

## Cultural identity as a tool for classroom management

<sup>1</sup> Janne T Scheie, <sup>2</sup> Vasiliki Brinia

<sup>1</sup> Oslo University, Norway

<sup>2</sup> Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece

### Abstract

The current paper discusses an interdisciplinary approach of presenting the principles of leadership in the classroom with their implementation in ancient Greek culture. The research was conducted in the new museum of Acropolis and its main aim is to examine whether this approach enables students to identify the main leadership features in ancient Greek culture and to adopt these characteristics in leading their own classroom by strengthening their cultural identity.

**Keywords:** teacher education, classroom management, leadership, interdisciplinary study, cultural identity

### Introduction

#### Background and rationale

The background for the experimental workshop we will present and discuss in this article, is a cooperation between the teacher education programs of Athens University of Economics and Business (TEP-AUEB) in Athens, Greece, and the Department of Teacher Education and School Research (ILS, UiO) at the University of Oslo, Norway. This cooperation was funded by grants from the Erasmus+ Mobility program and constituted of a university lecturer from ILS-UiO giving a lecture on Classroom Management at TEP-AUEB, which was then followed by an on-site workshop at the New Acropolis Museum in Athens. The workshop was planned and conducted by representatives from both institutions, the authors of this article.

#### Research question

Whereas the content of the lecture itself, Leadership in the Classroom, was non-experimental, the follow-up workshop was highly experimental in the sense that it was testing entirely new ground. The students who had attended the lecture was then brought to the museum to participate in a workshop. The purpose of the workshop was for us to investigate whether leadership principles which applies to the classroom also can be traced and recognized as leadership elements in the statues from the ancient Greek civilization of the 5th century B.C. If so, could one argue that these principles contribute in any way to enhance the cultural identity of the Greek teacher students?

In light of the above, we aim to answer the following research question: How can stimulation of teacher students' cultural identity contribute to enhance their classroom leadership skills?

#### Literature

It is well known that a classroom is a group of learners. In general, learning groups have at least two main objectives:

1. To complete learning tasks;
2. To maintain effective and positive relationships among group members (Wilcox S., 1997) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Leadership consists of actions that support the group to carry out its tasks successfully and maintain effective working relationships among its members. In order a group to be successful, both task-leadership actions and group maintenance-

leadership actions have to be acquired (Johnson D.W., 1991) <sup>[9]</sup>. Leadership is a set of skills that anyone can acquire. Responsible leadership depends upon:

- a. Flexible behavior;
- b. The ability to diagnose what behaviors are required at a particular time in order for the group to function most efficiently; and
- c. The ability to complete these behaviors or to get other members to complete them (Johnson D.W., 1991) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Central characteristics of leadership in the classroom are:

#### Having authority without being authoritarian

As a leader of learning you have to assume authority in the class. As a leader you may have to raise your voice, you may have to demand silence, you may have to tolerate resistance, comments and complaints, and you may have to say or do things that make you feel uncomfortable. Being a leader is not about winning a popularity contest, but if you succeed in establishing yourself as credible and trustworthy to the pupils, they will respect you and do what you tell them to do (Scheie J., 2016) <sup>[14]</sup>.

#### Having communication skills and relationship skills

Some essential skills are the ability to:

- Clearly and unambiguously communicate ideas and feelings.
- Make messages complete and specific.
- Make verbal and nonverbal messages congruent with each other.
- Ask for feedback concerning the way in which your messages are received.
- Display openness, and maintain eye contact.
- Listen without response until the other person has sent a full message.
- Paraphrase accurately and nonevaluatively the essence of the sender's message.
- Listen beyond words -- that is to be aware of nonverbal messages and behavior.
- Listen for requests and intentions in others' messages, particularly in complaints.

These skills are ones well known to teachers as important classroom skills. They are skills needed by any leader, in any situation (Wilcox S., 1997) <sup>[16]</sup>.

### Being perceived as credible and predictable

Acceptance and support are essential in building and maintaining trust. Underlying all significant learning is the element of trust. Stephen Brookfield (1990) [3] proposes that those playing the role of teacher in a learning group must pay attention to the balance between two important characteristics that make teachers more trustworthy in students' eyes: credibility and authenticity.

