The value of individualized education - Some thoughts about individualization

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Dear friends and colleagues,

I would like to thank the AC of INEPS for the honour to invite me to be a key note speaker in the congress. I hope to be able to respond to your expectations.

I will try to analyze some important issues on the topic as I understand them through my 30 years personal itinerary in the field of the prevention of addictive substance and behaviours. My involvement also in PL, the last 16 years, has given me an important knowledge on the aims of PL. Through different kind of activities of IPLE and INEPS that I have participated, I accumulated a lot of experiences which allow me to share some thoughts with you.

Now a little Greek language lesson.

In the Greek language we use the word $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ which differs from the word $\epsilon\kappa\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\eta$ (education). The word $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ has its roots on the verb $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\mu\omega$ which means teach, train, educate. There is not any equivalent word in English. We usually use the verb educate but it hasn't got the same meaning, the same width. One concept which could cover the dimensions of the word $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\iota\alpha$, is the verb $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\omega$ and you know some of the derivatives like pedagogy, pedagogical. The word comes from the Greek $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\epsilon\omega$ (paidagogeo); in which $\pi\alpha\iota\xi$ (pais, genitive $\pi\alpha\iota\delta o\xi$, paidos) means "child" and $\alpha\gamma\omega$ (ago) means "lead"; literally translated "to lead the child".

According to UNESCO, education is the process of transition of mental achievements from one generation to the next one. According also to Max Weber, every educational system aims at the cultivation of certain lifestyle behaviours among the young people, for the benefit of that group which has the power to decide the norms and rules in the social hierarchy.

The word education comes from the ancient Greek language verb $\epsilon\kappa\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\upsilon\omega$ which means breed since childhood, raise, nurture, teach. The equivalent English language, educate, has a Latin root. According to Jean Piaget the education depends on the formation of creators even if there will be not many or even if the creations of one creator are smaller than the others. We are in a great need of inventors, innovators and not at all of conformists.

Education with the wide meaning of the word, as we mentioned before, includes all the activities which influence with a certain way the thinking, the character, the body of a person. The aims of education hasn't got clear purposes because of the rapid technological development, nevertheless some of these purposes are generally accepted. With the process of education, certain knowledge is obtained, certain skills and abilities are developed and certain values are formulated.

Some of them are morality, sincerity, integrity, sense of justice, professionalism, responsibility etc. All these will eventually help an individual to formulate a character which will help him / her to choose a personal life process.

The education of young people of the future productive generation was the desired aim of every society temporarily. The goal of every state was the young people to obtain knowledge and behaviours according to the ideology, the lifestyle and the needs of certain societies.

The realization of these goals was achieved by educational systems which facilitated the success of each goal. The philosophy or ideology of each social system or regime, was the one which defined if the educational system would have a wide character (pedagogical) or would be restricted in a more technological frame. If the state was aiming at the development of free individuals or submissive technocrats who would obey to the system, or something in between.

Some   examples
A landmark for the global civilization and more specifically for the education, is the 5th and 4th century of classic Greece. The ancient Greeks were extensively occupied with the invention of those suitable means and methods, which would promote their mental skills and abilities.

Sparta
In ancient Sparta the education of children (after 7 years old) was undertaken by the state. The boys lived in groups and their leader was a paidonomos. The basic education was the exercise of the body and the cultivation of martial virtues. As second priorities were coming, the ability to read and write, mathematics, music and dance. This education was aiming at the ability of the children to become good warriors.

Athens
The good and kind, the educated and mentally, aesthetically, morally and physically developed citizen was the target for the Athenian state. The education in ancient Athens was liberal and the parents were responsible for it. The spirit of education was relevant to the traditions and the ideals of the city. That era contributed to the take off of pedagogy as we defined it earlier. It was an ideal period. Athens wanted active citizens who would be able to participate to common issues, to love freedom and struggle for it. They developed a philosophy where a liberal spirit could live in a healthy body. The 5th B.C century started functioning in Athens the first schools, Gymnasiums and Lyceums (Aristotle) and the philosophical schools, Academy of Plato, the walking school of Aristotle, the garden of Epicurs etc. The students had the opportunity to exercise both their spirit and their body.

The school is an institution designed to allow and encourage the students to learn under the leadership of the educators. The word σχολειο - school in English – in its Greek root, means inaction or time for relaxation, or available time for an important activity.

Plato refers: in Athens, people who care about young people, they have to teach and admonish their children. First is the feeder, then the mother, the pedagogue and the father follow and take care on how the child will become a good person by teaching it the difference between honesty and dishonesty, beauty and ugliness. When the children grow up, the parents send their children to the houses of the teachers. The grammar teachers, teach them writing and reading. The guitarists, bay exercising them in lyre, make them obtain delicate feelings and familiarize their souls with rhythm

and harmony. The children also go to gymnastics and palaestrae where the trainers make their bodies stronger so as not to become cowards because of a bad physical situation.

The Athenians encouraged also the children to practice the social life by participating to religion rituals and festivities, dancing and chanting. The theatre, the games, the art monuments were combined in such a way that they attributed the feeling of order and beauty to the young people.

