been brought up. And this, inevitably, occurs given the fact that all children from a very young age form and internalize social categories based on the world around them, they associate certain characteristics with these categories and, then, they attach labels. This specific process helps children in organizing their own world, and as such it is a positive process. The same process, however, could be a negative one if the particular characteristics -which are associated with a specific category of individuals, boy or girl- are restrictive and absolute. One such quite indicative example could be the view/thesis claiming that girls are not good in mathematics.

Focusing on a number of characteristics from the daily schooling reality of ours, we may point to several observable differences. As is widely known, one biological characteristic is the fact that girls physically mature faster than boys. This differential characteristic may result in faster maturation as far as their way of thinking is concerned. During adolescence, of course, boys overtake girls in both size and strength with regard to their physical/biological development.

Girls, from the first years in formal schooling, are noticeably better than boys in language related tests and in school subjects having to do with Literature, History, Language. Usually, they achieve better school performance by possessing/using a richer vocabulary and being able to express themselves in a more coherent and effective way. They tend to approach and handle different topics quite easily, not only verbally but in written assignments as well. They, furthermore, go into considerably more depth than boys when answering questions pertaining to the analysis of a text.

The differences in mathematical ability vary from very few to non-existent, while we have observed that boys start performing better during their attendance in secondary education. Yet, among both genders there have been students with abilities in solving problems and mathematical exercises. In this context I could

argue that boys prefer these mathematical problems more when compared to language related school subjects, given the fact that the solving of these problems demands the handling of concrete concepts. The respective answers do not necessitate particular development of verbal or written speech and they are short and quick.

As far as (school) Natural Sciences are concerned, the differences between the two sexes are greater, since girls lag behind vis-à-vis their male classmates whose school performance is better. Quite often boys are more apt and more interested in experiments in the classroom, especially when these experiments involve constructing things and/or necessitate the use of wires, batteries, lamps, etc. Even when arranging the 'setting' of the computer and the projector in the classroom, virtually all boys are always ready to offer their assistance with no hesitation whatsoever. It should be added that, with the continuing increase of the observed connection between technology and present-day education, one sees that both sexes manifest the same interest/involvement with computers on a daily basis as an integral and natural part of their lives.

Focusing on direct competitiveness between boys and girls, the need for academic success on the part of girls in primary education is stronger. This difference 'balances out' in secondary and tertiary education where the incentives of the boys are probably stronger as they conform more and more to a social status which, despite the equality of the two sexes, considers/desires men to be "stronger" and at a comparatively higher socio-economic level.

Aggression comes as an additional characteristic of boys, a characteristic that constitutes a noticeable difference which persists and continues impressively stable. This aggressive characteristic makes boys impatient and frivolous when it comes to managing their behavior problems in classrooms. As a consequence, this very characteristic of boys may hinder their attention span and their concentration on school subjects/lessons and, in turn, to have negative impact on their overall learning.

All the fore mentioned differences may be observed in both sexes but the teacher should not consider those differences as always operational, axiomatic and constant/stable. Entering his/her classroom, the teacher ought not to adapt his/her teaching to those differences because, if he/she actually does so, he/she will feed or perpetuate a system of stereotypical views which insists that the differences between the two sexes are great. The reason that these differences are mentioned in the context of this short presentation has to do with the fact that they concern every classroom teacher like myself, since their roots are deep within a school environment where the teacher him/herself has experienced them along with their results and consequences, when his/her own teachers used to consider and take those differences as 'given'.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning the similarities between the two sexes within the school classroom which stem from the same needs for learning through a series of basic human characteristics, irrespective of the distinction of male or female. Thus, their most basic similarities are that both sexes could recognize characteristics like humor, anger, indifference, interest, reinforcement,

dreams, as well as words referring to feelings, happiness, sorrow, disappointment, etc. They, furthermore, can decode the expressions of feelings like crying, smiling, a hug, manifestations of love. Clearly, these similarities lie outside the narrow limits of the gender and constitute ecumenical human characteristics.

In short, a classroom teacher like myself may (use)capitalize on these similarities so that he/she discern abilities – talents – particular characteristics of each student and, in turn, develop/cultivate analogous expectations for the student, leaving to the best possible extent outside his/her daily school praxis the factor gender. Additionally, the teacher may create equal opportunities, interactions with all students, reinforcing their self-esteem while respecting their personality and transferring to them indirect or direct feelings. In such 'settings', all students receive the message and function accordingly.

Dimitra Gouva (in Greek)

Speaking/writing about the learning style of my students (?)

It would be risky, if not unscientific, to support general differences in learning styles between males and females simply from the immediate and non-systematic observation in a functional teaching room, at least to a degree that would allow this kind of generalizations.

This claim is not arbitrary, but emerges from the following assumptions:

- a) Learning constitutes an individual, internal process for each student whose progress is difficult to be transcribed by the teacher step by step in the context of the function of the classroom, and more specifically, in the context of a contemporary classroom whose dynamics show a wide range of diagnosed learning or not learning difficulties (individual differences, students in the autism spectrum, dyslexia, ADHD etc.).
- b) Individuals learn in various and different ways depending on their distinct individual characteristics that are related to their perception, memory, information processing, brain activity, but also their personality, interests, and motivations.
- c) Learning is socially defined, but also is constituted a continuous process whose time and duration varies depending on the individual himself and the social environment he lives in. In the classroom and in the rigid time of its functionality, learning and the degree of achievement is evaluated primarily by the results via the completion of numerous assessment tests, but also from the total educational process, without necessarily allowing the teacher to 'diagnose' precisely how each student learns.

