

## Why History Education?

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Nadine Fink  
Markus Furrer  
Peter Gautschi  
(Eds)

# Why History Education?



**WOCHEN  
SCHAU  
GESCHICHTE**

Nadine Fink, Markus Furrer, Peter Gautschi (Eds)

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**WOCHEN  
SCHAU  
WISSENSCHAFT**

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# Why History Education?

## An Introduction

The question of the meaning of history education has increasingly been raised recently. The teaching of history must assert itself in the field of tension between politics, economics and culture. History teaching in classes has come under pressure in many places. On the one hand, it can be observed that the teaching of history is being instrumentalized in various countries in order to strengthen nationalism. On the other hand, history as an independent school subject is in the process of disappearing from the curricula of different countries. Last but not least, the strong utilitarian and competence orientation of many school systems raises the question of what learning history can actually contribute to understanding the present and the functioning of society. This fundamental uncertainty about the goal and purpose of history education stands in strange contrast to the public sphere, where a veritable boom in historical culture can be experienced. But even there, confidence in the orienting function of history in both the present and the future is low.

### **1. Fundamental uncertainties about the aims and purposes of history teaching**

We at the 'Institute of History Education and Memory Cultures' at the Lucerne University of Teacher Education and the University of Teacher Education, State of Vaud, in Switzerland took this problem, which has been around for a long time but has become more accentuated in recent years, as an opportunity to organize a digital conference in the 'International Society for History Didactics' from 16 to 18 September 2021. The use and purpose of history are always being questioned anew because societies are constantly re-locating themselves. From observations, however, it can be concluded that, in many places in and beyond Europe, the question of the meaning and purpose of teaching history has come to a head, especially at school.

Most of the articles presented in this volume, from four continents and 18 countries, with a total of 31 authors, were originally presented to this conference, each individually exploring the question of the function of history education in different contexts and from different perspectives.<sup>1</sup> The question ‘Why History Education?’ is primarily one of history didactics. Nevertheless, it is generally linked to the question of the significance of history in our societies. Moreover, it is older and is being raised again and again by historians. Why do people concern themselves with their history, and what do they hope to gain from it? What is the point of history?

## 2. What is the point of history?

Particularly well-known are statements on the nature of history from the pens of writers, philosophers and other intellectuals, which are often quoted more or less accurately and which sometimes take a pessimistic view of the usefulness of the discipline. The German writer Ingeborg Bachmann is credited with saying: ‘History teaches all the time, but it finds no pupils.’<sup>2</sup> The German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is known to have concluded: ‘But what experience and history teach is this, that peoples and governments have never learned anything from history and acted on lessons that could have been drawn from it.’<sup>3</sup> And George Bernard Shaw, following the philosopher, is quoted as saying, ‘Hegel was right when he said that we learn from history that one can never learn anything from history.’<sup>4</sup> Such quotations are numerous and evoke an anthropological pessimism.

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1 Further contributions can be found in: *International Journal of Research on History Didactics, History Education, and History Culture. Yearbook of the International Society for History Didactics (JHEC) (40) 2022.*

2 In the original German version: ‘Die Geschichte lehrt dauernd, aber sie findet keine Schüler.’ See the citation website: <https://faehrtensuche.wordpress.com/2015/07/11/aus-der-geschichte-lernen-2/> (30.1.2022).

3 In the original German version: ‘Was die Erfahrung aber und die Geschichte lehren, ist dieses, dass Völker und Regierungen niemals etwas aus der Geschichte gelernt und nach Lehren, die aus derselben zu ziehen gewesen wären, gehandelt haben.’ See: Hegel G.W.F. (1840) *Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, ed. by E. Gans, 2nd edition, Berlin: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, 9: [https://books.google.ch/books?id=ogEiGnYbWowC&pg=PA3&source=kp\\_read\\_button&hl=de&credir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.ch/books?id=ogEiGnYbWowC&pg=PA3&source=kp_read_button&hl=de&credir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false) (30.1.2022).

4 See e.g. <https://www.buboquote.com/en/quote/2882-shaw-hegel-was-right-when-he-said-that-we-learn-from-history-that-man-can-never-learn-anything> (30.1.2022).

By their very nature, historians are concerned with the question of the meaning of history. In antiquity, Cicero's formula of history as the 'Master of Life' (*historia magistra vitae*) was very present. History became a kind of 'learning machine' with its inexhaustible reservoir of sound insights and recipes from earlier times (Tanner, 2011: 271). The Enlightenment, and with it modernity, brought a loss of confidence in the orienting power of historical narratives, which could no longer simply be carried forward into a concept of progress. Wilhelm Busch aptly summed this up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the words: 'First, things turn out differently and second, they don't turn out the way you think.'<sup>5</sup> The emergence of history as a modern science thus specified the question of the discipline's purpose. It should be pointed out, as the German historian Jörg Baberowski notes, that history is not simply already there, but is produced by historians in various ways (2005: 10). This finding has enjoyed a widespread consensus since the cultural turn in the 1980s. However, it seems important to us to emphasize this aspect once again. In the study of history, the question of theory is closely linked to the question of the meaning of one's own subject: 'What is history for?' History is not a linear arrangement of historical events according to cause and effect, which is what the Enlightenment thinkers and later historians and philosophers of history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century still assumed. In order to grasp, order and interpret the past, theories are needed as a basis. Or to put it differently: 'We are not confronted with events, but always only with their interpretations' (Baberowski, 2005: 9). For the German historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler, history basically contains the 'only learning material' from which people can and want to learn (1988). For the Swiss historian Norbert Furrer, it is 'knowledge of the potential for change in what currently exists' (2003: 61): 'It is based on the conviction that our reality has become and is not given once and for all, that it will be different because it was different' (Furrer, 2003: 61). The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga formulated this in a similar way in response to the question 'how does history determine the present?', which always presents itself anew (1947: 95). The history didactician Karl-Ernst Jeismann concluded from this that history is not to be learned as material, but must be worked out as an idea (2002: 14).

