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## Interculturalism and Understanding of History: Problems and Teaching Proposals

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### Abstract

This research is a synthesis of the results from the Greek and International research and literature on the intercultural dimension of teaching of history in the Greek Primary School and Gymnasium (4th-9th graders). The research focuses on the problems in historical understanding and intercultural communication due to the lack of the intercultural approach in history teaching and on the application of appropriate didactic methods that can enhance both the understanding of the past as well as the different cultural and ethnic groups within a classroom.

**Keywords:** Interculturalism, Teaching of History, Student Learning

### Introduction

Although the Greek literature lacks of studies focused on understanding of historical time by students, it is rich in investigating the ideologies that dominate the analytical program and textbooks nurturing social and cultural stereotypes and the study of the issue of the didactic approach of history in the context of intercultural education. The multicultural composition of classes today cannot be ignored. This dimension is included in the study, based on the assumption that affects the understanding of history by students from different cultural backgrounds. After all, social cohesion is promoted through the recognition of cultural specificities of migrant groups and of establishing a social framework within which they can coexist and grow all cultures, without endangering the unity and social cohesion itself (Georgogiannis, 1999). This is the concept of interculturalism, the creative encounter of people of multicultural societies and the freely coexistence and development in both the social and the educational context.

### Theory

#### Theory of Research

All of the researches that critically examine the content of the curriculum and the books of history of our country, interest in this study insofar as the chronological presentation of past involves options of facts, periods even cultures and specific stories of cultural and social groups which not only are not ideologically neutral, but are addressed to all students of modern classes, who have

different social and cultural backgrounds. These researches are examined on the basis of the case that the selected content and methodology of teaching material in school history affects the development of historical thinking in general and the understanding of historical time in particular.

Despite the requirements of the legislation concerning intercultural education in Greece since 1996 (2413/1996), the teaching of history is still determined by the national curriculum and the only textbook which are governed by specific single-national ideological values. Number of researches has shown that the contradictions of the content of instructions to teachers for the curriculum in relation to the content and methodology have been incorporated in textbooks, and the ethnocentric nature of school history (Dragona & Frangoudaki, 1997; Dragona & Frangoudaki, 2000; Frangoudaki, 2000; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2008; Dragona, 1997; Kapsalis et al., 2000). So far the pedagogical intervention assessment surveys in order to understand history are less than the quantitative declaratory surveys of the existing level of understanding of students. Older declaratory surveys adopting the model of Piaget, setting age limits to the expected achievements in the understanding of historical time by students. Investigations, which are now benchmarks, demonstrate what students have accomplished more than what they are capable to do via the appropriate teaching intervention (Oakden & Sturt, 1922; Coltham & Fines, 1971; Peel, 1967; Hallam, 1970). Later researchers also agree that the past is a cloudy area for younger students emphasizing as important finding that even in the age of formal reasoning historical understanding of students was lower than expected in Piaget's model for their age (Arthur & Phillips, 2004; Haydn et al., 2003; Wood, 1995).

Bruner did not apply his ideas in history in a systematic way, but Rogers made an interesting effort and created a trend in England known as the "New History" (Bruner, 1966; Rogers, 1978). From a research point, the view of this teaching concept of "New History" put in the center the question of whether and with what methods and teaching means can foster historical thinking of students at ages in which according to the model of Piaget put restrictions on the development of it. Experimental investigations of the last decades have set the question of the existence of some considered data constraints in the development of thinking in specific ages (not in the existence of restrictions in general) and have studied the contribution of specific teaching methods to a better understanding of historical conditions (Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lee et al., 1997; Lee, 1984). They show that sometimes the younger students were able to handle difficult concepts and understood better than older students, if the teaching was done by certain methods (Shemilt, 1980; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Booth, 1987; Lee, et al., 1997).