Naturally, during the search of learning styles according to gender, one could not overlook the up-to-date scientific research that find differences in the brain activity between males and females, that are responsible for the differences related to the ability to use language, emotional intelligence, mathematical reasoning, spatial and visual perception, development of emotion and mobility, creativity and imagination. For example, it is a characteristic of international research to show a precedence of females in the listening learning style, and a precedence of males in the visual learning style. Additionally, in problem-solving, it seems that females are more capable in forming relationships and socialize easier with others compared to males, who seem to have a better interaction with objects.

However, even in the case that these biologically and socially formed differences between genders is contributing to the understanding of student behaviour from the teacher's part, the adaptation of teaching based on these differences would be impossible, if not dangerous, in the present day classroom for two more reasons:

- a) In the circumstance of the contemporary mixed and crowded classroom, individual teaching may be a lengthy process, therefore obviously not possible.
- b) These differences may constitute methodological obstacles that are related to the gender, and may limit the range of opportunities offered to each student, therefore empowering and continuing in that way social stereotypes and preconceptions.

Therefore, precisely because it is exceptionally difficult for the teacher to speak about the learning styles of each student, in the organization, planning, execution, and assessment of a process, the teacher takes into consideration (or should take into consideration) the scientific theories of learning that have been formed with the purpose to enrich the methodological tools, and therefore appeal to as many students and their abilities as possible. Finally, contemporary teaching should focus on the learning process and should attempt to turn the student to himself or herself in a way to understand the way in which he or she learns, and therefore gain control over his or her learning process and development (metacognition).

Anna Koraki

Similarities and differences in the actual classroom as an important parameter of learning

Quite often we think that the gender of a person constitutes a very important pre-cognitive (pro-gnostiko) factor concerning the abilities and the interests of all children. From the very early years of life people have different expectations from (for?) boys and noticeably different from girls.

More specifically, as far as formal schooling is concerned, it is a wide spread belief that girls do not do that well in mathematics when compared to their male classmates –and, according to this belief, this is so due to the fact that girls do not possess the so-call ‘square logic’. On the contrary, girls are expected to surpass boys in the ‘more theoretical’ school subjects where linguistic expression, rote learning and reading reign. All these commonly held beliefs are largely within a mere theoretical framework and –in daily praxis- may readily be overturned. In short, then, what should be actually investigated in this context is the particular way that the two genders learn.

It has been observed, for example, that the degree of consolidating an entirely new concept/knowledge is better -for both boys and girls- when the information provided is presented in a visual form. The picture provides a ‘security’ which gives to all students the possibility to think, to experiment and, finally, to act considerably more easily.

Girls, however, seem to be able to successfully organize information and data at exactly the moment that this ‘total input’ is provided to them. And this appears to be so because girls function ‘acoustically’ as well. More so, they devote more time and effort to doing their assigned homework until the new knowledge has been mastered. On the whole, girls act and work more methodically than boys, something that also shows the prevalent tendency among girls to conform to the rules of the school and of the family. On the other hand, boys -for the most part- are very often reinforced when showing tendencies of independence and autonomy.

However, although they boys may devote less time to doing their homework, they, nonetheless, appear to feel more comfortable at interacting with their teacher. They pose questions and they express their concerns/queries much more easily than their female classmates and, through this daily school practice of theirs, they secure for themselves immediate feedback and –in many cases- individualized assistance from the teacher.

Finally, boys seem to adopt a more active/energetic learning style where action is the priority. They think and experiment employing a comparable more abstract way of reasoning which, in turn, is always geared to acting. Girls, on the other side, appear to perceive and accommodate concepts through observation and not through action and they directly connect knowledge with people and feelings.

Elli Papadimitropoulou (in Greek)

Providing tailored strategies for individual students (boys & girls, girls & boys)

“Males and females are equal in their common membership of the same species, humankind, but to maintain that they are the same in aptitude, skill or behavior is to build a society based on a biological and scientific lie.”

- ANNE MOIR & DAVID JESSEL, Brain Sex

Do boys and girls learn in a different way; and how? Research conducted with international student populations indicated that boys and girls often have distinct environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological and perceptual learning – style attributes. The tendencies and overall patterns are summarized in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. Summary of Learning – Style Differences Between Boys and Girls		
Researcher (year)	Male preferences	Female preferences
Hong & Suh (1995)	Peer motivation	Persistence Self-motivation Teacher motivation
Honigsfeld (2001)	Kinaesthetic Peer motivation	Self-and parent motivation Teacher motivation Persistence Responsibility (conformity)
Jenkins (1991)	Kinaesthetic	Motivation Persistence Structure Authority orientation
Jorge (1990)	Structure Tactual	Learning in several ways
Lo (1994)	Late afternoon	Persistence Responsibility (conformity) Self-motivation
Pengiran-Jadid (1998)	Kinaesthetic Peer motivation	Motivation Persistence Structure Authority orientation
Pizzoetal. (1990)	Sound	Quiet

Even though the majority of the researches listed above date back to the 1990's, not so many things seem to have changed referring to gender differences in classroom. Even today, males seek for peer motivation and acceptance when at the same time

are mainly kinaesthetic learners whereas females are self and teacher motivated. Females conform to the existing rules more easily and are more persistent. Males and females also differ in their beliefs about what is most important to student learning, with females ranking social interaction with other students and self-confidence higher than males. Males are usually more achievement oriented, whereas females are more socially and performance oriented. Furthermore, males seem to attribute their success in the classroom to external causes, such as teaching, whereas females generally believe that their success is directly related to their efforts in the classroom. This indicates that males tend to be more externally focused, but females tend to be more introspective and self-critical.

