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The Model of Organised Hypocrisy Applied to Romanian Civic Education Policies and Practices

Abstract

Behind an apparently positive image, civic education in Romania proves to be an excellent illustration of “organised hypocrisy” (Brunsson, 2002). At a closer look, it becomes obvious that policy decisions related to civic education are isolated responses to various, and often contradictory, pressures from inside and from outside Romania, and that there is a huge gap between policy statements and the school practice, where civic education has a low status and where classical, directive and knowledge-focused pedagogical methods are still widely used.

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Keywords

Romanian civic education, organised hypocrisy, Europeanisation, education policies and practices.

Introduction

At a first glance, the current status of civic education in Romania looks very positive, from several perspectives. Civic education has a solid place in the compulsory curriculum, and every child in Romania studies civics in the 3rd, 4th, 7th and 8th grades. The Ministry of Educationⁱⁱⁱ also encourages schools to integrate civic education as an optional subject at 5th and 6th grades, thus ensuring a continuity from 3rd to 8th grades and in 11th grade, just the right time, before they turn 18, to prepare young people to exercise the right to vote and use at best their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Additionally, some other related optional subjects have received the endorsement of the Ministry of Education and are available for use in any school: Children’s Rights, European Education, Human Rights Education, Intercultural Education. Of course, schools may also develop their own optional subjects, with a content directly adapted to the specific local needs.

Teachers that teach civics as compulsory subjects have the choice between several alternative textbooks and all of them include suggestions for interactive educational activities. In fact civic education curriculum and textbooks have been the first ones in the Romanian education system to switch from a knowledge-focused perspective to a balanced perspective, including, besides acquisition of knowledge, development of specific skills as well as of attitudes and values. It is also worth underlining that the

introduction to the curriculum of civic education for primary school specifies that it should be seen as flexible and that teachers are expected to adapt educational activities to the needs of their pupils, while the secondary level curriculum mentions that the objectives (and not the contents) should be seen as the reference, and that didactical strategies should focus on achieving these objectives.

It is based on this flexibility that a number of agreements have been signed by the Ministry of Education with NGOs, to endorse their involvement in civic education at school level^{IV}. But the cooperation with NGOs is also taking place at local level, based on agreements with regional educational authorities or directly with schools.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education did not limit itself to promote a subject-focused civic education but, in line with the recommendations of several European documents, has been promoting as well an integrated approach. This can be illustrated by several initiatives, including:

- the “National Programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC)”, implemented by the Ministry in cooperation and with the support of UNICEF, that aimed at equipping class-teachers and educational staff in charge with extracurricular activities for integrating non-formal EDC activities in their work;
- a recent Order of the Minister, issued in July 2007 and requiring an integration of cultural diversity and of reference to minorities in the curriculum at all levels;
- elements of civic education recently integrated in the history curriculum for high-schools;
- the National Strategy for Combating Violence in School, adopted in June 2007 that requires schools to elaborate school-based plans including EDC-related activities.

Besides, civic education is supported also by the introduction of democratic mechanisms of school management and of structures that stimulate pupils’ participation, such as Pupils’ Councils at school, county and even national levels.

And not only the current situation, as described above, looks very positive, but if we look at civic education in the context of the evolution of the education reform, it results that this field has been among the promoters of positive change and has clearly progressed as well over the last five years, with revision of curriculum, addition of curricular standards, expansion of cooperation with NGOs, and new optional curriculum developed.

Romania has endorsed all European and international initiatives related to civic education and had a very active presence at European level: a Romanian^V has chaired the project of the Council of Europe on Education for Democratic Citizenship, Romania had a significant contribution in projects of the Council of Europe, in the framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, or in the EU programmes, Romania has organised the closing event of the European Year of Citizenship through education and has also a good cooperation with various international organisations with activity on this field.

However, we argue that Romanian civic education is an excellent illustration of “organised hypocrisy” (Brunson, 2002). We will try to prove this by looking at what is behind this apparently positive situation, in terms of curriculum, textbooks, organisation and supervision, as well as teaching practice and situation at school level.

Already in 2001, Birzea identifies in Romania a “wide gap between policies [related to EDC] and implementation measures on the one hand, and the citizenship competence of the population on the other hand. This gap is, above all, the result of the paradoxical situation of democracy, which Giovanni Sartori called *existential duplicity*”.