In recent decades, research has been done so as to assess the application of different teaching methods to foster understanding of the history and the particular perception of historical time, which can be applied in the intercultural approach of school history. Two major experimental investigations have been performed in the United States regarding the cultivation of understanding of historical periods by teaching interventions (Thornton & Vukelich, 1988; Barton, 2002). In U.K., researchers tested through experimental pedagogical interventions research the same issue (Lynn, 1993; West, 1981; West, 1982; Wood, 1995; Harnett, 1993; Stow, 1998). Experimental studies have investigated the application of different versions of the timeline in relation to the development of the understanding of the temporal sequence of historical

periods (West, 1981; West, 1982). Survey reference to Greek reality is that of Fragkos, which was aimed to investigate the perception of the concept of time in 12 years old students and recommend applications for the teaching of history (Fragkos, 1985).

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is the synthesis of research data of International and Greek literature for national and intercultural dimension in history teaching and its impact on understanding of history by the students of Primary and Secondary (Gymnasium) School so as to draw conclusions in relation to the teaching of History in the context of school education.

### **Research Issues**

1. If there are any intercultural elements in the character of school history at Greek school.
2. If there are and what are the difficulties in understanding the history by the students caused by the lack of intercultural approach to teaching.
3. If under what teaching methods and options of the content of school textbooks of history, the intercultural dimension can be integrated in the teaching of history.

### **Research Methodology**

In order to study the research, the "historical method" was used and the following steps were followed (Cohen & Manion, 1974): 1. Identification of the problem and the need to study the investigations. 2. Formulation of specific research questions posed in the studied researches and formulation of hypothesis that experimentally correlate variables. 3. Classification of information - the study results into categories. 4. Recording of results, discussion and conclusions in a logical narrative, whose reliability and documentation can be checked by the reader.

Examining investigations in the light of the above research questions, is shown below the investigation of the intercultural approach to the understanding of history and historical time by students of Primary and Gymnasium School, and the dynamics of specific teaching strategies. This age group was selected since, while even though their abstract thinking is not developed, students are taught history, facing difficulties in understanding.

### **Research Results**

#### **The Ethnocentric Orientation of the School Curriculum of History**

In the field of curriculum studies a stream of researches were developed by the 70s, who were trying to investigate the dependence of individual educational choices of specific political ideologies. In this direction led researchers trying to answer questions like, why these choices are being made in education and why some goals, methods, and contents of study are excluded (Schubert, 1991). Especially Apple mentioned the political dimension of education by identifying interactions between the school curriculum and the economic and social factors and the specific political ideology (Apple, 1979). A number of such studies on the objectives, the content of curriculum, textbooks, the "hidden analytic" have been made starting from the 80s also for the Greek education (Voros, 1988; Bampounis, 1988; Mavrogiorgos, 1981; Mavrogiorgos, 1984a; Mavrogiorgos, 1984b; Milonas, 1982; Noutsos, 1983; Papakonstantinou, 1984). These studies

have shown that the development of a curriculum cannot be considered separately from the political, economic and ideological context (Mavrogiorgos, 1992). Modern Greek researchers criticize the fact that even the interdisciplinary and experiential approach to history proposed is not ideologically neutral (Aggelakos & Kokkinos, 2004). The "innocent" starting point of education policy for teaching history can be read in the position that a fundamental purpose of the curriculum is to convey the appreciation and acceptance of the best elements of the culture that we have inherited. This position indicates the fact that because of the recording of cultural heritage and intellectual production is huge and we cannot learn everything it is needed to make choices. What are the motives and ideology behind these choices?

It is fact that teaching of history is used for the cultivation of national and cultural identity. Undoubtedly teaching philological courses should cover the transmission of culture in order to develop the next generations of the consciousness of their identity and citizens to develop values and attitudes that will enable them to live together harmoniously in this social environment. Often, however, it cultivates the perception of national and cultural superiority. Symptom eminently perceptible in our country, especially in the teaching of antiquity, is not our exclusive privilege. It is noticed in interpretations of history from many nations (Slater, 1989). However, as the Greek school classes are not culturally and socially homogeneous, it is interesting the fact that the common finding of many studies that the textbook primarily has been and still is in Greek education an important consolidation tool of ethnocentric ideology and reproduction of national stereotypes (Dragona & Frangoudaki, 1997; Dragona & Frangoudaki, 2000; Frangoudaki, 2000; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2008; Dragona, 1997; Kapsalis et al., 2000).

