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Global Discourses on Inclusion and Local Language Curricular Practices: A Greek Case Study

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Introduction: Inclusion as a dominant discourse in global education policy

Inclusive education is a complex and ambiguous "late modernity reform project", with problematic implementations within and across educational systems (Armstrong et al., 2011: 29). However, despite the contestation on its meanings and the complexity of its enactments, over the last three decades, discourses on inclusion and social integration have become dominant at supranational and national level (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Slee, 2013; Walker, 2009).

Supranational and international agencies have adopted different approaches to inclusion. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has promoted "economistic logics and more human capital conceptions of inclusion" (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015: 147), linking inclusion to equity and the cultivation of a minimum level of skills, competences, values and attitudes in all individuals, that enable them "to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future" (OECD, 2018: 4). As a result, improving basic skills of literacy and numeracy, especially of disadvantaged groups, and designing more inclusive curricula, are expected to combat increasing inequalities and to promote social integration and cohesion in the current conditions shaped by globalisation, fiscal crisis and migrant flows (OECD, 2012). From this point of view, inclusion through learning is deemed to be a balance-maker between market and welfare society in the context of "inclusive liberalism" (Craig & Porter, 2003; Walker, 2009). From a more humanitarian perspective, UNESCO recognises inclusion as a fundamental social right, focusing on equity and opportunity for all students (UNESCO, 2009). The approach of the European Union to inclusion does not stem only from human/social capital theory that conceives of inclusion as a marker of economic productivity. It also regards it as a prerequisite for the construction of the European identity and active citizenship as well as a weapon against violence, xenophobia and radicalization (European Council, 2018). In these supranational projects on inclusion, language education plays a key role as an instrument for economic and social integration in contemporary globalised and multicultural societies (Borjian, 2014).

Studies that explore discursive constructions of inclusion at national and sub-national level have charted diverse re-articulations of the dominant supranational discourses on inclusion, that often reflect "fragmented, incoherent, inconsistent or overtly discriminatory" policy settings (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015: 162). Within this literature there are studies which suggest that discourses on inclusion have taken a "therapeutic turn" in education policy, putting an emphasis on emotional and social skills, participation, well-being, etc. (Ecclestone & Brunila, 2015). This pervasive "therapeutic ethos", identified in social (and educational) policies since the 1990s (Chriss, 1999), often stems from identity politics and contributes to the construction of the idea of the vulnerable (and therefore governable) subject, marginalising questions on inequalities and social justice in education policy (Brunila & Rossi, 2018).

However, a rather unexplored issue in critical educational policy research is how inclusion as a dominant discourse may affect the construction of knowledge in local school contexts and with what implications mainly for groups of students which are in danger of exclusion. Attempting to fill this gap, the research reported here focuses on how inclusion as a regulative discourse is re-articulated at the micro-level of schools. In particular, it explores how this discourse affects the enactments of the Modern Greek Language curricula - a "gatekeeper" subject for students' successful educational trajectories - in specific school contexts of inner Athens, Greece, an area with high rates of multicultural and disadvantaged student populations.

The Greek policy context

A distinctive feature of national educational policy making in Greece during the last couple of decades is a shift of emphasis from democratisation and integration to modernisation of the education system, borrowing ideas emerging at the time in European policy discourses (e.g., performance, competitiveness, efficiency) (Sifakakis, Tsatsaroni, Sarakinioti, & Kourou, 2016). Part of this shift was a gradual replacement of the concept of educational equality with that of "social inclusion", which refers mainly to specified social groups (minorities, economic immigrants, refugees), representing a new category of school population. Under conditions of what has been called the Greek deficit welfare state (Zambeta & Koloskoufi, 2014), discourses on inclusion have become dominant. However, relevant policies appear to be inconsistent and fragmented (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006), although the prevailing social and economic circumstances (immigrant and refugee populations' settlements, poverty and policies of austerity) (Traianou & Jones, 2019) have increased the number of people which are at risk of social exclusion. These conditions put pressure on public schools to manage "inclusion policies", often with very little support from the government.

