

Person centred pedagogy in empathizing with the significant Others in the Balkans and promoting the European Dimension in Education”

According to the Council of Europe, Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon 2000, the European Council confirmed the fundamental aim of education and training in order to make the Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. This ambition and demand is set within the broader framework of the pursuit of a democratic, humanitarian and peaceful Europe within its own borders and vis-à-vis the world as a whole (Euridice, EU Action, 2000).

To achieve this ambitious goal, Heads of States and Government asked for not only a radical transformation of the European economy, but also a challenging programme for the modernisation of social welfare and education systems. In 2002, they went on to say that by 2010, Europe should be the world leader in terms of the quality of its education and training systems.

One of the most important tools to make this happen, as identified in Lisbon (2000), has been plurilingualism and therefore pluriculturalism. To that end, various actions and initiatives have been undertaken for the development of our education systems. It is aimed that these will be transformed in order to enable the Europeans to develop their professional qualifications through whole life. Amongst all these, foreign language learning has an important role. As apparent from the above, foreign languages play a key role in the issue of European dimension. The aim of foreign language learning is at the moment accompanied, by a number of other terms as well, such as: *Europe of languages, language diversity, bilingualism, multilingualism*.

It stems from the above that there is the need for a fundamental transformation of foreign language education and teacher training throughout Europe. This process of change has been going on for the past few decades in Greece which a) has been loaded with the burden of playing a crucial role in the

Balkans as a unifying agent amongst Balkan peoples and linguistic minorities and b) plays a leading role and takes a number of initiatives to develop the tools underpinning the European dimension in education. This new orientation of foreign language learning has been driven forward by cooperation at European level, through the sharing of experiences and working towards common goals.

Greece was assigned with this vital role due to a) its geographical position and b) the socio-political situation prevailing in South-East Europe for the last few decades which has started significant political, economic, social and cultural changes in the area. In this particular set-up which has facilitated citizen mobility, professionals and workers have a chance to look for better jobs, and people, and in general, pursue a better life, by choosing to live in Greece.

However not everyone shares the same enthusiasm about these changes. The idea of South-East Europe without borders and a common European policy in many walks of life appeals to its supporters, while adversaries express their concerns mainly about losing national identity. The strong voices of the latter group might be justified by the long tradition of fighting and the inflictions of misery, suffering and pain put upon the Greeks while defending their independence and the preservation of national values. This has made many generations of Greeks extremely cautious when accepting new trends and ideas. In this context, it was expected that we would take great pains in instilling in our people the values supporting Greece in its new role as a host country for a number of cultural groups and as a country / melting pot of languages and cultures. The promotion of plurilingualism and multiculturalism among citizens was hoped to combat intolerance and xenophobia by improving communication and mutual understanding between individuals.

Therefore, we have embarked on a big European campaign to promote the linguistic and cultural diversity which was seen a) as an opportunity to learn about the Others, our neighbours, sharing at the same time, with the Others the richness

of our language and culture and b) as a contribution to the construction of the European democratic citizenship.

More specifically, in order to comply with EU directives by fostering the linguistic and cultural diversity which is seen as the greatest strength of Europe, we have defined the following three priorities:

a) To promote learning of foreign languages: This implies the intensification of teacher training in foreign language teaching so that teaching practices are related to Common European Framework (CEF) of reference, as well as the implementation of the project “European Language Portfolio.

b) To promote the Greek language among foreigners (Greek as a foreign language) and in the Greek communities abroad (Greek as a mother tongue). The culmination of this project was the completion of Greek as a foreign language accreditation system in compliance with the CEF. The information and promotion campaign of these certificates have been conducted abroad, based on our Cultural and Education Attaches’ offices.

c) To launch the project of the Balkan Symposium on exploiting English as a vehicle which will allow us to approach the cultural richness of Balkan countries. This will also enable us to promote languages of our neighbours, by launching courses of Balkan languages, in cooperation with the neighbouring countries and the cultural minorities in Greece with the ultimate aim of understanding and peaceful coexistence of Balkan peoples. The 1st Balkan Symposium in 2001, an initiative taken in cooperation with the Teachers of English Union of Thrace, the then TEUT, and the Balkan Society of Pedagogy, was announced, by the Greek Ministry of Education, as one of the main Greek State official events while celebrating the European Year of Languages 2001.

