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# CRISIS AUSTERITY AND NEW FRAMEWORKS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING: A PEDAGOGY OF HOPE FOR CONTEMPORARY GREEK EDUCATION

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In this article, I present the objectives and the structure of my book *Crisis Austerity and New Frameworks for Teaching and Learning. A Pedagogy of Hope for Contemporary Greek Education*, which was published by Routledge, New York and London in July 2019. The book attempts to examine the educational consequences of the recent social and economic situation in Greece, and it explores—on a general level—new possibilities for teaching and learning at times of national crisis. My book concentrates on understanding the situation in Greece during the age of austerity: How did Greek society get to such a place? Where could it lead? What might Greek people want to do about this? What role should education play in preparing young people for such a social, cultural and economic transition? What is education, and what is its purpose? It also explores ways through which the existing strengths of the education system could be built upon in order to create a system better suited to facing major societal changes and challenging circumstances.

In my book, using Greece as an exemplary case, I demonstrate how the relationship between neo-liberalism and education is especially salient during difficult times; I also demonstrate the effect of this relationship on teachers' day-to-day experiences. By attending to, yet moving beyond, the negative implications of socio-economic crisis, my book aims to present core educational values of the current era, as well as the crucial issues that may become opportunities for reflection and change. Through this book, I attempt to convey a positive

message, to help educators understand the issues of teaching and learning and the purpose of education itself and to encourage the generation of practical and hopeful strategies for an alternative and better future, and the generation of a pedagogy of hope for contemporary Greek education. Thus, my book goes beyond the limits of one that presents an empirical analytic study; it explores how things might be different. In doing so, it rejects a stance of despair and instead seeks to articulate a possibility of hope and to present new frameworks for teaching and learning.

## INTRODUCTION

There is an enduring interest in the impact of economic policies on education, and there is a perceptible trend in sociological and cultural studies of a broader effort to develop and highlight a discourse of hope and optimism, despite tremendous setbacks to this such as, for instance, the installation of Trump as US President, or Brexit. With a title that includes the words ‘crisis’, ‘austerity’, and ‘pedagogy of hope’, people probably have come to this book with a certain expectation – that this work will contribute to the understanding of crisis and its impact on the lives of people, as well as on education, and that this understanding is for the purpose of building a momentum for transformation and change.

It is also likely that people have been intrigued by a book that explores how the aforementioned issues are being addressed in contemporary Greek society. The 2008 economic crisis had truly global consequences, but its impact was perhaps felt most immediately and most severely in Greece. Greece has been the focus of international media and of political and academic concern since 2009 because, when it came to the multiple crises facing ‘the West’ in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Greece was ahead of the curve. As the politics of austerity are now common across much of Europe, a book about the case of Greece can hold lessons for all; many countries around the world and multiple emerging nations might find this book informative with regard to their own struggles.

There is always a reason why someone wants to write a book. In my case, the reason was both personal and political. I have always wanted to do something with my life that would make a difference to my country and to the world in general. As a student, I was constantly aware of the power of education systems for creating (and, indeed, for restricting) truly transformative experiences for students; this undoubtedly influenced my decision to enter the field of education and become an educator myself. In those days, my purpose was noble and valiant – I have tried to hold this purpose in the forefront of my mind, no matter the challenges before me.

For me, being an educator means that my work truly does have positive or negative ramifications for my students, their families, and their future; for me, being a good educator means being a key promoter of human rights, striving to prevent injustice, oppression and discrimination, and preparing students to think more critically and creatively about their future. I believe that any person working with children, teenagers and young adults, both in

formal and informal education, possesses tremendous power to make a difference in society. This sense of responsibility was behind my decision to continue my studies in Education and Human Rights and then to carry on with my doctoral studies in Education.

Five years ago, I gave birth to a bright little boy, named Fotis. His name means *light* (φως) in Greek, and this is exactly what he brought to my life: as mother to Fotis, a new light entered my life. I began to reappraise everything that I had done up until that point from a different perspective; I became more compassionate in my aims and my dreams, and I felt a greater responsibility for the well-being of my family, my students, and of the rest of the world. My son brought not only light but hope into my life, and made me realise the importance of bringing hope into schools and into our society in general. This realisation was the motivation I needed to start writing this book.

At the time of writing, the social and economic situation in Greece has contributed to the generation of an increasingly complex society, uncertainty among Greek people, and a sense of the unpredictability of the future. However, it has also revealed new tendencies and possibilities in society. It is my belief that we may succeed in becoming aware of these new tendencies and possibilities if we manage to sidestep the negative implications of the crisis, and try to find room for new stories, another way of thinking, and a notion of hope. It can be argued that the education system is well placed to offer both this new way of thinking and a notion of hope.

Despite the vast number of studies that focus on the socio-economic crisis in Greece, little is known about the role of teachers and education in addressing some of its devastating consequences. My book is based on a qualitative study, which gave sixteen teachers the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of the impact of the crisis on Greek society and education, and the possibilities for the future, but it goes beyond the limits of a book that presents an empirical analytic study; it explores how things might be different. In doing so, it rejects a stance of despair and instead seeks to articulate a possibility of hope and to present new frameworks for teaching and learning.

