ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ
UNIVERSITY OF CRETE

PTDE NEWS:
EDUCATION, INNOVATION, FUTURE

Our Department as seen through the eyes of the students of the Experimental High School of Chania.

As part of the Department's effort to strengthen its outreach, the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete welcomed, on March 3rd, the students of the Experimental High School of Chania.

During their visit, the students were informed about the way the Department and the University of Crete operate as a whole, the career prospects of the Department's graduates, and student life both on campus and in the city of Rethymno. They also had the opportunity to actively participate in a fruitful discussion about the qualities of a good teacher and the overall role of education. We would like to thank the students and teachers of the Experimental High School of Chania for their interest and for visiting our Department!

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Stay in touch:

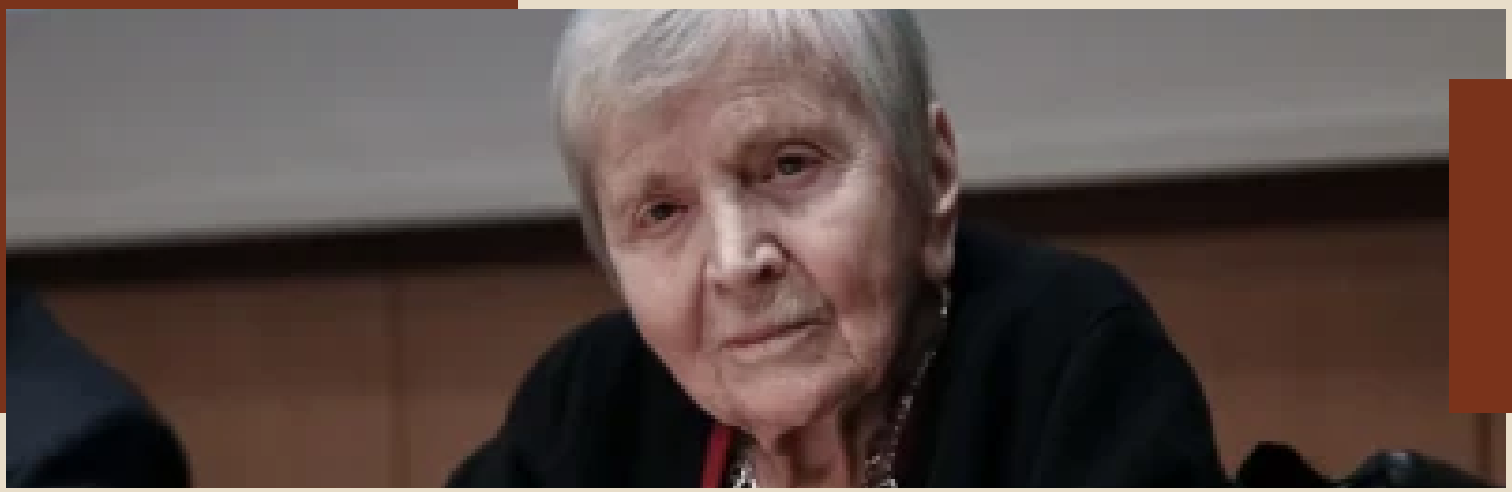
A great intellectual figure: Eleni Glykatzi-Ahrweiler

The Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete bids farewell, with deep emotion, to an outstanding figure, the Greek Byzantinist Eleni Glykatzi-Ahrweiler, a great intellectual with international recognition and a tremendous contribution to the fields of letters and scholarship.

Eleni Glykatzi-Ahrweiler, the first woman to serve as Rector and Chancellor of the University of the Sorbonne, received numerous international honors and distinctions. She developed close intellectual ties with the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete, where she had also been awarded the title of Honorary Doctor.

As a tribute to her memory, the Unit of International Education and Research of KEMEIEDE of the Department of Primary Education - which bears her name ("Eleni Glykatzi-Ahrweiler Collection") - remained open to the public from February 18 to 21 (10 Vernardou Street, Old Town, Rethymno).

Her immense contribution to culture, history, and the humanities will remain a lasting legacy for future generations.



