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Problematizing the location of comparative numbered data in national policy-making in education: The securitization of school timetables in Cyprus

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Abstract

This paper seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of national policy-making in education by problematizing a specific topos of the field of global education policy. It specifically argues that in an attempt to identify new forms of power in education and their effects, 'the topos of governing by comparison and numbers' overlooks the co-existence of permeological and immunological responses to international comparative numbered data in localities as well as the unintended effects of this uneasy co-existence on national policy and reform. To illustrate this argument, the paper explores the controversial timetables reform initiative in the Republic of Cyprus during the period 2014–15.

Introduction

The uses of comparative numbered data to describe education and inform education policy is not a new phenomenon (Lawn, 2013). Its origins are traced back to the rise of mass schooling where two distinctive phenomena – educational comparisons and the use of numbered data on schools – have begun to inspire each other and develop into a certain style of scientific reasoning in and about education (Pettersson, Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2016). Under current conditions of internationalization, this style of reasoning has gained prominence in and via 'evidence-based policy-making' (Slavin, 2002), to the point that comparative numbered data are said to be an influential political tool for managing and steering national systems of education from distance and via connotations of neutrality. This thinking, reflecting the rise of international organizations and supranational bodies as key players in policy and reform,

is captured in buzz-phrases such as 'governance through comparison' (e.g., Nóvoa, 2018; Martens & Niemann, 2010; Martens, 2007; Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003) and 'governing by numbers' (e.g., Grek, 2019, 2009; Ball, 2017; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simola, 2011).

The topos of governing by comparison and numbers stresses that there is a variety of reasons which makes comparative numbered data attractive to localities. Not only their adoption holds the promise of advancement and the minimization of reform risk, but it also signals adherence to international communities helping governments to secure external funding and expertise. Such forms of data are, moreover, attractive due to their capability to present education in apolitical, scientifically-neutral terms and by means of 'de-politicization' (Rose, 1991), 'de-ideologization' (Desrosières, 2013) and 'scientization' (Grek & Ozga, 2010), to justify contested reforms and defuse criticism. Some scholars go as far as to argue that in some local settings, comparisons and numbers are perceived as education per se (e.g., Pettersson, Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2019), while others that they have replaced national culture as the rationale for the reform of national education (e.g., Grek & Rinne, 2011).

The current paper seeks to problematize this main topos of the field of global education policy. It argues that in an attempt to identify new forms of power in education and their effects, the topos of governance by comparison and numbers overlooks not only the *immunity* of national contexts to comparative numbered data. More importantly, it silences the *co-existence* of immunologies with *permeabilities* and the *unintended effects* of this uneasy co-existence on policy and reform. Coined by Cowen (1997, 2009), the notions of 'immunology' and 'permeology' are employed in the field of comparative education to study the educational transfer of policies and practices across geopolitical, cultural and institutional settings (e.g., Klerides & Zembylas, 2017; Kariya & Rappleye, 2015; Beech & Barrenechea, 2011). Adapted to a critical engagement with the global education policy literature, permeology refers to the openness of a context to the adoption of comparative numbered data, while immunology to the power of the context to reject such forms of 'big data'.

School timetables reform in Cyprus: Permeologies and immunologies

In order to reach new complexities about how comparison and numbers are locally used and abused and why they are rejected, this paper explores the timetables reform initiative in Cyprus. In November 2014, Dr. Kadis, the Minister of Education and Culture of the right-wing Government of President Anastasiades, assuming that the challenges of timetables can be addressed via sound reasoning and the rigorous application of scientific knowledge, appointed a special advisory committee to review

them and recommend changes. This Committee consisted of two sub-committees: one for Primary Education and another for General Secondary Education. Our focus is the Committee of General Secondary Education and notably its reform proposal of a new Timetable for the Gymnasium and Grade A of the General Lyceum.[1] According to the press release of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Committee for the Restructuring of the Timetable of Secondary Education comprised six members: a former Director of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute; a Professor of Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Cyprus; the President of OELMEK, the Union of Secondary Education Teachers; a School Inspector of Mathematics; a Physicist-expert in timetable planning; and a Philologist seconded at the Office of the Minister (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014). The Committee submitted their Final Proposal for a new Timetable of the Gymnasium and Grade A of the General Lyceum in March 2015 amidst protests by teachers from certain teaching specializations and their corresponding disciplinary sub-associations of OELMEK.

