

PEDAGOGY

The Coeducation of Physical Education in Greece: From the Ancient Times Until the Modern Times

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Abstract

The majority of physical education (PE) classes in the United States became coeducational after Title IX was enacted in 1972. However, the process of considering the effects of coeducational PE did not begin there. The purpose of this study was to present in as much detail as possible, through a thorough literature review, the presence and development of coeducation in the subject of PE in Greece over the years. This historical review shows the views of the two founders of ancient Greek education, Plato and Aristotle, according to whom education was necessary for both boys and girls. This study also references the influences of the European Enlightenment, where the education of both sexes was considered necessary. During the 19th century, specifically in 1828, the institution of coeducation of the two sexes took the first timid steps toward an educational evolution, which is directly related to social, cultural, and moral issues. Laws played a catalytic role in the issue of mixed education of boys and girls, even under adverse conditions, to reach 1985, where Law 1566 was passed, the last to assess Greek coeducational PE.

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History paints a detailed picture of how society, technology, and government functioned in the past, so one can better understand how they have evolved. A historical lens also helps determine how to approach the future, as it allows leaders to learn from the challenges and triumphs of past societies. When examining the past, one can understand the process of education and how it evolved over the years to the present. Over 2 millennia ago, the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle laid the foundations of Western culture. Plato and Aristotle were the founders of the theory of education and the basic principles of educating children and the masses. Until modern times, specifically the 19th century, there was little to no evidence documenting the coexistence of the two sexes in education. After the creation of an independent Greek state in the 19th century, one finds relevant information pertaining to the sexes in education. Specifically, Dimaras (1990) stated, "On March 16, 1822, the Peloponnesian Senate, with its proclamation, announced the establishment and operation of a school in Tripoli and called on all young people to study there for free, while also inviting worthy teachers to teach them" (pp. 4–5). About a month later (April 7, 1822), the same committee urged parents to take care of the education of their children, boys and girls (Kantzidis, 2002, p.12).

Following the enactment of Title IX in the United States in 1972, physical education (PE) classes generally became coeducational. The controversy of mixed-gender education has been a concern of the educational world since antiquity. This can be seen in a brilliant way through the work of Plato and Aristotle, who were "the first founding fathers of the sciences of education" (Zourmpanos, n.d.). The Greeks made significant contributions to philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and PE. Aristotle's ideals, similar to Plato's, were focused on PE and sports to develop the spirit of sportsmanship and to develop good habits in life. This historical review shows the evolving views on education. The purpose of this study was to provide a thorough literature review, presenting the presence and development of coeducation in the subject of PE in Greece over the years.

The Influence of Plato

Socrates, the Greek philosopher who had an extensive influence on what now is known as Western philosophy, guided his students Plato and Aristotle in his ideology. Socrates educated Plato that the surest path to wisdom was rational contemplation and that being a “lover of wisdom” or philosopher was the highest form of life. In his two very important works the *State* (*Πολιτεία* or *Politeia*) and the *Laws* (*Νόμοι* or *Nomoi*), Plato cited views on education and pedagogy that find a place even in modern times. He believed that the education of children began in kindergarten and considered it appropriate and necessary for education to be public, be compulsory, and be applied equally for both boys and girls (Geraris, 2014; Platon, n.d., p. 367). As his views regarding how children should be educated were based on developing a utopian society, he suggested that for the first ten years of life, education shall be predominantly physical, proposing “play and sports are to be the entire curriculum” (Durant, 2006). He continued by saying that “music and physical exercise do not aim, as some believe in body shaping” but “in its cultivation of the soul with the help of others” (Platon, 1963, p. 141). Thus began the concept of PE.

In his work with equal emphasis regarding exercise, *Laws*, Plato considers education more deeply. In this work, education is structured in six stages (Platon, 1964, pp. 8–9). The first period of youth education includes the period from birth to the age of 3. It emphasizes the physical development of children as well as the cultivation of their souls (Platon, 1964, p. 158). During the next stage of education, which occurs between ages 3 and 6, both sexes have a common course coexisting in the educational process. After the age of 6, boys and girls are separated and both sexes continue their education with the same sex (Platon, 1964, p. 164). In this phase of their education, however, both sexes are taught the same subjects and in particular learn to “turn their attention to lessons of the masculine” (Platon, 1964, p. 164). The males turn their attention to the horses, bows, javelins, and the art of slinging. On the other hand, females, to the extent they consent, voluntarily attend the same educational courses until the stage of learning, “especially the use of weapons” (Platon, n.d., p. 331).

