

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The educational argumentation of the Hellenic political forces on special education in the 1913, 1929, 1964, and 1985 reforms

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Accepted 16 August, 2019

In this paper we attempt to show the educational argumentation of the Greek liberal political forces with respect to special education within the reform attempts that were undertaken in 1913, 1929, 1964, and 1985. More specifically, we detect the concepts that prevailed in each of the three main phases through which special education in Greece passed over the period under examination: a) the rejection and repulsion phase, b) the humanitarian treatment phase, and c) the recognition and participation-on-equal-terms phase. Finally, an attempt is made to interpret those perceptions of the liberal politicians regarding special education that dominated each time as viewed within the national-ideological framework that formulated them.

**Keywords:** Special Education in Greece

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the significant number of educational reforms that have been attempted in the course of modern Greek education (Fragoudaki, 1977, Dimaras, 1973-74, Bouzakis, 2002b), special education has been either ignored in them or only marginally approached. Nevertheless, over the last twenty years, special education has become part of the educational reforms and, in some cases, has appeared as an autonomous field with its own legislation.

In this study we focus on the dominant politicians' perceptions in specific periods, the way these are reflected in major reform attempts that were undertaken by certain liberal republican parties in Greece.

A basic assumption made in this essay is that the deep knowledge of the historical development of special education can illustrate the current situation and contribute to its evolution in the future. As Kazamias (2002), borrowing from English poet TS Eliot, says, "both present and past belong perhaps in the future. And future

belongs to the past."

## Goal – questions

The history of special education in Greece is well beyond the scope of this essay. The objective here is to identify the prevailing perceptions about special education that were expressed by those who played a decisive role in the shaping of special education and those who determined through their political decisions the institutional framework of the education of the persons with special learning needs, namely, by the politicians. We attempt to detect their theoretical origins, that is, their motivations for dealing with this issue. The following questions are addressed: 'which concepts prevailed and why?' and 'What were the influences on the discourse of politicians about special education?' In the history of the Greek education many transformations brought up by a government were cancelled or discontinued by the political party that succeeded in power (Mouzelis, 1986; Kazamias, 1986). It would be interesting to examine whether this was also the case with the political decisions that related to special education.

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## A brief historical review

As early as 1799, Jean Marc Gaspard Itard tried to train an 11 - 12 year old child found by some hunters in a wild situation somewhere in the Avenyon forest in South France. Victor, as he was named later, never managed to talk, to read, or to write. Nevertheless, Itard examined the child's behavior under difficult conditions (Winzer, 1993) and has been the first one to apply completely individualized methods to observe, examine and educate a student. He finally proved that even a person with a serious mental retardation could be helped to improve his abilities through special education (Polychronopoulou-Zacharogeorga, 1995).

Since then, however, the social conceptions, the stereotypes about individuals with special educational needs have passed through many stages that were reflected in the institutional framework of the educational systems in various countries. Pyrgiotakis (1994) and Bouzakis (2002a) attempted to classify these stages and distinguished three main phases:

- The rejection and repulsion phase,
- The humanitarian treatment phase,
- The recognition and participation-on-equal-terms phase.

## On the selection of the particular reforms studied here

In this study we have selected the reform attempts of 1913, 1929, 1964 and 1985 for the following reasons: The reform attempt of 1913 is the first crucial attempt of the previous century, in the framework of which primary education was instituted as compulsory and measures about persons with special learning needs were to be taken by the government. Before that time, special education had rested on private initiative alone, the state being practically absent.

The reform attempts of 1929 and 1964 were made by the same political forces as that of 1913 but they remained in effect for less time than that of 1913.

The reform attempt of 1985 is considered to be a major institutional step, since both in the preamble and in the final law, much attention was paid to special education. This reform intended to introduce a number of innovative elements.

The preambles of each reform as well as the proceedings of the Parliament and the Senate make up the archival material of our study.

In our analysis of this material we search particularly for:

The terminology related to persons with special needs, as this is used by the politicians, the principles they adopt each time, the perceptions of the politicians about these specific persons, the proposals of the politicians regarding the education, the occupational reinstatement, and

the societal inclusion of these persons.

All the items listed above are presented and interpreted within the historical framework of each reform. We have speculated and interpreted the evolution of the politicians' perceptions regarding persons with special educational needs, from their isolation to their segregation and finally to their integration into society.