Specifically through the instruction of the curriculum of certain teaching methods and the content of school textbooks, the position of national continuity is supported at the base of nationalist ideas of the last century, cultivating fear of the supposed threats to national cultures because of cultural contact of different cultural and ethnic groups. Based on the extensive research of European Research of Youth and History, it is showed that this ideology found in most European countries preventing the development of a common European consciousness (Angvik & Borries, 1997).

Although, there are many "stories" for the same object, that are often the opposite, contradict or complement each other. Alongside with the national historical narrative there are the history of women, minorities, the history of economically weak social classes, history aspects of daily life, like the history of the patriot and the enemy in the conflict of two different nations (Lee & Ashby, 2000). Especially in Europe the borders of the Member of recent centuries are constantly varied so as it is needed a more pluralistic and open approach to history (Pellens, 1991).

Therefore the ethnocentric approach to history reproduces national stereotypes hindering understanding of historical events. It focuses on national history, facts which are not familiar to students from different ethnic backgrounds, so their learning is not facilitated. It gives biased interpretations especially in military conflicts and political conflicts with neighboring peoples.

These may be incompatible with the knowledge and experiences of students from neighboring countries.

The question is which aspects of the various Histories are needed to be selected for the intercultural approach of history and with what methods must be studied by students.

### **Teaching Proposals**

#### **Need of Redefining the Content of teaching history**

##### **The common cultural past of culturally different students**

As the thematic of history, teacher needs to try to ensure that all pupils from different cultural groups will understand a past which is their common heritage (Davies, 1993). Undoubtedly the Greek cultural past and the Greek language are a basis on which Western civilization is based.

##### **From National History to the World History**

In Greek education system, the history books focus mainly on Western European cultures, while African and Asian are ignored and somehow discarded, thus forming racial stereotypes (Dragona & Frangoudaki, 1997; Dragona & Frangoudaki, 2000; Frangoudaki, 2000; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2008; Dragona, 1997; Kapsalis et al., 2000). Language and literature courses need to promote the appreciation of cultural differences, to support cultural diversity and pluralism and to limit racist phenomena (Haydn et al., 2003). An important trend in Europe and the US, which underlies the new textbooks of history, is to integrate in the material of textbooks, the history of other ethnic groups and to promote the connection with the society that students live.

##### **The Stereotype of the Supremacy and the History of Neighboring Country**

Because school history means in practice facts, periods, cultural and social histories, it is important to be examined in light of the intercultural dimension of education. The role of education systems to build an imaginative insights and glorious history, which excludes the neighbor and mostly based on myths curriculum covered the past has been emphasized by researches. Omissions and distortions in history play a major role in enabling the crystallization of stereotypes (Gundara & Jagdish, 2002; Koulouri, 2001; Dragona & Frangoudaki, 1997; Dragona & Frangoudaki, 2000; Frangoudaki, 2000; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2008; Dragona, 1997; Kapsalis et al., 2000). The school history needs to provide different perspectives on historical events and teach concepts that promote human rights. In this perspective, inhibitors are the lack of curriculum that supports it, so as not on personal concepts of some teachers, and the lack of systematic training of existing teachers in the previous university education. "The reason to teach history is not that changes society, but that is changing the students, it changes what they see in the world and how they see it." (Lee et al., 1992).

It is noted that the culture of peace and understanding between nations is not achieved with the beautification of nasty and gruesome facts of the story, nor to the deletion of historical memory. The examination of the joint of historical fact by the conflicting perspectives sources sides of opposite nations is the solution.