This is followed by the fourth level of education, which begins at the age of 10 and lasts until the age of 13, during which children are taught “reading, writing, arithmetic, stereometry and astronomy” (Geraris, 2014, p. 4). Additionally from the 13th year, selected students are given the opportunity to be taught music, specifically guitar and lyre (Geraris, 2014, p. 4).

The Influence of Aristotle

Aristotle was Plato’s most brilliant pupil and had developed a slightly different view. Growing up in a family of Greek physicians, Aristotle learned very early the value of observation and hands-on experience. Aristotle, for his part, emphasized that the highest good was happiness, but “it depended on the deeds of virtue” (Mouratidis, 1998, p. 52). To achieve “happiness,” the individual needs to receive the appropriate education and training, as these contribute to the development and cultivation of those abilities of the individual, which help them to make the right choices during their life (Mouratidis, 1998, p. 52). The philosopher “supported the measure and condemns the exaggeration” (Mouratidis, 1998, p. 50), while the virtue was “the disposition to behave in the right manner and as a mean free from any dose of lack and exaggeration” (Mouratidis, 1998, p. 50). Thus, according to Aristotle, there were two extremes, one referring to the minimal and the other to the exaggeration, while the median or “fine balance” (χρυσή τομή) is the right path for education and training (Mouratidis, 1998, p. 50).

For the achievement of this middle ground or mean, of course, it was necessary to keep in balance the body and the soul of man, which cannot be provided by nature to the individual, but by education (Aristotle, 1939, pp. 34–35). This was the duty of the state—to provide the education—and not of everyone individually (Aristotle, 1939, p. 22). Therefore, it is obvious that Aristotle was a supporter of the view that education should be public and not private, as it should be “one and the same for all” (Aristotle, 1993, p. 151).

The established courses of the time, of which the education of young people was founded, were “about four” (Aristotle, 1993, p. 155): reading-writing, gymnastics, music, and art (Aristotle, 1993, p. 155; Aristotle, 1989, pp. 23–28). It is worth noting that the training of the body, according to Aristotle, preceded that of the soul (Aristotle, 1993, p. 161), because man, from the moment he is born,

is characterized by his appetizing thymic and volitional element, while over time he develops speech and his mind (Aristotle, 1989, p. 31).

Both Plato and Aristotle, of course, argued that not only boys but also girls should receive a common (same) public education. In addition, it is worth noting that both philosophers embraced the view that the education of the individual begins at birth (Tsoni, n.d.). They also emphasized the importance of PE and the need to develop and cultivate it before the soul, as logic follows physical development (Sakkorafou, 1957, p. 274). The educational theories of both great ancient Greek philosophers shared similarities regarding the purpose of education, the scheme of education (curriculum), and the method of teaching but also differed significantly. Plato believed the purpose of education was to free the soul and turn it toward the truth. According to Aristotle, the purpose of education was to attain knowledge and happiness. Virtue can only be attained through happiness.

Influence of the European Enlightenment

The current education system evolved from these ancient principles. At the beginning of the 19th century, the influences of the European Enlightenment penetrated the circles of Greek educators, according to which the necessity of education of not only boys but also girls was emphasized. In any case, the education of each sex must be differentiated “in terms of its purpose and organization” (Dalakoura & Ziogou-Karastergiou, 2015, p. 40). According to the prevailing trend at that time, the role of the two sexes is clearly separated, with the result that their education must be different, as girls are destined for the role of host and mother and not to participate in public affairs (Dalakoura & Ziogou-Karastergiou, 2015, p. 40). The problems related to the education of girls at the time were (a) the differentiation in the education of students (“who and how much in total and how,” according to Xanthopoulos, 1873) and (b) the “co-education” (Karastergiou, 1986, p. 259; Xanthopoulos, 1873, p. 250).

Coeducation in Modern Greek Education

However, the coeducation of the two sexes, as an institution, in modern Greek education, has always had a direct relationship with social, cultural, and moral issues. This institution appeared especially

during the 19th century under certain conditions. Specifically, boys and girls coexisted in the same school space, when and where the need arose, because the state did not have the organizational and financial capacity to establish what were considered “pure” primary schools, some for girls and others for boys (Skoura, 2011).

