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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Citizenship education as identity formation in Greek primary schools

Maria Nikolakaki

University of Thessaly (Greece)

Introduction

Citizenship education, as a lesson and as a value in the school programme, has been gaining increasing attention over recent years. Radical changes occurring in the economic, political, cultural and social arenas have influenced the traditional vision of what citizenship is and the way in which citizens are being constructed.

Educating ‘good’ citizens is not a new issue; it was a concern of Plato, while Dewey made democratic citizenship a major theme. Across the ages it has been a role of the education system to promote the construction of the desired citizen through programmes that have varied over time and between and within socio-political systems and institutions (Cogan *et al.*, 1997; Davies, 1994). But it should be noted that citizenship has been conceptualised historically in different ways, too. As Heater (1990) claims, it has evolved from the personal development of the citizen in the *polis* into subordination to the claims of the nation state, frequently in terms of voting for representatives and obeying the laws. Today the concept entails also the potential for including the notion of the global citizen.

Theoretical background

This paper focuses on the way in which Greek primary school education is preparing the Greek citizen for the 21st century, and aims to

- explore the concept of citizenship that is being constructed by the Greek primary school, and
- investigate the intentions at central levels of educational policy, and the efficiency with which Greek primary school pupils are constructed as citizens to develop their participation in Greek society, in Europe, and in the world.

My theoretical source is the postmodern theory of curriculum and instruction, including the work of Bernstein and Foucault. I consider citizenship education as subjectification and identity formation, and postmodern theory supports these ideas. Of most significance is the focus on curriculum and its three message systems: content, pedagogy and evaluation. According to Bernstein (1975:85):

Formal educational knowledge can be considered to be realised through three message systems: curriculum (content), pedagogy and evaluation. Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realisation of this knowledge as part of the taught.

In his more recent writing Bernstein seems to be engaging more in a poststructural project. Bernstein (1990) writes

What we are asking here is how the distribution of power and the principles of control are transformed, at the level of the subject, into different, invidiously

related, organising principles, in such a way as both to position subjects and to create the possibility of change in such positioning (pp. 13-14).

The overall problem with which he is concerned is consistent with attempts to explore the relationships between social institutions, language, and consciousness-subjectivity to better understand how power is exercised, maintained, and at times undermined. His particular emphasis on discourse, specifically pedagogic discourse, echoes poststructuralist theorising that focuses on individuals' identity formation and power relations (Christie, 1999).

Of most significance to the exploration of the contribution of power structures to identity formation is the examination of Bernstein's formulation of instructional discourse (ID) and regulative discourse (RD). Particular competencies (ID) - such as supporting arguments with reasons and explanations or considering alternative viewpoints - can be examined in their own right, but Bernstein encourages exploration of the nature of the identities and social order (RD) that are constituted through pedagogy as well. Thus, this work recasts pedagogy as a relation of power, rather than only as a problem of technical competence and appropriate skills. As Atkinson (1985) argued, for Bernstein 'The point is, rather, that the circulation of texts and the production of pedagogic discourse - indeed any discourse - is the play of power' (p.177). This echoes Foucault's (1979a, 1980) concern for understanding the mechanisms of the normalising, disciplinary society. For both, the exercise of power is embedded in any articulation of discourse. Discourse positions the subject and pedagogic discourse produces particular subjectivities.

Bernstein provides us with frameworks with which to investigate the ways in which curriculum and pedagogy links power, knowledge, and consciousness, and how pedagogic practices relate to the structuring of the social order. In a complementary fashion, Foucault provides us with ways to uncover the processes and rules by which discourse emerges and disciplines individuals. While differing in their treatment of social structure (*cf.* Atkinson, 1985), Bernstein and Foucault share parallel concerns for the construction of discourse, the distribution of power, social control and change. Some of Foucault's work suggests the importance of examining the individual's relationship to the social order, which might be taken to be a central concern of citizenship education.

From this view, the various institutional attempts to re-locate curriculum content play a major role in shaping identities. It is important to analyse citizenship education as the basic subject that contributes to citizen-making so as to comprehend the underlying forces and assumptions that can have a significant influence on identity formation.

Distributive rules in citizenship education: textbook production in Greek primary schools

Citizenship education in Greek primary schools has taken the form of Social and Political Education (SPE), a subject taught in the 5th and 6th grade that can be considered an extension and a follow-up for older children to the subject 'Us and the world'¹. SPE as

¹ "Us and the world" is an introduction to the human and social studies, environmental studies, as well as science studies, which starts to be taught at grade A and goes up to grade D of primary school. The spiral content arrangement is adopted according to the model of Bruner's theory, with horizontal development in the same class and it examines the natural and man-made environment regardless of the close local definitions.

citizenship education, whose teaching and status in the upper two grades of primary school are being explored, has been commonly considered as a 'second rate' subject (Noutsos, 1979).