However, the question of the meaning of history is not solely one of historical theory. The Swiss historian Herbert Lüthy noted: 'Every society and collective that becomes self-aware organizes its history in order to establish itself and its self-awareness' (1969: 31). Lüthy thus addresses the strong identificatory

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5 The quote is often attributed to W. Busch, but it probably did not come from him. In the original German version: 'Erstens kommt es anders und zweitens als man denkt'.

function taken from history as people interrogate it to find out who they are. Thus, an essential function of history is that it 'presents' identities (Lorenz, 1997: 403). However, history as a narrative construct (Schrader, 2013) can only be understood if it communicates itself to readers in the cultural tradition they are familiar with. There are thus limits to the possibility and form in which a story can be told (Baberowski, 2005: 207). This also explains why certain interpretations hardly find resonance. This can also be seen as an indication of why it is not easy to overcome ideas of history that are considered outdated in collectives from the outside.

In order to find answers to the question of the meaning of history, it is also helpful to consult introductions by historians for students of history. Obviously, they ask about the social utility of the study of history: 'If it is true that we determine our identity historically and that our designs for the future depend essentially on how we relate to our history, then it is obviously very important that we are able to reject the false interpretations of history. History therefore also serves as a critique of ideology' (Sellin, 1995: 203).

The Swiss historian Jakob Tanner draws attention to another insight from history. This lies in the interpretation of historical processes and key events and is reflected in both history teaching and historical research when it is asked 'under which conditions people, groups, social movements, social elites, governments tried to learn with a reflected appropriation of the past and in which cases skewed analogies had to be used to justify the use of violence' (2011: 274). Such answers to the question of who learns what from history are, however, always normative and dependent on political standpoints, images of history and emotional ties. Tanner concludes that historical research should not be oriented towards 'popular pedagogical guidelines' in order to provide 'insecure contemporaries' with an orientation knowledge. Rather, its task is to 'sensitize people to problems' by irritating them, questioning what they take for granted and encouraging them to reflect on it (Tanner 2011: 276).

What is indicated by the function of orientation knowledge from the perspective of the historical sciences finds parallels in history didactics with 'historical consciousness' in the German tradition or 'historical literacy' in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. To give an example here: Jörn Rüsen's widespread 'types of historical meaning formation' show how these can be divided into the traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic. According to him, historiography – i.e. historical writing – fulfils a 'cultural orientation function': 'Its most remarkable and important manifestation is the articulation of the historical identity of those to whom it is addressed' (2002: 256).

### 3. History teaching and ‘ambitions of pedagogization’

While historiography, the philosophy of history and also public history deal with broad questions of the meaning of history and also its perception in society, history didactics faces the specific challenge that history teaching at school is a compulsory, state-organized form of instruction for a specific age group. Hans-Jürgen Pandel argues that in history didactics the ‘historical creation of meaning’ should be distinguished from the ‘creation of meaning’, since there can be no administrative creation of meaning imposed from above (e.g. by ministries of education) (2006: 163). The history of history teaching in elementary schools is nevertheless marked by the fact that socially desired knowledge is being disseminated. The example of Switzerland in particular is a good illustration of such ‘ambitions of pedagogization’ (Grube et al. 2017: 55).

When the nation states were formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, history became a subject in schools that was used to awaken a love of the homeland in children and young people. In 1848, after a brief civil war that gave rise to the modern Swiss federal state, the aim was to promote the process of nation-building. Schools played an important role in this process, and history became a recognized school subject. Precisely because Switzerland, a country with four different national languages and hardly any natural borders, owes its identity to history, the Swiss self-image is shaped by a national-political view of history. In the process, according to Jakob Tanner, a medieval history with myths of freedom as a ‘hallucinatory past’ became a ‘problem-relieving cover memory’ that created new certainties about the future (2015: 74). School history textbooks had the character of collections of examples or catechisms, and historians were elevated, as it were, to the status of high priests of the national (Furrer, 2017: 57). Ideas about history teaching can be found in the original tone of a preface from 1880:

*‘Hardly any other instruction forms all the soul forces of man as much as instruction in patriotic history. ... What could incite youth to any virtue more than the splendid examples of noble self-denial, unshakable love of justice, loyal brotherly spirit and joyful sacrifice for the good of the fatherland, of which Swiss history tells us?’<sup>6</sup>*

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6 Marty J.B. (1880), *Illustrierte Schweizer Geschichte für Schule und Haus*, Einsiedeln: Benziger. In the original German version: ‘Kaum ein anderer Unterricht bildet so sehr alle Seelenkräfte des Menschen, wie der Unterricht in der vaterländischen Geschichte. ... Was könnte die Jugend mehr zu jeglicher Tugend aneifern, als die herrlichen Beispiele edler Selbstverleugnung, unerschütterlicher Gerechtigkeitsliebe, treuherzigen Brudersinns und freudiger Hingopferung für das Wohl des Vaterlandes, von denen die Schweizergeschichte uns erzählt.’

The Swiss master narrative, formed around 1880, continued through the crises and wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and shaped the teaching of history until the 1970s. The Cold War in particular contributed to its extension and accentuation. Only social change, and with it harsh criticism of previous content and teaching practice, led to a change. The UNESCO Commission's criticism of the one-sided and retarded image of history that had already been voiced in the 1950s struck a chord with the times (Ritzer, 2015: 337). In 1971, a schoolbook titled 'Was wir ererbt von unseren Vätern' (What we inherited from our fathers) was published in the old tradition, and in 1972 the reform-oriented teaching aid 'Weltgeschichte im Bild' (World History in Pictures) was already being tested in school classes (Pfenniger, 1998: 104). Instead of frontal teaching and teacher narration, the focus shifted to active pupils working with text and image sources. The national master narrative receded into the background and received competition from other narratives. In general, there was an opening towards world history, and contemporary historical accents became more frequent. History teaching, according to a planning paper on curriculum revision from 1972, now sought the following:

*'History education should (1) be factual, (2) teach history as a world history encompassing the whole of humanity as far as possible, taking into account non-European states as well, without false idealism or exclusively negative criticism, (3) not only deal with politics and war, but also with economics, technology, society and peacekeeping, (4) lead to the present and to problems that will arise in the future, as it includes local, cantonal or federal and international events, (5) stimulate active thinking, questions and judgements and encourage seeing and thinking through the tasks and problems of the state, as it thereby makes its contribution to civic education.'*<sup>7</sup>

