Making a Difference in Education

The role of the school and especially the teacher in empowering gender discrimination under a policy of equality

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Abstract
The aim of this thesis is to find out how the role of the teacher can affect positively or negatively the issue of gender equality in classroom and more specifically how this question can be applied to the Greek educational system which, for years, has been following a program that suggests ways for the elimination of gender stereotyping. The reason that this thesis focuses mainly on the role of the teacher, besides the fact that teaching is my occupation, lies in the fact that the implementation of every policy presupposes the willingness of the teacher to carry out those implementations. The implementation of policies on gender issues requires a constant education and training on gender issues and rights, expanding the attitude and beliefs on the issue. So far the policies tend to aim to equality and elimination of discrimination. We will see at which level we currently are and which are the visions regarding this matter.

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Note to the reader

The current research is addressed to students of every field who intend to become teachers, to everyone who enacts with education but also to teachers and professors, as my aim is to prove that, even though there might be policies regarding gender equality, there is also a lack of realistic results, thus the major responsibility lies on the school and the teachers. Taking in account the fact that the current research is not representative, its results should be interpreted with relevant constraints.
Motivation

As a member of the teaching group I agree with the common belief that there is the need for the evolution of the principles of education in schools in order to respond to the current social conditions. The connection between school and society, as well as the fact that school is not neutral politically or socially, requires the reorganization of education. Examining the issue of gender in school environment, an environment in which the next generations are formed, we would all agree on the need for the democratic character of this environment and its need to contribute to the avoidance of every conflict or discrimination. More specifically there is a need for young people to understand the concept of gender, in order to embrace and respect it when they are adults, and particularly to understand that gender difference should not be a reason for exclusion.

This research started primarily as a personal willingness to learn more about how I can change some things in my classroom. Why in my field of studies are more girls than boys? Why do the majority of these girls want to become teachers or nurses? Why the colleagues of the same subject (humanities and anthropological studies) are mostly women? Does it hint at something? Can it be that it supports a well-established prejudice? Which are the laws around this matter and how feasible are they? What should I do as a teacher in order to support equality? In that sense, it is intriguing for me to firstly find out how the laws support equality between the genders in the school’s environment, second how the school as institution supports it and, finally, how the teacher, within his/her profession, can promote gender equality.
Introduction

Why should one care to study gender equality in the current classroom? Education is the pillar of a healthy relationship between genders, thus gender studies are considered necessary in the analytical or hidden curriculum of the Greek Ministry of Education in order to evolve equality as a democratic right. Gender stereotypes will be eliminated and a new society that shows respect to a biological difference will be constructed, and supported by education¹.

This research was based on the idea of difference between genders in terms of social norms, providing examples of female discrimination in the organization of the Greek high school. When I speak about difference I mean the division related to genders. Difference is not presented as something positive. The difference between genders in a classroom that is supposedly democratic, equal and uncritical lies on discrimination against girls mainly, even though pluralism sets every pupil in the same place.

In order to better understand difference we can relate it to equality. In order to achieve equality it has to be clear which is the extent of this difference, biologically and socially reaching every other aspect. Gender equality on the other hand has to do with equality between genders in terms of equal opportunities given by teachers, equal attitude received by them, but also the established equality in the culture of the institution of school and the wider environment. Thus the concept of equality in this research is examined mostly under the terms of education’s procedure and outcomes. ²

The co-education of boys and girls is established in the majority of countries, but that does not mean that an equal attitude towards each gender per se is also established. Despite the policy making on the subject of gender equality, which is relatively new and changes exist already in theory, the school reality shows that

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gender discrimination still exists. Gender discrimination in classroom can bring sad results in society.

The reason that this thesis focuses mainly on the role of the teacher, besides the fact that teaching is my occupation, lies in the fact that the implementation of every policy presupposes the willingness of the teacher to carry out those implementations. The implementation of policies on gender issues requires a constant education and training on gender issues and rights, expanding the attitude and beliefs on the issue. So far the policies tend to aim to equality and elimination of discrimination. We will see at which level we currently are and which the visions are over the matter.

The significant role of the teacher has been examined by many scholars, as we will see later. This role defines the maintenance of stereotypes, especially if we take into account their autonomy and freedom to act in their classroom. Their professional nature is supposed to be mediatory, but in any case a special place in the overall investigation of the matter receives the degree of the teachers’ consciousness as being responsible for the reproduction of stereotypes.

The issue of gender in education was brought up first by feminist scholars, of whom the results will be used in extent in chapter one. The critique of education and its relation to gender had much to do with the justice towards both genders through education. It is noteworthy that feminist theories tend to focus on rebalancing the established gender inequalities that establish either dominant or subordinate roles.

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Just because my thesis follows the same critique, it is also important to note that the feminist perspective is not anti-male, rather it brings to the surface the patriarchy that establishes gender inequality which then results to a wider human discrimination and an indirect, or sometimes direct, circumvention of the human rights.

Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to find out how the role of the teacher can affect positively or negatively the issue of gender equality in classroom and more specifically how this question can be applied to the Greek educational system.

These are the questions:

Which role does gender play in school activities and the structure of education?

How are the pupils treated in terms of gender?

What can teachers contribute with in order to accomplish gender equality?

The used method of research

The most profitable method of research for this purpose seemed to be a semi-structured group interview. With the semi-structured I mean that I created a list of questions-themes that were open-answered in order to let the participants feel free to raise a discussion over each theme. As Denscombe\(^8\) also notes, this method permits the interviewee to elaborate more on the points of interest.

