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Greek Pre-primary Education from the perspective of Capability Approach: Belief's and Practices of pre-primary school teachers

The rapid changes that have occurred in the social, political & scientific domain can not leave the area of education unaffected. The demands of modern society dictate actions and the assumption of initiatives in new areas in order to change the role of school.

In light of the wider changes in the social reality, the Pre-primary school units are expected to enact a more dynamic and active role in the contemporary social and educational affairs.

Greece's educational indicators lag behind those of other OECD countries. Educational attainment in most age groups is below the OECD average. PISA results are low and the resources devoted to education are also below par. Participation rates in early childhood education & care are low, reflecting poor supply & quality problems as well as social preferences for home care.

PISA scores as well as the OECD reports concerning Greece have influenced the Greek educational policy measures that have been initiated with respect to the entire spectrum of the educational levels, including the Pre-primary Education. Among these measures, the curriculum reform (2002) consists a measure which its outcome was intensely criticized (Kitsaras, 2004, Chrysafidis, 2004). The curriculum outlines the directions for programmes regarding planning and development of activities in the context of the following subjects: Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Creation and Expression (through Fine Arts, Drama, Music, Physical Education), Computer Science. Insofar, we can not estimate which aspects of the curriculum are implemented, because of the lack of assessment regarding teachers' practices. Assessment is referred in the curriculum but only with respect to children's performance.

Bearing this in mind, it is observed that there is a tendency to "schoolify" the pre-primary institutions, a fact which is a matter of concern for a number of educators and academics. This tendency provokes a controversy as regards the role and the purpose of the kindergarten and its functional place within the society.

Pre-primary institutions not only do they offer knowledge but also help innovate, to guide, create and strive to take the lead, to envision and to be more receptive to educational and social developments.

The capability approach is a broad normative framework which can be used for the evaluation of inequality, poverty, well-being as well as for the measurement of other aspects of human life, pioneered by Amartya Sen and further developed by Martha Nussbaum. The cornerstone of the capability approach is the division of human acts between capabilities and functionings. For Sen, capabilities comprise the real options (possibilities) a person has, while functionings are the acts a person chooses to do from a variety of choices that he has at his disposal and have a value for him. Moreover, he pinpoints that the capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experiences as children. Martha Nussbaum shares Sen's ideas on the capability approach but re-inforces the need to construct one specific list of basic capabilities. In Nussbaum's list the following mentioned acts, namely play, senses-imagination-thought, affiliation, emotions, are indicated as basic human capabilities.

The capabilities approach as a framework which aims at the expansion of human development and freedom is intrinsically attractive for educational science, especially for pre-primary education whose long-term effects are verified by well-known intervention studies.

Having as a core aim the illustration of the actors' beliefs, namely the pre-primary school teachers as well as the current educational practices in the pre-primary institutions, my PhD is focusing on the investigation of the beliefs and practices of the pre-primary school teachers with respect to specific core capabilities being referred to Martha's Nussbaum Basic Human Capabilities list.

This attempt will reveal the answers to the following research questions:

- Which factors of pre-primary teachers' background (*e.g. educational level, working experience, motivation, self-efficacy*) affect the beliefs with regard to what is important for the children?
- Do pre-primary school teachers believe that providing the capabilities of play, senses-imagination-thought, affiliation and emotions to children, are significant? And if so, how far & what does this imply for their pedagogical work?
- According to the teachers, do these capabilities constitute ends in themselves or do they comprise the means of the educational procedure in the pre-primary school?