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## **Teacher views and priorities towards curricular innovation as a venue for effective citizenship education**

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### **Introduction**

Effective teaching as well as effective learning is an important factor for improving education quality (UNESCO, 1998; EU, 1995; Lawton *et al* 2001). A recent focus has targeted micro-level learning policies for betterment of education; with one of the most effective being curriculum design/syllabus development (EU, 2001; OECD, 2001; The Council of Europe, 2003). The citizenship curriculum - applied by well-informed teachers - seeks to promote the skills and attitudes for self-regulating and lifelong learning as well as good and effective citizenship (Petrućijova & Meciar, 2003). Governments plan the application of new curricula, expressing their vision of 'a better future' for children in an increasingly multicultural and information oriented society (Reid & Williams, 2001; Rey, 2001).

In this framework, the Greek Ministry of Education published a governmental paper which included the latest version of 'The *Diathematikon Programma* (DP) (Inter-thematic/Cross-Thematic Curriculum) produced by the Hellenic Pedagogical Institute (HPI). This is the basis for the construction of textbooks and supportive/supplementary educational material as well as for the application of the teaching and learning methodologies (HPI, 2003c). The DP innovators consider it a holistic, systematic and innovative approach to compulsory education in Greece; one that modernizes schooling mainly through curriculum content and suggested methodologies (HPI 2003a; Kazamias *et al*, 2001).

In this paper the major issues of the recent curriculum reform in Greece are presented with special reference to citizenship education. A text analysis of the citizenship education curriculum is undertaken to identify its innovative issues and relate them to the major trends in the area. Additionally, findings from an empirical study on the innovative programme 'Flexible Zone'-part of the curriculum reform, are described below.

### **The Greek curriculum and the new *Diathematikon Programma* Cross Curriculum Framework**

The curriculum in Greece is mainly content oriented, and this content is organized in separate subjects which relate to discipline areas (Hadjigeorgiou, 1999; Koutselini, 1997). The textbooks - one per subject/class - are centrally produced by HPI and distributed free to all pupils. While teachers are trained to apply various teaching methodologies, the 'project' methodologies have not been adequately incorporated into the educational praxis. Although primary and secondary education is compulsory, systematic efforts towards the development of a 'united and linked' curriculum have also been lacking (Karatzia, 2002).

Researchers of the Greek educational reality (Kazamias *et al*, 2001; Matheiou *et al*, 2001) refer to the need for more teachers' freedom to adjust to the 'locality of the class' as well as to practice various methodologies. Similarly references exist about the need for 'lifelong learning skills' and 'democratic citizenship' attributes in the pupil population. At that same time a more policy-oriented discourse (PASOK, 1995) refers to 'opening and linking schools to society'.

The relevant literature is dominated by the need for an alternative curriculum; one that would include cross-curricular objectives, grounded on dynamic learning environments. It should contribute to 'lifelong learning' and to the betterment of the educational process-praxis (Craft, 2001; EU, 2001; Moon and Murphy, 1999). These represent some of the major concepts/ideas that dominate current trends in curriculum design and links with betterment of educational quality (Eliot, 1997; Fielding, 1997; Walker, 2001).

Turning back to the DP text one can see that it is based on a pedagogic discourse referring to principles describing 'general education', 'strong pedagogic climate', 'investigative methodologies', 'critical thinking', 'learning skills', 'democratic citizenship', 'lifelong learning' and 'sustainable development'. The aforementioned principles are connected to the local 'legal' or 'institutional' situation and are mainly projected to the European Union discourse (HPI 2003a).

The *Diathematikotita* discourse is chosen to substantiate the aforementioned pedagogic discourse and dominate the proposal, as it focuses on all the 'parameters' that form a curriculum; such as the content choice, organization, adopted teaching/ learning and assessment methodologies. A general description of this cross-thematic approach could be as follows:

[it]...refers to the possible horizontal links that can be achieved in DP amongst the curricula of all subjects...suitable organization of the teaching matter of each subject is necessary, so that the different themes are treated from diverse 'angles'... in a «multi – prismatic' way and related to everyday life situations. Within this framework a search for the 'extensions' that the themes under investigation could have in the fields of science, art and technology as well as in the development of skills, attitudes, behaviours and values is attempted... on the basis of fundamental cross-thematic concepts by promoting discussions and project methodologies application...themes are treated in a holistic way with an effort to relate knowledge to everyday life/reality. Consequently, diathematikotita includes and goes beyond the interdisciplinary approach. (HPI, 2003a).

