EDUCATION, IDEOLOGY, AND THE NATIONAL SELF: THE SOCIAL PRACTICE OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the intersection between national identity, education, and childhood. Its major focus is identity construction as it takes place in public elementary school classrooms. Using ethnographic examples from classroom interactions, the article describes and analyses the processes through which meaning is constructed in the classroom. The ethnographic evidence points to a much more complex socialising process than is often assumed; the process of identity construction reveals ideological contradictions to recognise the multivocal, heteroglossic nature of the social worlds in which children grow up and tensions which ultimately problematise simplistic reproduction theories which fail.

Introduction

The intersection between national identity, education, and childhood is still largely under-researched despite its enormous potential for informing our understanding of identity construction as it takes shape in the early years of life. This article aims to address this intersection and to illustrate it by using examples from contemporary Greek Cypriot society. My aim is to provide glimpses of social practice as it unfolds in public school classrooms and to attempt to interpret such practice through a contextually focused, anthropological lens.

However distant and immemorial identities may appear to be, identity construction is a highly particularised and contextualised process which is coloured by the historical, political, and cultural specificities in which it takes place. As such, it is the outcome of struggles in the present to define, in a collective sense, what it means to be a particular kind of person. In contemporary Greek Cypriot society struggles over

identity are as controversial as they have ever been. Whether one claims a Greek identity and downplays a Cypriot one (and vice-versa) or chooses something in between is a political statement of one's sense of collective being. The current situation in Cyprus, with Turkey's invasion and occupation of the island in 1974, the history preceding and leading up to this event (in the larger framework of national history), and the current political developments (e.g., the lack of progress in all efforts to solve the Cyprus problem and Cyprus's pending application to become a full member of the European Union) are important contexts to keep in mind when trying to understand identity construction as it takes shape in Greek Cypriot society at large and public education in particular.

The data presented here is part of a larger project which aimed to explore ethnic identity construction among Greek Cypriot elementary school children (see Spyrou, 1999). The project which extended for one year (July 1996 to July 1997) was ethnographic in nature and involved two schools and the communities surrounding them. The first was an urban community situated near the border in Nicosia while the second was a rural community situated in the Pitsillia region, southwest of Nicosia. In addition to the school, other contexts of ethnic socialisation were examined such as the home, the playground, the afternoon school, the religious instruction school *(katikhitikon),* and the athletic club. I used a variety of methods and techniques to gather data including interviewing (children, parents, teachers and other educators, community leaders), observation and participant observation, sorting and ranking (ethnic groups, countries, national flags), drawing, essay writing, picture and poem interpretation, photography, and video recording. I have participated in all school activities on a daily basis (to the extent that they were pertinent to the aims of the project) attending classrooms and participating in national celebrations, demonstrations, and trips. Similarly, I spent a considerable amount of time in the afternoons and on weekends observing and participating in children's play and other activities. My primary methodological aim was to contextualise children's daily lives and to provide "thick descriptions" of their social worlds.

Education, Ideology, and National Identity

Since the rise of nationalism in the 19th century and the concomitant emergence of the nation-state as a political entity, state-education has served the purpose of inculcating the masses with nationalist ideology. Together with other institutions, like the military, the school's task has been to reproduce an ideology which legitimises the existence of the nation-state. Through its uniformity, state-controlled education seeks to unify and homogenise all difference from within, to create uniform understandings of history and culture, in short, to naturalise the nation (see Anderson, 1983 [1991]; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). One of the main tasks of schooling is to communicate an authorised account of the nation.

Studies of ideological reproduction in education have focused mainly on class privilege. During the 1970s a critique of education was formulated by a variety of scholars challenging previous theoretical assumptions which saw schooling as an aid to upward mobility and educational success as based on individual achievement and merit (Levinson and Holland, 1996:4).These scholars (e.g., Althusser, 1971; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976) argued that, on the contrary, schools help to reproduce social inequalities by inculcating the values of the dominant classes in society.

Though these theoretical formulations help to expose the power of larger structural realities, they simultaneously present students as passive and malleable. What sense individual students make of the dominant ideology is not of concern since it is assumed that they passively internalise it. What takes place in the classroom - the possibility that meaning is constructed and negotiated by both teachers and students rather than unproblematically transmitted from the former to the latter - is largely ignored (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990: 29-30).

