

# The Way Classroom Functions: Another Hidden Curriculum to be Explored

Victoria Konidari, and Yvan Abernot

**Abstract**—This paper seeks to explore the actual classroom setting, to examine its role for students' learning, and attitude in the class. It presents a theoretical approach of the classroom as system to be explored and examines the concrete reality of Greek secondary education students, under the light of the above approach. Based on the findings of a quantitative and qualitative research, authors propose a rather ontological approach of the classroom and underline what the key-elements for such approach should be. The paper explores extensively the theoretical dimensions for the change of paradigm required and addresses the new issues to be considered.

**Keywords**—Group, class, collective subject, field, temporality, ontology.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ONE of the most common definitions of hidden curriculum is that it designates "all beliefs and values and understandings that are passed on to the student in an educational institution, not through formal teaching, but, unconsciously, through what the institution implicitly demands of the student" [1].

In this paper, authors adopt Jackson's [2] approach of hidden curriculum, who has originally coined the term and who insisted on the need to understand "education" as a socialization process. According to Jackson, we have to understand not just the social construction of knowledge (the way cultures define and produce what they consider to be valid forms of knowledge), but also the way the teaching and learning process is socially-constructed. In this respect, Jackson summarizes this idea when he argues: "The hidden curriculum refers to ways in which pupils learn to accept the denial and interruption of their personal desires and wishes". In this work, authors closer to the dimension of socialization process of Jackson, chose to refer to a parallel hidden curriculum that does not depend on what the institution demands of the student, but on the social dynamics of the class of students, on what the class of mates demands, and how the attitudes suggested by the students' immediate social environment create an *habitus* and influence students' identity and learning.

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The first part of this paper points out a theoretical approach based on the conception of class as complex system and dresses the main elements that need to be explored. The second part presents the findings of a quantitative and qualitative research carried out in Greek students, in order to explore the impact of classroom on students' attitudes and learning. Finally, the authors addressing the need for an ontological perception of class reality, conclude with the issues to be taken into consideration for students' learning and development.

## II. THEORETICAL APPROACH

This approach is registered in a systemic perspective registered profoundly in the educational field to be explored. As unit of analysis, is taken this time not the single individual nor the school establishment itself, but the classroom as an emerging entity constructing and negotiating continuously its collective reality and identity. Each classroom is thus a system that relates acting persons in spaces of significations collectively constructed and negotiated [3], [4], an artificial system that sets up the fundamental field for their success. It is not only the "relationship to knowledge" and the "results" or "process of knowledge" [5] that are important but also the relation to the context, to the field this knowledge takes place that are crucial. The main argument for taking class as unit of analysis is based on the fact that whatever are the real or supposed family problems that may have an impact on the child and on his schooling, it is always pertinent from a theoretic point of view and useful from the pragmatic point of view to consider a school problem in the context it is manifested, to search solutions in that context, whatever are the therapeutical measures taken or not elsewhere [6].

For their theoretical approach authors took into consideration two axes: First of all, the importance of group as dynamic entity, as it has been depicted by the researchers throughout the last century. It has been underlined that groups have a psychology that is different of that of individuals [7]-[9], that the self is a social and cultural construction created through every day interactions [10], that there is a correspondence between social and mental structures [11], that cognitive development depends on the interiorization of social coordinations [12], finally, that is the group the one that determines the individuals and not the opposite [13]

Secondly, given the importance of the classroom system for students' learning and well-being, recent researches on class

function have been taken into consideration making the situation more alarming and the need to explore this reality more imposing. Classes become characterized by indifference, inertia and unwillingness to take any risks that may show up the individual [14]. This attitude prevents students from engaging in a deeper educational experience, they settle a safer option, are not exposed to risk, avoiding and withdrawing from challenge. However, this may result to a major risk: "a damaging change in the learning process often happens ...which can last a lifetime...Instead of continually practicing making connections, guessing and inventing, the focus of learning shifts subtly away from learner to teacher. Instead of steadily increasing his or her skill in retrieving, connecting, comparing and transforming information, the child reacts passively and comes to rely on the authority of the others. If he does not know the precise answer...he waits for others to explain [15]. Moreover, many are the authors that have emphasized the importance of the classroom context as an artificial and relational system for students learning [16],[17], the detrimental effects of inappropriate class contexts for students' progress, cognitive and emotional profile [18], [19] and the great influence of school context to both students' identities, motivation, self-concept and attitudes towards learning [20]-[22]. Finally, there is also a large number of researchers that prove that when students are not supported by their class mates, school activities appear to be less interesting [23], school motivation and social aims are affected [24], and interest for lessons decreases [25]. In more general terms, when a child feels supported from the others, his efforts in the school and in the social level are positively affected [26].

