



Between “us” and “them”: Teachers’ perceptions of the national versus international composition of the Israeli history curriculum



Miri Yemini*, Hed Bar-Nissan, Oriah Yardeni

School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel

HIGHLIGHTS

- We investigate history teachers’ perceptions of the history curriculum content.
- The teachers were found to favor slightly local over global content.
- Teachers’ perceptions differ from the actual balance of the examined curriculum.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 April 2013

Received in revised form

9 February 2014

Accepted 7 April 2014

Available online 7 May 2014

Keywords:

Curriculum

Internationalization

Schools

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate history teachers’ perceptions of the desired history curriculum content in Israeli schools in term of national versus international composition. We surveyed Israeli secondary school history teachers in the Jewish secular stream, employing an on-line quantitative and qualitative questionnaire that asked the teachers to select the subjects that they consider important for inclusion in the curriculum. Our results show that teachers’ perceptions regarding the desired curricular balance between local and international content differ quite significantly from the actual balance of the official curriculum. Teachers’ perceptions might affect the gap between the intended curriculum and the implemented one.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Corresponding to the general global processes, in recent decades, two opposite curricular pressures in the education systems are evident. The first is expressed by the aspiration of elite groups to join the global discourse and adopt a global, cosmopolitan identity. The second pressure involves an opposite tendency to crystallize local social groups attempting to define their own identities and assure their own communal agenda within which they aspire to change their social status (Ram, 2004). Understanding the tension between different forces affecting curricular development – and especially perceptions of teachers in this context, as those who are responsible for the delivery of the curriculum into the classrooms – represents an important form of knowledge in schooling.

Like many countries worldwide, Israeli society comprises many competing social sectors and national groups, presenting a multiplicity of agendas, ideals, and values (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, &

Ramirez, 1997). At the same time, Israeli policies attempt to constitute basic social unity (at least among the Jewish population including immigrants from Europe, North Africa and Americas, with different religious or secular orientations) that is deemed necessary to ensure the existence of the nation-state (Al-Haj, 2005). Given the grave political and military conflicts, the state is continuously facing social cohesion certainly creates powerful challenges for curriculum developers, as well as other educational practitioners.

This study aims to investigate history teachers’ perceptions of history curricular contents in secondary schools of the Israeli secular Jewish education stream and to reveal the tensions over international and local subject-matter that teachers face. Our research question addresses the un-coverage of the teachers’ perceptions on the composition of the history curriculum in terms of international versus national subjects by questioning teachers on their desired curriculum content in terms of specific subjects. The lessons from Israel may be relevant to understanding more latent problems in curricular formation in other modern societies (Hofman, Alpert, & Schnell, 2007); these lessons can expose this multidimensional process in its less accessible facet of curricular development.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: miriye@post.tau.ac.il (M. Yemini).

1.1. Curricula in the era of globalization

Economic and institutional globalization corresponds to the decentralization of educational governance. This process is shaping a new image of the state's control of schooling, leading to educational reforms across many nations that champion a model of decentralized educational governance as the standard practice (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002). In many nations, decentralization trends are accompanied by high-stakes testing and accountability demands on the part of central governments. These trends expose schools to contradictory forces that affect schools' actions and practices. On the one hand, schools encounter institutional pressures requiring accountability for school outcomes according to prescribed regulations and standards; on the other hand, following decentralization, schools gain more autonomy in various domains (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009). Schools are thus influenced both by top-down accountability demands and by autonomous actions in a bottom-up manner. To some extent, schools enjoy discretion over their practices, as long as they advance and improve students' achievements (defined by central governments) (Cheng, 2002). Thus, a process of decentralization of the curriculum is incorporated within the context of national control over a core curriculum. This coexistence of centralized and decentralized practices demonstrates the tension policy makers face between the commitment to expand communities' and individual schools' ability to modify their curriculum in light of local and individual needs, on the one hand, and the need to maintain national unity through curricular control, on the other hand.

The debates over the desired form of the national curriculum have become more problematic in times of globalization: "People now live amid many social imaginaries, in addition to those that are dictated by the dominant national formations" (Rizvi, 2006, p. 197 cited in Doherty, 2009). This change forced reflection and re-definition of "ourselves" and "others" in the curriculum as well as other fields. Curricular developers and teachers may possess different or even conflicting views on those subjects (Pinar, 2003). As noted above, school curricular reform efforts have wrestled with achieving a global orientation while ensuring a strong national identity at the same time (Green, 1999; Koh, 2005), with pressures from both directions becoming increasingly fierce and common in recent years (Yemini, Nissan and Shavit, 2014).

