Two Case Studies Dealing with Social Studies at the Secondary Level: Applied Anthropology And Grounded Theory

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Abstract

The present study focuses on two case studies of social studies education, namely in Palm Beach County Florida and the Community of Madrid. A Grounded Theory approach is applied to the interpretation of government publications so as to develop two tentative emic models of social studies education. An overarching applied anthropological theoretical framework permeates the interpretation of texts so as to elucidate the intended role of social studies education in terms of constructing national and local identities. The study concludes that there are important similarities between the two social studies programs such as the incorporation of subjects dealing with world history as well as national history. One important difference is that the Palm Beach County program is more direct in proposing a model of civic engagement through the construction of a joint narrative about the founding of the nation, in this case the United States.

Keywords: *Grounded Theory, Social Studies Education, Curriculum Design, National Identity*

1. Introduction

The field of education has focused on developing better teaching methods and on issues of learning at the expense of more foundational questions such as the purpose of education and how it fits into a national narrative (Aud et al., 2011; Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020b; Feigenblatt & Peña-Acuña, 2020). The avoidance of topics dealing with purpose and in particular in terms of morals and ethics in the field of education is a negative externality of liberalism in the political sphere (Feigenblatt, 2021b; Feigenblatt, Pardo, & Cooper, 2021). There is also a parallel tendency in the field of education to focus on problems which are easily quantifiable (Creswell, 2012; Eldridge & Cranston, 2009; Georgakopoulos, 2009). Nevertheless, challenges with religious minorities in France, gun violence in the United States, and the polarization of the political landscape in both Spain and the United States make foundational issues of purpose and how the purpose fits into a national narrative pivotal for learners, teachers, and citizens (Bowen, 2007; Feigenblatt, 2019; Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020b; Feigenblatt, 2021a; Feigenblatt et al., 2021; Gillion, 2020). At the core of modern education is the idea of shaping citizens to participate in government and also as productive members of the economy (Albritton & Bureekul, 2004; Gleditsch, 2008; Tatsuo, 1999).

The primacy of the nation-state as the basic unit of the international system of independent states required the development of a national identity so as to integrate a vast array of ethnic groups, religious communities, classes, and more recently even genders into a national plan for development and growth (Feigenblatt, 2010c; Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020a, 2020b, 2020d; Ford & Kittisuksathit, 1994; Guinier, Fine, Balin, Bartow, & Stachel, 1994; Patton, 2009; Thapa & Feigenblatt, 2017). Corporations have organizational cultures and training programs to socialize new recruits and to help them fit into the organization (Otto Federico von

Feigenblatt, 2020a; Wellin & Fine, 2007). The literature on organizational behavior and management emphasizes the importance of organizational culture and the value of mentorship and formal training in order to strengthen and perpetuate organizational culture and to strengthen employee identity (Kantabutra & Saratun, 2013; Martin & Meyerson, 1988). Therefore, while corporations and the private sector have recognized the importance of identity and the value of constructing a joint narrative about personal and corporate goals, education has moved in the opposite direction (Grant, 2013; hallinger & Lu, 2013; Kimball, 2013). With an emphasis on individual difference and avoidance of the "imposition" of overarching societal goals for the individual, contemporary education in many industrialized countries has left a moral vacuum that has been filled with hedonism, consumerism, and moral relativism (Chizuko, 2010; Cochran, 2009; Eriksen, 2005; Ewest & Klieg, 2012).

While this turn away from a national moral consciousness and a strong national identity has affected education in general the last bastion of "citizenship" in the traditional sense of word has been the subfield of social studies (Bowman, 2001; Chottmann, 2006; Feigenblatt, 2010a, 2012; Feigenblatt, 2015; Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020b; Otto F. von Feigenblatt, 2020). Secondary school students are still required to take several courses dealing with world, national, and increasingly local history ("United States History Standards," 2021; "World History Standards," 2021). Those courses are supplemented with a course of two dealing with issues of civics and government ("Course Descriptions," 2021; "El Bachillerato en la Comunidad de Madrid," 2021). There are very few studies about the goals of those courses and what their specific goals are in terms of learning and most importantly in terms of shaping the individual (Chetty, Hendren, Jones, & Porter, 2018).