Comparative numbered data are adopted by the Committee in its Final Proposal and are taken from the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). We argue here that EU and OECD data are deployed in two broad ways that confirm the global policy literature. First, they are utilized in response to a widely-spread belief that there was an urgent need to improve the Timetable and made it more efficient. This belief emerged out of the intersection of local and international research. Prior to the appointment of the Committee, local scholarship had pointed to: first, the uneven organization of timetables attributed to the intersection of teacher union interests, clientelism and the unsystematic character of policy-making; second, the issue of the 'overloaded curriculum' according to which 'teachers race to cover content' and 'pupils suffer from overload'; and, third, the declining levels of Greek language competency (e.g., Koutselini, 2012a, 2010; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012, 2004; OELMEK, 2012a; Pashiardis, 2004). This belief was reinforced by the devaluation of the Cyprus School Leaving Certificate abroad and the poor results of Cyprus in TIMSS and PISA, and, was legitimized on the basis of the country's high public expenditure on education. Before the economic crisis of 2012–16, Cyprus was proportionally the first country in the EU in terms of public expenditure on education, at 7.8% of GDP compared to the average 5.2% (Klerides & Philippou, 2015). We argue that these problems made the Committee's proposal permeable to comparative numbered data. In their quest for solutions, its members adopted EU and OECD data as a valid, reliable and relevant basis upon which to base their advice and aspirations to modernize the Timetable, projecting that its modernization would have been achieved by aligning it with EU and OECD norms.

Second, we argue that the Committee also adopted EU and OECD comparative numbered data as a neutral device through which it could have justified and validated its controversial proposal for the reduction of the teaching time devoted to certain curriculum subjects. This proposal was driven not only by instrumental, scientific rationality, which projected a need to rationalize and scientize policy-making, strike a balance between subjects, achieve equality amongst specializations and unburden pupils from excessive workload. A general shrinking of time in the Timetable was also dictated by economic crisis (2012–16) and international pressures on government to curb spending in education (e.g., IMF, 2013; World Bank, 2014). The Committee knew that this proposal would have been opposed by the affected specializations of teachers and their sub-associations of OELMEK not simply because teaching time reductions would have downgraded the status of their (specialization) subjects in schooling. Fears of job losses and changes in the employment status of many teachers and members of OELMEK were of greater importance. OELMEK and its constitutive associations are a main stakeholder and pressure group in Cyprus education, which according to Bouzakis (2012), possess the power "to resist and prevent any reform that may cause a redistribution of power in the governance of education" (p. 74). Teacher unionism shapes the second layer of the openness of the Committee's proposal to comparison and numbers. In a quest for the legitimacy and validation of their proposal to reduce the time allocated to certain subjects, the members of the Committee found in EU and OECD data a supposedly neutral basis on which they could have based their hopes to appease the anticipated reaction and imminent criticism of the affected specializations of teachers.

In relation to other subjects, however, the adoption of EU and OECD data is either avoided or when such data are presented, their utilization is ignored, calling into question the global policy literature. This selective adoption of comparative numbered data, we finally argue, is a sign of the immunological power of the 'endangered' Greek Orthodox identity of Cyprus. While during colonial times this identity was depicted to be in danger by the British Administration of Cyprus (1878–1959), the threat has shifted to Turkification and Islamization since the Turkish invasion and occupation of the north part of the island in 1974 (Persianis, 2010). In more recent times, globalization and cosmopolitanism have been added to the list of real or imaginary threats to the Greek Orthodox identity (Klerides, 2019). From the angle of these threats and fears, the survival of the Hellenism of Cyprus dictates, both diachronically and synchronically, the safeguarding of the Greek-centered, Orthodoxy-based curriculum of schools. The Greco-Orthodox curriculum has been formed and prevailed since the late 19th and early 20th century (Klerides, 2009) and is mainly clustered around the teaching of language, religion and history (Koutselini, 1997; Frangoudaki & Dragona, 1997). In the timetable reform proposal of the Committee,