1.2. Internationalization in schools

The increasing effects of globalization and the demanding efforts of workplaces to internationalize in every sphere of life suggest that internationalization does not suddenly emerge in the higher education system, but rather continues from schools – even from lower and kindergartens (Yemini, 2012). We claim that internationalization seeps into schools from several different directions. First, higher education institutions compete globally and seek out students with wide global knowledge who possess some level of intellectual openness, thus incentivizing schools to prepare internationalized graduates (de Wit, 2002). Pupils – and more importantly their parents – understand that cosmopolitan capital provides the individual with a competitive edge and can be acquired through internationalization efforts, including living abroad for some time; visiting and hosting friends from different nationalities; attending meetings for an international audience; maintaining a globally dispersed circle of friends or relatives; reading books, magazines, and journals that reach a global audience; and possessing near-native mastery of English and at least one other language (Author, 2013; Marshall, 2007; Weenink, 2008). Second, the dynamic, technological environment of the 21st century results in children living and studying in a global environment using novel

tools, devices and skills, forcing schools to adapt to the new way of teaching and learning and to internationalize (Nachmias, Mioduser, & Forkosh-Baruch, 2010). Moreover, school decentralization reforms also contribute to the internationalization of education. Currently, school directors are increasingly forced to interact with various external stakeholders to gain additional resources and support for their schools (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009). These stakeholders (including parents and business sector representatives) usually possess a higher degree of 'international literacy,' thus creating internationalization pressure on the school (Weenink, 2008).

Although political, economic, cultural, social and academic rationales push the education system towards internationalization (de Wit, 2002), schools face different and sometimes contradictory pressures regarding internationalization processes. On the one hand, institutional forces hold schools accountable for achievement outcomes prescribed by local regulations and standards, potentially leading school management to resist any changes that may involve instability; on the other hand, increasing decentralization has expanded school principals' spheres of autonomy to engage with new and internationally-oriented activities, among other opportunities.

1.3. Teachers' roles in curricular development and delivery

Different scholars have expressed a wide range of positions regarding the role of the teachers in curricular development and implementation; general consensus exists, though, regarding teachers' importance in this field (Ben-Peretz, 1989; Calderhead, 1996; Shkedi, 1998). Researchers investigating curricular approaches have undertaken several study directions, focusing, for example, on the difficulties of teachers to follow the official curriculum (Campbell, 2007); the impact of teachers' curricular approaches on their professional development (Craig, 2006; Eilam & Poyas, 2012; Eisner, 2002); and teachers' curricular approaches impact on student learning and motivation (Eisner, 1990; Erickson & Shultz, 1992; King, 2002). Some researchers consider the teachers' role to involve the translation of curricular materials into learning experiences, since teachers are ideally situated for realizing the potential of curricular materials in their local context (Ben-Peretz, 1990). Others have turned to Tyler's (1949) school-based curriculum, in which teachers make the full range of decisions from determining objectives to selecting or even designing the curriculum and its implementation in the classroom (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). Connell (1985), as cited in Doherty and Shield (2012, p. 69), argued that "teachers are workers, teaching is work, and the school is a workplace"; thus, teachers' work and interests are necessary, important aspects of any educational and curricular reform.

Curricular development is usually viewed as a multistage process marked by a distinction between curriculum-in-theory – material written by external experts describing what is to be taught – and curriculum-in-use – teaching materials implemented by teachers and not necessarily identical to the written curriculum (Shkedi, 2009). Cuban (1992) identifies three kinds of curricula: the intended or official curriculum (content that official policy dictates); the curriculum that is taught in practice; and the curriculum that is learned. The three types of curriculum differ in the type of knowledge they implicate, in the way this knowledge is presented, and in how each of them copes with processes of social changes. In the era of globalization, the tension between the official curriculum and the taught curriculum is more severe, owing to teachers' and students' exposure to other, unofficial sources of knowledge (Doherty, 2009). The translation of official curricular policies into actual school or classroom activities is rarely a smooth or a

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373944>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373944>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)