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Teacher training for active citizenship

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the role that university departments involved in teacher training, play in fostering or impeding active citizenship. The first part of the paper combines a theoretical framework based on the neo-institutional organisation theory with insights from the CRELL research on education for active citizenship so as to shed light on how organisational and structural aspects of a study programme may foster specific types of knowledge, attitudes, values and skills that appear related to the development of active citizenship. The second part of the paper compares and contrasts two teacher-training programmes one Greek and one British. We discuss specific practices and modes of organisation that appear to promote or hinder civic engagement and the development of civic competence. As organisational practices promoting active citizenship we consider the development of problem-solving capabilities, reflexive and critical thinking, development of agency/autonomy, development of professional ethos as well as involvement of students in internships or in-service and active learning.

Keywords: *Organisation of Higher Education, Teacher Training, Active Citizenship, Civic Competence*

Introduction

Nowadays teachers are expected to be able to respond to the multitude of challenges posed by highly diversified classrooms and to promote active and European citizenship in the school environment. This “ability of teachers to promote active citizenship in the school environment” will be referred to as “civic competence”. So far, research indicates that higher education correlates positively with active citizenship, a result that may be seen as expected, even mundane, given that, as Zgaga has argued “citizenship is a concept inherent to the idea of the university and the role of higher education. It is one of its ‘archetypes” (Zgaga, 2009:177). Education systems and teacher training institutions influence students’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviour through the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are associated to the development of “civic competence” possibly leading to “active citizenship”. But are European teachers sufficiently trained to foster active citizenship in the school environment? To what extent do teacher-training institutions support the development of active citizenship and through which means?

Specifically we are interested in exploring the following questions: Which organizational elements of a study-programme can be seen as related to the development of civic competence? Do different educational pathways and specialisations that expose students to different experiences affect students’ ability to develop civic competence?

The results presented in this paper form part of a wider, ongoing research, which attempts to shed light on organisational aspects of teacher training programmes of study that can be seen as promoting active citizenship. Our full research design comprises

- (a) background research, based on analysis of the structure, the aims and objectives of a programme as presented on the Internet and in student handbooks
- (b) qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with academics and
- (c) quantitative research based on a student survey.

However this short paper is based on findings of the background research, namely content analysis of the aims and objectives and the structure of the study programmes, and partial analysis of interviews with academics. We have not yet entered the student survey phase.

In the first part of the paper we present a theoretical framework adapted from W.R. Scott's neo-institutional theory of organisations, as presented in his work "Institutions and Organisations" (Scott, 2001). In the second part we focus on two teacher-training programmes (one Greek and one British), attempting to shed light on organisational practices that appear to support the civic competence and engagement of students.

1. Theoretical Framework: Higher Education Institutions as Organisations.

The framework used here is based on W.R. Scott's neo-institutional theory of organisations, as presented in his work "Institutions and Organisations" (Scott, 2001). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are treated as "open organisations" interacting with their wider institutional environment and as social constructs formed by collective action in order to achieve specific goals (Scott, 2001:10).

As in every organisation, so in HEIs four main "building blocks" can be distinguished: participants, social structure, goals and technology.

The *participants* are the social subjects that contribute in the structure and the change of the organisational structure (Scott, 2001, p.19). Without their participation there is no social structure, no organisation (Scott, 2001, p. 20). Their actions form an integral part of the organisational structure.

Social structure refers to the relations among participants. It embodies norms, values and social roles played by the participants.

Goals are "the desired ends, which the participants are aiming to achieve through their action" They guide decisions taken and activities pursued within the organisation and limit or constrain the action of participants (Scott, 2001, p. 286).

Technology is used by Scott in a broad sense. It refers to the "management of knowledge within an organisation". HEIs can be seen as using two main "technologies": teaching and research. In a similar manner Clark distinguishes, the common elements of different activities of educators, which through different ways and at variant degrees aim at the

discovery, the maintenance, the transmission or the application of knowledge. (Clark, 1983, p. 12).

HEIs do not exist in an institutional vacuum. The wider institutional environment influences the organisation through three different “pillars”: the regulative, the normative and the cultural cognitive.

The *regulative* pillar comprises the legal framework within which HEIs operate as well as all formal, known and usually written rules, that constrain or foster specific forms of action. It comprises laws and regulations and is crystallised in institutional missions, overall goals of study programmes, specific objectives of modules/courses, as well as learning outcomes at programme and course level.