It is apparent that knowledge of learners' preferred learning styles is vital when educators wish to provide tailored strategies for individual students. Educators should stray from their own preferred modes of teaching and learn to use a variety of styles. By using a selection of teaching styles and approaches, there will be a better match between teacher and learner styles and learning will be affected in a positive way through interaction and participation. What seems more beneficial in this case is that educators are encouraged to overcome the predisposition that all students should be treated the same way. Consequently, the educational procedure is not a sterile knowledge transmission any more but an interactive journey.

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Katerina Toliou

Chronic searching for classroom catalysts in the Hellenic pedagogical arena

Drastic changes in Primary Education (?)

According to the latest public statements made by the Minister of Education **Andreas Loverdos**, a number of very basic changes are to be implemented in the daily functioning of Primary Education across the country. These changes will be fully developed and thoroughly discussed among all educational community officials and experts well up until the end of this year 2014, so that by January 2015 the entire project of educational reform in primary schools will be ready for implementation in due time. The Minister of Education had the chance to inform the Greek Parliament about the intention of the Ministry to start its "reform plan" from the very basis of the education system by focusing on primary education with specific and well-thought/developed changes at both the structural and the operational level.

The Minister stressed the fact that, unfortunately, over the years and the many different changes or reforms that have been promised and proposed/implemented in the Greek education system by successive Government and Ministers of Education, the overall emphasis has been on tertiary education (for the greatest part) and secondary education. By and large, primary education as a whole education 'sub-system' on its own, has always been treated by successive 'reformers' of the Greek education system as the 'poor relative', without particular attention paid to this important level of education. And this has been so for many years across different political parties governing the country, despite the very fact that virtually everyone in the country admits and declares that primary education constitutes the absolute basis and the real foundations of all education world-wide.

The so-called National Council for Education along with all the other educational committees and consultative bodies within the Ministry of Education are to be actively involved in this constructive dialogue and the proposed changes in primary education. As A. Loverdos pointed out during the most recent discussion in the parliament, he expects very few and sporadic only (if any) objections from the opposition parties, given the fact that all seem to agree on the basic arguments/changes proposed by the Ministry for restructuring and reforming primary education in Greece today.

Cultural pluralism in our xenophobic cosmos: contemporary philanthropists and stoics... in action

On the Roma education in today's Greece

Unfortunately, for many decades, the pedagogical and educational issues concerning the Roma population in Greece have not 'attracted' the attention needed by the official Greek state. The existing -however limited and sporadic as may be- literature on this very interesting topic, leaves no room for second thoughts in this respect. Likewise, the Greek society at large, with very few and occasional -definitely, noteworthy and highly positive- exceptions, has not been 'keen' to manifest its real concern for the overall education of Roma. It should be said that even the educational experts in the field, only during the most recent years appear to have included the education of Roma into their theoretical and research priorities. The "overall issue" (if not "problem"?) is very far from solved.

Having said all that as a general prologue to this short note on the education of Roma in Greece, one may cite and refer to historical, social, cultural and several other -perhaps- reasons for this well-documented lack of interest. Nonetheless, as observed throughout most of the now existing reviews of this topic, the vast majority of Roma children were not found in the state classrooms across Greece. And that was also the case in the geographical area of the co-capital Thessaloniki. Until a few years ago Roma children in Dendropotamos of Thessaloniki, Greece did not go to school. They were condemned to live in poverty inside the confines of a ghetto, where they often resorted to illegal acts. Today, however, these children are part of an exceptional Robotics Club and are preparing a special trip to the US on April 21, where they will be honored for an innovative robot which they built themselves.

Undoubtedly, this specific initiative in the middle of the severe economic crisis affecting all of Greece, although in itself does not solve the "problem" as such in its entirety, does constitute a worth mentioning development. It, thus, should be mentioned that the man behind this dramatic shift is Athinagoras, archimandrite at the Metropolis of Stavroupoli and Neapoli. Eight years ago, he created an organization called "Faros tou Kosmou" (Light of the World) which offers warm food, education, employment and hope to the children of Dendropotamos. The comments made by those responsible for running the program are very encouraging with regard to the Roma children and their "performance" during the implementation of the different phases of this program.

"When these children were asked to show their creations, they completed the task 15 minutes earlier than private school students. Some noticed their darker skin

tone and by asking around, found out that the children come from Roma families" he said during an interview, adding that "A great American company invited the team in order to honor them in St. Louis. Meanwhile, the team took part in a nationwide contest where the kids won one of the three top prizes."

The concept of the international competition was based on natural disasters. The team created a robot that bridges seismic faults, in order to safely transport the inhabitants of an affected area.

"Education and integration in a diverse society will help the children of Dendropotamos. Only with education and a great future job will they be able to escape from the fate to which they are bound," said Niovi Pavlidou, a local politician in the administrative region of Central Macedonia.

As a kind of epilog or concluding remark to this very promising (isolating?) initiative concerning the education of Roma children in today's Greek reality, one may hope and wish at the same time that more and more such concrete endeavors/programs may be implemented and flourish all over the Greek territory with the active and continuous participation/support of both the experts in the field and the official Greek state.

From the panepistimiako panorama

Greek and German universities “getting together”

In the midst of the harsh economic crisis that has hit Greece over the last five years and the perennial antagonism of tertiary education institutions for their ‘descent and effective operation’ within the framework of the so-called globalization of our era, Greek universities have been searching collaborations and joint initiatives outside Greece. This outward movement and reaching out for constructive co-operations with foreign universities in Europe and elsewhere, appears to have found quite ‘fertile ground’ in several cases with very tangible results. Among many others, one such concrete example of international collaboration is the latest agreement between Greek and German universities. In this line of looking for collaborative initiatives and joint endeavors, the presiding board of the Hellenic Universities Rectors’ Synod met with representatives of German universities, in order to discuss the collaboration between Greek and German higher educational institutions.