I chose to make a group interview for two reasons. The one was the time-period. Schools were closed for holidays and it would be difficult to arrange personal meetings during the summer, so I asked for help and arranged a date for all of us. The second reason was more qualitative, as I hoped and which indeed happened, to bring up different opinions and greater discussion. The fact that we knew each other before the interview-discussion didn’t seem to be an inhibitory factor.

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As for the nature of the group interview, having the experience, I agree with Christensen who argues that a group interview differs from an individual one in complexity. A group interview also is dependent on the group’s dynamic. As for our group’s dynamic I could assure that the fact that, even though we kept a sequence in our responses according to subgroups of teachers based on the teaching subject, we interfere and comment to each others’ opinions and the discussion was really interactive with a tendency to offer solutions to the discussed question.

The ethical part of the conversation lies mostly in the fact that we had to provide data for people. The gender issue is a sensitive one to be discussed openly- according to the Greek standards- and even more when we are among old conservative colleagues, at least most of the time. With the word ‘conservative’ I mean those who are traditionally supporting the social discrimination of each gender. In order not to circumvent any right of my colleagues I informed them totally about the content and the procedure of my research. I had their consent since the beginning and they were all willing to contribute. They all were well- aware how important was to give me their opinion as they were the ‘key players’ and they knew exactly the situation in our school.

In my analysis the teachers will be referred regarding their working title. The volunteers were two mathematicians, two teachers of chemistry, two musicians and two gymnasts. For each of these fields of studies a male and a female teacher responded. The two philologists unfortunately were two women, a woman colleague and me, as there is no male with this direction of studies in our school. This selection

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was intentional in order to have the opinion of both genders and objectivity, no matter each one’s field of study.\textsuperscript{12}

The data that I collected from our conversation, keeping notes most of the time are transferred following a sub-grouping order of the teachers according to field of study and theme of discussion. This collection framed a system of values, beliefs and attitudes that are vague in the school environment and helped me made them clearer. I will abstract the data and conduct the analysis\textsuperscript{13}. Then I will ‘integrate what has been done into a meaningful and coherent picture of the data’.\textsuperscript{14}

At last, the limitations of this research are detected on the part of ‘experience’. The validity of this experience will be testified by a satisfying number of semi-structured interviews. My position as a researcher will be in distance to the one of the participant. As there was no opportunity to find a male philologist I took this place and I gave the answers to the questions taking into account my occupation and not my role in this research.

**The structure of the thesis**

This thesis starts with the framework of my examination. I give an overview of the school’s role towards gender equality and stereotypes. I found it crucial to start with the school as an institution in which the teacher acts and practices. A supportive work environment is always beneficial for good results, as well as for teachers.

While reading previous research I found out that many scholars equate belief to practice. However, from my perceptive these are quite different, thus I divide their results of research into those related to what teachers believe and to those related to what teachers do. We will find out that teachers sometimes tend to know that they

\textsuperscript{12} Francis, B. (2008). Teaching manfully? Exploring gendered subjectivities and power via analysis of men teachers’ gender performance. *Gender and Education*, 20(2), pp.109-122. Francis notes that the attitude of each teacher is predictable if we take into account his or her gender.


support stereotyping but they do nothing to remedy the situation, and that other times they think that are practicing equality teaching while, in fact, they are not.

In the next stage of this thesis I examined the effect of the occupation of the teacher per se. As we will see, there is a direct connection between the occupation dominated by women in early classes and specific fields of studies by teachers according to gender that produce hidden messages to pupils related to their gender and the choice of specific courses, which results in a wider societal distinction amongst male and female occupations.

In the end of the first Chapter I examine the knowledge resources provided to teachers by the government and the pedagogical programs. In Greece, many older teachers have not received training from their academic departments of study in order to know how to apply values like gender equality or how to stand against the traditional roles established by their society.

In Chapter Two I proceeded to a further research by asking some colleagues of mine from my school in Greece to study a collection of questions and then proceed to a wider discussion, which was always based on the research questions and categorized into three subchapters. These subchapters include the relevant questions of the interview. I started by the wider view of the school, I forwarded to the teachers’ work and finally our thoughts about how we can change the current condition.

We discussed the subject working on each question one after another and I kept notes. I chose ten colleagues from five different subject areas. We worked in a friendlier environment than that of school buildings, since the time of my examination takes place in the summer when schools are closed. The session lasted almost two hours.

A short overview of the Greek Lyceum

Regarding the educational system in Greece and especially for the secondary level for pupils of ages 15-18 that attend Lyceum level classes, hereby follows a brief explanation. Lyceum is divided in the Unified Lyceum: there are schools that cater for students who want to get in higher departments of Universities and there are the
Technical Vocational Educational Schools that offer a certification related to the specialty chosen by the pupil and offer the opportunity to get in a lower university or a technical department. The same agenda works for public and private schools.\textsuperscript{15}

In both cases pupils have to attend all kind of courses during the three years of attendance and at the end of the third year they participate to the national exams only with courses related to the direction that they had chosen at the beginning of their second year at the Lyceum. In the Unified Lyceum there are three directions that lead to relevant universities. The directions are called a. theoretical- including math, chemistry, physics, biology, writing and a course of choice, b. theoretical- including history, ancient Greek, Latin, Literature, writing and a course of choice and c. technological – including math, physics, chemistry, economy, IT, writing and a course of choice. The course of choice is of great importance as it gives the opportunity to open more fields of studies. The directions of studies are three but the fields of studies are five.