Under the light of the above approach and the research outcomes taken into consideration, authors wanted to explore the actual educational setting in Greece to explore the way the class functions and what are the effects of this function on students' identity and learning strategies.

### III. RESEARCH ORIENTATIONS

Authors' main argument for their theoretical approach is that a student cannot be "good" and take advantage of all his possibilities unless he is sufficient in the psychological, relational and emotional level and the environment he is inserted in is suitable for his development. In that context, the parameters of psychological climate, of self-concept and students' profile have been examined as important dimensions of the field that structure students' learning.

#### A. Research: Methodology, Tools.

In order to explore the way the class system functions the method of triangulation was used. Two questionnaires measuring the Class Psychological Climate and students' self-concept were affected to 760 students of 4 public secondary education high schools of 4 different regions of Greece. The same questionnaires were distributed in the beginning and in the end of the school year so that we can see the evolution

during the school year. Another one questionnaire examining students' profile was distributed to 674 students at the end of school year in the same schools. It has also to be noted that interviews were conducted in a particular group of 89 students of the same schools, as authors wanted to corroborate the findings of the questionnaires for this particular group

The first questionnaire (Classroom Environment Scale CES). created by R. Moos and E. Trickett and adapted to the greek reality by M.G. Matsaggouras, aimed to explore the psychological and the learning climate of the classroom. It is composed by 24 questions measuring six dimensions of school environment: involvement, affiliation, teacher support, order/organization, rule clarity and task orientation. Students were invited to express their agreement or disagreement on the 24 questions of the questionnaire. It has to be noted that  $\alpha = 0.9$ .

The second questionnaire on self concept created by Harter, S. and adapted to Greek reality by Makri-Mpotsari, E. (2001), was composed by 55 questions centered on 10 main axes of general school competence, relations with children of the same age, competence in mathematics, relations with parents, competence in sports, competence in literature, behavior, friends, physical appearance and self-esteem. For the needs of this work, focus is limited on the axes of relations with classmates, behavior, and self-esteem. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  varied from 0.72 to 0.84.

The third questionnaire aimed to explore students' profile and to encompass the missing gaps of the two previous questionnaires. In this questionnaire students were invited to answer on questions on a Likert scale centered on 6 main axes: student profile, class environment, emotions, motivation type, processes of help seeking, relations of their parents with the school. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  varies from 0.5 to 0.89.

#### B. Interviews

Students' participation on the interviews was on a voluntary basis. Students' to be interviewed were chosen with the help of their teachers. Teachers were asked to indicate weak or average students that although they have possibilities to be good students for some reasons present a weak engagement to school. Good students were excluded from the interviews because in their vast majority they are students that have a strongly supporting family environment. Participants as a group could be described as an homogenous group as they were all average or weak students with a similar profile according to their teachers. Interviews were registered and transcribed. All participants were assured for the anonymity and confidentiality of the research. The treatment of the interviews was processed with the software *Sphinx Plus2-V5*. The aim was to obtain a clear perception of students' profile and to corroborate some of the findings of the questionnaires with this particular group of students.

IV. FINDINGS

A. First Questionnaire: Psychological Climate

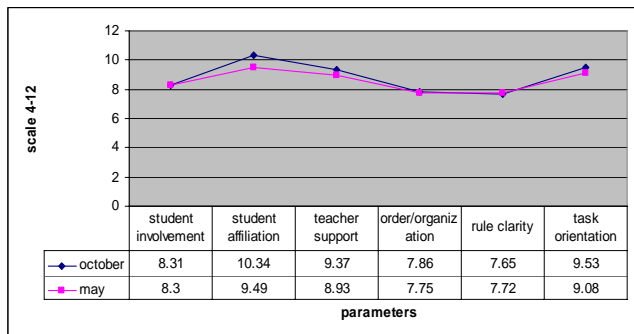


Fig. 1 Evolution of class psychological climate (1st class)