Both sides aim to increase joint postgraduate programs, student and research exchanges between Greek and German universities, and joint research programs. This first attempt will be the basis for a memorandum of cooperation between the two countries, which will be signed at a new meeting in Rhodes in the following months.

The chairman of Rectors’ Synod, Dimosthenis Anagnostopoulos, stated: “The discussion with our German colleagues is very important, especially now, when both Greek society and Greek universities are facing major difficulties. For this particular reason, I am very happy that German universities trust us and believe in our potential.”

The vice president of German Rectors’ Conference, university professor D. Lenzen declared that the state of Greek universities is extremely difficult.

“Budget and staff reductions up to 50% in both the scientific and administrative sector with a parallel increase of students, render the proper function of universities impossible. The best social policy is to invest in education and this will be the subject of our next meeting, which will aim to confirm this opinion and to properly inform Greek society,” he said. “It is also important to inform German society about the potential of Greek universities, so as to attract more students for collaboration and exchanges. Greek society respectively, should be informed that German scientists and universities are supporting it at this critical moment and will try to secure the future of Greek universities,” Mr. Lenzen concluded.

A final comment on this news item as a kind of interesting and somehow ‘provocative’ footnote in light of the prevalent ‘climate’ concerning the relations

and the attitudes between the two countries. On the whole, for the vast majority of Greeks –especially so today with the numerous austerity measures and the crisis– Germany is perceived and considered as the ‘bad guy’ and as the country/leadership in Europe which imposes all those severe cuts/measures on Greece and its people.

The hegemony of pedagogical antithesis

Graduate students on the increase

There has been a great increase in the number of university students that acquire post-graduate studies in Greece.

During the academic year 2012-2013, the number of the post-graduate students reached 60,268, for the first time surpassing 60,000. The number of post-graduate students increased by 186.7 percent compared to 2001-2002 while the number of PhD students increased by 104 percent compared to 2001-2002.

This number is even greater if we take into account the youngsters that chose to continue their studies abroad. The decision of continuing their studies beyond a Bachelor's degree has to do with the students' belief that attaining a Master's or a PhD degree will improve their chances of getting a job.

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), the unemployment rate of those who have a Master's or a PhD degree reaches 15.7 percent, while the unemployment rate on those who have only a bachelor degree is slightly greater at 18.8 percent.

However, nowadays, in order for someone to get a job even as a waiter, a Master's or a PhD degree is required by the employers, while in the past a General Lyceum Leaving Certificate was more than enough to get such a job.

In addition, the fact that many post-graduate programs include high tuition fees does not seem to discourage young people from working toward a Master's or PhD degree. In fact, they seem willing to pay 2,000 euro or more in order to acquire a post-graduate degree.

Eulogising a synoptic icon from the educational pantheon

Professions and career for Greek youngsters

The traditional 'affinity' of virtually all Greek parents to certain career choices for their children has been widely documented and discussed in many ways over the years. In short, everyone is familiar with the perennial insistence of Greek parents to 'demand' and 'push' their children to become (principally and foremost) doctors, lawyers and engineers.

A recent survey on this very issue among today's Greek parents comes as no big surprise, despite the many changes that may readily be observed in the contemporary labor market. The following brief comment and the percentages reported are more than indicative in this respect. As stressed, even the severe economic crisis and the relatively high unemployment rates among Greek doctors and lawyers today, very little seem to have changed the deep desire of Greek parents for their children's career choice. Thus, no matter if things have changed due to the Greek economic crisis and no matter if every major scientific field offers many related expertises, parents in Greece remain constant and traditional as for the career choices they wish their children to follow.

The field of medicine was once the first choice for Greek parents. Pursuing a career in the medical or paramedical sector was considered to be a good choice for rising on the financial and social scale. The same view was shared by parents with children graduating from a polytechnic university or a law school. But, are there any new trends?

No hope on the horizon as the trends remain the same. Greek parents insist on their conservative thoughts, ignoring the rising unemployment rates in the fields of medicine, law and many other disciplines.

A survey carried out by the company HP reveals that 15 percent of Greek parents still encourage their children to become doctors, followed by 15 percent of parents who want their children to follow a career in the paramedical sector or another scientific field. Starting a new business or maintaining the family business is also on the wish lists of 9 percent of parents, followed by architects with 5 percent and lawyers with 4 percent. Last on the Greek parent wish list rank the fields of media and arts, with only 2 percent of parents encouraging their children to become journalists, actors or singers.

Euphemisms in the agora of paideia

School holidays: a problem?

The issue of school holidays and the total number of (theoretically) working days that Greek teachers do not have to be at school and in their classroom is a 'touchy and sensitive' issue which creates heated debates and tension, especially so among the primary and secondary education teaching population. Thus, the latest initiative of the Greek Ministry of Education which has expressed its intentions to 'abolish' a number of school holidays, could not of course go unnoticed and without a very strong antilogos on the part of the Federations of Greek Teachers and their membership at large.

As reported in the press, the Greek Ministry of Education has recently decided to extend the school year and abolish several school holidays in order to deal with the problems caused by strikes and delays. The Ministry's decision has raised a general debate concerning the structure of the academic year, which has revealed some rather interesting data.

Although many believe that holidays for Greek students last several months, it appears that they have far fewer holidays and resting days than other European students. OECD member countries allocate almost four weeks of holidays (including Christmas and Easter), with an average of 10 single days off in the EU. According to data, only British students have fewer days off school. It should be noted in this context that quite often the different parties and/or individuals involved in this dialogue about school holidays in a comparative reading, tend to cite/refer to selected data and figures which they believe that serve their argument best.

