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Citizenship Education in Greece: Current situation and new dilemmas

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Abstract

In this article we analyse the current Greek curriculum of citizenship education, in use both in primary and secondary level, in relationship with the new dilemmas and demands in European and Greek society and education policy (active citizenship, participation, human rights and democratic values, European/national and global identity, multiculturalism, pluralism and social inequalities). Through the analysis of both the curriculum and the textbooks of the specific subject of citizenship education (Social and Political Education, Politics and Law) we will point out the values, knowledge, concepts and aims in the Greek case. The content analysis of this educational material will guide us in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of citizenship education in the specific environment as well as the generalisation in the European and international level.

Keywords: *citizenship education, social and civic education, multiculturalism, Greek school textbooks*

Introduction

The lesson of Social and Civic Education is closely linked to the concept of 'citizenship', which is considered one of the most controversial concepts of western political philosophy, as it has been associated with concepts such as 'democracy', 'rights' and 'values', and highlights the value of civic knowledge and virtue, as well as the value and importance of social and civic engagement. In particular, the aim of this lesson is to provide pupils with not only social and civic knowledge, but also the rules and values of social and civic life, as well as opportunities to test their knowledge and skills in the school framework. Civic and social education now includes three streams: 1. an *education about citizenship*, which is an effort to understand history, politics, government/governance, administration and political processes; 2. an *education through citizenship*, which covers an empirical knowledge generally defined as the constitutive element of learning through practice and application; 3. an *education for citizenship*, which aims to develop knowledge and understanding tools, and to cultivate skills, values and attitudes that give pupils the opportunity to participate actively, sensitively and responsibly.

The role of civic education has proven to be particularly important in developing ways of thinking, judging and acting, and in acquiring and establishing a civic conscience which will allow us to maintain social cohesion on the basis of knowledge, respect, acceptance of others and tolerance of cultural and social differences.

Citizen education and contemporary problems

The remarkable developments in almost all fields in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which have also had a significant impact on pedagogical thinking and school practice, have created an even greater need to review the education provided to citizens. The most basic of these developments are: the “Knowledge Society” – globalisation, European orientation, multiculturalism and pluralism. Great emphasis has also been placed on active citizenship because, as stressed in the Europe 2020 strategy, recovery from the economic crisis requires not only sustainable growth, but also growth in respect of views and internal cohesion, promotion of solidarity among citizens, as well as active and substantial participation in social and political life.

At the same time, this has given rise to new teaching and pedagogical proposals, such as:

- a) The interdisciplinary, integrated and holistic approach to knowledge
- b) Emphasis on the democratisation of school life and on promoting the participation and activation of pupils
- c) Contemporary psychological knowledge (e.g. Gardner and Goldman theories) points to the need to develop multiple types of intelligence, placing particular emphasis on emotional and interpersonal intelligence, and also on fostering critical and creative thinking.

Social and civic education in the Greek education system

The term “Social and Civic Education” was established as early as the mid 1980s for primary school and in the mid 1990s for junior high school, and continues to be used to date. This name (renamed from “Citizen Education” and “Elements of a Democratic Government”) indicates the expansion of the lesson’s scope, linking it to efforts to change direction in terms of the general philosophy behind this lesson. Therefore, formal teaching should no longer constitute the main factor behind the civic socialisation of young people, and the mission of civic education should extend across the entire spectrum of school work and life (Karakatsani, 2004). It appears that the concept of diffusion is being encouraged. In senior high school, similar issues are covered by the lesson of “Politics and Law”, whose title does not reflect the social dimension. The lesson is taught for one hour a week in the fifth and sixth year of primary school, and for two hours in the third year of junior high school and in the second year of senior high school (general lyceum).

A significant turning-point in Greece as regards the content, purposes and aims of the subjects being taught was the creation of the Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework for Compulsory Education in 2003. In accordance with this framework, the standard subjects have been maintained, while at the same time promoting ways to correlate knowledge on two axes, the vertical and horizontal one. Specifically, the vertical axis connects the syllabus in a spiral fashion, from grade to grade and from level to level, while the horizontal axis connects and processes the subjects of each individual

curriculum from several angles, thus contributing to the promotion of knowledge and its connection with reality.

