EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THEORY AND TEACHING PRACTICE

Session 7: Implementing Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) in Language and Literature Teaching

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Introduction

Teaching Language and Literature are two of the most important modules included in the school curricula in order to promote the goals of education for Democratic Citizenship, Human Rights education, and Intercultural Education. Due to the unique social contexts, cultural institutions, and global power differentials between European countries, the 'good citizenship' discursive fields are qualitatively very different from country to country. Thus when comparing national curriculum to national curriculum, we witness the considerable differences between the goals and teaching methodologies of Language and Literature modules, and the selection of texts included in the school textbooks so as to correspond to the prevailing national ideologies and the citizenships ideals that a state wants to cultivate in its citizens (Hajisoteriou, Neophytou & Angelides, 2012).

Focusing our attention on the teaching of language and literature in schools, we should point out that neither the teaching of language nor the teaching of literature has ever been ideologically neutral. The prevailing social and political perceptions,

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but also the personal preferences and the political or moral attitudes of the transmitter (who is the one who tries to send a message through oral language or text), define and compose an ideological orientation, sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously, that exists and is reflected in the language used or the text written (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Ideology refers to an established way of seeing and interpreting reality, which has its roots in the political, economic, social and cultural relations that prevail in our society (Foucault, 1980). At the same time, language and texts are products of the era during which they were produced, in terms of the socio-cultural and historical context of that era.

Language and texts are also products of interpretation processes carried out by the receivers (who are that ones who receive the message through oral language or text) (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Through the interpretation, definition and reading of symbols, the receivers construct their own perceptions and therefore their own actions and behaviors. The interpretation of objects, symbols and situations is also the main component of the process of construction and rendering of meaning (Blumer, 1969). However, interpretation is often the product of our socialization in human experience, rather than solely the result of our individual experience. That is why the act of interpretation is not autonomous, but has an interactive character, in the sense of cooperation and synergy. It is a process of negotiating meaning within the specific context, in which the meanings we attribute to oral messages or texts are not purely personal, but arise from our interactions within the social context (ibid.).

Cultivating critical literacy through the teaching of Language and Literature

Language, either in its oral or written forms, is discourse. For Foucault (1980), discourse encompasses the ways in which knowledge is constituted, along with social practices, stemming out of the nexus between language, subjectivity, and power relations. As power influences knowledge construction, it forms subjects who are both restricted and enabled by its omnipresence (Foucault, 1980). However, although power has an omnipresent character, it does not exclude the possibility of resistance. In the context of neoliberalism, Foucault argues that knowledge and social practices are constituted, maintained, and mainstreamed by '"governmental" or "biopolitical" techniques of subjectification and especially through techniques of governing the self' (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016: 14).

On the basis of the concept of language as discourse, we should argue that to promote the goals of EDC/HRE and intercultural education through the teaching of language and literature, we should draw upon the concept of critical literacy (Andreotti, 2014). Critical literacy does not only aim to cultivate students' simple skills of learning how to use the oral and written language, and the skills of reading and understanding the various types of texts. On the other hand, critical literacy enables the receiver of oral (the communicator) or written messages (the reader) to adopt a pro-active role in the transmitter-receiver or reader-author relationship in order to develop skills in understanding from a critical perspective that "questions,

examines and disputes the power relations that exist between readers and authors" (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004: 14).

Children's literature for EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education

Children's literature is aimed at children or adolescents, while intercultural literature is the literature focusing on issues of racism, ethnicity and racial prejudice. Children's literature for EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education has a dual role as it is called to entertain as well as educate young people in democratic citizenship, human rights education, and issues of diversity. According to Apostolidou (2007) in our very relationship with literature we discover a code of conduct, a moral code of communication and conciliation with the cultural 'Other'. Given the important role that children's literature can play in the promotion of democratic citizenship, protection of human rights, and respect to interculturalism, we should suggest that the Ministries of Education and their respective working groups in all European countries should make a more careful selection of texts and literature included in school textbooks, create a repository (reservoir) of online sources which teachers can refer to when they search for materials, but also training the teachers in matters of selection and utilization of appropriate texts and children's literature.