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7 State Archives Lucerne: StALU, A 696/1384, Thesen zum Geschichtsunterricht, Nordwestschweizerische Koordinations-Kommission für den Geschichtsunterricht, 170 ff. We owe this information to the Master's thesis by Joël Mayo, *Wozu dient Geschichte: Ein Fach in der postmodernen Legitimationskrise? Eine Untersuchung zum Funktionswandel des Geschichtsunterrichts am Beispiel der Lehrpläne im Kanton Luzern, 1958 bis 2016*, submitted to the Lucerne University of Teacher Education 2020. In the original German version: 'Geschichtsunterricht sollte (1) sachlich sein, (2) Geschichte als möglichst die ganze Menschheit umfassende Weltgeschichte vermitteln und dabei auch aussereuropäische Staaten berücksichtigen, ohne falschen Idealismus oder ausschliesslich negative Kritik, (3) sich nicht nur mit Politik und Krieg abgeben, sondern sich auch mit Wirtschaft, Technik, Gesellschaft und Friedenssicherung beschäftigen, wobei die Geschichte des "kleinen Mannes" als "Korrektiv" zur Geschichte der grossen Staatsmänner zu behandeln sowie die Stellung und Bedeutung

As a result, the curricula for history teaching have been expanded. Which stories should be taught, how and with what methods and with what intentions for historical learning is a constant question that preoccupies history teaching. To the question of the meaning of history, the question of the purpose of historical learning is added in history teaching. From this perspective, as a school subject 'history' is understood today not only as a subject of understanding and orientation for the various productions of (national) historical narratives, but even more as a subject of understanding and orientation in today's societies, which is reflected in the current Swiss curricula, with their regional language orientation. Thus, it is about 'gaining orientation for the future. This sense-making takes place in the dimensions of rule, economy and culture'.<sup>8</sup>

Paradoxically, this development did not strengthen the reputation of history teaching in schools. Since the 1980s, a diffuse drift away from the subject has become apparent, which is based on various factors that are outlined here as observations. On the one hand, there is the thematic expansion in the direction of world history mentioned above, as well as a stronger orientation towards social and cultural history topics. Despite or precisely because of this expansion, the subject did not gain in importance. On the contrary: with the collapse of the national master narrative, it lost its original classical function of conveying national identity and thus also its privileged position as a school subject that contributes to common orientation. In society as a whole, on the other hand, there was an increase in narratives and in the associated positions on what history education should teach. This is accompanied by new 'rivalries' for attention in that areas such as 'civic education' or 'education for sustainable development' are seen as more urgent. The competence orientation, as it appears in the new Swiss curricula, also reinforces those approaches that are functional and utility-oriented. As Jens Dreßler shows, the question of competencies simultaneously leads to the question of meaning in historical learning (Dreßler, 2012: 14). The effect of all this is that history teaching today finds itself in a headwind and confronted with the paradoxical situation that the discipline and the subject are arguably able to offer an 'immensely broad and profound orientational knowledge' (We-

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der Frau zu würdigen sei, (4) ebenso in die Gegenwart und zu Problemen führen, die sich in Zukunft stellen werden, wie er lokales, kantonales oder eidgenössisches und internationales Geschehen miteinbezieht, (5) zu aktivem Denken, zu Fragen und Urteilen anregen und dazu anhalten, die Aufgaben und Probleme des Staates zu sehen und zu durchdenken, wie er dadurch seinen Beitrag zur staatsbürgerlichen Erziehung leiste.'

8 Curriculum 21: Nature, Man and Society. Meaning and objectives, engagement with the world: <https://lu.lehrplan.ch/index.php?code=e|6|2> (30.12.2022).



hler, 1988: 13). While the subject didactics of history continue to recognize important goals in this respect, there is a strong tendency among the educational sciences to deny the subject of history its functions in school teaching. Dreßler even identifies a distrust in dealing with the past (2012: 157). This distrust also arises in political discussions when one side argues nationally and the other socially and pedagogically and both sides demand models that point in ‘the right way’. This is how history and historical studies are misunderstood (Tanner, 2012: 272). History as a discipline of the humanities consequently has a hard time, as in Jacob Burckhardt’s dictum that through experience we ‘do not become both wise (for another time) and wise (forever)’.<sup>9</sup> The loss of the subject’s importance becomes obvious and measurable in the reduced number of lessons that are now available for history teaching.

#### 4. Five thematic areas in this volume and the individual contributions

The Swiss example briefly outlined here stands for a broad but also multi-faceted development of history as a subject in a European and global context. The fact that history teaching in classes has come under pressure in many places consequently depends on several factors and cannot easily be attributed to a single aspect. Connected with this, however, is always the question of the meaning and purpose of historical learning, which is seen and weighted differently by the actors in the field of education. Answers to this question can be found in many different ways. In this volume, with examples from 18 countries, the question of the meaning and function of history education is broadly explored, thus also opening the door to comparative references. We have identified five thematic areas and approaches. At the same time, they form a matrix that can be laid over the contributions.

A first group of articles deals with fundamental questions about the ‘Purpose of Teaching History’: *Peter Gautschi* and *Alex Buff* show in their contribution ‘History Education in the Broad Present: A Great Challenge’ how, from the learners’ point of view, history education helps people to deal competently with

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9 Jakob Burckhardt (1905), *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, Berlin: W. Spemann, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. In the original German version: ... ‘nicht sowohl klug (für ein andermal) als weise (für immer) werden’, in the following context: ‘Damit erhält auch der Satz *Historia vitae magistra* einen höheren und zugleich bescheideneren Sinn. Wir wollen durch Erfahrung nicht sowohl klug (für ein andermal) als weise (für immer) werden.’

history, responsibly with society and reflectively with themselves. They explain this using the app 'Fleeing the Holocaust' and the video game 'When We Disappear' and conclude by reflecting on how history enters into teachers' beliefs as social sciences, an identity builder, a teacher of the present and the future, and a narrative about the past. *Aurélie De Mestral*, *Nadine Fink* and *Lyonel Kaufmann* present in their paper, 'Why do we Teach History? Multiperspectivity on the Past from the Teachers' Point of View', questions about the goals assigned to history teaching. These have multiplied over time and differ based on the allocations of educational authorities, politics, academia or the general public. The study is based on interviews with teachers from French-speaking Switzerland. *Wolfgang Hasberg* in his 'Why History Makes no Sense', concludes that 'history' merely transports meaning, which it takes from the contemporary culture that is associated with it and combines with what is known about the past. Using the philosopher Thomas Lessing as an example, he shows that the past alone (which is to be distinguished from history) is not endowed with sense, meaning or structure. In 'History Teaching: What are the Stakes Today?', the French European politician *Alain Lamassoure* asks about the challenges of the teaching of history today and tomorrow, which is currently in crisis. He points out that history teaching is handled differently from country to country in Europe. He therefore sees the establishment of the 'Observatory for the Teaching of History in Europe' under the auspices of the Council of Europe as an opportunity to advance the teaching of history in Europe.