Therefore, in compulsory education, “Social and Civic Education” has a common objective and includes 6 basic dimensions:

1. *spiritual development*: knowledge and understanding of the meaning of life and of the universal and timeless values of human society
2. *moral development*: cultivation of a critical spirit in matters of freedom, equality, justice, human rights
3. *social, economic and political development*: knowledge, understanding and acquisition of the necessary skills for participating responsibly and actively in social, economic and political life
4. *cultural development*: enrichment of national and cultural identity, realisation of the nature and role of the various groups to which one belongs and acceptance of difference and pluralism
5. *development of a Greek identity* and conscience based on our national and cultural heritage
6. *cultivation of social relations and social cohesion*, personal responsibility and social solidarity.

Depending on the school level, these objectives are divided into individual goals which cover three areas of teaching goals, namely knowledge, attitudes and skills, while at the same time enhancing the concept of citizenship on various levels: local, national, European and global.

In primary and junior high school emphasis is placed on the need to cultivate critical thinking and develop analytical skills, to formulate and investigate assumptions and draw conclusions, to think creatively and express ideas. In the area of skills, social skills such as communication and cooperation, argumentation-based dialogue, decision making and problem solving are promoted. The attitudes and values hoped to be achieved are similar: development of a research attitude, an interest in social reality, a sense of collectiveness, respect for otherness, responsibility and the active engagement of citizens. Furthermore, the concept of the changeability of contemporary society is also an element for which future citizens should be prepared. The main values that are promoted are democracy, human rights, peace, international cooperation and solidarity.

In senior high school the primary objective focuses more on civic education than on social education, and particularly on understanding the organisation and function of the state and developing of a civic conscience. Emphasis is once again placed on active participation in social and civic life. Typical individual teaching goals at this level include knowledge and understanding of the basic concepts of Politics and Law, as well as learning about the organisation and function of the state, the course of development of the Greek state and the constitutional history of the country. Apart from obtaining knowledge, the aim is for students to understand, criticise and assess the events and socio-political conditions in the country, in the EU and generally in the world. Emphasis is also placed on realising the importance of individual and collective engagement and

action, and on being aware of one's personal, political and social rights and obligations. Becoming acquainted with matters concerning European integration and international relations is also high on the list. Reference to the role of the media is also included among this level's goals. At this level too, dialogue and argumentation skills are enhanced, while the following are promoted at the level of attitudes and values: social justice and cohesion, solidarity at the international level in order to deal with global problems and protect human rights, the development of a Greek conscience while at the same time respecting universal values, as well as respect and protection of democracy.

Furthermore, participatory and experiential methods are promoted: dramatisation, role-playing, case studies, conducting small research projects, visiting and inviting people. Moreover, group discussions on current affairs, projects, the taking of initiatives and organisation of events are also encouraged. Although the parallel use of traditional teaching methods and aids has not been ruled out, it is suggested that they be enriched and that a variety of aids and materials be utilised. A holistic and integrated approach to knowledge is also recommended.

On the basis of the new curriculum, the preparation of new textbooks in all levels has gradually begun. At this point we should highlight Greece's distinctiveness in regard to this matter: the existence of a single textbook per grade bearing the official seal of the state as it is published with the assistance of the state and under the supervision of the Ministry and Pedagogical Institute. The school textbook for junior high school titled "Social and Civic Education" circulated in 2006, while the textbooks under the same title for the two primary school grades circulated in 2009, as did the senior high school textbook ("Politics and Law"). In the teaching textbooks of the two levels of compulsory education, the structure of the syllabus appears to have a common structure based on the following axes:

1. THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY
 2. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE
 3. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE EUROPEAN UNION
 4. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
- In the senior high school textbook the structure appears to be different, including the following units:
1. POLITICS
 2. LAW
 3. FROM THE CITY-STATE TO THE NEW GREEK STATE
 4. THE ORGANISATION OF THE STATE
 5. THE FUNCTION OF THE STATE
 6. PERSONAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RIGHTS
 7. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS
 8. MASS MEDIA
 9. INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
 10. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