In many texts included in school textbooks (i.e. tales and myths included in the textbooks of primary education) used for the modules of Language and/or Literature, the narrative over-highlights the so-called 'differences' of the hero or heroine, emphasising the elements that differentiate him/her from the majority. The

protagonist or the central heroine of the story is initially marginalised due to his/her 'diversity' or because the others violate his/her human rights, The protagonist eventually becomes 'accepted' and respected due to his/her heroization during an accident (i.e. a fire) or due to the recognition of his/her worth by a person in a position of power (i.e. prince), who comes to protect the protagonists and their human rights through their power, and not through democratic processes.

These texts often deal with myths concerning the classic moral conflict between the good and the evil, and thus portray in a rather chatechetic way how good citizens should behave democratically. But what is the problem with using this kind of texts? Texts of a moral-catechistic nature often contribute to and reinforce stereotypes and the violation of human rights by portraying the majority as in a position of power, having the power to regulate exclusively the inclusion or exclusion of the ‘different other’ or the power to safeguard or violate the others’ human rights. Therefore, texts with similar content should be avoided.

What are the criteria for selecting texts in language and literature teaching for promoting EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education? The texts we choose should (Bishop, 1997):

- Represent the reality realistically, without making it look better on purpose. This means that the selected texts should not over-emphasize the positive traits of characters, which come from minority groups or other countries or cultures.

- Do not exclusively focus on the description of the specific ‘different’ characteristics (i.e. cultural traits) of the characters. If our texts focus on different and often contradictory cultural traditions and values, then we should make sure that they do not simply describe them, but critically analyse their effects on people's lives.
- Criticise and suggest ways to combat the stereotype under examination (i.e. stereotypes referring to colour).
- Give students the opportunity to express, through a reflective process, their own prejudices against the "Other", which they put under discussion in the group or class.
- Address the common experiences, challenges and needs of children or adolescents (regardless of cultural background, gender or other characteristics) as they are shaped in the modern world. By highlighting the similarities, we avoid overemphasizing the differences that often contribute to the reproduction of stereotypes, and we also focus on the ways students may develop shared routes of action as active and democratic citizens.
- Promote a spirit of cooperation, solidarity and meaningful interaction between actors in order to face challenges to the democracy or challenges that relate to the violation of human rights.
- Include stories of violation of human rights that are told with an emphasis on the reasons behind such violations, the emotional state of the people, and conditions for change.

- Come from various authors around Europe. Translated literature gives an 'inside' picture of other cultural ways to approach problem-solving so as to promote democratic citizenship or safeguard human rights.

The use of tales and storytelling in primary education for EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education

Our mind works in a narrative manner; we attribute beginnings, middles, and endings to what is happening around us, in order to organise and interpret it. Therefore, tales and stories should be seen as primary acts of mind and modes of understanding that allow us to give meaning to our experiences and daily lives. Short (2012) argues that 'stories are thus what make us human—the nature of a life is that it's a story. Our views of the world develop as a web of interconnected stories that we keep adding to and rearranging in our minds' (Short, 2019: 1-2). In turn, these stories form the ways in which we view the world, our lives, ourselves, and others (Short, 2012; 2019); and because of their centrality in our thinking, we share stories in order 'to make connections, form relationships, and create community with others' (Short, 2012: 9). We should then understand stories and tales as having a world-making and world-changing potential and power.

Tales and stories enhance our *social imagination*, as they motivate us to imagine the world through the eyes of others (i.e. to empathise with the protagonist of a story). Tales and stories also urge us to imagine other, perhaps more socially-just, alternatives to our current societies (Wissman, 2019). In relation to the former

function, Nussbaum (1997) claims that narrative art (story) is particularly apt in nurturing what she calls the *sympathetic imagination*, as it enables us to experience the lives of others as if we were them. In relation to the latter function, Greene (2009) describes the social imagination as 'the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools' (1995: 5). Art that engages our social imagination can make us wonder, ache, or reject, 'but we may also ask: "What next?" or "What can be done" or "How does it affect what I make of my life?"' (p. 1). What we argue is that the two actions should be at the very core of education for democratic citizenship, human rights education, and intercultural education.

By developing and implementing a critical approach, the use of tales and storytelling in language and literature classes may empower children to speak up their voices and act as agents of change for cultivating democratic citizenship, protecting human rights, and safeguarding social justice. Tales and storytelling can be used to develop children's psycho-social skills including prejudice reduction, and perception- and concept-formation with regards to human rights and democratic citizenship. As tales are intertwined with our cultural expression and stories are integrated in our daily lives, they may become useful tools in facilitating children's spontaneous expression of their thinking, experiences, and emotions (Angelides & Panaou, 2012; Magos, 2014; 2018).