threats to and fears of the survival of the Greek Orthodox identity materialize as a securitization of the Timetable, which is constituted by the rejection of EU and OECD data, if they are depicted to mandate reductions to the time allocated to these curriculum subjects. Crucial for the securitization of the Timetable was the appointment of four philologists in the Committee, highlighting the Minister's policy preference for a hellenocentric reform proposal. Philologists and their associations, together with the Church of Cyprus and the political right, have been main agents of the Greekness of Cyprus (Klerides, 2019; Persianis, 2010; Mavratsas, 1998; Sofianos, 1986; Loizos, 1974). Apart from Danae Georgiadou, the Philologist seconded at the Office of the Minister, Nicos Orphanides, the former Director of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, Mary Koutselini, the Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Cyprus, and Dimitris Taliadoros, the President of OELMEK, shared the same disciplinary identity: They are all Classical Philologists trained in Greece. Prior to their appointment, these members were active in the public sphere expressing their concerns that the Greek language was in danger and their view that the effective acquisition of Modern Greek can only be achieved via a solid knowledge of Ancient Greek (Taliadoros, 2012, 2014; Koutselini, 2012b; Georgiadou, 2013).

The paper draws on three different sets of data to make a case for a more complex thinking about the location of comparative numbered data in national policy-making in education. First, it builds on documentary data drawn upon from a content analysis of the Committee's Final Proposal (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015) and from other key reform texts preceding and announcing this Proposal. The aim of the analysis of the 43-pages text of the Final Proposal was to examine how and why comparative numbered data are adopted and rejected, while engagement with previous reform initiatives aimed at tracing the genealogy of a highly divisive reform. For a deeper understanding of the rationales behind the adoption and rejection of comparative numbered data by the Committee for the Restructuring of the Timetable of Secondary Education, semi-structured elite interviews with its six members were conducted in the second half of 2016. The paper builds on interview data from these key policy actors, too. Equally important for grasping the ways in which comparative numbered data are adopted and rejected, was a study of the actions and reactions of the teachers' specializations associations of OELMEK during the drafting and immediately after the publication of the Committee's Final Proposal. The paper draws finally on material collected from the print and digital press where these associations expressed their views and concerns about the suggested changes.

Internationalizing timetable, improving schooling

The analysis of the Final Proposal of the Committee for the Restructuring of the Timetable of Secondary Education confirms the use of comparative numbered data, which take the form of *averages*. The Proposal includes juxtapositions of the teaching time allocated to curriculum subjects in the then current and proposed new Timetable in Cyprus with the average time of instruction of the respective subjects in EU 21 and OECD nations. This tendency runs through the whole text of the Proposal, and as table 1 illustrates, its most typical manifestation is what Williamson (2016) calls 'visualization'.

From the perspective of the Committee, the adoption of averages reflects EU membership and a need and desire to converge with European timetable standards. It is noted in the Proposal:

> The Committee believes that our suggestions are corrective to the current Timetable and improve and make it more efficient. At the same time, they converge with what is currently valid in Europe and the relevant European indicators of respective subject-time allocation, projecting and highlighting the European orientation of our Education. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015, p. 8)

Their adoption also derives from the Committee's desire for educational accession to the powerful community of OECD countries and this generates a need to align with OECD norms, too. The Committee mentions in its Proposal:

> The proposed Timetable, in its new form and content, aligns with international trends as these are demonstrated by OECD averages and, compared to the one that is currently in use in our schools, corrects rigidities and exaggerations and/or deficits and omissions. (ibid., p. 18)

