

Performing leadership of social justice for the integration of refugee children into the Greek schools

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Abstract: Education is going through a period of unprecedented demographic, socio-economic change. The mass influx of migrants and refugees has determined and shaped the contemporary Greek reality, which is made up of groups with particular national, religious and cultural characteristics. The Greek educational system is called to find effective ways to include and educate refugee children, implying the need to create a multicultural way of teaching in classrooms. The question of social justice has been discussed widely in the international literature, in regard with how this can be ensured in schools by the educational administration. Social justice leadership can be used to support a more general movement towards a fairer, less oppressive society, with the school principal who looks: a) for ways to smoothly integrate students who belong to minority groups and b) for ways to overthrow inequalities. After the outbreak of war violence in Syria, there has been a rapid increase of the refugee flowing in Greece, resulting in major socio-economic and cultural changes for the country. As school organisms are permeable to this change, they are now called to effectively manage the issue of integrating refugees into the Greek education smoothly. This essay will show that social justice leadership can provide strong bases towards this direction.

Keywords: social justice, leadership, integration, refugee children

Introduction

As Stylianidis and Pashiardis (2006) mention, the current era is stated by rapid political and socioeconomic developments world-wide, which mark the transition from the industrial economy and society to what is called the “new economy”. For this reason, it is increasingly evident that, in the modern world, these developments have implications, which often go beyond the borders of the countries, bringing migratory movements of populations globally.

Nevertheless, unfortunately even today, the world is plagued by violent civil conflicts for religious, political and socio-economic reasons. One of them, in Syria, over the past five years, has resulted in the forced migration of large populations, largely consisted of children, for survival reasons. UNESCO (2015) points out that preserving and strengthening human dignity, ability and well-being should be the primary purpose of 21st century education. Leadership of social justice, therefore, based on these global values, has the capacity to

eliminate internal conflicts, that can be created in a multicultural society, consisted of different socio-economic, religious beliefs and national backgrounds. Several years ago, Pashiardis (1993) mentioned that public schools owe to increase their quality and productivity and show behaviors and values their students must have, in order to respond to the predicted socio-economic problems and ensure the vitality of their future.

Initially, this paper deals with a theoretical description of social justice in education and leadership of social justice and then, it makes a brief presentation of the refugee issue in Greece. In the end, this study will prove the help, offered by social justice leadership, in the smooth incorporation of refugees into the Greek schools, proposing relevant actions that could be implemented by school leaders.

1. Social justice and education

This study is based on theoretical approaches, which concern the term of “social justice in education”. The question of social justice has long been discussed in the international literature, with regard to how this can be ensured in schools by the educational administration. The way this can be perceived varies, according to the socio-economic and political conditions and approaches of each period of time (Turhan, 2010). For this reason, in this paper, the context of social justice will be promoted by reference to the social, historical and political parameters, involved in its constitution. Several years ago, Griffiths (1998) presented the historical context of the term “social justice”, stating that the term has changed, from being socially focused, to concentrating on equality towards the gender and racial origin, in the 1970s and 80s, while it expanded on disability and sexuality issues in the 1990s. Similarly, Gerwitz (1998) identifies social justice as a distributive and relational dimension. Consequently, he attempts a more detailed separation between “distributional justice” and “relational justice”, based on the belief that “social justice should not be used, exclusively, in the narrow conventional sense of how goods are distributed in society, but should be extended to include all aspects of institutional rules and relationships...” (Gewirtz, 1998, p.469).

In the educational context, justice in the form of equality, has emerged in three forms, mainly (Gewirtz, 1998): the first one, “equality of opportunity” refers to equality as to formal rights. The second one, “equality of outcomes”, refers to the equality of success rates of different social groups, through interventions, that prevent deprivation, such as policies of positive discrimination and affirmative action. According to Gerwitz (1998), the third version, “equality of condition”, emerged from the inability of previous conceptions of distributive justice to address the fundamental problems of the hierarchic power, wealth and other privileges. Furthermore, it is interpreted as an equality in the living conditions of all levels of society (citizens and non citizens), taking heterogeneity into account, which may arise from gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation or any other orientation (Gewirtz, 1998: 472). However, in a later study by Cribb and Gewirtz (2003), it is proposed to separate “relational justice” into two distinct dimensions: “cultural” and “relational”,

resulting in a three-dimensional form of "social justice": "distributive", "cultural" and "relational". In addition, the same writers define "cultural justice as the absence of cultural sovereignty, disregard and lack of respect. In the context of cultural justice, a critical factor is the concept of recognition, associated with identity issues, since, as Taylor (1997) points out, the notion of recognition is closely linked to identity, authenticity and survival. The relational dimension of justice is complementary to the other two: the distributive and the cultural, as it concerns the mechanisms, that impede or restrict the ability of certain persons or groups to participate in decision-making processes, concerning their life issues (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2003). For this reason, freedom from oppressive relations could be considered a basic prerequisite for the existence of relational justice (Young, 2006).