With the publication of Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour* in 1977 a new way of thinking emerged that challenged the mechanistic models of reproduction theorists. Willis's study focused on the cultural productions of working-class students in an English secondary school. How culture is produced through practice and how meaning is constructed in daily life are major concerns in Willis's study. The "lads," or the working-class students he studied, are not passive but react to their schooling; they do not passively accept the messages disseminated by the school but actively resist them through their practices; they experience contradictions and tensions at school and develop antagonistic strategies to school culture. In the end, through their practices, the "lads" help to reproduce the structures of inequality. However, this is not done in a mechanistic fashion but through struggle and contestation. As Willis repeatedly argues, reproduction is never guaranteed. In every generation there is the possibility that radical change rather than reproduction will take place. This aspect of Willis's formulation is particularly important because it introduces dynamism to the notion of reproduction and frees it from any form of inevitable determinism.[1]

Since the publication of *Learning to Labour,* significant work has built upon the insights of cultural production theory addressing the intersections between identity, class, gender, ethnicity, race and education. By seeking to account for the processes of cultural production that give shape to identities, much of this work has fruitfully contributed to the discussions on the ongoing problematic structure/agency polarity.[2]

Power, Authority, and Truth in the Classroom

The classroom is undoubtedly one of the most formal contexts where ethnic socialisation takes place. For children, the classroom environment (and more generally the school environment) is a physically, socially, and psychologically constraining environment: their agency, though by no means absent, is largely curtailed.

In the social space of the classroom, the voices of teachers tend to be more powerful than the voices of students if, for no other reason, than that they are backed by their authority as teachers and adults. As an authority figure, the teacher dominates the classroom. She has the power to define the classroom situation (Wertsch, 1991:112) in ways that favour her agenda as a teacher and the implicit understanding is that when she talks with the students, the latter have fewer rights (French, 1990:37). She talks most of the time, initiates most conversations, and interrupts but is not interrupted, at least to the same extent as students are (Cazden, 1988:160). Similarly, more often than not, she decides what topics to talk about, who can talk about them, when, and for how long. She has the power to accept, reject, or ignore a student's comment, and to decide when a response is adequate or not (Green and Wallat, 1981:175; Edwards, 1990:54, 57; Heath, 1978:6). Finally, she can demand attention to what she says but also deny attention to what students are saying (Edwards and Furlong, 1978:14).

As authority figures, teachers also have the power to define truth. Though the extent to which a teacher actually has the power to define truth depends on children's own knowledge and the extent to which such knowledge is in line with or contradicts the teacher's knowledge, very often what we see is an attempt, on the part of both students and teacher, to come "as soon as possible (if not immediately) to a shared understanding that accords closely with what the teacher already knows" (Edwards, 1990:61).

The power of the teacher in defining truth is a key element in the ideological reproduction of national identity. Nationalistic discourse often aims to achieve a monologic reading of identity and to create unity of understanding and a sense of commitment to the ideal of the nation. In general, monologue discourages reflection while dialogue opens up the possibility for alternative discursive constructions that allow for negotiation and reinterpretation. In their day-to-day practice, the teachers I observed, regularly engaged in this kind of monologic and authoritative discourse. Their use of this discourse allowed little room for discussion or exploration other than affirmative contributions on the part of the students which helped to sustain and further legitimise it. In the process of explicating identity, teachers often essen- tialised and reified it. It is to a discussion of the teachers' use of nationalistic dis- course to symbolically anchor identity that I now turn.

Teaching the Essence of the Nation

Nationalist ideologies are often based on the essentialisation of identity through an emphasis on shared attributes like language, religion, and history which extend to an immemorial past. Whether in the classroom during the teaching of history (or another subject) or during a national celebration when students partake into the history of the nation through ritual, the aim is the same: to establish the nation's unbroken continuity through time, to illustrate it with historical examples, and to create loyal members who will uphold it above all else. If the nation is to continue to exist then a firmly established and convincing national identity is necessary and the school is the primary bearer of this responsibility.

In the process, of course, students will also come to imagine themselves in relation to 'others'. They will come to see their nation as unique in an absolute sense: better, superior, and more civilised than other nations. The rest of the world will be constructed accordingly; students will develop attitudes, beliefs, and values in relation to these 'others'. Some nations will be singled out to provide the nation with a well-defined sense of identity by serving as its enemies. If they happen to be contemporary enemies and not just historical ones, then their relevance for identity construction will be, even more, elevated. The students' sense of their own identities will depend greatly on how these 'others' are constructed, not merely within school, but in the larger society as well.

