

**act:onaid**

για έναν κόσμο πιο δίκαιο

# Recommendations for meaningful education in Greece

Policy Brief

**migratED**

ΟΠΤΙΚΟΑΚΟΥΣΤΙΚΗ ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ  
ΓΙΑ ΤΑ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΝΑ ΔΙΚΑΙΩΜΑΤΑ



Με συγχρηματοδότηση από το  
πρόγραμμα «Erasmus+»  
της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης

## Table of Contents

1) Introduction.....	3
2) The role of schools vis-a-vis contemporary challenges: a place of safety and retrospection.....	3
3) Today' s Greek educational system: setup and challenges.....	5
4) The role of Civil Society: connecting with the institutional education system .....	8
5) The example of ActionAid educational programs in Greece: a vision of modern learning for active citizens .....	9
6) ActionAid's positioning on education:.....	11
Inclusive and Equal Education for all.....	11
The social dimension of Education.....	12
Art.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Holistic Education .....	15
Education for Sustainability .....	16
The role of the teacher in modern school .....	17
7) Policy recommendations:.....	17
1. Adopting a National Strategy for Education.....	18
2. Curriculum reform.....	18
3. Reinforcing the teachers' role.....	19
4. Shaping the modern Lyceum.....	19

## Introduction

Throughout the world, today's understanding of education is deeply problematic. As an institution, school plays a role far removed from its original pedagogical and social mission, entrenched in outdated practices and knowledge that hinder rather than help students meet contemporary challenges, thus furthering inequality in education.

The primary mission of schools is to teach the girls and boys attending them how to comprehend and interpret the world around them and to prepare them for a smooth functional integration into society as critical thinking citizens. Contemporary educational theories converge on this general view on education, one on which most people today would agree. In practice, though, education has been a burning issue for the past few decades, whereas **the school institution is subject to a world-wide crisis and is constantly being demeaned.**<sup>1</sup> Today's schools are stuck in the past. They are outpaced by advancement in knowledge, technology, and society, and - despite progress made overall - researchers far and wide estimate that specific circumstances and conditions hinder their evolution.

**The type of citizens schools aim to shape and the type of society they prepare them for** are both questions that lie at the heart of the education debate. After all, anything that happens at school is - among other things - a reflection of the values of the society that it belongs to.

---

<sup>1</sup> Inadequate access to schoolrooms and the modern schooling systems' inability to meet contemporary demands constitute two of the primary factors behind the decline of education world-wide. For further information on recommended measures to ensure high-quality education see UNESCO (2013). The Global Learning Crisis, Paris, available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000223826>.

## The role of schools vis-a-vis contemporary challenges: a place of safety and retrospection

In an era of financial recess and pandemic-induced uncertainty, both in real-time terms and as concern for the day after, it is imperative that school becomes a **safe place for retrospection, a space for awakening minds and nurturing an ethical attitude towards the world**. The world keeps changing, needing to face increasingly complex challenges in all facets of life. Climate change, the rise of fascism, gender-based violence, racism, digitalisation, and the dangers lurking within it - these are but some of the pieces that make up the mosaic of contemporary living.<sup>2</sup>

**The answer to today's complex global reality is to build a new mindset towards knowledge and the world**, through education that enables students of both genders to develop a critical read on what is happening at a local and international scale, so that they comprehend their potential and ability to right wrongs and to help forge a healthy society.

For this to be achieved, it is imperative to **include the study of contemporary affairs in the core of each educational procedure as well as in the analytical curriculum of all grades of education**. Students will never be able to grasp the full picture of current-day living and comprehend its complexity, as long as studying and understanding the world are restricted to a single program or a deadline-saddled, never-to-be repeated project<sup>3</sup>, with no anticipated follow-up in the studies' core curriculum.<sup>4</sup> It is important to

---

<sup>2</sup> On September 2020, the European Commission approved two initiatives aiming to heighten the part that education and vocational training play in the EU's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis as well as to assist in the construction of a green, digital Europe. According to these initiatives, the European Education Area is underpinned by six dimensions: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers, higher education, a stronger Europe in the world. For further information, see [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/el/ip\\_20\\_1743](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/el/ip_20_1743).

<sup>3</sup> Taratori-Tsalkatidou E. (2007). *The Project Method in Theory and in Practice*, Kyriakidis Bros, Thessaloniki.