This is the picture of teacher that Socrates came to change – as Plato witnessed. The education as a divine order and duty towards the state, is exercised by the teacher selflessly during his lifetime not only by teaching but also with his personal lifestyle, acting as a model and as a paradigm. The teacher restrains his anger, behaves himself, is ready to forgive and the hatred and resentment don't have any place in his soul. He is wandering in the streets trying to persuade the citizens that they have to leave aside the wealth and the flesh and to be occupied with the improvement of their soul.

A new relationship is created between the student und the teacher. Teaching stops being an offer from one side and acceptance of knowledge from the other and becomes a common pursuit for both of them to discover the real knowledge which is found in the human nature.

An important characteristic of that era is that education becomes a major issue for the family, the teachers and the society who play an important role to the education of the new generation.

The education in its general principles has as a main goal to reproduce the politic-economical and social system of each society. Thus, it has got a general dimension which is the basis of all the educational projects with very few derogations.

The education is individualized, since it is attended to different people. But the degree of freedom, of choices and personal development of every person is dependent on the philosophy and the needs of the social system.

The actual dilemma is interpreted as follows: The individualization in education is identified with the needs and the potentials of each young person or it starts and ends at the attempt of a social system to choose those young people with concrete characteristics able to reproduce a certain social system excluding those who are not eager to follow?

If the social system is really democratic, then it sets the human needs in priority. If it really cares for all the citizens and wants to facilitate them to realize their dreams, then it will create an educational system where the individual will be in the centre. If it is based on values and principles then it will have the characteristics of the education that was offered in Ancient Athens where as citizens were named those who were active in political life, according to Aristotle. The non active citizen was considered as useless.

But if the social system wants only good warriors as in Ancient Sparta and even later (middle ages, theocratic, authoritarian regimes) then it will take the little children from their families and will educate them in military barracks. If the social system wants industrial workers then it will function schools which will offer basic knowledge necessary for the factory work and it will also educate them in discipline and blind obedience to the teacher first and the boss later.

Of course an elite which excels in certain fields, set by the system, will undertake the leadership. But even if this elite will have some more opportunities, they will not be able to develop fully their personalities. With the above examples I would like to land our expectations in education or to take them off. It is our choice.

We need to have in our minds that the shifting of the weight in education from the individual (as a link in the big chain of production), to the social human (as Socrates defines him) or from massive education in the traditional school to individual learning in PL, can play an important role in social changes. The active subject of history (not the passive consumer of products and behaviors) of can be part of social struggles for the turnover of the establishment (even if he is one more product of it).

I estimate that even in the same social system which creates the problems, we have the possibilities for correct pedagogical approaches by utilizing opportunities given by life.

A very good example is the attempt of the Productive Learning Schools to offer positive answers to the problems of marginalization and victimization of a big part of students who are not able to respond to the demands of the existing school.

The truth is that the system itself which creates and reproduces a big number of problems, is also forced under the pressure of these problems (drug addiction, racism, violence etc.) and the efforts of brilliant and inspired educators, to face them in order to survive.

Without changing the general orientation of the educational system which is part of the problem, the system is forced to retreat and allow the implementation of alternative educational methods such as the Individualized Education Program, which exists in some countries.

An IEP defines the individualized objectives of a child who has been found with a disability, as defined by federal regulations. The IEP is intended to help children reach educational goals more easily than they otherwise would.

The establishment delimits with clarity the process of individual education. It gives the frame where the different, the marginalised, will meet the mainstream students. This is the reason why enlightened educators are allowed some times to use innovative approaches and methodologies to develop projects which facilitate the social inclusion of marginalized groups and help also to personal development and progress.

We are confronted with a paradox and contradictory reality. The margin groups, (those who express the protest of the society against the malfunction of the system or their inability and denial to accept the unfair social system), are those who become the target group for the implementation of these innovative projects.

We witness values, principles and methodologies which define these projects, like PL or Prevention and Therapy projects for addicted young people that we would make us very happy if these projects were applied to the whole society.

The margin is the sick part of the society which derives its roots from the malfunction of the society but it is also this margin that feeds the hope for treatment of the whole society. It is up to us, if this malfunction of the society which we are called to correct, we will leave it only with

corrections or if we will take the advantage to make deeper pedagogic interventions. The first option is a positive but a restricted target while the second one is a wide pedagogic target.

In Greece, despite our efforts, we don't have PL. But we have the possibility to take advantage of the opportunities given when the educational system opens a window temporarily because of an urgent problem. In this case some inspired educators develop projects with similar principles like the ones of PL and are attended to the students of the existing school.

The projects are not only individualized to the needs and the potentials of the student but they also treat the student as a distinguished person, as a personality who has to be facilitated to get mature, to become a free and independent human. Under these circumstances this person will be able to obtain his-her self-awareness and self-esteem, to make his-her choices, to realize his-her dreams.

According to the self-centered theory of Carl Rogers, every human has the ability for development and relf-realization. These projects were named by one of our teachers (Mr. Alexandros Kosmopoulos, professor of relational dynamics in the University of Patras): TROJAN HORSE because they can put in question or reverse the existing education and help the implementation of new pedagogic approaches.

The shifting of the orientation of the educational systems from a massive education to an individualized education, gives hopes for a more human society.

The final goal of the developmental process is the self-realization of the individual, the humanization of the human, the "γενοιο οιος ει" of Heraclitus.

In conclusion we can say that the individualization of the student as an individual member of the society but at the same time as a collective subject of history, must be cultivated by the pioneer an inspired educators.