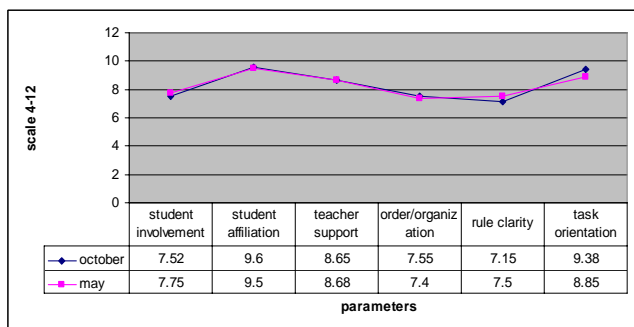


Fig. 2 Evolution of class psychological climate (2nd class)

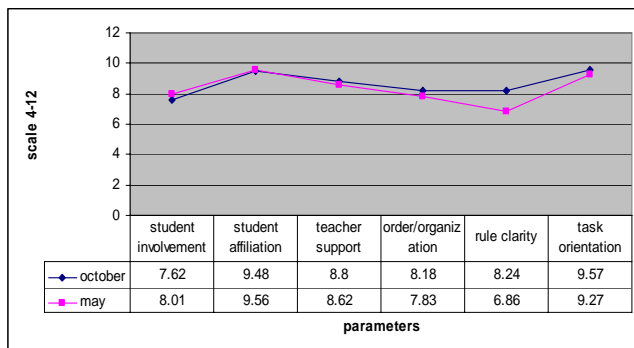


Fig. 3 Evolution of class psychological climate (3rd class)

As we see from the above figures, class psychological climate presents either stability or deterioration for the majority of schools and for the majority of the variables. It has to be noted that the first class presents a deterioration in the first three parameters of student involvement, student affiliation and teacher support, whereas the third class presents deterioration in the last three parameters related to class function. Moreover, the variable of “task orientation” is the variable the more affected that presents the more important decrease in all classes and in all high schools followed by that of “student involvement”.

B. Second Questionnaire: Self-Concept

In the following figures we see the evolution of self-concept in the following five parameters: general school competence, relations with school mates, competence in literature, behavior, self-esteem.

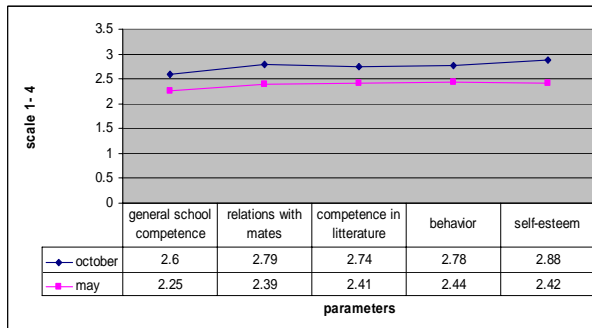


Fig. 4 Evolution of self-concept (1st class)

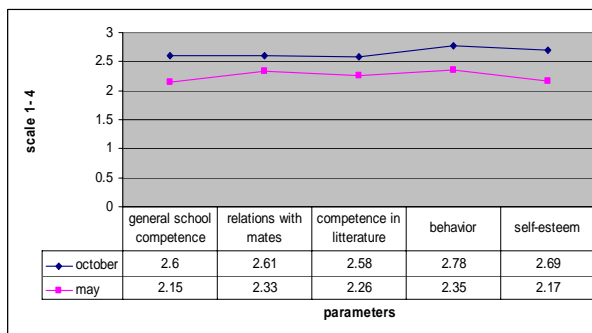


Fig. 5 Evolution of self-concept (2nd class)

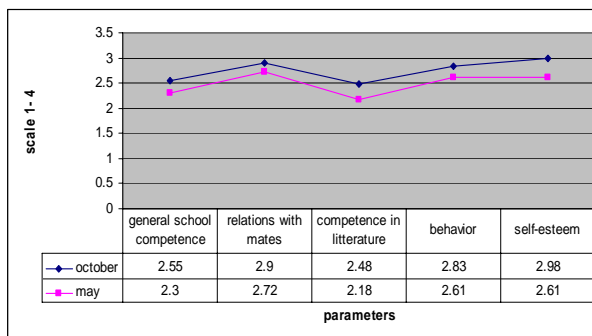


Fig. 6 Evolution of self-concept (3rd class)

The above figures testify an alarming situation as student’s self-concept in the five variables examined presents a systematic and generalized deterioration for all the classes, variables and schools.

C. Third Questionnaire: Students’ Profile

The Figs. 7 and 8 were chosen as the more representative of the results of the third questionnaire. It is absolutely necessary to be noted that 60.1% of students seek help less than the half

of times that they need. It is fundamental also to underline that the principal reasons cited by the students for the avoidance of help seeking are the shame or the fear of the tease of the others (58.5%), and the lack of time (27.4%).