A second group deals with 'Objectives and Practices'. *Sylvain Doussot* in his contribution 'The Teaching of History and Political Education: Didactic Analysis of the Case of Immigration History in French Curricula' starts from the premise that history teaching should not serve the training of future historians but of future citizens. The study of the past must therefore be in the service of political education, which is to be understood in a broad sense, namely as the ability to participate autonomously and thus critically in collective life and its democratic development. In his 'Creating a Historical Textbook: The Current Challenges', *Václav Sixta* presents a project to develop a textbook for Czech lower secondary schools between 2018 and 2021. He then looks at teachers' reactions to the textbook. *Barnabás Vajda's* contribution 'Teaching History in Slovakia: An Uncertain School Subject?' explores the question of the 'meaning' of history teaching in the Slovak context. He examines curricula as revealing documents on the subject, one from 2011 that is still in use, and the new curriculum currently being prepared by the Slovak Ministry of Education. *Jan Löfström* writes about 'What Students see as Generally Important and Personally

Interesting in the History Classroom, and how it Matches with the History Curriculum: Notes from a Finnish Pilot Study'. In the latter, Finnish Year 8 students answered a survey indicating how much they considered certain activities in the history classroom to be generally important or personally interesting. *Anitha Oforiwah Adu-Boahen* and *Charles Adabo Oppong's* study, 'Testing the Understanding of Historical Significance among Pre-Service Teachers in Ghana', explores how prospective teachers understand historical significance as a second-order concept. They asked about events and personalities in Ghana's history and about criteria that pre-service teachers use to ascribe meaning to events and personalities in history. *Johan Wassermann, Zoleka Mkhabela* and *Leevina Iyer*, in their paper 'The Views of South African History Teachers on Making the Subject Compulsory', present a case study in which they proposed to South African history teachers that the subject of history should be made compulsory up to Grade 12. Two opposing positions emerged, which are closely linked to the socio-political framework and the question of the importance of the subject in South Africa.

A third group of articles deals with 'Identity and Conflicts'. *Terry Haydn*, in his contribution 'The History Teacher's Dilemma: "Fundamental British Values" and Telling the Truth about the National Past', notes how history teaching in schools is developing in different directions in different parts of the world. While some countries focus on issues of multi-perspectivity, global citizenship or transnational issues, others primarily demand historical knowledge about their own national pasts and seek to encourage a positive view of the nation. He identifies the latter process in the UK since Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools announced in 2017: 'pupils should learn how we became the country we are today and how our values make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness.' *Michael Ndobegang Mbapndah* and *Eugène Desire Eloundou* use their paper on 'History Teaching, History Education and the Manipulation of History for Identity Construction in Cameroon' to show how state power and authority are used to influence the teaching and learning of Cameroonian history and how narratives are promoted for identity construction and nation-building. Since the introduction of history education, the authorities have prescribed the content, purpose and teaching methods of the subject and manipulated it for identity construction. *Karl P. Benziger*, in his contribution 'Civil Society and the Resurrection of Strong State Politics, or ... It Can't Happen Here', uses the examples of the USA and Hungary to compare how the highly prevalent narrative of the 'lost cause' shaped civil society in both countries and the role of history education in combating these narratives or myths. *Karel Van Nieuwenhuysse* analyses the re-

relationship between history education and identity formation since the founding of Belgium in 1830 under the title ‘History Education and Identities in Flanders: Contradictory Expectations between Historical and Canonical Thinking’. In particular, he examines the construction of identity in history education in Belgium and Flanders against the background of the Flemish government’s decision in 2019 to introduce a historical canon for Flanders. In his contribution ‘Dealing with a Canon: Teaching History in Flanders Using a Constructivist Approach to Heritage’, *Joris Van Doorselaere* also explores the field of tension that a canonization of history entails and asks how such a canon can be meaningfully dealt with in the classroom.

The fourth section of the volume is dedicated to the topic of ‘Disciplinary and Interdisciplinarity’ from different perspectives, which also have a country-specific character: *Sebastian Barsch* and *Andreas Hübner* deal with ‘Concepts of Time in Science Education and History Didactics: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Environmental History’. They emphasize the relevance of history education in the age of the Anthropocene. In order to be able to examine and discuss the climate crisis, students need to develop competencies that help them understand ‘time’ in its various dimensions. *Kaarel Haav* outlines ‘A Social Theory Framework for the Integration of History and Social Studies’, which looks at Soviet totalitarian ideology and its hidden influences on Estonian education. *Andrea Brait* addresses the topic of ‘Teaching History in Subject Combinations. The Example of Austria: History and Social Studies/Civic Education’. She asks about the relationship between history teaching and civic education and shows, on the basis of a survey, that teachers in Austria view the increased emphasis on civic education positively, but also that history teaching continues to take up the majority of time in the classroom. *Elisabeth Erdmann* asks, in her contribution ‘History as an Independent Subject or in a Subject Group in Germany’, whether it would not make more sense to teach history no longer as an independent subject, but together with other subjects such as social studies and/or geography. She concludes that from a cognitive-psychological point of view, the integration of very different subjects does not make sense, as there are clearly defined limits to the transfer of competences.