### **The Intercultural Dimension in the Study of Contemporary History**

Another trend observable in Greek school, but also that of other countries is that the teaching of recent historical events is avoided, often in the range of a century. It is considered that there was a risk that the teaching of history is about to serve political ideologies. This distinction reinforces the natural tendency of children to treat the history as something distant and irrelevant to their lives, rather than something that has shaped the world around them and is constantly formed by society. Furthermore, it aggravates the tendency to treat contemporary questions as if they had not been content in time and as if there were no parallel or earlier events. It is important to make a clear idea of historical approaches as one of the ways of understanding how things are today, how have formed relationships and stereotypes among peoples and how it can be done in the future. Additional questions that can help us understand the history from the perspective of interculturalism are: The borders between countries, which in the last two centuries are constantly changing, what divides and what unites? They have the same meaning for those who live on different sides of the border? What effect does the new frontiers in terms of political behavior and historical consciousness? (Pellens, 1991).

The discussion on the different versions of contemporary history for different cultural groups in the classroom plays an important role in understanding the historical past and reconciliation among peoples. Does it make sense to discuss the events of World War II in the classroom students for example from Greece, Albania and Bulgaria? Does it make sense to consider what we call Asia Minor campaign, the Turkish call it the national liberation war? Researchers emphasize the "healing" powers of school history as to the culture of understanding and as to the unity of different cultural groups (Edgington, 1982; Ferro, 1981).

Moreover in teaching methodology is important in intercultural classes the starting point for the study of history to be a family history of students and recent past, as will be shown below.

### **Teaching Methodology Proposals**

Investigations regarding the role of teachers in addressing the problem of ethnocentric content of history in multicultural classes of Greek school showed that teachers in small degree only take into account the presence of 'other' students, feeling sympathy for their difficulties (Spinthourakis et al., 2005; Georgiadis & Zisimos, 2008). With feelings of uncertainty and hesitation and without being essentially free of high-low culture stereotypes, work in a context of daily pressures and dilemmas trying to implement at best makeshift conditions taking into account their cultural diversity.

### **Starting Point of History Teaching of Recent Times**

In the international literature on the teaching of history, it has been discussed for decades, the question of what is the right age to teach students specific periods of history. Older researchers suggested that students engage in "pictorial and descriptive" aspects of history, because until the 11 years are not able to understand historical periods (Oakden & Sturt, 1922). An important pedagogical conclusion of the investigation of the Fragkos to Greek reality is that the understanding of the historical period that is taught to students at the First Gymnasium, that of

ancient Greek history, is in line with findings on the concept of time, achievement almost impossible for Children of 12 years old. Children are moving with great ease in the near past and at certain situations. Indeed they understand better the time when reference points are specific personal events and temporal terms of everyday life. Therefore, the time period that will be taught to students should be relatively recent. Therefore proposes to follow opposed chronological way: The teaching of history to start from the chronologically more recent events and to follow chronologically older. "In this way the child will know the history of the generation of his father, his grandfather, means the particular historical period in which lived the older and the directly interested, cause child constantly offered stimuli from the environment in which it lives. On the other hand the development of the child's ability to "view" itself in older times will help to acquire historical consciousness and give a chronological scale to weigh the various historical periods. Finally in this way the teaching of history will follow the path of spiritual advancement of the child from concrete to abstract and normal course that followed by the development of the concept of time from specific time to the time removal" (Fragkos, 1985).

In recent decades the debate in the international scientific community has been enriched by exploring the different practices applied in Great Britain in the context of the debate that began in the 70s with the tendency of New History and formed part of the educational policies of governments followed by the management of educational institutions. Applying the data of the surveys, the teaching of history in the Great Britain begins in primary school from the past of the students and their family and a period close to the memory of the living. This model is compatible with Piaget's theory for the development of cognitive skills of children. Most schools introduce children to the period of the last years of the 19th and 20th century. There were selected as a natural extension of the history of families and their immediate ancestors. This approach is particularly important for training in intercultural environments. Students from different cultural origin according to the proposal of Fragkos and foreign researchers, start studying the history of the generation of their father and grandfather. The personal element contributes to further understanding of common problems, struggles and difficulties in different cultural groups from either side of the border and if they are. As a result, social understanding is succeeded.