The use of averages does not signal simply adherence to the EU and desire to be part of the OECD club of nations. It is also linked to the notion of efficiency confirming the global policy literature which stresses that the adoption of comparative statistics entails the promise of the improvement of the quality of schooling (e.g., Ozga, 2014; Grek & Ozga, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For the Committee, juxtaposition with EU 21 and OECD averages is meant the 'detection' of the 'rigidities and exaggerations and/or deficits and omissions' of the then current Timetable, while 'convergence' and 'alignment' with these averages means the 'correction' of these problems. This twofold role of comparison and numbers in diagnosing problems and prescribing solutions is illustrated by a Committee Member. During the interviews, member #1 explained how the Committee had used EU 21 and OECD averages to draft its proposals stressing that "through averages, those conclusions are drawn that are necessary to improve your educational system … emm, they help you identify its distortions and rigidities".

Table 1: Timetable for Gymnasium (A, B & C) and Grade A of Lyceum (common core subjects)

		Current Timetable					Proposed Timetable					Totals %		
		Gymnasium			Lyceum		Gymnasium			Lyceum				
		A	B	C	A	%	A	B	C	A	%	Cyprus	OECD	EU 21
1.	Modern Greek	5	5	5	4	13.0	5	5	5	5	14.7	14.7	12.7	12.8
2.	Ancient Greek	3	3,5	3,5	3	8.9	4	4	4	3	11.0			
3.	Mathematics	4	3	4	4	10.3	5	4	4	3	11.8	11.8	11.2	11.2
4.	Physics	0	2	2	2	4.1	1	2	2	2	5.1			
5.	Chemistry	0	1	1	1	2.1	0	1	1	1	2.2			
6.	Biology	2	0	2	1	3.4	1	1	1	1	2.9			
7.	Geography	1	2	0	0	2.1	1	1	0	0	1.5	11.8	11.4	12.0
8.	History	3	2	2	3	6.8	2	3	3	2	7.4			
9.	Civics Education	0	0	0,5	0	0.3	0	0	0	0	0.0			
10.	English language	3	3	3,5	3	8.6	3	2	3	2	7.4			
11.	French language	2	2	2	2	5.5	2	2	2	2	5.8	13.2	13.8	14.8
12.	Computer Science	2	2	2	2	5.5	1	1	1	2	3.7	3.7	1.2	1.6
13.	Arts	2	2	1	1	4.1	2	1	1	1	3.7			
14.	Music	2	2	1	1	4.1	2	1	1	1	3.7	7.4	5.7	5.6
15.	Physical Education	3	3,5	3	2	7.9	2	3	3	2	7.4	7.4	6.9	7.2
16.	Religious Education	2	2	2	2	5.5	2	2	2	2	5.9	5.9	4.0	3.7
17.	Design and Technology	1,5	1	1	2	3.8	1	1	1	1	2.9	2.9	2.2	2.1
18.	Home Economics	1,5	1	1	0	2.4	1	1	1	0	2.2	2.2	1.2	1.5
19.	Counselling and Career Guidance	0	0	0,5	0	0.3	0	0	0	0	0.0			
20.	Economics	0	0	0	2	1.4	0	0	0	1	0.7			
		37	37	37	35	100.0	35	35	35	31	100.0			

In their attempt to 'improve' and make the Timetable 'more efficient', the Committee Members assume three lines of policy advice depending on how teaching time allocated to subjects in the then current Timetable measured against EU 21 and OECD averages: they recommend increase, decrease or keep intact subject-time allocations in the proposed new Timetable. From the perspective of this tripartite logic, the Committee suggests the "partial strengthening" of Mathematics from 10.3% to 11.8% with the aim of "tackling the general problem of degradation of Mathematics Education with respect to what applies widely to European countries today". The subject time allocation in both EU 21 and OECD is 11.2% (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015, p. 22). In relation to Natural Sciences, "there was no significant change" as the Committee deems that the Timetable is already aligned with the relevant averages. The subject time allocation accounts for 11.8% in the Timetable against 11.4%/12% in OECD and EU 21 respectively (ibid.). As for an instance of reduction, the Committee recommends a "small reduction" to Computer Science. It goes on to stress that "despite the [small] reduction, Computer Science still accounts for 3.7% … against 1.2%/1.6% in [OECD and] Europe [respectively]" (ibid., p. 23).