## The reform attempt of 1913: students with learning disabilities "cause harm and delay" to the rest of the students...

The reform attempt of 1913 aimed at a radical reform of the Greek school: "The draft of law intended not only to reorganize the system of education in terms of the school types, the curriculum, the teachers' education, the administration of schools, and the school buildings, but also to encode school legislation as well." (Bouzakis, 2002a). A large part of the preamble refers to critical subjects, including compulsory education and the struggle against illiteracy. An extensive list of problems, such as the teachers' education and training as well as the teaching of ancient Greek at schools were presented there. The education of persons with special needs does not seem to be a priority issue, since attention is given to many other problems concerning education. Persons with special learning needs are mentioned both in the preamble and at the Parliament's and the Senate's discourse only as a problem to the education of "normal" students.

The terminology used in the preamble of the 1913 educational reform (Bouzakis, 2002a, vol. A) included:

- "mentally retarded students",
- "students with mental or moral deficiency",
- "mentally deficient students",
- "pathologic students".

The solution that is suggested involved the isolation of students with special learning needs for the benefit of the other students; such a measure was justified as an action to facilitate the progress of "normal" students: "It is known that many students due to various physiological reasons show a retardation in their development. Under the current conditions those students attend the same class twice or even multiple times, as they cannot catch up with the mainstream. Consequently, they get disappointed and they retire from school with insufficient education, not to mention their negative influence on the progress of "normal" students" (Bouzakis, 2002a). The author of the 1913 draft of law, D. Glinos, adds: "It concerns not the mentally retarded students who definitely need to be treated in an institute but those whose attendance is so slow that not only do they get disappointed comparing themselves to their classmates but also they do harm their progress. These students need to be taught with a particular method, slowly and privately." (Bouzakis, 2002a). He also maintains that "the classification, the pro-

motion, and the graduation of the students must be arranged so that their mental performance can be controlled and ensure that students with a mental deficiency are deprived of any rights" (Bouzakis, 2002a).

From the above we conclude that there is a limited speculation about the education of persons with special learning needs. Their isolation is proposed to prevent a negative influence on the progress of the other students. Only one general reference is made to their education. In his speech at the Parliament, the Minister of Public Education, I. Tsirimokos, following the spirit of the preamble, suggests that mentally retarded students be educated separately, otherwise "they will affect normal students' education" since the latter "will have to keep up with their mentally retarded classmates" (Bouzakis, 2002a).

Moreover, although subjects such as the teachers' capability to teach ancient Greek, their ability to provide knowledge on agriculture or on various specializations are highly discussed, no reference is made to the proper training of educators in order for them to be able to deal with persons "having a mental or a moral problem" (Bouzakis, 2002a).

However, in these Preambles it was expected that some emphasis could have been placed to persons with special needs, given the increased number of mentally and psychologically disturbed persons as a consequence of the war. Was it perhaps the absence of social sensitization, the dominant social stereotypes, the economical situation of the country that did not allow investment in this field or the fact that the social-political situation imposed certain changes that would favor people with multifunctional knowledge (agriculture, navigation, etc.)? In this specific period, however, the Greek politicians were not the only ones to believe that persons with special needs had to be secluded. Greece appears to gradually tie with the West (see Case studies..., 1974; Putnam, 1979; Winzer, 1993) on this point though with some small delay.

Nevertheless, we should mention that in this period it was the private sector that played the main role in the field of special education in Greece through the foundation of institutes to provide special education to these children according to their individual problem. This implies that there was truly a need for schools of Special Education (Stasinou, 1991). The state, however, does not undertake such a "load". It tends to become a state of justice but not a state of welfare.

### **The reform attempt of 1929: The persons with special needs are offspring of "alcoholic or unhealthy parents"**

In the preamble of the reform attempt of 1929 it is stressed that "education has to vary according to the children's inclinations" (Bouzakis, 2002a). G. Papan-dreou, who introduced the corresponding draft of law, suggests that

gifted children be treated in a special way. "It is for the benefit of the state to provide the necessary freedom to those forces (that is, to the gifted students or to "the strong forces" as they are characteristically termed) that will allow them to develop fully their competences. It is also for its own benefit that the state should provide the necessary financial aid to the competent ones in order for them to develop fully their capabilities by receiving their education at superior schools regardless of any financial or social factors (Bouzakis, 2002a).

The terminology used in the preamble of the above law included (Bouzakis, 2002a):

- "abnormal or mentally abnormal children",
- "asthenic children",
- "mentally impaired children",
- "genius".