Civic education policy: who decides?

There is no doubt that the Ministry of Education has the main power and responsibility to initiate, implement and evaluate education policies in all fields, including civic education. However, there are different levels and structures within the Ministry, with responsibility and/or interest on this field and the coordination between them is not really effective, if it exists at all. First, a distinction should be made between the political level of Ministry leadership, changing every few years^{vi} and often not really knowing and understanding the key issues of the system, and the administrative management, with its different departments often in competition, rather than coordination and cooperation. The key players are the Directorate for Pre-university Education, in charge with the curriculum and the inspection of the teachers of civics, but also some other departments, situated in other General Directorates, such as the Department for Educational Activities, responsible for the support provided to class-teachers and for the extracurricular educational activities in schools and out-of-schools, as well as other departments, such as the departments in charge with teacher training or quality assurance and evaluation. A good example of this lack of coordination is the National Programme of EDC, initiated without the involvement of the Directorate for Pre-university Education, by the department in charge with the educational activities. This programme produced with the support of UNICEF, an impressive number of textbooks, has trained a number of teachers in the use of interactive EDC methods, but its impact in practice remains minimal precisely due to this lack of coordination and the competition for the curriculum time with other programmes, such as the National Health Education Programme.

In the absence of a clear political vision, the factors coming from outside the ministry seem to play, at least after 2000, a much more important role than the ministry leadership. These could be categorised into several distinct categories (in the order of their influence, as it results from the analysis of the policy documents produced): European and international organisations, Romanian civil society and Romanian political parties.

Another key player, part of the education system, active and competent, and whose recommendations are sometimes taken onboard by the Ministry leadership, is the Institute for Educational Sciences. The institute has played a major role in the design of the curricular framework and also ensuring the representation of Romania at European and international organisations. An example of situation when the Ministry has taken into account the work of the Institute for Educational Sciences is the National Strategy for Combating the Violence in School, but there are numerous examples when both the national level research performed by the institute and the messages that it brings from the international scene are only superficially accepted and find no consequence in education policy.

The education committees of the Parliament have also a significant influence on the policies. Their composition reflects generally the Parliament's political composition but it happened that nationalistic parties, even when in opposition, have been conceded the chairmanship or important positions in these Committees. This is why, the key issue that is interesting to analyse in this respect is the confrontation between the nationalistic pressure from the Parliament, seeing civic education as a tool to build patriotism, and the European and civil society pressure, focused on the development of critical thinking, civic participation skills and respect for cultural diversity. This is one of the issues that we focus on when analysing the content of the civic education curriculum.

The civic education curriculum and its paradoxes

Even a quick look at the curriculum for civic education will reveal a number of inconsistencies and differences, testifying a hesitant dynamics of its gradual revisions but also raising additional concerns and uncertainties for teachers. Some curriculum documents are based on framework and reference objectives, with suggestions of learning activities, and a list of contents added at the end, while others (mostly some of curriculum for the newer optional subjects) are based on competencies, with content elements connected to each specific competency and methodological suggestions at the end. However, there is no clear trend of moving from objectives to competencies, since some of the newer versions of the curriculum documents still use the objectives-based structure. Some civic education programmes do not have performance standards attached, while others have them, with or without the specification of minimum and maximum required levels.

Besides these more general structural inconsistencies, an analysis of the currently used curriculum reveals some other hesitations and internal contradictions. We will focus on three issues: (1) the relation between knowledge, skills and attitudes; (2) the dichotomies national versus European and patriotism versus civic participation; and (3) the perspective on civic education in relation to ethnocentrism and cultural diversity.