Research News:

13-16/01: The Department of Primary Education participated in the **International Conference on Qualitative Research ECQI 2026**, held in Athens from January 13 to 16, 2026. Our Department contributed with two presentations: **"Artificial intelligence, SRL and SEL in primary education: Teachers' reflections on practice"** (PhD candidate Christina Smaropoulou, Assistant Professor Aikaterini Vasiou & Professor Eleni Vasilaki) and **"Early pathways into academic life: A thematic analysis of first-year university students' expectations and transition experiences"** (Assistant Professor Aikaterini Vasiou, PhD candidate Malamati Veloni, Adjunct Lecturer Angelos Gkontelos & Professor Eleni Vasilaki).

15/02: The **Laboratory of Advanced Learning Technologies in Lifelong and Distance Education (EDIVEA)** of the Department of Primary Education held an online training workshop titled **"Artificial Intelligence in Education: the 4th wave"**, with keynote speaker Professor and Laboratory Director Panagiotis Anastasiadis.

25/01: Educators, researchers, and stakeholders of the Greek OSN, including the **Science Education Laboratory (EDTHE)** of our Department, met within the framework of the **FEDORAS Academy program** to evaluate progress to date and plan the next steps. The educators shared their experiences from implementing the activities in the classroom, opening up a fruitful dialogue on the teaching of the Natural Sciences.

The FEDORAS Teacher Academy

02-06/02: Our Department had a strong presence at the **Staff Academy Week** of the European Alliance **INGENIUM**, which took place at the University of Skövde in Sweden. Postdoctoral researcher A. Mavrogianni and Professor E. Vasilaki presented the innovative educational initiative titled: **"From Awareness to Action: Cultivating Responsible Artificial Intelligence Literacy through the ABCE Model."**

During the same days, our Department's students Maria Sifaki and Katerina Chairetaki participated in the **INGENIUM Junior Winter School** activities on Sustainability (**"Sustainability in Action"**). The students engaged in activities promoting sustainability and developed skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork.

The **Language and Literature Education Laboratory (EMEGLO)** of our Department (Assistant Professor Vasia Tsami, Associate Professor Vivi Thomou, and postgraduate student Anastasia Mountoufari), in collaboration with the University of Oviedo, is launching the research project **"Bridging In-School and Out-Of-School Literacy Practices: A useful online toolkit for the teacher."**
The project is funded by **INGENIUM** and aims to develop an online toolkit for teachers in order to effectively explore students' in-school and out-of-school literacy practices and bridge the gap between them.

24–25/02: The Department of Primary Education participated in the **6th International Conference "Literacies and Contemporary Society: From Skills to Practices"** in Nicosia, Cyprus, with six presentations:

- **"Digital Storytelling as a tool for strengthening foreign HE students' multiliteracies"** (E. Katsarou, P. Samioti, I. Kassotaki),
- **"Mapping Language and Literacy Representations in Greek L1 Curricula through Natural Language Processing (NLP)"** (E. Katis, E. Katsarou, M. Tzanaki, E. Daskalaki),
- **"Teaching metacognitive reading strategies in online environments to enhance reading comprehension and scientific literacy in 5th-grade primary school students"** (E. Gaki, I. Spantidakis, A. Mouzaki) [in Greek],
- **"Metacognitive knowledge and strategies in written production in first and second/foreign language: Investigating their bidirectional transfer in the writing of bilingual students in Greek high schools in Germany"** (K. Zarogianni, I. Spantidakis) [in Greek],
- **"Training students in dictionary use as a genre: A pilot study in primary education"** (E. Kasampaloglou, P. Thomou, V. Tsami) [in Greek],
- **"Exploring refugee students' attitudes towards the Greek context: A pilot study"** (V. Tsami, K. Garavelas, Ch. Zagkos, A. Giannakou) [in Greek].

