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Comparison of greek primary education curricula in terms of philosophical orientations: a critical approach

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to contribute to the criticism of the Greek Curricula (CA) of Primary Education Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework (CTCF)-CA (2003) and new Curricula (2021), in order to identify issues of sequences or changes in the context. Initially, the operational definition and research in the field of study of CAs is established and the context in which CAs are reformed is presented. The methodology applied was based on the content analysis in the light of critical pedagogy. From the comparative study of the teaching subjects of the CAs (2003 & 2021) issues of sequence and change emerge which are discussed globally in the framework of the CAs theory. The scopes and the philosophical orientations as analyzed and used in the official texts are not consistent with the purposes and contents as they are listed in the teaching subjects. The educational policy is technocratically aimed at social efficiency and not at social justice as it is claimed in CA.

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Key words: curricula, greek primary education, philosophical orientation, critical pedagogy

Introduction

This paper attempts a systematic comparison of the purposes of the teaching subjects for primary education, as formulated in the previous CA (2003) and in new (2021) for the public schools in Greece, in terms of the philosophical orientations and purposes of the teaching subjects.

Theoretical framework and interpretive tools

The curriculum is complex and multifaceted, operating in a variety of focal points and in a variety manifestations (Adamson & Morris, 2007). The curriculum constitutes a critical pedagogical political theory that expresses specific ideological assumptions, since it connects knowledge with social practices that legitimize dominant cultural norms, giving a specific picture of the world that the student is called upon to understand through a dialectic relationship (Au, 2012: 29). CAs are a structural element of the educational process. Each curriculum is understood through its context. By context is meant all the text surrounding a word, a sentence, a paragraph that allows the reader to better understand its meaning or value.

This paper focuses on the texts of the Greek official CAs, which were approached with a theoretical framework from the fields of CA, educational policy, and critical pedagogy (Grollios & Gounari, 2016). Specifically, a perspective was adopted in which CA is defined as a socio-political, ideological, cultural, institutional text (Pinar et al., 2008). This approach of the CA, especially the

official-institutional one, as a means for the specific political and social goals of the state or the wider society, is found early in the specific field of the study of programs (Bobbit, 2004).

The new CAs (2021) were reformed in the context of the broader Educational Reform and it was considered as "necessary to write new CAs that will incorporate the positives of the previous CAs but also respond first of all to the needs of all students, to the new social reality and to the new data of the sciences for teaching, learning, knowledge objects and their practices, as well as the development of the skills that are necessary for the citizens of the 21st century" (IEP, 2003).

Methodological approach

This paper attempts a qualitative discourse analysis of the general purpose of each teaching subject of primary education, in order to determine the philosophical orientations and purposes that pervade the texts of the previous (2003) and new (2021) CA. In particular, from the tripartite framework of CA comparison suggested by Adamson & Morris (2007), the critical perspective was adopted in relation to the evaluative or interpretive perspective, because official CAs were investigated, analyzed and commented on as a text of political theory expressing specific ideological assumptions and the critical interpretation of the purposes and intentions was attempted by looking for the declarative and factual conditions.

For the qualitative analysis of the texts, techniques of content analysis and constant comparison of content were combined. Analytical concepts were drawn from the field of curriculum theory, specifically the philosophical orientations that have been identified and discussed from an inquiry perspective (Marsh & Willis, 2007) and critical pedagogy (Gounari & Grollios, 2010).

During the bibliographic review (Filippou & Karagiorgi, 2014) of philosophical orientations, Flouris (2008) classifies them in theories of: social effectiveness, child study, academic theory and social reconstruction. According to the same logic, Pyrgiotakis (2009) also distinguishes them as Flouris. According to Koutselini (2009), the philosophical orientations are distinguished into technocratic, humanitarian-progressive, academic and reconstructive. According to Matsaggouras (2009) there are four approaches: the method-centered, the child-centered, the knowledge-centered and the socio-centered approach. Hatzigeorgiou (2004) refers to the philosophical orientations according to Eisner, Schiro and Grundy, and connects them with the corresponding philosophical bases of idealism, realism, pragmatism and existentialism.

The present paper focused on the official text of CA as an educational policy text that captures a society's basic vision of education and expected to influence the textbooks or materials and teachers' practice.