Theatrical conventions to be used when analysing texts to promote EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education

Parallel to the narration of the text and the use of visual materials to support the analysis of the text, the teacher may use various creative strategies that are called theatrical conventions. Some examples are the following (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2012):

- Role play: children are asked to spontaneously develop dialogues impersonating the main characters. As at this stage, children may express conflicting views, we should constantly remind them to always explain the arguments for their views.
- The 'mantle of an expert': children are asked to wear the ‘mantle of an expert’ in order to examine the issue that is presented in the text. For example, as psychologists they may examine the emotional state of the text characters by recording their feelings in giant "figures of emotions". As photographers, they can take photos in their school or community with regards to the challenge or problem presented in the text (i.e. a social-justice issue or an issue portraying the violation of human rights), which may be included in newspaper articles. As scientists (i.e. doctors, academics etc.), they may suggest solutions to the problem or issue discussed in the text.
- The "corridor of thought": When the class compares two texts with contrasting or conflicting arguments on an issue, the students are asked to take position in the corridor of thought. The students make a choice to stand in the line supporting the argument made in text 1 or in the line supporting the argument made in text 2. Then they face their peers standing in the

other line and engage in a debate whether we should adopt the argument of the first text, or the argument of the second text.

Develop and implement projects during Language and Literature classes to promote EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education

What topics shall we explore with our students so that our projects to actually fulfill their intent to promote EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education? On the one hand, the selected topics should motivate students to consider, but also to suggest measures to alleviate social injustices, threats to democratic processes, and violation of human rights within the school and their community (Thomson, 2007). On the other hand, under such programs, students in collaboration with teachers can develop and conduct group studies to investigate issues related to social justice (or injustice). Examples of such projects are: (a) incidents of ethnic and inter-ethnic conflict, and (b) work and housing opportunities provided to immigrants or families of lower socio-economic backgrounds in their community or country. As teachers, we can also mobilize our students to explore issues related to social exclusion and marginalisation through the analysis of articles from the media.

For example, teachers and students collaborate to collect and study articles from the daily press that discuss a contentious issue related to social justice (i.e. refugee camps, illegal immigrants, benefits, etc.), violations to democratic processes (i.e. political corruption, propaganda, etc.), and human-rights violation (i.e. violation of the prisoners' rights). Students can then study a variety of information about decision-making on this issue by analysing the semantics and

grammar of policy documents and other texts, conduct interviews or send questionnaires to local agencies and organizations.

To carry out these projects, we motivate students to collaborate in multiethnic groups in order to enhance their interaction, but also to promote a change in attitudes and perceptions regarding pluralism. Students can present the results of their projects using creative visual materials such as posters, films, and presentations. They can also communicate the results of their work, as well as their suggestions, by writing letters to state or local bodies and non-governmental organizations that are active in related issues. They can also produce articles for local or national media so as to communicate their suggestions, leading to their proactive roles as citizens. Finally, they can develop relevant actions in the context of the development of their social responsibility in the sense of volunteering.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper we argued that for the teaching of Language and Literature to promote the goals of EDC/HRE and Intercultural Education, teachers should draw upon critical literacy. Additionally, teachers should carefully select literature texts, integrate tales and storytelling in teaching, and use various creative techniques from Theatre Education. There are a number of strategies and practices that teachers may use to engage children in critical literacy methodology, and the use of the aforementioned tools and texhniques. The most important ones that we should always remember as teachers are dialogue and critical reflections.

In more detail, teachers can engage their students in dialogue in the sense of conversations and provide the with the opportunity to ask questions and understand what they see, hear, and read. These skills include asking inquisitive questions, and pointing out lack of or faulty evidence in argumentation, and prejudiced perspective. In addition, critical reflection entails an active process of learning and is more than thinking or thoughtful action. Reflection encourages looking at issues from different perspectives, which can help students to understand the topic and start to create assumptions and perspective. Teachers, by introducing and engaging students into reflections about the issues discussed in oral or written communication, they motivate them to proceed to deeper reflections (in practice, reflection entails the next step following dialogue).

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