20/02–13/03: The **Laboratory of Psychology and Special Education** implemented the free **TRIPLE P – Positive Parenting Program**, under the scientific supervision of Associate Professor Vicky Tsourtou. The program was aimed at parents and focused on strengthening parental empowerment, providing a safe and supportive environment for children's learning and development, as well as applying caregiving practices that respond to the needs of each developmental stage.

27–29/03: **The Science Education Laboratory (EDTHE)** participated in the **6th Conference of Early Career Researchers in Science Education and New Technologies in Education,** organized by ENEFET. Three master's theses were presented, as well as two poster presentations through which the laboratory's two research projects, **"The Fedoras Teacher Academy"** and **"ENerGISE"**, were highlighted.

19–22/03: Our Department had a strong presence at the **4th Panhellenic Conference of School Psychology.**

With the organization of an invited symposium titled "From research to educational practice: Evidence-based interventions for the development of cognitive, linguistic and emotional skills." The symposium was chaired by Professor A. Mouzaki of our Department, and, among others, the following presentations were delivered:

- Evaluation of a blended intervention in a digital learning environment for the development of metacognitive memory and attention skills in children aged 6–8 with ADHD. (Z. Karaspirou, M. Tsikritsaki, S. Papadaki, V. Karkania, A. Mouzaki, P. Simos) [in Greek]
- Interventions for the development of oral language in preschool children with developmental language disorder: A comparison of semantic and phonological approaches. (V. Desylla, A. Mouzaki, A. Ralli, M. Vlassopoulou) [in Greek]

With the organization of the round table titled "The Greek school community of Imbros: Psychological needs, motivation, and school–family collaboration." The session was chaired by Assistant Professor A. Vasiou of our Department, and the following presentations were delivered, among others, by members and researchers of our Department:

- Parental support and the basic psychological needs of the student population in the Greek school of Imbros (A. Vasiou, E. Vasilaki, S. Altan, A. Mavrogianni, G. Vleiōras, K. Mastrothanasis) [in Greek]
- Student motivation in the Greek school of Imbros through the theories of self-determination and ecological systems (E. Vasilaki, A. Vasiou, S. Altan, A. Gkontelos, A. Mavrogianni, G. Vlioras) [in Greek]
- Understanding school–family collaboration in the Greek school community of Imbros: Perspectives of parents, teachers, and students (A. Gkontelos, A. Vasiou, E. Vasilaki, A. Smaropoulou, A. Mavrogianni) [in Greek]

With the participation of members and researchers of our Department presenting papers in other invited symposia of the conference. Indicatively, the following presentations were delivered:

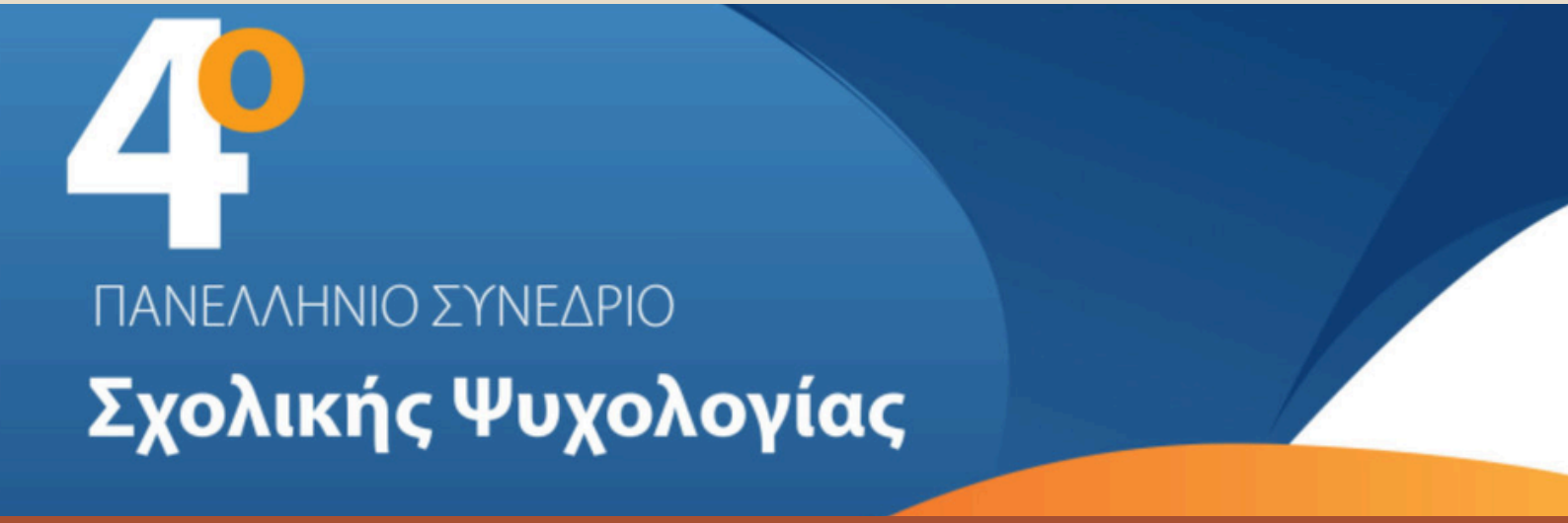
- Emotion regulation and teachers' anger profiles as predictive factors for classroom management practices (A. Vasiou, A. Mouratidis, A. A. Michou, Th. Touloupis, M. Psychountaki) within the invited symposium "School climate as a key factor of psychosocial adjustment and well-being: Multidimensional approaches and practical applications" (Chair: P. Lianos, Discussant: G. Dimitropoulou) [in Greek]
- How emotional intelligence enhances academic performance and student happiness: The mediating role of cognitive test anxiety and basic psychological needs satisfaction (A. Vasiou, E. Vasilaki, K. Mastrothanasis, A. Gkontelos, E. Galanaki) within the invited symposium "Academic well-being of the student population" (Chair: E. Galanaki, Discussant: A. Touloumaki) [in Greek]
- Test anxiety: A nationwide survey among the student population (E. Galanaki, A. Vasiou, E. Paraskevadiaki) within the invited symposium "Academic well-being of the student population" (Chair: E. Galanaki, Discussant: A. Touloumaki) [in Greek]

With the participation of a member of our Department presenting papers in other symposia of the conference. Indicatively, the following presentations were delivered:

- Developmental Language Disorder and Specific Learning Disabilities: Co-occurrence, differentiation, and prediction through psychometric tools. (F. Antoniou, A. Ralli, A. Mouzaki) [in Greek]
- FOCUS: An innovative battery of standardized digital tools for the assessment of executive attentional control and visuospatial working memory. (P. Simos, A. Mouzaki) [in Greek]

With the participation of members and researchers of our Department in various thematic sessions. Indicatively, the following presentations were delivered:

- The contribution of cognitive and linguistic skills to early spelling knowledge. (S. Yazitzidou, A. Mouzaki, H. Deacon) [in Greek]
- Investigating the relationship between metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and reading comprehension in primary school students within a computer-supported reading environment. (E. Gaki, I. Spantidakis, A. Mouzaki) [in Greek]
- The impact of arts and science on the happiness and positive development of young people: A pilot intervention in 5th and 6th grade primary school students (M. Assariotaki, E. Vasilaki, A. Vasiou) [in Greek]
- Emotional experiences and reactions of students to classroom management practices: Findings from observation and vignettes (M. Veloni, A. Vasiou) [in Greek]
- An intervention in social-emotional learning through a learning management system with artificial intelligence tools: A pilot study (Ch. Smaropoulou, A. Vasiou) [in Greek]
- Inspiring leadership: How teachers' autonomy and emotional intelligence enhance their work engagement (E. Kokkinidis, A. Vasiou, M. Veloni, G. Iordanidis) [in Greek]
- The dialogical journey of Philoctetes: From exclusion to inclusion (M. Tsikritsaki, A. Vasiou, A. Koutra, I. Kourkoutas) [in Greek]



The new issue of the journal ***Epistimes Agogis* (Education Sciences)**, published by the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete, has been released. It includes seven scientific articles with original research contributions in the field of Education Sciences, contributing to the ongoing development of academic dialogue and the dissemination of contemporary research findings within the educational community.