\textsuperscript{15} https://academicexchange.wordpress.com/2015/07/24/15-facts-on-the-education-system-of-greece/
Chapter One

-The framework-

1.1 The role of school

The significance of gender equality is reflected on many aspects of social life and many correlated beliefs are constructed during the school years\textsuperscript{16}. School is a carrier that greatly affects young people, contributing to the configuration of their values and beliefs.\textsuperscript{17} The importance of its role lies in the fact that the school’s values are testifying the existent or inexistent inequality between genders\textsuperscript{18} and depending on the wider societal system it can support the patriarchy even among pupils.\textsuperscript{19}

This purpose succeeds with the help of the hidden curriculum that is described as unofficial ways of teaching. Its efficiency is detected in the results of the way of teaching that is organized by each teacher.\textsuperscript{20} The hidden curriculum is not structured as the official program that the teacher has to follow. At this point its power is understood under the terms of indirect and innuendo character of transmission, but nevertheless research has proven that even though there might be a suggested


\textsuperscript{17} Giroux, H. (2002) ‘Neoliberalism, Corporate Culture and the Promise of Higher Education: The University as a Democratic Public Sphere’, Harvard Educational Review, 72 (4): 1–31. Scholars have argued that education’s power is so strong that it can maintain, challenge or both of them at the same time hegemony and patriarchy.


curriculum, it seems to be dependent on the school management and the personnel who might embody a traditional gender system.\textsuperscript{21}

The hidden curriculum is one of the ways that society transfers its values. We easily understand that it is not only the teachers that are taking part, but also the pupils, the parents and the whole of society. But as the teachers are the agents of education, they have the greatest responsibility, and as it is said, “teachers are the involuntary actors of the hidden curriculum and its objects”.\textsuperscript{22}

It is easy to understand that the hidden curriculum reveals the organization of the school in which each teacher interacts and is affected by\textsuperscript{23}. Policies that exist for years, such as the separation of boys and girls while they pray each morning or when they seat in different places in the classroom, worsen the task of the teachers who seem to be hesitant to change something that has been established for many years. These policies enhance the school’s organization based on gender\textsuperscript{24}.

As a matter of fact, Furlong, O’Brien and Sugrue argue that inequalities related to gender, as well as to others of course, instead of being challenged are reproduced.\textsuperscript{25} The same scholars, as well as others, noted that the expectation of the school management is for the teachers to fulfill the course’s obligations and as it is proven


that this expectation sits in the background as the hidden curriculum, and thus all the virtues are dependent on that.26

As a conclusion, the school should offer an environment for cooperation between the teachers, with the support of the director and with the opportunity for the teacher to obtain further knowledge. The teachers, in order to apply values to their students, should have the autonomy and the freedom to take initiative and actions27.

1.2. The teachers’ beliefs about gender.

Nevertheless, such a delicate subject-for the Greek standards- as this of gender cannot be regulated by a curriculum or a law, yet attention should be given to the beliefs that teachers carry in the classroom, since teachers have a great responsibility of the stereotypes’ maintenance. Thus, besides the influence that the content of the educational books or the wider social system have, the stance of the teachers, as well as their relationship with the pupils, can promote or eliminate the gender stereotypes.28

A fact that has been detected related to the contemporary educational reality is that current teachers tend to conceal their sexist tendencies presenting themselves as progressive and supporters of gender equality in classroom, as well as in the wider society.29


27 Sakka, D. & Delianni-Kouimitzi, K. ( 2000). ‘We have to find a solution…’: Male identities, family gender divisions and the notion of fatherhood among Greek adolescents. Εισήγηση στη Διεθνή Στρογγυλή Τράπεζα της IAC με θέμα Η Συμβουλευτική στη Νέα Χιλιετία. Θεσσαλονίκη, 2-5 Μαΐου. (Contribution to the National Round Table of IAC with subject: The Counseling of the New Millennium, Thessaloniki, 2-5 May).


Researchers have shown that this ‘neosexism’ proves that their beliefs are not clear. Even though they know to what extent stereotyping is reproduced in their classroom and according to Greek studies teachers consent to the principles of gender equality and their need for embodiment in the curriculum, it seems that they cannot understand their own attitude against each gender. They also don’t understand the dimension of inequality that takes place in their environment and they are mistaken about inequality as an educational problem, attributing its existence in factors outside of school.

Many other aspects related to the teacher could be their level of education, the courses taught at the university around gender issues, their experience in handling issues of discrimination and their interest in offering ethics and values besides the obligatory agenda on their subject. Of course, the sense of their efficacy in the teaching part plays a great role in their effort to be engaged with matters out of their course.