Identity is an important part of culture which in turn deals with the idea of cosmovision (Avruch, 1998; Clark, 1989; Feigenblatt,

2010b). Humans make sense of the world as part of a group and inhabit a subjective reality that is both perceived and imagined. Victor Turner clearly explained the importance of "imagined communities" and how people are socialized as full members (Turner, 1969). Therefore the role of social studies education is particularly important in the process of socialization and in the development of a stable national identity for young members of society. At the very least secondary social studies education prepares young men and women to become full members of society.

Spain is a highly developed country in southern Europe with an increasingly diverse population and going through a period of deep socio-cultural and political polarization (Roberts, 1997). At the core of the contemporary polarization is the controversial law passed in 2007 known as the Historical Memory Law. This particular law condemns the rule of Generalisimo Francisco Franco, Caudillo of Spain, and all the symbols connected to this particular period of Spanish history (Roberts, 1997). One of the challenges with this law and what it represents is that the Franco period is connected to nationalism and a period of renewed pride in national history. Therefore many opponents of the regime connect the idea of having a strong national identity and pride in the past accomplishments of the country (Roberts, 1997). Thus, the teaching of history is particularly challenging in the case of Spain because of ideological fragmentation and polarization. One good example of this is how during the Franco years many symbols of the early years of Spain, mostly from the period following the Reconquista, were promoted by the government (Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020a). Thus it is difficult to separate the original meaning of the symbols from the meaning they acquired during the Franco years.

The United States is also going through a period of increased historical revisionism (Chetty et al., 2018; Feigenblatt, 2014; Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020b; Gillion, 2020; Jimenez, 2017; Kibbey, 2002). A renewed culture war over the meaning of national

symbols and in particular about the founding fathers has polarized the public sphere (Gillion, 2020; Jimenez, 2017). At the core of the debate is the issue of slavery and the role that it played in the early years of the history of the United States (Hochschild & Powell, 2008). An important challenge to traditional social studies education comes from groups from the radical left (Jimenez, 2017). Some groups are advocating a range of revisionist actions such as the renaming of buildings, change of history books to emphasize the role of slavery, and the "cancellation" of certain historical figures because of their positions on the issue of slavery and later on regarding segregation (Feigenblatt, 2015; Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020c). In the case of the United States most states have resisted attempt to revise history but due to the fragmented nature of the secondary education system in the United States, the degree of revisionism encountered in the social studies curriculum greatly varies from school district to school district (Feigenblatt, 2015). Extreme examples include New York City which includes LGBT literature in its elementary school curriculum to certain districts in the deep South that still celebrate holidays to honor leaders of the Confederacy (Feigenblatt, 2015). More problematic than the revision of history is the avoidance by many school leaders of topics dealing with national pride and national identity (Feigenblatt et al., 2021). The debate over the requirement to stand up for the national anthem is a case in point (Gillion, 2020). Many schools forgo the traditional morning pledge of allegiance so as to avoid conflicts dealing with ideological positions. The result is the hollowing out of social studies education and possibly a weakening in national identity.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study follows a critical constructivist approach informed by a broad anthropological perspective (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2007; Hoffman, 2009; Willis, 2007). Victor Turner's approach to culture as an "imagined community"

permeates the study in terms of how national identity is interpreted as a construct rather than as a given (Turner, 1969). At the same time anthropology's holistic approach to understanding the interaction between the individual and his or her community influenced the study's engagement with the socio-cultural context of the case studies in discussion (Feigenblatt, 2009; Gulliver, 1988; Hamann, Zuniga, & Garcia, 2007; Sluka, 1992).

3. Methodology

The present study applies the Grounded Theory method of model construction to the study of publicly available texts (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Feigenblatt, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 2009b). Grounded Theory is an approach that was developed by Glasser and Strauss in order to help qualitative researchers develop models and theories based on data (Glaser & Strauss, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). As an inductive approach, Grounded Theory has the advantage that it starts with the data in a process known as the constant comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 2009b). General themes are identified through a literature review and those themes are used to identify an initial batch of texts. The texts are then coded so as to identity categories and attributes that are then gradually connected in order to discover a model of a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). Sampling and analysis take place concurrently because Grounded Theory posits that the data have to drive the process and if a category needs to be expanded through the discovery of more attributes then it will be necessary to expand the sample (Glaser & Strauss, 2009b). Finally, core categories and attributed are identified based on the data and it is triangulated with other models found in the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 2009b). This approach is complemented by Stake's emphasis on holistic analysis in case study research (Stake, 1995). Stake's approach is flexible yet rigorous and has at its core an emphasis on understanding systems and interactions (Stake, 1995).

