

Historical Culture in Early Childhood Education.

A study in Greek Contemporary Curricula

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Abstract

The concept of historical culture reflects the representations of the historical past, the forms and processes by which the past is projected in contemporary societies. The cognitive significance of history is included in this concept as well as the history as social science, the study of human activities and the everyday life in historical time. A very interesting aspect of historical past is emerging in school history since primary education and kindergarten.

This presentation studies the working hypothesis that children's contact with historical culture begins in kindergarten and in the first grades of primary school, namely from the early education of children aged 4 to 8. Specifically, it tests the schema of Jörn Rüsen (2012) regarding the historical consciousness in combination with the data from the curricula and international scientific research. This schema is shaped by the following three dimensions: aesthetic, political and cognitive. Specific examples are given that correspond to educational practices, for each of these dimensions.

This study is focused on the Greek curriculum for the early childhood education and primary education and draws its elements from the international bibliography. The methodological approach of this study is the critical discourse analysis and specifically the study of the expression of historical culture in the discourse of the curricula. The conclusions confirm the working hypothesis and, in addition, mention

some important elements concerning the meaning of the concept of historical culture in early childhood education in Greece.

Key words: History Culture, Early Childhood Education, Curriculum, Educational Programs, Elementary School, Critical Discourse Analysis.

The concept of Historical Culture

In contemporary scientific research, the theoretical framework and educational applications regarding the historical education, the concepts of historical consciousness and historical culture have a special meaning. Scholars have attempted to outline these concepts and to link them to perceptions of the historical past, social and cultural environment. Their study reveals interesting elements about the way in which the past is perceived and attempted to be transmitted to future generations through formal and informal forms of education.

According to Jörn Rüsen (2012), historical consciousness is an intellectual activity of interpreting the past in order to understand it in the present and in the context of the expectations of the future. This approach includes an awareness of time and the changes that occur in its passage, its continuities and discontinuities, its meaning, as it is perceived by historians and by citizens at whatever stage of their lives they are in.

The concept of “Historical Culture” (Rüsen, 2012, 2017) includes the expression of historical consciousness in society in a variety of forms and processes and the results of the perception of the past and the powerful forms of meaning regarding historical past. We can summarize these forms as follows and argue that historical culture exists : a) in the knowledge of function of historical studies, b) in the habits of everyday life c) in the way in which the historical past is understood and expressed in them, d) in the historical significance which we attribute to our personal identity, e) in the expression of memory in human civilization and culture.

Also, the concept of *Historical Culture* encompasses the elements of culture that are related to the past, such as museums, historical education in schools, representations of the past in various media or literature and so on. The study of the expression of Historical Culture in education and curricula is complicated and

composed of many different dimensions. The five main dimensions of historical culture, according to Rösen (2012, 2017) are: 1) Aesthetic, 2) Political, 3) Cognitive, 4) Moral and 5) Religious. In the present study I choose to research the three out of five dimensions which are mentioned first by the Rösen (2012): 1) Aesthetic, 2) Political, 3) Cognitive. This choice takes place because a schema with three dimensions is more flexible and appropriate for the education in the foundation stage (kindergarten and first two grades of the elementary school).

Historical culture exists as part of a wider culture in formal and informal forms of education, in family, local community, care centers and nursery schools. Children meet the past through the public use of history since kindergarten, this is inevitable. As a result, children from an early age have various experiences that are related to the historical past.

To continue, I will present the study of the contemporary curriculum in Greece from the kindergarten and elementary school regarding the way in which historical culture is expressed. Specifically, I will present the methodology of the study, the working hypothesis, some important facts about the Greek education system in order to understand the main elements of the present study, the sense of historical culture in Greek contemporary curricula, the evidence of the study, a critical evaluation and the conclusions of this study.

Methodology

The current study presents the critical study of the curricula for kindergarten and primary school in Greece and some empirical observations. In particular, it focuses on the extract from the curricula regarding Historical Education. The methodological approach of this study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA) and observation as a method of educational research (Cohen, & Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Jorgensen, & Phillips, 2002; Wodak, 2001). Critical Discourse Analysis (Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA) is revealed in the light of the relationship of discourse to social phenomena, discourse patterns developed in the curricula their influence on the “dominant narrative” regarding the perception of history in Greece and the discourse structures constituted by structures of social

representations that we find in scholars such as Foucault, Habermas and Moniot (Wodak, 2001; Moniot 2002).