An important parameter of gendered separation, which will be reflected in the part of the interview in chapter two, is the distinction of courses into “boyish” and “girly”. Each gender is supposed to have specific characteristics that affect their

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performance in its course. At last, the nature of its gender is considered by the teachers as leading for the pupils’ evolution in education.\textsuperscript{34}

1.3. The teachers’ attitude in classroom.

Taking into account firstly the social role of each gender, which implied that men had to be enrolled in public matters and women should take care of their household, and secondly the educational process of each gender related to these social roles, we understand how patriarchy interferes into the hidden curriculum and in extent the established values of inequality to the new generations.\textsuperscript{35}

When I speak about attitude I mean the forms that can receive inequality, like the different expectations that teachers have from pupils according to their gender for every course but also the perspectives of development of each pupil-boy or girl-, the promotion of masculinity, the attribution of specific characteristics to pupils according to their gender or even the messages that they transmit to pupils through words or body language, gestures or facial expressions.\textsuperscript{36}

The delineation of activities for each gender works inhibitory in a practical level, either that is related to a game or a lesson. The sexist discrimination is done by separating pupils physically and by ascribing them different intellectual capabilities. The boys tend to prefer math or science and girls more the theoretical courses. The


practical dimension of this statement lies in the time that teachers offer to each gender in relation to the course.37

Teachers seem to pay more attention to boys with the excuse that boys have a more restless character. Sometimes even if teachers think that their attitude towards their pupils is equal, they tend to pay more attention to the boys, even by punishing them more often. On the other hand, girls unavoidably are made to have a more dependent attitude because of their secondary position in the classroom.38

1.4. The occupation of the teacher per se.

The association of women with the nature of the mother and the expected care to children justifies the predominance of women in the profession. This gendered expectations and forms a professional reality which extends to professional female identity.39 Although the woman acquires independence through work, on the other hand she is dammed by sexism’s maintenance promoted tangible by her own profession.40

The fact that the occupation per se can receive the dimension of gender have been interpreted as a resistance to the women’s domination which accentuate the contempt of their educational skills.41 Furthermore, factors that keep men from the profession are: a negative working environment for men, low social prestige or ideological


weakening of the profession. Another factor is the fear of pedophile’s suspicion that promotes sexist standards.

The fact that male teachers teach science, math and technology and female teachers teach more theoretical courses, in the studied school, give the impression to pupils that each gender should be enrolled in specific courses and they are inheriting a different approach of knowledge. Once this separation is made it is assumed that the courses are also separated in male and female addressed courses. Accordingly, as a result of the courses’ separation and the choice of them for the introduction to the university, a primary occupational direction is hinted at.

It can be seen that the unofficial policy that directs pupils to specific courses affects even the choice of their future occupation, making an even clearer distinction between male and female occupations. Scholars have examined the issue, at least according to the Greek data, and found that, in terms of this policy, girls suffer. The explanation for this suffer lies on the fact that even though girls are recognizing the existence of female occupations, they show interest in fields of study that are male dominated, thus intended for male. The struggle comes from the willingness for their emancipation of girls on the one hand, and on the other the traditional vocational stability.

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44 See p.11 the division of directions in lyceum. Theoretical courses are: Ancient Greek, Newly Greek, Literature, Poetry, History, Latin, meaning all those that lead to the field of humanities.


It is noteworthy the fact that women tend to be in lower positions in the work hierarchy of power and men tend to hold the decision-making positions. So teaching is for women but the administration of the school usually is in a man’s hands. That instantly gives the message to pupils that each gender is intended for specific work places and positions.\textsuperscript{47}

\section*{1.5. The teacher’s knowledge about the gender issue}

Scholars have attributed the existence of gender discrimination and stereotypes in the Greek school to the lack of existence of practices.\textsuperscript{48} Factors that seem to affect this situation are as follows: the lack of existence of programs at the universities related to gender and people or groups that are researching the subject and set it into practice, Greek bibliography and of course teachers who know how to elaborate it in their classroom.

Many are those who have examined the proposition to apply on how it is possible to apply an education of equality or change the existent conditions. Since Greek society is based on a patriarchal system, with roots on the Christian conservatism and secularization of the church, then we can comprehend the lack of existence of strong female groups and of gender studies.\textsuperscript{49} Given these social conditions, many theories


\textsuperscript{49} Sakka, D. & Deliyanni-Kouimitzi, K. ( 2000). ‘We have to find a solution…’: Male identities, family gender divisions and the notion of fatherhood among Greek adolescents. Εισήγηση στη Διεθνή Στρογγυλή Τράπεζα της ΙΑΣ με θέμα Η Συμβουλευτική στη Νέα Χιλιετία. Θεσσαλονίκη, 2-5 Μαΐου.

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In this chapter, we saw that the school and its organization and principles play a significant role to the establishment of gender equality. It should support the teacher to act in it democratically and ethically, promoting a hidden curriculum that provides values to pupils. It is important always to take into account that the school is not only offering knowledge.

We also saw that there is a difference between the belief and the practice of the teachers, not always, but quite enough. We can attribute this difference to many factors, like the unsupportive environment of the school or the wider stereotypical society, the teachers’ fear of applying values indirectly and their conservatism. In any case, it is important for everyone to have self-knowledge and try to adapt to the current conditions.

The occupation of the teacher also seems to hint at being a stereotype in itself, as it is mostly chosen by women, especially in early classes. In higher grades, there is the distinction between male and female teachers according to the subject of teaching. The domination of male teachers in a specific sphere of courses and female in another gives the message to pupils that they are intended to do what their gender requires.

At last, at least in Greece, there is a lack of courses related to gender and feminism in academia and especially in pedagogical departments. It is understandable that this fact is an obstacle to teachers’ knowledge on how to apply values, rather than just focusing on their course.