In the concluding fifth part, the contributions explore the topic of ‘Concepts and Access to History Education’. *Sun Joo Kang* writes about ‘School History in the Era of Deauthorization and Horizontality: Popular History, Digital Public History, and History Education in South Korea’. She focuses on the tension in the digital age between historical narratives written or produced by lay people and those written by academic historians. She goes on to show why

history should be taught in schools and what should be taught in history classes in the digital age, which is characterized by ‘de-authorization and horizontality’. In her contribution ‘Historical Literacy and German Studies: How to Make Sense of History in a Foreign Language’, *Katja Gorbahn* points out that historical learning takes place not only within the framework of school subjects such as history or the social sciences, but also in foreign language teaching. Against this background, the article discusses the relationship between linguistic and historical thinking skills and looks at the concept of historical literacy. *Joanna Wojdon* presents the results of a pilot study under ‘Social Media as a Tool in Research on History Education’. A Polish-language Facebook group of history teachers with over five thousand members was analyzed, which also provides insights into teaching practices. The results of the study seem to be transferable internationally. Under ‘Transnational National History: Perspectives for History Education’, *Thomas Metzger* looks at the approaches to transnational history in current history teaching materials in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. His finding is that these show elements of an entangled history to varying degrees. However, they are rarely used to convey a transnational extension of Switzerland’s national history.

## 5. Plea for a competent approach to history

This anthology thus contains contributions that illuminate the question of why history should be taught in schools and in the public sphere from different perspectives. On the one hand, the publication contains a series of theoretical reflections and models, for example, on how to deal with time or on the question of identity and history. Furthermore, authors from all over the world provide information on how the question of the goal is dealt with in everyday educational practice, be it in curricula, educational media, everyday teaching, museums, exhibitions or social media. In addition, new findings from research are presented, for example, on teachers’ history-specific beliefs. The publication then presents a whole series of reasons why history must be taught today, and reads as a plea for a competent approach to history in today’s society.

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# Purpose of Teaching History





PETER GAUTSCHI, ALEX BUFF

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## History Education in the Broad Present

### A Great Challenge<sup>1</sup>



### Abstract

The present-orientedness of many people seems to have intensified once again in our time. This may be related to two phenomena. First, the world is changing very rapidly today: new things are constantly emerging that cannot be explained with reference to the past. Second, today the future appears more as a threat and no longer as an optimistic promise. Thus, the question arises with new urgency why we should deal with the past today, especially in school history classes. In order to answer this question, it helps to refer to the Didactic Triangle as a structural model of teaching. This shows that there are three directions of justification for school-based history education. Reasons for this can be found in society, in the science of history and in learners. The present contribution argues primarily from the learners' point of view and shows that history education helps people to deal competently with history, responsibly with society and reflectively with themselves. In these three dimensions, a number of aspects can be identified that need to be stimulated while mediating history. This will be explained by means of the app 'Fleeing the Holocaust' and the video game 'When We Disappear'. In any case, what is important is the fact that learners appropriate history and use it to make meaning and produce stories. Finally, it is shown that history ed-

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1 Presentation at the conference 'Why History Education?' on September 21, 2021 in Lucerne.

ucation can manifest itself in different ways. Different history-specific beliefs of teachers and a first empirical exploration of these theoretically postulated constructs ('History as a Social Science', 'History as an Identity Builder', 'History as a Teacher for the Present and the Future', 'History as a Narrative about the Past') are presented.

## 1. Introduction

Dealing with the past seems useless, pointless and boring to many people. They prefer to live in the present, in the now, in the moment. This is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1874, Friedrich Nietzsche recognized that people envy animals because they can immediately forget, that is, live unhistorically:

*'Consider the flock that grazes by you: it does not know what is yesterday, what is today, leaps about, eats, rests, digests, leaps again, and so from morning to night and from day to day, short-tempered with its desire and displeasure, namely, to the peg of the moment, and therefore neither melancholic nor weary. It is hard for man to see this, because he boasts of his humanity in front of the animal and yet looks jealously at his happiness – for that alone he wants, like the animal, neither to be weary nor to live in pain. [...].'* (Nietzsche, 1984: 8)<sup>2</sup>

And yet, the present-orientedness of people seems to have intensified once again in our time. This is due to the fact that today the future appears more as a danger and is no longer an optimistic promise. Aleida Assmann stated:

*'Experiences such as environmental pollution, the shortage of drinking water, climate change, but also demographic problems such as overpopulation and the increasing aging of societies have fundamentally changed our view of the future. Under these premises, it is no longer the El Dorado of our desires and hopes, and with it the pathos of progress is extinguished.'* (Assmann, 2013: 12 f.)

Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht comes to the same conclusion. He also notes that the future is no longer an open horizon of possibilities for us, but a dimension that is increasingly closed to all forecasts and which, at the same time, seems to be approaching us as a threat (2010: 16). Gumbrecht recognizes a second phenom-

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2 Thanks are due to Kurt Brügger for the translation: <http://www.swissamericanlanguageexpert.ch/> (8.6.2022).

enon in the fact that we no longer succeed in leaving any past behind us. Pasts flood our present, and of course the perfection of electronic memory performances plays a central role in this.

Moreover, also the past is becoming a threat here and there, for example in Switzerland, which refused to remember in dealing with dormant assets from the World War II era (Maissen, 2005). Abraham Foxman of the Anti Defamation League (ADL) got to the heart of the situation in 1997, when the impression arose in Switzerland of being unfairly criticized by Jewish people for the behavior in particular of banks and insurance companies in dealing with National Socialism: “It is not the Jewish people but their own past that is the enemy of the Swiss” (Maissen, 2005: 285).

Between this past, which is sometimes hostile and floods us, and this threatening future, Gumbrecht recognizes what he calls the ‘broad present’ (2010: 16). Neither the future nor the past play an important role here, but what can be observed is a longing for moments of presence. Gumbrecht suggests that everything that constitutes historical thinking is lost in this broad present (2010: 15 f.), for example, the ideas that man is on a linear path through the time horizons, that all phenomena are affected by change over time, that man is constantly leaving the past behind, that the future is an open horizon of possibilities toward which man is moving, and that the present is exclusively a barely perceptible, brief moment of transition. In the broad present, history has lost its orienting and meaning-giving function. Thus, the question of why we should deal with the past today has acquired new urgency.

In this contribution, we will focus on history education in schools. In the first section we draw on the Didactic Triangle to analyze the structure of teaching. This shows that there are three directions of justification for school-based history education. Reasons for this can be found in society, in the science of history and in learners.

In the second section, we focus on learners and point out that history education helps people deal competently with history, responsibly with society and reflectively with themselves. In these three dimensions, a number of aspects can be identified. This model, with its three dimensions and fifteen aspects, is our answer to the question ‘Why History Education?’.