A key characteristic of nationalistic discourse is that it seeks to essentialise identity in an absolute sense by implicitly denying its historicity. Both 'us' and 'them' are thus presented as immutable and unchanging with roots in time immemorial. Present-day Greek Cypriots (often referred to in such formulations as "Greeks of Cyprus") are direct descendants of the ancient Greeks; they share the same blood, the same psyche, the same character. Present-day Turks are, likewise, seen as descendants of an unchanging national line which reaches deep into the beginnings of time. Identities become dichotomous constructions so that 'us' and 'them' emerge as polar opposites in all fundamental respects: 'we' are good, 'they' are evil, 'we' are civilised, 'they' are barbarians. Any sense of similarity is suppressed in favour of difference whose absoluteness is given, proven, and non-negotiable.

National identity construction is based on the erection of a firm symbolic boundary which keeps 'us' separate from 'them'. The following example illustrates how 'self' and 'other' are discursively constructed in such a reified and mythologised form.

[5th grade, history, Niki][3]
The teacher explained that there are some people who wanted to take over Byzantium.
Teacher: "These are barbarians, wild, they come from the depths of the East, they were war-like *(polemokharois).* We are peace-loving *(tilirinikoi),* they are war-like."
The teacher explained that the man who went to collect snails was killed by the Turks who always try to find excuses to kill "us" [Her comment refers to an incident which took place during the fall of 1996: a Greek Cypriot man accidentally entered the Turkish-controlled area, was arrested and executed by Turkish soldiers]. She also added that "if we go and do something to them they will come back at us and do a lot more".

The teacher in this example starts by using the present tense ("These are barbarians, wild, they come from the depths of the East, ... ") to then switch to the past tense(" ... they were war-like") and finally back to the present tense ("We are peace-loving, they are war-like.") Through this intermixing of the past and the present tense, the teacher collapses historical time; past and present are unified in such a way so that one implies the other. The past becomes more understandable given what is presently known; students can make better sense of history from what they know about present-day Turks. As Handler and Linnekin (1984:276) so aptly put it, the past is inseparable from its interpretation in the present. The reverse also holds true: *if these are the same people, then and now, it is not surprising that they continue today to behave in the same barbaric way.* In this manner, identity is fully reified based on a putative essence which characterises each group. In her statement, the teacher makes it clear that she refers to this essential nature of each group: *these barbaric, war-like people who lived then and wanted to take over Byzantium are no other than the Turks. These same people are still with us.* And in her example, the teacher provides the proof: *these are the same people who killed the man who accidentally entered the Turkish-controlled area while gathering snails, earlier this year.* This discursive construction essentialises identity – both 'ours' and 'theirs' – in a manner that prevents any historicising of 'our' relations with 'them'. Present and past become intimately interconnected: the national present is the way it is because of the past but equally and paradoxically, the past is what it is because of the way the present is. To put it another way, in the discourse of nationalism past and present as conceptual frameworks work to reinforce one another and ultimately the ideology of nationalism.

But if past and present are intimately connected in nationalistic discourse, the future is also a central concern of nationalist ideology. After all, a sense of national identity depends on the survival of the nation. But to the extent that change is permissible, it has to be within the confines established by the weight of the nation's history. Thus, the lessons of the past are projected into the future; what happened before will happen again and again as if history follows an endless cycle of repetition. Consider the following statement made by a teacher:

[6th grade, history, Yiangos]
Teacher: [referring to Greece] "Superpower *(iperdhinami).* Greece was a superpower from about 450-1050AD. Greece was *the* superpower, the only superpower. We are Greek Cypriots *(Ellinokyprioi),* Greeks of Cyprus *{Ellines tis Kyprou).* If we know that we are descendants of a superpower we know that our country will, one day, be liberated."

