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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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Educating interculturally competent teachers: Citizenship in a global and local context

*Charikleia Pitsou , Anastasia Koutiva , Julie-Athena Spinthourakis
University of Patras (Greece)*

Abstract

The European Union has published official documents to promote the creation of 'The European citizen'. The key to implementing this concept lies within education. As a means of socializing, it is called upon to respond to current global and European challenges and needs by educating future teachers prepared to successfully deal with the current social reality and to contribute to the implementation of 'the European citizen concept' (Hollins 1993; Liliou 2009). For this reason we argue that national Departments of Primary Educations' (DPE) Programmes of Study (PS) need to be restructured to supply teachers with skills, knowledge and practices required, initially, to reexamine their own stereotypical beliefs on diversity (Larke,1990) and their competency to help create a citizen who carries both his/her national traits and global-European ones. This paper examines through a) content analysis the contribution of a DPE's PS to the intercultural competence and preparation of future European educators; and b) 69 questionnaires, the extent to which fourth year students, participating in traineeship lessons, feel competent and prepared to face challenges of current multicultural classrooms within the context of the European citizen. The preliminary results suggest that, although the PS includes the corresponding cognitive fields that promote respect towards supranational traits and attitudes, seniors do not "feel fully and properly equipped" to face these challenges. The question arising and is discussed asks whether the theory/practice gap can close, and offers related suggestions.

Keywords: *Intercultural competence, future European teachers, Department of Primary Education, Programme of Study.*

Introduction

The current social reality is defined by diverse societies constantly undergoing changes. European societies are an example of such societies, as due to globalisation, they underwent changes mainly after World War II. A reasonable assumption would be that these changes not only on local but also on supranational socio-political level have an impact on defining the meaning of the term citizen and each country's educational system. While Europe has been facing the phenomenon of multiculturalism, a need of people of culturally diverse background to more effectively coexist has come up. Thus, the European Union (EU) has tried to define the rights and the duties among people who do not belong to the same nation, in other words, it has tried to develop the identity of the European citizen through education as it plays a vital role to the promotion of citizenship. Consequently, the EU proceeded to publish official documents to promote the creation of the European citizen.

European Acts

In the Single European Act (1986) that set the groundwork for free movement of individuals, services and capital among the EU Member States, the notion of European Citizenship was correlated with facts that concerned the political and cultural dimension of the European unification. In the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) the idea of the legal presence of the citizen was introduced for the first time, despite being restricted in terms of social traits. Specifically, in Article 8 the European Citizenship is institutionalized and every person that has the nationality of an EU Member State can be called a European citizen. For the notion of the European citizen the political parties at the European level play a significant role as they contribute to the creation of the European consciousness. Also the articles 126 on education and 128 on culture are introduced, and the notion of the European citizen is regulated, later extended by the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) in which a number of regulations were made about the European citizen, such as securing fundamental freedoms, handling the issue of discriminations and making decisions in a more open way on behalf of the citizens.

Furthermore, both the Green Paper (1993), on the European dimension of education presents the forthcoming directions and actions of the European Community and its Member States, and the White Paper (1993) on competitiveness, development and employment includes references on adjusting educational systems and vocational training to European Citizenship. An important step was, also, the Treaty of Lisbon (2000) when the EU Member States established as a centre line of their policies the vision for a Europe as the society with the highest potentials for learning worldwide. This Treaty mentioned that when educating those that handle the issue of education, intercultural skills should also be regarded, thus, placing the emphasis on what is referred to as Intercultural Learning.

Accordingly, the key to implementing the concept of the European citizen lies within education. It does so as a means of socializing, and is obliged to respond to current global and European challenges and needs by educating future teachers in such a way to ensure that they are competent and prepared to handle current social realities successfully and contribute to the implementation of the European citizen (Hollins, 1993; Liliou, 2009).