### Cultural Identity and Teaching

Every teacher brings himself—his life experiences, cultures and histories—into the classroom (White *et al.*, 2005) [15]. Teachers have their own assumptions and beliefs concerning of what a good teacher is and does, their knowledge of education research, theory and human development, and their knowledge and love of content areas. They bring their teaching styles and personalities that are shaped by cultural and social interactions (White *et al.*, 2005) [15].

Over the last years, Greece is facing an economic crisis which affects people's attitudes and views towards many issues, but the most important is that this crisis affects the sentimental health of Greek people. As a result, both students and teachers have to deal with hard sentimental situations which affect the way they learn, teach and their will to attend a course or innovate though teaching.

The introduction of an innovative approach towards leadership in classroom may contribute to a new dimension of the perceptions of educating teachers. Although, it is necessary to investigate whether this attempt has the desirable results with regards to active participation of students, understanding the need of the historical identity of the teacher in teaching and the importance of leadership in the classroom.

It is very characteristic for teachers to continually express their culture but the danger is being unaware of that expression. In order to understand the ways in which one's beliefs, values, experiences and assumptions are connected to culture is an important feature of culturally responsive practice. As Giroux (1992) [7] states, "Teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse" (p. 201). Cultural responsiveness seeks for teachers to understand and acknowledge their own cultural values and how this affects their own teaching practice (White *et al.*, 2005) [15].

The need of the historical identity of the teacher in teaching,

- Understanding the importance of leadership in the classroom.

Teachers who value and understand their own cultural identities can recognize culture as a complex construction (White *et al.*, 2005) [15]. By doing so, they create the possibility for in depth connections with their families and students. Cultural responsiveness derives from understanding self and others in order different values to be understood and respected, more than one set of values being imposed on all. Culturally responsive teachers are able to build strong learning environments in which teachers and students can build deeper and richer understandings of themselves and each other because they uncover and investigate the school curriculum (White *et al.*, 2005) [15].

Understanding each teacher his own cultural background and connecting that background to the students in the classroom creates a rich learning environment in which the students and teacher value each other. The below activities can deepen the

understanding of the ways in which culture influences the practice as teacher.

- Learn about your own history, heritage, family, community and culture, as well as other groups to which you belong.
- Talk to friends and family; share and listen stories of others' life and family experiences.
- Reflect on the things you value in your life including important customs, artifacts, family events, and the ways in which you celebrate them.
- List some characteristics of your culture
- Write about your traditions, celebrations, cultural practices and beliefs.
- Embark on a reading program. In the next months, be purposeful about the authors and topics that you pick for reading. Try to select authors who represent cultures that differ from your own. Read both nonfiction and fiction accounts of border crossing, a term used to describe moving across cultural and racial groups. Start or join a reading club that engages readers from multiple backgrounds.
- List the things that you do in your classroom that derive from your cultural perspective. Check your list with a teaching colleague. How are your lists similar and different? (White *et al.*, 2005) [15].

In the context of the research, we desire to illustrate some leadership characteristics in ancient Greek culture by enhancing cultural identity of the teacher. The selected historical period is the classical area (5th century B.C.), an area that Athens was at the peak of its glory and part of this glory is demonstrated in the sights of the new museum of Acropolis. The leading personality of this era was Pericles, whose life and political career highlighted his leading characteristics.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

The purpose of this research is to examine whether this approach enhance students to identify the main leadership features in ancient Greek culture and to enable them to adopt these characteristics in leading their own classroom.

The selected research framework for the data collection is closely linked to the research aim and objectives (Bird, 1999; Faulkner *et al.* 1999) [1, 6]. The research approach that has been considered as more appropriate for achieving the research aim is the qualitative one, as it permits for an extensive and in-depth analysis and interpretation of perceptions and attitudes and its main goal is to present and understand processes through analytical induction (Bird *et al.*; 1999) [1, 6].