The message here is one of optimism based on 'our' essential nature: *the glories and achievements of the past remind us of our true nature. What the ancient Greeks were able to do, we can also do. After all, we are the same people.* Notice here how the teacher switches his emphasis from *Greek Cypriots* to *Greeks of Cyprus* to establish a more unambiguous genealogical classification (i.e., *we are true Greeks)* that would reinforce his assertion that "we are descendants of a superpower" and hence capable of living up to the glory of ancient Greeks (see Herzfeld, 1987). In the end, through this cyclical, repetitive conception of time the nation and its struggles enter into the realm of myth and eternity. The nation does not exist within history (despite the constant rhetorical resort to it) but without history. If history is contingent and hence unpredictable, the nation's history and future are far from uncertain: they are known, indisputable, and knowable. To the extent that there is fear regarding the nation's survival, it is aimed to warn against the dangers of national apathy, not to challenge its predetermined course.

The Social Practice of Identity Production

So much of what the teacher says about identity in the classroom is meant to be accepted as the authoritative truth. Often, students are offered little room to explore the identity issues addressed except in a fashion that provides further supportive evidence for the nationalistic framework which explains them. Thus, when students offer their input it is usually because the teacher asked for it and, more often than not, it is aimed to meet the teacher's expectations.

But despite apparent differences in power between teachers and students, practice shows that meaning in the classroom is not always constructed monologically but is also created and recreated through a constant process of negotiation and adjustment. As Green and Wallat (1981:175) suggest, classroom conversations are creative and their direction is to a great extent unpredictable: "a lesson is not a preset entity, but rather a product of the social-conversational-pedagogical actions of the participants as they interact with, and act upon, the messages and behaviours of others to reach the goal of instruction" (see also Luykx, 1996:243-244).

Though the power differences between teacher and students never cease to exist, the relationships between them are not fixed but are constantly redefined in social

practice (Woods, 1990:147-148). Both teachers and students switch to different genres or registers (e.g., from the genre of personal experience to that of formal instruction) as they negotiate meaning through their interactions (Wertsch, 1991:116). Students intervene in the lesson and sometimes successfully redirect its course; they contribute to the lesson and provide their own understandings; and, on some occasions, they even critique and challenge its implications. In the end, what comes out of a lesson is not a pre-given meaning but a negotiated, reconstructed meaning that may involve acceptance, rejection, or modification of the original message and intention of the teacher.

Consider the following example where the teacher in a 6th grade history class attempts to communicate a sense of national identity but is faced, to some extent, with doubt and resistance on the part of the students.

> [6th grade, history, Yiangos]
> The teacher first shows to the children how much bigger Byzantium was compared to present-day Greece and discusses its loss to the Ottoman empire. The following discussion then takes place:
> Teacher: "Unfortunately, Turkey. But these lands are Greek. And this creates a lot of problems, not only for us but for other countries [referring to Turkish control of the Bosporus straits]. The happy thing, though I haven't researched this, is that today Turkey is the country with the most enemies, which means that one day justice will prevail."
> First Boy: "But sir, the Americans are with them [i.e., Americans support the Turks]."
> Teacher: "Who is with us?"
> Second boy: "Greece."
> Teacher: "Of course, since we are Greeks of Cyprus. Greece is also called the motherland (i mitera patridha). Who helps all the Greeks?"
> Third boy: "Russia."
> Teacher: [Ignores the student's response] "God is with us. Kolokotronis [national hero of the 1821 Greek war of liberation against the Ottomans] once said that God signed the liberation of Greece and that [actually] happened [i.e., Greece was actually liberated]. If you think that by fighting with each other we will be liberated [from the Turks] you are wrong [referring to class noise and play-fighting among some children]."

Here, the teacher draws on basic nationalistic themes such as the need to regain the nation's true borders, the theme of the universal evil (Turkey in this case), and the theme of eventual redemption. He communicates to the children that *there is a larger homeland, even if today it only exists in our memories and dreams.* Then he proceeds to implicate Turkey directly in his previous statement: *it is Turkey which is responsible for the loss of that larger homeland.* By doing so, the teacher utilises the familiar self/other frame to construct a particular understanding of the world which is based on an eternal and absolute dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'.

