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# European integration, multiculturalism and the intended curriculum of primary education in Greece: myths and realities

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## Introduction

The knowledge selected for schools by a country and formally distributed to students through the curriculum and textbooks has been a key factor for the maintenance of specific 'national' characteristics. Systematic analyses of textbooks (mostly social studies) reveal that statements and patriotic accounts of a country's history are often emphasised, leading students to believe that their country is superior; national loyalty is promoted, while little time is devoted to analysing the role of the nation as a member of the world community (Patric & Hoge 1991, Ivrideli 1998 & 2002). This emphasis on national development in textbooks is common in many countries and may present a considerable obstacle to acknowledging the diversity of cultures and for attaining a European and global awareness, although some authors support the view that textbooks in Europe should reflect each country's national interest (Szabolsci 1992, Ivrideli 2002) and that the curricular systems are responsible for the reproduction of ethnocentricity and Eurocentricity in Europe (Coulby 1997, Ivrideli 2002).

There is no doubt that education in societies that are in transition towards multiculturalism challenges the existing curricula, bringing together the three main processes of political socialisation (Bell 1996: 203, Bell 1991 and Papadakis 1998: 45- 47), namely the promotion of citizenship, 'the process of intensifying cultural influence through mutual contact', and the re-socialisation of adults (see Mangan 1990). These processes can be facilitated in those situations where certain historical, cultural, geographical and existential bonds exist between communities who seek to share a supranational identity. An interesting dilemma faced by schools in the European Union (EU) is how to harmonise the strengthening of national tradition in students with the development of a European consciousness.

This study aimed to investigate the degree to which European peoples are portrayed in the curriculum and textbooks used in primary education in Greece. Our method was to examine the national curriculum and school textbooks by conducting a content analysis in order to ascertain how European peoples are presented in them. At this point we should mention that

- today's Greece faces two distinct but interrelated challenges: Europeanisation, consisting of interactions between European and domestic political and socio-economic patterns; and multiculturalism, brought about in part through sharply increased levels of immigration from the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the 1990s (see Lavdas & Papadakis 2003), and
- the selection and distribution of educational knowledge in schools in Greece through a single textbook for each subject, distributed free to all students in Greece and

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published by the Ministry of Education. Thus, the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘when’ of school knowledge is determined and controlled by the current Minister of Education.

### Collecting research material: methods and procedures

In order to assess to what degree the European peoples are portrayed, the curriculum guide and the student textbooks of all primary education subjects in Greece (Grades 1 - 6) were analysed. Each text was examined to determine the quantity and quality of related information. The quantitative analysis applied included all four categories of content: text, questions, activities (exercises) and quotations, but was not recorded separately. Content regardless of category was classified as positive, neutral or negative.

The analytic categories which were used to record the content were: *Nature*: Life, and Matter; *Humans*: Spirit, Emotion and Body; and *Society*: Economy, Social life and Culture. The above categories were modified and adapted from a conceptual framework used by UNESCO (1990) in peace education, and have also been used in several other studies (Ivrideli 1998 & 2002).

### Findings of the content analysis

#### *Analysis of the curriculum*

The analysis of the curriculum guides revealed that the highest level of references to European peoples exists in history. Table 1 shows that the sum total of references was 4% for all grades in this subject. The greatest percentage was concentrated in the category ‘society’ and the subcategory ‘wars & conflicts’, followed by the subcategory ‘institutions, rights, peace’. Analogous percentages appear in the same categories and subcategories for the individual grades in the same subject.

**Table 1**

Subject	References	Percentage
History	238	4.00%
Environmental studies	45	0.80%
Geography	23	0.40%
Religion	21	0.30%
Social & political education	13	0.20%
Mathematics	3	0.05%
Language	-	-
Physics	-	-

The second largest percentage of references was concentrated in environmental studies, entitled ‘we and the world’; the sum total was 0.8% while the category ‘society’ and the subcategory ‘institutions, rights, peace’ received the highest percentage.

The next highest percentage was in geography with a total of 0.4%. Of this, the largest percentage dealt with ‘natural environments’, followed by ‘institutions, rights, etc’. The smallest percentage of references, 0.05%, was in mathematics. All of these references

were concentrated in the category 'society' and the subcategory 'art, values, myths & symbols'.

No references were recorded in either language or physics.