On the other hand, Greek teachers explain that the particularities of each country affect the school year structure. In Greece teaching over summer is impossible, due to poor equipment of schools; most Greek schools do not have air conditioning. This leads to longer summer holidays.

Teachers in Greece believe that the number of hours allocated for teaching are enough. As their elected representatives have argued time and again in all private and public fora, what is needed is a drastic re=arrangement of curricula and school subjects from grade A of primary school onwards. They, furthermore, complain about the long-lasting exam periods. They point out that this is an inherent matter of design, as the Greek education system is focused on exams. They claim that for many years the Ministry of Education has consistently failed to ensure the proper operation of schools and as a result, valuable teaching hours are wasted at the start of each school year.

An eclectic autopsy of authentic data at random

University studies abroad per receiving country

Among many other idiosyncratic characteristics of the Greek education system over the year has been the 'strong tendency' of Greek students to pursue university studies abroad. Understandably, Anglophone universities and Anglophone countries have traditionally received the comparatively larger number of Greek students, with the UK to maintain a clear lead in this. Here is a list of the top 15 countries that Greeks prefer for their studies, categorized according to the different types of degrees. No doubt, these specific informative figures portray in the most eloquent way –among others- trends and tendencies of immediate educational, pedagogical and economic interest for both the sending country (Greece) and all receiving countries concerned.

Undergraduate degrees: UNITED KINGDOM: 2475 applications, ITALY: 925, CYPRUS: 559, BULGARIA: 392, USA: 389, FRANCE: 256, RUSSIA: 237, GERMANY: 236, ROMANIA: 213, TURKEY: 171, UKRAINE: 151, SERBIA: 120, ALBANIA: 84, CANADA: 69, HUNGARY: 61, Other countries: 884. Total: 6338 applications.

Post-graduate degrees: UNITED KINGDOM: 5.758 applications, ITALY: 1014, CYPRUS: 910, USA: 700, FRANCE: 641, BULGARIA: 578, THE NETHERLANDS: 441, GERMANY: 286, SPAIN: 162, BELGIUM: 155, SERBIA: 97, SWEDEN: 74, AUSTRIA: 73, ROMANIA: 61, SWITZERLAND: 40. Other countries: 920. Total: 10.990 applications.

Doctorates: UNITED KINGDOM: 762 applications, GERMANY: 188, FRANCE: 163, USA: 149, ROMANIA: 61, ITALY: 44, THE NETHERLANDS: 34, BULGARIA: 33, SPAIN: 33, SWITZERLAND: 26, BELGIUM: 15, AUSTRIA: 14, SWEDEN: 12, CANADA: 11, AUSTRALIA: 10, Other countries: 69. Total: 1555 applications.

Combining mystery and rhetorical hordes

Pre-school education in Greece

According to the respective data compiled by the European Commission concerning pre-school education in the member states, the corresponding percentages of children attending that particular level of formal education in Greece are from encouraging. And this is so due to the fact that, as the Commissioner responsible for Education, Culture & Youth A. Vassiliou has indicated when responding to a question posed by a Greek member of the European Parliament, in the case of Greece only a total of 73.5% of those eligible children attend pre-school education, whereas the corresponding average figure for the European Union as a whole is 92.4%.

No doubt, the on-going severe economic crisis affecting virtually all Greek families over the last five years, has played its highly contributing role (and) in this seemingly low participation rate in pre-school education.

In relation to this important issue characterizing the 'Greek case', Mrs Vassiliou pointed out that the operational program of the EC entitled "Development of human resources" within the framework of the ESF co-funds a number of specific actions which aim at supporting access to pre-school education. The program is open to women (both working -in the private sector only- and/or unemployed), with a total budget of 506 million euro. It has been estimated that so far 133,062 women across the EU have been benefited from their participation in this program.

Epimorphosis of teachers in a rapidly changing cosmos: emphasis in school gnosis and praxis

Pedagogical and teaching “adequacy” Program

The department of Primary Education of the University of Crete (Center for the Research of the History of Education and the Teaching Profession) has developed a new Program called “Program of Pedagogical and teaching Adequacy” which is scheduled to ‘open its doors’ for all those interested during the academic year 2014-2015. The basic aim of this new program is to respond and cover the existing needs of: a) all those university graduates who wish to be employed as fulltime teachers in primary education; b) those of professional teachers qualified to teach a specific school subject (e.g. Mathematics, Geography, Physics, History, etc) and already working in primary schools; and c) all those interested to acquire this “certificate”, irrespective of when they have started their university studies or the particular course of studies/discipline they have already completed.

This program has a total duration of 440 hours which are ‘distributed’ into two different academic terms. Due to the ‘specific student population’ and its particular needs, the program will operate every Friday, Saturday and Sunday and the participants will be required to attend in person a number of the courses offered, while there will also be several courses via a distance teaching/learning approach.

Secretariat of the Program: R. Avgenaki & N. Pyrgiotaki

For more information in the site: <http://www.katartisi.org>

Enigmatic logos & praxis

'All-Day School' in Greece

A synopsis of the results from a survey among parents and teachers conducted by professor (Univ. of Ioannina) C. Konstantinou for GSEE (Federation of Greek Laborers) concerning the social and pedagogical role of the 'All-Day or Extended School' in today's Greece, reads as follows:

The majority of the parents and the teachers who participated in this most recent survey seem to have an overall positive opinion about the All-Day school as a different educational arrangement, while most of those participants stated that they would like to see the continuation of that type of schooling for today's Greek children. Thus, on the basis of those outcomes it becomes evident that, despite a number of negative views and comments made by the same participants concerning the day-to-day operation of those schools with an 'Extended Program', that type of schooling has already been established itself as a desirable and viable educational arrangement. Therefore the Ministry of Education is urgently called upon to take very concrete action in order to rectify all 'drawbacks/negative aspects' of All Day schools and improve its overall functioning by implementing the necessary policies.