- **Professional Roles and Stereotypes in the Media and Their Impact on Children** (Koukoumaka E. A.) [in Greek]
- **What Does "Child" Mean? Parental Conceptions of Childhood** (Kiprianos P. & Spiliopoulou G.) [in Greek]
- **Challenges and Limitations in the Effective Use of ICT by Primary Education Teachers: A Case Study** (Lagioy A., Asimaki A, Koustourakis G. & Panagiotakopoulos X.) [in Greek]
- **From Trauma to Resilience: Intercultural Education and Refugees** (Maniatis P.) [in Greek]
- **Satirical news as a tool for critical literacy: A teaching intervention in the Modern Greek language course (Lower Secondary School)** (Rentziou G. & Georgalou M.) [in Greek]
- **The Inclusion of Students as 'Equal Partners' in Higher Education; Implications for Assessment** (Spanaki E. & Katsampoksaki -Hodgetts K.) [in Greek]
- **Differentiated Instruction in Primary Education** (Tatsi A. & Mihalopoulou A.) [in Greek]

20/03: As part of the workshop organized by the Municipality of Chania on the topic **"Artificial Intelligence and Empathy"**, Professor **Giannis Spantidakis** of our Department spoke about **the use of AI in education.**

"AI can be used as a cognitive tool to generate ideas, organize them, and record them in ways that serve one's own purposes. Today, AI is changing what we call writing. We used to write differently with a pen, differently with computers, and differently again today. Each technological artifact requires new skills. The goal is to use AI to express ourselves more effectively and to exercise critical thinking, rather than passively accepting something we do not truly understand."

In his speech, Mr. Spantidakis emphasized that the impact of new technologies depends on how they are used, highlighting the need for a more human-centered approach to intelligence in education.

ΤΟΠΙΚΑ 9

» Προοπτικές και ηθικά διλήμματα στο επίκεντρο ημερίδας στα Χανιά

ΠΡΟΚΛΗΣΕΙΣ ΜΙΑΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΕΠΟΧΗΣ

Τεχνητή νοημοσύνη και ενσυναίσθηση

Μπορεί να αναπτύξει ενσυναίσθηση η τεχνητή νοημοσύνη; Ποια είναι τα ηθικά διλήμματα από τη χρήση της σε κρίσιμους τομείς όπως η ιατρική και η εκπαίδευση; Είναι έτοιμη η κοινωνία σήμερα να αντιμετωπίσει αυτές τις προκλήσεις;

An evening dedicated to the memory of Dimitris Ploumbidis, Professor of Physics in the Departments of Physics and Primary Education and the first Vice-Rector for Finance of the UoC.

On January 31, 2025, at the Student Cultural Center "XENIA" of the University of Crete in Rethymno, an evening was held in memory of our Department's professor, Dimitris Ploumbidis, who passed away in November 2025.

The Director of the Department's Science Division, a position held for many years by the late professor, Professor **Marianna Kalaitzidaki**, presented the key milestones of his life.
"Dimitris Ploumbidis was born in Lagkadia, Arcadia, in 1936. He had a difficult childhood. Nevertheless, he managed to study Physics in Germany and became a professor at the renowned Free University of Berlin. In 1982, he was elected Associate Professor of Physics at the then newly established Department of Physics of the newly founded University of Crete. In 1989, he was elected Professor of Physics at the Department of Primary Education, where he remained until his retirement in 2004."
Mrs. Kalaitzidaki, who served as an adjunct lecturer, worked alongside the late professor for seven years. Their offices were located opposite each other. She shared her personal testimony regarding his dedication to teaching the fundamental concepts, principles, and ways of thinking in Physics to our students, who, coming mainly from a humanities background, often had limited knowledge and a sense of fear towards the natural sciences. Dimitris Ploumbidis had the gift of inspiring students to love Physics and Science and to understand the importance of teaching it meaningfully in primary education through simple laboratory setups and constructions using everyday materials.
Ms. Kalaitzidaki referred to him as a *"Teacher with a capital T"*.

