

School Curriculum & Cultural Heritage: A case study from Jordan

By:

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"المدرسة مدرسة الدولة، حيث تجعل الشباب مخلوقات الدولة، أي لا شيء سوى أبالسة الدولة.
عندما دخلت المدرسة دخلت الدولة. لقد جعلتني المدرسة مطواعا إلى الدولة، وصيرتني رجلا لابساً الدولة،
رجلا منتظماً ومنضبطاً، ومروضاً وحامل شهادة وشاذاً وكئيها مثل جميع الآخرين.
فعندما نشاهد رجلاً فإننا لا نشاهد إلا رجلاً تتلبسهم الدولة،
خدم دولة يخدمونها منذئذ طوال حياتهم ما يضاد الطبيعة"

THOMAS BERNARD

The school is the school of the state; it is where subjects are transformed into state creatures. When I entered the school, I entered the state. The school disciplined me and made me a docile body in the hands of the state. When we see men, we only see men possessed by the state, serving it through lifetime against what nature may prescribe.

- School curriculum was in the center of two international crises, the first broke out between China and Japan whereas the second broke out between Japan and South Korea. Japan has been accused of manipulating its school curricula by presenting its colonial past in a very positive way. Meanwhile a strong polemic has broken out in France between the main political fractions when the French National Assembly was debating on a new legislation that requires school teachers to talk to their students about the positive role of the French colonization.

- The importance of the school in the State construction is clearly manifested in the long debate that the western thought has known and is still witnessing. For the classical Marxists it is not the school that reproduces the state but it is the means of state production. So what is economic reproduces what is political and educational

- The growing role of the school and the university in contemporary western societies urged the Marxists to reshape their attitude. The position of the Neo-Marxists vis-à-vis the relationship between school and the State represents a radical change

- The insistence on education and on school can be reduced to the role they play in modern societies. School plays a crucial role in the production and reproduction of the existing nation states. One can even claim that in one way or another school is the state itself

- The work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu on the school could be revolutionary in the way one should look at the sociological aspects of the school. For Bourdieu school and then the curricula are responsible for the reproduction of the society and for the legitimating of the social hierarchy dominating the society. The social order is reproduced by a huge process of producing symbols in which school plays the crucial role

- One of the necessary elements for the construction of the so-called citizens of the Nation State is the construction of cultural and social identity that should go in harmony with the particular identity of the state itself. As such, cultural heritage plays an important role in the state construction that every society is seeking all the time

Teaching cultural heritage through
school curriculum in Jordan:
The Present situation.

- The study of the present status of teaching cultural heritage in Jordanian school curriculum has imposed a particular methodology. This methodology is based on what is called in anthropological studies a discourse analysis.

- Up to 120 questionnaires have already been distributed in different schools in Irbid governorate. As such, the study focuses on the curricula contents and the knowledge accumulated in the mind of schools' students as they are answered in the questionnaires.

- A critical reading and analysis of both school curricula and the answers given in the questionnaire by students can allow us to make the following remarks:

- 1- Cultural heritage does not constitute an independent topic or theme which is presented in an independent school curriculum. Many curricula, like history, Islamic education, Arabic language and national education all deal with cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the Jordanian government has recently developed a new curriculum under the title of “National Education” in which many pages are dedicated to Jordan’s history and cultural heritage. From the age of 12 up to 18 students are required to learn some information about cultural heritage in Jordan.

- 2- The Jordanian curricula present some pictures about some cities of a historical importance chosen from the south and the north as well. Some archaeological sites have also been chosen to be presented through the curricula. Through simplified texts, illustrations and pictures the curricula try to shape and reshape the Jordanian students' imaginary on Jordanian history and cultural heritage.

- 3- There is a big emphasis on the modern history of Jordan with almost a complete neglect of its very long and extended history. The curricula lack the balanced coverage of Jordan's history and seems to be selective while dealing with the successive civilizations that Jordan had known. A large number of students included in the questionnaire indicated that they lacked detailed information about the ancient history of Jordan.

