The Communication of Greek Culture, Tradition and Cultural Heritage to High School Students: A First Investigation in Greek High Schools

Maria St. Karagiannis
Senior Year Bachelor Student in Classical Literature, National University of Athens.

Abstract
The article attempts to make some evidence of cultural events throughout the intermediate educational system in relation to the cultural activities that are being offered to high school students. It refers to the educational planning and the importance of it so that: every high school student can be aware of the culture, the traditions and the cultural heritage. The article records the steps of modernization, which sometimes levels any cultural idea. At the same time, it investigates and outlines the ways that Greek cultural heritage can be enriched until 2020. To conclude the above, we used an anonymous questionnaire (quantitative research) that was given to high school students from all over the country. We aim at the culture, the tradition and the cultural heritage of Greeks, assembling the interest of individual researchers, school-teachers, students but also the masterminds that are in charge of planning the educational courses. We hope that our attempt concerning the teaching of culture, tradition and cultural heritage combined with the results of our research will become a reflection in the educational field. As a result, there should be no subjective intention on the part of teachers in relation to mentioning the tradition and the cultural heritage of Greeks during the school period, but these points will be included in the main courses.

Keywords: educational system, modernization, Greek culture, Greek tradition, Greek cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION
Melina Merkouri (2012) always stressed out that we have the privilege to live in a country in every single inch of which its culture and history are revealed. However, if we examine that in a macroscopic view, we come across to the fact of the cultural transformation. It is reasonable but scientifically difficult, if not impossible, for one to answer to the question: “where does modern culture go”, or how ethics are being transformed and simplified, while living conditions are not being improved. On the contrary, crimes have become more and wilder. Local wars do not seem to have an end fraud, mischief, fallacy and calumny get bigger. The love for the fellowman, beyond sayings and statements, is decreasing. The freedom of individuals and nations is infringed. The wild instincts are the dominant ones, while our era is considered to be a transitional stage of tremendous changes and transformation in modern culture. Tsoureas Eustr (2001).

For the time being, the Greeks believe that because of the economic crisis, which is a moral crisis as well, their country is in a really disadvantageous position. The country can be rescued only by being under the everlasting values of the Greek culture. By mentioning the Greek culture, we refer to the one that was developed in this country from the early days of our history with significance to the 5th and 4th century BC and has been maintained up until our days; the monuments of incomparable art express its meaning. Our ancestors conceived for the first time the history of humanity, and since then, all people believe it.

They came across the form of humanity, which was moved away by the feasibility and the interest. They believed with all their heart that the human nature, even though mortal, is the miracle of creation and that man’s only purpose is to live in the highest moral and spiritual level. Ergolavos Sp. (1992)

The Meaning of Greek Tradition and Culture
It is our belief that visitors-tourists of our country, from the very first moment they visit the country, experience the nature of Greek cultural heritage. In a recent visit to Vienna, we discussed with Greek and Austrian academic professors about the similarities and the differences of the nations around the area. One of them said: “I remember that the first time I came to Greece, I was immediately under the impression that there was a «Menschliche Würde», a sense of hospitality”. We thought he was influenced by the early Greek classicism which had influenced Europe in the earlier years. We were also surprised to hear another professor’s opinion who stated that the Greeks are no longer worthy to invoke of their history and culture. Their comments were accepted. But we reminded to him that very recently, thirty
Nobel Laureates and especially German Günter Grass (2012) had expressed, through his poem, the deeper respect that everybody has to show to the Greek culture (coming of the translation). He also points out that civilization derives from Greek ancient times and lasts through centuries because of the power of tradition and the existence of monuments.

A Brief Report on the Structure and Function of Secondary Education

While some students or even some teachers are not aware of the importance of our spiritual heritage, taking into consideration that some younger folks have made tremendous progress, they inevitably accept their modernization. We consider that we should take a close look, even a brief one, at our educational system by exploring what the educational system has to offer to civilization and cultural choices since the existence of the teaching institution by itself may also be seen as offering choices to the student on behalf of culture – national as well international, older or more contemporary.

Still, there are some people who believe that it is impossible to fundamentally change our educational system to one that satisfactorily disseminates the protection of our culture and tradition through education. It is obvious however, that there is some kind of confusion in the midst of financial crisis since the Greek student is not likely to become a passionate guardian of education for the simple reason that struggle for survival becomes top priority.

One of the key questions that were raised in a sample of students during our research, following individual discussions, was: «How satisfactory are the cultural choices offered by the Greek educational system to today’s high-school student?» To facilitate the answer we would have to examine and make an in-depth reference to the detailed programs and teaching manuals (which is out of scope of this research). We use the term “satisfactory cultural choices”, referring to the important aspects of contemporary culture as well as cultural heritage, which stem from the past and could be very well taught in high schools. Tzika–Chatzopoulou Alikí, Gerasimou. St. (2011) Unfortunately, responses were ambiguous.

After studying the suggested Report of the Law L. 1566/1985 Structure and Operation of Primary and Secondary Education on «The Structure and Function of Primary and Secondary Education...», we read among other things that the purpose of new curricula is: «to cultivate and harmoniously develop the spirit and the body of students, their attitudes, interests, and skills and to acquire through their school education social identity and consciousness with a view to understand and realize the social value and rate of intellectual and manual labor. To become informed and practice on the beneficial for mankind use and application of the goods of modern civilization as well as the values of our folk tradition. To understand the importance of art, science, and technology, to respect human values, and to preserve and promote culture. Specifically, high school helps students: to broaden their value system as a way to regulate their behavior in accordance with their will. To control and direct their emotional world toward creative goals and humanitarian actions, whereas textbooks for students and teachers are compiled in accordance with the curricula...». It becomes clear therefore that, through the implementation of programs, secondary education targets to establish a combination of tradition and modernization through the new books. While sometimes results are impressive with many important aspects, other times there aren’t. Of course, this process of passing «through educational filters» can never be considered as the absolutely excellent program.