The HPI stated that content of these concepts is both wide and 'basic' enough to make it possible for teachers to use them towards the cross-thematic approach of knowledge without 'putting at risk' the construction of the conceptual unity of every discipline based subject. Thus, during this step of practice the HPI suggested keeping the traditional framing of the discipline based subjects and at the same time contextualizing

school knowledge through applying conceptual links applicable to every day situations (HPI, 2003a & b).

These conceptual links are found in the HPI list of cross-thematic concepts, and recommendations that text book authors and teachers use as additional concepts towards effective learning. This 'indicative' list of the cross-thematic concepts contains the following concepts:

Change, Communication, Civilisation, Dimension (time- space), Interaction, System, Similarity – difference, Unit (atom-element) – whole (group, set).

The DP proposal also allows for a more fulsome cross-thematic approach; here, no single subjects are taught, teaching is based on the thematic approach. This is the 'flexible zone' program, consisting of two teaching hours per week, minimum; and is used to do 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' (HPI, 2001). This program has been successfully piloted in selected schools for three years. A percentage between 60-68% of the participant teachers believed that through project-based investigative learning/teaching, better relations among the education stakeholders are promoted and a creative and cooperative climate is developed (HPI 2001).

### **The Citizenship Education Curriculum (Civic and Social Studies Curriculum)**

The Greek citizenship education curriculum introduction notes that the course may serve as a linking agent. In this sense citizenship education may promote the cross-thematic approach to learning and be based on investigative, cooperative and participatory teaching/learning methodologies (Erickson 1998).

Text analysis was carried out to investigate the extent that the specific curriculum offers itself towards this innovative approach. The specific curriculum was used as a policy text that expressed the discourse and the ideology of its producers (Ball, 1994). As such it ought to be investigated in its contexts of influence, production, implementation and practice. The investigation continues as the contexts of implementation and practice, mainly based on educational material production and in-service teacher training, continue.

The results from a context of production study carried out in spring 2003 are presented here. Citizenship education (CE) is taught in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes of Primary school and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> class of Gymnasium, and is organized around four axes: a) 'The individual and the society', b) 'The individual and the state', c) 'The individual and the European Union', and d) 'The individual and the international community'. The topics included are chosen with reference to general aims of this subject. The analysis contrasts the DP's general aims for citizenship education such that the cross-thematic approach is promoted

via the cross-thematic concepts (CTC) implementing project methodologies and relevant activities. The latter, apart from subject-specific development could be used towards horizontal or cross-thematic skills development, utilizing a cross-thematic approach, thereby strengthening learning and schooling in general. In the table below the main findings are presented:

### Empirical Study Results

The empirical study was designed to find the views and the priorities of the teachers on the best teaching practice and relate them to the Flexible Zone innovative programme (HPI 2003c). A representative sample of twenty schools was selected with relevant criteria from the province of Attica, the largest in population in Greece which includes schools and students from various geographical and socio-economic settings. Two-hundred-forty-seven teachers participated in the field study in spring 2003. Their views on effective teaching practice are investigated through priority scale questions and supported by open-ended question findings. This analysis' data are compared to the data from the analysis of questions related to the Flexible Zone Programme and the cross-thematic approach.

More specifically the study participants were asked to prioritize the changes needed to improve class teaching practice. In the table below the findings of the analysis are provided:

**TABLE 1: Teachers' views on the priorities of the changes needed in class teaching practice (N=247)**

For the improvement of class teaching practice it is necessary to:	1 <sup>st</sup> priority (%)	2 <sup>nd</sup> priority (%)	3 <sup>rd</sup> priority (%)
1. practice various and modern teaching methodologies	37.3	9.8	13.0
2. strengthen action researcher teacher role	22.3	12.4	19.2
3. change/improve textbooks	15.5	26.4	20.2
4. adjust curriculum	14.5	12.7	21.2
5. practice various ways of student evaluation	12.4	29.0	17.6
6. other	1.0	2.1	7.3

These views and priorities link with findings of an open-ended question on views of changes needed for the improvement of teaching practice. The answers were coded in the categories appearing in Table 3. The percentages in column two refer to the percentage of the references that concern any specific category.