The idea of a balance between knowledge, development of skills and preparing students for “practical action”, and the promotion of attitudes and values is recognised as a “defining trait” of civic education in the introduction to the current curriculum documents. The important role of the skills and attitudes, as opposed to an exclusive focus on knowledge, which is largely the case in the curriculum of other subjects, is underlined by the formulation of the framework and reference objectives. The problem is that for all compulsory civic education curriculum there is little logical connection between these objectives and the list of contents specified. Thus, there are objectives that find no explicit correspondence in the list of contents and contents that have little, if any, connection with the objectives. For example, in the curriculum for the 3rd grade, the objective “to identify the universal rights of the child” is not reflected at all in the list of contents, while the chapters on “the complexity of personal identity” and on “patriotism and European integration” have no clear connection with the stated objectives. And, of course, as we explain below, it is this content list that is taken as reference for both the textbooks and the teaching practice. Besides, the generally accepted assumptions behind the need of a balance between knowledge, skills and attitudes is that all are equally important for citizens and that positive attitudes will be better developed through active engagement in interaction, rather than by using a moralising classical teaching approach. However, most of the curriculum for 5th grade takes a normative moralising perspective and some objectives focusing on attitudes are formulated in an inadequate way. For instance, the objective “to prove willingness to participate in groups” (3rd grade) is rather irrelevant and the one “to manifest respect in the relations with others” (7th grade) can hardly be evaluated by the civic education teacher based on a one-hour per week contact.

The second key topic, the relation between national and European references and the one between patriotism and civic participation is more a matter of a key option regarding the fundamental goals of civic education. Basically, one of two options can be taken as reference:

1. The goal of civic education is to prepare citizens for Romania, to develop loyalty to the country, a positive national identity and foster patriotic feelings.
2. The goal of civic education is to develop competent and active citizens, aware of their rights, the organisation and the key issues in their society, at local, national and European levels, and equipped for an effective civic participation.

The first option is more connected with traits of an authoritarian identity, particularistic and submissive, while the second one corresponds to a democratic identity, universalistic and evaluative (Hedtke et al., 2007).

The Romanian law of education includes references to both options and they correspond to the two main aims of the education system. This coexistence of the two options translates in the content of civic education curriculum but its challenges are not made explicit.

In fact, by looking at the framework and reference objectives of all compulsory civic education curriculums, one can assume that the second option is clearly taken: there is no mention of patriotism, national identity or similar keywords. Framework objectives mention just generally „the quality of citizen” without any specific affiliation (national, European, or local), as well as human rights and children’s rights. Reference objectives for 7th grade include indeed “to identify and explain constitutional values and principles from our country”, but also “from other countries”, and insist more on the local community, though formulations like “to manifest initiative in solving the problems of the groups they belong to and of the local community”. The specific objectives for 8th grade are also formulated in general way, focused on civic participation and on social and communication skills. The standards also remain general, in compliance with the objectives. They include no mention of nation or patriotism, focusing on group relations and capacity to use specific language.

However, the content sections take a very different perspective, with explicit references to national identity and patriotism. For instance, the 4th grade curriculum content mentions “the people” and, optionally “the nation”, as well as “symbols of the Romanian State” while the 8th grade contents section includes, besides sections on the concepts of authority, responsibility, justice (inspired, without explicit mention, by the US curriculum on Foundations of Democracy), a chapter “patriotism”.

There are reasons to believe that there are different sources of pressure for one or the other of the two views on the goal of civic education: the Romanian Parliament and its Education Committees, pushing for seeing civic education mainly as a tool for “the preservation of national identity”, while European and international structures are pushing for a focus on developing active, informed and critical thinking citizens.

Regarding the reflection in the curriculum of the major European documents, it is rather surprising that, taking into account the highly visible and active participation of Romania to Council of Europe activities in the field of Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, with the endorsement by Romanian authorities of all Council of Europe documents on this topic, there is almost no mention of these in the introduction to the civic education curriculum. For instance, even recent versions of the curriculum mention “the final document of the Conference of the European Ministers of Education from 2000”, held in Bucharest, and the UN Convention for the protection of the rights of the child, and make no reference to directly relevant Council of Europe documents, such as the Recommendation on EDC adopted in 2002, or the declaration on intercultural education signed by the Ministers of Education in Athens, in 2003. References to Council of Europe documents can only be found in a project of curriculum for high-school specialisation on Social Studies, where also confusion is made between the Council of Europe and the European Council.

The European dimension should have represented by now a clear and explicit focus of civic education at all levels, following an order of the Minister of Education adopted in 2000. However, despite some mentions of this topic in the 7th and 8th grades contents (and not in the objectives), the choice of the Ministry for the primary level has been to

elaborate a separate optional curriculum for “European education”, instead of adapting the existing compulsory curriculum.

The third issue we focus on in the analysis of the current civic education curriculum is the way it relates to cultural diversity and, in connection to this, the approach taken to national identity, ethic-based or civic.