This year, in cooperation with the Teachers of English Union of Thessaloniki (EKADEVE), under the auspices of Central Macedonia Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education, we plan the continuation of this project in Thessaloniki.

Unfortunately, we are all aware that the present state of South -East Europe is not the best Europeans can do and neither was the past. In pressing forward to find our best we need a common language medium through which we can penetrate the idiosyncrasy, the cultural richness as well as the character of people.

We need a vehicle to help us virtually get to know our neighbour and initiate co-working on important matters of common interest, such as the protection of environment, which cannot be viewed brokenly but needs to be treated as a unified system, as a whole and a continuum.

The role of English as the lingua franca provides the basis for promoting cross cultural understanding in an increasingly European village. It also promotes cooperation and exchange of ideas in the Balkan countries. The exploitation of English as a means to achieve plurilingualism and through this multiculturalism is justified as follows.

Students of South- East European countries do not know enough about one another, despite their many historical links. What they know most about is based on what they have heard from the elderly and is usually related to the past wars waged on their territory.

It is because of these wars that unfortunately, the languages of the Balkan nations still evoke ambiguous emotions resulting in the deterrent of understanding and acceptance of Otherness.

A sentimentally neutral language is likely to effectively achieve cross-cultural awareness and respect for the cultural heritage of the Balkan peoples. When this is achieved through a neutral language that is English, it is then easier to launch courses on Balkan languages in our schools.

This advantage of the English language classes in the Greek educational system will be intensively taken by our EFL teachers in order to diffuse the European dimension in our schools. The student is the key player and the adoption of 'student-centred pedagogy' will result in flexible language programmes

adjusted to individual needs. Yet, language programmes should develop linguistic as well as intercultural knowledge and socio-cultural competence. This reality takes us to the consideration of Humanistic approaches to language teaching/learning.

Humanistic approaches emphasize the importance of the inner world of the learner and place the individual's thoughts feelings and emotions at the forefront of teaching. They place the learner centre-stage. They view the teacher as a facilitator/mediator. They are concerned with the development of the whole person and not only with the development of cognitive skills. They see the importance of a learning environment which minimizes anxiety and enhances personal security. In effectively teaching foreign languages, they think of and apply ways in which people learn their mother tongue, outside of school.

The humanistic English language teacher is able to facilitate the shaping of young people's European perspective. He/she is able to teach his/her students to understand and respect the values each individual in the group holds because as Plato said "the part cannot be well unless the whole is well" and vice versa.

This kind of enlightened teacher takes the opportunity to capitalise on diversity and enable students to express themselves through their own culture, as they are unique human beings different from each other.

In the humanistic classroom the main goal of language teaching, that of genuine interpersonal communication is achieved in meaningful language and purposeful activities and this, in its turn brings about learning. The remarkable Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1962,1978) stresses the importance of language which he views as an important tool by means of which the learner can make sense of the world or the learning task, in their own unique way.

This is depicted in Vygotsky's belief that it is by means of language that culture is transmitted, thinking develops and learning occurs.

These words reveal the holistic nature of Vygotsky's approach to learning which takes us to classical education, based on the ancient Greek concept of

Paideia. Understanding the ways in which learners make sense of learning in their own unique ways, observing what consciousness and psyche bring in human behavior and fostering the importance of language as a means to express one's inner world and thoughts could justify the consideration of Vygotsky as the forerunner of humanistic language teaching.

Put in simple terms, the active role the educated is credited with, the role of the protagonist for the learner in the learning process and the role of the teacher as a mediator and facilitator in this process have had a considerable influence on language teaching and place Vygotsky within the humanistic perspective.

Hamacheck (1977) argues that the humanistic teacher begins with the idea that students are different and he/she strives to help them become more like themselves and less like each other.

Students are encouraged to discover all the similarities and differences that exist in the lives of the inhabitants of their countries, thus becoming aware of and respecting what is different. Through this exploration they learn about each other, accepting that the human being is different by emancipating from the belief "I am human SO to be human is to be like me, which is unrealistic and can be quite harmful.

