

**Lecture of G. Sinefakis, Professor of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.  
"Speaking about democratic issues at school"**

**SCHOOL PICTURED AS A SEEDBED  
OF DEMOCRATIC, SOCIAL AND MERITOCRATIC CONSCIENCE  
George I. Sinefakis**

Graduate of the 2<sup>nd</sup> boys high school at 1969 – Former Present President of the graduates association of the 2<sup>nd</sup> "IKTINOS" high school

Proposal for the Erasmus+ program:  
'Promote Integrated Environment to Guarantee Refugees Acceptance'  
2<sup>nd</sup> high school of Thessaloniki – 20<sup>th</sup> March 2017

I am honored that the Organizing Committee, within the framework of the European program Erasmus+: 'Promote Integrated Environment to Guarantee Refugees Acceptance', has assigned me the task of presenting a proposal about Democracy and School. I hope that my selection was mostly based on the fact that I graduated from this school at 1969 and that I have been its graduates association's president and less on the fact that I am an academic professor. My point is that my proposal is inevitably going to be emotional because of the memories that I obtained from this school and the fact that my proposal is in fact directed to other students of my school and students from Italy, Belgium and Germany that are visiting our country.

My title 'School pictured as a seedbed of democratic social and meritocratic conscience' was not randomly selected as I firmly believe that this is the School's role: To create a democratic, social and meritocratic conscience for the students, a basic pylon that a whole state will be based upon. School ( with a capital S), is the place where the children's character is formed during puberty. During this critical period, when biologically speaking, boys become men and girls become women, a major part of their character is formed.

I would like to clear out two basic concepts that are directly tied to the institution of School. The concept of education and the concept of culture.

Education includes all the activities that intend to influencing one's thought process, character and upbringing. Technically speaking, through the process of education one obtains knowledge, develops skills and qualifications and forms values. The word '*education*' (ekpaideusi), in Greek, derives from the verb '*educate*' (ekpaideuw) which means to raise someone since a young age. In conclusion, education is an organized process through which a state offers the citizens knowledge.

The concept of culture is not easily defined, but it is a life lesson of utmost importance that cannot be taught because it has neither specific content nor organized structure. Even though culture can not taught, it derives from education. It derives from the procedure during which teachers, students and educational values interact with each other constantly. That interaction originates from depths where personal, national, religious and racial differences that divide people, do not matter. Culture unites the people; the voice of ethics, that defines a human's quality, emerges from culture as well. Culture is the cultivation of a

person's character in every field equally.

School is an educational institution whose goal is providing children and teenagers with education, through systematic teaching of certain subjects and is

based upon an officially approved program.

Historically, the concept of gathering students into specific areas in which they would 'learn', takes effect since the classical times of ancient Greece. Plato's Academy and the Peripatetic School were organized public educational institutes. On the other hand, there were some teachers that were also physical trainers called '*paidotribes*' whose task was to teach children at home. Moreover, there were more organized schools in other countries of Far East (China, India etc.). The Byzantine empire had an educational system since 425 AD, that had basic education as its goal and was a must have qualification for military. So, the institution of school had already the historical basis on which to build upon. The development of the institution was stopped and delayed by the Ottoman occupation for 400 years. However, there were communities from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century that created local schools that provided children with knowledge. There was always a '*Paidagogeion*' of goddess Estia operating in every household, where the people's wisdom was passed down from generation to generation.

The year 1929 was a major turning point for primary and secondary education under the presidency of Eleftherios Venizelos and minister of education George Papandreou. The educational reform of Alexandros Delmouzos resulted in forming two 6 month educational periods. High schools and vocational schools (industrial, agricultural etc) are established in smaller towns. During 1930 George Papandreou, the minister of education, took a loan from a Swedish company in order to accommodate the state's educational need. 145 schools were built and 1375 more completed with that loan in 2 years (1930 – 32). 7376 classrooms were added to the country's educational facilities. The same educational structure, with slight changes, is still applied in our country.

During that period, an inspired architect Nikolaos Mitsakis designed this School's building, the first one of liberated Thessaloniki after 1912. This school facility was established in 1931 and began operating in 1933. Iktinou's School facility is considered innovative, with exceptional building program and innovative facilities for its times. Even today it is considered an innovative architectural accomplishment.

Greeks are considered to be education friendly people. Was it because of the ancient Greek tradition, because of the country's geographic and political location? Was it because of the country's morphology? Was it because of the language's particularity? All these combined together created a learning friendly environment that contributed to the people being educated despite the severe adversities.

Even in Greek Mythology, if that can be considered an acceptable science sector, the same education friendly mentality applies. The gods in Greek Mythology established institutions and formed the era's ethics through their catalytic interventions. The stories and myths based on tradition and the legends, were destined to give an explanation to cosmological problems, physical phenomena and everything else that could not be explained logically. Athena, the daughter of Zeus and the goddess of knowledge and wisdom, had a powerful rank at '*Dodekatheon*'. It does not come as a surprise that the Parthenon, a work of Iktinos is one of the 7 wonders of the world and an international symbol of architectural perfection, was devoted to her.

Today, in a rapidly evolving world, with social rearrangements happening all the time, new realities are forming. So, education is the strongest mechanism that humanity possesses in order to cope with the needs of these new realities. Except for providing with basic knowledge, School is the most important place where the teenager's conscience is formed in multiple levels.

