



Teaching Modern Greek History to High School students by dramatizing literature texts

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Abstract

Teaching Modern Greek History to High School students by dramatizing literature texts' is an educational program which was implemented in a Lyceum in West Attica during 2014-2015. The above program aimed to meet a very important goal of the National History curriculum: teaching and presenting historical facts of the period 1914-1923 which resulted to the pogrom of Greek population from Pontus and Asia Minor. Students had the opportunity to approach this important period of Modern Greek History by studying relevant literature, exploring useful historical sources and performing role play. Following teamwork processes, students coming from all grades, formed their own history study groups. To begin with, triggering their interest-as Vygotsky put it- in order to start their research on relevant literature and primary historical sources was a really important task. By using the constructivist discovery approach elaborated by Gagne, Bruner and Piaget they attempted to separate the dominant ideology from historical facts. After completing their research they started creating their own theatre play which was divided in five parts: the first part was about the pogrom against Greeks of Pontus (1914-1923), the second part was about everyday life of Greek population in Konstantinoupolis before WW1, the third presented everyday life of Greeks in the cosmopolitan city of Smyrni and the village of Kirkintze next to ancient city of Ephesus, the fourth was about the destruction of Smyrni (1922) and finally the fifth presented the gradual assimilation of refugees in Greek society. The play was attended by all school classes and also the local community. We will present the educational results of the program mainly focusing on experimental history teaching strategies. Moreover, we will discuss students' critical approach of history, their ability to link past and present and relate art to literature in a context of national, transnational and multicultural values, students' creativity and productivity related to art and art performance. We will conclude by suggesting a cross-curricular approach which brings together history, literature and drama.

1. Introduction

The educational program 'Teaching Modern Greek History to High School Students by Dramatizing Literature Texts' was implemented at the 1st General High School (Lyceum) of Aspropyrgos in Western Attica (Greece) during the academic year 2014-2015. Students' participation was optional with their parents' written permission. The meetings were taking place for two hours per week after school lessons for a period of five months.

The aim of the program was to understand by experiential learning the historical facts of the period 1914-1923 which resulted to the pogrom of Greek populations from Pontus and Asia Minor. According to the Greek National Curriculum of History^[1] the main goal was to approach the critical facts which took place at this geographical area at the dawn of the 20th century and consequently their repercussions on Greece and Europe as well as on the lives of the historical subjects who experienced the facts, Greeks and Turks. Furthermore, by studying literature of that period and getting involved into relevant role playing based on the above texts, students had the chance to approach history from another perspective and finally realize the necessity of world peace, human rights and justice.

2. Theoretical Context

According to the principles of cross curricular learning^[2], history, literature and theatre can be complementary to each other and therefore, result to a holistic approach of knowledge^[3]. In this context, several methods were implemented such as discovery, participating and experiential learning which tend to relate learning procedures to real life. Cross curricular approach focuses on critical



thought and cooperative learning, highlighting the social and cultural values of education^[4]. Moreover, history as a discipline is not only about war and historical personalities^[5] but also studies the ways that everyday people experience war as historical subjects. Literature can be revealing in this effort.

In order to achieve these goals, it is very important to relate aesthetics to history. According to Dewey^[6] aesthetics can trigger students' critical thought in order to interpret art. Art contributes to an overall development of students and according to UNESCO can be fundamental as long as the learning process is concerned^[7]. In addition, art in education can be very useful in bridging inequalities regarding different cultural capital that students inherited from their families^[8]. Using drama in education promotes collaboration and students' learning capacity^[9] and also their commitment to learning procedures while at the same time avoids an one - dimensional perception of students' intelligence^[10].

3. Methodology-Teaching methods

3.1. Critically approach literature texts

In the beginning of the program, students formed their own groups following the principles of cooperative learning^[11] since it is perceived as the most efficient way in implementing cognitive^[12], social and cultural theories^[12] according to which learning is the result of an inner construction of knowledge (Constructivism) through experience and active participation in a real learning environment^[13].

Students' had to choose and critically approach literature texts and historical sources of that period according to Discovery Learning^[14] and the Information Processing Theory^[15]. They had to separate historical facts from the subjects' experience and the dominant ideologies of that era in order to understand the society of that time. By studying literature of that era, they had the chance to approach historical facts from a literature perspective. Moreover, they were asked to discover the causes of the facts and highlight their repercussions on simple peoples' lives. They were also asked to detect any gaps in narration and also any authors' biases in the texts.

In that way, there was a multidimensional approach of historical sources and at the same time a comparison was made among the literature texts in order to detect similarities and differences.

