

# The Diachronic Value of Teaching Principles and Good Pedagogical Practices in Learning Process: The First Public School of Commerce in Athens Case Study

Kolla Eleni<sup>1</sup>, Rentifis Gerasimos<sup>2</sup>, Fountopoulou Maria-Zoi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Pedagogical Studies, Philips University Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

<sup>2</sup>Higher School of Pedagogical and Technological Education, Athens, Greece

<sup>3</sup>Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

Email: elenkolkon@philipsuni.ac.cy, grentifis@eppaik.aspete.gr, mafoun@ppp.uoa.gr

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## Abstract

This work attempts to highlight the didactic principles and teaching methods that were utilized in the first public School of Commerce in Athens since the beginning of the 20th century. The innovative teaching principles and pedagogical methods and practices that were exploited in the Athenian School of Commerce are identified and presented. It is noted that these principles and methods significantly contributed to the learning act, strengthened the pedagogical role of teachers as well as the learning procedure. Most importantly, these principles and methods are far from outdated and are still valuable today. This paper showcases the intertemporal and at the same time, contemporary value of the aforementioned pedagogical practices. Furthermore, it emphasizes the multifaceted, complex and formative physiognomy of teaching. This work is useful for the scientists of pedagogical and education disciplines.

## Keywords

Self-Activity, Experiential Learning, Active Participation, Sociability, Work Groups, Dialogue, Simulation

## 1. Introduction

This article seeks, through the analysis of the case study of the first public School of Commerce in Athens, to capture the didactic principles and teaching methods that were applied during the 20th century and to highlight their pedagogical value.

Nowadays, since the Internet occupies a dominant position in the learning and teaching processes, it is particularly important to look back at earlier educational structures, which functioned successfully without the use of technology. Today, the internet is about the rapid movement of information and offers the possibility of creating “networks” between teachers, so that information and cooperation can be promoted regardless of the physical distance. However, checking the validity of the information, safeguarding the personal data, copyright protection and quality of the traffic data are parameters that always should be applied as safety nets. In contrast to what is valid today, the study of successful but non-technologically supported teaching practices can highlight their effectiveness in the learning process and become a learning model. Towards this learning direction the most important teaching principles and pedagogical practices are unfolded and, through the study of primary data, conclusions are drawn about which of them were applied in Schools of Commerce during the 20th century. A discussion follows regarding the similarity on the contemporary teaching principles and innovative pedagogical practices that are still applied today. As such, it is understood that the process of interactive teaching is complex, multi-faceted and timeless. Finally, the intertemporal value of the application of teaching principles and good pedagogical practices is underlined.

## **2. Review of Teaching Principles and Pedagogical Practices of the 20th Century—The First Public School of Commerce in Athens**

### **2.1. The First Public School of Commerce in Athens**

At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th, Greece undergo intense industrialization and development of trade. Higher education, beyond the elementary education of primary school, high school, secondary technical or vocational school, was considered from most Greek parents as a stepping stone to improve their economic situation and their social position (Tsoukalas, 1987).

The first public School of Commerce in Athens is the subject of historical research and study, not only as a record of the schooling of the boys, who wished to receive a commercial education, but also as a field of interaction between the educational activity and the socio-economic and political situation of the country (Kolla, 2021). The Athenian School of Commerce was the first, the largest in terms of student strength and perhaps the longest-running and most important School of Commerce in Athens, and possibly in Greece. It contributed to the specialization and training of trade professionals from 1900 to 1964 and managed to function smoothly even during extremely difficult times for the country.

### **2.2. The Teaching Principles and Pedagogical Practices of the School of Commerce in Athens**

In the Athenian School of Commerce, the operation of a library, a physics and

chemistry laboratory and a merchandising museum was envisaged. These are interpreted in today's practice as the implementation of modern experiential and interactive programs, which cultivated self-activity and contributed to the practical application of students' theoretical knowledge. Also, during the teaching of mainly commercial and economic courses, innovative—for that time—teaching methods were applied, such as walking conversations, practical application desks and the case method (Papaioannou, 1950).

