Review

Social representations of European integration as narrated by school textbooks in five European nations

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Social representations of European integration in the school textbooks of five European countries (France, England, Germany, Finland and Sweden) are analyzed. By analyzing the history and civics textbooks of major educational publishers and by presenting a double content analysis of textbooks of five European countries, this study aims to demonstrate what is written on European integration and how it is portrayed. The study shows how textbooks function to shape the identity space through articulations of the symbology of history and identity. The results show how European identity is only very rarely portrayed as an end in itself, but dominantly as an instrument for the nations to gain power in the globalizing world or even as a threat. Despite the efforts to Europeanize educational systems in the EU-countries, the story of European integration is told from a national perspective in each country and textbooks are used as vehicles of nationalism.

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1. Introduction

The economic, political and social face of Europe has been changing rapidly in the past decades. These changes are unique in the history of Europe, but not without challenges for the nation states. Support for European integration varies among countries and recently there have been signs of growing pessimism among EU citizens (e.g. Eurobarometer 76, 2011). However, as political participation of citizens is a prerequisite for a successful democratic community, continuation of the European integration process depends upon the support and engagement of citizens. The "democratic deficit" and the need

for political legitimacy have directed reformers' and scholars' attention toward political socialization and motivated the search for a European identity (e.g., Beetham & Lord, 1998). From the beginning of the 1980s, education has been seen as one of the key factors in fostering and promoting a European sense of belongingness and civic participation (e.g., Pépin, 2007). In other words, along with development of different EU-policies (e.g., the European Union Youth Strategy, 2010–18) addressing the demands of civic participation, a standardized, European level educational policy and schooling system were seen as a key in the growth of a feeling of European identity (Smith, 1992). Together with the influences of family, friends, mass and social media, schools play a pivotal role in the political socialization of youth and in the development of their political identities (e.g., Niemi & Junn, 1998).

The present study is concerned with social representations, in narrative form, of European integration that are found in the textbooks of five European nations: France, England,[1] Germany, Finland and Sweden. These countries represent different histories, positions and policies in the European context (e.g., Esping-Anderson, 1990). These five countries do not differ only in terms of their size, history of participation, and advocacy of the European Union, but also with regard to their roles in past intergroup conflicts. For example, in the Second World War France and Britain were on the winning side, Germany and Finland on the losing side, while Sweden managed to keep its neutrality. Most importantly, these countries differ in terms of their positions in today's economic and political balances.

The nation states have particular interests in the education system and textbooks (see also Kello & Wagner, 2014). The linkages between mass education and identity building are recognized by many social and political scientists. For example, Hobsbawm (1990) highlights the crucial role of the school system in mediating narratives of the nation and in establishing universal national identifications throughout the state territory. In a similar vein, Smith (1998) points out that, by adopting an educator role, the state is capable of mass inculcation of standardized, patriotic culture that forms the base for a culturally unified nation-state. In other words, textbooks are used to convey certain national representations and narratives in order to promote a sense of national belonging. In line with Critical Junctures Theory (Liu, Fisher Onar, & Woodward, this volume) textbooks are state technologies – means that are used by the state to reproduce itself. Thus, the symbologies of the state – national narratives, myths, ideologies, symbols and heroes – the system of meaning that is communicated by the technology of the state to strengthen its hold on its citizenry – are often depicted in school textbooks. Textbooks are particular locations where different kinds of knowledge – e.g., scientific, commonsensical or ideological – co-exist side by side. They do not mediate only brute facts or knowledge about the history but symbols, opinions, attitudes and tone (Crawford & Foster, 2008; Vincze, Toth, & Laszlo, 2007). This perspective is consistent with Halbwachs's idea of the difference between formal history and collective memory that is presented in schoolbooks: "Undoubtedly, history is a collection of the most notable facts in the memory of man. But past events read about in books and taught and learned in schools are selected, combined, and evaluated in accord with necessities and rules not imposed on the groups that had through time guarded them as a living trust" (Halbwachs, 1950/1980, p. 78). Previous works on textbooks (e.g., Carretero, Asensio & Rodriquez-Moneo, 2012; Crawford & Foster, 2008; Soysal & Schissler, 2005, just to list few) have underlined the importance of the school and textbooks in the construction of a nation, the national identity and divisions between ingroups and outgroups. In other words, textbooks can be seen as tools of identity politics and othering, as examples from postwar Bosnian and Herzegovinian (Baranović, 2001; Torsti, 2003), from Turkish and Greek (Antonious & Soysal, 2005) and from Israeli and Palestinian textbooks (Bar-Tal, 1998) clearly demonstrate. Thus, the function of textbooks is tied to group identities within and between states that vie for legitimacy of meaning systems and people who struggle for control of the state apparatus.

Critical junctures theory describes the nation-state as a complex system governed by the interaction between the following system parameters: symbology, technology, and identity space (Liu et al., this volume). In the time of its creation in 1950s, European integration was a complete historical novelty trying to create a new social reality out of old nations, which were divided for a long time by cruel violence. In line with critical junctures theory, the EU can be seen as a new and powerful superordinate identity (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) that acts as a new attractor in governance systems that distorts the attractor of the traditional nation state. Commonplace configurations (i.e., attractors) of the technologies of state, symbologies of state, and group identities have been and continue to be destabilized by the emergent configuration of the European Union. The formation of the European Union has posed new kinds of civic and political questions about the definition of citizenship and nationality that people have to deal with and make sense of. This sense-making process takes place in social interaction with family, friends, school and the media.

The social representation approach (SRT) (e.g., Moscovici, 1961, 1984) provides an analytical framework for the study of this unfamiliar, troubling or disturbing phenomenon – European integration – by showing how it is encountered, understood and explained to young European citizens. Social representations include shared knowledge and thus their formation is a social process where something unfamiliar or troubling is made familiar. The two basic concepts of social representation theory, anchoring and objectification, allow a further operationalization for the analysis of the state symbologies, or meaning

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[1] Each of the countries of the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) has separate educational systems. To analyze the British system, we have chosen to focus on English national curricula and textbooks. There is a difference whether one uses a term England (a nation), Britain (an island that constitutes of England, Wales and Scotland) or the UK (an independent country that consists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Thus to clarify this point, whenever we refer to our research material, textbooks, we use the term "English", but otherwise we use the term "British". The political actorship and identity are not constructed in terms of English but rather in terms of British in the context of the European integration, but the textbooks analyzed are English.