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European Identity and Citizenship in Textbooks/Educational Media

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Active citizenship, European citizenship education, young people, school, textbook analysis

1 Introduction

The choice of devoting a special issue to the analysis of how textbooks and educational media frame citizenship education in secondary schools in the European context may appear counter-intuitive, and not really up-to-date in 2018, considering two key features of the students that populate secondary schools nowadays, that make them different from any previous generation.

2 First: A generation of digital natives

Many in this generation of students have grown up using technologies like the Internet, computers and mobile devices, which are considered a natural part of their learning environment. Some scholars (e.g. Prensky, 2009), as well as some popular narratives, argue that due to their familiarity with technology, digital natives think and learn differently from any previous generation, supporting the idea that textbooks may be obsolete, and may have lost relevance in the educational context. However, evidence that support the idea of a real anthropological transformation of learning is still scarce (see, Thomson, 2013), and despite the apparent ubiquity of technology and its educational potential, the level of computerisation in schools still varies in EU countries (Eurydice, 2004), as well as its real use, due also to a lack of ICT training of teachers. This allows us to think that textbooks continue, even nowadays, to play a central role in classrooms, as they contribute to the transmission of knowledge and the structure of the teaching-learning processes (Schissler, 1989/90, p. 81) in particular by giving teachers implicit and explicit guidelines regarding the method, the curricula, the habitus of the profession and even the desired profile of the potential reader/student (Escolano, 2012, p. 43). As a result, textbooks continue to be

essential work instruments for teachers, for technical, symbolic and scientific reasons (Pinheiro, 2014).

3 Second: A generation of European natives

This generation of students is one of the first generations of native EU citizens. Recent Eurobarometer data (2017) revealed that a large majority of young Europeans (89%) agree that national governments should strengthen school education about rights and responsibilities as EU citizens; 83% also agree that learning about European matters - such as the functioning of the EU and its institutions, EU history or European culture - should be part of compulsory school education. Not less relevant, half of them think that the promotion of critical thinking among young people is a key challenge for the future of Europe. Critical thinking is also an essential component of citizenship education, that is part of national curricula for general education in all European countries. According to the recent Eurydice Report on Citizenship Education (2017) in the majority of the European countries both in primary and secondary education, critical thinking, acting democratically and promoting participation are as important as knowledge of institutions.

If young people demand more Europe and more citizenship education, there is reason to believe that these themes may not be as prominent in their educational experience as the educational agenda claims. And this brings us back to textbooks and their contents and legitimizing an in depth exploration of the discourses they convey on the concept of citizenship, and of the citizenship education competences they insist on.

The in depth exploration was designed according to three main directories, focusing on citizenship education competences, active citizenship promotion and European education, with these underlying questions:

- 1) To what extent are textbooks and curricula able to provide young people with opportunities to acquire the skills and the practical competencies (i.e., critical awareness, media literacy, etc.) necessary to take part in contemporary political, economic and social life?
- 2) To what extent do textbooks and curricula promote (or hinder) active engagement of young people in their social, political and educational communities, at the local, national and European level?
- 3) To what extent is Europe and/or the European Union presented as a community that offers young people the opportunity to practice citizenship, and in more general terms, which discourses on Europe and European identity are conveyed by textbooks?

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4) To what extent are visions of “us, the Europeans” or “us, the Nationals” presented as complementary or opposing, and how is diversity, within Europe and within the Nation, represented (positive vs. negative, desirable vs. undesirable...)?

The special issue includes five empirical papers built around those questions. Three papers (Arensmeier; Albanesi; Piedade et. al) are based on results from the Horizon 2020 CATCH-EyoU project - standing for Constructing AcTive CitizensHip with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions - which involves scholars coming from different disciplines (Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Media and Communications, Education) from eight European countries (Sweden, Estonia, U.K., Germany, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, Italy). The two remaining papers analyse school textbooks to address how they deal with European integration in Slovakia (Sulikova) and with representations of otherness, the Sami ethnic minority and colonialism in Sweden (Eriksen).

The first paper, by Cecilia Arensmeier, *Different Expectations in Civic Education: A Comparison of Upper-Secondary School Textbooks in Sweden*, provides an interesting, and somehow unexpected picture of civic education in Swedish upper-secondary school. Arensmeier starts her analysis showing the contradictions of the educational Swedish system. On the one hand policy documents claim the importance of building knowledgeable, equally capable democratic citizens, on the other hand educational reforms have progressively reduced the relevance of democratic goals and democratic citizenship education in particular in vocational tracks, where greater emphasis has been placed on employability and practical skills. Arensmeier wanted to understand if (and how) these contradictions affected social studies curricula and textbooks for different educational tracks and the implications in terms of civic expectations, and the exercise of citizenship. Her analysis is based on a sample of 10 books of social studies, and her results can be summarized sketching the portraits of two hypothetical Swedish students: one enrolled in an academic track, treated like a capable, potentially active citizen who learns on books that are designed to provide skills than enable his/her development of a comprehensive understanding of society; the other attending a vocational track, treated like a "failed citizen", who studies on books that do not really prepare and equip him/her with analytical skills. These findings raise a critical question concerning the role of civic education as a tool to reinforce inequality.