#### Field Research

The planning and the realization of educational visits have important meaning for the enrichment of students' experiences. In order to meet its goal one visit has to be held after a careful examination and selection of place according to the analytical program. It is a necessary that the time of the visit coincides to the time of the teaching of the units relevant to the object of the activities that are going to be held in the selected place. The skills that the students develop are: observation, formation of questions, listening, recording of data, analysis, composition and evaluation (Brinia, 2006) [2].

### Research Instruments

#### Convenient Sampling

This type of sampling is a specific type of non-probability

sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in study (Research Methodology). The key advantage of this current sampling method is the convenience that it presents in its application. On the other hand, its use does not lead to the creation of representative samples, which leads to the reduction of the representation of research results, and the existence of a large error in assessment (Zafiroopoulos, 2005) <sup>[17]</sup>.

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consists of a preplanned set of questions which are designed in order to derive particular information to correspond a specific need for research information about a relevant topic. The research information is gathered from the population normally from a relevant interest area. The questionnaire is an economy way of data standardization even though participant's motivation is hard to evaluate, affecting the validity of response (Key J., 1997) <sup>[10]</sup>. In our research, the questionnaires were completed anonymously in order not to restrict participants' answers.

### **Semi-structured Interviews based on qualitative questions**

It is the most convenient way of interview because it permits the deepest analysis of facts. This is because the order and structure of questions can be easily change so as to enhance the researchers to develop a deep understanding of the selected issue of interest which is necessary for analyzing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation). Semi- structured interviews are mostly preferred in pilot research.

### **Research Process**

#### **Research Sample**

The research sample consists of 60 students of the Teacher Education Program of Athens University of Economics and Business (aged between 22 and 25 years old). It was undertaken in the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016 (March - June). The research lasted one week and was executed during the analytical program offering two hours of teaching and two hours of field research.

In order to implement the research, two hours in the class were required to cover the theory and the preparation of students for the practical part, which included a visit to the Acropolis Museum, where students in groups were asked to answer questions about the leadership in ancient Greece (classical period).

The teaching hours included the first stage of the methodology which was the lecture. The teacher taught to the students the didactic unit of "Leadership in classroom" in order to provide them with the necessary theoretical background for the next step. The next step was the visit in the museum of the Acropolis. Firstly, a guide informed the students about the history of the museum and leadership in Ancient Greek culture. After that, the students separated into groups and they had to complete some activities based on questions that they were set to them (Questionnaire 1 & 2). Then, the representative of each group presented in the other groups their work.

The last part of the educational procedure was the completion of a questionnaire which evaluated the whole process and a discussion about this experience. In the end, students were asked to write an experiential essay about this experience and to deliver it after one week so as to recall this experience.

### **Results**

The results of the research process consist of the data that were figured out by the questionnaires that were filled by the students during this educational process.

#### **1st questionnaire results**

The questions of the first questionnaire aimed for detecting the main characteristics of leadership in ancient Greek culture throughout the visit in the museum of the Acropolis. Moreover, it is an application of What, Why and How of leaderships in terms of what leadership is, why it is important and how you become a leader.

The questionnaire (Appendix) consists of three questions that students have to answer them in cooperation with the other team members. The first question was about how they understand leadership in the museum, the second about how they believe that leadership affects the culture development and the third which are the factors for ancient Athens to become the leader among the other Greek civilizations.

Question one (the What): Students stated that some characteristics of leadership can be identified in the statues of the museum which have huge size and whose body position that they is very imposing ("no verbal imposition", "the statues are imposing without looking "bossy"", "the men sculptures are in "battle's" position while women statues are in position of "attention""). The museum room is well organized and it exhales safety and order. The statues have some distance among them so as to consider them unique and there were a lot of representations of battles and symbols of power such as lions and horse-riders (horse were symbol of power during classical period because of the development of equestrian force).

Question two (the Why) : Students mentioned that leadership affects the development of Ancient Athens in terms of the development of arts, democracy, culture, economy, laws and justice system, military force and power and glory of the city.

Question three (the How) : Students noted that Athens become a leader because of the democratic spirit, the cultural development, the leadership of Pericles and is vision of becoming Athens the center of Greek civilization, the need of becoming a leader, the good economic situation, the developed commerce, geographical position and the educational system.