In our recent studies (Pavlos, Karakatsani & Printezi, 2010a, 2010b) we have started to record the way in which the *cross-cultural and European dimensions* are reflected in the

Greek textbooks of the three educational levels, as compared to the corresponding textbooks of previous decades. The *content analysis* method was used, which is a research method that ‘uses specific rules to make valid inferences based on the analysis of written texts’ (Weber 1990, as cited in Kyriazi, 2009: 284). This does not involve the simple reading of a text, but its systematic study with the ultimate goal of detecting messages directly and indirectly. Its basic goal is to “transform ‘raw’ and varied information on an issue into data that can be subjected to systematic – as a rule – statistical processing and description”. The data will be divided into distinct categories so as to enable the review of the process. These categories will be related to the research objectives that have been set (Kyriazi, 2009: 288). Of course, one does not study all aspects of a text; only the characteristics that are of interest to a specific study are analysed. In fact, in this particular case an attempt is being made to perform an “*analysis of the entire set of textbooks*”, both *horizontally* (books of the same time period) and *vertically* (books of different periods) (Meyers, 1976, in Bonidis, 2004). This analysis has resulted in six thematic categories, into which the analysis units have been divided. This paper presents some of the key findings from the current textbooks of the three educational levels and draws certain conclusions through a comparative analysis between their present content and that of previous years:

a) *Culture*: references to various cultures, the importance of Greek culture, cultural relevance and hierarchy, global culture. The primary school textbooks make reference to the common needs of children regardless of where they live, and encourage learning about the diversity of different nations, cultures and countries in respect of various sectors (e.g. regime, education). The textbooks of the other levels highlight – to a certain degree – the importance of cultural interaction, while there are also references to the lasting value and contribution of Greek culture to humanity. The preservation of the Greek cultural identity is also presented as being of concern to the Greek Diaspora, which provides a “*bridge for cross-cultural cooperation*”. Similarly, foreigners in Greece are presented as preserving their own cultural heritage; however this is not discussed in detail.

b) Composition of the community – homogeneity – multiculturalism: references to the multicultural nature of contemporary communities, to different social groups and the phenomenon of migration.

A distinction is made between the concepts of “nation” and “country”, giving a general presentation of the transition from relatively homogenous communities to multicultural ones. Attention is drawn to the difficulties affecting their smooth functioning, which requires respect for difference.

Although the Orthodox Christian Faith is referred to as the official faith of the Greek state and as “... *an important element of the identity of the Greek nation*”, there is clear mention of the lack of homogeneity that now defines Greek society, both in terms of national descent and in terms of religious belief and culture. Greece is presented as trying to integrate these varying elements into its bosom. Incentives are provided to converse and become better acquainted with minority groups forming part of Greek society (Gypsies, Pontians and immigrants). The difficulties they encounter and their inclusion among society’s vulnerable groups are described in general lines. Examples are

presented of the provisions made by the Greek state for minorities (e.g. in the education sector, the institution of Reception Centres). The need to become acquainted and to coexist harmoniously with people from different ethno-cultural groups living in our country is presented in a positive light.

c) Social discrimination – prejudice: references to social discrimination against minority groups in particular.

There are several references to discrimination, which is characterised as negative and unconstitutional. Foreigners are included among the groups that are subjected to discrimination. Through comics, photographic material and relevant scenarios (e.g. on the bullying of foreign pupils or on the racist attitude of refusing to rent a house to a foreigner), efforts are being made to raise concern and awareness, and to cultivate a sense of empathy. A parallel is also drawn between such discriminations and those suffered by Greek immigrants abroad. Taking action against discrimination is presented as each citizen's obligation, whereas the example of the Church as regards this area is also presented in a positive light.

d) Rights: references to the different categories of rights and to the persons who should be enjoying these rights (nationals, foreigners, etc.).

This issue has been systematically incorporated into all levels. A distinction is made between personal, social and political rights, and reference is made to the requirements for exercising the latter.