# act:onaid

## για έναν κόσμο πιο δίκαιο

find the space and time needed to foster the values and views that will best prepare students of all genders to meet modern challenges with a deep-seated sense of civil and social responsibility.

Given their mission, schools should have been the ones to fulfil this role. Even prior to the pandemic, however, structural problems in the institutional educational system bred discrepancies in the education provided from one school to another and from one region to another, as well as substantial disparity.<sup>5</sup> Over the months of the pandemic, disparity heightened. Keeping students physically away from schools for health reasons did nothing to help schools develop into a space for recollection that embraces all students and encourages their critical thinking abilities and creativity to unfold.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, closed schools and **distance learning are creating a wide educational gap** that dissociates the student population from productive and meaningful learning and the school from its mission to serve as a field in which to practice democracy, critical thinking, taking action.

---

<sup>4</sup> ActionAid- KARPOS (2018). *Mapping and Assessing Needs in Greece*, Chapter II2, whereby: It is worth noting that Active Citizen Education activities are primarily carried out at the initiative of teachers, seeing as these subjects, as mentioned above, are not mandatory under the official curriculum. Teachers proactively come up with activities that include these subjects, usually working in synergy with external associates and organisations. 18% of them stated that they do not have such programs at their schools. The percentage of teachers working exclusively with external associates of partner organisations is very small. Text available at: <https://education.actionaid.gr/media/1977750/Needs-Assesment-Greece.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> These are observations that have been reached over the past 20 years, drawing from educational programmes implemented in Greece by ActionAid and a host of schools spread throughout Greek territory.

<sup>6</sup> See Papakonstantinou A. – A. (2020). Analysis: *Educational Disparities in Times of Pandemic*, I Kathimerini, available at: <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1074313/analysis-oi-ekpaideytikes-anisotites-se-synthikes-pandimias/>. UNICEF (2020). Coronavirus leading to 'desperately unequal' learning levels, UN News, available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1065672>, Education and COVID-19: MEPs call for measures to close the digital gap in education, 2020, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20201016IPR89550/covid-19-meps-call-for-measures-to-close-the-digital-gap-in-education>

---

ActionAid

Λεωφόρος Μεσογείων 204, 1ος όροφος, 15561 Χολαργός Αττικής, Ελλάδα  
T: 212.000.6300 (Ελλάδα) | T: 22.100.399 (Κύπρος) | E: info.hellas@actionaid.org

actionaid.gr | ActionAid Hellas:     

## Today' s Greek educational system: setup and challenges

As per Article 16 of the Constitution of Greece "education constitutes a basic mission for the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of Greeks, the development of national and religious consciousness and at their formation as free and responsible citizens"<sup>7</sup>. So according to the constitutional legislator, the educational system's mission is multifaceted and should serve all purposes mentioned above. **In other words, the educational system's objective should be the students' optimal integration into society as active citizens.**<sup>8</sup>

To enable a multi-dimensional growth of the learning procedure and to ensure the genuine inclusion of each student's individual contribution - irrespective of gender - to the creativity and studiousness of their peers, it is imperative to have in place a **curriculum that fosters freedom and initiative-taking, one that views learning as a dynamic, living procedure**. It would appear, however, that Greece's current educational system embraces a primarily exam-centred approach (as predominantly demonstrated in Lyceum), which does not allow for the space and time necessary for the multi-dimensional growth of its student community members.<sup>9</sup>

Schools actually focus on advancing knowledge and skills that are "useful": at first as preparation for the exams, then for the acquisition of an ever-rising number of formal qualifications (degrees, certificates) and, lastly, so that all students, irrespective of gender, might turn into professionals that can be successful in the global labour

---

<sup>7</sup> The Constitution of Greece, Article 16, Paragraph 2.

<sup>8</sup> [Government Gazette 303B/13-03-2003](#)

<sup>9</sup> Vergidis, D. *et al.* 2012). *Greek Educational System: Key Figures and Other Aspects of Inequalities*, KANEP-GSEE, Athens, p. 103, available at: [https://blogs.sch.gr/isiglavas/files/2013/04/ELLHNIKO\\_EKPAIDEYTIKO\\_SYSTHMA.pdf](https://blogs.sch.gr/isiglavas/files/2013/04/ELLHNIKO_EKPAIDEYTIKO_SYSTHMA.pdf).

