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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 curriculum, teaching methods, attitudes and newcomers: a need for change?

G. Nikolaou, Universities of Ioannina (Greece)

J.A. Spithourakis, University of Patras (Greece)

The changing geopolitical realities of Europe today from both the perspective of the 'old' as well as the 'new' Europe represent challenges to education generally and to citizenship education specifically. These challenges are faced by educational systems intent on moving away from a rigid ethnocentric to a more flexible multicultural perspective; one which attempts to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Both the ethnic profile and the educational profile of newcomers varies for recent immigrants throughout Europe. Differences exist that are country specific and often linked to government policy as well as the status of the newcomers. What are rapidly changing are locality and school demographics. It may be argued that, in light of these changes and the need to integrate and initiate all students into their society, a significant issue confronting education today is the teaching of citizenship education.

Recognizing the existence of diversity within changing societies is critical in developing appropriate strategies to help native born students accept newcomers as well as immigrant children to integrate into their new school and social environment. How we go about achieving this is the conundrum as we need to look at various facets of the issue.

An encounter with someone who is 'different' does not always led to mutual understanding. The same is true in teaching. In some situations the potential for understanding and developing inclusive practices exists and in others for ostracizing and excluding. Educational policy as well as the school as catalysts and agents of socialization, respectively, can determine which way the pendulum may swing. Commensurately, teachers who are often the direct interpreters of as well as filters for policy implementation are also critical to effective teaching for citizenship education as a means of integration. In an ever increasingly multicultural world there is an implicit need for inclusion and understanding rather than for exclusion.

Citizenship education can provide a forum for commonality that prepares students for their lives as citizens (Callahan and Banaszak, 1990). When considering the recommendations of the European Commission's 'Child Immigration Project' (CIP) Report (Collicelli *et al*, 2001), we see references to ten actions that may be taken at the national level that may be linked to citizenship education and can help promote the integration of the immigrant child as well as to help the native population be more receptive to their new classmates. Of the ten noted, we will focus on the first two:

- Revision of school textbooks and curricula to introduce elements that are intercultural (inclusive of cultures) and reflect multicultural society.
- Creation of training and refresher schemes for teachers

In light of these recommendations and with respect to the Greek context we refer the reader to recent policies developed and implemented to assist in the betterment of education of native born and immigrant students. One such policy focuses on curriculum design and syllabus development. Curriculum in the hands of well informed teachers can promote the skills and attitudes for effective citizenship (Spinthourakis, Karatzia-Stavlioti and Lambropoulos, 2004). In 2003 the Greek Ministry of Education published *The Diathematiko Programma* (DP) (Cross Thematic Curriculum/cross curricular). This is intended to be the basis for the construction of textbooks and supportive – supplementary educational material as well as for the application of the teaching and learning methodologies. In the DP a proposal for the application of an alternative cross-thematic approach is also included. Here no single subject is taught, and teaching is based on the thematic approach in the so called *Evelkti Zoni* or Flexible Zone, which consists of the minimum of two teaching hours per week and is used for carrying out projects and activities ‘chosen by the individual classes, not clearly ‘belonging’ to a specific subject and suitable to sensitize educational community and promote ‘diathematikotita and holistic approach to learning’ (Hellenic Pedagogical Institute, 2001; Nikolaou, 2001). Thus we see an effort on the part of the central educational authority without making a direct reference to the CIP, indirectly meeting both of the aforementioned recommendations (Alachiotis, 2003). It further comes to challenge the image of others and in particular Europeans in the existing essentially ethnocentric school textbooks (Ivrideli, Papadakis and Frankoulis, 2003; Flouris and Ivrideli, 2002; Schleicher, 1992).

The issue that arises, though, is to what degree are Greek teachers’ attitudes towards both the new curriculum as well as the newcomers aligned as to help the students meet the challenge of citizenship in their new home? Furthermore to what extent are teachers inclined to accept their newcomers as having the same rights as the native born students.