In my opinion there are three major parameters in forming the teenager's conscience and they go as follows:

### 1. Democratic Conscience

Etymology of the word democracy shows us that democracy is a composite word. It derives from the words '**Demos**' and '**Kratos**'. The word **Demos**, contrary to monarchy, aristocracy, and oligarchy, was adopted by Athenians during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and it means a group of people that have political rights. **Kratos** in mythology was the son of Styx and Paladas, and brother to Via, Zilos and Niki. The word derives from the verb "κρατ-έω, κρατ-ώ" that means to rule. So Democracy is the Demos' ruling. It is the group of people that accept to work as a team and they freely select to respect the following principles:

- The principle of egalitarianism: The fact that all citizens are equal when it comes to law matters. It also means that every citizen has the right to achieve a powerful public rank. That right derives from the obligation to participate.
- The principle of equal vote: Every citizen's participation in forming the Demos' decisions is of the exact same importance and result.
- The basic of freedom of speech: Every citizen has the right to share his opinion and be protected by the Demos.
- The principle of majority: Every citizen has to respect the majority's will.
- The principle of transparency, that concerns the decisions, the procedures and the Demos' resources. Every citizen has the potential and the obligation to inspect the Demos.

So, it comes as no surprise that in a law-ordered state, School has to cultivate the meaning of democracy and equip the teenager's souls with the principles mentioned above.

This comes to life when Teachers (with a capital T) act as officials and not just professional educators and they can pass down these values to their students.

### 2. Social conscience

Conscience is an organism's mental capability of understanding himself/herself, his/her surroundings and the concept of his/her actions consequences.

Social conscience is described as the rules, habits and values of a society that contribute to making each and every individual feel as a member of a group. The goal is to form the person's conscience into feeling that he/she belongs and co-exists in a social group.

Without having this sort of conscience, it is impossible for an individual to survive and furthermore to achieve a society's prosperity. Society is not just a group of people. It is and it has to be its own entity with basic principles, rules and communication codes.

In order for the society to prosper, it is essential for its members to develop this sort of conscience. Social conscience should not be confused with the concept of social state because it includes it. Social state can have some

prosperous results, whereas social conscience is an inter-temporal state of life.

School is a small society on its own. So the same rules, codes and values of the society apply. The only difference is that this small society of students is prosperous and it changes steadily, with annual student inflow and outflow. However, students live together for 6 years, the most important ones in forming their personality. In these precious years the students learn, make friends, work on obtaining social conscience and developing sociability, discover cooperation. Through these beautiful and sensitive years, the students forge lifelong relationships, they have fun and indulge in every teenage trick there is.

In addition, when the Teachers (with a capital T) act as officials and not just professional educators, they sense those characteristics that the students develop and they encourage them. The teachers act as a compass and they guide the students down their path helping them clear things out along the way.

### **3. Meritocratic Conscience**

Meritocracy means that everyone has equal opportunities, which is a fundamental principle of democracy. It is of utmost importance that in order to achieve a public rank one's individual skills, prestige and 'virtue' are brought to light. This 'virtue' is not the same virtue that there was at oligarchy and aristocracy because it is based on individual skills and prestige and not on origin or financial power. It has nothing to do with nepotism, in fact it is the actual opposite. Even though, nepotism should have been eradicated with the downfall of absolutism, some parts of it still exist and they show either indirectly or even directly in some occasions, in every level of political and social life of this country.

People are equal to each other but they are not similar. There are endogenous characteristics and hereditary tendencies, which shape each and every one of us into a complete entity. These characteristics require environmental, natural and social stimuli in order to develop and to convert their power to energy, according to Aristotle.

One of the social factors that create and clarify the concept of meritocracy, leading to the subconscious sense of justice that every individual has, by establishing behavioral rules and creating meritocratic conscience, are the executives of education. No citizen, let alone a student, can stand out in every knowledge field. Moreover, knowledge is so rapidly multiplied in our days, so that no one can capture it all. Therefore, it is an obligation of the teacher to cultivate the concept of competition and to move the students away from the concept of cynical antagonism.

So, when the Teachers (with a capital T) act as officials and not just professional educators, they can spot the differences between competition and antagonism and they can clear them out for their students. They treat their students as equals and they help them build stable conscience basis. They prepare the students for the hardships and the roughness that they will have to deal with in their lives.

### **School pictured as a life shell**

School is not just a building, some teachers and students. School is not a sum of the above. School is one and all those together. It is an inter-temporal life shell. It is a palimpsest (a papyrus or parchment, rewritten) in which we all deposit our life lessons. The teachers and students have to pass something inter-temporal down so that the next generations do not destroy it or overflow it with

memories. After all, people are their memories. And memory is one's literature.

Except for offering knowledge, the School should also provide the students with culture. Mostly culture. Culture's teachers are the world's teachers (as the great teacher Christos Tsolakis used to say), they are the teachers that know no borders that overcome the technical obstacles of different nation, religion, race, color, origin and ideology. Teachers build the Human School that harmony will emerge from through the differences and contrast as Irakleitos used to say.

A man of Culture and not just simple education grows so mature that in time conquers even the most difficult professions, which could be part of the Ministry of Occupation and not the Ministry of Education.

Let the school become the development of the '*Paidagogeion*' of Goddess Estia that enlightened the families for centuries. Let the school be the antidote of rude and brazen television.

Let the Teachers always be wrote with a capital T, true teachers and not just educators. They have the responsibility to protect the children's souls from the negative challenges that await and clear paths for them to make communicating with each other easier. They have the responsibility to protect our language, the responsibility to provide society with educated and thinking souls. Knowledge is acquired through the activity of thinking whose science is logic. If that knowledge is isolated from social conscience and sensitivity it becomes cold and sterile knowledge that will be close to social insensitivity, some times close to social cynicism.

Thank you for your time and I wish the students the best

**George I. Sinefakis**

Architect, Polytechnic School AUTH – Architect Mechanic Department  
Former President of the graduates association of the 2<sup>nd</sup> "IKTINOS" high school