The European teacher

The main question that arises is what should be the characteristics of the European teacher. In the 21st century the European teacher should be able to handle successfully the social, cultural, national and educational diversity of pupils since he/she has all the necessary knowledge and skills in both the theoretical and practical level of managing multicultural classes. He/She organizes learning environments so as to orchestrate the conditions by which all the students can acquire knowledge. He/She is open to other cultures and knows how to behave with a non dominant manner. He/She cooperates perfectly with the parents of culturally diverse people. The European teacher acts as a European citizen, meaning that he/she shows solidarity with the citizens from other

countries, and shares with them values such as democracy and respect for human rights (Schratz, n.d).

Raising teachers to a professional level within a common European framework is more and more related to the growing ability, he/she has to exercise his/her educational autonomy to improve the school's pedagogy in a way that all students are fully active, can develop the sense of citizenship, live and work in a multicultural tolerant and not a selective society as European citizens (European Commission, 2010).

Research on multiculturalism and training of teachers have taken place worldwide (Banks, 2001; Margison, 2002; Lane, 2007). The need for teachers with high qualifications regarding students from different cultural background in an increasing number of societies that are in a transitional period from a single culture society to a multicultural one has led many researchers (Abbate-Vaughn, 2006) to study to what degree the issues on interculturalism are related to Higher Education Institutes (HEI) Programmes of Study (PS). With regards to Europe the issue of multiculturalism has often been a point of interest to the European Community (Council of Europe, 1986; Damanakis, 2005).

For this reason, it is necessary to once again look to the national PS of the Departments of Primary Education (DPE); enrich them with cognitive fields that will reinforce and construct their intercultural competence and with respect to the preparation of future teachers, have a clear multicultural orientation (Gundara, 2002; Hooley, 2007) and supply them with skills, knowledge and practices required to reexamine their own stereotypical beliefs on diversity (Larke, 1990). Even though learners tend to be multicultural, teachers tend to derive from a single culture (Davis & Turner, 1993; Stavenhagen, 2008) so the type of education needed is one that will supply them with skills, knowledge and practices leading to the creation of citizens who can carry both their national traits together with global – European ones. Since teachers are the motive force of the learning process their intercultural competence is a challenge for the Institutions that have the responsibility to educate them.

Intercultural Competence

Various aspects of competence have generated significant debate in the social sciences. In the present literature competence refers to a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire leading to effective, embodied human action in the world in a particular domain (Hoskins & Crick, 2010; Hoskins, 2008; Baartman, Prins, Kirschner, & Van der Vleuten, 2007). Thus, competence is not so much about learning isolated knowledge, skills and attitudes, as about integrating these with a view to performing (in our case) social tasks and solving problems. Cross-cultural competence may be defined as: 'the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures' (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein & Colby, 2003, p. 177). So a person, and more specifically, an effective teacher in a multicultural classroom is according to McAllister and Irvine (2000, p. 4) one 'who has achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural and whose cognitive, affective

and behavioral characteristics are not limited but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of only one culture’.

To put it in different words, a teacher who is competent in interculturalism can accept the other cultures simply as different and not as inferior or superior. He/She can identify instances of racism and intervene appropriately to discourage them. He/She can also implement theoretical and scientific knowledge on bilingual education. He/She can know and select the appropriate teaching methods and strategies to teach a classroom of culturally diverse students; and last but not least he/she can develop cooperation networks with people to support learners and their families from different cultural environments.

Methodology

This paper examines through: a) content analysis (Denzin, & Lincoln, 1994) the contribution of the PS of the DPE in the University of Patras to the intercultural competence and preparation of future European teachers; and b) the statistical analysis of 69 questionnaires (Cohen & Manion, 1994) the extent to which fourth year students, participating in traineeships lessons, feel proficient and prepared to face challenges of current multicultural classrooms

The main research question is whether teacher education institutions ensure that the intercultural competency of teachers support their personal and professional development aiming at forming European citizens. As this research regards the intercultural competence of pre-service teachers we record the progress of intercultural education in the DPE in the University of Patras being studied, to examine the degree to which this particular educational institution that has been responsible for training future teachers has adjusted to the demands of the current social reality and European directives.