This paper will focus on Greece, an ‘old’ European country which in the last decade has demographically changed to become an ‘old’ Europe with a growing ‘new’ European population. In Greece, this is particularly evident given an almost 350% increase in immigrant student representation in primary education in the last decade (Nikolaou 2000; Spinthourakis and Katsillis 2003). In particular we will present findings from a study that looks at the degree to which the educational system has dealt with the issue of the ‘new’ populations through the prism of citizenship education. References to reforms to the curriculum will be described. Elementary school teachers will be surveyed on the degree to which they perceive that have were prepared to and have modified their teaching to deal with the new realities.

Methodology

The study was conducted in 2004. The questionnaire was developed by the authors and was distributed to two groups of teachers attending the University of Ioannina (UI) and the University of Patras’ (UP) two-year *didaskaleia* (continuing-education teacher training institutes). These teacher training institutes are voluntary, entrance is based on national exam results and acceptance guarantees two years of paid educational leave for

the teachers selected (Papoulia, Spinthourakis, and Kamarinou, 2001). A brief description of the study descriptors is as follows:

- Study sample: 104 elementary school teachers attending two-year continuing teacher training institutes (35 from the University of Ioannina and 69 from the University of Patras)
- Study conducted Spring 2004
- Questionnaire consisted of 19 closed and 2 open-ended questions
- Likert scale 1-5 (completely disagree-completely agree) and rankings were used
- Analysis was conducted using SPSS 11

The issues that this study sought to look at were:

- What are Greek elementary school teachers' impressions of their level of readiness to teach citizenship education?
- How do they perceive the 'new Europeans' in relation to the 'old European' students in terms of citizenship education?
- What are their teaching strategies and expressed qualities in relation to citizenship education?

Findings and discussion

Selected findings from the study are provided here. Fifty-four percent of the respondents were female and 47% male. This follows the general gender breakout of teachers as a whole in the field of elementary education in Greece. Additionally, 56% taught in urban area schools, 23% in semi-rural areas and 21% in rural areas. Greece as with many European countries has an increasingly urban centred population base. In terms of the respondents' education and training, 47% were graduates of the old 2 year *Pedagogical Academies* (the fundamental teacher training forum for elementary school teachers which were eclipsed in 1987 to be subsumed by four year university departments of elementary or primary education). Beyond this initial teacher training, the majority of the respondents have continued with either vertical and/or horizontal four year tertiary education (extern programs to complete the remaining two years to acquire a BA, a second BA, MA, and/or a PhD). However, in terms of citizenship education courses and/or seminars and training, the picture is quite dismal. Less than 18% have taken any courses and <7% have attended seminars on the subject. Furthermore, their general experience with innovative programs in intercultural issues is also quite low (<2%). The only innovative program that participation is evident is with environmental education. Thus, it would appear that while the majority of the teachers in the study have availed themselves of educational opportunities to continue beyond their basic teacher training, they have on the other hand a limited background with respect to training in the area of citizenship education as well as with that of intercultural education. This is interesting given the fact that citizenship education is a long standing elementary school subject prescribed within the national curriculum and taught in the upper elementary school grades (Nikolakaki, 2003; Spinthourakis, Karatzia-Stavlioti and Lambropoulos 2004).

As to what they perceive their level of readiness to be in response to teaching citizenship education, the teachers present a fairly consistent picture of a group that appears to feel ill prepared to handle the challenge. In Figure 1 we note that in response to questions linked to citizenship education, the teachers while agreeing that it is something that the school should promote and that there are innovative programs that can prove effective implementation arenas (i.e., cross curricular teaching, *Eveleki Zoni-flexible zone*), the majority feel that their preparation to tackle the subject is inadequate.

