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**IDEOLOGIES AND CONCEPTUALISATIONS TO ORGANISATION AND  
OPERATION OF EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present paper is an attempt to interpret the legislative regulations for the time period between 2011 and 2015 regarding Experimenting Schools (ProtypaPeiramatikaSholia) and the policy of intentions, determined by the economic, political and social conditions. The “narratives” are activated by them, as internal automatic systems which trigger the functionality of institutions like education.

The legislative development of the afore-mentioned period is being explored, as it is tied to an institution, particularly the regulations and prerequisites of students entering these special schools. More specifically, evaluation on special qualifications and skills is carried out based on selection criteria. The periods of evaluation conducive to attending these schools are being simultaneously scrutinized compared to the recently-formed legislation about selecting students by lot.

Moreover, a framework formed by social meanings and symbolic existence about the concepts “charismatic person” or “high intelligence person” is being explored. They are meaningful references valuing “difference” to the creation of special schools. The aim is to correlate the developing function of these schools for charismatic children based on class and neo-liberal perceptions which reinforce – in the name of “the right to difference”- the content of standpoints. This is achieved by utilizing political structures of the nation-state and globalized political decisions. The underpinned new ideologies, as ipso-iure, through new fetish words – “modernisation”, “innovation”, “reconstruction” – impose and legalise, as “construction”, the “educational correctness” of an expanded type of differentiations. Perhaps, the educational structural differentiations are cancelled by the recent law of 2015. This way, deliberation is brought back as there is necessity to reform public education through expanded opportunity structures.

**Key Words:** charismatic people, differentiation, experimenting – model schools (protypapeiramatikasholia), legislation, public education, opportunity structures.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Within the wider global context of on-going crises, Greece appears to be in a perpetual state of socio-economic and political turmoil, crisis-ridden and often stigmatised as in the periphery of Europe and saturated by wretched livelihoods (1). Yet, in times of crisis most nation - states equate education with a process of citizenship-making, not just discursively emerging but

explicitly in educational institutions, curricula and learning systems that incorporate values, ideologies and prospects for sustainable futurities through these educative practices (2) (3).

Taking into consideration the theoretical analysis of the two laws on Experimental Schools, the present paper is an attempt to delve into political integrated meanings towards the production of a different content tied to education functionality. The certain time periods 2011 throughout 2015 are compared with each other, as they are both included in the economic paradigm, prevalent in Greece since 2008. This time period is distinctive of two legislative texts, L. 3966/2011 and L.4327/2015, on education, Experimental Schools in particular. Katsikides&Koktsidis (4) argue that this has to do with the intensive economic crisis and its corresponding effects on lower social strata marginalisation which is depicted in the form of decreased income, unemployment and endless emotional despair within a setting characterised by marginalisation and exclusions. The comparative study of these laws on Experimental Schools provides breeding ground for further interpreting the socio-political conditions generated by two different governments<sup>1</sup>, as they are both included in a different narrative of education conceptualisation. This form of institution cannot be isolated by broader discourses on the political content of choices in dialectic political fields.

Moreover, a framework formed by social meanings and symbolic signifiers about the concepts ‘charisma’, ‘ability’ or ‘high intelligence’ is examined in the analysis of this case study. They are meaningful references valuing ‘difference’ for the establishment of special schools. The aim is to correlate the developing function of these schools for ‘charismatic’ students based on class and neo-liberal perceptions which reinforce – in the name of ‘the right to difference’ – the content of standpoints. This is achieved by utilising political structures of the nation-state and globalised political decisions. The underpinning new ideologies, as ipso-jure, through new fetishized words such as ‘modernisation’, ‘innovation’, ‘reconstruction’ – imposed and enacted as a means to ‘educational correctness’ of an expanded type of differentiations. There is a hope that such educational structural differentiations are cancelled by the implementation of the recent law of 2015. This way, deliberation is brought back as there is necessity to reform public education through expanded opportunity pathways and the elimination of structural constraints.

The following sections provide a thorough analysis of both theoretical and practical issues tied to the political decision of both governments in 2011 and 2015. This way, issues of political differentiations and circumscriptions can be approached, as they have been determinant to formulating political standpoints pertaining to the form of education through the periods of democratic system political dis-functionalities along with an extensively explicit or implicit political rights refutation. The aim is to prove that this is not a simple settlement of a certain policy on a certain type of school, but rather the specific legislation corresponds to broader political standpoints on education and its functionality within a complex economic-political setting. This is distinctive of interpretations and political inferences based on the dialectic interaction of multiple factors towards composing political discourse.