In the third section, this model will be explained by means of the app ‘Fleeing the Holocaust’ and the video game ‘When We Disappear’. In any case, what is important is the fact that learners appropriate history, use it, make meaning and produce stories. Combining the two verbs ‘producing’ with a ‘c’ and ‘using’ results in the artificial word ‘produsing’ with an ‘s’.

The fourth section shows that history education can manifest itself in different ways. We assume that these differences are caused by teachers' different history-specific beliefs.

Finally, in the fifth section, we present an empirical exploration of this theoretical question and propose a new model to show directions for answering the question 'Why History Education?'

The present contribution thus links theory, practice and research. As is well known, theory without research remains blind and without practice empty – and analogously this also applies to research and practice. Only the linking of the three perspectives allows a further answer to the question 'Why History Education?'

## 2. The didactic triangle: a structural model to explain history education

History education has changed significantly in recent years and decades – and of course also during the pandemic since 2020. Like schools in general, history education is also driven by societal megatrends.

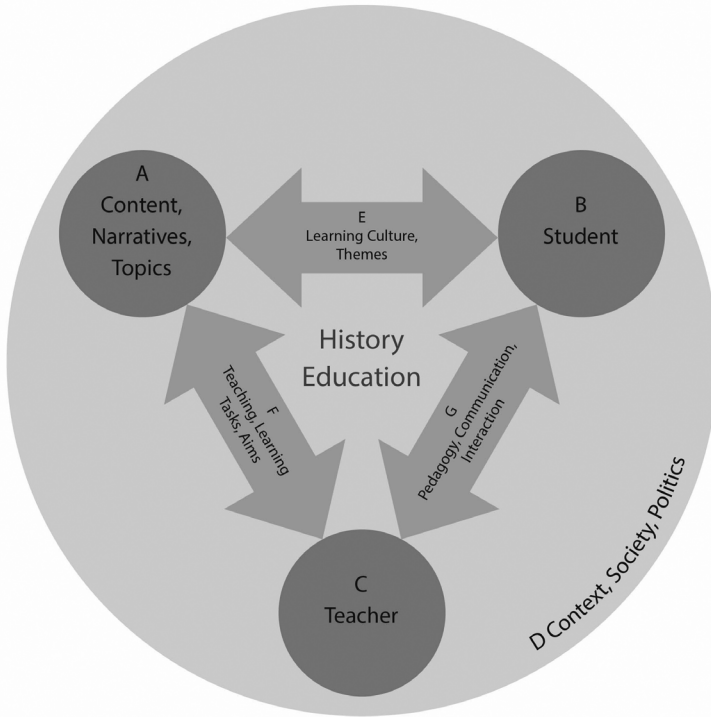
- *The broad present:* First, the change in the structure of time in our societies once again raises the question 'Why history education?' with new topicality and urgency. The changed time structure also leads us to the fact that in many places historical learning is no longer offered as a separate subject, but is taught in combination with political education or geography, or is integrated with social studies.
- *Connectivity, Social Media, Digitization:* Second, connectivity, social media and digitization are shaping the teaching of history. A rich array of media and materials is available, and new forms of communication and digital tools enable more diverse and other history lessons than in the past.
- *Demographic change, social change, divided societies:* Third, learners in a school class differ much more today than in the past in terms of their cultural backgrounds, and inclusion also contributes to greater heterogeneity. In addition, divided societies make relaxed and trustful learning in the class community difficult.
- *Climate change and new contemporary concerns:* Fourth, climate change and new contemporary concerns lead to new questions about the past, which in turn leads to new content, topics and goals in the teaching of history. While national history and 'antiquity' used to be given central importance earlier,

today contents such as environmental history, migration, or global history can be found in curricula and teaching materials.

- *Synthetic media, knowledge, information:* Fifth, we note the end of school dominance in the teaching of central historical topics. In today's society, children and young people grow up under very different circumstances than the generation before them. Information is always available to them, but whether the information is reliable is difficult to judge. Competence orientation shapes the talk about history education and, to some extent, everyday teaching.
- *Individualization and gender shift:* Individualization is a central cultural principle of our time. Self-realization and self-determination have gained in value. In addition, gender has lost its fateful significance. New role patterns are leading to a culture of pluralism. All this leads to the fact that, first, the way we deal with learners in history lessons is changing. For example, it is important to address preconcepts to enable appropriation. In addition, the role of the teacher changes fundamentally. They are supposed to be coaches and process facilitators, rather than knowledge transmitters.

The list is not exhaustive, but it nevertheless makes clear that a major change has taken place in the teaching of history in schools in recent years.

However, there are some structural constants, which become clear in the 'Didactic Triangle' model provided by General Pedagogy. This structural model is used to describe what factors affect events in the classroom in general and in history education in particular. The model also helps to find answers to the question: 'Why History Education?'



**Figure 1: The didactic triangle. This is a structural model with seven aspects used to describe history education (Diederich, 1988: 256; Gruschka, 2005: 27; Gautschi, 2007: 50; Gautschi, 2015: 33).**

History education always deals with the universe of history. This is constituted by the axes of time and space as well as content areas, and it grows with every day and with all new events, phenomena and people. From this vast universe, contents and goals must be extracted through a process of structuring and reduction. The chosen contents can be viewed, questioned or problematized from a wide variety of perspectives and points of view with a wide variety of goals. Different narratives can be taught. The chosen approach to a defined content is called a topic. Content, narratives and the topic occupy the upper left corner of the didactic triangle.

It is this content that learners are supposed to confront in the system of teaching. This circumstance gives a name to the upper right corner of the didac-

tic triangle. The fact that both the content and the learners appear above in the representation of the didactic triangle makes it clear that teaching is primarily about this process of learners' encounter with the universe of history. They should acquire the topic and be enabled to deal competently and independently with past events.

Teachers who teach history can support this historical learning. They are shown at the foot of the didactic triangle. They initiate the learning process by selecting and structuring topics from the universe of history, by establishing a climate conducive to learning through their relationship with the learners, and by providing learning paths and arranging learning situations for historical learning.

