Review

History and inter-culturality: Educational and ideological aspects of the “cross-thematic integration” in the curricula of the compulsory education in Greece

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With this paper, after the presentation of the main theoretical approaches for the management of diversity in society and school, a critical approach is attempted regarding the new, cross-thematic curricula of the compulsory education in Greece. The educational and ideological aspects of the cross-thematic integration in the curricula will be studied, and it will be found if the cross-thematic integration has given a more inter-cultural orientation, particularly to the new curricula of History.

Keywords: Cultural diversity – History – Curricula - Cross-thematic integration

History and management of diversity: theoretical remarks

The management of cultural diversity in the countries of the so-called Western World, at a theoretical, political-ideological and educational level, seems to have taken various forms, which, however, can actually be classified to three clear and distinct strategies (Kokkinos, 2005).

The first strategy, which has a clearly nation-centred orientation, sees cultural diversity as a problem-risk for the one and single national identity, as well as for the order of the society and the state. Thus, it suggests the elimination of any element of cultural diversity at a social level, or the violent submission of anyone having such cultural diversity to the homogenised national identity of the group with the social majority. In education, this strategy is realised with the violent integration of those having cultural diversity in the current ideological framework of the school, or their conscious exclusion from participation in or their expulsion from any educative project.

The second strategy, affected by the principles of the political liberalism (Kokkinos, 2005), accepts the multicultural character of the modern society, and considers it inevitable, as well as the existence of a prescriptive cultural model of global values, based on which many cultural differences have to be evaluated as deviant, extreme and problematic and, therefore, in need of change or adaptation to the universal model of values. Special emphasis is placed by this strategy both on the respect and tolerance towards cultural differences that do not oppose the universal code of values, and on the elimination of the inequalities and discriminations against culturally different groups of a country’s population by the State. In education, this strategy appears with the declarations of the official institutional texts (Laws, Curricula etc.) about the tolerance and respect towards the diversity, without the actual change of the educational practices towards students from different cultural environments. At the same time, students from such environments have the “chance” to “change”, so that they can be integrated in the structure of the current school, also integrating some elements of the culture of the culturally different groups in the curricula and school textbooks.

Finally, the third strategy of multi-culturality or multi-cultural models is in contrast both to the nation-centred and to the second strategy, that of the universal model of values. If we consider the extreme forms of this strategy that lead even to conditions of cultural isolation or autonomy “as fantasy of a wish rather than a realistic solution to the problem of the socio-cultural integration” (Gotovos, 2001), then the prevailing trends of the strategy of multi-culturality require “that we acknowledge the diversity and the social, political and cultural equality, showcasing the demand for the establishment of collective rights or the implementation of political, positive
discriminations” (Kokkinos, 2005). In education, this strategy is realised with the establishment of compensatory education measures for students from socially deprived and culturally different minorities, while, at the same time, the establishment of collective rights of the culturally different groups is asserted or achieved for the systematic teaching-learning of their language, the performance of their religious or “national” ceremonies, their political representation etc. Thus, educational curricula are created that take account of the language and cultural specificities of the students, and it is stressed out that the social cohesion is promoted with the acknowledgement of the cultural specificities, after an educational and social framework is formed where all cultures can co-exist and develop, without the unity and cohesion of the society being at risk (Lynch, 1986).

The aforementioned cultural diversity management strategies have been applied in other societies with negative results regarding the goal, and often with unpleasant side-effects (Gotvos, 2001). In the Greek society, the educational policy uses the main elements of the strategies of assimilation and integration, sporadically using methods-measures of compensatory education for students from socially deprived and culturally different minorities (immigrants, gypsies, Muslims of Western Thrace etc.) (Agelakos, 2002). It is interesting to study, within the framework of these strategies, how the issue of cultural diversity is dealt with in the Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework and the new Cross-Thematic Curricula of the compulsory education, and particularly in the Curricula of History, a subject where issues of educative and ideological management of the cultural diversity continuously arise. It is also worth examining if the cross-thematic integration in the new Curricula of History has given these curricula and, therefore, the respective school textbooks new aspects, directions and orientations in the management of cultural and any other diversity, in the Greek education system.