# act:onaid

## για έναν κόσμο πιο δίκαιο

market.<sup>10</sup> It seems that what matters most is the quantity of knowledge provided, instead of its quality or the way students should go about harvesting it.<sup>11</sup> A school is deemed "good" when its teachings bring about immediate results, focusing almost exclusively on the content of examinations, i.e. linguistic and logical-mathematical aptitude development. This is contrary to contemporary education theories, such as Gardner's<sup>12</sup> theory of multiple intelligences, which advocate human intelligence has multiple facets and should thus be developed comprehensively and holistically. Correspondingly, today's society offers a wide range of different options in all fields of human activity, proffering new jobs, new scientific and technological fields, new artistic expression trends and a host of new ways to take advantage of free time<sup>2</sup>. Considering this, **a school embracing such a one-dimensional course restricts a child's horizon, rather than broadening it up**, and raises multiple barriers to students, who end up pursuing professional careers that do not suit them.

Numerous theories, such as Bernstein's theory on elaborated and restricted language codes depending on a family's social background<sup>13</sup>, indicate that students enter the

---

<sup>10</sup> Further, it is worth noting that, according to the PISA findings for Greece, students attending the Greek educational system score considerably lower than the overall OECD member-state average, even with respect to basic skills, such as reading and text comprehension. Social disparities may constitute one of the reasons behind the poor performance mentioned above, but they can by no means justify it on their own. Moreover, a child's participation in the examinations that yield certificates and other formal qualifications (e.g., IT and foreign language examinations) is no outcome of their participation in formal education, depending instead on their parents' financial ability to shoulder the corresponding cost of out-of-school education, in a pattern which underlines that societal classes apply to date and not all students start life on an equal footing. Indicative results of the PISA 2018 index for Greece are available at: <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=GRC&treshold=10&topic=PI>.

<sup>11</sup> Another factor holding Greek schools back is the conviction that knowledge is not something to be discovered, so that a school should provide one with the tools to unearth it and the critical thinking required to weed out fake information, but rather something to be collected, the more the better. This standard reflects 19th century ideals better than those of the 21st century, where the real challenge is how to manage the massive volume of information available instead of a lack of it, as used to be the case.

<sup>12</sup> Gardner, H. (1993). *Frames of Mind, Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>13</sup> Bernstein, B. (1971). *Class, Codes and Control: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

educational systems having set off from differing starting points. **This is a given that our educational system should factor in, ensuring equal educational opportunities** for all students, boys and girls. It is worth clarifying that equality should not be construed as the provision of a string of uniform educational services leading to authoritatively uniform procedures and behaviours. All students of all genders should have equal and individually pertinent opportunities to access knowledge, regardless of the obstacles they face due to social circumstances, disabilities, or other special conditions.<sup>14</sup> This is equally true for children with special talents or skills. Otherwise, education runs the risk of becoming one-dimensional and exceedingly uniform, deepening, and perpetuating educational inequalities, since it will fail to provide diversified teaching, suited to the learning needs and the linguistic and cultural specificities of all children.

Education that does not promote the development of children's proclivities and talents - and instead, pushes them from an early age towards going after top grades and achieving high targets that may be significantly different to what they truly desire - turn a misconstrued sense of competitiveness into an end in itself for both children and their parents. Succeeding at exams becomes the Holy Grail, the sole thing that guarantees a future in the labour market.<sup>15</sup> It makes sense to ask oneself **how, in a process that is so steered, young people can learn to think in a way that is creative, out of the box and individual, given the fact that education and learning are viewed as technical matters, cut off from politics and social life.**

In its broader sense of cultivating body and mind, education should empower young men and women to shape their own stance vis-a-vis social reality and encourage social participation. Besides, learning is not just about mobilising mind (head), feelings (heart) and activity (body/hands); and it is not limited to schools conducting and students successfully participating in tests and examinations. As Papanoutsos says, speaking of the teacher's role: "... (a child) harbours within it a chest of **treasures - intellect,**

---

<sup>14</sup> [Government Gazette 303/13-03-2003](#)

<sup>15</sup> What is more, in recent years, successful entry into the labour market has not hinged on a person's formal qualifications alone, but on their acquired level of soft skills, such as adaptability, working well with others, etc., which are not nurtured by the Greek educational system.