Bell (2007) mentions that the role of educational social justice is to enable people to develop critical, analytical tools, necessary to understand: a) the concept of oppression and b) their own way of socializing in oppressive systems in order to change oppressive elements and behaviors in themselves and in the communities they participate. Critical, postmodern, transformational and multicultural theories frame the objectives of educational, social justice. Their common goal is the demand by institutions, such as schools, to uncover and transform oppressive policies and practices (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2012).

- **Critical theory:** according to the fundamental principle of critical theory, social sciences or human relationships, such as education, may not be perceived by a scientific, logical, objective view. On the contrary, the distinction of human relations requires the identification of subjectivity and recognition of economic, historical, political influences on human relations (Sommers, 2014). Critical theory deals with the roles of institutions, such as schools, in spreading socio-economical and political inequalities. Critical theorists believe that social inequalities derive, in part, from racism, sexism, class hierarchy and discrimination, depending on human abilities (Hooks, 1994). Decades ago, Freire (1970) has pointed out that the basis of critical theory is the concept of "conscientization", which refers to the fact that human beings place themselves in a socio-economic and political structure. The well-known educator stressed that, knowing the placement of everyone in this structure, makes it easier to challenge this differentiation, which leads to the achievement of social justice.
- **Postmodern theory:** it is linked to educational social justice, since, according to DeMarrais and LeCompte (1995), it challenges "not only the power of traditional science but the legitimacy of any valid model or rule, whether it concerns art, literature, science or the philosophy " (p.32). Postmodernist theorists argue that students and teachers should be aware of the relationship between power and knowledge or what Foucault (1980) calls "the regime of truth". He said that "every society has its own truth system, the general policy of truth , which is composed of the types of speeches that accept and function as truth" (p. 131). That is why this theory argues that schools, as institutions, are responsible for the socialization of young

people and are the foreground of the classification of knowledge within the structure of power (Chomsky, 2000). The teacher, therefore, by becoming aware of the relationship between power and knowledge, becomes self-reflective, he thinks that his pedagogical practice, perhaps inadvertently, marginalizes certain pupils and primes others by applying a pedagogical practice, that is pluralistic and representative for all groups, as it encourages students to participate in social justice actions (Sommers, 2014).

- **Transformational theory:** similar to the postmodern one, transformational theory has characteristics of educational social justice. The notion that power permeates underground education, determines transformational theorists, such as Cherryholmes (1988), who defined power as "individual or group relationships, based on political, social, material asymmetries, because of which, some individuals are rewarded and enjoyable, while others are denied and sanctioned "(p. 5). From this perspective, the same theorist points out that power in schools serves to reward some disciples and punish others, based on their social position in the pyramid of the hierarchical social structure.
- **Multicultural theory:** Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) propose four important approaches to multicultural theory:
 - **Conservative multicultural / mono-cultural approach**, which emphasizes on the hierarchical identity and culture within society (eg Western values). Teachers and school leaders, who accept this approach, often see diversity as inferiority (Nieto, 1996).
 - **Liberal multiculturalism**, which emphasizes the similarities and the sense that multicultural groups share equal and common humanity.
 - **Pluralist multiculturalism**, which focuses on diversity, more than similarity. Diversity and cultural heritage are popular concepts here, but again, as in the two above theories, power relations and structural inequalities are not questioned (Fish, 1997).
 - **Critical multiculturalism**, which, on the contrary, challenges inequality and recognizes the role of power relations to form sovereignty practices. The focus of this theory is not on the surface differences, but on those related to social injustices. The central point of this approach is the recognition of the ideological mission of school and the role of teachers in controlling the dominant culture value gateways (Kincheloe, & Steinberg, 1997). On such topics, critical intercultural approaches are allied to anti-racist education, stressing that critical multiculturalism needs to actively challenge racism and other types of injustice, rather than simply recognizing differences. (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001). An important concern of this theory is to emphasize the structural racism, educational theory, politics and practice, wanting to reduce differences and "change our way of thinking about diversity" (Leslie, 1998 , p. 64).

2. Educational leadership of social justice

Above, there has been attempted to show the conceptual approach of social justice and its value, in a wider context of reference, and to establish its interconnection with education. The conditions of welcoming, handling and caring for children are shaped at school, aiming at their successful progress and education. The act of educational leadership is developed at the micro-level of the school, which is also the natural area of development and implementation of the educational process. Many years ago, Sadler (1964) pointed out that any policies, that aim to create conditions of justice and equality, cannot be enough without the transformative mediation of actions, which take into account not only what happens in the school but also outside of it. The leading role in this mediation will be played by the school principal, who is also the link between the school's internal and external environment.