Validating reductions, appeasing reactions

This specific scheme through which teaching time reductions are discursively framed in the Proposal highlights that the problems of the Timetable were known to the Committee *regardless of averages* and according to a member (#3), they derived from that "decisions were never made rationally or comprehensively. Quite the contrary, they were based on certain group interests and were fragmented". Prescribing solutions had proven to be a 'tough' undertaking in the past, as was stressed by another member (#4) during the interviews: "the change of timetables had been an issue for many years and we all knew that. It had been long sought but, because it required tough decisions, it had been impeded and the necessary decisions were never made". The Ministry first attempted to change school timetables in the period 2011–2012 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012), but OELMEK rejected the proposal on the grounds that it lacked "a scientific-rational analysis-review of the Timetable" and "a scientific validation of the proposed suggestions/changes" (OELMEK, 2012a). Under these circumstances, reference to the averages of EU 21 and OECD countries was deemed of necessity to scientifically-rationalize and strengthen the Committee's reform-driven views. "For that reason," as member #4 mentioned during the interviews, "we wanted to use as much evidence and data as possible to support our proposals". Likewise, member #3 stressed that "under these circumstances, we had to be concerned about and use data from other European systems, because we are an EU member state, too".

The Final Proposal reflects this consensus amongst the Committee Members implying, at the same time, the objectivity of the proposed changes. The Proposal stresses:

> From the outset the Committee studied available scientific research and related reports and used evidence from older proposals and reviews of school timetables. Its final report aimed at justifying and validating its views in a scientific and valid manner, making references to data and evidence from educational research and the pedagogical sciences. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015, p. 8)

The Committee resorts to the allegedly neutral objectivity of averages to validate its proposals for the reduction of the time allocated to specific subjects and to attempt to appease reactions from the affected specializations of teachers: that is, proposals that would change the status of their subjects in schooling and their working conditions including a possibility of job losses. The Committee knew that these proposals would have caused "labor turmoil" and "difficulties in the re-employment of teachers", as it mentions in its Final Proposal (ibid., p. 4). An overall shrinking of time in the new Timetable was taken for granted, partly as a result of "the economic crisis we are experiencing" (ibid., p. 8) and the austerity measures the Government agreed with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, following the collapse of the country's banking system in 2012–2013. Such a shrinkage, states the Committee in its Proposal, "beyond its pedagogical dimension which is the balance of curriculum subjects and the unburdening of pupils from excessive workload, will also lead to the financial relief of the state" (ibid., p. 35). During the interviews, member #3 estimated that "going from the then existing 37-hour Timetable to the proposed 35-hour one, would have required, roughly speaking, 250 less teachers".

Within a context of uncertainty, teachers from all specializations and their disciplinary sub-associations of OELMEK sought to highlight the relevance of their subjects during the drafting of the reform proposal. Their voice was expressed in the print and the digital press, as well as during the meetings of their representatives with the Committee, thus exerting 'huge' pressure on its members. Member #1 outlined the pressure and the overall circumstances that had resulted in the adoption of averages from EU 21 and OECD countries, as follows:

> There was huge pressure exerted on us as well, which, I'd say, reached the point of absurdity because each specialization almost told us that all teaching hours should be allocated to their own subjects … [But] the aim was not to satisfy these demands or to surrender to the pressures of specializations … [Thus] under the burden of general pressures exerted and proposals submitted and views expressed by the specializations every day, we decided we had to pay attention to these averages.