To this end, the 1990, 2000 and 2009 PS of the higher education institution in question was examined. The rationale underlying the examination of the Programmes was that in each one of these periods, a change in the content and the goals of intercultural education was noticed. The cognitive fields that were treated as ‘relevant’ with intercultural education were categorised as follows: a) according to their intercultural coherence on the basis of the title of the course and the text’s analysis (with an intercultural orientation/ with European orientation), and b) their status in the PS (mandatory or optional courses).

Research Findings

After analysing the findings (Diagram 1) it has become clear that in the 1990 PS there was not a single course that had a clear intercultural orientation while there are only two courses (mandatory and optional) that have a European orientation, the first one is ‘Comparative Education- European orientation in education’ and the second one ‘Specialised subjects of Comparative Education’. At the beginning of the 21st century

the notion of interculturalism was introduced in the PS since there was a mandatory course with a clear intercultural orientation and three optional ones related to 'Bilingual Education', 'Education of Roma children' and 'The interculturalism and function of European educational Institutions'. In addition, there is an increase in the number of optional subjects with a European orientation, which are related to European educational programmes. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century there was an increase in the number of courses in both categories.

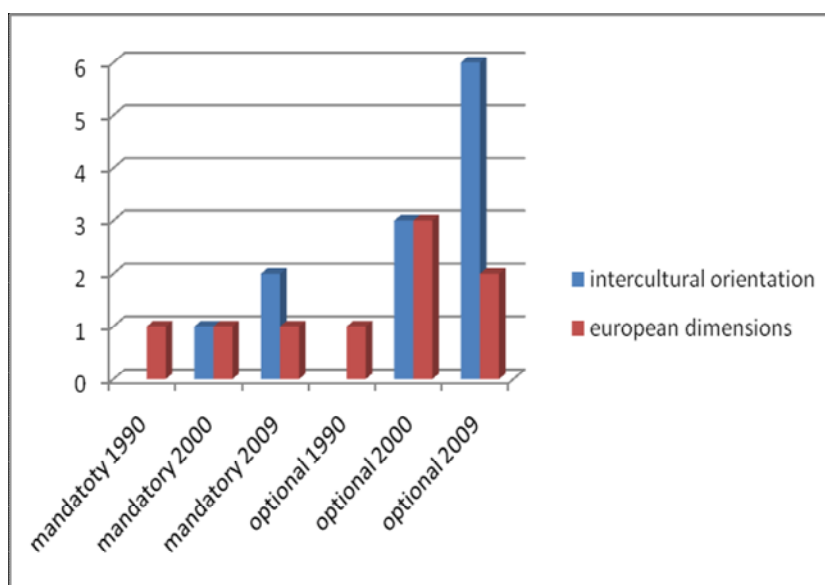


Diagram 1: Subjects of Department of Primary Education in University of Patras

The second phase of the research took place during the 2008-2009 academic year with 69 participants, all students in their 4th year of study and specifically, in the traineeship they underwent during the last semester of their studies. All the students were from Greece as there were no students from a foreign country registered.

Specifically, the 69 students were given a questionnaire with both closed and open questions. The data which have been collected by this questionnaire were analysed in a descriptive way. To start with, answering the question if they were involved in activities with culturally diverse students during their traineeships 65.2% responded positively, a fact that shows that future teachers have already been in a multicultural classroom. The following question was an open one and was about the problems they had faced with culturally diverse students. The answers we received concerned mainly problems with pupils' difficulties in reading, writing and text comprehension and how to respond to them suitably. Next, we wanted to examine whether future teachers, after having faced the above difficulties during their traineeship in previous semesters, tended to choose optional courses on intercultural education; 59.4% of them did so. Also, in the question if there is a need to introduce more mandatory courses that involve intercultural and European orientation to education 81.1% of them responded positively. This shows their

interest to come better acquainted with subjects which can reinforce their intercultural competence. Moreover, the students were asked if they were satisfied with their own level of response in the traineeship in a multicultural classroom. 68.2% responded that they were a 'little satisfied', whereas 31.8% was 'satisfied enough'.