#### **2nd questionnaire results**

The second questionnaire (Appendix) was completed after the end of the field research and was about to examine the metagnostic experience of the students in terms of their experience. The first question was about how they identify/ feel some characteristics of leadership in the museum, how the experience this process as for enhancing learning in the classroom and the third one was about theirs thoughts on how historical identity helps them in teaching.

Question one: The students stated that authority can be identified in the imposition and authenticity of the place and the statues, communication through working into teams and exchange opinions and trustworthiness as for the dominance and the glory of the statues.

Question two: According to students, this experience will enable them to understand the importance of leadership in classroom, the implementation of such actions in the teaching process, the importance of experiential learning, the adaption of historical identity in teaching, the important of interaction, the combination of observation in the context of an activity with

learning.

Question three: Students stated that historical identity can support their teaching as for utilizing and understanding historical data, integrating features and personalities of ancient Greek culture, enhancing interdisciplinary approach, obtaining self knowledge.

### 3rd questionnaire results

The last questionnaire (Appendix) was an evaluative one of the whole process. The first question was about the field research and whether it was interesting. The second question about how this experience contributed to the rising of students' leadership characteristics. The third one was about the importance of the visit in the museum of the Acropolis, the fourth one was about the combination of theory and field research in understanding the issue and the fifth one about the leadership characteristics. Question six referred to the historical identity and the importance of leadership for a teacher in enhancing learning in class. The last two questions were about the improvement of the teaching process and the benefits that were obtained by the students by this process. The results are the following.

Question one: The majority of students agreed that the field research was interesting because of its innovation, the implementation of experiential learning, the contact with the statues, the difference experiential approach and the group work.

Question two: Thirty seven students stated that this process contributed in the understanding of their leadership characteristics because they had the opportunity to think about them, work in teams and collaborate.

Question three: Twenty five students stated that the visit in the museum was enough important while twenty one stated that was in a satisfactory level because they had the chance to implement the theory in practice, to deeply analyze the ancient Greek culture and to participate in interactive activities.

Question four: Forty four students cited that the combination of theory and practice contributed to the identification of their leading characteristics because they had the chance to see characteristics of leadership became more clear though the visit.

Question five: Students mentioned that they identified more communication skills and trustworthiness than authority in themselves and their main argument was the chance for self knowledge.

Question six: Twenty four students stated that the formation of their historical identity was enhancing though this visit while eleven stated that contributed in an enough level because of enrichment of their historical knowledge.

Question seven: The majority of students believed that the teacher with leading characteristics contributes to the enforcement of learning because of its inspiration, authenticity, communication and interpersonal skills.

Question eight: Students suggested that there should be more time through the field research and better exploitation of the place.

Question nine: Students stated that the benefits that they gained were group work, contact with ancient Greek culture, participate in a new teaching process and the enrichment of their historical knowledge and their self knowledge.

### Discussion

#### Reliability and validity

Reliability is synonymous with consistency and reproducibility over time, research tools and in groups-occurring (Cohen *et al.*,

1994) [4].

The techniques used in this research in order to increase reliability and proposed for qualitative research are:

- a. Prolonged occupation: The researcher has to spend time within the under study environment and to acquaint the participants' trust.
- b. Tripartite intersection sources, methods, evaluators: Refers to the use of more than one source that the cross-referencing to give reliable results. This is achieved by cross-checking both the students themselves and from information collected by teachers.
- c. Suitability of references: It is the collection of other assets (other material) retained for possible retesting (abroad). The researcher when conducting research taking notes with the consent of the participants.

The validity is that a research tool actually does that which seeks to measure (Cohen *et al.*, 1994) [4]. In qualitative research the validity can be ensured by the depth, the richness and content of the data collected by the participants accessed through selflessness and triangulation of the researcher (Cohen *et al.*, 1994) [4]. In this research, the questionnaire is used as a data collection tool, as an attempt to make the respondent to answer more honestly. An important element is the validity and generalization of research, in terms of the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other contexts or groups. Because of the small and often non-representative sample of qualitative research, generalization can be achieved by a detailed description of the data and findings of the investigation, so as every reader to understand the experiences, compare them with their own and to conclude whether these data can be of useful. Many researchers believe that the liquidity and flexibility of methods such as case study (as in this research), increase reliability.