The results of the survey underline the fact that the All-Day school satisfies – in a priority order- the social needs of the parents concerned since it 'frees' them from the need to supervise their children during working hours. However, this educational arrangement does not satisfy to the same degree the pedagogical needs of their children attending these 'Extended' school programs.

Furthermore, the outcomes of the survey point to the apparent lack of basic infrastructure needed for the different 'services' and activities that constitute the core program of the All-Day schooling, while the teachers themselves voice their concern about their non-existent special training for this particular educational arrangement. Finally, almost half of the teachers who took part in this survey propose that today's 'type' of All-Day primary schooling should change drastically.

Pedagogical analyses of diagnostic interest

Getting...in!!!

One of the main and long lasting ‘feature’ of the Greek system of education has definitely to do with the annual university entrance examinations taken by approximately 100,000 high school graduates each academic year. More specifically, as every single Greek family having children would attest, the three-week-long university entrance exam is the single event that defines a Greek student’s success – or failure – in the Greek educational system. The pressure to score high in tough tests, one day after the other, in combination with Greek society’s view that every student should obtain a University degree, makes the ‘Panellinies’ a traumatic event for many Greek youngsters.

The suicide of an 18-year-old high school student in May, who jumped off an apartment building the day he was due to take university entrance exams, showed how intense is the pressure to get into Greece’s colleges, and which leaves many applicants unable to eat or sleep right until they know the results.

The head of the local branch of the National Health Operations Center (EKEPY), Tzina Leptokaridou, linked the apparent suicide to pending exams. “Instead of going to school, he climbed to the fourth floor of a nearby building and jumped, ending his life,” she said. The irony is that all the pressure on Greek students is to get into college because there’s literally none after, when they can stay as “eternal students” for decades if they want, don’t have to attend classes, don’t have to graduate and don’t have to take exams, but are still listed as students. It should be added here that this ‘Greek phenomenon of eternal university students’ which has characterized virtually all of Greek tertiary education system for decades, seems to be coming to end with a new law introduced by the Minister of Education A. Loverdos.

But for most graduating high school seniors, the Panhellenic Exams are one of the most trying periods of their lives, physically and emotionally, as they get worn down by studying, preparing – including with private tutoring or at Frontistiria and prep schools – as they want to excel in competition for the annual allotted slots at state schools.

This year, there were about 105,000 students taking part in the exams, but only 70,305 spots open at state schools around the country, with the University of Athens among the most in demand.

Oxymora schemata in the Greek education mosaic

Greek teachers and contemporary...pornography!

As unbelievable and/or unexpected it might sound, it is nevertheless absolutely true. Child pornography appears to have made inroads (isolated and very few cases, so far) into the Greek teaching profession, a negative development in the education which –rightly so- has created apprehension and deep worries/concerns among parents, the society at large and the officials of the Greek state. The latest news item on this very important issue reads as follows: Seven Greek teachers – four in Athens, three from other parts of the country – have been arrested by the Electronic Crime Unit on charges related to child pornography possession. Education Minister Andreas Loverdos has requested their names from the Unit head, Manolis Sfakianakis, after a recent scandal regarding the re-hiring of an accused mathematics teacher was brought to light. Other felons, a report has found, were also allowed to return to classrooms even as they faced charges of child pornography possession.

According to police officials, charges have been filed against all the accused individuals and their court cases are currently pending. The majority was placed on administrative leave but after a specific deadline elapsed, however, many were allowed to return to the classrooms. The problem is exacerbated by the sclerotic Greek public sector: their cases are expected to take a shocking eight years to be decided. There is no doubt that this ‘legal delay’ makes things worst at the level of public opinion, and more so as far as parents and families are concerned. The fact that the Minister of Education has assured everyone that he will ‘speed up’ this whole procedure, very little has contributed towards entertaining the concerns and the worries –principally- the parents.

Some of the teachers have defended their actions, assuring critics that they had acquired the child pornography images purely for “research purposes.” Yet, no one seems to believe this type of ‘explanation’ or ‘excuse’ for their immediate involvement with child pornography and everything that such involvement/engagement entails and means...

The Education Minister has discussed the issue with the relevant Ministers today, including Public Order Minister Vasilis Kikilias. The Public Order Ministry has expressed intent to implement an interactive program for safe internet use in public and private schools.

It is of interest to remind in this specific context an additional ‘incident’ involving a classroom teacher whose ‘initiatives’ with child pornography have been made public a few months ago. A mathematics teacher in a well-known private school in Athens was arrested six months ago for downloading child pornography.

Although he was immediately dismissed from the school, several months later, according to police sources, he was re-hired as a “book evaluator” by the Education Ministry. He was dismissed 10 days ago by Loverdos, following a more extensive background check.

This was just one of the seven cases angrily described to the Greek Parliament by Loverdos. He stressed that such individuals must be eradicated from the education system forever. Of course, along or besides the public declarations which are so commonly delivered by Greek politicians from all political parties, one is expecting/hoping to see concrete action and tangible results with regard to this extremely significant ‘topic’ of our days in Greece.