It is evident that societies shape teaching. Teachers and learners are directly and indirectly shaped by society, and the topics mirror the culture. In addition, teaching takes place in a selected environment with certain conditions and at a certain time that can promote or inhibit what is happening. Society comprises the didactic triangle; this makes it clear that, on the one hand, society influences teaching, while on the other hand, of course, teaching also has an effect on society. In concrete teaching situations, strands of social discourse are intertwined in the classroom. Alexandra Binnenkade calls this a 'discursive node' (Binnenkade, 2015).

Those who now seek answers to the question 'Why history education?' can, first of all, take a look at this discursive node and formulate justifications for history education from the point of view of society. Those who search in this direction arrive at answers that underline, for example, the importance of identity or emphasize the socialization of learners through history.

A second possible starting point for identifying justifications lies with the narratives and the universe of history, that is, with the historical sciences. Those who look in this direction answer, for example, that history classes are supposed to teach how to deal with history in a scientifically propaedeutic way: young people acquire the historical method, learn to think critically with sources and always interpret the past from different perspectives.

Another way of searching for an answer to the question 'Why history education?' consists of thinking from the learners' point of view and thus putting the students at the center of attention. This will now be implemented in the following chapter. The starting point is the question of what characterizes learners when they are historically educated. To an extent this involves 'backward thinking'. We start our argument with a goal that has been reached: historically educated people.

### 3. History education: dealing with history, with society and with oneself

Whoever has recently been concerned with learners in history classes has wondered how their competences might be developed and differentiated. Competences, in Franz E. Weinert's much quoted definition, are 'the cognitive skills available to or learnable by individuals to solve specific problems, as well as the motivational, volitional and social dispositions and skills associated with them to use the problem solutions successfully and responsibly in variable situations' (Weinert, 2001: 27–28).

However, history lessons are not always about problem-solving, especially in the history lessons that students and teachers remember best. For example, teachers who invite Holocaust survivors to history lessons or who visit a concentration camp with students, or teachers who show videotaped eyewitnesses talking about crimes during the Second World War or the genocide in Rwanda in the classroom, do not initially want to impart knowledge to the learners, nor do they primarily want to enable them to solve a problem (Thünemann, 2018). Here, the focus is often on other concerns, for example, 'the linking of our ego with the world', as Wilhelm von Humboldt put it as early as 1793 when he described 'education' (*Bildung* in German; Humboldt, 1903: 283). The teaching of history in general and the thematization of the Holocaust in particular are not about the mere adaptation of the individual to a world given to him, not, therefore, exclusively about solving certain problems in this world. Rather, it is about a multifaceted engagement 'in which the individual can develop his or her own particular form of being human in this world [and] thus educates himself or herself' (Sander, 2014: 11; 2018). Summarizing briefly and simply, education mirrors a reflective approach to oneself, to others and to the world (Wikipedia, 2021).

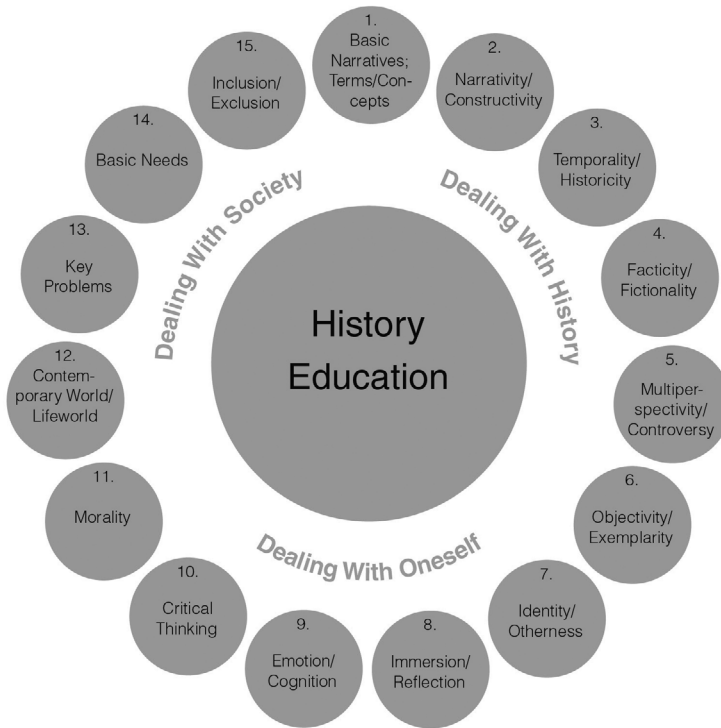
Now, in recent years history didactics has hardly dealt explicitly with history education in this Humboldtian sense. The relevant works can be counted on one hand (Buschkühle, Duncker and Oswalt, 2009; Dreßler, 2012; Henke-Bockschatz, Mayer and Oswalt, 2005; Mayer, 2005; Mütter, 1995). As we know, education refers to a development (educational process) as well as a state (being educated) (Sander, 2018). Historically educated are people with differentiated personal and social identities who encounter the universe of history with openness and curiosity, who have well-developed competences in dealing with the past, history and memory, and who, building on this, see and use their own scopes for action in the present and future society, as well as recognize the op-



portunities of history education and want to continue to educate themselves (Gautschi, 2019b).

In the following, this definition will be differentiated along the three dimensions of dealing with history, dealing with oneself and dealing with society. These three dimensions result from the general definition of education, and they can be made plausible well with the didactic triangle. The starting point here are the learners. In the process of history education, they encounter the universe of history, they do this in connection with society, and they also deal with themselves.

The differentiation of history education along a model aims at a concretization and visualization of subject-specific principles and concepts. It goes without saying that history education – like education in general – is a lifelong process that cannot be achieved all in one go. We describe with the model an ideal rather than learning objectives for a teaching sequence or even for a specific school history lesson. The model is inspired by Hans-Jürgen Pandel's model of historical consciousness (Pandel, 2005). He has also illustrated his model, which comprises two dimensions, in a circle. To explain the model and its aspects, they are briefly named and described below. History education aims at forming and differentiating these fifteen aspects. These fifteen aspects are principles of history education.



**Figure 2: History education in three dimensions: dealing with history, with society and with oneself<sup>3</sup>**

Historically educated people are first able *to deal competently with history*. They ...