The ***working hypothesis*** of this study is that ***children's contact with historical culture begins in kindergarten and in the first grades of primary school***, namely from the early education of children aged 4 to 8. Specifically, it tests the ***schema*** of Jörn Rüsen (2012) related to the ***Historical Culture*** and expressed by the following three dimensions: *aesthetic, political and cognitive dimensions*. Curricula are an important part of children's official education because they are designed by scientific teams of specialists in History and Historical Education who operate within the framework of the official educational policies. Specific examples are given that correspond to educational practices, for each of these dimensions.

***The expression of Historical Culture in Contemporary Greek Curricula
in the pre-school education and first grades of primary school.***

Some important facts about the Greek education system

The main part of this study tries to trace the historical culture expressed in the contemporary kindergarten curriculum. In Greece, the duly constituted historical education starts in the third grade of primary school. The autonomous curriculum for the teaching of history, which takes place in a separate subject, the history course, is in effect since the third grade of primary school and onwards. History Textbooks are written for the last four grades of primary school (third, fourth, fifth and sixth). The elementary school ends in the sixth grade of primary school. For the pre-school education and the first two years of primary school, there is no stand-alone history curriculum. However, there are references, sometimes specific and others generic, with special emphasis on history education. Based on these references we will try to explore the working hypothesis of this study.

In 2021, new curricula for pre-school and primary school were published. During the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, the curriculum for kindergarten was implemented in some kindergartens, the so-called "experimental schools", which aim to implement innovative educational programs and link them to modern research on education. The implementation of the new curricula in all kindergartens in the

country is planned for the school year 2023-2024. A similar plan is in place for the curricula for primary schools.

The curriculum's references to educational programs with historical orientation in kindergarten is titled as the autonomous unit: "History and Culture" in the framework of the broad thematic field "Society" and "Social Sciences". This means that inside the curriculum, history is recognized as a part of human culture and civilization and history and historical education can be included in children's education since the kindergarten (OGG (of H.R.)/5961, v2/17-12-21).

In the following we will refer to comparing phrases and educational practices related to historical education and culture, based on Rösen's schema: Aesthetic, Political and Cognitive dimensions of Historical Culture.

Aesthetic dimension

The aesthetic dimension is related to the combination of school performances, anniversaries, memorial days and public holidays. Moreover, it is expressed through art, specifically music, dance and theatre. In "Table 1" we will focus on the extracts from the text of curriculum from the kindergarten, units and pages in which these phrases, words and expressions are mentioned.

Examples

Thematic section	Extract from the curriculum Official Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, OGG (of H.R.)/5961, v2/17-12-21	Page
Arts	"Forms of physical, artistic, theatrical and musical action in relation to the historical, social and cultural context"	76269
Learning Organization	"Every day and exceptional situations (such as celebrations, cultural events and family customs): they can become a rich learning experience"	76273
Social Sciences- History (Learning Outcomes Expected)	"To cooperate (children) in organizing activities involving representations of historical events and celebrations (celebrations, local activities)"	76291

Table 1

Political Dimension

The political dimension of Historical Culture in contemporary curriculum for the pre-school education is connected with the nation, world, active citizenship, critical attitudes, democratic processes, culture, and the other's history. In "Table 2"

we will focus on the extracts from the text of the curriculum from the kindergarten, units and pages in which these phrases, words and expressions are mentioned.

Examples

Thematic section	Extract from the curriculum (Official Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, OGG (of H.R.)/5961, v2/17-12-21)	Page
Content- Thematic field	“The skills included in the toolkit are transversal and interdisciplinary, developed in all learning contexts and are complementary to children's all-round development and support their role as tomorrow's citizens of the nation and the world”.	76266
“Child, Self and Society”	“Given that the formation of active citizenship is not a simple individual process, but takes place through social interaction, social literacy which provides the tools for the processing of social reality and the cultivation of knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote communication, cooperation, active participation and mutual understanding, so that children become culturally literate and informed citizens, always in the context of their developmental maturity.”	76267
“Child, Self and Society- Attitude”	“-appreciation of the importance of historical development as a basis for the future path at individual and societal level.” “-a critical attitude towards problems and the application of democratic processes to decisions.”	76268
“Child, Self and Society- Attitude”	“-respecting the historical, cultural and religious heritage of their country and of other peoples.”	76292

Table 2

Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension is related to the connection with the family activity and simple concept of time, the concept of communality regarding the important human activity, the facts and situations, the symbols of the nation, the tradition, the connection between past and present, the formulation of questions about the historical facts. In “Table 3” we will focus on the extracts from the text of the curriculum from the kindergarten, units and pages in which these phrases, words and expressions are mentioned.