Amalgamation

On the private tertiary education front

For quite sometime now the issue of the so-called private (tertiary education) colleges which operate in Greece under a scheme of some type of 'association' with foreign universities, has been at the center of controversies and intense 'dialogue' between the Ministry of Education and the owners of those colleges. In short, despite the existing EU directive calling for recognition of professional rights of the graduates completing their studies in these colleges, the official recognition of those colleges and the degrees they award to their students by the Greek state continues to be a 'pending' matter. But, according to latest developments in this front, it seems that, from now on, foreign university and private college graduates in Greece will have the same professional rights as Greek university graduates.

As an informative reminder in this context, it is noted that: Until now, non-Greek university graduates had to have their degrees officially recognized by the Greek Inter-University Center for the Recognition of Foreign Degrees (DOATAP) — a Greek state organization — to be able to work in Greece. The application process was a time-consuming process, requiring a lot of bureaucracy and a great deal of paperwork in order to be completed, and in many cases graduates failed to have their degrees recognized.

However, Greece from now on will start to comply with the EU education standards. According to a modification made by Justice Minister Charalampos Athanasiou, graduates from foreign law schools won't be required to have their degrees recognized by DOATAP, they will have the same professional rights as Greece's graduates and will be able to enroll with Greek lawyer organizations.

Graduates of other professions, such as engineers, economists, managers, doctors and healthcare employees, will soon have the same rights as well. According to the law modification, the Greek professional unions and organizations such as the Technical Chamber of Greece, the Economic Chamber of Greece and the Pan-hellenic Medical Association, will now be responsible for the evaluation and the recognition of foreign university and college degrees as they already do with the graduates of the Greek universities.

Time alone in conjunction with all other developments in the Greek society at large –especially so nowadays- will tell whether this very important issue has been definitely settled, or it will continue to be a 'pending' matter affecting thousands of Greek youngsters and their families.

The alpha hypothesis

Looking for a better future outside Greece

The number and the statistics speak for themselves. Although one may argue that, traditionally, a number of Greek university graduates used to leave Greece and look for employment in another country (the so-called 'brain drain' phenomenon has not excluded Greece, for that matter), during the last five years, the years of severe economic crisis across Greece, the number of 'Greek minds' migrating to other countries has been on the increase. As a matter of fact, there have been many voices of great concern for this present-day 'hemorrhage' hitting the Greek society which, thus, loses its most valuable human capital.

In this context of most recent events, Greek Minister of Labor Giannis Vroutsis announced that he has formed a new plan so that the "great minds of Greece," people who have graduated from higher educational institutions, don't feel the need to leave the country in order to find a decent job.

Vroutsis presented his plan to the first meeting of the Governing Council for Employment, today, September 1. According to the Minister, the plan includes a mix of institutional incentives and financial resources, mostly from the European Social Fund (ESF), in order to benefit companies, bodies and, of course, young people.

The Minister aims for the Greek labor market to take full advantage of the young Greek university graduates who have excelled in their discipline.

The project will be implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and, in particular, the State Scholarships Foundation, which will be instrumental in locating young people who have excelled.

With the implementation of these measures, young Greeks who graduate from universities of the Greek public educational system will be faced with better conditions in regards to production and creation, thus strengthening the new, extroverted, competitive and developmental model of the Greek economy, said Vroutsis.

Prosopography of synchronous Hellenic pedagogue

Chryssi Vitsilaki (Χρυσή Βιτσιλάκη)

Chair, Department of Preschool Education and Educational Design at University of the Aegean
Greece

Chair, Department of Preschool Education and Educational Design

University of the Aegean

September 2014 – Present (3 months) Rhodes, Greece

Director of Post-Graduate Program "NEW FORMS OF EDUCATION AND LEARNING"

University of the Aegean

May 2014 – Present (7 months) Rhodes, Greece (through e-learning)

Designed and elected by the Department of Pre-School Education and Educational Design (TEPAES) to Direct this innovating master's programme aimed at providing theoretical knowledge and professional and technical expertise on designing, organising, implementing and assessing education and training programs aimed at adults, through e-learning.

Director of Life-Long Learning through e-learning Program

University of the Aegean

2010 – Present (4 years) University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece

Designed, secured funding and is presently organising and directing the new Life Long Learning through e-learning programs of the University of the Aegean -- 70+ programs and 250+ multidisciplinary courses.

Professor

University of the Aegean

1990 – 2011 (21 years)

Teaches courses on Child Socialization, Gender Socialization, New Forms of Education, Sociology of Education, and others

Adjunct Professor

University of Crete

1989 – 1990 (1 year)

Taught courses on Social Movements, Social Science Methodology and Qualitative Research Methods

Amorphous enigmas...with neophytes

Education and skills for the labor market

According to a survey released by Eurobarometer, 43% of Greek citizens and 25% of Europeans report that their education and training do not meet the requirements of the labor market.

In fact, 43% of Greeks claim that the education they received did not provide them with the skills needed to find a job that corresponds to their qualifications. This study places Greece first in the European Union, followed by Spain (38%) and Italy (35%). In contrast, the lowest percentages have been reported in Sweden (10%), Denmark (11%), and Germany (13%).

Almost half of the Greek respondents believe that their qualifications would be recognized in other EU Member States. However, 6% of Greek and European citizens tried to work or study in another Member State, but failed in either case because their qualifications could not be recognized or because the respondents did not have sufficient information about the recognition of their skills abroad.

As for the quality of education received in school, 81% of Greeks evaluate it as "good," compared to 29% of them when asked to evaluate their higher education.

In addition, the majority of European citizens (95%) believe that the qualifications, such as foreign languages or general skills that can be applied in different kinds of jobs, can be acquired outside the framework of formal education.

Only 21% have heard about the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), while 9% knows at what level of the EQF their qualifications correspond.

The European Commission indicates that over the years, a number of European initiatives about the recognition of the qualifications have been implemented, a rather difficult task. The effort is also supported by the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou.