Thus, on the one hand, this exchange illustrates the teacher's attempts to establish an undoubted sense of national identity. On the other hand, it illustrates the children's role in shaping the lesson, however minimally, by drawing on other voices and discourses with which they are familiar. Thus, as the lesson unfolds, the teacher draws on two other key nationalistic themes: the theme of blood kinship and the theme of divine sanction (Kecmanovic, 1996:68-69, 75). The first boy's question is a subtle challenge to the teacher's previous statement that *in the end, justice will prevail.* The boy speaks through a voice of doubt and cynicism he appropriated as part of his political socialisation. Of course, in the end, the teacher retains control of discourse. Rather than addressing the student's concern, he re-directs the attention of the class back to nationalistic discourse. His use of the label *Greeks of Cyprus* is frequently used in nationalistic rhetoric when the speaker wishes to emphasise the *Greekness* of Greek Cypriots. Furthermore, by defining Greece as the motherland the teacher is appropriating a kinship metaphor which focuses on a blood relationship (mother and child) of paramount sentimental value: the nation is a family and in that sense a sacred institution. Through tropes of blood and kinship the nation is substantialised: what keeps it together is its "shared substance" which is not merely psychic but also biogenetic (Alonso, 1994:384-385).

Further down, the teacher's authority allows him to ignore a student's response to his question. That the student responded with "Russia" is not without significance; it reflects the student's knowledge of current political developments. At the time, Cyprus was contemplating the purchase of ground-to-air missiles from Russia. The firm stance of Russia against Turkish threats for preventing the purchase gave rise to renewed optimism among many Greek Cypriots that Russia is indeed Cyprus's ally. But this is not what the teacher has in mind. So he chooses to ignore the student's comment, something which is not that rare in classroom interactions.

Most teacher-student interactions in the classroom are initiated by the teacher and involve the teacher asking a question, the student responding, and the teacher in turn again evaluating the student's response (Mehan, 1979:140). Often teachers ask questions which allow them to regain the floor so that they can evaluate or elaborate on the student's contribution and ultimately remain in control of the discussion (Edwards and Furlong, 1978:17). While teachers have the power to define what is valid or true, children "have to step into the teacher's meaning system, and leave it relatively undisturbed" (Edwards and Furlong, 1978:28; see also von Glasersfeld, (1996:7). So, very often, as Edwards and Furlong (1978:28) point out, "Teachers are less likely to listen *to* what is said than they are to listen *for* what they can use and what they should discard" (emphasis in the original).

Returning to our example, in the end the teacher is able to, once more, return to nationalistic discourse adding another layer to it by linking national with religious

identity. In this last layer, God is implicated in the history of the nation: *God is on our side. He is a national God. He signed the liberation of Greece. As a nation we are blessed with divine protection.* This, of course, emphasises the putative indivisibility of religion and ethnicity in Greek nationalistic thought.[4] The nation is not just built on a physical and emotional bond, but it is also a spiritual essence. It is sacred, not simply because it demands the ultimate devotion from its members, but also because *it is God's nation.* The very existence of the nation is fully legitimised by resort to its special relationship with the divine: it has a divine right to exist and to fulfil its destiny which is no different than God's will.[5]

In his last sentence, the teacher adopts the same kind of nationalistic discourse to control students' misbehaviour in class ("If you think that by fighting with each other we will be liberated [from the Turks] you are wrong"). I heard the same teacher time and time again using similar kinds of statements in an attempt to bring about order in the classroom: "There is no reason to laugh. This is serious stuff. The Turks are waiting to do the same things again;" "Our homeland is in danger and you waste time;" "Those children who are laughing, have they read the last two paragraphs in the passage where it says that during the Second World War 300,000 Greeks died from starvation?" The nationalistic voice of the teacher and its symbolic authority is metaphorically transformed into another kind of discourse, the discourse of classroom order and injunction. The classroom in this sense is turned into a microcosm of the nation.

Ideology, Contradiction, and Children as Social Actors

McNeil (1983:117) has suggested that "many students, like the teachers, are far more articulate and informed on a given topic than the classroom processes make admissible to the classroom." Indeed, there is much that is not said, much that is not done in schools and classrooms in particular, because it is not sanctioned by school culture. But though schools are constraining social spaces for the expression of children's agency they still offer opportunities for children to do so. And though classrooms are the most constraining of school spaces, children, as I have shown, nevertheless manage to enter into dialogues with one another and with the teacher and to become co-constructors of classroom meaning rather than passive recipients of the teacher's messages.

Children's ability to comment upon, critique, and expose contradictions in the messages they receive in the classroom allows them to construct their understandings of identity in a more active, dialogical fashion. For instance, the values communicated in the classroom are, sometimes, contradictory and ambiguous. A nationalist ideology which emphasises self-sacrifice and selfless devotion *to* the homeland may contradict with a religious or liberal ideology which emphasises respect for life.