The analysis of references on specific European countries according to the chronological period revealed that most were 'general' 113<sup>2</sup>; 97 were neutral and most were distributed in the subcategory 'institutions, rights, peace'. Italy follows with 42 references, 36 of which were neutral and recorded equally in the subcategories 'institutions, rights, peace' & 'conflicts & wars'. Spain, Hungary and Serbia recorded the least number of references (one each). For Spain and Hungary this reference was in the subcategory 'art, values, myths & symbols' and for Serbia in 'conflicts & wars'(Table 3).

**Table 2**

Country	Quantity of references	Quality of references
Europe (general references)	113	97 NL
Italy	42	36 NL
Russia	39	NL
France	38	37NL
England	31	29 NL
Germany	31	NL
Bulgaria	12	NL
Cyprus	11	10 NL
Austria	6	NL
Prussia	4	NL
Yugoslavia	4	NL
Moldavia	3	NL
Norway	2	NL
Hungary	1	NL
Serbia	1	NL
Spain	1	NE

P: = Positive references

NL: = Neutral references

NE: = Negative references

In sum, the content analysis of the Greek primary education curriculum reveals that most of the references to other European countries were neutral, followed by negative, while in the last place we find positive references.

<sup>2</sup> Those references referred to Europe as a continent and not to a specific European country.

*Textbook analysis*

The situation in textbooks was similar. History was the subject that yielded the highest percentage of references at 1.9% (Table 3). Of this the largest number were concentrated in the subcategory 'conflicts & wars'. Thus Greek youngsters become acquainted with other countries via wars and not through 'cooperation or friendship', as it is stated should be the case in the purpose of history and in the law 1566/85. There is therefore an obvious disharmony between the written goals of this subject and its content.

**Table 3**

Subject	References	Percentage
History	584	1.90%
Language	428	1.40%
Geography	377	1.20%
Environmental studies	112	0.40%
Physics	50	0.20%
Mathematics	40	0.10%
Social & political education	21	0.07%
Religion	8	0.03%

The subject that received the next high percentage is language (1.4%); while the category 'society' and the subcategory 'war & conflicts' received the highest percentage.

The next percentage was concentrated in geography (1.2%). Of this the largest percentage was concentrated in the subcategory 'natural environments', followed by the subcategory 'air, water, soil' & 'climatic conditions'. These percentages were to be expected in this subject because it focuses on geophysical aspects such as the natural environment, climatic conditions, air, water and soil. Lesser significance was placed on the socio-cultural aspects of the globe. There was also a small percentage that referred to the subcategory 'conflicts & wars'.

The subject of 'religion' showed the least amount of references of all subjects (0.03%) and contained only two categories 'institutions, rights, peace' & 'art, values, myths & symbols'.

Italy scored most references of specific European countries according to the chronological period (400), 338 of which were negative and were recorded mostly in the subcategory 'conflicts & wars'. 'General' references follows (342), 289 of which were neutral and most were distributed in the subcategory 'climatic conditions'. The fewest number of references were made to Ukraine, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Switzerland, and Norway (one each). For the Ukraine this reference was in the subcategory 'air, water, soil' and for the others in 'natural environment' (Table 4).

**Table 4**

Country	Quantity of references	Quality of references
Italy	400	340 NE
Europe (general references)	342	327 NL
Germany	307	287 NE
France	110	57 NL
England	44	24 NL
Bulgaria	35	27 NE
Russia	25	18 P
Austria	24	13 NE
Albania	10	5 NL 5 NE
Spain	4	NL
Holland	3	NL
FYRo Macedonia	2	P
Poland	2	NL
San Marino	1	NL
Norway	1	NL
Slovakia	1	NL
Switzerland	1	NL
Czech Republic	1	NL
Ukraine	1	NL

P: = Positive references

NL: = Neutral references

NE: = Negative references

Our analysis reveals that most of the references to other European countries were negative, followed by neutral; in last place we found positive references.

In sum, the content analysis of both the Greek primary education curriculum and textbooks revealed that for the most part nationalistic messages prevailed, although supranational dimensions were also present.

Furthermore, the European Union countries are not presented adequately; in fact there are only a few pages (a total of four) that describe the European Union, of which Greece has been a member since 1981. Both the curriculum and the textbooks neglect to present and elaborate amply the differences between the north and the south, centre and periphery, etc.