In the context of Greece it was considered important because, moreover, the importance given to it during the Educational Reform made the official texts central, both in terms of their development process and in terms of the implementation process (experimental schools, teacher training).

Focusing on the official CA text, there is from the outset the limitation that the analysis focused only on the intended CA, and indeed only on the 12 teaching subjects of the new CA (2021) that were common to the previous CTCF-CA (2003) primary education curriculum.

Results

Objectives of the CA (2003-2021) listed below are the data obtained from the analysis between CTCF-CA (2003) and New CA (2021) in the 12 common subjects.

Table 1. Objectives and scopes of the Curricula (CA) 2003 and 2021

Subject	CTCF-CA (2003)	New CA 2021
Geography	for students to acquire basic knowledge and familiarize themselves with methods	Recognize maps, derive information from them and use them effectively in their daily lives, Identify basic geographic elements, develop skills, attitudes and adopt behaviors, decision-making, problem-solving, working plans or small geographic research and presentation of their results, skills of transferring the knowledge of geographical concepts to their daily life.
Arts Education	<p>The general purpose of teaching Visual Arts in Primary and High School is for the student to get to know the Visual Arts, delve into them and enjoy them</p> <p>The student's creativity, the production of artistic work, his participation in the visual arts. Knowledge and use of materials...</p> <p>This Curriculum focuses on the mental dimension of the creative process, as children are asked in the Visual Arts courses to make choices, make decisions, reflect, synthesize, think analytically and abstractly, invent, investigate and, even , to think critically. p.1</p>	The development of investigative skills, through experiential visual learning, is done with topics that highlight connections with the cultural and social experience of each student, which reflects aspects of contemporary visual culture...to know, to participate and to enjoy creative visual exploration through the cultivation of a multi-faceted visual literacy, so as to interpret, evaluate and consciously choose ways of participating in visual culture. At the same time, the development of critical skills allows them to understand and appreciate the world's cultural heritage with sensitivity to social, cultural
Religious Education	<p>In the acquisition of knowledge about the Christian faith and the Orthodox Christian tradition... development of religious consciousness... promotion of Orthodox spirituality as an individual and collective experience</p> <p>In dealing with social problems and great contemporary dilemmas... developing independent thought and free expression... evaluating Christianity as a factor in improving people's lives</p> <p>...students are invited to acquire the appropriate skills, so as to coexist harmoniously with all people and with the religiously "other" and to cooperate contributing to the orderly functioning of society.</p>	<p>contribute:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In shaping free, responsible and critically thinking citizens – In the understanding and interpretation of basic aspects of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, as recorded in the Holy Bible, in its doctrinal and moral teaching, in its devotional life and in the tradition of its Holy Fathers. – In the all-round, harmonious and balanced development of the intellectual and psychosomatic powers of the students, so that they have the possibility to develop into complete personalities, to be able to live creatively, with love for the human, life and nature and to be possessed of loyalty to the homeland and the genuine elements of the orthodox Christian tradition, which is a fundamental element of modern Greek and European education.

History	the development of historical thought and historical consciousness. The development of historical thinking concerns the understanding of historical events through the examination of causes and effects, while the cultivation of historical consciousness... students can acquire not only the awareness that the modern world is a continuation of the past, but also the perception that the modern historical horizon is directly connected to his life. The purpose of historical thinking and historical consciousness is thus linked to the more general purpose of education which refers to the preparation of responsible citizens.	The general purpose of teaching History is linked to the broader and ultimate purpose of education, which refers to the understanding of the Greek past and the formation of life attitudes on the part of the students, so that they develop into integrated personalities and become active, democratic, free, autonomous and responsible citizens.
Social and Political/Civics Education	The social and political education of students, tomorrow's citizens,...to deal with the difficult social and moral problems that often appear in their lives, both in the immediate and in the wider physical and social environment...to acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills that are essential elements for their free, responsible and active participation in social, economic and political development,... the development of our Greek identity and consciousness	the development of values, knowledge, skills and attitudes in students, so that they become active democratic citizens with critical capacity and participatory action. Citizens who participate effectively in a democratic culture of trust and cooperation,
Mathematics	the purpose of teaching Mathematics is part of the general aims of Education and concerns the contribution to the completion of the student's personality and his successful social integration,	to appreciate and value Mathematics ... to develop mathematical processes and practices ... to utilize a variety of resources and tools ..introduce students to concepts, skills and thinking strategies that are essential in everyday life and support learning...contribute in a decisive way to their development as successful lifelong "learners"...build a stable conceptual basis in Mathematics, which will allow them to use their knowledge and develop academically. ...recognizes that different learning styles exist in a classroom, encourages expectations that require the use of a variety of teaching and assessment tools and strategies, and provides all students with mathematical challenges for the progressive development of higher-order thinking