Given the legislative development of 2011-2015, the standpoints on Experimental Schools will be approached in comparison to previous corresponding regulations(5) (6) in order to illustrate

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A. Diamanatopoulou served as Minister of Education in the first government of 2011 (G. Papandreou’s government, from 6<sup>th</sup> 1 October 2009 until 11<sup>th</sup> November 1011)

inter-textual political discourse generated during different time periods and distinctive of political coincidence and historic structural development. Education policy is developed within historic time in order to fulfil the needs of contemporary social phenomena such as the refugee issue, environmental crisis, the rise of far right, shrinking humanistic capital and not only the market needs.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The legislative regulations of 2011 and 2015 about Experimental Schools are included in two different political paradigms pertaining to the role and dynamics of education. The policy about Experimental Schools should be included in the comparative approach to political representations – models spawned by broader reflections on issues of social organisation and composition of the political (7). According to L.3966/2011 and the consecutive one of 2015, the legislative regulation corresponds to political points highlighted through political conventions (8), definitions of form and content dimensions. The laws passed by two different governments reflect competitive political identities and corresponding political relations. Conflicts or considerations about Experimental Schools remind us of contracting discourses which interpret issues of change or propagated political reality in different ways. In other words, the political discourse emanating from the specific legislative texts reflects the newly formed demands of the contemporary era. At the same time, they can be perceived as an attempt to eliminate weaknesses of the existing education system, while putting forward different dimensions related to experimentation, creativity, innovation and good practices dissemination.

Thus, the piecemeal study of legislation about Experimental Schools is conducive to isolating the constructed discourse from expanded statuses of education policy within the overall education plan. Based on the deliberation about education, theoretical standpoints and political inferences are showcased, since they stem from a broader given discourse, representative of the European Union and international centres. The authority – relations patterns, the role of social classes as well as the special interests of upper social strata are all included in the expanded plurality of political practices (9). These practices are seemingly unified within a productive model of discourse about education, knowledge and subjects' positioning in an education system (10).

Legislative regulations, in the form of time incisions, reflect discourse transformations and perceptive fields developed through the interconnection of issues and considerations that give meaning to verbal processes about knowledge and the individuals' positioning in the social web. School is part of the state mechanisms and, in this sense it reproduces and controls the dimensions of the political. The common everyday school practices are included in broader convergence processes by which the individual is rendered as a political subject in the system. Education legislation is put forward as an education plan, a form of reality inscription and interpretation which, through knowledge, makes the educational practice meaningful. Ruptures or subversions are parts of a different narrative about education, as theoretically illustrated in the left wing policy papers.

### **The legislation of 2011 about Experimental Schools**

The government of 2011 introduced L.3966 according to which students who wished to attend Experimental Schools should sit an examination. The prevalent economic crisis (11) of that

period provides breeding ground for multiple interpretations of the highlighted contradicting discourses which depict the verbal dimensions of the distorted operation of education. Reformation, reconstruction and modernisation, as discourse – analytical categories, make the necessary education policy reformations more meaningful. On the basis of practices that create meaning, an education organisation model is propelled, according to which everything is determined by economy.

A sequence of measures pertaining to education is introduced by the government of 2011. More analytically, abolishing – merging of schools, abolishing subjects and fields in vocational schools and downgrading of all-day schools are introduced<sup>2</sup>. The afore-mentioned steps are some of the performing education measures tied to cost curtailing. This is actually a cost curtailing on education without prior investigation of the effects on society. On the contrary, Hurst (12) argues that choices and standpoints towards escalating social inequality are naturalised.

The public school is downgraded in such a way so that opportunity structures for lower social strata along with social mobility are limited within a constructed social inequality. In public schools both teachers and students are confined in a constructed education system inconsistent with the theoretical model about innovation and school functionality promoted by the government. In this respect, common meanings are created within an educational environment distinctive of limited opportunities, possibilities and fields of knowledge.

The educational environment is gradually being downgraded (13) or, at least, it is not being upgraded should that be the governmental intention and proposal. Various forms of reflection on a series of issues, such as evaluation tied to system advancement and modernisation, are obviously refuted by the educational representations of reality in the public school. The examination system that allows students to attend Experimental Schools generates one more different group, that of the chosen ones, meaning those ones to excel in the examination.

In this vein, three categories of chosen entities are created: a) the chosen ones of private schools, b) those of the Experimental Schools and c) those attending tutorials and receiving versatile knowledge. All three categories have a common feature that is the high economic and, usually, educational capital compared to public school common students. In other words, amidst an economic crisis period, a new privileged space is generated, that one of sitting an examination to attend Experimental Schools, while public education is experiencing a general deregulation.