1	Centre for Asia Minor Studies:1980-1982. <i>Exodos Book 1-3</i> . Athens (en.kms.org.gr)
2	Papadimitriou Elli, 2005. <i>Koinos logos</i> Athens, Hermes.
3	Gritsi-Milliex Tatiana, 1976. <i>Tripoli of Pontos</i> . Athens, Kedros
4	Iordanídou María, 1963. <i>Loxandra</i> . Athens.
5	Sotiriou, Didó, 1971. <i>The Dead Are Waiting</i> . Athens, Kedros
6	Sotiriou, Didó, 1962. <i>Farewell Anatolia</i> . Athens, Kedros.
7	snhell.gr/testimonies, www.domnasamiou.gr
8	Papazogloy Georgios , 2003. <i>Ta hairia mas edo</i> Eptalofos

Table 1 presents the books on which students mainly focused

Cooperation and social interaction triggered students' interest and contributed to learning procedures since students were motivated to participate^[16]. Language can be fundamental in learning according to Vygotsky. The study of the language used in these texts such as the idiom of Pontus and other relevant local dialects contributed to experimental learning and historical empathy^[17]. The role of teachers was limited in scaffolding and offering guidance to the students^[16].

3.2 Dramatizing historical sources/literature texts

The students themselves created an original play^[18] structured in five different parts:

1) Life in Pontus, Konstantinopolis, Smyrna.

The students dramatized the testimonies of the Greeks coming from Pontus. A very important number of students who study at the 1st Lyceum of Aspropyrgos come from Greek families who were repatriated from Russia at the 1990s. In these narrations the refugees were describing the pogroms against them during WW1. The narrations were followed by a performance of a Pontiac Wedding during peace time. The students transcribed the language of the sources which were written in Modern Greek in the Pontiac idiom. (During the play there



was a translator on stage). The above was followed by a part which represented life in Konstantinopolis focusing on the peaceful life Greeks and Turks had together during the 19th century while at the same time scenes from the film “A touch of spice” (2003) were projected on stage. Finally, the students dramatized and presented the sudden and violent change of this peaceful relation between Greeks and Turks at the beginning of the 20th century focusing on everyday life in Kirkitze, a small village in Asia Minor near to ancient Ephesus and Smyrna.

2) The pogrom of Greeks in Smyrna.

The second part was the most important as far as the plot was concerned since it depicted the destruction of Smyrna. The students used devised theatre techniques such as modern dance and movement. (Bicat, Baldwin 2002)^[19].

3) Greek refugees.

At the end of the play two female students performed a multilingual song^[20] concerning refugees, popular in the Eastern Mediterranean^[21]. Finally, two very important historical narrations were presented to the audience. Both Domna Samiou (a prominent performer of traditional Greek music and folklore researcher) and Angeliki Papazoglou (a well known singer coming from Smyrna) described the procedure of integration of the Greek immigrants' populations from a social, political and psychological perspective after 1922. The narrations also focused on the everyday life in the refugees' camps and settlements.

The set was simple and the costumes were offered by local cultural clubs. The music of the play was live traditional music from Pontus performed by students who play the traditional lyra of Pontus.

The students who participated in this program approached Drama Teaching holistically^[22] implementing the main principles of Theatre Education under the guidance of a professional actor^[23] who volunteered to supervise them. They combined the above theatre techniques: role playing^[24], improvisation^[25], mixed group techniques of Devised Theatre^[19], education through music and movement^[26] and acting^[27]. They have also practiced at school and at the ancient theatre of Epidauros (which has great acoustic) in order to develop the way they articulate^[26].

4. Paedagogic benefits

The students approached in many ways an important historical era and they understood the relation of cause and causality and the ways people react and behave in critical situations such as war. They also have realized the historical continuity of the world they live in especially regarding immigration and refugees in the geographical area of the Eastern Mediterranean^[28]. They have also understood how important is respecting and securing human rights for every individual or group. They concluded that religious and cultural differences between people cannot serve as a trigger of war since people have to respect one another and live peacefully together.

By dramatizing literature texts, they practiced in playwriting and they had the chance to express themselves in creative ways, improvise and boost their self confidence^[6].

The play which was performed in front of the rest of the school and the local community of Aspropyrgos, an area inhabited by many immigrants, aimed to show the significance of peaceful coexistence among people with different cultural capital, a main priority in multicultural societies^[29]. Moreover, the bonds between students from different cultural environments were strengthened^[8].





Picture 1. scenes from theatrical performance

5. Conclusions

This paper has outlined an innovative educational program which took place in Aspropyrgos during 2014-2015. The implementation of the program confirmed bibliography regarding the benefits of using drama techniques as an effective tool in history teaching which helps students form critical historical thought and show responsibility as active individuals in a democratic society^[1]. According to the humanitarian approach of history, the above implemented program which was constructed on an anthropocentric basis, emphasized values such as respect, equality, acceptance, social justice^[5]

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