Study of the Environ-ment	acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills, values and attitudes, which enable the learner to observe, describe, interpret and to some extent predict the functioning, relationships and interactions of the natural and man-made environment within which ... development of cognitive connections and interactions between different subjects, in which the emphasis is placed on treating the student as a researcher.	the formation of the modern, active, responsible citizen, with personal fulfillment and development, who, in addition to ensuring his quality living with values and with sufficient abilities (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) that are updated throughout his life, is aware and interested for world peace, human dignity, cultural heritage, sustainable development, innovation, entrepreneurship, the protection of the natural environment, its participation in solving environmental problems on the planet, taking initiatives to upgrade the quality of life of all peoples, guaranteeing human rights, justice, democracy, social cohesion and decision-making in the internationalized society with equal treatment of all peoples.
Music	development and cultivation of the ability for aesthetic pleasure when listening, performing and creating music as one of the manifestations of artistic expression and creativity of humans.	the cultivation of students' musicality and musical skills, develop skills in playing musical instruments, show improvisation and composition skills, acquire knowledge and skills in music writing and reading,
Language	aims to develop students' ability to handle written and spoken language with competence and self-confidence, consciously, responsibly, effectively and creatively, so that they can actively participate in their school and wider society"	focuses on learning the written word (writing and reading), on students' broader literacy in a variety of media ..broaden their thinking and be able to express themselves in spoken and written language with fluency, accuracy and factual appropriateness, so as to communicate their ideas and evaluations in their environment and to communicate actively through the production and reception of it of speech" (p. 2)
ICT	for the students to acquire an initial but structured and comprehensive understanding of the basic functions of the computer, within a perspective of technological literacy and recognition of Information and Communication Technology, while developing wider skills of critical thinking, ethics, social behavior as well as a willingness to activate and creating both individually and in collaboration with other people or as members of a group... acquiring the ability to understand the basic principles that govern the use of computing technology in important human activities (such as: information and its processing, communication, entertainment, new possibilities of approaching knowledge), the necessary conditions are created that favor a pedagogic and teaching methodology centered on the student, the differentiation and personalization of learning opportunities is facilitated and, finally, students acquire the necessary critical and social skills that will ensure equal access to knowledge and lifelong learning opportunities. ... preparation for their participation in the Knowledge Society by cultivating life skills.	to develop the necessary digital and computing competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes, attitudes and values), which enable them to make adequate use of computing systems, digital devices and the Internet in order to collect, organize, manage and analyze data, expressed, ...show behaviors of an active and responsible citizen. The objectives of the CA concern the achievement of digital and IT literacy and the building of computational thinking and include five dimensions: the technological (fundamental knowledge and skills of using digital technologies), the cognitive, the social (information management, communication, collaboration), the dimension of problem solving with digital technologies (creativity, modeling, decision-making, critical thinking, innovation) and the dimension of digital culture which concerns knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors and values regarding digital learning, digital citizenship and digital security.

Natural Sci-ences	In Physics and Chemistry, it is also intended that students come into contact with modern ideas and topics from the field of Physics and Chemistry, The teacher, utilizing modern findings of cognitive psychology and educational research, is possible, using appropriate activities:.. to help the student to discern the inadequacy of his views on the interpretation of phenomena, lead him to build and use scientific standards-"models" e.g	The purpose of the CA is the transfer of the scientific theories of the natural sciences, the procedures they foresee and their applications in the educational process...the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skills and the formation of attitudes required for the scientific or working future or – simply – the citizenship of the students, but also consistent with their age, cognitive characteristics....the objectives of the Physics relate to the formation of future citizens, the development of skills, and the literacy in natural sciences of all students. The emphasis of the teaching process moves from the subject matter and the teacher to the students, to a strongly student-centered approach with teacher guidance.
Physical Education	The purpose of Physical Education in compulsory education is to contribute as a priority to the physical development of students and at the same time to help in their mental and spiritual cultivation as well as their harmonious integration into society. Priority is given to the development of students' motor skills	aims to equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that will lead them to an active and healthy lifestyle. Movement is an end in itself but also the means that will make the students physically active and will promote their health and quality of life, for life... aims at students' physical/physical literacy, the necessary motor and social skills and cognitive concepts to participate in a variety of physical activities