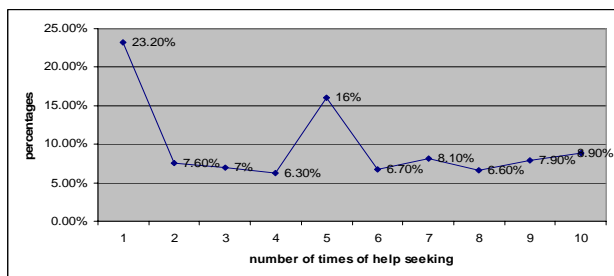


Fig. 7 How many times are you asking of help in the classroom in case of fault or miscomprehension?

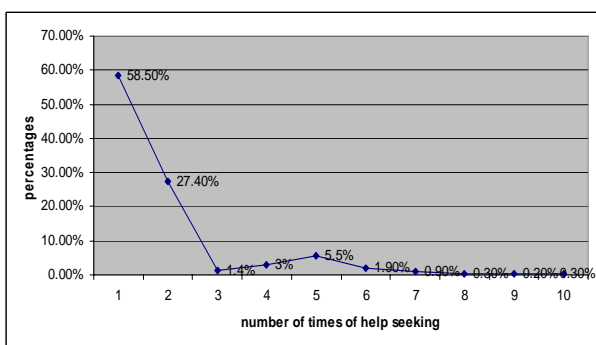


Fig. 8 Reasons of avoiding help seeking

TABLE I  
REASONS OF AVOIDING HELP SEEKING IN THE CLASSROOM

1	Be ashamed
2	Lack of time
3	Boredom
4	Lack of interest
5	Teacher is going to be mad
6	I don't need it
7	Teachers will reprimand me
8	Teachers don't know the answer
9	I am stressed
10	The others are posing the question
11	I take private lessons
12	Teachers don't care about me

D. Interviews

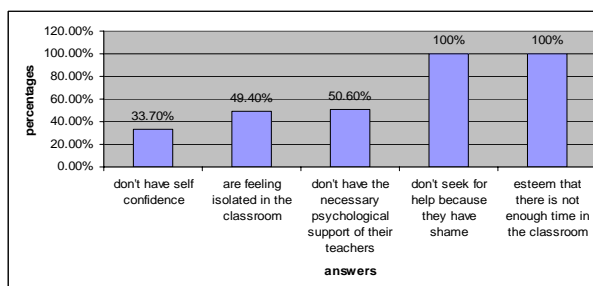


Fig. 9 The main points revealed during students' interviews

The above figure presenting the most important findings of the interviews of this particular group of students, confirms the results of the questionnaires as 33.7% affirm that they don't have self-confidence, 49.4% feel isolated in the classroom, 50.6% don't have the necessary psychological support of their teachers, 100% esteem that there is not enough time in the classroom, whereas 100% of these students don't seek for help because they have shame. Our sample is composed by 56.2% of boys and 43.8% of girls. 20.2% are on the first grade, 16.9% on the second and 62.9% on the third.

V. DISCUSSION

The above results could be summarized as follows: shame, isolation, affaishment of self-concept, avoidance of help-seeking, decrease of psychological climate. They testify in other words a deficit manifested in three levels: communicative, relational, and temporal (Fig. 10).

First of all, we should say that communicative deficit is of utmost importance as communication is an activator of social change [27], serves comprehension [28], participates in the construction of sense-making [29], and assures the existence and the coherence of a system [30]. Communication is, apart from a cultural and social reality that concerns the way people and societies contact each other [31], a fundamental human need as people need to communicate with the others in order to obtain self-consciousness [32]. We observe thus that group communication appears as a process that can blur the limits of the self as when these limits are uncertain and the feeling of identity is fragile, the multiplicity of looks may cause a feeling of depersonalization [33]. Todorov's words [34] on this subject are revealing: human existence is not threatened by isolation but by certain forms of communication that are impoverish and alienating.

Secondly, relational deficit becomes even more important if we consider that there is a direct relation between a group's cohesion and satisfaction [35], that a non cohesive group holds in general a negative opinion of itself [36] and that the isolation of individuals within the group is an essential factor for the development of conformism [13]. Considering that a group is not a gathering of individuals in interaction but fundamentally an institution, vehicle of values, norms, and rules that structure the perception, emotions and behavior of

its members [33] and that the fading of psychic groupality is directly correlated with the fading of the ways of thinking, working and acting [37] makes the above deficit even more alarming. School population appears rather as a mass of non identified individuals, like a group whose possibilities to bound relationships and to approach knowledge through living, working and being together appear reduced.