**sensitivity, activity** - awaiting for their (the teachers') care to help it blossom, grow and become complete<sup>16</sup>.

Over the previous decades in Greece, any attempts made to reform the educational system centred around exam performance, instead of focusing on the students' real needs. Educational upgrade predominantly targets technology and digital skill acquisition, downgrading the importance of culture and the arts, as demonstrated by the changes recommended under the omnibus bill on Education, which ostracised art courses from Lyceum<sup>17</sup>. Along the same disturbing lines, the same bill bans the "Creative Research Activities" subject, which had been compulsory, as well as social science subjects, namely the previously compulsory "Modern World: Citizens & Democracy" subject, the "Greek and European Civilisation" optional subject and the academic discipline "Basic Social Science Principles (Sociology, Economics, Political Science)" compulsory subject, while equally reducing teaching hours for the "Civil Education (Economy, Political Institutions and Principles of Law, Sociology)" subject. These courses allowed students to connect to the world, process social issues and lay the foundations for active citizenship.

It appears that acquiring skills, by which young people may enrich their resume and face off contemporary society's specialised demands, is prioritised. It is also clear that skills, such as critical and systemic thinking and creativity<sup>18</sup>, can without a doubt be considered indispensable for student growth. It is thus considered that the Ministry of Education made a positive contribution to the compulsory education system upgrade, by incorporating the creation of "Skill Labs" in the bill of law voted on June 2020. **However, this action is yet another one in danger of being sporadically dealt with as a separate entity, as has so far been the case, for example, with Flexible Zone projects.** Skills should be linked to all cognitive subjects of all educational grades; they should be

---

<sup>16</sup> Papanoutsos, E. (1979). *Paths of Life*. Filippoti Editions. Athens

<sup>17</sup> [L.4692/2020, Ministerial Decree 74181/D2/2020 - Government Gazette 2338/B/15-6-2020](#)

<sup>18</sup> The bill of law on "School Upgrade" provided their description as "soft skills, life skills and technology and science skills".

an intrinsic part of all aspects of school life.<sup>19</sup> Focus should be placed not on the skills to acquire, but rather on **how to make the most of them so that students will be able to evolve and transform**. Education is not about practising predetermined skills that the market holds in high esteem, but about forging personalities that are comprehensively different.<sup>20</sup>

## The role of Civil Society: connecting with the institutional education system

Open Schools<sup>21</sup>, the inception of which needs to be a key priority for all modern states, should be connected with other education providers, the local community, parent groups and the Civil Society (organisations, local initiatives and/or non-formal education practice groups), ensuring that schools will have plenty of opportunities to seamlessly and creatively interact with society. Exchange of know-how, good practices and methods that Civil Society agents may have utilised (irrespective of whether they are agents operating exclusively in Greece or abroad) has the power to provide the entire school community with experiences and tools that would be much harder to gain access to if an education system stood isolated from the rest of the world.

Both at a Greek and at an international level, Civil Society brings to the forefront issues related to modern challenges and human rights, with a view to raise awareness and mobilise citizens. The goals of modern Open Schools can be attained through synergies with Civil Society, by means of local and international actions and campaigns able to

---

<sup>19</sup> As mentioned in the UNESCO publication 'Education for Sustainable Development Goals – Learning Objectives' (2017), Education for the Active Citizen "has to be integrated in all curricula of formal education [...] It should not be considered as an add-on to the existing curriculum but constitute an integral part of teaching and learning all core subjects".

<sup>20</sup> Biesta, G. (2005). *Against learning. Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning*. Nordisk Pedagogik, Vol. 25, pp.54–66. Oslo. ISSN 0901-8050.

<sup>21</sup> See Open Schools for Open Societies, at: <https://www.openschools.eu/>.

revitalise even schools that are essentially exam centred. Civil society has an important role to play, as - in tandem with schools - it can set up opportunities for school activism and participation in collective actions that allow the student population to engage on an equal footing, regardless of the students' cognitive and linguistic abilities level.

## The example of ActionAid educational programs in Greece: a vision of modern learning for active citizens

ActionAid's activity in Greece begun back in 1998 and, from the very beginning, education was of top priority for the organisation. Since 2000, it has been looking into awareness raising and educating children and the young about topics regarding human rights, critical retrospection, the reasons behind poverty and inequalities around the world and ways to take action against them. More than 500,000 children and 40,000 teachers of various Greek schools from all over Greece as well as from other countries have taken part in the organisation's educational actions.