This debate has brought a new type of school leadership to light: the leadership of social justice. The 21st century has led to significant socio-cultural changes for many nations, due to the movement of populations, directly affecting the school environment, which seeks ways to adapt to this new reality. Educational leadership puts issues of social inclusion and multiculturalism at the heart of its vision and practice (Theoharis, 2007,2009). The concept of social justice is used to support and link a more general movement to a fairer, less oppressive society through educational leadership, seeking ways to overcome inequality and improve the conditions of children's success and access to education and other goods of public and private life (Griffiths, 2003). Dantley and Tillman (2010) stress that leadership for social justice explores and examines the policies and processes that form schools, which perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, social order of gender. The same writers point out that schools are very important places, in this endeavor, which starts with the educational leaders.

The school leaders, who apply social justice leadership, have six characteristics, according to Lopez, Gonzalez and Fiero (2010): 1) they are educational leaders above anything else, 2) they are extrovert, 3) involve parents and members of the community in critical dialogue, 4) do not fear communicating their feelings, 5) have embraced the value of social justice, and 6) make personal investments in family and communities. Furthermore, Merchant and Soho (2002) highlighted two criteria for distinguishing social justice leaders: a) school leaders of social justice are distinguished by a deep and strong belief that all children can receive the messages and ideals of public education and 2) believe that public education has the potential to create an inclusive, deeply democratic and respectful society. Social justice leadership is a premeditated intervention, which includes the ability to formulate values and commitments to social justice, "following tactics, practices and policies (educational and socio-economic), that promote opportunities for all children, especially those who were marginalized" (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006, p. 279).

An important role for the educational community is played by research efforts, carried out in divided social structures, with intense internal problems and turbulences, aiming to

redistribute power. For this reason, in the disrupted Northern Ireland society, McGlynn (2008) and Mc Glynn and London (2012) conducted scientific researches, adding that issues of educational leadership become more complex in societies suffering from internal political disturbances. These researchers have indicated that tendency to religious hegemony, as a source of social division, often prevents other social concerns from providing solutions within the everyday school life (for example: solidarity for immigrants or for those who do not belong to the same religious group). Similarly, the Zembylas (2010), Zembylas and Iasonos (2014) researches in Cyprus show that the unresolved political problem has a negative impact on the school leaders' perceptions and practices of social justice, so that justice is often formulated with similar "nationalist" terms.

Because of the massive flows of refugees and immigrants, nowadays, Greece consists of a culturally diverse social territory and, therefore, convenient to internal conflicts, considering that, since 2010, it is plagued by economic crisis. Unfortunately, there are no similar research data in Greece. However, these past few years, a debate has begun on the need to create a modern democratic school, which will aim at equal opportunities and benefits to all students (Eleftherakis, 2008).

3. Including refugee children in Greek schools in the light of school leadership: proposed actions

In the long history of Greece, especially in the 20th century, refugee and migratory movements are an important element of the country's socioeconomic development, as large refugee flows entered the Greek territory with the massive influx of 1,200,000 people from Mikra Asia, Thrace, the Pontus and the Balkan countries (Benetos, 2007 ; Kaloforidis, 2014). However, unfortunately, even today, the world is full of violent, civil conflicts for religious, political and socio-economic reasons. One of them, in Syria, over the last five years, has led to the forced migration of large populations of children, many of them unaccompanied. The available data indicates that, until October 2017, the estimated number of refugee and immigrant children in Greece is 19,000, of which 3,150 are unaccompanied and alone (UNICEF, 2017).

Greece, now, consists of groups with particular national, religious and cultural characteristics, shaping the new Greek reality. The Greek school, as a powerful field of cultural transfer, is called upon to build Greek identity and conscience and to function as a mechanism of expanded cultural reproduction (Kaloforidis, 2014). UNESCO (2015) points out that while the world is changing, education must also change, as societies are undergoing profound transformations everywhere. This requires new forms of education that adopt the skills, societies and economies need today and tomorrow. The area of education plays an important role in creating the conditions for accepting and recognizing pluralism and otherness as basic traits of social development (Nicholaou, 2011). By accepting diversity as an existing state, multiculturalism contributes to the creation of an educational setting, which

is determined by the acceptance and respect between individuals, as well as the creation of appropriate communication conditions and the provision of equal opportunities for access to knowledge (Kanakidou & Papagiannis, 2009). The beginning of multicultural education in Greece was, in fact, in the 1990s, implementing the Law No 2413/1996, where the issue of equal opportunities, smooth educational and social inclusion of pupils with different national, cultural and religious background is the main goal of Greek education policy. In the wake of the rapid increase in refugee flows in Greece, mainly due to the Syrian civil war, the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs proceeded to plan actions for the support, care and education of refugees in the country. For this reason, the Commission for the Support of Refugee Children was formed (Ministerial Decision No. ΓΓ1/47079 / 18-3-2016) in order to proceed to these actions:

- Recording of children in pre-school, school and post-secondary age (age, family status, level of education), aiming at identifying their needs for support, care and resources.
- Registration of registration of refugees who could work or volunteer on educational structures and actions, based on certified professional qualifications, language skills and other skills.
- Inscription of relevant initiatives by Greek and international organizations as well as the pursuit of co-operations and identification of good practices and human resources.
- Education and training of the staff that will be involved in the actions.
- Any other action to be taken, concerning the preparation of the relevant action plans, the organization and co-ordination of the actions and resources to be decided.

Taking the above actions of the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs into consideration, there is a need for the school leadership to turn to educational practices of social justice in order to integrate refugees, as smoothly as possible, into the Greek school environment. According to Blackmore (2006), the school principal can encourage the performance of good educational practices in the classroom, taking the socio-cultural changes in his school into account and linking these practices to the local and international reality. Taking the above theoretical background into consideration, the principal could call the Teachers Board for a meeting and discuss the following possible options for the school unit: a) creating a school culture, that accepts the equality of all people and rejects all kinds of discrimination (social, linguistic, religious, cultural nationality), b) the inclusion of educational specificities in the school educational programs, c) the creation of refugee integration programs for the families of the refugee children, in partnership with the School Board of Parents. d) opening the school to the local community so as to succeed the smooth integration of refugees and their families in the local society. After adopting the above objectives, the following could be implemented:

- Creation of a multicultural school environment: By adopting a transformative leadership style and fostering teamwork and participation in decision-making, the school principal could encourage the teachers to attend multicultural education

training programs, inside and outside the school unit. Furthermore, in these programs it would be good to involve the families of all pupils, plus the refugee families. The support of the school library with books, written in other international languages, besides the Greek one, would also be of great help.

- Inclusion of educational particularities in the educational programs: It is important to create and promote innovative educational programs, based on multicultural educational material, which is developed under the auspices of the Council of Europe and other international institutions, such as UNESCO. Teachers should realize that they should play the leading role in the cultural exchange process, developing and using strategies of understanding other cultures through education. They should encourage communication amongst pupils of all ethnic groups in order to create a pleasant learning environment, in which all of the children, depending on the cultural capital they bring with them, can develop their skills and interests (Benekos, 2007). With the help of the Greek State, all these factors above could be implemented, giving multicultural dynamics to school subjects such as: geography, history, social and political sciences, religious sciences, literature, foreign language teaching, etc.
- Creation of integration programs of refugee families / Opening the school to parents and community: it should be of primary importance for the school leadership to encourage personal relationships between children, teachers and their families in order to create teamwork dynamics and mutual acceptance. Perotti (1994), from very early on, pointed out the importance of engaging all parties, such as: parents, local societies, organizations and institutions, even the media, in multicultural education. School activities could be organized, based on the refugees' and the Greeks' tradition and customs, so as to bring all civilizations together in a beautiful feast. In the end, classes of Greek language learning could be created in schools for the refugee families with the voluntary offer of teachers, parents and local institutions.

Discussion

In order to implement social justice, schools should develop a common culture, impregnated with the values of democracy and caring, which are required in order to respond to the needs of the refugee people in the Greek territory. Educational leaders are the most appropriate people to facilitate significant and meaningful change at school, creating the conditions for active involvement of the staff, the pupils, the parents and the local community (Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normor & Hodgins, 2007). As Blair (2002) points out, in the context of a reflective environment, leadership is based on the importance of reflective democratic processes, where focus is not on the efforts to change attitudes within students' communities and cultures, but on the processes of exclusion within the school itself "(p. 184).

Educational leaders, who embrace social justice, are committed to values and are annoyed by the inequality for children at school, due to a difference in background, origin and religion. Besides, as many years ago, Derman-Sparks and Phillis (1997) have mentioned, the leader

who defends social justice must: 1) believe that oppression undermines the quality of everyday life and work, 2) have a desire to resist in oppression and 3) be willing to reflect and take risks.

It is essential, therefore, that, today, school leaders adopt the value of social justice by implementing similar actions in order to cope with the changes in the structure of Greek society, that derive from the intense refugee flows of recent years. The smooth integration of refugee children into the educational system should be a global priority for school leaders in their units, as, according to the texts and notices of international institutions, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, the restoration of dignity and education of refugee children and their families is a matter of major importance (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2017). This is why this study aspires to convince for this necessity, proposing, also, the implementation of training programs for school principals, referring to the creation of social justice actions in their units.

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