As regards the rights of all Greek residents, apart from reference to religious freedom, specific reference is also made to education, which “*constitutes a right as well as an obligation [...] of not only Greek nationals, but also of foreigners*”. It is stressed that foreigners are protected against discrimination both by international conventions and by the Greek Constitution (e.g. Article 5) and mention is made of the right to seek political asylum. It is also underlined that the human rights laid down in the Universal Declaration of 1948, as well as the 54 articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child apply to all, regardless of descent. Of course, it is clearly stated through examples (e.g. of a woman from the Ukraine living in Greece) that the category of political rights does not apply to all residents in Greece, while the special privileges enjoyed by citizens of EU Member States in this area are also presented. Furthermore, the issue of applying for citizenship is raised, and examples of obtaining citizenship both in Greece and in another country (USA) are provided.

e) EU – European identity: references to the concept, function and role of the EU, and to European citizenship and identity.

Special chapters in the textbooks of all levels are dedicated to issues related to the European Union. These issues account for approximately 11% of the entire syllabus. Pupils are informed of the function and purposes of the EU. Expressions such as “*European family*” and “*strength in unity*” reflect the basic messages intended for pupils, highlighting the advantages of this unification in terms of economic-social progress and national security, and are accompanied (mainly in the higher levels) by concerns about

and objections to the goals, the effectiveness of the unification and the decision-making method. Balancing relations between countries with a different standing is presented as an important challenge.

The motto “*European Union: Unity in Diversity*”, which is presented in a photograph of related posters, broaches the matter of the diversity of the nations it is made up of. Besides, efforts to better acquaint EU Member States with each other are presented as an important task (e.g. searching for information on the history, culture, holidays, eating habits and education of other nations). In addition, EU actions and programmes for cooperation and exchange are presented, especially in areas that may be of greater interest to pupils (Comenius, Annual Environmental Conference, Green Week, European Capital of Culture, e-Twinning, etc.).

Emphasis is placed on the concept of the “European Citizen” and on the importance of his/her role to the success of unification. The development of a national identity into a European one and the difficulty of experiencing this are clearly presented. It is stressed that “*the nation-homeland becomes part of a United Europe*” and the concept of patriotism is extended to include “*defence of peace, democracy and national interests through dialogue, cooperation and mutual compromise with other countries*” (*junior high school book*). Pointing out the risk that citizens may be indifferent to common problems, efforts are made to help pupils develop an interest in the issues and problems affecting European reality. Pupils are informed of the rights and obligations of European citizens, while special reference is made to the political rights of citizens of EU Member States, namely the right to elect Members of European Parliament and to participate in the municipal elections of the host country.

f) International community – International relations: references to human and official inter-state relations, international organisations, globalisation and international law.

Another substantial part of the syllabus (12%-15%) is dedicated to issues regarding the international community. The following topics are discussed: international organisations, human rights, international law, non-governmental organisations, the concept of the interdependence of all countries around the world, and the need for friendly and peaceful relations and for joint action in order to deal with global problems, which form the central idea behind these units.

At the primary school level, reference is mainly made to organised groups and associations (UNICEF, Greenpeace, WWF, Action-Aid, Doctors Without Borders, Red Cross), whose actions are not limited to the local level, but extend to the global level, thus giving children the message that the issues concerning us (environment, health, human rights) are not confined to the boundaries of our country, but are universal. In the following levels several references are made to globalisation “*which is expanding on many levels: economic, political, social, cultural*”, thus rendering the international community a “*global village*”, a “*world without borders*”, a “*planetary community*”, in order to... Apart from pointing out the advantages of internationalisation, some negative aspects are also underlined (unfavourable labour measures for the purpose of attracting foreign capital, unemployment, prevalence of mass culture). Lastly, strong emphasis is

placed on the profile of the active citizen combined with the concept of the cosmopolitan. Attention is drawn to the difficulty faced by individuals in experiencing this new identity, while sensitisation and action with regard to local as well as global issues through participation in organisations and social movements are presented in a positive light.

Greece's position in the world is an important issue, especially in the senior high school textbook, placing emphasis on the role it can play in the international scene through its foreign policy, the strength of Greek shipping and the contribution of the Greek Diaspora to key sectors such as science and economy.