On this topic there are as well several contradictory influences, on one side the nationalistic political parties, with important influence in the Parliament’s Education Committees, and even the Orthodox Church, and, on the other side, the representatives of the Hungarian minority in decision-making positions in Government, the civil society, including minority organisations, as well as the international commitments, such as the Athens Declaration from 2003 and the recommendations received from the Council of Europe in relation with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. In 2007 the Minister of Education issued an Order requiring the inclusion of a diversity-based perspective in the curriculum of all subjects.

Currently, there is no mention of cultural diversity in primary school compulsory civic education curriculum (except for the mention of religious groups in a part of the extended/optional curriculum). Here also, the choice has been, in order to give an answer to the Ministerial Order, to add an optional curriculum on “Intercultural education”, and not to revise the compulsory curriculum.

In the introduction to the new version of civic education curriculum for the 7th and 8th grades it is specified that the focus should be on “cultivating respect for oneself and others, while accepting pluralism under multiple aspects (political, economical, religious, cultural, etc.)” and also that “civic education is an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach that requires openness, communication and flexibility, cultivating them simultaneously”; it allows for an “inevitable dialogue between various knowledge modalities and between different types of cultures”. However, there is no explicit reflection of these generous ideas in the formulation of the objectives but some mention of topics connected to cultural diversity in the list of contents. But, all these topics, including “prejudice and stereotypes”, “xenophobia, chauvinism, demagoguery”, are labelled as “not compulsory”, and therefore usually are not dealt with in classroom practice.

Curriculum in practice: the real status of civic education in school

The gap between educational policy and official documents, on one side, and classroom practice and concrete outcomes, on the other side, has been widely acknowledged as a key issue in both nationally and European-focused reports (Birzea, 2001; Rus, 2002; Cotofana-Boeru & Balan, 2001; Dodescu et al., 2004; Birzea et al., 2004). In the case of Romanian civic education there is little systematic research focusing on the practice but a number of important conclusions can be deduced just by analysing some general elements related to the organisation of the teaching of civic education.

The importance of civic education has been stated explicitly in various documents issued or signed by the Minister of Education. However, the status of civic education as a “marginalised” subject is obvious. Cotofana-Boeru and Balan (2002) argue that this marginalised status can be illustrated with the fact that it is a subject that is compulsory only on grades 3, 4, 7 and 8, that, even if in theory at these grades pupils can study civics between 1 and 2 hours per week, it is always just 1 hour, as well as by the fact that civic education is the only subject for which the content of the official school competitions is not relying on the curriculum content. They also add the fact that most of the teachers that teach civics have no specific qualification for this, or have no

qualification at all and that in most schools civic education is a subject that is used to complete the required number of hours of teachers of other subjects.

In the introduction to the curriculum documents it is clearly specified that “the factual elements, the examples, the cases and the situations used as reference for activities with the pupils, can be chosen depending on the specificity of the class, of some pupils, of the local community, etc. The curriculum is just providing an orientation in terms of contents and methods. [...] Teachers and authors of textbooks can concentrate their attention in a different way on the learning activities and on didactic practices. The diversity of concrete situations makes possible and necessary a diversity of didactic solutions. From this perspective, the proposals of the curriculum should not be seen as inflexible recipes. The balance between the various approaches and solutions should be the result of personal didactic design and of the cooperation with the pupils of each class.” This is a very powerful statement that encourages teachers to be creative and flexible and to adapt their practice to the needs of the pupils. Unfortunately, in practice these recommendations remain largely unused. This is understandable if we take into account that most teachers are not prepared and are not supported in this sense.

The textbooks of civic education are, for their large majority, more open than other textbooks towards interactive methods and promoting critical thinking. They remain however directly connected to the list of contents specified in the curriculum and give less attention to some of the key objectives in the curriculum, particularly those that find a less explicit correspondence in the contents.

The consequence is that the content of the textbook remains the main reference and it is often used with a focus on knowledge, since teachers have less experience and confidence with the interactive methods suggested.

Teacher training and supervision: the double bind

The low status of civic education in schools is probably best illustrated with the situation of the teachers that teach it. At primary level civic education is taught by the class teacher that in most cases has never received specific training on contents and methodologies. At the secondary level, civic education is usually taught by history or social sciences teachers. There are also numerous cases, particularly in rural areas, where civic education is taught by teachers of various other subjects, from mathematics to sports, or even by temporarily employed staff, with no or very little didactic qualification.