In the reference “about the operation of the Athens Public School of Commerce”, document no. 125 of folder 26 of the archival material, a students' discussion is recorded during the year 1924-1925 that reveals the particular emphasis the School gave on the self-activity, active and exploratory learning of both male and female students. An example that confirms the above statement is that of the teaching of the Modern Greek Language course, in which the teacher, applying a student-centered method, ensured that the students, through dialogue, adequately interpret and analyze texts from the teaching manual, based on their personal experiences. In this way, the teacher actively involved the students in the learning and teaching process through discovery learning.

The analytical study of folders 17 and 26 of the archival material, relating to Acts of Teachers' Associations, Reports of Acting Directors, Reports of Commercial and Secondary Education Inspectors, Physics and Chemistry Laboratories, Commodity Museum, reveals that the didactic principles of supervision, of experiencing and self-activity acquire special meaning in the context of teaching, and as a result, they can contribute to the digestion of the knowledge that has been offered. Laboratory and practical exercises, simulations and experimental activities in workplaces through visits to commercial, industrial and banking institutions, as well as visits to museums, triggered the students' interest and enabled them to act independently through active participation and practical application of their theoretical knowledge. It could be said that the program and orientation of the School was quite close to the Work school, that is a pedagogical movement pioneered by Dewey in America, Kerschensteiner in Germany and Montessori in Italy. The Work School shaped the new pedagogical principles having the child in the center, rather than the teacher (Danassis-Afentakis, 1985), through respect for individuality, use of modern language and inquiry-based learning. These principles are similar to the principles of modern Functional Didactic, which seems to have already begun to take shape since the 20th century, although it was formulated at a later time. Therefore, the dominant teaching theory of the 20th century is the beginnings of “Functional Didactic”, in the context of which the educator and the learner cooperate, so that the offered learning object is not self-evident but is a personal matter of research and highlighting their characteristics. The teacher, in the framework of the Functional Didactic, outlines the structure of the learning process, provides the appropriate tools, offers stimuli for the learner and is a partner. Knowledge is not provided ready-(made) but is revealed after personal effort and participation. In this way, students shape the

learning environment, adapt it to their own characteristics and actively participate.

Learning is a dynamic, active process and is shaped based on what is requested. In addition to the above principles, the first Public School of Commerce in Athens integrates educational visits to factories, customs, crafts, stock exchange, professional chambers, chamber of commerce and industry, as well as the speeches and lectures that took place at the School contributed to the development of the sociability of the students as well as to the consolidation of the knowledge provided.

The goal of the first public School of Commerce in Athens was the best possible training of future professionals in the commercial sector, through innovative teaching principles and teaching practices. From the timetabled study programs, particularly innovative and modern elements can be found both at the level of economic courses (Law, Political Economy, Economic History, Tax Legislation, etc.) and at the laboratory and practical nature of certain courses (Practical Office, Laboratory Exercises). This experiential, exploratory learning and self-activity approach enabled the students to understand as much as possible their future profession. It is understandable that the timetable of the School was in direct correlation with the labor market and its needs. This constant interaction between theory and the application of teaching and learning has always been a characteristic and a demand of education. This means that scientific developments in the fields of learning and teaching enrich the respective educational material of the academic curricula, overflows into school practice and, conversely, feed back from it. Through the aforementioned connection of theory and practice of the programs, that clearly characterized the School's programs, the graduates were able to be aligned with the needs of that time, to cover the demands of the professional field as well as to respond to the labor market changes due to urbanization and the rise of the bourgeoisie.

At this point, the difference of the first public School of Commerce in Athens with the rest secondary education, the "Gymnasiums", has to be mentioned. The Gymnasiums, having a classical orientation, did not promote the new pedagogical concepts, self-activity and active and exploratory learning, whereas the teaching principles and pedagogical methods applied in the School of Commerce were innovative.