Finally the temporal deficit is crucial as from the sociological point of view time has a function of coordination and integration [38], is gifted with signification [39], and it is substantially related with the emergence of alterity (ibid. p. 343). "We have to wait for sugar to melt" used to say Bergson [40]. There is no conceivable system without environment and duration is indispensable both for the evolution of the environment and the development of internal interactions [41].

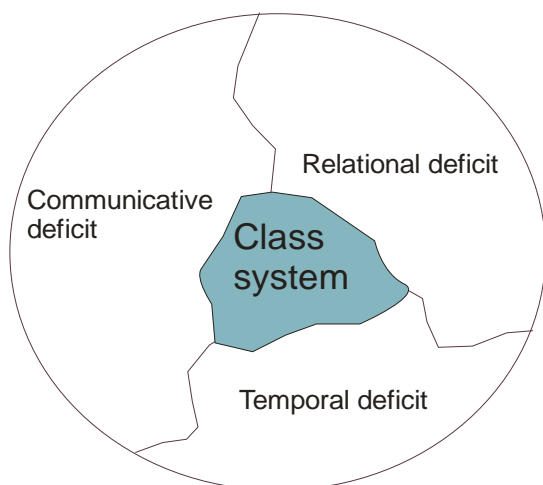


Fig. 10 The three deficits of school reality

#### VI. POST-DISCUSSION: AN ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE CLASS SYSTEM

If we examine closely the above results, we will probably come to the conclusion that students' indifference, inertia and unwillingness attested many times by the researchers are not without reason, but these phenomena are manifested with reason. What we have seen is that classrooms lack of coherence that students proceed to a self-disqualification in order to avoid to be exposed, that they maintain a relation of exteriority with their own class, that their subjective dimension is attentively concealed so that they feel protected. In other words, students seem to abstain from the construction of reality of their classroom as they don't feel neither responsible nor protagonists of the later. The impact of the above findings becomes even more important if we considered them under the light of Goethe's words that there is nothing to search behind phenomena. They are of they own the doctrines. What emerge thus one more time are the complexity and the emerging nature of classroom as a self-organized system, able to produce in autonomy a particular order, a particular way of function and evolution.

Under the light of the above considerations it is to be noted that that most of the researches carried out until today focus on the map of school reality whereas the particular territory of classroom and the emerging *habitus* have not been thoroughly explored. In other words, it seems that it has been ignored one of the first principles of Damascius and of neoplatonic philosophers that the knowledge of the knowable exists in the knowing subject, and not in the known. It seems that it has been forgotten that complex systems characterized by an operational closure have their own mechanisms determined by the network of their internal interconnexions that need also to be explored. In other words, it has been forgotten that to know the object, we have to know above all its internal properties [42].

It has been forgotten finally that human beings are situated and that their relations and bounds are mostly ontological. By adapting Banasayag's words [43], it is argued that the efficacy we are looking for cannot be only linear or immediate simply related to students' progress or to school outcomes but also ontological, as each person belongs to a scenery, a land, a temporality. We can think of the situation, we can think of the scenery, but this thinking is immersed, included in the scenery of which it is part (ibid. p. 194). In other words, the thinking of the situation from a phenomenological point of view it is the person in its becoming and deployment (ibid. p. 193). Briefly, we forgot the fundamental principles of Wittgenstein [42] that I am my world (microcosme) and that the world is the totality of what takes place, the totality of the facts not the objects. Because the totality of facts determines not only what takes place but also what does not take place.