She also noted that *"many of his former students went on to become faculty members, such as his doctoral student Giorgos Malandrakis, Associate Professor at the Department of Primary Education of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Ilias Karassavidis, Associate Professor at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Thessaly; Anna Traianou, Professor at the University of London; and Christos Christidis, Professor of Physics at the University of Patras. His postgraduate students Stergios Chatzakis and Eirini Bayati became school advisors in primary education".*

Subsequently, attendees shared memories of their personal relationship with the late professor. Professor of Physics **Nikos Flytzanis** referred to the years they worked together at the Department of Physics in Heraklion and the organizational innovations that Ploumbidis had introduced to the department. Emeritus Professor of the Department of Primary Education **Panagiotis Michaelides**, colleague and friend, highlighted the late professor's contribution to the development of a solid curriculum in the Natural Sciences at the Department of Primary Education, as well as his substantial role in the infrastructural development of the University of Crete in Rethymno and Heraklion during the years 1987–1990, as the first elected Vice-Rector for Financial Planning and Development during the rectorship of Dimitrios Markis. He also emphasized his gentle character, his deeply democratic ethos, and the universal human values that defined him.

The retired professor of the Department of Primary Education, **Dimitris Karagiorgos**, colleague and friend, spoke with emotion about the difficulties the late professor faced in his childhood, despite which he managed to study and become a university professor. He noted that these experiences were conveyed to him by a relative, as the late professor himself never referred to this period of his life. He described him as an honest and kind person, with intelligence, a distinctive sense of humor, and an excellent conversationalist.
Testimonies were also shared by Emeritus Professor of the Department of Primary Education, **Michalis Damanakis**, and Professor of the Department, **Antonis Chourdakis**.

Next, former students of the late professor took the floor. **Nektarios Tsagliotis**, Director of the 9th Primary School of Rethymno, stated that he was deeply influenced by Ploumbidis' teaching, through which he came to understand and love Physics, and he still keeps handwritten Physics notes by the late professor that he reads to this day. In collaboration with Dimitris Ploumbidis, he organized "Physics Festivals" at the primary school, during which the professor also provided hands-on support, helping students construct a model of the solar system, homemade solar ovens, and improvised photovoltaic cells together with primary school pupils. Speaking from a distance and with emotion, **Giorgos Malandrakis** also shared his testimony, referring both to the scientific influence that led him to complete his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of the late professor and to their personal relationship. **Nikos Giannakakis**, Director of a Primary School in Chania, was so strongly influenced by the late professor's teaching at the Department of Primary Education that he went on to study Physics at the Department of Physics in Heraklion through entrance examinations. He maintained a friendship and communication with him until his passing. Personal testimonies were also given by former students from the Department of Physics: Dr. **Giorgos Vlastos** referred to their extensive discussions on Physics, society, and their shared experience of studies in Germany. **Stefanos Frantzeskakis** noted that after his graduation, the late professor sought him out in Rethymno and visited him at his home, conducting simple physics experiments with his young twin sons. This simple and heartfelt evening was honored by the presence of, among others, the Deputy Mayor for Education of the Municipality of Rethymno and Physics professor at Hellenic Mediterranean University (ELMEPA), **Nektarios Papadogiannis**; the President of the Department of Primary Education, Professor **Dimitris Stavrou**, who succeeded Ploumbidis after his retirement; Professor **Pela Kalogiannaki** of the Department of Primary Education; former foreign language lecturers of the University of Crete **Anna Karagiorgou** and **Tassoula Damanaki**; the former Director of the University of Crete Library, **Michalis Tzekakis**; and **Ms. Neonaki**, former Secretary of the Rector's Council of the University of Crete, who remained a friend of the Ploumbidis family; Physicist **Kostis Chalkiadakis** (EKFE Rethymno); and Physicist **Dimitris Sgouros** (Experimental High School of the University of Crete and Physics Association of Crete).