The following example reveals such contradictions and tensions and pinpoints children's agentive role in the construction of meaning in the classroom.

> [4th grade, history, Fani]
> The lesson was about ancient Sparta. The teacher explained to the children that Spartan women told their sons when they went to war *'Itan i epi tas'* which means 'come back a winner or else they should bring you back dead.'
> Teacher: "Imagine a mother saying that. Can your mother say that? This means they were inured to hardship. This means they liked war. They did everything for their homeland."
> The teacher explained that if a sick or weak child was born its mother would throw it down the *'Taighetos,'* a tall cliff, so that only strong and healthy children who could become warriors would be raised.
> Lakis: "Mrs, are they heartless mothers?"
> Teacher: "Ah! You know, they loved their state."
> Minos: "If somebody did not want to throw down their baby would the state do it?"
> Teacher: "They wanted to do it because they thought they were doing it for the homeland."
> (…)
> Then somebody asked if they continue to be like that in Sparta today and the teacher said no.
> (...)
> Ivi: "If they continued to be like that, some children like Makis [she refers to Makis who is also in the 4th grade but is developmentally delayed] would not be alive."

At a superficial level, the aim of the teacher here is to teach patriotism: *that we should put our collective well being above our individual well being.* But her voice reveals some of the contradictions entailed in such an ideological position. She says: "Imagine a mother saying that. Can your mother say that? This means they were inured to hardship. This means they liked war. They did everything for their homeland." Though not explicitly, the teacher opens up the possibility for challenging the notion of duty to the homeland: *If your mother would not do that, what does that imply for your mother? That she is not interested in helping the homeland? On the other hand, if she could actually do that (i.e., throw you down a cliff if you were sickly), then what does that imply for your mother? That she is not a good mother?* The children here are confronted with two sets of contradictory values: the value of duty to the homeland and the value of duty to one's family. Both are important cultural values but they also seem to contradict. How can one be loyal to her children and ultimately her family, yet sacrifice them? The contradiction becomes apparent, yet one the teacher does not address as such.[6] But, though she does not openly expose the contradiction, the voice of the teacher – herself a mother – indirectly questions the extreme form of collective loyalty exhibited by the Spartans, at the same time, that she appears to be advocating it. The ambiguity she has helped create is reflected in the children's comments: "Mrs, are they heartless mothers?"

[Lakis] or "If somebody did not want to throw their baby down would the state do it?" [Minos]

The teacher's response to the children's comments further down, once again, reflects her ambiguous assertion: "They wanted to do it because *they thought* they were doing it for the homeland." In other words, 'They did .not just want to do it because of the homeland' but 'because *they thought* they were doing it for the homeland'. Ivi's comment ("If they continued to be like that, some children like Makis would not be alive") is a reflective critique of, and challenge to, the Spartan model proposed earlier by the teacher. Ivi reflects on her own immediate experience as a student in that particular class. She exposes the inhumanity of the Spartan model which is nothing more than an extreme version of what would otherwise be praised as everyone's duty to the homeland: the ability to sacrifice what one cares for most (one's own children) for the collective well being, for the homeland. Ivi was elaborating on the teacher's more camouflaged critique. That neither the teacher nor another student reacted or commented on Ivi's statement is indicative of its power which problematised the notion of loyalty to the nation.

Through this dialogical, interactive lesson children are offered an opportunity to actively engage in the construction of meaning. Despite the limitations imposed by the curriculum, the personal knowledge and experience of students interacts with that of the teacher to produce new meanings and understandings that are not necessarily those intended by the inculcating authorities. As the example above illustrates, ethnic socialisation may be a much more complex process than simply the passing-on of information from teacher to students. Rather, it illustrates that meaning may be constructed through a process of negotiation, interpretation, and re-interpretation. Or, to quote Luykx (1996:264), "rather than simply being inculcated with a prefabricated ideology, students bring their own meanings, practices, and values to the pedagogic situation, and the outcome is a conflictive mixture of what they bring and what they encounter there".