Curriculum reforms have been a part of the project of modernising the Greek educational landscape. Since the 2000s, transnational policies on literacy have penetrated the Greek educational context through two curricular reforms for compulsory education (in 2003 and in 2011). The two curricula recontextualise the skills and outcomes based approach to curricula and knowledge, promoted by supranational and international agencies (e.g., Official Journal of the European Union,

2006), by placing emphasis on the development of general communication skills, alongside other "soft skills" (critical thinking, digital skills, creativity, etc.) (Pedagogic Institute, 2011). However, despite the discursive constructions of language as a means for participation in multicultural globalised societies, the two curricula retain the monolingual orientation to language teaching in Greece (Gkaintartzi et al., 2015).

Conceptual framework and research questions

The theoretical framework of the paper is based on a revised conceptualisation of the notion of "school context", a complex and ambiguous concept in the literature. Ball and his collaborators, in their theory of enactment, use the concept of 'school context' as an analytic device, through which they describe the overlapping and interrelated material, relational and discursive factors and variables that shape policy enactments (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011). Their approach helps us understand policies as discursively constructed, and the implementation of curriculum policy in schools as contextually mediated, translated and interpreted (see also Lopes, 2016). In rethinking the concept of "context", in order to include the processes of the selection and distribution of knowledge at macro- and micro- level, we also draw on Bernstein's theory of the pedagogic device (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). His "conceptual grammar" offers productive tools for exploring "how socialisation into macro power and class relations happens through the micro processes of schooling (selection and organisation of curriculum, pedagogic practices, evaluation methods)" (Singh, 2020: xi), which form different "relations to and within education" for different student groups (Moore, 2013: 60).

From this perspective, the enactments of language curricula policies embed two potentially contradictory discourses: one focusing on the instrumental (skills, knowledge), and the other on the regulative dimension (e.g., discourses on inclusion, theories of instruction) (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). This paper raises questions about how these two discourses are played out in specific school contexts, how the pedagogic discourse is articulated at the school level and with what implications for students' learning.

Research methods

The empirical research study was carried out in six lower secondary state schools (students' age 12-15) located in the Athens inner-city, a part of the capital rapidly restructured by socio-spatial transformations and prolonged fiscal crisis. Three of the schools have high rates of disadvantaged groups of students (85-90%) (immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers or/and students coming from working class families). The three other schools have lower rates of immigrant students (6-40%) and larger numbers of students from middle class backgrounds. This design allows a strong comparative focus. The data has been produced in the school years 2018-2020, based on 39 semi-structured interviews with teachers, head teachers and school advisers, and 41 hours of classroom observations. Data was analysed by operationalising the concepts of the theory, as described in the preceding section.

Results and discussion

As already mentioned, crucial for understanding the diversity of practices identified in schools with different contextual features is the relationship between the instructional and the regulative components of the pedagogic discourse. Our data analysis supports the view that the pedagogic practices differ significantly between and within the schools of our sample, as manifested in the teachers' reasoning about what and how to teach, and what criteria to use to structure their lessons. There is evidence to suggest that in many cases, a strong regulative discourse, therapeutic in character, drawing on diverse discursive resources, was mediating the instructional discourse. We argue that disseminated widely in proliferating sites of teachers' pedagogisation (e.g., publicly or privately offered courses on teacher development) as well as through legislation (e.g., school reorganisation aiming to avoid segregation according to European standards), "inclusion discourses" have become powerful normative components of pedagogic discourse and practice.

In the data from interviews we have indentified different versions of the inclusion discourse, regulating pedagogic practices:

- a discourse on difference founded on fears for social disintegration, leading to explicit practices of social control;

- an explicit and well articulated therapeutic discourse, focusing on vulnerable students' emotional support and on "healing" their "traumas" (see also Brunila & Rossi, 2018);

- a discourse on the recognition of difference and the acceptance of otherness, often with an emancipatory character, aiming to empower students, encourage their participation in learning processes and allow their voice to be heard.

These regulative discourses stem from "policies of recognition" of different identities and "policies of empowerment" (Power, 2012), recontextualised into the Official Recontextualising Field (state agencies) and the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (universities, agencies of teachers' training) (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). They also draw on media/popular discourses, founded on the fear of disintegration, which see such children (and their families) as a 'threat' to society.