The first timid appearances of coeducation in Greek education occurred around 1828, immediately after the liberation of the country from the Ottoman Empire. The concept was first established in the schools of the Greek islands, then in the capitals of the provinces, and then in the other municipalities of the country (Ziogou-Karastergiou, 1986, pp. 46–56). As early as 1829, despite the unfavorable conditions, there were parents who sent their girls to school and the girls attended the same school establishments as the boys. These schoolgirls faced difficult, almost primitive conditions and studied with a large number of boys in the same schools. There were simply not enough educators to go around.

On July 15, 1833 (new calendar; old calendar on July 3, 1833), the committee for the organization of schools in the Greek state provided for the establishment of primary school “and for the girls.” However, due to the lack of female teaching staff, young women had to be taught by men with the necessary presence of an elderly woman, who had the role of the girl’s curator with the obligation to teach them embroidery. The same act also provided gymnastics instruction for girls (i.e., exercise in wrestling, jumping, and running; Antoniou, 1992, p. 43). Also, in this plan, the meeting of May 1 and 2, 1833, the government was asked, at least for the time being, to accept two types of primary schools: the mutual learning schools (Andreou, 1989) and the coeducational secondary schools (Kalafati, 1988, p. 129).

Chasekidou-Markou (2013) and Andreou (1989) both alluded to the Royal Decree of February 6, 1834 (Law 1834 On Primary Schools, 1834). When this law was passed, primary education was organized, while secondary education was established with the decree of December 31, 1836 (Kitsou, 1993, pp. 14–15; Royal Decree on the Regulations, 1836). These decrees, in addition to some changes, were enforced until the first two decades of the 20th century and formed the basis of the Greek educational system. These decrees provided for the establishment of pure primary schools for

girls, where possible. However, this plan was not maintained due to lack of financial resources and properly trained teaching staff. In the middle of the 19th century, Minister S. Vlachos (On Boys Leaving, 1852) completely banned coeducation in both public schools and private schools that attended to students of both sexes, because it was characterized as “interference, which predisposes to the seeds of unpleasant consequences” (Fournaraki, 1987, p. 141).

The issue of coeducation came up again in 1873, particularly regarding the views of members of the Hellenic Teachers’ Association. Most of them argued that mixed schools were, of course, a “necessary evil” but “harmful to the morals” of the country. A smaller number of members thought that they should be kept where it was not possible to operate mono-educational schools for each sex, while a third party claimed that mixed schools should not be maintained at all, because they affect the moral formation of generations. As a result, there was a hesitation from teachers and parents and consequently from society and the state. The works of Kitsou (1993) invoke the views of many educators of this era who support the differentiation of students, believing the nature and mission of education of women in life is different from that of men (p. 36).

Also noteworthy is the way in which the draft laws on education were created as early as 1870 and then discussed in the Greek Parliament. These draft laws contributed in some way to tackle the problems of coeducation in the primary school in the country. Thus, they influenced and changed the already existing negative attitude of the public opinion and the teachers toward the issue of coeducation (Kitsou, 1993, p. 37). More specifically, the first draft laws of 1870 and 1877 highlighted the need for the complete separation of primary schools into boys schools and girls schools, while the draft laws that followed in 1880 and 1889 were more compromising, accepting coeducation under certain conditions as a solution to the problem (Kitsou, 1993, p. 38). Essentially, the gym was established as an important facility in the primary school from the year 1878 (Antoniou, 1987, p. 402).

Ioannis Fokianos made a profound and impactful contribution to the establishment of the gymnastic course in primary education (Giannakis, 1998, p. 21). The highly successful organization of the gymnastic demonstrations of the primary schools of Athens on May

15, 1883, contributed to this. The Minister of Education and many officials watched with great interest the gymnastics demonstrations of the students at all three levels. The success of these gymnastic demonstrations gave Fokianos the opportunity to conquer the field of primary education. Since then, the gymnastic exercises have been established and introduced in the primary schools as well (Giannakis, 1998, p. 21).

Aik. Lakaridou emerged as an innovative figure for the education system in Greece. She worked in collaboration with the Gymnastics Association to establish gymnastics classes for teachers in 1891. Her pioneering ideas were revealed in such an early period, during which there was an obvious emphasis on the instruction and employment of women in Greece (Ziogou-Karastergiou, 1986, p. 180).

The issue of coeducation has occupied the educational world quite vigorously since the early 1880s, but it has also strongly evolved since this time. Confrontation raised against coeducation slowly diminished when Law ΒΤΜΘ' (1895) was enacted, which decided the condition for girls to study with boys was that there should be no boys-only schools in the area and the boys should not exceed the age of 10.