A more thorough study (14) on the Experimental Schools audience based on the corresponding legislation is proof of the fact that student preparation for this type of examination is actually an end in itself. Competition acquires a new dimension since the preparation for these schools can be supported by upper social strata. Given their high economic and educational capital, they are able to interpret the functionality of this type of school on the one hand and fund this choice on the other. The management, conceptualisation and interpretation of information remain, in this way, solely an upper social strata privilege. This means that besides private schools, their offspring are able to attend a different type of school as well. They are aware of the fact that

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See the last legislative text including “Secondary Education School Merging” (A.D. 29988-D4/440B). “Downgrading, merging<sup>2</sup> and abolishing Schools in Kindergartens and Primary Schools” (A.D. 29984-D4/440B) and “Abolishing Secondary Education Schools” (A.D. 29987-D4/440B) published in the Government Gazette on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2011. The same policy applies throughout 2011 (A.D. 71367/D4, A.D. 71336/D4, FEK 1575/27-6-2011) and much later throughout 2013-2014. This model of merging or abolishing schools was commenced by Minister of Education, A. Diamantopoulou (October 2009- March 2012) and Undersecretary P. Christophilopoulou.

during a period of public education depreciation, one different form of organised schooling is available to them. Amidst the economic crisis period, upper social strata are able to reform their offspring's framework of choices and preferences by utilizing different structures both on national and international levels. As a result, social differentiation and inequality are maximised (15).

With regards to Experimental Schools the question posed is whether a diversified type of school has actually been created. Why should it exist since it does not differ from a public school regarding the material and content of knowledge? Eventually, the operation of Experimental Schools during the specific time framework is tied to a different school to be attended by the few, within a condition of deregulated institutions and structures addressing the majority of the population.

Throughout the deliberation stage, a large number of questions about the feasibility of exams were posed, in contrast to the limited number of questions about the convenience of these schools. Provided that Experimental Schools exist, they can offer a different type of education and students can be selected based on public school proposals. This means that children excelling in certain fields would be able to access Experimental Schools upon their teachers' proposals. Legislation on examinations to attend these schools eventually refutes students and their parents' democratic right to choose a school. The problem remains unsolved, as special groups of talented or brilliant students do not have an alternative. On the contrary, preparing through tutorials to succeed in the examination was reinforced. Moreover, teachers for Experimental Schools are selected according to their formal qualifications, while the school space is organised in such a way so that interest in certain fields is enhanced, while choices and performances tied to students' personal and educational future are enriched.

The association between evaluating educational functionality and the exam system for Experimental Schools is rather distorted. Moreover, the idea that these schools can be reformed through the selective examination system is misleading.

### **The educational policy of 2015 about Experimental Schools**

The legislation of 2015 signifies a political change, as a left wing government takes office. Their policy of intentions is distinctive of the contrasting discourse to the economic crisis and the corresponding memorandum. This is significant of a different policy emphasizing social inequality mitigation and opportunities structures activation for the lower social strata. The political discourse is characteristic of its inter-textual reference to left wing political repertoires focused on forming a different political field (16) (17). Economic processes, in particular, are monitored by the international supervision and control centres. The policy of breach includes education reformation according to the governmental policy papers.

The governmental inter-textual approach seems to correspond to the legislative proposals of the first A. Papandreou's government<sup>3</sup>. Both governments begin on a common conceptualisation that highlights competitive social interests and the naturalisation of ruptures and subversions. Throughout the two time periods of 1981 and 2015, Experimental Schools were included in the planning of a different form of education. Students are selected by lot beyond class-related

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Reference is made to A. Papandreou's first government from 21<sup>st</sup> October 1981 until 5<sup>th</sup> June 1985. The Minister<sup>3</sup> of Education A. Kaklamanis was in charge of this legislation.

separations and interests based on the rhetoric about social consensus. Both legislations regard any form of examination as a privileged manner of selection in favour of the upper social strata. The latter are usually benefited by opportunity structures, enabling them to organise their offspring's life in such a way so that their preferences and choices are strictly associated with the class model reproduction.

With regard to issues of hegemonic relations, power and privileges determined by education, the education policy of 1981 and 2015 make an effort towards transcendence through processes characterised by post-modern perceptions about social mobility and the right to quality education. The education policy of 2015, formally or informally, is included in the meanings virtually determined by economy. The "deficiencies", as interpreted by the left wing government, prevail on all fields and particularly refer to lower social strata beyond the abstract mapping of inequality. Opening of these privileged schools towards the entire population is inscribed in a political view which emphasizes the transformation of political perception about the possibilities of education.

According to Verdes & Scotti (18) deliberation on the Internet, meaning the expression of different approaches to this issue on social networks is of special importance. The intermediary discourse was conducive to developing various reformed analyses of political argumentation. The issue of integrating Experimental Schools into a broader plan to reform education created expectations for a chain-like association of political context within a unified education proposal. The discourse-analytical approaches to knowledge will be the focal point for future research. Knowledge and representations are obviously interrelated within a changing socio-political space by the left wing government. Knowledge is approached through social interaction and participation of the educational community. Normalities and limitations on all levels of knowledge construction and educational environment formation are determined by the active social subjects.