The *normative* pillar encompasses norms and values that are encouraged or discouraged within the organisation. It comprises attitudes and behaviours that are not strictly regulated “but we all know that are expected of us”.

Finally the *cultural-cognitive* pillar operates at a deeper-structure level; that of the local (national) culture and consists of routines, practices, modes of organisation that are “rarely questioned” and are “taken for granted”.

The wider institutional environment may comprise both national and international actors, (for example a (national) Ministry of education and the European Union), which influence the organisation in different, even opposing, ways. Changes in the institutional environment may induce changes in the organisational building blocks of HEIs and vice versa. Finally it is obvious that building blocks and pillars are connected and interdependent and the distinctions made here serve analytical purposes.

2. Education for Active Citizenship and Civic Competence: Organisational Aspects

So far the European Commission is making use of the JRC/CRELL CRELL definition of “active citizenship” as “participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy” (Hoskins, 2006) ... Active citizenship is understood as encompassing rights and duties, such as voting in European elections (representative democracy), as well as the broader involvement such as encouraging participation, taking part in civil dialogue and other forms of activities aimed at enabling civil society to make their views known to decision makers and promoting more transparent and accountable policy making (participative democracy) as well as volunteering and other forms of community commitment and solidarity (societal engagement)” (Hoskins, 2008). Here active citizenship is conceived in the very broadest sense of the word “participation” and is not restricted to the political dimension. It ranges from cultural and political to environmental activities, on local, regional, national, European and international levels.

Following a similar rationale “education and training for active citizenship” is defined as “appropriate and effective formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities at any stage of the life cycle that facilitate or encourage active citizenship”. CRELL has

proposed that knowledge of human rights and responsibilities along with practical skills, and attitudes and values such as for example *autonomy/agency, social justice or gender equality*, are important for the development of active citizenship.

Taking note of the above one would expect that a programme of study that promotes active citizenship should present the following characteristics:

(a) Centrality of courses that promote values, attitudes and knowledge on issues that can be seen as related to active citizenship, such as *human rights, social justice, special and inclusive education, multicultural education, gender equality, citizenship and European identity* etc.

(b) Development of practical skills that can be seen as related to “civic competence”, such as *critical reflection, research capability, advocacy, debating skills, active listening, reflexivity, problem solving*. At the institutional level one would expect promotion of organizational practices that enable the student to solve every day problems through service-learning, internships etc that create opportunities for the involvement of students in social networks.

It is relatively easy to judge (from course description and content) whether a course or module appears to promote knowledge and values that could enhance the development of civic competence. It is however far more difficult to assess if specific organisational practices contribute to the development of practical skills that promote civic engagement/civic competence.

3. Application of the Theoretical Framework and Operationalisation of Concepts.

We compare here a Greek and a British programme: the M.A. “Education and Human Rights” of the Department of Early Childhood Education of the University of Athens and the Secondary PGCE in Citizenship of the University of Leicester.

We have chosen to present a comparison between two programmes whose course content is highly relevant to the development of civic competence. The specific subject matter of these programmes ensures that the knowledge, attitudes and values, promoted by both programmes could be seen as positively related to the development of active citizenship. For example in the British programme the Citizenship ‘subject knowledge folder’ contains Human Rights, Diversity and Social Cohesion, Crime Justice and Law, Government and Public Services, Parliament and Democracy, the Voluntary Sector, Conflict Resolution, Media in Society, the Global Community, Environmental issues, Europe, The UN and Commonwealth, Active Citizenship, Economic Awareness and Business, Consumers Employers and Employees, the Voice of the Child, Democracy and Diversity. Respectively, the Greek M.A. programme incorporates courses that directly address issues related to active citizenship. These include (among others): Rights and Education, The Social Construction of Discrimination, Educational Institutions and Citizenship, Justice: Contemporary Social Issues and Perspectives, Gender and Social Capital, Sociology of ‘Race’ and Education, Minorities, Migrants and Refugees in National Education Systems, Social Reproduction and Education etc.

In this way we can focus on the way organisational practices relate to the development of practical skills for civic competence. We furthermore consider that

- (a) The “goals” of the teacher training programmes are adequately reflected in the “aims and objectives” section of the Students’ Handbooks.
- (b) The structure of the programme and the educational pathways offered reflect the “technology” used by the institution. We remind here that “technology” relates to the management of knowledge, i.e. teaching and research practices in the institution, types of assignments students are required to complete, assessment methods, organisational practices supporting active or in service learning etc.