### **3. Creative Teaching Principles, Effective Teaching Methods and Practices during the Learning Process**

#### **3.1. Creative Teaching Principles during the Learning Process**

The teaching principles are the rules of the teaching process, which govern the pedagogical process and are related to the teaching environment (e.g. principle of active participation), to the general methodological directions of each cognitive subject (e.g. principle of experientiality), with the specific techniques for each subject (e.g. principle of supervision) and with the development of synthe-

ic abilities (e.g. principle of problem solving).

The most important teaching principles, which are also found in the studied archival material, are:

1) The didactic principle of self-activity refers to the conscious use of the student's abilities when performing a task, to his voluntary active participation and involvement in the learning process, to the enrichment of knowledge and the development of skills. It is a student-centered principle, in which the student, having a primary role in the learning process, acts under the guidance of the teacher.

2) According to the didactic principle of supervision, students acquire knowledge and form supervisions of teaching objects through the contact that the student develops with real objects or images of things (Matsangouras, 2007). The contribution of supervision to the learning process is recognized today by all education scientists (Kasimati, 2011), as through images, students' memory is cultivated, concepts are easily formed, students' interest is stimulated and their emotional intelligence is developed (Vaina, 2011; Vassilopoulos, 1977).

3) The principle of experiential learning and active participation is based on the didactic utilization of the experiences students have acquired (Matsangouras, 2007). During the teaching process, students make use of their personal experiences, through which they cultivate their creative thinking, activate their imagination, discover solutions for their problems and concerns (Vaina, 2011). Thus, personal experience is transformed into a teaching tool and shapes new learning environments.

4) The principle of topicality contributes to optimal learning results, as through it contemporary events are connected to the teaching and learning process. Through the connection of teaching with current affairs, students' interest is stimulated, their critical, comparative and synthetic skills are cultivated and knowledge becomes more accessible.

5) The didactic principle of sociability (Kasimati, 2011) refers to the creation of opportunities for the student to cultivate his/her sociability, relationships, cooperation and communication with others. It also focuses on adapting the individual to society, recognizing the truth, avoiding evil and doing good (Blackburn, 2001). In addition, the main concern of the school is to encourage students to respect traditions, laws and rules and to educate them according to the moral values of society (Gismondi, 2008). Today, experiencing an environment of global crisis and turmoil, conflict and war, education advocates cooperation between peoples in order to create a peaceful all-human society (Weber, 2010).

### **3.2. Effective Teaching Practices during the Learning Process**

A key point of the teaching and learning process is the choice and use, by the teacher, of the most suitable teaching method, so that the part of the material taught is understandable and digestible by the students. Depending on the subject to be taught, and the specific objectives of the teaching material, the teaching

technique is also chosen, which can contribute to the best learning results and motivates the students' interest. The most important teaching methods, which are also found in the material used for this article are:

1) Dialogic teaching

The active participation of students in the teaching and learning process is the first principle of effective teaching. Contemporary pedagogical literature supports that reflective dialogue is one of the most widespread active techniques successfully applied in educational practice (Brookfield, 1995; Jacques, 2004). Given that in the modern educational system, plain presentation is an outdated technique that should be avoided, the teacher mostly applies the dialogue technique to approach an issue in depth and highlight its aspects. The dialogue is considered an appropriate and effective teaching tactic, as it allows the students to be mentally active, to act intellectually and to find out the way in which the other members of the group evaluate other members, situations and phenomena. The teaching process is carried out through the co-operation and exchange of views between teacher and student. In this way, the dynamic and active participation of the students in the teaching process, their practical training, their "learning by doing" and their reflection and critical and creative thinking develops (Vaina, 2011). Questions and answers are the constituent element of dialogic teaching, determining the success of the discussion. As a teaching technique, it is particularly demanding and complex, as it requires a high degree of mental alertness and readiness on the part of the teacher. In order to achieve the inner intellectual activation of students, a special skill in formulating questions is required. The questions and answers should stimulate the interest and attention of the students and help to understand, summarize and consolidate the lesson, creating a climate of communication and participation. Finally, through the answers, the teacher has the possibility to determine the degree of understanding and the needs of the students regarding the subject of learning and to give them feedback (Kasimati, 2011).