The organisation envisions a world where children, the young and all those involved with their education realise that reality can be viewed from different angles and seize opportunities to construct the role that they can play in the evolution of humanity. It plans for materials and actions based on a balanced foundation bringing together the 3 key sustainable development dimensions (financial, social, environmental) with the addition of the cultural dimension. Its entire educational work banks on the GCE (Global Citizenship Education) methodology. GCE programs do not work by adding extra courses to a school's curriculum. Rather, they enhance and enrich school implements with dedicated material regarding local and global reality and the opportunity to participate in collective actions and campaigns.

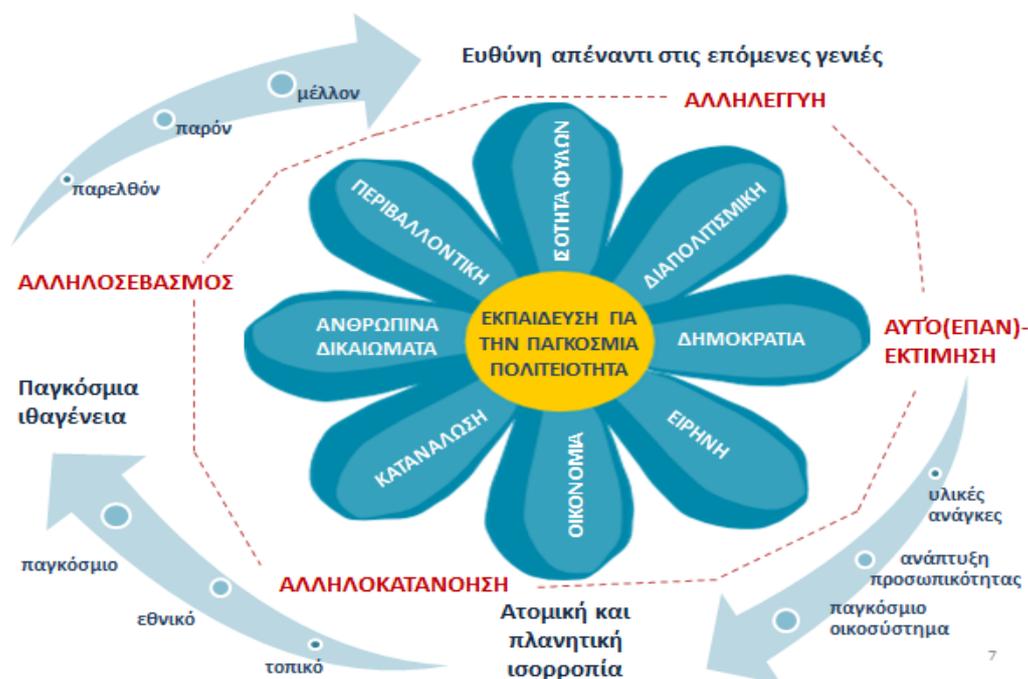
The goal of GCE is to translate into action the vision needed for us to shift to a configuration of understanding, social justice, co-operation and solidarity between people. It provides the space needed for changes to be made, aiming at springing

# act:onaid

για έναν κόσμο πιο δίκαιο

conscientious citizens with a global mindset, who will take on responsibility and forge a common vision of a world that is fairer and more sustainable for all.

The table below offers a schematic depiction of the GCE configuration and dimensions according to ActionAid.



## ActionAid's positioning on education

After 20 years of working together with teachers and students of all genders from schools all over the country, the vision of ActionAid for education may be summed up based on the following axles:

### Inclusive and Equal Education for all

Now more than ever, given the challenges that our country is facing, it is imperative to establish in Greece schools that are open to society, schools that **embrace diversity and cultivate respect of human rights and human dignity**. An inclusive school, i.e., a school