The cross-thematic integration in the new Curricula of compulsory education

The cross-thematic integration in education was born within the framework of the general theoretical thinking about inter-scientificity. The continuously increasing segmentation and the rapid development of knowledge have greatly contributed to its appearance. The educational bodies discovered that the segmentation of the subject matters and their content, as they were presented to the students, involved the risk: a) of the often random segmentation of some subject matters that no longer corresponds to the modern form of language, b) of the maintenance of the obsolete character of some perceptions about subject matters, their structure and the organisation of their content, despite the discoveries of the genetic scientificity and cognitive psychology, c) of the inability to keep up with the social and economic development of the modern world, which requires complex learning abilities that refer to the understanding of a general mental development instead of the knowledge of specific content or the accumulated knowledge, with the prospect of lifelong education, of course.

More specifically, the term “cross-thematic approach” means the form of teaching during which, on the one hand, the content of teaching is unified and, on the other hand, the teaching includes laboratories and research. From this general definition, the two main features of the cross-thematic approach can be seen: a) the unification, and not the segmentation of knowledge, and b) the quest of knowledge in an inquiring and experiential way (Theofilidis, 1997). The first feature exceeds the “traditional” – vertical division of the detailed curriculum in autonomous subject matters, while the second one accepts active methods of learning-working, which start from the experiences and interests of the students (Chrisafidis, 2000). This does not mean, of course, that the cross-thematic approach of knowledge is identified with the inter-scientific one. More specifically, the inter-scientific approach is connected to the parallel study of a subject matter or subject field through the content and the methods of various scientific fields, while the cross-thematic approach, through the examination of issues or problems, offers the chance to acquire knowledge without the boundaries of the various scientific fields being distinct (Matsagouras, 2002).

The main assumptions on which the theoretical thinking about the structure and the cross-thematic character of the detailed curricula is based are the following:

(a) In the curricula that maintain the distinct subjects, priority is given to the intra-disciplinary knowledge in its school version,

(b) The school knowledge must be organised in a concept-centred way, because this makes it easier for students both to understand and to transfer the school knowledge,

(c) The cross-thematic extensions, which are proposed by the alternative forms of cross-thematic integration, constitute a significant and necessary element in a modern curriculum, to the extent that they promote the deepening of the intra-disciplinary knowledge and they contribute to the composition of the supra-disciplinary knowledge, which allows for a more global perception of reality, and

(d) For the cross-thematic curricula to be functional, they must guarantee the natural and smooth transition from the intra-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary to the supra-disciplinary knowledge, so that the unity in the curriculum, the educational material and the teaching is maintained (Matsagouras, 2002).

Based on the aforementioned thinking, we will attempt a critical approach to the cross-thematic curricula of compulsory education (Pedagogical Institute, 2002).
The educational framework of cross-thematic integration in the Curricula of the compulsory education

With regard to the way the school knowledge is organised

In the new cross-thematic curricula of the compulsory education, the organisation of the school knowledge in distinct and “independent” subject matters based on the traditional criteria of distinguishing the subject matters is not doubted nor changed, without taking account of the findings of many scientific fields, regarding both the separation of the subject matters and the learning abilities of the students. On the contrary, as it is highlighted, “the autonomy of the subjects is not cancelled, but the distinct subjects are maintained” (Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, 2002). The cancellation of some main subject matters would be an extreme proposal for the implementation of the cross-thematic reference, but the replacement of some traditional subjects with multi-subjects or cross-thematic subjects, where issues, main concepts and complex situations are approached in a global and holistic way, (Gavalas, 2003), such as the pre-existing ones in the Elementary School (Study of the environment, I research the natural world), would be expected. Particularly in High School, the introduction of a new cross-thematic subject was necessary, and would constitute a pilot-subject for wider changes in the course timetable and the wider framework of knowledge provision. It is worth mentioning as a simple, typical example the unification of the subjects of Geography and History, according to the standards of the French education system, so that, among others, the students can approach the time and space in the same way.