In the preamble of the law there is a separate chapter under the title "Schools for abnormal children and open-air schools for asthenic children" (Bouzakis, 2002a). G. Papandreou, who introduced the draft of law, attempted to set the foundations for neglecting the persons with special needs arguing that there exist more serious deficiencies in the educational system to deal with: "There are so many deficiencies in regular schools in the sectors of hygiene and the actual instruction process, that it seems to be a luxury to take measures for those children that, due to mental or physical problems, cannot attend classes in a regular school" (Bouzakis, 2002a).

In that period, children with "psychic disorders" are considered to be "offspring of either alcoholic or asthenic parents" (Bouzakis, 2002a). The introducer suggests that open-air schools be created so that the needs of asthenic children, that are free of "mental disorders", can be satisfied. Thus, the isolation of these children seems to be, according to the introducer of the law draft, the only possible solution which, nevertheless, aims not to improve the education of children with special educational needs but to rid normal students of them; the latter are considered to be obstructing the education of the former who are also to be protected from possible infections; as the the preamble of the educational law drafts of 1929, expressed it: "For those children the creation of open-air schools, in a country like ours, would be a real salvation and will also keep away from infections their healthy classmates", (Bouzakis, 2002a).

There is not any estimation about the number of the children that constitute a "problem" for the reformers. The introducer comments that "there are not many of those children". Consequently, he suggests that "one or two schools of that kind be created to avoid overburdening the budget" (Bouzakis, 2002a, vol. A, p. 240) . However, neither the place nor the manner in which these two schools will be functioning are specified. Furthermore, there is not any planning about the specialization of the educators who will teach these students, much less

about the way they will acquire some basic training to perform this task. At the same time there is a long list of problems mentioned in the preamble concerning the basic training of teachers in all stages of education. The same spirit prevails in the discourses that are held both in the Parliament and in the Senate.

It is impressive that students who are genius are considered to be students with special educational needs and their advancement “to superior classes” (Bouzakis, 2002a) is proposed no matter what the financial burden will be. At the same time, the reformers claim that building schools for students with special educational needs is not feasible due to financial problems. Moreover, no speculation is discerned here about the possible occupational perspectives of persons with special needs given that no provision is made whatsoever for their professional training.

Taking into account the remarks made above, we have come up with the conclusion that in the reform attempt of 1929, isolation is suggested as the only solution to the “problem” of persons with special needs, as was also the case with the reform attempt of 1913. The only difference between these two reforms lies with the statement made by the introducer in 1929 during the planning of the second reform, according to which the State’s budget does not allow for any actions regarding the education of persons with special needs. Thus, it seems that although the government is somehow willing to deal with this issue, the existing financial difficulties –the world had just come out of a universal financial crisis – provide them an “alibi” for sidestepping this particular problem.

### **The transformational attempt of 1964: the concealment**

It is surprising that the preamble of the reform of 1964 makes no reference to persons with special educational needs despite its strong concern with many other educational issues, including buildings, curricula, books, students’ mess, administration, structure of the educational system, teachers’ education. Special emphasis is also given to issues of political welfare –free education, equal opportunities for all – etc. Despite the fact that according to N. Alavanos who introduced the law draft, “there is a consensus in this draft of law concerning the school curricula in that our Nation’s education has to be humanistic” (Bouzakis, 2002a), special education is entirely absent in the reforming speculations. It is obvious that special education is not considered to be a priority of the state welfare, which nevertheless makes commitments to free education (tuition fee waiving, free book supply, free lodging, etc.).

In order to be able to interpret this phenomenon, we looked for relevant information in the publications of the Pedagogic Institute. Although the Pedagogic Institute was doing an intensive research in that period, there was not any research proposal on Special Education approved.

Moreover, although the work done by the Pedagogic Institute in collaboration with international foundations is very important, there is no any reference to special education in the reports resulted from this collaboration. Nevertheless, a number of courses under the title Didactics were scheduled to be included in the curriculum of the teachers’ training that was offered from 1966 up to 1967. A course under the title “Study and treatment of students’ school retardation” was given among others (Bouzakis, 1999), as well as in the curricula of the educators’ training programs within this period. Unfortunately, we could hardly find such indications. This omission is, perhaps, attributed to the fact that E. Papanoutsos, who is considered to be the architect of this specific reform attempt, came from the sector of secondary education and, consequently, he focused mainly on it. However, he participated in the Committee of 1958 that does refer to special education (Dimaras, 1973 -1974) within its concluding statements. Moreover, there may have existed plans for a separate draft of law that never reached the stage of discussion, since the whole reform attempt was interrupted in 1965 and was eventually abandoned in 1967.

