

Book presentation
‘Children as social researchers; a Resource Book for Teachers and Other Educators’
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Dear ladies and gentlemen,

It was with pleasure that I accepted Dr Spyrou’s invitation to talk about the resource book being launched today, as I consider ‘Children as Social Researchers; a Resource Book for Teachers and Other Educators’ unique and an example of breakthrough scholarship in a number of ways.

In explaining why I think this, I will be bringing in my own perspective, as a teacher educator, involved in both initial, postgraduate and in-service teacher training on curriculum and instruction, who is consistently faced with challenges in supporting teachers viewing their role in schools and in the classroom in self-reflective, critical and creative ways and their relationships with children in ways informed by progressive and critical pedagogies. I will also bring into this presentation my perspective as a researcher and academic activist who has been involved in research with teachers in primary school settings in Cyprus as well as in research across the divide in Cyprus and has first-hand experience of the challenges these entail.

So why do I consider this book an example of breakthrough scholarship:

Firstly, it is a book about research methodology encompassing a range of topics and issues in doing social research. There is a variety of chapters addressing different topics such as research design, approaches to research methodology, research ethics, doing field research, report writing and disseminating research findings, collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data, social research and children. The scope of the book is therefore an achievement, as it manages to cover almost all the needs of a novice researcher or a teacher who would like to teach social research methods to children.

Secondly, it is a book about teachers supporting children in becoming social researchers. This topic moves beyond even progressive research designs such as those of action research as developed over the last 60 years (mainly in Anglo-Saxon contexts), wherein teachers are supported in reflecting on their practice in collaboration with researchers. Moving beyond this then, this project has been about empowering children in becoming social researchers as a journey through which they will develop, amongst other things, critical and active citizenship. This topic is skilfully addressed in the first chapter of the book and I will not comment on it in detail here. Suffice it to say, that from my perspective, this approach fits in perfectly and is informed by a century-old calls by pedagogues and theorists of education for a progressive or child-centric approach to education (e.g. Dewey, Neill etc) and half-a-century-old calls for critical, socio-centric and

anti-oppressive education (Freire, Illich etc); an education which puts the child, its needs, curiosity, trepidations, interests, concerns and anxieties at the centre of its attention and which provides opportunities for children to interact with adults in democratic ways where power is shared, not imposed; negotiated, not oppressive. These pedagogical traditions also aspire that children will influence their worlds in ways that the traditional school does not allow and that they will be supported in exploring and evaluating social realities in critical ways with a clear view for social change. This is a project that would make these pedagogues and visionaries feel that their ideas are alive and well and influential.

Thirdly, it is a publication which has resulted from a project which managed to bring together scholars from the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot community, with expertise in social research methods. In the divided context of Cyprus, it is therefore an example of how scholars can collaborate in setting, pursuing and achieving shared goals. It is also an example of groundbreaking work in how scholars can point towards new directions, towards a reconceptualisation of the future shared by all Cypriots in addressing together even issues of education-a historically segregated arena.

Fourthly, it is a book bringing together researchers, teachers and children, breaking down the traditional 'boundaries' of the academic and school worlds and, on the contrary, facilitating a process of mutual and refreshing interaction wherein researchers become mentors in situations where research takes empirical forms at the school level to be conducted by and for teachers and children. As far as teachers and children are concerned, this project managed to bring them in contact with the research perspective and provided alternative tools and perspectives with which to engage with school realities and their own experiences within them.

Fifthly, it is published in three languages, addressed to all schools in Cyprus across the divide and it could therefore be expected to have a greater impact than to the one of publications we usually encounter as outputs from projects. The decision to publish in 3 languages has been a difficult and expensive one, I am sure. I would like to assure the project partners, however, that it is also a worthwhile one, as the language barrier is always an issue in projects bringing together Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot educators and the fact that this publication is now available to both Greek-speakers and Turkish-speakers in Cyprus epitomises the democratic, inclusive and respectful character of this project as well as creates opportunities for communication and collaboration amongst teachers across the divide in using the same resource material.

Sixthly, it is an example of the kinds of new knowledge that inter-disciplinary collaboration may produce, since the authors of the chapters represent a variety of disciplines or areas of expertise, ranging from anthropology and sociology to educational research to political science and international relations. This is a variety that rarely does one find in research in general and social research methodology textbooks in particular. The outcome, as one reads one contribution after the other, one chapter after the other, is enriched by these different disciplines represented in the book and the kinds of perspectives they bring to social research and children.

Seven, it is a book published in Cyprus; this should not sound as too extra-ordinary; however in a publishing context such as a the Cypriot one, wherein a lot or most of the

resources available to teachers and academics are published in Greek and Turkish in the respective countries, this publication is breakthrough in its being grounded in the Cypriot context, a characteristic that many Greek and Turkish publications lack. This reason becomes all the more important when one remembers that it is also a book written in three languages.

Eight, the book is written and presented in reader-friendly ways. It is clearly locating the reader at the centre of the attention of the authors in well structured, clear and condense chapters which start with the 'learning objectives' anticipated by the authors for the reader once the chapter is read; and conclude with 'tips for communicating the material to children'; with suggestions for 'classroom discussion questions'; with a summary of 'what children need to know'. In each chapter the reader will also find helpful tables suggesting examples and exercises they can use in teaching social research methods to children at school. Each chapter is indeed a reminder of why this publication is called 'a resource book' by the authors, an accurate title as it claims no exclusivity, but is merely offered as a tool to teachers.

There are of course a number of other reasons one could find of why this book is so important in its innovative approach and conceptualisation. These are just some of the reasons I came up with from my perspective and I am sure the authors and the readers-instructors of this resource book will find a lot more. Limitations or weaknesses are in my view only opportunities for more challenges in the future; I would therefore like to conclude by thanking the project partners for enriching our resource materials (and the bookshelves of every school in Cyprus) with this exceptional contribution as well as the Centre for paving the way with this and its past projects for innovative approaches to research in Cyprus. I would finally thus like to express my anticipation for the new challenges I am sure the Centre will take up in the future.

Thank you

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