New synergies and new enthusiasm with sympathy

Proposals concerning the teaching of English in state schools

The Panhellenic Association of English Language Teachers (PEKADE) has submitted to the Greek Minister of Education a number of interesting proposals concerning the teaching of English in all Greek primary and secondary schools. More specifically, these proposals cover a wide range of related topics aimed at improving the 'overall status' of the English language teaching in the public education domain. Among all other aspects discussed within the framework of those most recent proposals, one that seems to be of particular interest is the proposal concerning the establishment of a 'new post' in the already existing infrastructure of the Ministry of Education. Thus, one reads the (and) following suggestion in the long list of proposals submitted by PEKADE:

The planning, the organization and the specific needs characterizing the teaching of English in Greek state schools require/demand a very well=organized and immediate handling by a 'special English language advisor' serving at the Ministry of Education or at the Institute of Educational Policy. Therefore, we kindly ask you to thoroughly consider these proposals of ours which are the result of long-term collaboration and research among classroom teachers and academics specialized in all related disciplines.

Needless to say that these proposals are in full accordance and follow the contemporary trends/recommendations concerning the teaching/learning of foreign languages in our present day competitive labour environments. We would like to believe that you do agree with us that in periods of economic crisis, state (public) education ought to give each student the opportunity to develop his/her knowledge and skills of English at the highest level possible.

Furthermore, the Greek state education system of our days should appreciate and reward all systematic efforts of English language teachers who are always trying their best in order to fulfill their daily school duties and professional obligations.

Looking for a catharsis in the Greek educational tragedy

The teaching of theater (theatrical) education in primary schools

The Greek Ministry of Education in response to recent requests submitted by a number of school headteachers concerning the teaching of theater (drama) in primary education, has sent to all schools the following circular:

The school subject of the teaching of theater (drama) in the Greek primary school across the country constitutes a concrete medium of knowledge, recreation and aesthetic cultivation for the children of that age. The goals and the general aim of the official curriculum of primary education, among others, also includes the creative contact of all pupils with the art of theater (drama). And this is achieved through the reading of different theatrical plays as well as though the actual participation of the children in rehearsing (preparing) and performing/acting on stage.

No doubt, all these 'theatrical lessons' play a very important role in the development of the personality of all children. It is, therefore, necessary that we all make (put forward) the utmost effort so that the theatrical or drama classes are taught by appropriately trained teachers within the officially prescribed primary education curriculum.

With this latest concrete reference to the teaching of theatrical/drama education in primary schools, the Ministry wants to make sure that this particular 'school subject' receives the attention and the daily school practice it really deserves. The very fact that in many cases theatrical education and the teaching of drama in Greek primary schools has not been 'at the forefront of educational interest –beyond the occasional rhetoric and several sporadic declarations on the contrary- makes the content of this Ministerial circular even more relevant and extremely important.

Agonies and ecstasies within the educational liturgy

The School of our Dreams

The Department of Education of the University of Crete in collaboration with the Greek Ministry of Education and the Panhellenic School Network announce the organization of the 1st Panhellenic Competition of Creative Expression for Primary Education Pupils for the current school year 2014-2015. The competition, which as its general theme has the following moto: "Let us imagine the School of our Dreams", is open to all primary schools across Greece, inviting all headteachers and the teachers of each school to encourage –as much as possible- the participation of most of their pupils.

As explained in this written announcement of this competition that has been circulated thought the Ministry's official channels, pupils are invited to participate in groups (from the same grade or from different grades of the same school) with the support and the coordination of their classroom teachers (irrespectively of the particular school subject taught by each teachers involved). It is required that each group of participating pupils should have a teacher as the person in charge of the group, the same teacher who will have the responsibility of uploading the proposals of the group on the special platform of the competition constructed in the internet.

Thus, each participation in the competition is submitted electronically to the platform between 1 and 28 of February 2015. All interested participants may submit their proposals as to how they imagine "The School of their Dreams" in whatever format they like, keeping in mind the following categories: Music/song/dance/movement; Drama/theatrical performance/pantomime/shadow theater; Arts; Poetry/fiction/essay/novel/fairy tale; Animation video/digital storytelling/comics/cartoons; Blogs/wiki/software/sites, etc.

The central theme of this issue

Similarities and differences in the 'learning style' of boys and girls

Expectedly, the pertinent literature on both the similarities and the differences that traditionally have characterized over the years the 'learning style' of boys and girls, has already furnished a voluminous body of theoretical and empirical studies internationally, while at the same time has been always posing new and 'fresh' questions concerning many interesting parameters of this ever challenging topic. Regardless if one adheres and supports one or another view which –perhaps- underlines either the primary importance of existing similarities or the persistently reported differences in the way (s) that boys and girls learn, the fact of the matter is that this perennial discussion appears to acquire additional significance and an ensuing (relative) momentum nowadays that both informal and principally formal learning has become the order of the day in the so-called 'learning society' of our era. Interestingly enough, this on-going dialogue and multifaceted debates across socio-cultural and economic/political contexts has been apparently intensified within the framework of the different feminist movements and the continuous concerns/efforts on the part of most contemporary societies to achieve pragmatic and substantial improvements concerning the ultimate goal of consolidating equality of both sexes at all levels and domains of personal and collective life. No doubt, despite the highly noticeable progress that has been recorded world-wide on the 'similarities/differences' front and the seemingly overall consensus with regard to the ever increasing importance/relevance of this dialogue at both the theoretical and the practical/schooling levels, a lot more remains to be actually done in approaching, understanding, appreciating and –eventually- effectively dealing with the similarities and the difference pertaining to the learning style of boys and girls today.

L.C.B.