ActionAid

Λεωφόρος Μεσογείων 204, 1ος όροφος, 15561 Χολαργός Αττικής, Ελλάδα  
T: 212.000.6300 (Ελλάδα) | T: 22.100.399 (Κύπρος) | E: info.hellas@actionaid.org

actionaid.gr | ActionAid Hellas:     

for all, should set forth equal opportunities making it possible for everyone to learn to coexist with everyone else. A school of this kind allows all children to live and learn through their joint action and is able to better meet the individual needs of each student - boy or girl - separately. The latest changes in legislature, which tackled school upgrade and took place last April, included no provisions introducing measures to back the inclusion of thousands of students, such as refugee or disabled children. On the other hand, **the increase in the number of students per class raises more obstacles to the learning procedure, one of the key obstacles being that it becomes impracticable for teachers to devote time to each child individually** to meet their learning needs, while at the same time avoiding establishing a multi-tiered approach to education and learning within a single classroom. This all seems to be preserving an educational system that is drifting away from the modern learning approaches of individualised and differentiated teaching, making it increasingly harder to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

## Education's social dimension

School, especially as entwined in today's social tissue, is a social development and discourse community. It provides students with an environment of emotional safety, thus acting as a guarded antechamber to society, where children can experiment, process relationships, negotiate boundaries and discover social functions. Everyday life in a classroom is a means for children to develop their image of the world, on which they will then find personal convictions that will serve to guide them when - as adults - they navigate their social environment. Inside the classroom, they discover efficient communication methods, develop skills and stock up on life skills. Over the course of their school years, children learn to sort out the functional aspects of society from the dysfunctional ones. School councils are a sound institution allowing their members and the student assembly to exercise their right to participation, public dialogue, and representation. Through this fundamental procedure children start shaping their civil identity as well as their active, participatory citizenship.

It is the school's responsibility to preserve the emotional safety constructed within this antechamber of society. This is precisely why it needs to remain open to diversity and broaden the horizons of all students, setting up opportunities for the children to discover, ponder, envision, and claim. **Under certain conditions, a school's social work**

can be miraculous and help children gradually evolve into adults with integrity, a sense of responsibility and collective conscience, thus contributing to the establishment of a just world.

## Art

As a staple of the democratic society, schools should have both a formative and an educational nature and, as such, they should aim for the young individual's holistic growth at a cognitive, social, and emotional scale. Numerous scientific surveys and studies in the fields of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology have demonstrated that the students' aesthetic experiences, as acquired through art in all its shapes and forms, are essential for developing creativity and critical thinking, for both the recipients of said experiences and the people involved in creating them.

A quick glance at the relevant literature is more than enough to showcase the decisive role that art plays throughout the various stages of a person's growth. Kant was the first to explain that aesthetic experience offers recipients the opportunity to perceive empirical reality through an alternate, creative perspective. In the early 20th century, in his book 'Art as Experience' (1934), John Dewey maintained that aesthetic experience is the quintessential tool to the development of imagination, which he considers fundamental to the learning procedure. Gradually, the opinion that aesthetic experience is important to cognitive growth was corroborated by theoretical insight and research conducted over varying scientific fields. Moreover, according to Efland (Art and cognition, 2002), art incites us to better comprehend our social and cultural background and allows us to perceive dimensions that cannot be fully understood in other ways (feelings, moral values, spiritual quests)<sup>22</sup>. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, and philosopher centred his pedagogical theory on the liberating nature that education can have and - consequently - acknowledged and highlighted "artistic events", i.e., art, as a

---

<sup>22</sup> Kokkos A. (2009), Creativity development through contact with Art. At 'Art as a tool for environmental education - Pedagogical/Educational Approaches of the Forest/Tree & Recycling', 1st Greek Multi-Disciplinary Convention on Art and Environmental Education, 29-31 May 2009, Athens: East Attica Directorate of Secondary Education and Eugenides Foundation.

# act:onaid

## για έναν κόσμο πιο δίκαιο

constant transformation with aesthetic content, given that it is a process of rebirth through which students are shaped and evolve<sup>23</sup>.

After more than 20 years' worth of actions and cooperation with students from all grades and educators of all disciplines, **ActionAid recognises and endorses the part that arts hold in education as a dynamic medium facilitating both knowledge intake and the comprehensive development of all students, regardless of gender.** Systematic interaction with art yields many benefits, such as nurturing and developing critical thinking, creativity, and aesthetic criteria - to name but a few. Furthermore, it is worth remembering how decisive art can be in preventing violence and eradicating racism, while also paving the way to the establishment of an open, inclusive society.