It should be noted that the late professor's wife, **Renate Portz**, former Professor of German Linguistics at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, was unable to attend due to illness.We would like to thank **Dina Metaxa** (Department of Primary Education) for the design of the invitation, **Nikos Kapelonis**, EEDIP of the Department, for technical support, the newspaper **Rethymniotika Nea** for journalistic coverage, and the company **GEVSINOUS** for offering the coffee.

23/03: Film screening of "Like Stars on Earth"

The volunteer group ***Noiazomai kai Dro*** **("I Care and I Act")** organized a screening of the film **"Like Stars on Earth"** on March 23, 2026, at the "Xenia" student residence hall, with free admission. The initiative was part of the student community activities of the University of Crete and was open to all members of the university and the local community.

31/03: Scientific workshop "Sciences and Religion: Critical approaches in education," held at the House of Culture (Rethymno).

The public scientific workshop was successfully held, organized by the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete and the laboratories EDTHE and EMEGLO, within the framework of the undergraduate course "The relationship between religion and science: social, political and educational perspectives."
Greetings were addressed by the representative of the Metropolitan of Rethymno and Avlopotamos, the Very Reverend Father **Vasileios Papadakis**; the Vice-Rector for Culture, Mr. **Emmanouil Tsakonas**; and the President of the Department of Primary Education, Professor **Dimitrios Stavrou**.
This was followed by the opening lecture by Ms. **Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou**, Lecturer in Social and Political Theology at the Department of Primary Education, entitled "Theological and Scientific Discourse in Greek Education: Institutional Boundaries and Symbolic Contestations."
The keynote speakers of the workshop were Mr. **Vasileios N. Makrides**, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Erfurt, with a presentation entitled "Orthodoxy and the natural sciences in modern Greece: Periodizing their historical interrelations," and Mr. **Kostas Tampakis**, Principal Researcher at the National Hellenic Research Foundation, with a presentation entitled "From monkeys to stars: Orthodoxy, natural sciences and ideology in the Greek state."
The event was honored by the presence of the Deputy Mayor for Greenery and Stray Animal Management, Mr. **Giorgos Papadosifos**, and the Vice-President of the Department of Primary Education Professor **Eleni Vasilaki**; the Director of EMEGLO, Associate Professor **Paraskevi Thomou**; faculty members of the Department of Primary Education and other departments of the University of Crete; students; members of the academic community; educators; and citizens of the city of Rethymno.

The presentations aimed to highlight the evolving relationships between science and Orthodoxy in modern Greece, to examine the institutional boundaries and ideological uses of scientific knowledge, and to contribute to a critical reflection on the teaching of Natural Sciences and Religion in contemporary education. Following the presentations, a lively and fruitful discussion took place. The audience's response and the quality of the dialogue confirmed the importance of such initiatives for strengthening scientific and pedagogical reflection, as well as for the meaningful connection between the University and the local community.

Student News:

The Department of Primary Education is organizing its **first English-taught course within the COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) framework**, titled **"B01 11: Mind Full or Mindful? Mindfulness in Education."** It is implemented by Professor Eleni Vasilaki and Assistant Professor Aikaterini Vasiou, in collaboration with Prof. David Manier, Department of Psychology, CUNY University, USA, and Prof. Ashok H.S. University Chanakya, India, creating a dynamic intercultural environment of co-teaching and collaborative learning.
The course focuses on theoretical and applied approaches to mindfulness in education, emphasizing the creation of a supportive learning climate and the enhancement of empathy and school well-being. Upon completion, students receive a certificate of participation, and the course is open to students from all Departments of the University of Crete.

Life Before and After Graduation–Alumni Stories:

"From Crete to California: Christoforos gives voice to students' sense of belonging!"

Christoforos Mamas is 44 years old and studied at the Department of Primary Education (PTDE) from 2000 to 2004. He is currently based in the United States, where he works as a professor and researcher at the University of California, San Diego.

Before Graduation

Why did you choose to study at our Department?