The recruitment procedures also illustrate the status of civic education as a marginalised subject. Thus, although it is possible, as for any other subject, very seldom positions of “civic education teacher” are declared open by schools. Even when this is happening, the procedure requires to give priority to graduates of philosophy, history, law, and sociology (in this order), over the graduates of political sciences, when, according to Cotofana-Boeru and Balan (2002) over 80% of the contents of civics are related to political science.

The fact that history and social sciences teachers, but also, sometimes, language teachers, use civic education to complete their required number of teaching hours also determines a high fluctuation of teachers that actually teach civics. One class can do civic education with the history teacher in the 7th grade and with the social sciences teacher in the 8th grade. This high level of fluctuation makes it even harder to provide specific and effective training to these teachers. Data from schools involved in using innovative methods, such as Project Citizen – a methodology developed in the US, based on the study of a public policy issue chosen by the pupils, shows that the

decision to allocate civic education classes is largely made by the school principal and that continuity for the pupils in the subject is not one of the important criteria^{vii}.

Under these circumstances, teachers are faced often with double bidding messages. They give priority, as history teachers, to their main subject and consider less important their (temporary) quality of civic education teachers. This reflects also in the relations of the same teacher with the inspectors in charge with history and with social sciences, which in many counties are different persons, with different priorities. In all cases the inspector in charge with civic education has another main subject, be it history, philosophy, economics, etc, and even him/her consider civic education as less important.

Another double bind that teachers of civic education are facing results from the contradiction between the official messages in the curriculum documents, promoting innovation, flexibility, and focus on learning objectives, not on contents, and the actual monitoring and evaluation procedures of the inspectors in charge with civic education, that in most cases require teaches to follow strictly the contents in the curriculum.

Conclusion

This brief outline of the internal contradictions, differences between discourse and practice and lack of a coordinated and explicit vision, and the image of a system that reacts in an inconsistent way to various pressures from inside and from outside, shows that the model of organised hypocrisy (Brunsson, 2002), applies to the teaching of civic education in Romania.

It was not our aim lead to an exclusively negative conclusion and to ignore the indubitable progress that could be witness in this field over the past ten years but it was our goal to identify this type of reaction to a complex and changing environment in order to check the validity of Brunsson's model. This is not to say nor that it was just an intellectual exercise and to deny the high potential for identifying possibilities for improvement that such an analysis offers.

It is also obvious that more research is needed, both on the content of the educational policy documents, and on the procedures actually used in the system, and, most of all, on the real teaching practice in schools.

There are as well some connected topics that could be addressed in future studies from a similar perspective. Taking into account that education for democratic citizenship should be a comprehensive and holistic approach (Kerr and Losito, 2004), one example could be the connection of the civic education compulsory and optional curriculum with the curriculum of other subjects, as well as the status of the integration of a democracy-focused perspective in other subjects. Another one could be a look at the dynamics of the reactions that the education system had over the past 20 years in relation with civic education. It is obvious that in the post-totalitarian period there was a move from the denial of the need to change, to the rather chaotic acceptance of various inputs and it would be interesting to connect this with the various sources of influence, both internal and external.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Romania has a centralized education system, with the national authorities deciding on the "National Curriculum". A process of decentralization has been initiated about ten years ago and is still not finalised. We use the generic "Ministry of Education" although over the years there have been different names used for the national educational authorities. The current complete name is "Ministry of Education, Research and Youth".

^{iv} Several examples of NGOs that have consistent cooperation with the Ministry of Education for civic education programmes can be given. They include Save the Children Romania, for the optional curriculum on Children's Rights, the Civic Education Association, for the curriculum and textbook on civic education for the eleventh grade, the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, for "Project Citizen", an interactive method based on the study of a local community issue chosen by the pupils, the Center Education 2000+, with several projects, including one on integrating citizenship issues in history teaching, etc.

^v Cesar Birzea, Director of the Institute for Educational Sciences in Bucharest.

^{vi} Over a decade, since 1998, when the rhetoric of educational reform started to have a correspondence in reality, Romania had six ministers of education from four political parties.

^{vii} Unpublished report on CIVITAS Programme in Romania, Intercultural Institute of Timisoara