#### Analysis

Unfortunately, there are few previous issues concerning cultural identity. Researchers like Eleuterio (1997) [5] and Hoelscher (1999) [8] observed that classrooms filled with teachers and students who openly share their cultural identities, lives and their life experiences build trust and foster stronger relationships. In our research, it can be concluded from the results that this educational process towards Leadership in classroom has been an innovative proposal for teacher education with great appeal to students, contributing to a pleasant and interactive process

All students argued that the process became more interesting because of the combination of ancient Greek culture and leadership in class as it is a way of implementing leadership in class by formatting the appropriate historical identity of the teacher which is important for acquiring a concrete identity. The link with ancient Greek literature created additional motives to students, allowing the exchange of ideas and the enrichment of knowledge. In the end of the process, students were able to identify leadership characteristics in themselves by analyzing leadership in ancient Greece.

Teamwork and experiential learning activities aided in the freedom of expression, view exchange and the opportunity of identifying elements of leadership in themselves. The theme of the course and the link with ancient Greece contributed to this by making course more interactive by applying practice into theory.

In conclusion, this innovative educational process contributed to

the enforcement of cognitive results which helped students to form their own views regarding leadership in classroom issues and to develop an overall view of leadership in relation to Ancient Greek culture.

### Conclusion - Guidelines for future research

The introduction of this educational process and the collaboration of these two universities is a very promising proposal with remarkable results for teachers' education. The implication of the research proposal in leadership in classroom can be combined with the enhancement of cultural identity of the teacher so as to be more confident in leading his class.

Throughout this survey, there was continuous exchange of ideas, knowledge and teaching material which strengthened collaborative research, which is very important for expanding the horizons of the forthcoming teachers. It is necessary for a student to acquire round knowledge and format his personality with as many elements as possible. The combination on ancient Greek culture with leadership leads to the acquisition of both cognitive and self-knowledge which contributed to the improvement of student as a teacher.

Last but not least, during this teaching methodology, teamwork, development of critical thought, communication and interpersonal skills were nurtured. Future studies can investigate the challenge for the teacher to select the appropriate method or combination of methods so as to improve teaching process through innovation.

### References

1. Bird M, Hammersley M, Gomm R, Woods P. Educational Research in Practice- Study Manual. Patra: Hellenic Open University. 1999.
2. Brinia V. General and Special Teaching of Economics. Athens: Stamouli. 2006.
3. Brookfield S. The skillful teacher. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1990.
4. Cohen L, Manion L. Research Methods in Education. London : Routledge, (4th edition). 1994.
5. Eleuterio S. Folk culture inspires writing across the curriculum. C.A.R.T.S. Newsletter. 1997, 4.
6. Faulkner P, Swann J, Baker S, Bird M, Carty J. Evolution of The Child in the Social Environment. Handbook of Methodology. Patra: Hellenic Open University. 1999.
7. Giroux H. Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education. New York: Routledge Press. 1992.
8. Hoelscher KJ. Cultural watersheds: Diagramming one's own experience of culture. Social Studies & the Young Learner. 1999; 12(2):12-14.
9. Johnson DW, Johnson RT. Learning together and alone. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. 1991.
10. Key J. Research Design in Occupational Education. Oklahoma State University. Available on line. 1997.
11. <http://www.okstate.edu/ag/agedcm4h/academic/aged5980a/5980/newpage16.htm>
12. Research Methodology. Convenient Sampling. Available online : <http://goo.gl/PabNxC>
13. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Qualitative Research Guidelines Project. Available online : <http://www.qualres.org/HomeSemi-3629.html>
14. Scheie J. Leadership in the classroom. AUEB Lecture. Athens. 2016.

15. White K, Zion Sh, Kozleski E. Cultural identity and teaching. National Institute for Urban School Improvement. Arizona State University. 2005.
16. Wilcox S. Leadership in class. Instructional Development Centre, Queen's University. 1997. <http://goo.gl/pa9s6U>
17. Zafiroopoulos K. How is a scientific work done?.Athens: Kritiki. 2005.