Table 1

Question	SD	D	A	SA	AA
My training to teach citizenship education is satisfactory.	6	54	29	10	5
Immigrant students should acquire citizenship awareness in school.		2	21	31	50
Citizenship education should be differentiated on the basis of country of origin.	39	28	15	7	10
The citizenship education course (Social and Civic Education - 5th gr. and 6th gr.) provides immigrant students an organized learning environment in which to develop citizenship awareness.	19	50	15	10	11
The Greek Elementary School Curriculum provides earlier opportunities for foreign born students to develop citizenship awareness.	28	55	13	7	1
The eveleki zoni helps in the acquisition of foreign students' citizenship awareness.	3	27	30	26	13
The use of a cross curricular teaching approach helps in the acquisition of foreign students' citizenship awareness.	1	19	38	28	17
Foreign students attending Greek schools are likely to acquire Greek citizenship in the future.	4	22	27	20	23
The course requirements for Social and Civic Education (citizenship ed) should be differentiated between those for foreign students and those for immigrant students.	53	22	12	7	9

This we would argue appears to support the premise that the teachers in the study have a realistic awareness of their perceived preparedness to deal with the challenges as well as an awareness of educational programs and approaches that could be employed to enhance the involvement of the immigrant or foreign born students generically. We will return to this latter point later in the paper. It also points to some interesting perceptions on the issue of what the citizenship education curriculum provides immigrant students. While not directly referring to immigrant students, the curriculum does speak to issues of citizenship, multiculturalism, linking agents, and the need for its promotion (Spinthourakis, Karatzia-Stavlioti and Lambropoulos, 2004).

With respect to the teachers' perception of the 'new European' versus the 'old European' students in relation to citizenship education, we again refer to Table 1. The responses are categorized on the basis of a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree-SD' (1) to a strongly agree-SA' (5). In particular we see in response to questions 2, 3 and 9, that the teachers overwhelming agree that the school should

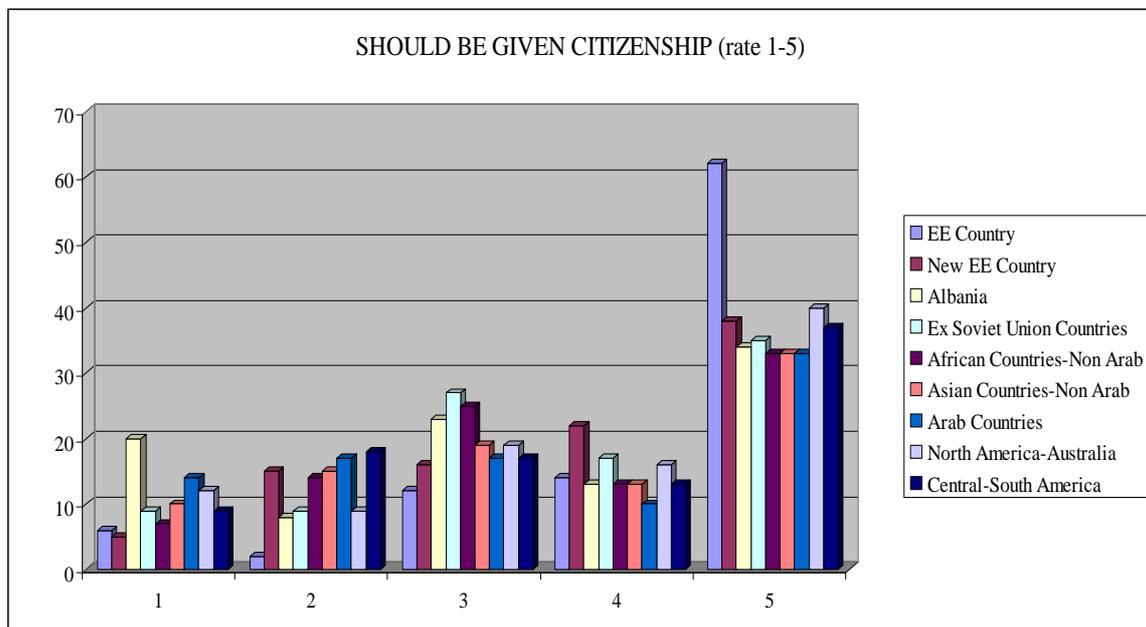
provide citizenship awareness to the ‘new Europeans’, strongly agree that the citizenship education should not be differentiated on the basis of the students country of origin nor on whether or not they are foreign born. Consequently, we note that the teachers appear to have a balanced perspective on the treatment of new and old Europeans—they should be treated in the same manner. However, when asked who they believed should get citizenship and were given specific countries and regions of origin (EU, new EU, Albania, former USSR, Africa, Asia, Arab, N. America, Central/South America), their responses were less balanced. The ratings ranged from 1 (the most negative) to 5 (the most positive). While no group was exempted from negative ratings, the respondents gave higher negative ratings to three very visible immigrant groups evident in Greek society, Albanians, Asians and Arabs and somewhat lower negative ratings to Africans and immigrants from the former USSR. The Albanians had the highest (20). This takes on added importance when we consider that over 80% of the foreign born students in Greek elementary schools are from Albania (Nikolaou, 2000) and the group with which 94 of the 104 respondents had worked with in the past. Interestingly though for the other two groups noted actual teaching experience was very small (3 for Asian and 10 for Arabs). These two groupings also represent a very small percentage of the overall foreign born student population generally speaking. Adult Asian and Arab immigrants though are a more visible element in the non formal economic sector (i.e. street vendors). As noted earlier, the issue of how the respondents see the new versus old Europeans when asked generically appears to be balanced, however, when regions and countries of origin are added to the equation, the tableau changes. This may be due to the increasing perception on the part of Greek teachers that over the last decade they continue to voice the fact that they are inadequately prepared to deal with the daily challenges of teaching increasingly multicultural classes (Spinthourakis and Katsillis, 2003).