Specifically, my book draws on a research project that was conducted at the end of 2014 during my doctoral studies at the UCL Institute of Education (IoE), University College London. The main objective of this research project was to seek to recover the 'subjugated knowledges' of teachers, as well as to look for 'lines of flight' – namely, ways out of the crisis. 'Subjugated knowledges' is a term invented by Michel Foucault to describe knowledge and ways of knowing that are left out, opposed or ignored by the mainstreams of a dominant culture, and which are often located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity<sup>1</sup>. 'Line of flight' is a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>2</sup>. It designates a possibility of escape; it is that elusive moment in which change happens.

Specifically, the purpose of my research project was to learn more about teachers' experiences of the recent political and economic changes in Greece and the new challenges

that stem from these, as well as teachers' perceptions of the possibilities for the future. My intention in undertaking this study was to explore how we could build on the strengths of the education system at the time in order to transform it and create a different system better suited to the newly-arisen societal changes and challenging circumstances of the country. Given this, my tone may, in the passages that follow, appear critical and imperative at times – I begin from crisis and try to think about what might be done and what must not be done if we are to be able to think about education differently.

In the endeavour to, as mentioned earlier, give voice to teachers' concerns, anxieties, commitments, and hopes, my research project focused on the following questions:

- How do teachers experience the consequences of the socio-economic crisis in their everyday life and their work?
- What do teachers think are the social and political problems which underlie the current crisis?
- According to the teachers, does the Greek education system have a part to play in the reconstruction of society and political life in post-crisis Greece? If yes, what would be the most important features of this?
- According to the teachers, are there any strengths in the present education system that we can build on in order to create a system to suit the current major societal changes and face the challenging new circumstances?

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

There are two parts in the book. Part I aims to contextualise my research by furnishing the reader with the broader socio-economic context and the theoretical underpinnings of the study. More specifically, Part I integrates relevant literature and theoretical insights, and provides a synthesis of the work which has been done in the area of social crisis and educational research within the last few years.

Part I comprises four chapters. Chapter 1, 'Introduction', presents the rationale, the social context, and the conceptual-theoretical framework within which the topics and issues presented in the remaining chapters of the book are addressed. Specifically, it puts forward the view that it is not only necessary to explore thoroughly and insightfully the negative implications of the socio-economic crisis, but also vital that we learn to recognise the core values of the current era and the crucial issues that may become opportunities – and even driving forces – for reflection and change. The starting point of this book is an ontological need for hope<sup>3</sup>, and its main aim is to deliberately seek out possibilities of hope, particularly those possibilities which are articulated by teachers, and to present new frameworks for teaching and learning for contemporary Greek education.

Chapter 2, 'Crisis', identifies and reviews relevant literature and theoretical insights in the areas of social crisis. The chapter is organised into five sections. Section one focuses on the conceptualisation of crisis and briefly discusses what the term 'crisis' suggests. Section two continues by considering a crisis as an opportunity for the opening of a 'policy window'. Section three moves on to discuss the crisis that started in 2008, pointing out that it was not simply a financial crisis but a multiple and plural crisis; beyond the concerns of finance, it is evident that democracy came under siege and citizens were gradually impoverished. Section four examines in greater detail the ongoing repercussions of the crisis in Greece today. Lastly, section five discusses the refugee crisis and its impact on Greek society and education.

Chapter 3, 'Crisis and education', focuses on the impact of the socio-economic crisis in Europe and in Greece, with particular interest in the impact of the crisis on education. The chapter is organised into three sections. The first section briefly presents education in Europe in times of crisis. Specifically, it presents how the crisis affected the educational domain in Europe (e.g. in Spain, Italy, etc.) in both direct and indirect ways. Section two moves on to present the Greek education system in more detail and look at how the socio-economic crisis impacted it. Section three discusses the possible role of education in changing the precarious post-crisis economic and political context.

Chapter 4, 'Rethinking education', makes an attempt to reconsider the system of education that exists today. The chapter is organised into three sections. Section one starts by trying to define education and to shed light on its purpose. Section two attempts to rethink education and its fundamental values and content in the political and social era found in Greece today. Finally, section three moves on to consider the kinds of teachers that might be sought in the context of austerity and the socio-economic crisis.

Part II reflects and supports the aims of my research project: to explore how teachers experience the political and economic changes in Greece and the new challenges that stem from them, and to learn more about how we can build on the existing strengths of the education system in order to create a system better suited to the major societal changes and challenging circumstances of the country. It also aims to underscore the role which the school and its teachers play in pioneering alternative and better futures. This part of the book is mostly for readers who are interested in empirical studies about the impact of the crisis on society and education, in teachers' perceptions, or in the design of the practicalities of a qualitative study e.g. the methodology, the method, the operational framework for the study etc.