### **The transformational attempt of 1985: The approach of societal incorporation**

In the texts related to the reform case of 1985 one can distinguish, from the very beginning, a different attitude towards the persons with special needs, compared to that in the previous reform cases. The new approach shows clearly in the preamble of the draft of law. K. Katopodis states: “Special education is dealt with, in an equivalent manner, as a part of the educational system across all grades, without losing its own peculiarity”. He then adds: “The goal of special education is the same as that of primary and secondary education for every grade and every type of school” (Bouzakis, 2002a). The logic of secluding persons with special educational needs appears, at least in his speech, to be outdistanced by the introducer of the 1566/85 law.

The field of special education constitutes an autonomous part in the preamble. The terminology is now totally changed. New terms appear (Preamble of Law 1566/1985, Chapt. I’), including:

- “special education”,
- “special educational needs”,
- “special professional training”,
- “inclusion”,
- “occupational settlement”,
- “social provision and social protection”.

Furthermore, expressions like “they (namely, the persons with special educational needs) are treated by a state of humanity.....they are not considered to depend on charity” (Bouzakis, 2002a) are used. Persons with special

needs are classified into different categories according to the type of their problem (Law 1566/1985, Chapt. I', art.32, paragr. 2). "In the article 34 of the Law 1566/1985, 1566/1985 «

» 'Structure and Operation of the Primary and the Secondary Education and other arrangements', the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (M.N.E.R.A.) is determined to be the exclusive conveyor of Special Education. Besides, there are various services under M.N.E.R.A. that involve into the process of the education of persons with special needs, like the Council of Special Education (CSE) which gets constituted through paragraph 2 of the same article. It gets possible through paragraph 3 that Units of special education and of special professional training that are under other ministries or foundations and operate either as public or as private school come (upon their request) under the supervision of M.N.E.R.A."

The agents (public or private) that will get involved in this educational procedure are determined. Apart from educators, many other specialties (medicine, psychology, child psychology, etc.) are involved. That is, both coordination of efforts and contribution by other scientists (psychologists, social ministers etc.) for the common good are now organized. Thus, the Preamble of the Law 1566/1985 noted that "The place where persons with special needs are given help becomes a place where many sciences get together...new diagnostic and therapeutic possibilities arise, a number of social care and protection measures can be taken" (Bouzakis, 2002a). The planning of special educational curricula on one hand and the writing of special textbooks satisfying the demands of each group of students on the other are both considered being necessary. The reformers are strongly concerned about the future of these special children. Their education has to result into "their becoming able to incorporate into both the society and the production" (Bouzakis, 2002a).

The reestablishment of the Pedagogic Institute (Law 1566/1985, art.24) along with the role that the introducer gives it are major steps here. In the preamble of the 1566/1985 law, it is made clear that the composition of the Center of Educational Studies and Training does not allow it to take over the subtle field of special education; this role will be assigned to the Pedagogic Institute (Bouzakis, 2002a) when it will be established. The Pedagogic Institute collaborates with the National Education Council, the Universities, the Technical Institutes, the Education Consultant Councils, and the Study and Research Foundations in Greece and abroad (Bouzakis, 2002a). Consequently, it collaborates with the Special Education Council as well. Moreover, the observations made by the School Counselor of Special Education through Law 1304/1982, the Inspectors of the special schools of Primary Education get replaced by the School Counselors of Special Education are to be the

subject of study and further elaboration by the specialists of the Pedagogic Institute. As the Preamble of Law 1566/1985 puts it: "The Pedagogic Institute gets linked to the educational reality through its collaboration with School Counselors" (Bouzakis, 2002a). In this way, theory will be linked to practice.