Law ΒΧΚΑ' (1899) in Article 4 imposed gymnastics as a primary subject in all schools of primary and secondary education of the state in both public and private. Also, the same law in Article 6 provided that students who attended all schools of primary and secondary education, males and females, as well in teaching establishments, be taught gymnastics at least 3 hours a week. Also, Article 11 of the same law imposed the subject of gymnastics on both sexes (Antoniou, 1987, p. 410).

However, the substantial assistance of the Minister Ath. Eftaxia in Physical Education was completed at the end of the 19th century with the Official Government Gazette/Φ.Ε.Κ. 225 on 20/11/1899 with the publication and voting of (a) of the Royal Decree for teaching gymnastics in schools, (b) "the decision to teach gymnastics in primary and secondary schools and in both sexes," and (c) of the Curriculum Analytical Program (cf. the royal decree, the decision, and the curriculum were published in Official Government Gazette, Ε. τ. Κ. Α Φ.Ε.Κ. 225, Vol. Α'/20-11-1899; Antoniou, 1987, pp. 398-422).

The first educational conference, which took place on March 31, 1904, dealt with educational issues of the country, among which was that of women's education. One of the decisions concerned the application of the law for compulsory schooling of girls in primary school so that their illiteracy could be combated (Parren, 1904).

20th Century to Present Times

At the beginning of the 20th century, of course, the issue of co-education preoccupied both the Greek world and the European world. The coeducational model, despite the initial reactions of teachers and the public, was gradually finding supporters, if only for primary education. This support emerged from a survey, and the concerns from the results of the questionnaire were published by Marsalis's deputy director M. Papamavros in the magazine *Ergasia* (Skoura, 2011). In July 1929, the same issue preoccupied them with the participation of secondary education officials at the International Congress in the Hague, who, after intense and interesting discussions, concluded that each country should make relevant arrangements, considering its educational and social aspects, as well as its customs, traditions, and its financial situation (Palaiologos, 1938, p. 156).

Until August 1929, Law 1242/1919 B' (1919) was enforced. According to this law, girls could also attend public schools, since there were no girls' school in the area, with the limitation that they would not exceed the age of 10. Female teachers were preferably appointed to these schools. In another case, boys were allowed to attend girls' schools when there was a shortage of male schools and, of course, if they did not exceed 12 years of age (Karachristou, 1934, p. 6). According to Kitsou (1993), the government, because it was unable to establish schools for girls, urged many parents to send their daughters to boys' schools, showing that coeducation was essentially and compulsorily applied. This is clearly evidenced by the statistics available at the time; out of the 7,843 schools in the country, 5,327 operated as mixed and only 958 pure for girls and 1,558 pure for boys (Gontikas, 1913, p. 12; Kitsou, 1993, p. 57). Thus, as Karachristou (1934) mentioned, the so-called coeducation occupied all the elementary education and almost all the public schools of the primary education of that time (p. 9).

However, from 1923 to 1924, the issue of coeducation was re-kindled. A portion of teachers supported the mixed teaching of boys

and girls. However, some of them were concerned about the subject of gymnastics and claimed that a distinction should be made between boys and girls because the mental and physical strengths of the two sexes differed (Kitsou, 1993, p. 65). Some teachers, of course, had the opposite view of this institution, arguing that pure schools were appropriate because the mixed attention distracted the boys and because the girls' destination required different teaching materials (Kitsou, 1993, p. 65).

Thus, in August 1929, Law 4397/1929 (1929) was passed: "Always the schools of elementary education, except for households, are mixed." The application of Law 4397/1929, according to Gontikas (as cited in Kitsou, 1993, pp. 57–58), resulted in the bias of the prejudices of parents and public opinion against mixed schools. The interaction of the two sexes, according to this law, from an early age contributes to the mental development of children, helping them to form healthier, more human and civilized perceptions of their lives and actions. They also find suitable conditions for the noble and social feelings of all students to develop (Kitsou, 1993, pp. 57–58). This law in Article 5 defines the subjects of the primary school and does not exclude gymnastics from them. Social and economic benefits of coeducation are evident from the application of this law. For example, large sums of money have been saved as a result of the reduction of teaching staff as well as teaching and teaching instruments (Kitsou, 1993, p. 58). From all these actions, it can be seen that the reasons that led the Greek state to establish the universal institution of coeducation in primary education were not only social but also educational and economic.