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(Contribution to the National Round Table of IAC with subject: The Counseling of the New Millennium, Thessaloniki, 2-5 May).
Chapter Two

-The results of the discussion-

In this chapter the discussion was structured according to the research questions and its analysis is separated into three subchapters in which the relevant questions of the interview are included. So I started by the wider view of the school, I forwarded to the teachers’ work and finally our thoughts about how we can change the current condition.

In order to open the conversation around the subject I had prepared a list of ten questions relevant to the aim of the thesis. They are outnumbered under the three subchapters. When we met, my colleagues and I started discussing these questions one by one. I chose to make notes and use a recorder in order to make it easier to analyze the results later. Each question below is followed immediately by the answers.

The institution of school

Which role does gender play in school activities, courses and the structure of education?

1. In the school’s curriculum are there activities that seem to be based on gender? Is a system of stereotypes supported formally or informally by the educational system?

All teachers agreed on one thing, that the educational agenda does not promote discrimination intentionally or formally, but informally. The fact that older conservative teachers still have a teaching position at school worsens the situation, besides the fact that there is no evaluation of their work or mandatory training according to the new social conditions. It seems that one’s training stops at the end of university studies and acquisition of more knowledge comes as a personal will.

The teachers of math and chemistry presented the fact that their subject is severely restricted on science and they are forced to cope with a huge amount of material, especially for the higher classes of gymnasium. The orders that they get from the Ministry are mainly on this and not pedagogical issues.
The other philologist and I agreed on the fact that there are no restrictions set for us regarding questions of gender by the Ministry or the institution. The taught courses like Ancient Greek, Latin and History reveal indirectly gender discrimination but it is taken for granted as our past. On the contrary, in literature or poetry we also teach contemporary ideas. However it is taken for granted that the man is the leader at home and has to work and support the family financially, but there is no discussion in the classroom about that because, on one hand there is the danger of getting away from the content of the course and losing the teaching hours, and on the other hand, there is the danger of raising disagreements or gender racism that are subordinated under the norms of a classroom.

The male teacher of music that divides his course into theory and practice said that in theory lessons all are totally equal. Even though he is instructed by the ministry for a full equality, actually that meant that there is no reference to boys or girls pupils, he admitted that informally he urges boys and girls to choose an instrument that best suits to their gender. For example an electric guitar or a saxophone, he says, is better suited to a boy. On the contrary, the woman teacher of music showed a total equal attitude toward pupils, without restricting the choices based on gender. She noted that if a girl wants to play a more ‘male’ instrument then she has the freedom to do it. It is her choice whether she continues with that or not.

At last, the gymnasts said that there is a canonical order for their course that promotes gender inequality. The instructions of teaching off alternatives methods of teaching, like separating boys and girls when it comes to choosing a sport. For example boys choose football and girls choose volleyball or something more elegant or light for them.

All the above show that there is a system of stereotypes supported by the educational system, although not as extended as in the past. Also the fact that the institution per se shows some kind of negligence in the matter shows that discrimination will be present for many more years in Greece.
2. Do gender stereotypes exist in the school books? If they do how do you treat them?

To this question, the teachers of gymnastics, chemistry, math and music couldn’t take part because of the courses’ content.

As for me and the other philologist, we are in the difficult position to face the fact that we did and do find enough examples in our books of gender stereotypes. Literature and poetry unfortunately present intensively the traditional roles of each gender, the woman as the householder or without a job and the man that brings money and food at home. For example, in a poet given to the third grade there is a homosexual man who is parallelizing his fear of getting old like a knife. In all the commentaries from various books about the specific poet, the fear of ageing is presented as a woman’s characteristic inherited by a homosexual man.

At this point there is a distinction, at least at my point of view after serving in town as well as in a village. Students, whose mothers work or even have a leading position at their work, seem to differentiate from the traditional model. On the other hand, students from a village whose mothers tend to stay at home and wait for the husband to support them financially, seem to inherit the traditional role of genders uncomplainingly.

Our effort at this point is to present, support and argue on the current roles of the genders and the rights of each one. It is extraordinary though that most of the boys react sometimes strongly and others not that much, to the lessons in history where we discuss about how late the right for women to vote was given in Greece, in 1952. In my classroom, as well as in my colleagues’, there were boys who said that women shouldn’t vote at all, even nowadays. We are aware that some voices might come out as a joke for the girl pupils but it can’t be neglected.

We are given though a great opportunity to discuss the matter of gender openly in the course of writing, where we chose a subject each time, we discuss it and then the pupils write an essay. As all pupils are preparing themselves for the Greece-wide examinations in order to get into a university they are following a main instruction that is absolutely disastrous for their creativity. They are taught to offer an opinion that shows that there are not for or against the matter. Even though in the classroom
their ideas are heard, it is not possible to see them written and evaluate the level of conquest of equality.

Easily we can understand how important is for the Ministry of Education to revise the content of the books. It is essential to give food for thought and awakening from monolithic or conservative ideas to the pupils.

3. **Do you think that your classroom is the ideal place in order to raise a discussion on gender, intersectionality and change? How feasible is that? To what extent the Ministry of Education or your personal studies allow you to carry out such a discussion?**

All teachers agreed that indirectly even if the content of the course doesn’t allow it, their attitude indirectly gives messages to the pupils that they unconsciously inherit and later promote. We also all agreed that the classroom is the ideal place in order to raise a discussion on gender, sometimes extensively and sometimes briefly, but more or less it is feasible. For example, the gymnasts seemed to agree with the proposal that, even the given alternatives in teaching by the Ministry with separating the pupils by gender, they have the possibility to take initiatives and act more equally and not discriminate due to physical superiority or inferiority.