Part II is organised into six chapters. Chapter 5, 'Research Strategy and Design', presents the research design of the study and offers a brief account of its methodological foundations and methods of data collection and analysis. It also presents the characteristics of the schools that took part in the study, outlines the rationale for their selection, and discusses the sampling procedures. This chapter is divided into six sections. Section one starts by presenting an overview of the relevant research. Section two explores the ontological and epistemological

assumptions of the study. Section three discusses the research approach and the methodology. Section four describes the methods of data collection and data analysis. Section five focuses on sampling and the procedures of the fieldwork itself. Lastly, section six gives consideration to the ethical issues that arose during this research study.

Chapter 6, 'The impact of the crisis on Greek society and education', offers important insights into the profound implications of the Greek socio-economic crisis for both society and the education system in Greece, especially for teachers and students. Specifically, it presents the impact of the socio-economic crisis for Greek society as the teachers interviewed perceived it. In particular, it introduces two narratives or versions: one with an absence of future, the second with a possibility of different and better prospects. The chapter continues with the teachers' views of the impact of the socio-economic crisis on Greek education, reporting specifically on the challenges Greek schools face in the age of austerity, and on the impact of the crisis on teachers' and students' work and well-being.

Chapter 7, 'The social and political problems behind the socio-economic crisis', provides some interesting indications of teachers' thoughts on the social and political problems that underlie the current crisis and on the possible responses that they believe necessary to address and counter them. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the social and political problems – pertaining to governments, the Greek people and global capitalism – which the teachers identified as being at the root of the crisis. Section two moves on to discuss the possible responses, including political change, changes in the behaviour, values and mentality of Greek people, and struggle and resistance against the policies of the recession, that teachers think Greece needs in order to fight the problems that led the country into the current socio-economic crisis.

Chapter 8, 'The role of education in the reconstruction of Greek society', examines teachers' projections for the possible role of the Greek education system in addressing some of the devastating consequences of the socio-economic crisis. In particular it presents: a) the changes to the Greek education system that teachers consider necessary in order to meet the new challenges that have arisen from the rapidly changing social and economic context, b) the skills, attitudes and values that they feel students need to be taught in response to these changes, and c) the existing strengths of the education system that can be built upon in order to create a system better suited to handling major societal changes and better able to face challenging circumstances.

Chapter 9, 'New frameworks for teaching and learning', attempts to discuss several further aspects of the analysis undertaken in chapters 6, 7 and 8, and to explore some of the possibilities that might emerge from the different version of education articulated, more or less clearly, in the data. The chapter is organised into two sections. Section one discusses the findings, relating them to the relevant studies reviewed in chapter 5 and the methodology of the study. Section two, based on the second narrative of the crisis seen in the teachers' responses – the one which is composed of new beginnings, the existence of hope, and

possibilities for a different future – and on a review of the literature, attempts to re-imagine Greek education. Using the teachers' views as a basis, this section outlines a different kind of pedagogy, with an emphasis on humanitarianism, care of the self and others, social awareness, critical citizenship, etc.

Chapter 10, 'Conclusions', concisely summarises the contribution to knowledge, methodology, policy and practice of the book. The chapter is organised into three sections. Section one reflects on the analysis and the main findings of the research project presented, and discusses the scope and some of the limitations of the study. It also attempts to explore how these limitations could be developed in new scholarship, perhaps by the readers of this book, and includes proposals for different tools and frameworks for future research. Section two presents the concluding remarks of the book. Specifically, it reflects on the theoretical framework deployed in this book and on the situation in contemporary Greece, and provides a summary of the main conclusions. Moreover, this section includes the possible implications that this book might have for education policy and future professional practice and research, and it outlines the rationale behind the proposals presented for particular policy alternatives, potential solutions or courses of policy action for education. Section three brings the book to a close with a final comment.

In periods of threat and possibility, all of which affect the lives of young people, education systems must develop robust and urgent responses. Through this book, I attempt to convey a positive message, to help educators understand the issues of teaching and learning and the purpose of education itself, and to encourage the generation of practical and hopeful strategies for an alternative and better future, and the generation of a pedagogy of hope for contemporary Greek education.

This book is written for teachers, educational and social researchers, scholars, academics, stakeholders, and policymakers. It is also written for students, both undergraduate and graduate, in education, sociology of education and connected fields, since it does not assume a vast amount of prior knowledge and expertise. I believe that it will also interest educators across a wide range of disciplines/sub-disciplines, particularly those connected to sociology and policy studies, but also scholars of comparative education. Moreover, it could be relevant to courses on sociology of education in the education departments of both Greek universities and universities in other European countries, particularly in those that find themselves in a similar socio-economic situation to Greece. The book may also be relevant for NGOs, interest groups, progressive groups, civil society groups, activist groups, and educational associations.

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## FOOTNOTES

**1** M. Foucault. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. New York: Picador.

**2** G. Deleuze and F. Guattari. 1984. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

**3** P. Freire. 1994. *Pedagogy of Hope*. London: Continuum.

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