Considering the above the refined research question we attempt to answer is whether the goals set by the teacher training programmes are adequately served by the technology used.

4. Discussion

4.1. Goals

The two programmes state both general aims and a series of more specific objectives. Both programmes emphasise the issue of professionalism and the development of practical skills. However the Greek M.A. emphasizes as a method for enhancing active citizenship physical mobility and acquaintance with a different educational environment, while the British programme emphasises reflexive practice and critical ability and a positive attitude towards lifelong learning.

The British programme aims:

- To prepare citizenship teacher trainees for their lives in schools as excellent, resourceful and knowledgeable professionals
- To provide a Higher Education curriculum and programme of teaching and learning that is stimulating, relevant and enjoyable
- To support trainees in their personal and professional development, and in their role as reflective practitioners, critical thinkers and life-long learners. (PGCE–Students’ Handbook, p.1)

The Greek programme aims to:

- Promote the mobility of postgraduate students and teaching staff, promoting collaborative teaching and the acquaintance of students with different educational, social and cultural contexts.
- Train specialist educators and scientists that will cover the labour market needs of schools, public sector services (as for example the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogic Institute) at local and regional level, NGO’s in the subject Human Rights Education.
- Train scientific personnel capable to carry out education research, formulate education programmes and policies and utilize practices suitable for combating

social inequalities in the education context. (M.A. EHR – Students' Handbook, p.4)

The differences between the two programmes become more apparent when one examines the content and phrasing of the specific objectives of the programmes. The British programme offers more information on means and practices used to achieve these objectives or external criteria that have to be met in order to achieve the described objectives. The description of the Greek programme offers little insight as to how, or through which means its specified objectives are to be achieved.

The specific objectives of the British programme are:

- To ensure that the course engages with the TDA standards required for QTS.
- To support trainees to extend and deepen their subject knowledge of citizenship and to individualise their learning on the course as competent and committed professionals and to individualise their learning on the course as competent and committed professionals
- To expose trainees to a wide range of strategies for teaching learning and assessment in citizenship, including the use of ICT, through use of the university's Virtual Learning Environment (the Blackboard) as an integral part of the course
- To engage with the trainees' personal and professional development through tutorials and use of the Blackboard
- To ensure that the PGCE equal opportunities policy statement is adhered to, and that no trainee is treated negatively or marginalised as a result of ethnicity, gender or age
- To prepare trainees for their professional lives beyond the course through support in gaining their first appointment, and through encouraging them to see themselves as life-long learners (at Masters Level and beyond) and as reflective practitioners. (PGCE – Students' Handbook: 1)

The Greek M.A programme states three different types of objectives, which relate to the development of (a) knowledge and understanding, (b) academic abilities and (c) practical/professional skills. (M.A. EHR – Students' Handbook, pp.5-6). Here one could remark that the distinction between objectives aiming at the development of 'understanding and knowledge' and 'academic abilities' is not very clear and some overlaps occur.

The programme helps students understand:

- The provenance and formulation of education policy in different sectors at national, European and international level.
- The role and effects of European institutions and globalisation tendencies on European education systems.
- Major theories and concepts related to education with special reference to the construction of social discrimination and exclusions.
- The social and cultural differentiation of participants in education programmes.

The students develop the academic abilities:

- To recognise and place in the right framework / context issues related to theory, research, policies and professional practice.
- To understand and critically appraise the theory and research methods suitable for the exploration of specific issues and education problems.
- To use multiple data sources and to apply theories and research methods in small-scale research.
- To systematically use comparative analysis so as to understand interdependencies in educational issues and to critically appraise the way in which comparative analysis is used in various cases.
- To work in interdisciplinary teams and exchange ideas and views that lead to the production of new knowledge.

The students develop practical-professional skills and learn:

- To apply educational theories and methods to problems related to research, policy and practice.
- To design intervention programmes taking into account the background and the specific characteristics of the group for which the educational intervention is designed.
- To act with professionalism and to effectively work in teams

4.2 Technology: Programme Structure and Educational Pathways

Both programmes differ substantially as to their structure and organisation, they both present distinctive features and offer trainees a choice of different educational pathways.

The British PGCE is a one-year programme and one of few with a secondary PGCE specialisation in Citizenship. The programme has a very strong practical component where the students are required to put their knowledge into practice while in placement in neighbouring schools.