The sad thing around this question is that a gender issue was not examined in the studies of music, math and chemistry, so the teachers are eliminating even since the beginning besides the fact that the Ministry of Education didn’t offer them some relevant training. On one hand, the teachers felt that they didn’t have the knowledge to discuss this issue and on the other hand they had the instructions to concentrate on finishing the year’s material.

We as philologists took some courses related to women’s rights, restricted in number, materials and even within regions. Pedagogically we seem to have obtained the basic principles but we didn’t get training on how to face social matters in the classroom. As for the ministry’s instructions around our courses, we as well did not receive further instruction on this.

From all the above we resulted that the teacher’s initiative is a most significant element to get more knowledge and be eligible to handle current conditions. Even if the university studies are insufficient in this regard, and even if the Ministry seems to
neglect the issue, there is the need for all teachers to be ready for every challenge and tackle the phenomena of discrimination and inequality.

4. **Why girls choose the theoretical courses in contrast to boys that choose science?**

   **Is it a supported division by the school or the Greek Ministry?**

   For this answer I don’t have to go in pairs of teachers. We all discussed the motives given from early age to the kindergarten and primary school. It is not easy to transform someone’s belief at the level of gymnasium, and we related that to the stereotypes constructed from the early age. Others believe that this fact has to do with the specific choice of courses and others attributed it to different interests. It was also said that the system that introduces pupils to the university is also a reason for this choice. The male dominated occupations are connected with the courses of science at school and accordingly the female dominated with the theoretical. Thus, we can not ignore the fact that informally the educational system supports gender discrimination.

   As a conclusion, priority should be given at first to the establishment of a healthy educational system from its roots to the university. At all levels teachers should take action, beginning from even the earliest stages.

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**The teachers’ beliefs and attitude**

**How are the pupils treated in terms of gender?**

5. **Do you promote a gender division to your classroom? Do you think the subject of the course matters?**

   The discussion showed once again that the content of the course really matters and the teachers are really affected by that.

   The gymnasts and the male musician already have admitted that they base their course on gender division because of the nature of these courses. During our discussion they seemed to be aware of people who succeeded at music or athleticism despite the established idea that it was not suitable for them because of their gender. It is noteworthy the fact that even though they recognize the girls’ abilities and potentials, they admitted that they will continue consulting likewise. Their exact
words were: ‘We don’t oblige them to choose the exact instrument or game, but we advise them.

The teachers of math and chemistry noted that boys are better students than girls on these subjects, making unavoidable the fact that they will give more attention to them, instead of trying to focus on a girl with difficulties. At this point someone asked: “If there is a girl and there is also a boy who are both good students, neither excellent nor bad, on whom will you focus? The male teacher said that his priority would be the boy, arguing that a boy can make a career in science or math, at least, is necessary for his role as the main support of the home. On the contrary, a girl can be good in math but she can not go far with it in a career. The women teachers seems to agree that science is more understood by boys and the majority of their best pupils are boys, but they wouldn’t neglect a girl just because the occupations that result from their direction of studies are male dominated.

The two philologists argued that intentionally there is no diversion in their classroom. Some parts of the courses’ content raised disagreements during the lectures, like those mentioned above, but in general the theoretical courses seem to be more profitable for discussions. In the last grade of lyceum pupils are taught to write essays using only argumentation. With this exercise they are more inclined to think about the other side and not be monolithic or stuck on conservative ideas.

Regarding this question we came to the conclusion that for gymnastics, that has to do more with the physical condition of the student, there is a formal discrimination, supported by both the system and the teachers. For the course of music, the ideas differ, and for the other two courses the idea is still well established that boys do better to science and the teachers seem to do nothing to eliminate that stereotype. The philologists are offered a profitable opportunity to prove the right and necessary equality between genders.

6. Do you think that you or your colleagues show a different treatment to one of the genders? To whom, why and under which circumstances?
The discussion around this question showed that all recognize that there is favoritism towards their own gender but also recognition of the others’ attitude and of course excuses for that attitude.

The gymnasts said that women are not that strong and they tend to work harder on the boy’s training. Girls are often excused for abstaining from the course during their days of period. Both teachers of gymnastics seemed to agree with each other, though the other teachers seemed to disagree with their attitude. The male mathematician’s daughter is a football player and even though he as a father had many sad conversations with her at the beginning, her male couch finally proved that football is for everyone. The father had, wrongly, the stereotype in his mind that her football playing meant that she was a lesbian. He shared that with us, but still the gymnasts didn’t seem to rethink it, if not changing their minds.

The musicians were more reluctant. They showed to respect one another’s opinion, maintaining their beliefs and way of teaching.

The teachers of science showed favoritism to boys, as it is already said because of the course taught. At this point a lively discussion arose regarding the fact that the teachers seem to take for granted that boys are more intelligent and that the girls can not succeed, thus not giving much attention to them. This attitude promotes the stereotypical model of separating the occupations according to gender.

The philologists recognized that they are holding the golden ticket for promoting gender equality. We were hesitant though because of the fact that we only had two hours per week during which other topics had mainly to be covered.