These versions of the inclusion discourse tend to be articulated in the three more disadvantaged schools. They usually underpin practices characterised by an emphasis on cultivating basic literacy skills, which make low intellectual demands on students. Data from the classroom observations indicates that, in these schools, the emphasis on students' participation in educational processes, on "hearing all students' voices", often leads to pedagogical interactions that orient students to context-specific meanings (see also Bautier, 2012, in Frandji & Vitale, 2016). That is, the instructional discourse tends to take the form of horizontal discourse (Bernstein, 2000). However, classroom observations also show instances where, in these disadvantaged settings, discourses on recognition, empowerment and participation are interpreted in ways that give rise to forms of pedagogic practice which tend to orient students to "vertical discourse" (Bernstein, 2000) - context independent, abstract meanings - which is a

precondition for students' intellectual enhancement (Wheelahan, 2010). Overall, our data suggests that the pedagogic practices range from practices which could be recognised as very traditional (focusing on grammar and syntax) to practices that lead students to officially 'legitimate' meanings, often without neglecting students' everyday experiences. The regulative discourses on inclusion identified in the three more disadvantaged schools of our sample also seem to affect schools' micro-policies (e.g. extracurricular activities aiming to include students, staff's attitudes towards students and parents), but also school advisers' perceptions and their recommendations to teachers about language teaching in disadvantaged school contexts. As a result, they operate as a broader contextual factor that "creates meanings", a lens through which the curricular policy is interpreted at meso- and micro- level.

As mentioned in the research methods section, for purposes of comparison the study included three other schools of the Athens inner-city which are relatively more advantaged in terms of their student population. Data from these schools suggests that inclusion is not an issue of concern among school actors. On the contrary, teachers' pedagogic practices appear to be regulated by discourses portraying schools as modern(ised) institutions, open to the environment surrounding them and the wider world. These discourses on "modern school" and "modern" teaching and learning, promoted by global and supranational actors (OECD and EU) (see also Robertson & Sorensen, 2018), have been recontextualised into the Greek school system through policies of the last decade on "open schools", "innovative curricula", "student-centred pedagogies" and "school leadership" (Sifakakis et al., 2016). Disseminated also through teacher training courses and the media, such ideas became dominant in the public sphere, generating new expectations about what a good school is and how it should function (Koutsiouri & Tsatsaroni, 2016). Specifically, we argue that these regulative discourses project an image of the modern (lower secondary) school as an active, well-connected, richly networked and technologically advanced institution, able to provide a variety of experiences to its students and to facilitate their future integration into contemporary globalised societies. Consequently, they shape the instructional discourse in ways that place emphasis on enriching students' experiences and cultural capital through in-school activities and out of school visits, and on developing them socially and emotionally. Often informed by child-centered (socio-constructivist) pedagogies, these pedagogic practices reflect a rather selective implementation of the official curriculum, and tend to marginalise discipline language knowledge. However, teachers' practices vary within and between these more privileged schools of our study, and it is not unusual to observe the co-existence of an 'open-schools' ethos with traditional instructional practices, both in terms of content selection (emphasis on grammar and syntax) and in terms of pedagogy (strong control over classroom communication and strong hierarchical relationships between teachers and students).

We argue that these findings shed light on the complex ways in which global discourses on "modern(ised)" schools and innovative forms of teaching and learning interact with national and institutional contexts, their histories and their positioning in the world. The varying ways in which schools and teachers respond to the new expectations such discourses generate – a matter for further research in the Greek context – depend upon many factors, such as how school actors make sense of such

expectations (experiencing them as opportunities or pressures), and not least of all on their sedimented, deep-rooted professional beliefs and practices.

Conclusions

The nuances identified in the pedagogic practices through which language curricula are enacted in the six schools participating in the study indicate the complexity of the contextual factors that affect the translation, interpretation and enactments of policies at school level. They also illustrate how, different regulative discourses (on inclusion and on "modern(ised)" school, in the disadvantaged and the more advantaged schools of our sample, respectively) relate to the instructional discourse that shapes the communicative context and interactions in classrooms. In other words, our study illustrates how various discourses, diffused in the pedagogic field, under certain conditions may become regulative, affecting actors' interpretative understandings of school context and their responses to it. Such regulative discourses shape language curricula enactments, promote specific practices and exclude others, and have serious implications for students' learning.

The study is significant because it sheds light on how regulative discourses embedded in globalised policies and (re)articulated and interpreted at the various levels of educational governance, shape the pedagogic practices through which policies are enacted (cf. Muller & Hoadley, 2010). It also illuminates how such regulation may have what Ball calls "second order effects" of a policy: changes to "patterns of social access and opportunity and social justice" (Ball, 1993: 16).

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