At this point reference can be made to the selection of authoritative carriers with teachers directly choosing education executives, as stipulated by L. 4327/2015. In other words, the political discourse and educational action are activated through teachers based on the available viewpoints about the carriers' effectiveness or non-effectiveness. Reference can also be made to other points of the proposed education policy, yet they do not relate to the topic of the present paper. Our interest lies in the combination of new political elements in order to explore the changes pertaining to Experimental Schools (articles 10,11& 12 of Section B/ L. 4327/2015). Emphasis is placed on developing a deep understanding of the policy, the meanings tied to educational discourse and eventually the development of the proposed education policy that will turn into the afore-mentioned law.

Issues of social consensus or compliance are the focal point. Policy practices that put forward compromise or rupture are transformed within developing political discourse. The comeback to the policy of 1981 pertaining to selecting students by lot does not seemingly refute the basic differentiation between Experimental Schools and other schools within public education. The special features of these schools in terms of infrastructure and teachers' selection make them "special schools", as already stated. Even if lower social strata students are able to participate in the lot procedure, given that they could not financially support exam preparation through private tutoring, social inequality remains. Lower social strata offspring who fail probably lose their

only opportunity. Upper social strata offspring who fail definitely have other choices either selecting private schools or tutorial courses.

This is perhaps the first time that the concept of juvenile culture (19) is included in the process of developing and interpreting the political decision. This concept is distinctive of the juvenile identity and personal development. This way, competition is interpreted as reinforcement of segregations in the social field and as the juvenile rights refutation in socio-psychological terms.

In particular, competition and rivalry are interpreted as separating representations, while school is considered to be the mediator in conflicts and contradictions. In this vein and in psychological terms, people miss life moments and their personal interests are lost, while being confined in rivalry constructions. Furthermore, in political-educational terms, the dynamics pertaining to developing collectivities, perception of social self and functionality of knowledge as autonomous fields of study and reflection are refuted. The autonomous subject, the one living in the juvenile culture within a field of representation is depicted as the desideratum in argumentation. In this respect, perceived partnerships and interventions in social political issues (20) are schematised by humanistic conditions. As a result, what is put forward is that the examinations system is inscribed in political processes of the subjects' asceticism and marginalisation in which the meaning of education is confined in rivalry.

The proposal, eventually not included in the specific law, about students' selection on the basis of criteria set by Experimental Schools obviously reinforces the standpoint that they are special schools. Based on a free model of terms formation, the educational community holds the responsibility to transform the selection of human force. Both legislations of 2011 and 2015 maintain the Experimental Schools as different models of education without making their operation and objectives clear. The content of studies seemingly creates opportunities even if they are confined in a tight curriculum. At the same time, the special selection of teachers to staff these schools is inscribed as prerequisite towards developing discourse and setting in alternative terms.

Nevertheless, Experimental Schools obviously work alongside public schools, while special talents, skills or abilities in certain scientific fields are not highlighted. In other words, the specific schools are not interconnected with other public schools so as to reinforce children with special knowledge, skills and abilities within a model of different educational organisation.

### **3. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Focusing on the students' selection processes to attend Experimental Schools probably obscures and obfuscates political meanings and ideological relations rather than clarifying standpoints and intentions. Both laws of 2011 and 2015, the latter bringing back the argumentation developed by A. Papandreou's first government, do not obviously resolve this issue. It is evident that students' selection by lot provides more possibilities for lower social strata children to attend Experimental Schools. The tight curriculum of these schools is of primary consideration. Despite developing cumulatively reformed orders of educational discourse, it inhibits individuals' skills and abilities development due to lacking clearly defined structures that would enable the development of scientific fields.

Experimental Schools have not found their destination yet and have not been defined as schools of alternative orientations even if they are portrayed as an elaborated form of schooling. As already stated, a different political planning about them would probably transform them into

functional institutes to promote development, consideration, skills and abilities given the proper infrastructure and law-making of an open curriculum. The main prerequisite for this model could be the association of Experimental Schools with public schools so that Primary and Secondary Education teachers would be able to direct special groups of students towards the former. This schematic representation of associating the two types of schools is based on a different operation of public schools in which the educational practice could be included in student-centred assessment, prevailing in their portfolios along with a defined profile of their interests, preferences, skills and abilities.

In this sense, Experimental Schools could be based on objective controllable criteria, while the content of studies would be formulated with regard to these students' special needs. This model could possibly be associated with the theoretical framework of innovation and humanistic approach contrary to the neoliberal educational paradigm since students could expand their practices to create meaning and promote new scientific areas through different forms of consideration and reflection.

All things considered, the educational process is complex, while political positioning and political reality are not suitable for single-sided interpretations. Theoretical traditions are tested and, at the same time, new fields of political verballity are formulated distinctive of the differentiated left political discourse compared to the conservative neoliberal political discourse.

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