For the teachers that take a humanistic approach, learning should be personalized as far as possible. According to Rogers (1980) significant learning will only take place when the subject matter is perceived to be of personal relevance to the learner. Learning which is self initiated and which involves feelings as well as intellect is the most lasting and pervasive. These teachers should empathize with their learners by getting to know them as individuals. Rogerian thought firmly places the students centre-stage and does not see them as the objects of the teacher's skills but as the protagonists in action. Rogers proposes a side -line role or the role of the facilitator for the teacher who should help students map their own procedures and experiences.

It is obvious that we need well-educated and versatile teachers; we need dedicated teachers who will promote human values, respect for diversity and tolerance. Large amounts of time and effort are invested, not simply in training teachers but in inspiring them to accept the new challenges, to take on new responsibilities by subscribing to humanism.

The humanistic approach to language teaching equips them with the necessary skills to confront the danger of xenophobia, racism, and nationalism in this sensitive area of Europe in the new environment of European integration. The European dimension can be implemented as the cross-curricular path in our schooling systems. One of the possibilities is to present the students during the lessons of history, geography, languages and literature with the treasury of European linguistic and cultural diversity and to focus on the issues that unite and not divide South East Europe.

Harmonious with the concept of United Europe, the Greek Macedonian King, Alexander the Great has been the pioneer in the area that constitutes the philosophical background of his “policy of fusion” which has been credited to him by some scholars. This is the area of cross cultural perspective which was made explicit through his acceptance and respect of the different resulting in a world of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Alexander’s world philosophy and great belief in a united world under his monarchy is highlighted in his OATH which follows.

THE OATH OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT (OPIS, 324 BC).

It is my wish, now that the wars are coming to an end, that you should all be happy in peace. From now on, all mortals live as one people in fellowship, for the good of all, see the whole world as your homeland, with laws common to all, where the best will govern regardless of their race. Unlike the narrow-minded, I make no distinction between Greeks and Barbarians.

The origin of the citizens, or the race into which they were born, is of no concern to me. I have only one criterion by which to distinguish them. VIRTUE. For me, any good foreigner is a Greek and any bad Greek is worse than a Barbarian.

If disputes ever occur among you, you will not resort to weapons but will solve them in peace. If need be, I shall arbitrate between you.

See God not as an autocratic despot but as the common father of all, and thus conduct will be like the lives of brothers within the same family.

I, on my part, see you all as equal, whether you are white or dark skinned. And I should like you not simply to be subjects of my commonwealth, but members of it, partners of it. To the best of my ability, I shall strive to do what I have promised.

Keep as a symbol of love this oath which we have taken tonight with our libations.

***Arrian Anabasis of Alexander,
6th Book, Plutarch, Moralia***

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SUMMARY:

Title:

“Person centred pedagogy in empathizing with the significant Others in the Balkans and promoting the European Dimension in Education.

«It is a fact that Greece has become a host country for a number of different ethnic and cultural communities, a melting pot of languages and cultures. To cope with this reality great emphasis has been placed on foreign language teacher education and training. The plurilingual and pluricultural dimensions of educational systems in Europe, as promoted by the Council of Europe, are best served through the adoption of student and person-centered pedagogy which takes us to the consideration of humanistic approach to foreign language teaching. Thus foreign language teachers, in the state sector, are getting equipped with tools needed to promote human values, respect for diversity and tolerance as well as maintenance of various cultural identities in the United Europe. Harmonious with the concept of United Europe, the Greek Macedonian King, Alexander the Great has been the pioneer in the area that constitutes the philosophical background of his “policy of fusion” which has been credited to him by some scholars. This is the area of cross cultural perspective which was made explicit through his acceptance and respect of the different resulting in a world of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Alexander’s world philosophy and great belief in a united world under his monarchy is highlighted in his OATH at OPIS in 324 BC. In this age of loss of direction and human dignity,

Alexander the Great , his grandeur and own place amongst long established History' s heroes is hoped to guide and inspire our youth to elevate the quality of life by linking to his humanistic / philanthropic philosophy.

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CV in brief:

Dr Angeliki Deligianni holds a Master's and a PhD degree from the University of Exeter, UK. She now serves in the post of Thessaloniki School Advisor. She works as a Tutor with Hellenic Open University and cooperates with Cambridge and Athens University. She has taught at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and has served in the post of Education Attache for Greek Embassy in London. She is the author of 24 research articles and 2 books.