Yet, at the same time, it should be remembered that children's ability to exercise their agency in the classroom is always circumscribed; ultimately, the power and authority of the teacher may determine what is or is not permissible on the part of students to introduce as knowledge in the classroom. Though students often seek to introduce personal knowledge in the classroom, it is the teacher who ultimately decides if such knowledge is valid or not. I have noted many cases where the teacher ignored, rejected, or labelled as bad and worthless a child's contribution to the class. As Cazden (1988:191) points out, students contributions of personal knowledge to class discussions might never succeed in "getting the floor" because there might be a subtle and implicit understanding by teachers that such knowledge is inferior and hence should not be used in the classroom. Denying the introduction of stu-

dents' personal knowledge in the classroom may eventually lead to an acceptance of a client status by students (McNeil, 1981:326). In the following example, a teacher readily and decidedly rejects the contribution of a student because it challenges the patriotic ideal of fulfilling one's duty to the homeland.

> [6th grade, religion, Apostolos]
> Nikiforos: "Sir, what about the children and the women if there is war?"
> Teacher: "We said that only those who can fight will fight in a war."
> Marinos: "Adults say that if war takes place they will go and hide." [Here, the student is referring to cynical statements occasionally made by men about their disillusionment with politics and their unwillingness to fight for their country.]
> Teacher: [Upset] "Marinos, you should not listen to what they say in the neighborhood."

Here, the teacher defines the classroom as a setting where only certain kinds of knowledge are appropriate or a setting where personal knowledge is not appropriate knowledge. Personal knowledge is seen as inferior and potentially harmful because it contradicts with the "right" kind of attitude towards the homeland, namely, that one should be ready to fight and die for it whenever necessary. The teacher refuses to allow a change in the use of speech genres from an instructional, patriotic genre which is authoritative and clear in its declarations (i.e., "one must fight and if necessary die for the homeland") to one based on personal (and hence defined as non-authoritative) knowledge which seeks to challenge the clear injunctions of the former. The possibility for an alternative construction never materialises, at least discursively, because the student's knowledge does not constitute 'proper' knowledge worth engaging with. Its introduction in the classroom, however, by a student suggests the existence of counter-knowledge, that is, knowledge which is threatening to the dominant ideology of identity and which, at some level and even if to a limited extent, may undermine it.

In Between the Common-Sense and the Not-So-Common-Sense

Schools play a powerful socialising role especially because they selectively propagate specific discourses and control access to others. The power of nationalistic discourse rests in its potential for encouraging students to think in particular ways and not in others and to the extent to which it persuades them to act on it if necessary. Foucault has done much to show us how discourses help to naturalise the world so that it may not be imagined otherwise, so that what is 'otherwise' becomes 'deviant' and ultimately suppressed.

Yet, children are not what they are often thought to be: passive, malleable, and vulnerable creatures at the mercy of the all-powerful forces of ideological indoctrination. They, too, like their parents and teachers, are social agents who operate within social realities that both constrain and enable them. The power structures that

confront them at school do, of course, significantly constrain them by limiting their ability to freely engage with knowledge, both factual and ideological. The school is after all a primary site for the production of subjects;[7] it is a site where the cultural and the ideological turn into the natural and the common sense. This is where the socially-constructed nature of the world will become the unquestioned, taken-for-granted truth or 'the way things are' (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 and Gramsci, 1971). As an ideological state apparatus, the school will achieve its aims not through repression but mainly through ideology (Althusser, 1971).

Of course, the transmission of ideology at school and in the classroom in particular, is a very complex process which, as I have indicated, depends on several factors such as the mediating role of the teacher, the student's counter (or personal) knowledge, and the pedagogical methods used. The existence of such complicating factors means that the reproduction of official ideology is never fully guaranteed. To start with, the world is not held together by a single, unitary discourse but by multiple intersecting and often contradicting discourses which are often in tension and which have the potential for destabilising official meanings. When counter ideologies are accessed or when contradictory elements of the dominant discourse become apparent, official meanings are destabilised. In the classroom, this may happen when personal knowledge contradicts official knowledge. To the extent that dialogue permits it, new meanings may be constructed as both students and teachers engage with knowledge. Messages may have preferred meanings but there is no guarantee that such meanings will be so understood and accepted by the interpreting subjects. Instead, their polysemy might give rise to oppositional understandings or, as is more often the case, negotiated responses (see Hall, 1980).