Critical Analysis

In both CA for Language, it seems that there is no child-centered but knowledge-centered and method-centered approach, since the student should handle the language effectively, without reference to the particular abilities or needs that may exist.

In both CA for Civic Education, emphasis is placed on values and skills as tomorrow's citizens without giving specific cases or explaining and further analyzing cases where the above does not apply, e.g. unequal distribution of funds in the European Union. The economic, social, political and cultural needs are not mentioned and the existing unjust conditions for many social groups are not questioned. The aim of the curriculum is social efficiency rather than social justice. Students are asked to obey and conform to the circumstances rather than challenge and assert. Participatory action is mentioned in the CA (2021), in the strengthening of democratic identity and democratic consciousness and action, however it is not ascertained that these are given meaning.

In both CA for Mathematics, it seems that the child-centered approach is absent since the emphasis is placed on the successful social integration of the student, the completion of his personality as a "lifelong" student and future worker. Compliance with the conditions as they are created will allow them to utilize their knowledge and develop academically.

In CA for Art, reference is made to the connections made by the student, to his cultural and social experience and to the development of critical skills. Of course, the emphasis is on the student getting to know and delving into topics that are already predetermined and already selected.

Also both CA for Religious Education, are confessional in nature and promote the dominant religious culture. There are no child-centered elements since the emphasis is on the knowledge that the student will acquire about the Orthodox Christian faith and the teachings of the Orthodox Church. There is a reference to the formation of free, responsible and critically thinking citizens and to be able to live creatively, with love for human, life and nature but within the context of the homeland and the orthodox Christian tradition. Here it is clearly seen that cultural and religious differences are not taken into account and therefore the student as a carrier of socio-cultural and religious wealth is ignored, just as he is also ignored as a producer of knowledge and a doer.

Both CA for Study of the Environment, emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills. In fact, in the New CA (2021) it refers to innovation, entrepreneurship, elements that make it harmonized with the imperatives of capital.

In both CA for Music Education, the development of enjoyment and listening skills are non-child-centered elements. The reference that the child can create through improvisation also targets the process itself. Also, there is no mention of the different abilities and how they could be used.

In both CA for ICT, the main aim is for students to develop the necessary digital and computing skills, school knowledge is acquired through scientific knowledge processes. Reference is made to the pedagogic and teaching methodology that is centered on the student, and the differentiation and personalization of learning opportunities is facilitated. However, the main objective is to prepare students for participation in the Knowledge Society by cultivating life skills.

Therefore, in CA for Geography, child-centered orientation seems to be absent in the two programs, since a series of goals are given for the students to acquire knowledge, develop abilities and acquire skills. The student is not understood as a producer of knowledge but as an executor of pre-determined goals.

In both CA Physics, emphasis is placed on the what and how of knowledge, the teacher as a leader of the procedure, who using modern findings of cognitive psychology and educational research, it is possible, with the use of appropriate activities: to help the student to distinguish the inadequacy of his views for the interpretation of the phenomena, to lead him to the construction and use of scientific standards-“models”. So, the student’s self-awareness and the betterment of society are not at the heart of CAs.

In CA for Physical Education, their harmonious integration into society cannot be interpreted as a child-centered element, the emphasis is again on skills (motor and cognitive) and knowledge of physical/physical literacy. The reference that a student will promote the health and quality of his life, for life, can be considered child-centered.

In CA for History, promote cultural transmission and continuity by developing national identity to ensure coherence and continuity. There is no mention of the functional involvement of students to produce new knowledge and interpret historical events and make connections to understand contemporary reality.