2) The working groups

Through the working groups, a cooperative climate, reciprocity and mutual help is developed among the students. Most importantly, workgroups can be implemented in all learning cycles and at all levels of education. Working groups free students from the fear of "failure", as spontaneity and the free exchange of opinions prevail (Dimitriadou & Efstathiou, 2008). Collaborative and group learning can release students from the tight guidance of the teacher, while it can contribute to the integration of students with special needs in the "normal" core of the educational process. But most importantly, it gives the students the opportunity to form a group identity, accepting and respecting the rules of the group (Vaina, 2011). The basic concept of cooperative teaching is the group, in the context of which the students practice collective work and communication skills. Working in groups offers students the opportunity to collaborate and interact, to work together on a topic, but at the same time to act autonomously and responsibly, taking individual responsibility for the successful completion of the

project. Group work can include games, simulations, role play, because cooperation is an essential humanistic experience (Kohn, 1991), which predisposes participants to form a positive view of others, since it allows them to overcome their egocentric attitudes and it encourages them to have trust, sensitivity, open dialogue and social activity. Therefore, through cooperative teaching, the cultivation of healthy interpersonal relationships and the exercise of social skills, such as cooperation, solidarity, mutual help, volunteering, and also noble rivalry, are favored.

### 3) The simulation

The teaching technique of simulation refers to an activity in which students “work” on a virtual environment, in which a situation that corresponds to real life conditions is represented. In this way, children learn, acquire the appropriate knowledge, in real conditions, without having to bear the consequences of their possible wrong moves (Vaina, 2011). On the contrary, they have the possibility to examine calmly and with the help of their classmates the mistakes they made, to identify the reasons of these mistakes and to make sure they are not repeated, re-examining their attitude and redefining their position. The simulation allows students to take responsibilities and initiatives in the learning process, thus developing internal learning motivation (Dimitriadou & Efstathiou, 2008).

## 4. Conclusion

This article attempted to highlight the innovative teaching principles and creative pedagogical methods that were used during the teaching process at the first public School of Commerce in Athens during its operation in the last century. The School of Commerce in Athens is a best practice example of educational policy formulation and educational project planning, where the initiatives and the introduction of educational innovations has become a new life-giving educational reality. Today, the transformation of the learning process, from memorizing and individual to exploratory and collaborative, with the aim to holistically approach the knowledge by cultivating the skills and positive attitude of students, remains a key demand. Even though many innovative programs such as Environmental Education, Health Education, Education Career, Cultural Programs have been introduced into the school curriculum (Spyropoulou et al., 2007), teachers need to be trained in modern psycho-pedagogical and didactic theories, in order to adequately manage the learning process and to contribute to the promotion of new understandings of education regarding the change of principles and beliefs, the implementation of new teaching approaches and the use of new teaching methods, in order to respond to the modern scientific and ethical challenges (Reppa-Athanassoula et al., 2008). Especially nowadays, teachers of cognitive subjects may choose the most effective teaching technique through a set of elements offered to them on custom configured platforms. Such platforms supporting the work of teachers operate under the auspices of state agencies, i.e. the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute. Teachers can find recommended practices, teaching scenarios, up-to-date bibliography/information



and also submit their own experiences, lesson plans and concerns.

In this way, they will be able to bring about changes, to contribute to changes, to support changes, promote innovations within the formal education system and guide students in their gradual achievement of learning goals, such as: living in harmony and respect within a multicultural society, to understand and give meaning to history, languages and culture, to recognize rights and obligations—their own and those of others—to make use of new technologies and to become responsible and self-reliant citizens.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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