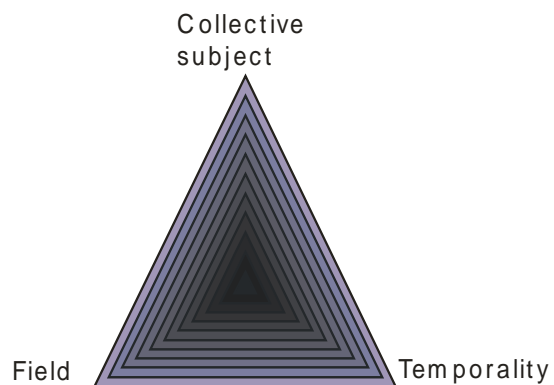


Fig. 11 An ontological perspective of the class system

What emerges as real *aporie* (question) at this point is how we can create new possibilities for the students and the situation. Given the fact that anytime we think in terms of more and less, we ignore the differences of nature between the two, or between the persons, the existants [40], and that perhaps the biggest mistake of thinking, the common mistake of bith science and metaphysics is to conceive everything in terms of more and less, and to see only differences of degree or intensity where there are essentially differences of nature [44], we chose to skip the logic of seeing class reality in terms

of efficiency or efficacy, and to see it as an emerging, self-organized entity to consider it in an ontological perspective under the prism of three key-elements: the collective subject, field's internal elements, temporality (Fig. 11).

The above figure stress first of all the need to consider classroom as a collective subject, as although the last twenty years researches on social cognition have shown that cognitive functions are largely dependent on the social context in which they are realized [45], and that the most during changes are obtained in collective situation [8], the way school class function is far from being that of a learning community when there are fragile identities, poor communication channels and weak engagement towards the school establishment.

Secondly, the work environment should also be considered as a determinant factor not due to its technical characteristics but, rather, due to its complex relations and interactions among individual perceptions and beliefs, and organizational routines [46]. Briefly, the context determines the relation of individual to the task, its way of working and its investment to the situation [50]. Our choices are orientated by our socially constructed and profoundly interiorized experiences, by our cognitive capacities, visions, preferences, hierarchies. There is thus a relation between the objective and incorporated structures that form the base of individual's relation to the object of knowledge [47].

Trying, therefore, to change the knowledge paradigm for students without exploring the context in which any change effort is to be implemented, deprives the effort from its possibilities to succeed. The context is not considered just in its technical or structural dimensions, but mostly in the dimensions of interaction and interrelation, as persons in interaction become environments for each other [48], as the context is in the same time producer and result of the social action [49] as the structures do not exist as elements exterior to individuals and social groups but they are interiorized and interjected in a way that they are integrated parts of their structure [50].

Finally, as for the dimension of temporality, it is time we moved from the linear, absolute, rational perception of time pruned by Galilee, Newton and Descartes, according to which time has to be productive, useful and rentable [51], aligned to financial and technical priorities and evaluated according to its immediate rentability [52] with no place for shared projects, time and rhythms. The ontological perspective of the class system requires the change of our perception of time, and the disaffection of the unidimensional approach of time as clock-time. We need to perceive time in its subjective and intrinsic nature of the human development and becoming as it has been underlined by many authors and philosophers throughout the centuries.

It is proposed in other words, to take into consideration the conception of time as it has been underlined through the centuries and it is forgotten today. It is need to perceive time as *kairos*, meaning the right moment, the moment of realization, situating temporality in the interface between psyche and movement [53], to integrate it in the individual

subjectivity, to consider it as an essential structure of thinking, a universal condition of phenomena, nothing but the way the spirit is affected by its own activity, universal necessary condition to apprehend our-selves as objects of our-selves [54]. It is time we took into consideration its intuitive, intimate and immediate nature relating time to memory and to personal identity [40], to consider it as a major social bond [55]. For humans diminish duration cannot be an end to itself. [...] From the point of view of subjectivity, the problem is not to abridge time but to enrich it. If the acceleration of operations is translated as an impoverishment of the lived time, it is rather a loss than a gain [56].

It is time thus we considered that our relation to time determines our being into this time [52] (p. 7), both because human temporality is charged with consciousness (ibid. p. 113), and also, because the denial to our right to time is the denial of our being and not only something less to have (ibid p. 161). Taking, therefore, the necessary time in a school context should be seen as a type of investment instead of a loss. It is time we consider that creation, being and time go together requiring one another [57]. Finally, we insist on the importance of time, not only because we need much time and effort to change a complex system, since we have to understand the system in order to change it, if we want the change process to be successful [58], but mostly because for the change to be introduced there is need for a different quality of time.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the three deficits detected in Greek secondary education students, authors came to the conclusion that the implicit and often unconscious way classroom functions determines students' learning, fragilizes their identity and undermines their learning outcomes. The solution proposed in order to change the above reality consists to consider school efficacy and class function under an ontological perspective based on the interconnection and interdependency of fields' organic elements. In other words, authors by adopting Benasayag's words argue that it's time to understand that the more I become impotent, the more I diminish my capacity to act, the more I diminish my scenery. And this goes both ways [43].

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