Textbook production in Greece is defined by a special law that describes what a school book is, how it is produced, who approves of it, the procedure with which it is published and distributed to students. Although the law (1566/85) allows textbook authoring to be by competition or by selection, the latter has prevailed. In practice, the writing and usually also the production of the teaching material for a particular subject in a particular grade, is entrusted by the Minister of Education's decision to writers who are usually educational co-operators of the Pedagogical Institute. The Minister's decision includes detailed instructions for the topics to be included, the techniques and the educational directions, and the content of the corresponding teacher's handbook. When the writing and the illustration of the books is completed and approved by a committee of the Pedagogical Institute, the textbook and the teacher's handbooks are printed by the School Books Publishing Organisation and are distributed to the schools at no cost.

The textbook plays a vital role in the rhetoric for the teaching of Social and Political education in Greece. In all texts relevant to the curriculum the importance of the teaching procedure is emphasised, as is the need to avoid a book-centred teaching approach (Vougioukas, 1985). According to the curriculum makers, to achieve successfully inquiring work and a problem-centred approach in teaching, the schoolwork should not revolve exclusively around the book. The most important role of the textbook is 'the consolidation of the bilateral dialectical relation' between the teacher and his/her student as it introduces 'conditions of both-sides communication' between them. It is, therefore, concluded that the books 'are almost useless in the hands of experienced teachers and the most intelligent students, and when one of the factors: teacher – student – book – environment is missing. They work only in the dialectic circuit which is defined by them'. I contend that this is wishful thinking, because what they are afraid of is that what is happening in real life circumstances.

As Bernstein (2000) says, the content and the form of the curriculum carry ideological messages. The Curriculum of Citizenship Education in Greek primary schools includes for each subject and grade the content to be taught, which is explicitly described, and formulated objectives. The curriculum content given in the textbooks, is clearly that of Social and Political Education. That means that the knowledge therein concerns only social and political affairs such as the importance of groups, of international organisation etc. A content analysis of the textbook reveals that for the most part nationalistic messages prevail: supranational dimensions are present, although very scarce. The European Union is not presented adequately; in fact there are only four pages that concern it. In addition Citizenship Education textbooks neglect to present and elaborate sufficiently on Third World countries, the differences between North and South, centre and periphery, the 'haves' and the 'have nots', as well as other global human problems.

This lack of exposure to the diverse problems of humanity may result in the presentation of an unreal and distorted view of the world and may lead Greek students to believe that the whole world is equitable and homogenous. The analysis of global themes and the way Europeans and 'others' are depicted in Greek school textbooks indicates that the Greek educational system has not adapted itself sufficiently to the new realities of the international scene. The nationalistic elements that are maintained in the books seem to

cultivate a moderate form of ethnocentrism since the greatest value is placed on Greek culture while other cultures are ignored. Furthermore, the ancient Hellenic tradition seems to predominate (Flouris, 1997).

Framing, according to Bernstein (2000), is about who controls what. The framing of the curriculum for SPE in Greek Primary schools is strong, since the state controls both the instructional discourse and the regulative discourse. In general where framing is strong there is a visible pedagogic practice. Here both the instructional discourse and the regulative discourse are explicit. It can be claimed that the strong framing that determines textbooks production in Greece restricts the possibility of their improvement, 'modernisation' and their 'being up date', but also restricted is the possibility of considering the educators and the 'pedagogical subjects' more important than the textbooks (Pasoula, 2001).

The textbooks currently in use in Greece were the product of the reform of 1982-1986, when there was a clear move away from retrospective identity (before and after the dictatorship) to the therapeutic, projected by the professionals of the Pedagogical Institute (Moutsios, 1997:147). Bernstein (1996) suggests that 'in a therapeutic identity the autonomy of the institution is necessary to produce features of the identity'. But in the case of Greece the traditional mode of curriculum control was not influenced.

The instructional discourse embedded in the regulative discourse: the pedagogy in the teacher's book

I now examine how the content of the teacher's book is formulated in the subject of Social and Political Education, attempting to decode the pedagogy inscribed in the books, since the possibility of not following these texts is, in the highly centralised educational system of Greece, restricted.

At the beginning of the teacher's book is an introduction which emphasises the 'new teaching approach' of the lesson: following this the objectives of the subject are given, with an explanation of the book's layout and the way it must be used. The un-wisdom of learning by rote is particularly emphasised: 'Any kind of memorising is strictly prohibited'.