In the Final Proposal, the attempt to justify and validate teaching time reductions with the help of averages is evident in relation to the subjects of Computer Science, Arts and Music Education, Physical Education, Design and Technology, and Home Economics, except the teaching of Foreign Languages. It manifests itself in playing down the reduction first and then juxtaposing the reduced subject-time allocation with the respective EU 21 and OECD averages, which are always lower even after the suggested reduction. By means of this discursive scheme, the Committee hopes to trivialize reductions conveying the message that the affected specializations of teachers should be satisfied with the proposals, because reductions ought to have been more significant. This discursive scheme also helps the Committee to disclaim the proposals projecting them as 'inevitable' and shifting responsibility to international norms. Here are a few examples from the text of the Final Proposal:

> Arts and Music Education, despite the small reduction, still accounts for 7.4% … against 5.7%/5.6% in [OECD and] Europe [respectively] …. Physical Education, despite the small reduction, still accounts for 7.4% … against 6.9%/7.2% in [OECD and] Europe [respectively]. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015, p. 23)

In relation to Foreign Languages, the Committee avoids framing its time reduction suggestion via this scheme since not only EU 21 and OECD averages (14.8% and 13.8% respectively) were higher after the suggested reduction from 14.1% to 13.2% (see table 1), but they also prescribed contradictory action.

However, resorting to EU 21 and OECD averages neither appeases reactions nor defuses criticism from the affected specializations of teachers. On the contrary, the adoption of averages is challenged as biased, aiming at promoting the interests of specific specializations. A typical example of questioning averages is the reaction of the Design and Technology Teachers Association (2015):

> We believe that it is no accident the unprecedented satisfaction of the demands of the teaching specializations represented in the Committee (Philologists, Mathematicians, Physicists). … The omissions and biased references to data and evidence and the way these are presented imply that skillfully and deliberately the Committee tried to justify its own preferred choices.

Securitizing timetable, perpetuating identity

For the Committee, drafting the reform proposal could not have relied solely on EU 21 and OECD averages, but should have also considered and been adjusted to the cultural realities and historic peculiarities of Cyprus. "After we had studied these averages," mentioned member #2 during the interviews, "we adjusted them to our education and its historical specificities". What justifies and explains why "we selectively applied averages during the drafting of our proposals" (member #3) is the fear of losing the Greek Orthodox identity of Cyprus and desire to safeguard it via the medium of schooling. Member #1 outlined this rationale as follows:

> It is necessary to experience as strongly as possible our *faith*, our *language* and our *history* [my emphasis] through schooling, in order to be able to continue our path in history, as our past mandates. This is a place that has been Greek for 3,500 years. Thus, whatever constitutes our effort to retain and preserve the historical identity of Cyprus, should be the foundation for the future.

Similar views were expressed by the majority of the Members of the Committee, highlighting, at the same time, that the averages of EU 21 and OECD nations ought to have been ignored in relation to the subjects of Religious Education, Language Education and History Education (if the averages mandate reductions to the time allocated to these subjects).

Religious Education

Despite that the time allocated to Religious Education is higher in Cyprus (5.5%) than the respective averages in EU 21 and OECD nations (3.7% and 4% respectively), the Committee keeps intact the subject-time allocation in the proposed new Timetable, thus ignoring European and international norms. The Committee justifies its decision in the following way:

> The subject relates with the aim of retaining our historical identity, the peculiarity of our semi-occupied homeland, and at the same time, is enriched with elements of our religious-cultural heritage, as well as with themes of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue and understanding. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015, p. 23)

The rejection of averages is dictated by several factors according to this justification. In addition to the presumably general desire to preserve the historic identity of the island, the fear of the Turkification and Islamization of Cyprus, an implied desire not to displease the Orthodox Church, and the subject's relevance to the cultivation of cosmopolitan ideals, all are important reasons for ignoring EU 21 and OECD norms.