In the recent years, ActionAid Education has steadily opted to utilise arts throughout the greatest part of its educational activity, primarily turning to drama as a key formative and educational instrument and methodology. The choice to implement - at almost all educational actions and activities - certain drama techniques that for years now have been utilised in educational programs around the globe was made based on the multiple and multi-tier benefits the educational process has to gain from drama and theatre. Besides the purely cognitive goals it fulfils (for example, developing and cultivating linguistic and other skills), this choice is justified by the ability of art - especially the dramatic arts - to raise awareness, awaken and ultimately empower community members to achieve social reform and fight for a fairer world<sup>24</sup>.

---

<sup>23</sup> Freire, P. (2006), Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Rappa Editions, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> This understanding of the role of education and school is put into practice in the role of theatre art in the comprehensive system created by Brazilian theatre practitioner and activist Augusto Boal, greatly influenced by Freire's pedagogical approach. The techniques of his Theatre of the Oppressed, along with the Devised Theatre techniques, are basic educational methodologies that the educational sector uses often, not just because they provide a holistic approach to knowledge, but also because they cultivate the Active Citizen identity and skills among students, focusing primarily on those of retrospection and critical thinking. What is more, these goals align with the skills necessary in 21st century society, which IEP is promoting as of this year <http://iep.edu.gr/el/psifiako-apothetirio/skill-labs>.

Although contemporary society demands - in line with the latest educational study findings - highlight the need for a completely different education and school model, one that is more creative, holistic, and liberally utilising art, it appears that in modern-day schools the latter is losing ground, even though the time and space allotted to it in school curricula are already restricted. **The school upgrade law mentioned above abolished artistic subjects in Lyceum, brought down the numbers of hours allocated to them in all other grades and promoted one-dimensional, fragmented cognitive approaches that treat students like "knowledge banks", passive recipients in the learning process or "empty vessels" to be filled with knowledge.**<sup>25</sup> But is this truly the way to set about creating a society of active thinking citizens, who can shape their own future instead of waiting for it to happen?

## Holistic education

Global Citizenship Education treats the world as an interrelated whole and firmly believes that all knowledge regarding it is interdependent. What enables us to process reality through several angles is combination learning, the outcome of the inherent interaction between sciences and other fields. Nowadays, even though the cross-thematic approach has been heralded as the way to go with curricula (since 2003) in Greece<sup>26</sup>, cognitive subjects remain strictly divided and are approached in a manner that is fragmented and provides few opportunities for interaction between them.

Said cross-thematic approach is mainly implemented through the Flexible Zone and project execution, though only in primary and lower secondary education (elementary school, gymnasium) and as a separate, non-compulsory module. It is imperative to effect curricula based on the holistic approach to knowledge intake, as it is the only way for children to learn to correlate knowledge with life so that they are better able to understand the modern world, its challenges, and happenings. At the dawn of the 21st century, Edgar Morin stressed the importance of the holistic approach to knowledge, pointing out that

---

<sup>25</sup> Banking Education in Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

<sup>26</sup> [Government Gazette 303/13-03-2003](#)

"The predominance of fragmented learning divided up into disciplines often makes us unable to connect parts and wholes; it should be replaced by learning that can grasp subjects within their context, their complex, their totality" <sup>27</sup>

It is equally deemed necessary to embrace the holistic approach with respect to an individual's growth during the learning process. The prevailing education model focuses primarily on intellectual development, leaving behind all other dimensions of the human being, such as the psyche and the need for hands-on action. It would be best to implement the holistic approach throughout the broader school environment; ideally, it should be applied to school as an education provider in its entirety, permeating its ethic and culture and thus helping prepare children to feel that they are part of the societal whole.

This guide was drafted based on a holistic approach that views school as a whole (whole school approach), taking into account the needs of all students, the teachers and the wider school community, not just within the school curriculum, but also spreading out to the entire school and learning environment. This entails collective and collaborative action both within and by the school community, with a view to enhance the learning, behaviour, and prosperity of all students as well as the circumstances supporting them. This approach recognises that all school community aspects may have a positive effect on the students' health, safety, and prosperity and therefore on their holistic educational growth.