At the same time, there is no substantial differentiation in the management of the teaching time, since the cross-thematic projects that are proposed are integrated in about 10% of the total teaching time of each subject matter (Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, 2002). This time framework (4-6 teaching hours in the whole school year for the majority of the High School students and many Elementary School students), given that many teaching hours are often missed, as well as that there is much pressure for the completion of the teaching material, is actually prohibitive, if not subversive for the successful organisation and completion of the work plans proposed in the respective curricula of each subject.

The same critic can be expressed for the diffusion of the indicative fundamental concepts in the curricula (Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, 2002). A thorough study of the integration framework of these concepts leads to the following conclusion:

1. An obscurity or difficulty can be noted for the reader-teacher to understand the way in which these concepts will be diffused in the curricula and the teaching material. More specifically, some fundamental concepts appear in the Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework of a subject, and new-different ones are added to the respective curriculum (see example, Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework), or they are absolutely different from the one module to the other (see example, Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework and Curriculum of Modern Greek Literature). (Agelakos, 2007)

2. A large deviation can be noted regarding the number of the indicative cross-thematic concepts, which reveals that they are neither specific nor fundamental. In detail, it is found that, while, in the Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework of Modern Greek Language for the Elementary School, and History for the High School, the fundamental cross-thematic concepts are eight (8), in the History for the Elementary School, they are more than eighty (80) (see example, Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework and Curriculum of History for the Elementary School), and in the Modern Greek Literature for the High School, they are sixty (60). It is reasonable to wonder how the concepts provided in the whole operation will be interconnected, how the fundamental concepts will be distinguished (Gavalas, 2003) from the secondary concepts or the concepts of minor significance. More specifically, in the Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework of History for the Elementary School, the scientist-teacher can understand why the concepts “space-time-change-system-culture” etc. can be used during teaching as fundamental teaching concepts of interconnection with the other subject matters. On the contrary, it cannot be understood why special historical terms such as Dodekatheon-iconoclasm-Sacred Band etc. are integrated in the cross-thematic concepts (see, for example, Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework and Curriculum of History for the Elementary School)

With regard to the teaching procedures - projects

The proposed teaching procedures (dialogue, narration, use of supervisory material, group-cooperative teaching) in the new Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Frameworks and Curricula already existed as theoretical proposals in the individual curricula of 1999 (Greek Government Gazette 1999), while, in the new curricula, only the great emphasis on them during teaching and their wishful use in the classroom is provided. What is really emphasised in the cross-thematic curricula are the proposed projects in the form of work plans. Attempting to approach the proposed work plans, it is found that many of them correspond to the main theoretical principles for the development of such a project (Frey, 1986; Vaina, 1996 Matsagouras, 2002). However, a number of work plans prove the ignorance or confusion
The technological orientation of the historical education in Greece

From the study of the new cross-thematic curricula, interesting information about their ideological orientation can be found.

In the official texts of the leadership of the Pedagogic Institute, a tendency to proclaim the cross-thematic integration as the panacea for the improvement of the education system is found (see the introductory note of the President of the Pedagogic Institute in the Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, 2003; Kathimerini, 2003, Education issues review, 2002). This proclamation of the cross-thematic integration as an innovation that will radically change the current school framework is enhanced through:

- Historicity references ("the cross-thematic approach of knowledge has concerned human thought even from the times of Plato".),
- Reassurances for democratic procedures and
- Consent ("the dialogue with the dynamic teachers has re-fuelled the enthusiasm for the 'vision' of cross-thematic integration", "the relationship that was developed between the teaching community and the Pedagogic Institute (on the occasion of the cross-thematic reference) is very significant and reflects great hopes"),
- Hopes for educative effectiveness ("Through the proposed Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Frameworks and the Curricula, we intend and hope that the student will be 'provided' with the appropriate 'educative mantle' to deal more successfully with the 'storms of life', forming his or her own worldview"),
- Proof of European innovation and cooperation ("53% of the European countries have not dealt with this issue, for which our country has an official, innovative proposal", "this attempt is in harmony with the goals of the Council of Ministers of the European Union"),
- Transformation of political choices into national ones ("the Greek intellectual elite must participate in this national attempt and come together", "scientists that preferred to take part in this national attempt").

With regard to the curriculum of History, some ideological choices are noticeable which enhance the opinion that the cross-thematic integration is dealt with as a "technical" issue, without the ideological orientation of the curriculum changing, particularly in the Elementary School. The following are examples of such choices:

- The nation-centred character of the curricula of History and the respective school textbooks. For example, one can mention the absence of critical approach to the Byzantine Empire as a multinational power arrangement,
- The obsession on an event-based approach to historical knowledge,
- The tool-like - mechanical utilisation of the historical sources during teaching,
- The clear ideological orientation of various projects proposed in the curriculum, which manipulate teaching (For example, one can mention two from the unit "The Byzantine state and the neighbouring peoples – The 'neighbours' of Byzantines-Persians and Avars ally against Byzantium"

1. "They discuss the Akathistos Hymn, they learn the relevant hymn by heart and they sing it" (Religion, Music, Greek Language – these are the subject matters with common cross-thematic elements, according to the Curriculum).
2. "They associate the successful military campaign of Heraclius against the Persians with that of Alexander the Great" (Pedagogic Institute, Curriculum of History for the Elementary School, 2002).

This tendency becomes almost ridiculous – or almost an admission (?) – in the curriculum of Religion for the Elementary School, where, from the fourth to the sixth grade, on the one hand, the writing and learning of
hymns are proposed eleven (11) times as cross-thematic (?), while, on the other hand, not even one cross-thematic project is proposed in a significant unit (see Curriculum of Religion, 2002) that refers to the introduction to other religions, such as that of the Muslims or the Jews.

The management of cultural diversity in the Cross-Thematic Curricula of History in the compulsory education of Greece

The rhetoric about diversity and multi-culturality in the new cross-thematic curricula is assertively present in the introductory texts and the general principles of the Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework and the Curricula, but noticeably absent in the largest part of the individual units and curricula of History in the compulsory education.

In detail, in the introductory texts of the Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework (Pedagogic Institute, Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, 2002), in the Curriculum of Greek Language (Pedagogic Institute, Single Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, 2002), as well as in the special goals of the Curriculum of History, there is a plethora of general references with principle character, in matters of management of the cultural diversity, which carefully “utilise” elements of all the three strategies analysed above, such as:

- The admission of the inevitability of multi-culturality, and the tolerance: “The minimisation of distances and the globalisation of the economy place people in a multi-cultural environment”, “The multi-cultural reality of our society obliges each citizen to accept and respect the cultural diversity of his/her co-citizens, so that they can all live in harmony, in an environment of cultural, national and linguistic diversity”, “The achievement of conditions that allow the student ... to develop a responsible, democratic and free personality, with social and humane principles, without religious and cultural prejudice”, “To understand and accept the cultural, religious or other differences as a fundamental right of humans in a democratic society and as a positive factor for its development”

- The existence of a prescriptive cultural model: “The composition of the Greek society is constantly changing, being enriched with people and bodies of different linguistic and cultural traditions, which leads to the increase of the cultural diversity, which can be considered healthy from the aspect of the revival of the prevalent traditions”, “With regard to the foreign student, who is integrated in a class where the Greek language is used as the mother language, he/she must: experience the Greek culture through the language, and adopt a positive attitude towards it”