As a conclusion, everyone seems to recognize the other’s equal or unequal attitude toward pupils. It is noteworthy the fact that no one stood against someone strongly but in contrast provided the excuse that he/she can not take part in the others’ courses and ways of teaching.

7. *Do you support the belief that boys are more aggressive, intelligent and independent? Is there an excuse for their low school performance? And on the other side, do you think that girls are dependent and not that intelligent?*
Observing my colleagues I found out that we all were a little bit restrained in telling that we consider one gender superior to another because we were five males and five females, intentionally. We all agreed on the fact that boys were more aggressive because of their biology. But again, there are boys who are really quiet during the course and girls who are making noise, something that dictates that the previous statement does not consist a rule. On the part of spirituality we weren’t all consensus.

The gymnasts comments were based on boys’ bodily superiority. They excused the boys’ aggressiveness by explaining that males have natural instincts as protectors and a more strategic mind. This strength also contributes to their independence. But on the other hand, they didn’t refuse that there are girls with this characteristics, but they are the minority. They do not think that gender has to do with low performance at school but that performance depends on each pupil. At last, they didn’t think that girls are not intelligent, instead they stood to the elegance of their gender.

The musicians also think that boys are more aggressive, that is why they are choosing instruments that sometimes require strength or intensive playing, like drums or an electric guitar. The teachers attributed the low test results to the fact that boys are more practical. On the other hand, they claimed that, girls are more inclined to philosophizing, thus they are better in theory.

Once again the teachers of math and chemistry stood on the content of their courses that are more suitable for boys. They did not claim that girls are not intelligent but their interest is more on theoretical courses. Boys think differently and once again their mind is more practical. Their low performance is not an attribute of gender but of each one’s personality.

The philologists thought that both genders have the same intelligence, as all pupils seem to take part in their conversations. Boys seem though to dislike ancient Greek and Latin, but they are equally good in history as girls. One difference lies in the fact that boys tend to understand history better and girls tend to learn the content by heart. In literature the boy’s low performance is more marked.

As a conclusion boys might sometimes be more aggressive but this does not apply as a general rule. Girls are not considered less intelligent and the boys’ low
performance is not a safe statement for teachers as in some courses they are good and in others not. The boys tend to be more selective about what they will study.

8. **Do you think that discrimination based on gender could be even greater combined with other factors, like race, social status or even disability?**

Taking into account examples from our school, we faced the ‘tragedy’ that indeed there is also a further discrimination. For example, a girl from a wealthy family will receive a better grade, just because her parents are well-known or they help the schools’ financial. Instead, a girl of a middle class family had to face the favoritism of boys, and, as well, girls from privileged families. As for girls with disabilities, they also receive a secondary treatment.

**The teachers’ contribution**

**What can teachers contribute in order to accomplish gender equality?**

9. **Did you ever have conversations about the traditional roles of each gender with your students? Do you believe that these conversations should be had? Which is the tendency of your pupils on this statement?**

The discussion around this question started on whether we ought as teachers to talk about that or should we leave it to the parents or to the society as a whole taking into account that gender discrimination is a construction of society. The philologists and the musicians pointed out our wider pedagogical role besides the teaching of each one’s subject. We all agreed that the great amount of the material to be taught is depriving us from the possibility to take action for secondary conversations as the gender issue is included in the informal curriculum.

The gymnasts said that they didn’t have full conversations during their teaching time. They noted that even at the beginning of the year when they meet new students, they seem to have already inherited the idea of separating the class according to gender and choose each game accordingly.

The musicians had no such discussions, as well as the teachers of math and chemistry, except for some references to some famous women that were recognized
worldwide for their contributions to a science or art, noting that still that isn’t a conversation on the issue.

We as philologists had the opportunity to raise the issue more times in lessons, apart from the one teaching hour that is related exclusively to the equality between the genders, for example during the course of literature where are presented the traditional roles of genders, but either we are restricted to a small discussion on how things changed or we just cover it quickly in order to finish the lesson on time.

In any case, we found out that it is not as much the fact that teachers are not willing to speak about social matters as it is their fear of rejection or misunderstanding from the pupils. That is why they try not to raise such discussions, especially if they suspect that the pupils might come from a conservative family that would disagree with the content of the teaching.

10. Do you think that you, as a teacher, can contribute to the establishment of gender equality in your classroom, even though there are factors like the wider society or family that can work to inhibit gender equality?

Again everyone seemed to share the same opinion. As teachers we can contribute to the establishment of some values to our pupils. It is important to be aware that the pupils spend at least the one third of their day at school, which works in a beneficial way. The teachers that recognized that they are not supporting gender equality in their classroom agreed that they could support it. It is not the classroom or the course but mostly their belief and willingness. Setting willingness as the first step, we concluded that the wider society confronts the ideals given by school. Conservative families could stop disagree against ‘innovations’ according to them, once all teachers support these actions.

So the factor ‘teacher’ comes finally in first place and is recognized by everyone, even those who were strict in teaching just the courses’ material. However as we said at the beginning, a teacher is not offering just knowledge, but it is also a paradigm for imitation, is the one that establishes democracy and ethical values, is the one that constructs the next generations.
Wider results of the discussion

In relation to the theory of chapter one, we observe that the Greek gymnasium doesn’t set as priority the transmission of values like gender equality, especially for the last classes that the main aim is the preparation for the Greek-wide introductory exams to the university and the coverage of the year’s material. In that way, the statement that the educational system of the school plays an important role is testified and the direction, sufficiency or insufficiency of the hidden curriculum characterizes the cultural background of the school as well as the boundaries of each teacher’s actions.