Conclusions – Proposals

Based on the above analysis, it appears that a different approach is being promoted through the content and aims of social and civic education, as these are presented in the pages of the school textbooks. An innovative character has come to the fore, particularly in respect of issues with a European and intercultural dimension, which is the topic that interests us. Elements such as human rights and universal values, the role and objectives of the EU and international organisations, and the global nature of social and political problems are analysed in a more systematic way. Furthermore, the percentage of references in the new books regarding the aforementioned issues is substantially higher. It is also worth mentioning the provision of a wider variety of examples from other nations and cultures, as well as the positive attitude towards becoming acquainted with that which is different and accepting it. The subject of the EU is linked to the cultivation of a European identity and conscience, which are considered to be the basic elements for strengthening and establishing relations within the "European family".

However, the most basic element differentiating these particular textbooks from the previous ones is the presentation of Greek society in its new multicultural dimension. There is mention of the coexistence of people belonging to other nationalities, religions and cultures. An outline is provided of the contemporary school with its cross-cultural nature, while the problems faced by foreign pupils are highlighted, both with regard to the language and their relationship with their classmates (phenomena of racism and xenophobia). A distinction is made between Greek citizens and persons merely residing in Greece, while the concept of nationality and the rights that come with being a national are analysed.

This new approach intends to detach the content of the lesson from a narrow national outlook and give it a European and universal perspective. Without undermining the importance of preserving the Greek cultural identity, the need for equal treatment of every cultural group is supported. The strong ethnocentric tones of the past have been replaced by clearly more moderate ones, which are accompanied by a language that cultivates the principles and values of cultural pluralism and the acceptance of others. In many cases it is stressed that the new dimensions of the identity complement the national identity, and that the preservation of cultural distinctiveness is the right of every nation in the framework of the European and international community. The Greek culture is still in the forefront, thus putting an end to any concerns about the weakening of pupils'

Greek conscience. Besides, neither the difficulty faced by the individual in terms of experiencing the new dimensions of his/her identity and taking action to fight problems beyond the boundaries of his/her country, nor the potential negative consequences of the European model and of globalisation have been overlooked.

Despite the positive aspects of the new curricula and the significant degree of improvement of the content of the Social and Civic Education textbooks, as compared to previous textbooks, we should stress that various problems pertaining to the function and organisation of the Greek school obstruct the fulfilment of the goals of the lesson in question. A review of the curricula of all levels of compulsory education (primary and junior high school) has recently begun in an effort to reform the knowledge imparted and to change the teaching practices and pedagogical strategies employed. The philosophy of the Social and Civic Education lesson is promoted, which is not only connected to a cognitive approach, but also to an experiential, critical and reflective outlook. The objective is now to educate active and responsible citizens, and to achieve social and political education that promotes, apart from knowledge, the development of communication, information, critical analysis, study and problem-solving skills.

It is stressed that the Social and Civic Education lesson is offered for purposes of critical educational intervention and can serve as a tool for solving problems, dilemmas, conflicts inside and outside the school, and for processing crucial and controversial issues. A new form of organisation of the syllabus is being promoted for all lessons and is based on the provision of a common core of topics and issues, from which the educator can choose those that interest him/her depending on the conditions, aims, circumstances, requests and questions of pupils. Consequently, a more flexible and open form of curricula is being promoted. Emphasis is also placed on the need for greater integration of Social and Civic Education topics in other lessons (impregnation), and for forming a link between social sciences and history. New teaching tools have been put forward, which rely on a more active and experiential form of learning (cooperative teaching, action plans/projects, simulation activities), on the greater involvement of pupils, the search for and analysis of knowledge, and on argumentation. Efforts are made to link the lesson to the activities and situations experienced on a daily basis within the school environment, to improve conversation and dialogue, and develop argumentation, thinking, research and discovery tools.

Emphasis is also placed on the fact that all of the above should be combined with improved education and training of educators in teaching social subjects. Cooperation between educators is considered necessary for the exchange of material, experiences and 'good practices', as is staying informed, brainstorming and taking action against socio-political problems.

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