- The cultural diversity as a problem-threat for the one and single national identity: “The enhancement of the cultural and linguistic identity within the framework of a multi-cultural society through the development of the national, cultural and religious education”, “The development of the awareness of the European citizen, with the parallel maintenance of our national identity and cultural self-awareness”

- The integration of elements of other groups’ culture: “The smooth social integration of each person requires the development of the communication ability, both through his/her mother language, and through other languages, as well as through his/her information about the history and cultural diversity of not only his/her group, but also other national, religious and cultural groups”

- The equality of chances in education: “The guarantee of equal chances and learning possibilities for all students”

With regard to the internal elements of the curriculum of History, the following are found:

1. In the curriculum of History of each Elementary School class (Pedagogic Institute, Curriculum of History, 2002), both the goals and the content, and the examples for project have clearly nation-centred – mono-cultural orientation. Particularly, “the contribution and effect of the Greek culture” are repeated as a goal, while the effect of other cultures (Roman, Arabic etc.) on the Greek culture, from the ancient years to this day, is ignored. Carefully studying all the proposed cross-thematic and other projects, one can find out that there is no project with inter-cultural orientation, except one, at the end of the sixth grade, where, on the occasion of the settlement of the refugees from Minor Asia in Greece, the students are simply asked to “research (what kind of research do the Curriculum and those who prepared it mean?) if refugees have been settled in their area (not immigrants or anything else!) and to collect information about their life and customs”.

2. In the curriculum of History for the High School (Pedagogic Institute, Curriculum of History for the High School, 2002) a difference is detected, mainly in the Medieval and Byzantine era, where the teaching goals involve the distinguishing of the ethnological composition of the Byzantine Empire population, as well as the understanding of the interaction between the culture of Islam, Byzantium and the West. The proposed projects allow students to perceive various aspects, as well as the contribution of the Arabic culture. One cannot claim the same about the recent and modern history in the curriculum of History for High School, where, although the contents have both European and global orientation, both the goals and mainly the projects (cross-thematic and other ones) have no inter-cultural orientation and either remain in modernized, nation-centred frameworks of the European view and worldview or are limited to the reading of tables and maps, as well as to an endless collection of photographic, literature and other cultural
CONCLUSION

From the analysis, the initial opinion is confirmed, namely that, although the new cross-thematic curricula were presented as innovative, both in general (Ntinas and others, 2003) and specifically in the matter of management of cultural diversity, they do not seem to bring about changes or differences in the attitude of the school organisation. At the same time, they involve a rhetoric about multi-culturality and diversity that easily gains wider consent and acceptance, while, in the “hard core” of the curricula, features that have been recorded and criticised by the scientific and educational literature (Damanakis, 1997; Fragoudaki-Dragona, 1997; Markou, 2001) for the last twenty years survive and are perpetuated.

Of course, the reality of the curricula reflects the fear, the insecurity and the blind eyes of the Greek society and particularly the power structures towards the noticeable non-accordance of the current school with the social facts of the modern, multi-cultural Greek reality. And if the authorities continue to dangle between assimilation or integration, on the one hand, and marginalisation or indifference, on the other hand, it is important that the scientific community and the scientists request radical changes in the structure and function of the educational organisation, as well as the policies of management of diversity in the Greek society, or else, we will soon experience the upsetting message of a school as presented in the awarded French film “Entre Les Murs”:

“A young teacher stands in front of the blackboard. Open, kind, determined to penetrate the minds of those 14-year-old immigrant children. A real teacher who has something to say. But this rainbow of skins, mentalities and perceptions is not interested at all. Simply because these children have grown up in the 20th district of Paris, a refugee refuge since the late 19th century, and the street education has mapped them a pre-decided route: factory, kitchen, unemployment fund or even jail. It is at least funny that the white French thinks that he will teach them the past perfect as a solution to their problems.”

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