## Education for Sustainability

Education for Sustainability (EfS) arose from the need to integrate in education subjects that deal with the great, universal challenges currently affecting society, economy, and the environment in correlation with sustainability.<sup>28</sup> It affirms the role that young men and women can play in bringing about social reform, provided that education has successfully helped them develop the necessary skills, values, behaviours and

---

<sup>27</sup> Morin, E. (2001). Seven complex lessons in Education of the Future", *Ekdoseis tou eikostou protou*

<sup>28</sup> See Education for Sustainable Development, available at: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>.

mindsets. Within the framework of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it would be useful to have subjects like climate change, poverty eradication, equal access to education, gender equality, justice and peace become a fixture in school curricula, both horizontally and across all grades, so that the young may develop critical thinking, learn to innovate, and come up with solutions that will lead to more sustainable lifestyles. At a time when we are face to face with major global challenges, it is our belief that school can play a decisive role in empowering students so that they can make decisions and take on action that will positively contribute to environmental integrity, financial sustainability, and social justice, both for the citizens of today and for the generations of the future.

## The role of the teacher in modern school

Greek schools are brimming with teachers who are excellent educators and fully dedicated to their work and the relationship with their students that they are truly invested in. Sadly, over the previous decades, the teachers' role has steadily been downgraded, losing part of its spiritual and creative character. Constant obstacles are slowly undermining them, especially seeing as their role is being identified with that of simple administrators of curricula and syllabi, eating away at their conviction that - through their teachings - they can be the bearers of change to society<sup>29</sup>. In secondary education, in particular, their teaching scope is significantly restricted and dictated by the curriculum that needs to be taught.

**Teachers should regain their pedagogical autonomy, feel once again that they are the creators of their teachings and reinstate freedom in their pedagogical work.**

## Policy recommendations

---

<sup>29</sup> Giroux, H., A., (1988). Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Based on the above, the Greek State needs to adopt the following policies and recommended measures, to strengthen school's modern character, in a way that focuses on the inclusion of all students and the provision of equal opportunity, irrespective of what their starting point was before they entered the learning process.

## Adopting a National Strategy for Education

It is imperative to draft a national plan for education's meaningful upgrade throughout all levels and areas: frequent policy changes inflict shifts in the educational system even before ample time has passed to truly test and assess existing policies and practices, given that the time-frames of their implementation are far too narrow. What we need is a realistic, feasible plan that will be formulated based on a constant, substantial dialogue with societal stakeholders, while also making room for the voices of parents and students, irrespective of gender, to be heard. Teachers have a pivotal role to play, not just in enacting changes as they come along (which is what usually happens), but also in influencing their conception and design. There needs to be a



"Still, a teacher with greater freedom is also a teacher with greater responsibility, since freedom entails responsibility. And responsibility requires freedom. Freedom and responsibility are the two poles of creation. And teaching is creating."

Christos Tsolakis

meaningful and ongoing dialogue on education - one that doesn't look to ready-made, copy-paste solutions from other countries, but strives to yield a long-term plan that will win everybody's trust, so that they can commit to completing and implementing it.

## Curriculum reform

Curricula of all educational grades and levels require reform, so that all students can actively participate in a process, which brings them into contact with triggers and knowledge related to all the subjects mentioned above, without making a distinction between important and less important ones. This would make it possible to perceive the complexity of the modern world, as well as the need for study and synergies

between all disciplines, if we are to create a healthy international community of people that believe in togetherness when it comes to bringing greater justice to the world.

## Reinforcing the teachers' role

Reinforcing the teachers' role presupposes an improvement of their working conditions, in terms of the materials and infrastructure at hand, support provided for other difficulties that they come up against (e.g., resistance by some of the parents), along with any concerns regarding their working rights. Teachers should have the opportunity to devote themselves to performing their work, without getting side-tracked, for example by having to teach at two or three different schools, a practice that makes it impossible for them to dwell on the individual needs of their students. Ongoing education and vocational training is yet another teachers' right that ought to be secured.

## Shaping the modern Lyceum

Under the national education policy/strategy, it is necessary to provide for designated strategic planning for the modern Lyceum (upper secondary education), since it appears to be distancing itself from all that is implemented during the previous stages of education. Lyceum has been converted into a preparatory plant for the students' entry into tertiary education. However, students of all genders need to be part of a school community providing them with the stimuli and opportunities that will forge their character and highlight their talents and skills, for them to safely enter society and discover ways to apply the knowledge that they developed over the previous years. Students need to acquire an empirical and comprehensive understanding of society beyond school, so that they can make informed decisions as to the future that they wish to create.