Examples

Thematic section	Extract from the curriculum (Official Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, OGG (of H.R.)/5961, v2/17-12-21)	Page
“Child, Self and Society- Knowledge”	“-identify simple concepts related to time in the context of human familiar activity”	76291
“Child, Self and Society- Knowledge”	“-recognize commonalities in important people, "things" and situations over time”	76291

“Child, Self and Society-Knowledge”	“-distinguish national symbols of Greece and other countries (such as the flag, the National Anthem)”	76291
“Child, Self and Society-Knowledge”	“-recognize family habits and traditions and the way of life in the past”	76291
“Child, Self and Society-Knowledge”	“-collect facts about events, people and data from the past and relate them to the present, developing a sense of chronology”	76291
“Child, Self and Society-Knowledge”	“-ask questions about historical facts”	76291

Table 3

In the new curricula (2022), historical education is not mentioned in the first two grades of primary school. There is no autonomous curriculum for historical education. Children are introduced to the historical past and to history through indirect references or through non-formal educational events, school visits, public holidays, ceremonies and anniversaries. These are some examples of children's contact with the public uses of history.

Summary of references to historical education in early years

Historical Education according to new curricula in Greece is connected to:

- 1) School performances, public holidays, memorial days, art (Aesthetic Dimension)
- 2) Nation, world, citizenship, critical attitudes, culture (Political Dimension)
- 3) Introduction to chronology, to national symbols (their own and other's) and to traditions. Also, with the continuity in time and with forming questions and collections of elements about historical facts (Cognitive Dimension)

Critical Evaluation and Conclusions

The new Greek curriculum from the kindergarten is related to the historical past in a closed manner. This is proved by the references to the tradition, the nation's symbols and historical facts. Also, the limited mention to the concept of historical time, the second order concepts and the chronological thinking is a fact that demonstrates the focus on the traditional forms of historical consciousness (Rüsen, 2012).

In the two first grades of elementary school there do not exist autonomous mentions regarding the historical education. Historical education in the early years is connected with the public uses of history and non-formal forms of education which is quite different from an organized training regarding the historical past, historical culture and historical education.

The three dimensions of Rösen's schema regarding the historical culture (aesthetic, political and cognitive) are visible in the contemporary curriculum. Historical culture in the early years draws on elements from the traditional historical consciousness.

Given that in contemporary international literature there are "schools of thought" for historical education which have been geographically developed in North America, North and Central Europe (Barton, & Levstik, 2009; Champan, 2021; Cooper, 2017, 2002; Lee, & Ashby, 2001; Moniot, 2002; Seixas, 2017a & b; Wilscut, 2019;), the influence of the concept of historical culture has an impact on the Greek curricula for early education. But this influence is adapted in the major narrative from the historical past in conduct with the central educational policy from history education in Greece. This policy gives priority to the history of the nation and reduces the range of references to the history of individuals and society.

Thus, there is still a lot of work to be done. The points to be improved are related to the development of new forms of historical consciousness and historical narrative such as critical and genetic, the cultivation of an awareness of historical time, the creation of internal motivation for learning and active participation of children in the learning process, the educational conditions for the exploration of knowledge, linking play with research to get to know the historical past, linking historical education with human culture and historical sources. Furthermore, linking the learning process with cultural places such as museums, areas of archaeological interest, monuments (etc.) and the development of historical empathy.

The present study confirms the initial working hypothesis: *Historical culture begins since kindergarten*. In the new Greek curricula for history education in the early years, historical culture is associated with public uses of history, with the concept of nation, the tradition, temporal concepts, the limited contact with the concept of historical past and with an awareness of the history of others.

Limitations of this study include the fact that no reports or studies of their application in practice have yet been published, so we have no data about how they are taught. Also, the present study was not compared with other curricula that have preceded it in Greece or with other curricula from other countries. Furthermore, the two out of five dimensions of the Rüsens' scheme, named moral and religious dimension, were not studied. Hopefully, these will be data to be explored in future researches.

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