The second paper, *Citizenship Education In Italian Textbooks: How Much Space Is There For Europe And Active Citizenship?*, by Cinzia Albanesi, looks at the Italian context and investigates how school curricula and textbooks incorporate national and European recommendations on European and citizenship education. Analysing the best selling History, Citizenship and Constitution and English Second Language (ESL) textbooks adopted in Italian secondary schools, Albanesi

found that the recommendations, which focus on equipping learners with the knowledge, understanding and skills that can support their action, are far from being incorporated especially since “the textbooks seemed to invite young people to deepen their factual knowledge, to discuss it, but not to make questions, to criticize, to reveal and engage with societal issues and challenges”. The author further explored how the issue of active citizenship, with a particular European focus, was present in the textbooks by looking at presentations and representations of sense of belonging to the EU, democratic citizenship and practices of participation. The resulting picture is nuanced, interesting and troublesome. Sense of belonging to the EU receives very little attention in the analysed textbooks appearing mostly conveyed in images and seldom critically discussed. Democratic (and European) citizenship was present even if mainly approached in a descriptive and informative manner and pointing to formal opportunities to participate (and mostly at the national level). Especially troublesome is the finding that the discourses of youth active citizenship, besides being generally absent, present it “as something detached from young people’s reality”, detached from their contexts, such as the school or the community, and present time limiting the possibility of preparing young people to critically engage with issues affecting their lives, whether local, national or European.

The paper by Filipe Piedade, Norberto Ribeiro, Manuel Loff, Tiago Neves & Isabel Menezes, *Learning about the European Union in times of crisis: Portuguese textbooks’ normative visions of European citizenship*, examined European and Citizenship education in a sample of History and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks used in Portuguese secondary schools. The authors wanted to understand which kind of EU related content was offered in the textbooks under inspection and to see if disciplinary specificities regarding EU related content emerged. They were also particularly interested in understanding to what extent textbooks were able to engage students in critical thinking, given the relevance of this competence in the democratic citizenship education framework. Even if their analysis is based on a restricted sample of textbooks, Piedade *et al.* results are provoking and resonate well with the recent Eurobarometer data (2017), showing that contrastive and controversial contents and activities that might contribute to a critical reflection and discussion on EU and on EU citizenship are to a large extent missing in the inspected textbooks. Moreover they show that there are upstanding differences between educational tracks in Portuguese schools: the EU and EU related issues deserve more quantity and quality of space in History textbooks (that is a mandatory subject only in Language and Humanities courses), compared to EFL, which is mandatory in all academic tracks and where discourses on the EU are almost absent. The authors, even if cautiously, cannot avoid to question the generalized resistance by textbook authors regarding the inclusion of pedagogical contents that transcend the national level of

identity, identifying this as one of the major shortcomings in the Portuguese educational agenda.

In the fourth paper, *A vehicle for post-national transformation or an instrument for interstate cooperation? European integration in Slovakia's secondary education textbooks*, Jana Sulikova explores how European integration is represented in lower secondary History, Geography and Civics textbooks. Assuming that education can be an instrument to promote more positive attitudes towards European integration, which existing research and recent events have shown to be fragile, Sulikova considers that the European dimension of education can serve this purpose by including in the curricula themes related to "representations of Europe, European identity and integration, and inclusion of universal values, combined with openness towards cultural diversity within Europe". Her analysis of textbooks uses two conceptualizations of the integration process, supra-nationalism and intergovernmentalism, the former representing the goal of post-national transformation of Europe, and the latter viewing integration as an instrument for interstate cooperation. The findings show that the European integration is presented in a positive light, compatible with the interests of Slovakia; however, there is a tendency for an economic instrumentalism, as economic interests are presented as the main foundation for integration, together with an ethnocentric narrative. However, textbooks are relatively vague in discussing the implications of the integration process and the future of the EU.

The fifth paper, *Teaching about the Other in primary level social studies: The Sami in Norwegian textbooks*, engages in an analysis of the role of textbook discourses in constructing the national imaginary and representing otherness. The example of indigenous peoples in Norway is the point of departure for this paper, where Kristin Gregers Eriksen focus on social studies textbooks for primary school and uses critical discourse analysis. Her analysis of narratives and images presented in the textbooks reveal how "the Sami are essentialized and actively constructed as the Other", while at the same time textbooks affirm the Nordic exceptionalism, i.e., "the idea of Norway as a peace-building, inherently good and humble country that is innocent of imperialism and colonialism". This does not foster the recognition of the role of assimilationist policies that historically denied the rights of Sami and other minorities, as well as the confrontation of racism and the myth of an homogeneous national culture. The paper discusses these findings by calling our attention to the relevance of oppression and colonialism across Europe, and to how recognizing this is preliminary for a significant anti-oppressive education.

A final contribution to this issue is made by Kaarel Haav in the guise of a country report entitled *European Identity and Citizenship in Estonia: Analyses of Textbooks and Theoretical Developments* where Haav sets himself to the task of reviewing and evaluating the main civics school textbooks and syllabuses in Estonia.

Together, the papers in this special issue contribute to a better understanding of the role of educational policies and curricula in promoting (or not) young EU citizens' engagement, participation and active citizenship. They contribute to update the existing literature on citizenship education, and to fill the gap regarding the presence of EU matters, not limited to EU institutions, but including EU belonging and identity in national curricula and in textbooks of different disciplines. They also show clearly that despite European recommendations and policy initiatives adopted by EU member states, many differences remain across EU countries and across curricula (i.e. vocational vs. academic tracks) concerning both the contents and the ways in which citizenship education is proposed. These differences may contribute to exacerbate existing inequalities, instead of challenging them.

Furthermore, they have significant educational policy implications by pointing to reflections that could help the next generations of teachers and educators (and publishers) to improve how (European) citizenship education is delivered, enabling the development of more competent, critical and aware generations of young Europeans.

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