In general, teachers seem to admit that they understand whether or not they are supporting gender stereotypes and if they continue to treat pupils differently according to gender. But their beliefs don’t correspond to what really happens. Even though they all supported the idea of personal action they found obstacles in doing so. Some of them think that an equal attitude is feasible, but there is a restriction due to a course’s content and nature, which accordingly supports stereotyping that equals to the future ideology of the new generations.

They believe that gender equality should be included in the school’s program but on the other side we see that they are discriminating pupils physically and intellectually. In addition to all these, we saw the forms that inequality can receive according to the selected five subjects of studies. There is still a promotion of masculinity, p.e. when teachers pay more attention and offer more time to boys in the course of math promoting an intellectual discrimination or in the course of music that girls shouldn’t choose to play a ‘boyish’ instrument, like drums.

Physical competences seems to play a significant role for teachers as they are excusing boys for their misbehavior or neglect but they are expecting from girls to be more disciplined because of their nature. Furthermore, they tend to attribute this ‘excused’ discrimination in factors outside the school, mainly the parents, of whom are all worried about their reactions. The influence from their environment is of special interest as they are transferring it into their classroom. With this statement I mean the social structure and traditionalism.
Regarding the occupation of the teacher per se there is a vicious circle, as the majority of each gender teaches specific courses which attract the interest of same gender of pupils who accordingly choose gender based occupation. As a result of the courses’ separation and the choice of them for the introduction to the university, a primary occupational direction is hinted at. As for the issue of hierarchy that we discussed in chapter one, in our school the principal is, currently and also for about thirty years, male, which testifies the statement about the gender discrimination in hierarchy.

At last, in the part of knowledge and sufficiency of applying such values during our teaching, we were all insecure. It seemed that it didn’t matter if we graduated ten or thirty years ago from university. There was no method or course in our bachelor programs, and it is obvious that this knowledge lies in the teacher’s willingness of further self-education. The issue of gender equality actually is new in Greece and even today there are disagreements among teachers about its inclusion to the hidden curriculum, and the general system of values that the school follows.\textsuperscript{51}

The whole organization of the Greek School does not promote gender equality in the classroom, and particularly in high school. On the contrary, through our discussion we resulted that the Greek high school leans towards a male-centric education and undoubtedly the institution of school offers the proper environment and reasons to support or neglect gender equality.\textsuperscript{52} We saw that in gym-class girls are excluded by some activities or especially in the last grade, in which the pupils have to choose the direction of studies, there is a great division among genders according to male or female dominated occupations. This fact is also connected to the social norms related to the range of each gender’s activities.

The team of the ten teachers from whom was collected all the above empirical material commented critically on how we could introduce gender equality to our daily course, even though we had no such direction from our universities. We as teachers


could not work without the support of the whole system, so we concluded that at first there is the need for a change to the analytical school program, and that the Ministry of Education should take initiatives and include relevant courses at the level of Bachelor degrees and even at higher levels for the teachers.

In addition, the teachers should follow a manual of new ideas and methods of teaching even for the hidden curriculum. The seminars should be available to every school unit and not only in larger cities in order for each teacher to be informed. The books should be appropriately structured according to this purpose as they are the teacher’s tool.

Lastly and more importantly, there is a need for a change to the teacher’s beliefs and attitudes towards pupils. We saw that even though there is the recognition by the teacher that there is discrimination, there is also the nonchalance to change the conditions. Every teacher should be more conscious of what is supposed to succeed in classroom and there is the need for willingness and interest to offer some values to pupils besides the knowledge of the specific course.

What we also noticed, even from those who work over twenty years, is the fact that there was no exact examination of the conditions around gender equality in schools. We focused our interest on the fact that those who make policies do not have a personal point of view or experience on what happens in a classroom. The policies are based on theories or examples from other European countries and the policy makers propose some ideas, not compulsory, to the Greek teachers. We find it critical that policies should be in direct relation to the conditions in our schools, in order to be effective.
Conclusion

The educational and cultural model that supports the gender issue seems to be inadequate for the Greek teachers of secondary education. The success or the failure of the introduction and the cultivation of an education of equality is shown to be dependent on the teachers’ attitude, besides the school’s direction. When the attitude is positive, a culture of equality is created, which is necessary for the well-function of a democratic school that offers equal opportunities to all students. Furthermore, it constructs an ethical system of values that can not feedback the traditional inequalities.

The teachers as carriers and transmitters of values of equality are the protagonists in the classroom and the discussion revealed that in our school gender is conceived as a social and ideological category that interfere to the educational procedure. Opening new fields of study, like how conceivable is the necessity of personal effort by the teachers themselves, we found out that daily practices were taken for granted and the issue of gender equality is neglected, even more when the interest of the teacher is turned on how to cover the year’s material, especially for the last grade of high school.

As we have already seen the success of a well-structured hidden curriculum requires the active participation of the teachers as well as of the state. Single attempts by teachers can bring some change, but a unified effort towards the introduction of gender issue in the educational procedure can be more productive. In other words, there is the need for a reevaluation of the school’s progress according to the current social conditions. The development of a school that aims to the enhancement of a more critical and humanitarian thinking should be the central attention of the policy makers of our times.
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