The political shift (to a socialistic government) that took place at the beginning of the 1980s resulted in the shaping of a new plan for education as a whole. The welfare state develops in a dynamic way through institutions like the open care centers for elderly people, the National Health System, public tourism etc., whereas some new financial resources from the Integrated Mediterranean Programs allow the handling of various financial problems and facilitate further significant changes. The field of special education struggles on one hand to catch up and on the other to achieve the model of incorporation that dominates in the West. After 1983, parallel or special classes are established within normal schools, and units for special professional training are organized (Presidential Decree...1983)

The aforementioned material indicates that these efforts did not lead to complete integration, which is a model that has been already applied in the West (Edgerton, 1979; Stasinou, 1991). Children with special needs acquire separate education although they share the same building with normal students. All the plans that were mentioned above are merely within the intentions of the reformers and are part of the rhetoric of the reforms. "Law 1566/1985 set Special Education in Greece. Nonetheless, it prefigured the voting of a number of edicts that never got voted, whereas many arrangements of the law above were partially put into function. For example, the health committees created by the article 33 to make medical diagnoses in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and that of Public Health, did not function, at least in the periphery, on an inter-scientific basis as it was announced in the law. Although they had a psychologist and a social officer they did not have a special educator, a speech therapist and many other medical specialties. Consequently, diagnoses were not spherical and the support provided was insufficient. Law 2817/2000 besides filling in the gaps above also completes some fields that were inadequate by extending Special Education to the Secondary Education and by creating Institutes of Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support". Reality is different, since the state believes that it is useless to rush into this direction "...what comes first is to proceed methodically, prudentially and, what is most important, according to a schedule" (Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, 1988).

### **A comparative approach**

The terminology that is used by politicians in the framework of the aforementioned reform cases is shown in the Table 1 above. In the table we note that a similar termino-

**Table 1.** A comparative approach.

<b>Reform of 1913</b>
mentally retarded students
students with mental or moral deficiency
mentally weak students
pathologic students
<b>Reform of 1929</b>
abnormal or mentally abnormal children
asthenic children
mentally impaired children
genius
<b>Reform of 1985</b>
special education
special educational needs
special professional training
inclusion
occupational settlement
social provision and social protection

logy is used in the first two reform attempts with few exceptions only. The “mentally retarded” students of 1913 turn into “abnormal” or “mentally abnormal” children in 1929. In the reform attempt of 1985, a modern approach to the problem is taken, which reveals a new attitude that combines the social dimension and the inquiry about the occupational settlement of persons with special needs. It is long due modernization of the institutional framework of special education, which took place in a period (1980’s) when there was a strong spirit of “modifications” and a “reforming fertility”.

### Contemporary trends

Nowadays, the field of special education in Greece has been formulated on the basis of the 2817/2000 law under the title “Education of individuals with special educational needs and other arrangements”. The terminology that was used in the law of 1985 and presented in a previous section, has now been adopted to a great extent. Thus, concepts like special educational needs, inclusion, special professional training, social provision and social protection, are encountered throughout the current legislation.

Current law refers to all the categories of individuals with special educational needs (mental deficiency, deafness, blindness, learning disabilities, etc) . According to the law, the education, both general and vocational, of the individuals with special needs is free, is supervised by the Ministry of Education, and is provided in schools of special education (infant schools, elementary schools, intermediate schools, comprehensive high schools of special education, schools of technical- vocational education, laboratories of special professional education) or in

separate classrooms or departments of normal schools or foundations, or even at home in some extreme cases.

The foundation of Centers of Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support (CDES) of individuals with special educational needs is considered to be a significant innovation of the current legislation. The goals of these Centers are, among others, to locate individuals with special educational needs, to recommend their incorporation in the appropriate school unit, to plan the organization of the appropriate curricula, to provide consultative support, etc. CDESs will be founded in all prefectures throughout the country, and will be equipped with the suitable personnel (specialized educators, psychologists, social officers, physiotherapists, speech-therapists, etc.). Fifty-four CDESs are currently in operation in Greece.

### Conclusions

It is obvious that the perceptions of the Greek politicians who belong to the liberal and socio-transformational parties about the persons with special needs, based on the records of their educational discourses, have undergone significant changes over the last century. The attitude of “isolating” these children not for their own benefit but rather to prevent them from acting as obstacles to “normal” students, according to the “reform” logic, has been gradually replaced by the idea that their coexistence with “normal” students is beneficial for all of them. Suggestions aiming at the school and social integration of these children replace the policy of their isolation, which was based on the argument that “they either carry hereditary illnesses or are inclined to various diseases...to keep infections away” (Bouzakis, 2002a) . A new philosophy has appeared that is centered around the concept of equal opportunities. This philosophy has been partially institutionalized towards the end of the period under examination here, namely, before 1985.

In brief, we can say that both the Greek politicians and the Greek society have gone through various stages regarding the treatment of persons with special needs: their strict isolation was replaced with their dependence on charity activities, which in turn was replaced with their gradual acceptance and participation in life on equal terms.

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