### **Recording of oral Testimonies**

An important role has the recording of oral testimonies and control reliability. Although, it is noted the tendency of students to do critical sources or accept what their grandmother says as the only reliable source. Not consider: How does he/she know this? It is true what you say grandmother? There is a strong tendency of students to receive information from books or adults as undeniably true (Rogers, 1978; Thompson, 1984). The programs implemented in Greek schools is significant that students usually look for their answers from a single source (one adult or an ancestor or a text book), which they consider as reliable as there is no reason to interbreed with other oral or written source. Repeated efforts are needed from teachers and discussions to understand that the information, that they accept, should be crossed and every time to be doubtful whether the next piece of information that will bring, have previously crossed (Kamarinou, 1995).



### **Multicultural Historical Maps for the Understanding of Historical Time**

The one-dimensional history teaching has not only emotional nature consequences to students of different cultural backgrounds that make up the population of today's classroom, but also has implications for the development of perception of historical time and understanding in history. Chronologically points of national history benchmarks do not exist and those of Greek history are not unfamiliar. In order to understand time sequences, they have proved effective the various versions of the timeline and sort and sequence of historical periods exercises / events. The time sequences would not necessarily be linear. Teachers utilizing the intercultural dimension in a historical period can experiment with circles and curves, integrating different events chronologically parallel national stories in the timeline. Wood going a step further argues that there are positive effects on the understanding of historical time, when students try to create their own time lines and historical narratives (Wood, 1995). Hoodless in the early years of the primary school proposes personal life lines of students and even three-dimensional in the classroom and in life local lines, national and world history (Hoodless, 1996). Alongside the chronological map of Greek culture, the trading of maps of civilizations origin of student in class carries the potential of contributing to cultural pluralism and better understanding of historical time and history in general.

### **Group- Cooperation Learning and Project Method**

In history teaching in Greek schools criticized the fact that the collating work plans hold a marginal share (10%) in the intended teaching time (Aggelakos & Kokkinos, 2004). The contribution of experiential learning activities and applying the project method is important for the conducting of student research (Kamarinou, 2012). In this context, it has begun to be recognized the value of teaching objects and everyday materials of the recent past from the cultural origin of student groups and their usage as a material experiential activities (Kamarinou, 2012; Kamarinou, 2000; Kamarinou, 2013).

### **Conclusions - Suggestions**

The exclusive ethnocentric character of school history contributes to the creation of national and racial stereotypes and prejudices and impairing the understanding of history. Particularly, it causes problematic for the perception of historical time, since not all students in multicultural classrooms are familiar with the reference points.

Intercultural approach to history has at least two dimensions. One regards the content of school curriculum and other teaching methodology. Regarding the content of the school history needs to expand not only Europe, but also to include the history of African and Asian peoples. Historical events involving rival neighbor country needs to be assessed according to sources from the perspective of both countries, especially if the visual is conflicting. Alongside the national history we need to study the history of social groups of a State, which may have elements in common with that of other nations.

Regarding the teaching methodology, a good starting point for intercultural approach is the modern history and particularly the history of grandparents. The oral testimonies, cultural

objects even that of daily use, contribute to a better understanding of history for all students of multicultural classes, but also to better understanding and communication between them. The methods of experiential learning, the Project method create teamwork research opportunities and complex chronological maps with benchmarks from the periods of the history of cultural students origin groups contribute to a better understanding of historical time and perception of historical events in their context, as and to create a climate of acceptance and understanding for all students in the class. The aim of education is reconciliation and peace between peoples and intercultural approach to history can contribute greatly to this.

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