Discussion

A general conclusion is that the new CA (2021) were not reformed based on an evaluation of the previous ones (2003). Although, as it is explicitly stated, it was considered necessary to write new CAs that will incorporate the positives of the previous CAs, but will first of all respond to the needs of all students.

We notice that in the CA (2021) the aims of the programs of Social and Political education, Mathematics, Religious Education, Study of the Environment, ICT, Physics and Chemistry, and History deal with the formation of the student as the future citizen.

At the same time, the program for Religious Education focuses on the Orthodox Christian tradition, which is a fundamental element of modern Greek and European education, the program for Geography and Study of the Environment is based on the sustainable development of the planet, the Mathematics is based on awareness of the nature of mathematical knowledge and its critical/big ideas that connect and unify the individual fields of mathematical science.

For Music it prioritizes the cultivation of musicality and musical skills in the context of the modern post-industrial and multicultural society, in the context of the information age we are living in today. Physics takes into account research results from other sciences such as psychology as well as results for student performance. The program for ICT takes into account the current state of technology and its impact on all sectors. In Physical Education, the primary purpose is physical/physical literacy in terms of motor, cognitive, behavioral and moral/emotional/social. In History, the main purpose is historical consciousness and continuity with national identity. In Geography and Study of the Environment based on the sustainable development of the planet without looking for the main causes for the destruction of the planet with reference to the production of capital and the socio-political conditions that they shape.

As Grollios (2022a) has mentioned, there is no single and clear orientation in all teaching subjects. Of course, despite the heterogeneity they present, they are connected by a common thread in terms of adapting to the conditions that are formed in a socio-economic and ideological-political context, promoting a uniformity and non-divergence from the dictates of capital, the market and the European Union. That is why in 7 of the 12 programs the goal is tomorrow's citizens and the cultivation of skills according to the labor market. The "required" skills include creativity and flexibility in a "changing" environment.

It is noteworthy that they claim to be student-centered by taking the student into account, but on critical analysis they seem to contradict themselves. The emphasis is on the cultivation of skills and abilities mainly to enable the student to cope as a future citizen. The desired and intended skills listed are over thirty and include "soft skills". About the values such as democracy, justice, respect, human rights are presented as already held and not demanded. In all the programs there is no reference with specific examples of the existing conditions that prevail in the EU and in the whole world, for the resulting inequalities, wars with millions of civilian casualties. It seems that the words are used vaguely, without a clear definition just for the simple reference and not for the essential criticism of the consequences of imperialism.

It appears to "perpetuate a European factory model of schooling that ignores students' interests and backgrounds" (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003: 80). If the Eurocentric projection is challenged, with cultural products and lessons based on students' lived experiences, then students can enjoy strong community support and involvement. (Adamson & Morris, 2007: 280)

There are references to social justice, disability, social gender but there is no mention about the class issues, gender discrimination, vulnerability and economic inequalities resulting from the exclusion of certain social groups. Even when references are made to the cultivation of critical skills, this is done on a superficial level of "rebuilding attitudes", "cultural acclimatization", "hope for a better world".

Therefore, although the purposes appear as reconstructive and aimed at social reconstruction, we observe that not only are they not confirmed by the content but instead they serve to fully adapt to the existing conditions without any deviation. This also constitutes a deliberate distortion and appropriation of terms and concepts without responding to the basic purposes and philosophical orientations of the programs. This is confirmed when student-centered programs are characterized but ultimately the goal is the cultivation of skills by the teacher for the future assimilation of the student as a future worker who will have to adapt to the ever-changing conditions. Also, just as there is no single frame of reference for the philosophical orientation, the same can be seen in the use of the student-centered approach. The use of the term "student-centered" takes on a different perspective in each program. Below it will be mentioned some examples to make it more clear:

- in Language: "the student is at the center of the educational process and determines both the beginning (the purpose) and the end (the achievement) of each teaching plan" p.10
- in Social and Political Education "the focus is on the student who is encouraged to learn and apply knowledge and skills... Project-based learning contrasts with traditional teaching in which a linear path of knowledge is followed" p.12
- In Geography: "constructive teaching" is a "student-centered model".
- in Physics: "the emphasis of the teaching process moves from the subject and the teachers to the students, to a strongly student-centered approach with the guidance of the teacher" p.2
- in Music: "student-centered teaching method, with the application of which students acquire knowledge and skills responding to the individualized needs of students" p.12
- in Study of the Environment: "learning environments are adopted and organized which focus on the students" p.4
- in ICT: "Learning design emphasizes the overall activity of the class or group of students"
- in Religious Studies: "the emphasis moves from the subject, the teachers and the teaching process to the students (student-centered) and the results" p.7
- in Mathematics "supports the cognitive-individual (student-centered) and the socio-cultural-participatory approach" p.8
- in History: "teachers organize a student-centered environment with strong teacher-student and inter-student relationships"

It is noteworthy to mention that the clear priority of the EU with the OECD guidelines is the development of students' skills through the clear pre-defined objectives in the CA (Priestley, Alvunger, Philippou & Soini, 2021).

At the same time, the enforcement of specific educational policies through funding guides the development of business-oriented curricula (Hill, 2007). That is why the actions of the European Commission (2016) prioritize the strengthening of digital tools and entrepreneurship by proposing "New skills for new jobs and redesigning education". If the CA are intended to prepare students as potential workers, they create a capitalist condition that leads students to a highly competitive and method-centric approach, then education falls short and is removed from its essential role.

Education and CA that focus on preparing students for the labor market limit students' all-round development. As Rikowski (2020) states: "The tragedy of labor can disappear and, with this fading away, education is freed from the shackles of capitalist labor as it becomes increasingly redundant as a generator of labor power qualities designed to work in capitalist labor processes".

There is the targeted intent and purpose of developing and nurturing skills through CA based on labor market requirements and harnessing these skills for the benefit of the economic framework and capital. In the curricula of Greece it is stated that every student is the future citizen who must meet the needs for specialization, as dictated by the developments of the present and the prospects of the future. Students should be able to apply the knowledge and skills they acquire in their daily life, in their social activities as well as in their professional employment, for a more meaningful connection between schooling and the labor market.

The contribution of this paper is the outline of the philosophical orientation of the primary education CA (2003, 2021) in a critical approach. It is confirmed by the analysis that the CA, although they are presented as child-centered, nevertheless prove to be pedagogical and in fact aim at specific ones that are harmonized according to the criteria of the capitalist system, because there is no distinction in the needs of the students, there are individual differences between the students due to the different starting point, of different experiences, skills, backgrounds, needs, motivations, etc. Educational and cultural capital according to Bourdieu (1986) is not taken into account, which refers to the culture, structure, socio-economic and educational background of the family, the status of the family, the form of power and control, the cultural context and learning style. At the same time, it does not enable the teacher to reflect on the teaching practices with the aim of self-transcendence and from being a simple implementer of the program due to predetermined goals and objectives to be able to become the 'transformative intellectual' (Rodríguez, 2008).

A valuable insight in critical pedagogy and policy development is that CA appears as a preparatory filter that sorts students according to their skills and prepares them for the labor market. Students are presented as products, in a context of commodification aimed at cultivating skills, monitoring and evaluating these skills, and finally disciplining production systems according to the rules of the global market (Sounoglou, 2024).

Conclusion

From the above it is obvious that the concept of "student-centeredness" is not clearly defined and each time it is used with a different meaning. Therefore, it is very difficult to define an approach for all teaching subjects since each time a different meaning is given. At the same time, the concept of student-centeredness negates itself, when there are so many predetermined "expected learning outcomes" with specific teaching goals. All these characteristics have as their starting point the social effectiveness of Bobbit (Grollios & Gounari, 2015; Grollios, 2022b). According to which students should adapt to the prevailing socio-economic and ideological-political conditions (Au, 2024). So, it turns out that the reference of the concepts either intentionally or unintentionally leads to a misunderstanding of the teachers and those directly concerned. Because, formulaic terms are used and the legalization of educational policies is technocratically aimed at social efficiency and not at social justice as it is popularly claimed. In summary, the article aimed to identify the philosophical orientations of the CA and critically analyze the content to highlight the contradictions and distortions that lead to confusion. The concepts as analyzed above and used in the official texts are not consistent with the purposes and contents as they are listed, with the result that the CA acquires a hermaphrodite policy that does not serve the pedagogical function it should have in general.

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