The teaching of Modern Greek

For the Committee, a main threat to the historic identity of Cyprus is the declining levels of literacy because, as member #6 explains, "induction to a language means induction to the culture which this language reflects". In light of this threat, the Committee recommends the strengthening of Modern Greek:

> The problems in Greek language competency which pupils face and which have been repeatedly highlighted both through the results of external surveys and tests, and internally, by the evaluations of the Ministry, make it imperative to strengthen the teaching of Modern Greek. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015, p. 21)

After its strengthening by an extra teaching period, that is, from 13% to 14.7%, the time allocated to Modern Greek surpasses the respective EU 21 and OECD averages,

which are at 12.8% and 12.7% respectively. Yet a closer reading of the above justification reveals that there is indirect reference to comparative numbered data. The Committee evokes EU surveys and OECD's PISA tests where Cyprus has been recurrently ranked below average on literacy. These other forms of data contradict EU 21 and OECD subject-time allocation averages and are preferred because they help the Committee to validate their suggestion to strengthen Modern Greek.

The teaching of Ancient Greek

There is another contradiction in the Proposal. While cosmopolitanism is depicted as a desired outcome of Religious Education, it is feared in relation to Language Education and this justifies "a small reinforcement of the subject of Ancient Greek Language/Culture from 8.9% to 11%" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015, p. 22). The Committee outlines the logic behind "the partial strengthening of Ancient Greek" in the following way:

> Language awareness builds cultural identity and the teaching of Ancient Greek, in constant reference to Modern Greek, strengthens the sense of belonging. All these are deemed necessary in an era of cosmopolitanism and globalization and in light of looming threats to the Hellenism of Cyprus. (ibid., p. 37)

The aim of increasing the hours of the subject "is, amongst others, to conform partly to the respective subject time allocation in Greece where the subject is taught 5 periods per week" (ibid., p. 22). This shift in the frame of comparison reflects the historical educational ties with Greece and a desire to maintain them in the future, permitting the Committee, at the same time, to further justify their proposal of increasing the teaching hours of the subject in the proposed new Timetable. For the Committee, this shift was also of practical necessity, because the teaching of Ancient Greek was absent from European curricula, as several members stressed during the interviews. In spite of this claim, a closer look at the Final Proposal reveals the opposite:

> The presence of Ancient Greek continues to be constant throughout European Education Systems in Germany, Italy, Spain, France and the UK, where it has been upgraded recently. Ancient Greek is considered a subject that highly improves the pupil's cognitive infrastructure, as it is extremely demanding, as well as the school's learning achievements. The so-called humanistic gymnasia in Europe are schools of high standards. (ibid., pp. 37–38)

The shift back to an abstract juxtaposition with European systems, along with the move of cosmopolitanism as a threat, the need to converge with the standards of Greece, and the thesis of Ancient Greek as a demanding subject, all highlight the anxiety of the Committee about the decline of the subject in schools, as well as the controversial nature of its suggestion to strengthen it. A few days after the publication of the Final Proposal, the Computer Science Teachers Association (2015) contested

this suggestion in the following way: "It really sounds like a joke that in an effort to modernize schools, the teaching hours of Ancient Greek are increased and those of Computer Science are reduced!"

History Education

The Committee also keeps intact the time allocated to the teaching of history. Unlike Religious Education, there is no discussion attempting to justify this decision nor any reference to the respective EU 21 and OECD averages. This was discussed with the Committee during the interviews. Many of its members avoided explaining the reasons for overlooking the subject and this may relate to the public controversies of 2008–10 over history textbook revisions (Klerides, 2019). It may also relate to the difficulties the Committee must have faced in translating averages and adapting them to local realities. While Cyprus teaches history as a separate subject, EU 21 and OECD nations classify it as one of the subjects of Social Studies, along with geography and civics. Defining the average time allocated to History Education in EU 21 and OECD nations seems to have caused difficulties to the Committee, who may have responded by avoidance. Those who did respond to the issue of overlooking the subject, mentioned that Language Education was far more important than History Education for the survival of the Greek identity. Member #1 stressed that "retaining the historical identity is related not only to the subject of History, but more importantly, to the teaching of Modern and Ancient Greek", while member #3 stressed that "we needed to increase the teaching hours of language because, to be honest, it is pointless to have a person with historical knowledge, but with no ability to express one's thoughts".