Finally, the third focus of our study dealt with what they thought was of importance for the acquisition of citizenship in terms of strategies and qualities. The respondents were given a closed as well as an open ended question. In the first they were asked to rate the importance of seven topics in relation to the acquisition of citizenship consciousness.

Selected teaching strategies and qualities for citizenship education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative teaching • Project approach • Delegation of responsibility • Democratic functioning of class • Role-playing – drama education • Community service • Relations with NGOs • Interdisciplinary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice and impartiality • Democratic behaviour • Self-determination • Responsibility • Sensitivity to environmental issues • Authenticity • Innovative spirit • Honest intentions

They prioritised the topics as follows (highest to lowest): respect for human rights, cooperability, responsibility, community participation, knowledge of history and culture, knowledge of a foreign language and use of new technologies. In the second they were asked to identify teaching strategies and qualities they thought important to citizenship education. The strategies they gave are listed in the first column and the

qualities in the second of the figure above. When we consider their responses to both the closed and open ended questions we note that when given a free hand, neither foreign language nor technology appear to be among their collective listings. This may be a consequence of the fact that both of these are concrete skills not within the teaching domain of the teachers surveyed. English while a required subject in the national Greek primary school curriculum from the third grade (students aged 8 years old) onwards is not taught by elementary school teachers but by English as a Foreign Language specialists and new technologies (i.e., computers) have only recently been introduced into the elementary school and are still considered a peripheral to daily teaching. In either case, it appears that the teachers are aware of the teaching strategies that may be used to enhance citizenship consciousness and have a good general awareness of the qualities which will lead to active and responsible citizenship.



Conclusions

When we look back to the questions posed by this study, the responses garnered from the questionnaire and the existing teaching and educational realities in Greece today, it appears that Greek teachers present a mixed picture. On the one hand they appear to make no distinction between generalized old and new Europe students while on the other hand do to some degree differentiate their position when asked to relate this to specific groups of students. Thus we would argue that there is a differentiation between the stance and attitude towards at least one immigrant group that might be designated 'new Europeans'. In conjunction with the first of the recommendations of the European Commission report, 'Child Immigration Project', we see that the ongoing change of the curriculum in Greece is one that teachers appear to agree potentially supports the cultivation of the skills, attitudes and values for democratic citizenship in contemporary Greek society which is part of the European Union. However, as with past research here too we see that Greek teachers feel the need for more concentrated and focused training to meet the needs of the incoming immigrant children. This supports the premise of the

second CIP recommendation which calls for the creation of training and refresher schemes for teachers. Furthermore, from this study we note that there appears to be a limited in scope but somewhat negative inclination towards immigrant children of Albanian decent in contrast to those of other nationalities.

We conclude that change is needed. One proposal that derives from our findings is that teachers need more focused and direct training on dealing with new immigrant groups on a practical basis wherein multiculturalism and citizenship education can find a common ground.

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