4. Findings

An initial set of nine government texts was coded to identity the main categories ("Anti-Racism," 2021; "Atencion a la diversidad," 2021; "Black Lives Matter," 2021; "Compensacion de desigualdades en educacion," 2021; "Course Descriptions," 2021; *DECRETO 52/2015 de 21 de mayo, del Consejo de Gobierno, por el que se establece para la comunidad de Madrid el curriculo del Bachillerato*, 2015; "Direccion de Area Territorial Madrid-Sur," 2021; "El Bachillerato en la Comunidad de Madrid," 2021; "Que estudiar en la universidad. Grados de la rama de conocimiento de Ciencias Sociales y Juridicas," 2021; "Racial Justice," 2021; "Social Studies," 2021; "World History Standards," 2021). Several categories were clearly identifiable in the first round of coding. The category of civic participation was important for both the Spanish and the American case ("Compensacion de desigualdades en educacion," 2021; "Social Studies," 2021). Further development of this category revealed several attributes such as inclusion, identity, and togetherness. Another important category in the case of Florida deals with issues of social justice and its relationship to mental health ("Anti-Racism," 2021; "Black Lives Matter," 2021; "Racial Justice," 2021). One of the main differences between the case of the Community of Madrid and Florida is that the category of "Race" was considerably more salient in the case of Florida compared to the case of Madrid. Further development of the category of "Race" in Florida revealed a focus on the relationship between African Americans and other ethnicities ("Anti-Racism," 2021). An interesting finding is that in the case of Florida the State mandated standards for teaching social studies courses are officially posted on a website hosted by Florida State University and the standards themselves focus on factual information dealing with concrete historical events ("World History Standards," 2021). On the other hand district level resources tend to provide more context and interpretation with a greater focus on mental health and inclusion ("Anti-Racism," 2021; "Racial Justice," 2021).

5. Discussion

This brief pilot study reveals that both in Spain and in the United States issues such as identity, inclusion, and mental health are considered to be important in the field of secondary education. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the nature of social studies education and how it fits in the national dialogue over identity and inclusion (Feigenblatt, 2015; Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020c; Feigenblatt, 2021b). In the case of the United States, and in particular Florida, standards tend to be very specific while recommendations provided by the School District of Palm Beach are more specific and provide considerably more interpretation ("Course Descriptions," 2021; "Social Studies," 2021; "World History Standards," 2021). In other words, standards provide specific learning outcomes while the guidance provided by the School District favors a particular interpretation of those outcomes.

In the case of the Community of Madrid there is also an emphasis on inclusion and identity but less of an emphasis on the issue of "Race" ("Atencion a la diversidad," 2021; "Compensacion de desigualdades en educacion," 2021; "El Bachillerato en la Comunidad de Madrid," 2021). The different emphasis in the case of Spain is due to a different socio-political context (Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, 2020b). Local identity tends to be more salient in the case of the Community of Madrid compared to the case of Florida while "race" is more salient in Florida because of the current attention to racial relations in the United States (Gillion, 2020).

6. Conclusion

The main conclusion of this pilot study is that a qualitative approach such as Grounded Theory can serve as a starting point to provide a more holistic understanding of the role of social studies education in broader societal goals such as the socialization of citizens. Moreover the construction of identity, both at the national and local levels is clearly present in the standards, required subjects,

and guiding documents in both the Community of Madrid and Palm Beach School District ("Anti-Racism," 2021; "Atencion a la diversidad," 2021; "Black Lives Matter," 2021; "Compensacion de desigualdades en educacion," 2021; "Course Descriptions," 2021; *DECRETO 52/2015 de 21 de mayo, del Consejo de Gobierno, por el que se establece para la comunidad de Madrid el curriculo del Bachillerato*, 2015; "Direccion de Area Territorial Madrid-Sur," 2021; "El Bachillerato en la Comunidad de Madrid," 2021; "Que estudiar en la universidad. Grados de la rama de conocimiento de Ciencias Sociales y Juridicas," 2021; "Racial Justice," 2021; "Social Studies," 2021; "World History Standards," 2021). Therefore, further research is needed in order to map the complex interaction between local education and national identity formation. The present study should be interpreted as a limited starting point in a long journey to explore the nexus between education and national identity formation.

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