The programme comprises two parts with similar structure. A university-based part of the programme includes seminars, presentations, workshops, tutorials and outings, followed by a placement in a collaborating school, where under the supervision of a co-tutor the trainee is introduced to professional practice.

In total, there are five required pieces of work, with varying formats: two University Assignments, two Subject Directed Tasks and a B3 Subject Project. In addition, students are required to do preparation, reading and follow-up work for the university sessions. Much of this takes place through Blackboard. Students are also expected to upload resources that they develop themselves, and to engage in reflection and discussion with their peers, especially whilst on placement.

The two University-based modules have slightly different assessment patterns. The first University-based module's assessment is common to all students and the assignments are differentiated by outcome into H or M level attainment. Those who achieve M level (worth 30 credits towards a Masters degree) in this assignment can opt to continue with

M level in the second University-based module. This second University-based module's assessment is differentiated into H or M by requirement.

To summarise, there are two education pathways (H and M level) that lead to a recommendation for Qualified Teacher Status. The M level route, in addition, allows students to gain 60 credits towards an MA in Education. Both pathways require students to carry out two successful school or college placements/modules, in which they have to achieve all the Standards required by the Teacher Development Agency.

The main strong point of the programme appears to be its practical component, which directly addresses labour market needs. Trainees are assessed through a variety of ways and this ensures a versatile programme structure. However, according to an academic, students tend to find the workload excessive and the structure of the programme rather rigid. The pressures posed by the workload seems to undermine the other strong point of the programme, namely its focus on reflexive practice and critical thinking, both of which are time consuming activities. Furthermore, one should remark that the use of the Blackboard and the requirement to maintain a personal blog, can be cited as 'good practice examples' as a virtual learning environment is used to ensure the engagement of trainees with their peers especially during placement. This practice could be seen as maximising chances for civic engagement with the local community as well as networking with peers.

The Greek M.A programme is entirely university based and has a two-year duration. The programme is one of few in Greece that provides an education pathway that leads to a joint degree with a major British University (IoE-London University). Students that decide to follow this pathway study for two terms in Britain. Students who study entirely in Athens obtain a Postgraduate Diploma of Studies solely from the University of Athens.

All students are requested to take two core modules (Educational Research Methods, and Construction of Social Inequalities: Contemporary Theoretical Issues), to successfully attend three interdisciplinary seminars. During the last semester of their studies trainees are requested to submit and defend a dissertation (10.000-15.000 words) on a subject of their own choice. The dissertation is considered as the 'apex' of the studies, given that serves to demonstrate the research capability of the students, where students present the design and findings of their own small-scale research.

The students that follow the joint degree educational pathway are requested to complete three courses at the Institute of Education and two courses in Athens. Those that follow the University of Athens educational pathway are requested to successfully pass seven more courses in Athens. The difference in the numbers of courses is due to the difference of ECTS credits assigned to Greek and British modules respectively. According to three academics the Joint Programme degree, which foresees physical mobility, appears to foster the civic engagement and the European identity of trainees more than the local programme.

Courses include seminars, presentations by the lecturers and the students and discussions. Assessment for courses is by essays, which students submit at the end of the

semester. The interdisciplinary seminars are characterised by the academics as ‘the most interactive component of the programme, which students seem to appreciate and enjoy’. Otherwise the mode of assessment (through essays) promotes solitary work and does not favour engagement with peers. Civic engagement usually results during the preparation of the dissertation but its intensity seems to depend heavily on the topic of the dissertation and the persona predisposition of the student.

5. Conclusion

The background phase of our research appears to indicate that the way a programme is structured and the educational pathways it offers may affect the development of civic competence just as much if not more than the content of courses/modules.

The Greek M.A. emphasizes as a method for enhancing active citizenship physical mobility and acquaintance with a different educational environment. The British programme emphasises reflexive practice and critical ability. Specifically,

- Incorporating a practical component appears to be an appropriate and effective way to “teach” students how to solve real life problems and how to put knowledge into practice.
- The use of ICT/VLEs and social networks may be used to promote both social engagement of the students and reflexivity in the teaching practice
- Mobility and acquaintance with different social and educational contexts appear to boost the agency and autonomy of the students as well as their ability for intercultural appreciation.

The above points are at present corroborated by initial partial analysis of interviews with academics, but remain to be corroborated by the results of the student surveys. It would be interesting to see if the students that appreciate the specific components of the two programmes are confident that they can promote active citizenship in the future and if they act as active citizens in their everyday life.

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