Furthermore, 56.5% of the future teachers responded that they felt 'moderately qualified' as a consequence of the offered PS to face the needs of the culturally diverse students, whereas only 12% felt 'very qualified' to do so. The majority of the questionnaire respondent university students (60%) responded 'moderately', as well, as far as the degree of their training in intercultural education was enough to allow them to correspond to the needs of a multicultural classroom, and only 17.4% responded 'greatly'. It becomes clear, that there are deficiencies in the PS that make students feel insecure about their intercultural competence.

In another question we asked them to provide an answer as to what degree they know cognitive fields that are about intercultural competence (such as: teaching Greek as a foreign language, coping with culturally diverse students and their families, implementing models of intercultural teaching, promoting the official Greek syllabus to culturally diverse students and managing mixed classrooms in a successful way). The results showed that the only cognitive field that they know much about is teaching Greek (50.7%) followed by the relationships with the children's parents (43.8%) and the promotion of the official syllabus (40%). In terms of managing a classroom that is different than a monocultural one, the results were discouraging: where only 27.5% knew how to manage a mixed classroom in a successful way.

Finally, we asked students, through an open question, what they regarded as significant to be included in the PS in order for them to enrich their knowledge in intercultural education. The responses that we collected were mostly about mandatory courses on intercultural education, traineeship in intercultural schools, attending and participating in seminars and sample teaching related to intercultural and European education.

Some Conclusions

According to the research data, even if we cannot generalize because of the small sample size, it is obvious, that societies need both good professionals and educated citizens, educated for citizenship, capable of critical thinking, prepared to live and work in a multicultural society. HEI have an important role to play in the promotion of these characteristics in pre-service teachers. This task remains difficult and very challenging because HEI deal with global knowledge but at the same time the main sphere of influence is very local. This is the main reason why their PS should not only respond to the needs of the time but look out to the future (Jarab, 2007). Teacher education institutions not only need to be postgraduate and research oriented, but also each field connected to intercultural dimensions and the notion of the European Citizenship has to acquire and develop its own expertise through a high level of professionalism and rigorous educated teachers' trainers.

Citizens of the 21st century need to be competent enough to live in communities where both equality and respect for diversity are recognised as a key to harmonious coexistence. Schools will need to provide children with skills to challenge everyday racism, and this implies an educational system that is grounded in everyday experiences. At the present time teacher education needs to have close links with schools to meet the needs of minority communities. The participation of parents, legitimate representatives of minority communities, minority school teachers and administrators of education policy in decision making will lead to educational practises and reformation of the PS of the teachers, so as to meet the real needs of the European community.

This global process, which drives HEI into taking on responsibilities for the development of intercultural competent teachers and the values of the European citizen, consolidates changes in the way future teachers are trained. Firstly, there is a need to shape a concept of citizenship within pre-service teachers in order to become active citizens; secondly, they should improve their scientific knowledge; and thirdly, to educate their learners towards the realisation that citizenship extends locally, regionally and globally (Teune, 2007).

All in all, training teachers should offer both the gaining of theoretical knowledge and teaching skills. These goals are interchangeably related, which means that theory and practice can flow from one to the other. Thus, as for the training of the future teachers, the DPE can implement the principles of intercultural education and the European citizen, and not in their internal organization alone, but within the local community they are address. There can be a turn towards society and a focus on its immediate problems. The universities can be the knowledge and culture centers and the link to other factors in societies. For this reason, traineeship should not just be an unproductive mandatory procedure that occurs during teachers' university studies but an essential opportunity for a real turn towards the forming of a European and global culture of co-existence and mutual respect (Lynge-Nielsen, 2007).

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