We believe that the correct combination of tradition, culture, and modernization in high school is one of the most difficult problems. And this does not apply solely to the program developers of the Ministry of Education or the authors of textbooks, but also to the teachers who should be preparing for an education not just contemporary, or just traditional with cultural references, but one that combines the old with new for the Greek student of the next decade. Many people argue that education is related, affected, and determined by global trends. Perhaps this is the reason why modern Greek education began to shift lately. While it was purely theoretical followed by practical training, today we see a reversed order depicting more clearly the spiritual heritage of students by using different methods of introducing culture, tradition, and spiritual heritage in high school.

For all the above, and other reasons as well, we performed qualitative field research to investigate the way high school students rank the cultural possibilities-options offered, which are: the communication of culture, traditions, and cultural heritage.

The Identity of the Research

The author of this paper stayed within the code of ethics, according to the technique of the market research, in order to conduct the research. The time period the research was conducted: 15/2/2011-20/4/2012. The place that the research was conducted: Chalcis and Athens. Sample: 98 students of third year of High school. The technique of collecting evidence used: Random sample. Way of investigation: An anonymous questionnaire divided in three sections: “What are the choices related to culture being offered to high school students today” “In what way are those choices being offered to them
in a long term period of 2020” and “What are the ways for Greek cultural heritage to be enriched”. The methodology of the research was based on a number of visits, meetings and discussions with the students in Athens and Chalcis, where I also had my internship. There are 23 questions in this questionnaire.

THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Concerning the first section’s answers, that is related to the cultural choices being offered to high school students, the sample seemed to adopt modernization of cultural studies, in a degree of 79.59%. There is a similarity in the findings related to Greek traditions in a degree of 73.47%. The students also claim that the modernization of teaching allow the understanding of culture. 81.63% say that text books also seem to contribute to the understanding of contemporary global civilization. However, 91.84% said that they need examples of how Greek tradition is being applied, in order for them to understand issues related to cultural heritage, rather than getting informed by books, even in a modernized way.

These ranges of percentage that were observed resemble the country’s sociopolitical fluctuations. Even though these numbers are indicative, according to our opinion, there is an underlying bias between this superficial link of tradition and modernization. This might not be apparent to the opinions and the evidence presented, concerning tradition and modernization.

Concerning the second section, that has to do with the way cultural studies should be offered until 2020, the sample believes that the educational system could be modified. 64.29% believes that the modernization of education related to this issue, has negative results. It is clear that the educational reformation that was applied during the last decade, led to modernization (new projects, book materials, courses, measures related to organization and operation). Still, the students who gave the answers to the questionnaire had a negative attitude towards modernization. Since 96.94% believes that we should rely on our cultural heritage, we hope that the experts will find ways, using more sensitive social indicators, to allow to students be more familiar with the cultural heritage.

The results coming from the third section of the questionnaire showed that 51.02% agree to the fact that there is an urge to emphasize on practical ways of preserving cultural heritage Mitoula Roido (2006), via the school visits, of some cultural resources units such as the Acropolis, Delphi, Mycenae, Olympia, places that were visited by Paul the Apostle; 84.69% had agreed on the same fact concerning the Macedonian Tombs at Vergina.

It is high time we make an attempt to reverse the situation and help young people to acknowledge the importance of cultural heritage. School has already been criticized for neglecting the training of students multidisciplinary (which contains all those great objectives of education). 79.59% agreed with our opinion that teachers could also teach the students the importance of traditions and cultural heritage. In addition to this, 71.43% agreed that it should be widely known that Democracy was born in Greece and 96.94% agreed with the fact that it should become profound the first Olympic Games happened in Greece. A lot of these issues need to be reformed, since we are often led to be biased between tradition and modernization, which is not a result of local cultural procedures. A vast majority of 72.45% support that the knowledge that is being offered is one-sided and that there the information given concerning our cultural heritage is inadequate.

With minimal exceptions that concern individual educational institutions, the subject that we investigate has been left in the individual initiative of the teaching community. Perhaps, the presented indifference also needs further research concerning the teachers of our country and, additionally, the executives of the Ministry of Education that work out the programs of study. As a result, the question concerning the necessity of teaching the Greek culture - tradition and cultural heritage- will be answered by all sides involved in the object of our research.

CONCLUSION

There can’t be a certainty about the level of compensation that high school offers concerning cultural heritage, but we are aware that within high school some information about our cultural heritage given is inadequate or even incorrect. We believe that this should be a question for education in order to achieve to have a balance. Some people believe that high school curriculum is set not according to emotions or free will, but in a way to adopt modernization, while they are concerned of the fact that this may lead to elimination of Greek civilization, traditions and cultural heritage. This shows, that there should be a balance between this mixture. Greek education must start being effective and the faculty must be trained to solve these kinds of problems using for instance, homework that is related to civilization, traditions, cultural heritage, monuments, and in general all those elements that consist the major factors of our culture and are also even a motive for handling correctly our cultural national issues.

It has been proven that because of the crisis we are not being active to protect our civilization, traditions, and cultural heritage, since Greek people no longer guard those issues consciously. We should not forget
though, that philosophy, art and the ideas related to culture have helped Greece, so, there are still people all over the world (with a great amount of knowledge) that expect from our country to incarnate some of these old Greek values of life.

Now that the Greek educational system contains the use of the computers, high school students should imitate, Sfaelou k. (1979), who was always collecting material related to traditions, sayings, beliefs, stories, songs, and legends so that students could experience their ancestors cultural heritage.

REFERENCES


Sfaelou k. (1979): Words from the Prow, Minoas, Athens, p.11