Conclusion

In light of the internationalization, validation and securitization of the Timetable, it is no more fruitful to continue *simplifying* national policy-making in education assuming that comparison and numbers are *either* subjects of international power and domination *or* objects of national manipulations, indifference and opposition (e.g., Grek, 2019, 2009; Ozga et al., 2011; Martens & Niemann, 2010; Martens, 2007). Instead of centrally locating comparison and numbers in policy-making, they should be seen as *simply one* of the many voices, styles of reasoning and affects in "the evolving global education order" (Carney & Klerides, 2020) that are inextricably interwoven to shape policy and reform. Assemblages of policy and reform are partly shaped not only by a diversity of permeological and immunological responses to comparative numbered data. More importantly and as a consequence of the co-existence of irreconcilable responses to such forms of data, they are also constituted by

ambivalence, paradoxes and confusion. Such features cast doubts if national policy and reform are governed by comparison and numbers, as the global education policy literature suggests.

The above analysis shows that the maneuvers and endeavors of the Committee to strike a balance between the various permeological and immunological voices, styles of reasoning and affects, are not always successful. The different voices, styles of reasoning and affects are not always effectively combined and vacillations between them explains and accounts for the ambivalence, paradoxes and confusion that characterize the timetable reform proposal. On the one hand, driven by desire, hope and seduction, the Committee sees comparison and numbers as a force of progress and salvation from historical and contemporary problems. On the other hand, they are feared and rejected, paradoxically depicted as both a threat and a prop to the security and survival of the historic identity of Cyprus. While comparison and numbers are treated as an unproblematic force of progress and salvation, they are simultaneously projected as problematic and fragmented dictating agendas that pull in opposing directions. The co-existence of all these inconsistent points of views generates ambivalence making it impossible to determine 'the' location of comparison and numbers in the timetable reform proposal.

The location of comparison and numbers in the proposal is further destabilized by fluctuations between scientific rationality, political ideology and disciplinary specialization. Guided by obligation, attraction and ambition, the Members of the Committee apply sound reasoning and valid evidence upon which they base their decisions and advice for progress and salvation. The product of rational robustness and scientific evidence is however characterized by paradoxes and discrepancies, which are partly shaped by the fragmented and contradictory character of comparison and numbers, as well as by the ideological and disciplinary identifications of (the) Members of the Committee. One moment they adopt comparison and numbers fulfilling science's promise for a neutral and sound proposal, the next moment they discard them undermining this promise and laying the groundwork for the rejection of the reform proposal.

As a result of the failure to bridge and cover over the discrepancies and inconsistencies deriving from the heteroglossia of the evolving global education order, the timetable reform proposal appears to move back and forth between the various voices, styles of reasoning and affects that enter its composition. Such a conception of policy-making in which comparison and numbers are *indeterminately* entangled with other voices, styles of reasoning and affects, could be a point of departure for re-writing the global education policy field (Carney, 2019). This may be an elusive task, but it is a task that promises to revitalize the field along new complexities.

Note

1. The Gymnasium is the lower secondary education school in Cyprus and is compulsory for 3 years (age 12 to 15). The General Lyceum makes up the final three (non-compulsory) years of secondary education. While Grade A of the Lyceum follows a common core curriculum with a few subject specialization electives, Grades B and C follow tailor-made timetables which are based on the selection of group course streams (specializations), specialization subjects and subjects of special interest. The Committee of Secondary Education submitted a separate set of proposals for the reform of the Timetables for Grades B and C of the Lyceum, which are excluded from this study because there is no reference to comparative numbered data in them.

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