- 4- School curricula don't consider any sort of balance between what we can call national cultural heritage and regional or local ones. It is easy to notice that the regional or local cultural heritage is almost absent from school curricula. Students tend to have no information on the town or the place where they live and the local communities which they belong to and the life styles that exist in these communities.

- 5- A careful examination of the provided materials demonstrates that the content has not been deeply thought of and thus has changed several times in the past two decades. Cultural heritage in its wider sense is not covered. Only some parts of history and historical events are briefly mentioned.
- 6- There is a poor definition of cultural heritage as it means only archaeological sites without giving any attention to other forms of cultural heritage especially the intangible heritage or what we call the non-material aspects of cultural heritage.

- 7- The association between cultural heritage and Jordanian identity is very poorly defined as there are various political ideologies and agendas that push their own understanding such as (Pan Arabism, Islamic movement, Jordanian nationalism).
- 8- The included element about heritage is very descriptive and does not provoke creative thinking among students.
- 9- The use of cultural heritage to connect the present and future with the past is totally missing and consequently the feeling of continuity is difficult to be realized.

- 10- The whole concentration is on what we can call material culture or tangible cultural heritage. The intangible culture is completely absent in the mind of those who wrote these curricula.
- 11- Moreover, the teacher does not usually have a big margin of power to suggest and implement thoughts outside the curriculum. Consequently, he/she remains preoccupied with activities such as grading and lesson preparing. This in itself is negatively reflected on the performance of students whose main concern becomes memorizing information and scoring good grades
- 12- The way the curriculum on cultural heritage tries to present Jordan cultural heritage does not provoke the students' curiosity for more knowledge about the civilizations that produced these monuments, the techniques and the technology used by these civilizations to build these sites.

- 13- The present school curriculum on cultural heritage is too centralized, elite-dominated and urban-oriented. In Jordan like most countries of the world, knowledge on cultural heritage tends to be produced and reproduced by the central authorities in the capitals in collaboration with certain elites. In this sense one can talk about some sort of monopoly of the reproduction of cultural heritage.
- 14- As far as their collective identity is concerned, most students included in the questionnaire seemed to consider themselves Muslims first and then Arabs of Jordanians. This issue deserves some attention as it shows that the state has failed to forge a national, a state- bounded identity. However, one could also consider this as a deliberate tactic by the state to produce subjects with shifting identities and thus can be easily controlled.

Recommendations

- 1- The new school curriculum and pedagogy on cultural heritage should develop a clear and modern definition of cultural heritage.
- 2- The new cultural curriculum and pedagogy must take into account the life-view and life styles of the communities to which the school students belong and the curriculum should also adapt the content of learning to their needs and aspirations.
- 3- Teaching of cultural heritage must concentrate on the values of cultural and historical diversity. Teaching students that Jordan has known many successive cultures and religions can make students more conscious of the multicultural history of Jordan.

Recommendations

- 4- Teaching cultural heritage could and must strengthen **values of tolerance and accepting the other**. Teaching cultural heritage must fight the values of absolutism and should strengthen values of relativism.
- 5- Students should not be asked to **memorize** facts about culture but to learn heritage in **a tangible** way, through activities. The heritage activity should not be extra curricular but should be evaluated as other curricular subjects. It must be taught in all classes in the school curriculum.

Recommendations

- 6- Heritage activity must be taught through child-friendly activities like dance, painting, etc, in lower classes. There should be a gradual transition from the experiential in the lower classes to the conceptual in the higher classes. At all levels students should be involved practically, by their teachers, in knowing the material heritage (archaeological sites, churches) and abstract heritage (philosophies, poetry, scriptures).
- 7- The instructional materials of various subjects should be divided into practical and conceptual modes of instructions but should be transmitted (conveyed to the students) through projects and activities.

Recommendations

- 8- Besides the school system, other cultural resource centers such as museums, historical sites, documentation research institutions, places of worship, holy sites should be used to give respect for the living heritage and the regions of Jordan.
- 9- Special care should be taken to use the local, regional and geographical aspects of heritage around the school to accommodate the diversity of Jordanian culture.