"I chose to study at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete because it is a department with ***a strong scientific foundation and a clear pedagogical orientation****, which is not limited only to the transmission of knowledge but fosters critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the role of the educator in society. The curriculum places particular emphasis both on theoretical grounding and on the connection between theory and practice, through practicum experiences and collaborations with schools, offering substantial preparation for educational work.*

At the same time, the Department of Primary Education at the University of Crete stands out for the high level of its faculty and their research activity, as well as for its open and democratic academic environment that encourages dialogue, reflection, and pedagogical innovation.

Finally, Rethymno is a beautiful city with a rich history, a distinctive cultural identity, and a vibrant student life, all of which contribute decisively to a comprehensive and meaningful university experience."

How were your studies?

"The studies at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete were particularly meaningful and multidimensional for me. The courses offered a strong balance between theory and practice, covering pedagogical and didactic subjects as well as topics in psychology, sociology, and educational research, *which helped me gain a comprehensive understanding of education and the role of the teacher.*

The faculty at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete were generally well-qualified, approachable, and open to dialogue, encouraging participation, reflection, and critical thinking in the classroom. The teaching practicum was especially important, as it gave me the opportunity to engage directly with school reality, apply what I had learned, and understand both the challenges and possibilities of educational work.

At the same time, my studies were enriched by many other experiences, such as group projects, participation in seminars and activities, as well as the vibrant student life in Rethymno, all of which contributed not only to my academic but also to my personal development.

I have many strong memories from those years, but what stands out most are the moments when learning was not confined to the classroom, but took place through the relationships and experiences we shared as students. ***I vividly remember the discussions after classes, the group assignments that lasted for hours but led to meaningful dialogue, as well as my first practicum experiences, where theory came to life in the real classroom.*** *Particularly powerful were also the moments of collectivity, whether in student activities or in everyday life in Rethymno, which strengthened the sense of belonging and created friendships that last to this day."*

Where are you today?

"Today I am in the United States, where I work as a professor and researcher at the University of California, San Diego. My work focuses on education, inclusion, and students' social relationships within schools, with a particular interest in how students experience belonging, friendship, and participation in the school community.

At the same time, I take part in research projects and collaborations with schools and educators at an international level, while teaching and mentoring students remains one of the most meaningful parts of my daily work."

My studies at the Department of Primary Education played a decisive role in what I do today. *They laid the first and most solid foundations for how I understand education-not only as a teaching practice but as a deeply social and pedagogical process. Through courses, discussions with faculty members, and practicum experiences, I began to understand the importance of relationships, belonging, and children's participation in school life-elements that are now at the core of my academic and research work. At the same time, the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete cultivated my critical thinking, reflection, and research orientation, helping me to interpret educational reality in a more complex and critical way. These foundations accompanied me throughout my postgraduate and doctoral studies and continue to directly influence how I teach, conduct research, and collaborate today as a university professor at the University of California, San Diego".*

What are your next goals?

"In terms of my research, ***I aim to continue and deepen my work on relational inclusion, students' social relationships, and the role of the teacher in creating school communities that promote belonging, justice, and democratic participation.***

A key goal is to further connect research with educational practice through collaborations with schools and educators in different social and cultural contexts. At the same time, ***I want to continue contributing actively to teaching and student mentoring, supporting young researchers in developing critical thinking and socially responsive approaches to education.***

In the longer term, my goal is to strengthen international collaborations and contribute to the development of educational policies and practices grounded in research, placing relationships and belonging at the center of school life, through my work at the University of California, San Diego and beyond."

What advice would you give to a student or graduate?

"Approach your studies and your later professional path not only as a set of obligations or career steps, but ***as a process of personal and social formation.*** *Make the most of the experiences that university life offers, both inside and outside the classroom.*

Especially for those interested in education, I would say: ***prioritize relationships-****with your peers, your instructors, and above all with the children you will meet in schools.* ***These relationships are what give meaning to knowledge and largely shape the identity and trajectory of an educator.***

Finally, remember that ***the journey is not linear****; be patient, persistent, and trust yourself, using the foundations you gained at the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete as a basis to build your own unique path."*