**Table 2: Analysis of general aims of CE via the HPI suggested cross-thematic approach**

AIMS	WAY CTC ARE USED	CT ACTIVITIES
<p>Note: Concepts of 'interaction' and 'system' dominate this subject because of content construction methods. Participatory methodologies promoted strengthened use of concepts at skill and behaviour development level. This curriculum's ideology promotes student recognition/identification/understanding: of their place in human-made and natural environment, basic elements/functions of social systems and rights and responsibilities of the individuals as well as roles of societies.</p>		
<p>1. Intellectual development by promoting knowledge and comprehension of the deeper meaning of the aim of life as well as the universal and diachronic values of human society with ulterior purpose the application of these values in daily life.</p>	<p>The concept of 'interaction' together with that of 'communication' are used in contexts that indicate the various aspects of life in the dimension of 'time' and 'space'. All these interact in the frame that shows the production of civilization. Learning and knowledge that relate to this context could be from History, Language, Art etc</p>	<p>Note: The activities are indicative, individual or group oriented and may relate to more than one aims.</p> <p>1. Field investigation</p>
<p>2. Moral development by encouraging students to evaluate critical issues relating to freedom, justice and human rights and also issues concerning their own rights and responsibilities in society.</p>	<p>The concept of 'system' is clearly related to the issues of human rights and responsibilities. Its understanding is promoted through the values of freedom etc that are closely related to the concepts of 'communication' and 'civilization'. Ties to cultivation of positive attitudes towards democracy.</p>	<p>2. Search for information from various sources</p> <p>3. Technology or art constructions</p> <p>4. Debates</p>
<p>3. Social, economic and political development by supporting students to acquire knowledge, comprehension and skills that are essential elements to be able to participate actively, in a responsible way in the social, economic and political process.</p>	<p>The concepts of 'interaction' and 'system' are used to help students identify the various contexts (social, political and economic) and learn about their organization and operation. This aim is closely related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills relating to active citizenship.</p>	<p>5. Role play activities</p> <p>6. Various ways of presentations, collections, initiatives promotion etc)</p> <p>The above mentioned activities could be part of class projects. An example:</p>
<p>4. The cultural development by strengthening the students' national and cultural identity, by making them aware about the nature and the role of the various groups they belong to and ready to accept the diversity and pluralism. The development of our Hellenic identity and awareness based on our cultural heritage.</p>	<p>The concept of 'civilization' or culture is dominant here. Use of the concept 'communication' and the application of the concept 'similarity – difference' helps students become familiar with their cultural heritage. Cultivation of positive attitudes towards 'the others' and development of collaboration skills-individual and societal development is promoted.</p>	<p><u>Class elections</u></p> <p>The pupils work systematically to plan and carry out elections for a student board. The concept of 'system' may be used for cross-curricular links i.e., the decimal system of numbers may be used in counting the votes, different types of communication could be applied (language, written or oral, music etc)</p>
<p>5. The cultivation of the virtues of social coherence, personal responsibility and social solidarity.</p>	<p>Closely related to development of positive attitudes towards social cohesion/social solidarity. Additionally, to virtues related to attitudes promoted through the synthesis of CTC and their use in knowledge related or skill related activities.</p>	<p>(History, Literature, Mathematics, Language and Arts).</p>

**TABLE 3: Teachers views on changes necessary for improvement of class teaching practice**

Categories relating to issues of teaching practice	Percentage of the references
1. Student centred system of teaching practice	44.9
2. New teaching methodologies	39.2
3. Student participation in innovative projects	12.6
4. No answer	3.4

The participants were also asked to note topics their classes chose to investigate and describe how they were carried out. The distribution of the choices were among the categories of Environmental Education (35%), Culture and tradition (50%), Domestic Science (e.g. Food, Euro, Housing) (36%), and Local History (22%). Most of the topics were closely related to issues of Citizenship Education. This is especially evident when the participants describe student tasks undertaken during the project. Almost 90% of participants reported that students worked in groups and presented their group work together (85%). Similar percentages of teachers responded that students carried out constructive debates (80%), collected information from various sources (75%), made constructions (70%) and investigated issues using problem-solving methodologies (collection analysis, synthesis, evaluation, implementation) (78%). More than 50% of participants said that students expressed satisfaction during the Flexible Zone programme and participated actively in the materialization of the projects.

In an open ended question that sought their views on the role they played during the programme most of the teachers saw themselves as facilitators for holistic knowledge acquisition (see Table 4).

**Table 4: The views of teachers on their role during the Flexible Zone programme**

Participant role description during the implementation of Flexible Zone programme	Percentage of the responses that refer to the specific category
1. Facilitator to holistic knowledge approach	90
2. Assistant during difficult situations (when asked)	82
3. Facilitator towards student collaboration	67
4. Giving instructions	56
5. Other	53

In these results, a potential trend is identified focusing on the adjustment of the teachers' role in Greek classrooms to the needs of the contemporary society of knowledge as described in the introduction of this paper.

### Concluding comments

The aforementioned analysis indicates that ongoing change of the curriculum in Greece is one that potentially supports the cultivation of skills, attitudes and values for democratic citizenship in a contemporary Greek society which is part of the EU. What appears to be needed at this point is an effective application of the cross-curricular principles in educational materials, and furthermore, in educational praxis by well informed and appropriately trained teachers.

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