Theories of instruction (pedagogic knowledge) legitimise the processes of recontextualisation and the production of the relevant school knowledge (Lamnias, 2002), but they also legitimise knowledge or reject the arguments within the educational field that contribute to the production of alternative forms of communication. So it is important to see the pedagogy as the 'means' through which educational knowledge is supposed to be transmitted, and to decode the underlying assumptions and values.

The teaching methodology advocated inscribes an 'invisible pedagogy' which adopts the child-centred liberal theories of instruction and emphasises acquisition and competence (Lamnias, 2002). It is supposed to focus on procedures internal to the acquirer (cognitive, linguistic, affective, motivational) as a consequence of which the text was created and experienced (Bernstein, 1977). But it is obvious that the teacher's book has a strict instructive character that restricts the educators' initiatives and formalises teaching. Although these textbooks advocate the use of a child-centric approach, and despite the fact that to an extent they facilitate teaching, especially for inexperienced and new teachers since they offer ready solutions, they make teaching homogeneous and

flattening, underestimating the ability and also the obligation of the teacher to teach by adjusting the subject to the particular needs of the students. The books fail to urge the initiatives which would make the teaching more creative: the teacher is regarded as a bureaucratic facilitator rather than as a professional (Starida, 1994). The textbooks have not changed since 1985: after twenty years of teaching from the same books, one can imagine how flattening teaching the subject can be.

Evaluation of SPE follows the rules of evaluation of the Greek Primary School. Monitoring standards in the Greek Educational system are identified with regulating input in the form of standard curricula and textbooks (OECD, 1997); thus standardisation concerns the prescription of teaching contents. No testing that may lead to comparison of performance between schools and regions occurs. Assessment is mainly oral and informal and is left to the discretion of teachers. Teachers are given a great deal of freedom to form their own judgements, as the criteria for assessment prescribed by the state have been found to be, if not vague, lacking in strict definition.

The characteristics of SPE, as prescribed by the curriculum and the teacher's handbook, render it relevant to the construction of the Greek citizen. But what kind of citizen? In the Greek school the illusion of a similar and homogeneous community, uninfluenced by others, dominates. In books about Citizenship Education the entire absence of reference to the different minority groups which live in Greece is notable. The relevance that SPE can have to such a construction cannot alone make the subject beneficial for students' development as citizens. In the absence of adequate interest from all the parties involved (children, teachers and parents), and the absence also of appropriate pedagogical approaches and active participation, the subject's potential contribution is reduced. This approach cannot lead to the development of Freire's 'critical soul'.

Conclusions

My conclusions are that:

- The four basic structural elements of the teaching of Citizenship Education (objectives, learning contents, organisation of teaching and evaluation of school progress) are distributed in the curriculum, in the teachers' handbook and in the school textbook, all of which are regarded by the curriculum makers as mutually dependent. A possible classification based not on the characteristics of the subject but on its rhetoric advocates the use of spiral, student-centred and problem-centred teaching, but in the classrooms a book-centred pedagogy is implemented.
- The framing of the curriculum for SPE in Greek Primary schools is strong, since the state controls both the instructional discourse and the regulative discourse.
- The classification, according to Bernstein's terminology, is strong: what is pursued is the whole, balanced development of students, and more specifically their education into the moral, religious, socio-economic and political values of Greek culture. This excludes European and global aspects and results in SPE teaching an ethnocentric model, as though Greece was isolated from the rest of the world.
- When the current textbooks were written, there were many less immigrants in Greece, but that situation has changed dramatically and the book is out-of-date. A new curriculum was clearly necessary, but its creation, begun in 1997, has not resulted in new textbooks and handbooks.

- The new development is based on knowledge. This reduces the potential ability of SPE to be a transformative subject and to contribute to the formation of the democratic citizen.

Although the intentions of SPE were to move towards a democratic pedagogy, teachers have limited initiatives, restricted by the centralising character of the educational system in both pedagogical methods and assessment, the strict prescription of the teaching contents in the curriculum, and the almost suffocating ‘instruction’ of the handbooks. The educators as a social group are neither blind to their medium nor fighters, against the disparities reproduced by the scholastic mechanism (Noutsos, 1996): they do contribute to the production of formal scholastic knowledge with the pedagogical perceptions that they apply in the class and the information they give during teaching. Their actions are defined by their training and their perception of the education profession (Tzani, 1995). This increases teachers’ responsibility and her/his self-awareness when teaching the subject.

In this paper, I have considered citizenship as identity formation, but one could think of it as a shifting balance between what is remembered and what is currently demanded. Identity is thus always shifting; it is never fixed (Preston, 1997). The notion of citizenship is thus flexible, being influenced by society’s expectations and values, and education has a vital role to play in maintaining social cohesion by upgrading and modernising children’s view of society’s images. That is a major challenge for us - the teachers and the teachers of teachers - to achieve.

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