Our results demonstrate that the references to other European peoples do not harmonise with the pronouncements of the educational law 1566/85, which makes reference to a 'spirit of friendship and cooperation with all the people of the world'; neither corresponds to the purpose of the Greek curriculum (PD. 583/82) which calls for 'a deeper

understanding and appreciation of other people who belong to different national, religious, social and cultural groups...’

Lastly, the quantitative deficiency of the European references in the content of the intended curriculum for primary schools (curriculum guide and textbooks) does not correspond to their goals, which make reference to coping with ‘problems faced by common efforts by the world community...resolved... with the cooperation and mutual exchange of all people’.

### **Otherness in crisis: political connotations of a purposive absence**

The analysis of the way European others are depicted in the curriculum guide and textbooks we examined indicates that they have not been adapted to the new realities of a post-ethnic context, such as the EU. The nationalistic elements that are maintained in them seem to cultivate a moderate form of ethnocentrism, placing preference and value on Greek culture, while the absence of some other cultures is apparent. The evidence gathered appears to reconfirm the findings of previous studies which showed that what seem to exert the strongest influences in the shaping of the Greek national identity and character are the ideals of classical Hellenism and the institutions and teachings of the Greek orthodox church (Flouris & Ivrideli 2002 ).

The nationalistic elements that were found to be predominant in this study should not be judged as completely negative. Nation states engage in such educational practices as overemphasising specific national features, recreating their national culture and their national excellence in order to preserve their own past and to relegate the ‘others’. The limited projection of European peoples in the Greek primary education curriculum and textbooks is a common practice of other nation states (Schleicher 1992).

Our textbook analysis indicated that European others are either relegated to a secondary position of importance or treated superficially. For example, in the case of neighbouring countries such as the Balkan states there are some references made, a part of which imparts negative perceptions towards them; they are presented in the context of war both during the Byzantine period or during the war of national independence (Flouris & Ivrideli 2000).

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study tend to support the observation that the formal curriculum and school textbooks used for primary education in Greece are organised more according to a national and regional perspective than a supranational or global one. The national curriculum and textbooks potentially direct teachers to promote national loyalty and ethnocentric orientations in students, which can function as an obstacle to the attainment of a European identity and a global awareness (Ivrideli 1998 & 2002).

This practice of espousing ethnocentric curricular and textbook views, which reflect the world coloured by a specific interest, is quite common in Europe and in the rest of the world. (Szabolsci 1992, p. 108). Other authors have argued that the presence of ethnocentrism in Europe is intricately connected to what is taught in educational institutions, and it is the curricular systems of Europe which generate and reproduce much of this form of ethnocentrism known as Eurocentrism (Coulby 1997, p. 145).

It is obvious that such educational practices may cloud students' perceptions of European and global concerns. Furthermore, they can potentially impede cross-cultural understanding and supranational sentiments (such as European identity, solidarity, unity and global peace), while the maintenance of a state-endorsed curriculum that promotes the formation of nationalism while lacking cosmopolitanism (Massialas 1995) could easily exacerbate tensions with internal minorities and bordering states.

Developments point to the fact that nation states in the EU and elsewhere can no longer afford to offer to students a parochial pedagogy and ethnocentric orientations. Such approaches ignore supranational and global views and themes which can effectively mediate the formation of a European and global identity. Perhaps the time has come to engage in a systematic reappraisal of national curriculum and textbooks by moving away from existing systems and establishing new ways of life, which enlighten the minds of the future citizens of Europe and of the world. Students need to become good national as well as global citizens, able to think reflectively and willing to participate in the democratic processes by taking appropriate actions. *Conditio sine qua non* for the achievement of such a task is, inevitably, the focus on a new citizenship. In fact, a citizenship-construction process that does not reduce citizenship to nationality, but reinforces an open minded approach to the qualities and attitudes that correspond to the four types of civic virtues - general, social, economic and political (see Galston 1991: 221- 4). We must not forget that the balanced development of these virtues is still the fundamental precondition for an actual democratic citizenship ('citizenship education'/ Kymlicka & Norman 2000: 7-8) in late modern, diverse societies.

The time is right for schools to foster more than one identity and reality via multicultural experiences, in an attempt to function harmoniously in the patchwork of the European and international scene for a more promising future.

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