Indeed, there are moments - brief moments - at school when students manage to penetrate ideological constructions. These destabilising moments challenge, however subtly, the hegemonic order and its putative naturalness. It is, therefore, fruitful to move theoretically beyond simple, deterministic models of reproduction in order to capture the forces which both settle and unsettle ideology. This is the realm of the everyday, of the mundane, and is concerned with what individuals do, think, and say in the social contexts in which they live and act. The dualism consent/opposition perhaps simplifies the complexity of socialisation as constitutive of both the old (and hence reproductive) as well as the new (and hence productive). The process of socialisation which entails the process of being subjected - of becoming a subject - is, as Luykx (1996:241) so aptly argued, a dialogic process "in which hegemonic forms are simultaneously absorbed, resisted and transformed in unpredictable ways". The reality which emerges is not that of overpowering indoctrination and passive acce tance that reproduction theorists would have us think; it is a reality "which is jointly constructed by students, teachers, and institutional constraints, where students are active agents in the formation of subjectivities, working and reworking the

messages offered to them by the school" (Luykx, 1996:243-244; see also Willis, 1977, 1990). Of course, the teacher may still have the power to suppress and dis-miss such meanings through his or her authoritative position. But to the extent that dialogue is permitted, it opens up the possibility for de-naturalising and relativising the taken for granted.

All this, of course, requires reconceptualising the classroom as a cultural site where meanings - in their consenting, negotiated, and oppositional forms - are played out and are never securely anchored. This interplay, between everyday expe- rience and received or ideological knowledge, is what makes ideological production and reproduction a much trickier process than it might appear to be. This is the very same process which Bakhtin describes as the struggle between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. The former, according to Bakhtin (1981:346, 427) is monoglossic or undialogised discourse and is characterised by absoluteness, in con-trast to the latter which is relativistic and heteroglossic. It is this tension between the authoritative and non-authoritative which leads to the ideological becoming of the person (Bakhtin, 1981:342).

Greek Cypriot children live in a heteroglossic world which informs their under-standings through different ideological voices. Though official discourse is powerful and authoritative, children still draw on other voices that do, to some extent, manage to decentre it. Ultimately, their cultural penetrations into ideology may be dislocated by the power of other ideological messages which naturalise arbitrary cultural presuppositions and values (see Willis, 1977). Gradually, and as they grow up, their ideological becoming will take shape as a result of these tensions however minimal their impact may be during childhood.

Notes

1. In much the same way, studies of childhood have moved away from the normative approaches which treated children as passively involved in the reproduction process to theoretical approaches which seek to foreground the creative role of agency in childhood socialisation (e.g., Bluebond-Langner, 1978; Davies, 1982; James, 1993; James and Prout, 1990; Mayall, 1994, 1996; Skinner, 1990). James and Prout (1990:3-5, 8-9) have outlined some of the basic characteristics of this new direction in childhood studies which includes, among others, the assumption (or realisation) that children are not passive subjects in society but play an active role in the construction of their own lives and their own social worlds as well as the lives and worlds of those around them. This new paradigm also advocates the use of ethnog- raphy as a particularly good method for giving a voice to children and for gaining insights into their worlds. Increased sensitivity to the role of context - whether historical, social, or cultur- al - in socialisation has also encouraged the exploration of socialisation as a situated, interac- tional process (e.g., Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

2. Some examples of work utilising a cultural production approach include: Apple and Weis, 1983; Eisenhart, 1996; Foley, 1990, 1995; Hall, 1995; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; Levinson, 1996; Levinson and Holland, 1996; Luykx, 1996, 1999; Myerhoff, 1986; Skinner, 1990; Rival, 1996; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez and Shannon, 1994; Weis, 1985, 1990.

3. The bracketed entry at the top of each exchange states the context where the exchange took place, the subject taught at the time, and the name of the teacher. The real names of both teachers and children have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

4. For a discussion of the relationship between religion, nationalism, and education in Cyprus see Persianis, 1967 and 1978. For an interesting parallel example of how the interrelation- ship between religion and nationalism impacts children's understanding of identity in Northern Ireland see Coles, 1986.

5. A belief in the sacredness of the nation is widespread among nationalists who see themselves as a unique people or God's chosen people (Kecmanovic, 1996:68-69).

6. See Rizvi's (1993) essay where he discusses how children handle ideological contradiction

in relation to racism.

7. For interesting conceptual frameworks surrounding the issue of subject formation see Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, Althusser's (1971) notion of interpellation, and Bourdieu's (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) notion of symbolic violence.

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