From 1929 to 1959, there was no significant change in the country's educational issues. In 1959, the Educational Reform (Law 3971/2-9-1959; Law 3973/2-9-1959) established a series of decree laws that also concerned primary education. Specifically, they "strengthen Primary Education by increasing its staff and improving the training of kindergarten teachers and teachers" (Meletiadis, 2015). However, this period is characterized by the complete absence of PE teachers from primary education. Similar stagnation and inactivity, as in previous years, characterize the period 1959 to 1964, during which no obvious change in the issues of gymnastics in primary education was observed.

On November 7, 1964, a plan for educational reform was submitted to the Parliamentary Authorization Committee by Papanoutsos, accompanied by a detailed presentation. The explanatory memorandum proposed the adoption of three acts to be passed in parliament. The first was related to the organization of primary and secondary education, the second was related to technical education, and the third was to improve some issues of higher education. The first draft law was passed by parliament and became state law and is the Decree Law 4379/1964, while the other two would follow in May 1965. Unfortunately, the last two did not manage to be voted on, because after 2 months, on July 15, the government of the Center Union of Papandreou was dissolved (Kantzidis, 2002, p. 70).

Among other things, the Decree Law 4379/1964 (1964) provided for the increase of the compulsory attendance of students from 6 to 9 years and, as in most countries, free education. The Pedagogical Institute was established as an independent public service belonging to the Ministry of Education to improve education and research (Kantzidis, 2002, p. 70).

The Royal Decree 72/14-1-1966, which was then voted after the Decree Law 4379/1964, only caused disappointment to spread in the gymnastics world, as this did not provide a solution to the chronic problems of the industry. Furthermore, the disadvantage was that it referred to the application of older and anachronistic provisions (Royal Decree 5/9, 1935, referred in turn to the application of provisions of Presidential Decree 18-11-1931 and Law 4373/1929, Art. 5, “On the Regulation of Middle Schools Education”). In contrast to this royal decree, Ion Ioannidis, a gymnast who had been elected as educational advisor at the Pedagogical Institute, organized a series of seminars across the country during the 1964–1965 school year to inform teachers and professors of issues related to modern fitness trends, which prevailed internationally for primary education. But also Royal Decree 425/4-5-1966 (1966) and Royal Decree 1074/15-12-1966 (1966) did not positively affect the education and especially PE in the schools of primary and secondary education. So this was the picture of the general situation in education until April 21, 1967, when the 7-year dictatorship was imposed.

However, the last law passed in Greece, which concerned the structure and operation of education in both primary education and

secondary education, was Law 1566/1985 (1985) on the “structure and functioning of primary and secondary education and other provisions.” It is still applied in Greece today. According to this law, primary education, especially in primary school, aims at the intellectual and physical development of students. It also aims at building mechanisms that contribute to the assimilation of knowledge, physical development, physical and mental health, as well as cultivation of motor skills (Law 1566/1985, 1985, Art. 4, paras. 1a, 1b). This law does not expect anything more for the course of PE compared to the previous ones, which concerned education and especially primary education. While the past three decades have produced some educational reforms, nothing substantial has been done for PE, especially not in primary education.

Article 19883 of Presidential Decree No. 373, which sets out the curriculum of the PE course in the last four grades of primary school (i.e., third, fourth, fifth, and sixth), does not mention any substantial relevant regulations with the issue of coeducation. In October 1995, Presidential Decree No. 377 defined the curriculum of the PE course at the primary school that is to be taught in all its classes.

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to present a historical overview of the development of coeducation in PE in Greece. This historical review shows the views and impact of the two founders of ancient Greek coeducation. In summary, it is concluded that coeducation in primary schools in Greece continues to be practiced even today with great effects as a result of these initial steps, in spite of its adverse origins. Coeducation continues today as established by Law 4397/1929 on elementary education. Studying the history of coeducation in PE starting with ancient Greece can provide insight into the origin of our culture as well as cultures with which we might be less familiar, thereby increasing cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

The COVID-19 disease has given everyone time to think about and consider the past, present, and future of PE. Greek education provided some of the early methods and systems that are still used in teaching coeducational PE today. PE is so much more than just physical activity; it is a catalyst through which students learn character and self-efficacy and develop persistence, resilience, and mettle. As PE teachers, we have an amazing opportunity and respon-

sibility to continue to innovate the field of PE. By keeping this field updated and interesting for students, instructors can provide a new generation of students with a toolbox of transferable skills that can be utilized across a range of situations. Hopefully, studying ancient Greek culture can spark the innovative spirit of the past that physical educators need to help shape the future.

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