1. ... have acquired socially relevant basic narratives (Gautschi, Bernhardt and Mayer, 2012: 332–334) and know relevant terms and concepts.
2. ... tell and analyze stories (narrativity/constructivity) (Pandel, 2013: 86–105). In doing so, they link themselves narratively to the world (Humboldt, 1903) and show how they themselves are ‘enmeshed in stories’ (Schapp, 2012).
3. ... take into account the before and after (temporality), continuity and change (historicity) (Pandel, 2005: 10–15), and causes and consequences of processes.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks are due to Janina Tiemann for crucial support in drawing up Figures 1 and 2.

4. ... distinguish factuality from fictionality (Fink, 2018; Moller, 2018).
5. ... implement multi-perspectivity and controversy (Lücke, 2017).
6. ... strive for objectivity (Pandel, 2017; Rösen, 1997) and are aware that they never see the whole but reflect to what extent the general shows up in the concrete (exemplarity).

Historically educated people are able *to deal with themselves reflectively*. They ...

7. ... have a differentiated identity and are open to alterity (identity/otherness) (Bergmann, 1997; Rösen, 2013: 267–271; 2020). Furthermore, they know acting and suffering people from the past and can assess their scopes of action (personalization/personification) (Schneider, 2017).
8. ... can plunge into history (immersion) and also adopt a reflective distance (reflective ability) (Knoch, 2020): How do I succeed in comprehending what people experienced in the past? What sources help me to do this?
9. ... can empathize with people (emotion) and analyze processes (cognition) (Brauer and Lücke, 2013).
10. ... think critically, and thus do not simply accept things as they seem, but ask themselves whether things are really as they seem (Fink, 2017).
11. ... orient their being and acting towards values (moral consciousness) (Pandel, 2005: 20).

Historically educated people are able *to deal responsibly with society*. They ...

12. ... are able to orient their being and acting to the present and the living world and, at the same time, to detach themselves from it (Buck, 2012; Gatzka, 2019).
13. ... know and thematize selected episodes from the past in order to show key problems of contemporary society (Klafki, 1985).
14. ... have the basic social needs (food, water/air, clothing, housing, living together, education, work/recreation, communication, etc.) in mind and ask themselves which factors in this and that time facilitated the satisfaction of these needs and which factors made them more difficult (Gautschi, 2019a: 50).
15. ... thematize inclusion and exclusion (Völkel, 2017).

History education understood in this way is the goal when we develop stagings for conveying history, be this now in analogue or digital space, in school or in public.

#### 4. Using and producing history

Especially when dealing with the topic of the Holocaust, there is an obligation to offer young people history education and to enable them to deal well with history, with society and with themselves. By broaching the issue of the Holocaust, many basic questions of human action that touch on fundamental questions of history education appear to be addressed in an exemplary manner. Of course, it is neither possible nor desirable to convey all of the above-mentioned fifteen aspects of history education each time the Holocaust is made a subject of discussion in school or to ask all the basic questions of human action. Didactics, as is well known, is the art of showing, selecting and reducing to the essential. But the aspects of history education mentioned above serve as an orientation compass for the development of such productions as we developed it with the app 'Fleeing the Holocaust' (Gautschi and Lücke, 2018) and the video game 'When We Disappear' (Schillig, 2021).

##### The app 'Fleeing the Holocaust'

The web app 'Fleeing the Holocaust'<sup>4</sup> was jointly designed and developed for teaching purposes, but also for free use by the association *\_erinnern.at\_* (VEA) in Bregenz, the University of Applied Sciences at Vorarlberg in Dornbirn (FHV) and the Institute of History Education and Memory Cultures of the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (PHLU). The app, which is available in German and, thanks to the work of Nadine Fink and her team at the University of Teacher Education Vaud, also in French (Fuir la Shoah<sup>5</sup>), can be downloaded free of charge from the relevant stores.

After downloading the app in the German version, a trailer starts which begins with the statement 'In some rooms you encounter memories'. An adolescent enters an initially empty room and then discovers five black-and-white photographs of young people. She takes one of these photographs from the wall, whereupon the woman pictured on it begins to speak and tells of the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany and how she was separated from her parents in the process and never saw them again. It becomes apparent towards the end of the

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4 The German version of the app can be obtained free of charge through the usual platforms (App Store and Google Play), as well as on the website <http://www.erinnern.at/app-fliehen> (8.6.2022) for Windows applications.

5 The French version is also available through the usual platforms, as well as on the website <https://www.fuir-la-shoah.ch> (8.6.2022).

trailer that the story of the woman, Sophie Haber, is one of five stories told in the app.

The five people are then briefly introduced on the screen. The users, mostly students, click on the portrait photographs to see the person's name as well as a very brief summary of the story, for example: 'Eva Korálnik, born 1936, flees from Budapest to Switzerland at the age of eight'. After you have decided on a person and a story, a video starts that lasts approximately twenty minutes, an edited interview with a contemporary witness. In this case it shows Eva Korálnik in a portrait shot while she tells her life story. At the end of the video, the students are presented with four aspects, two of which they can select for further work, for example, 'Life in Budapest' and 'Lifesaver Harald Feller'.

Now a number of tasks follow for the selected aspects which stimulate the students cognitively and draw them into an intensive encounter with the contemporary witnesses and the topic. They must write short answers, select quotations, write down impressions, mark correct answers in multiple choice questions, complete the beginnings of sentences, merge a text from text blocks and write short texts themselves. Due to a change of epoch, towards the end of the approximately 45-minute study of the topic 'Fleeing the Holocaust', the students finally also deal with the phenomenon of 'flight' at the present day.

Those materials from the app that the students deal with, as well as their formulated thoughts, are collected in an individual album in PDF format entitled 'My testimony'. The students mail this 'testimony' to addressees of their choice, in school contexts to the teacher, and their work is also returned to them in order so they can study it further or possibly file it in their portfolio. Because the students themselves produce a document and tell a story – their own testimony – effective historical learning is made possible.

Four core ideas guided the development work:

1. At the centre of the app are videotaped interviews with contemporary witnesses who talk about their experiences. Students meet these fugitives, know their names, see their faces, and hear and understand their stories.
2. The app is a variable teaching offer for school-based mediation. There are three teaching options for using the app: individual or small groups work in the classroom on their own devices; presentation via beamer or interactive whiteboard by the teacher; or the learners use the app at home, and the albums they create are then compared and discussed in the classroom.
3. Learners are made to tell stories through a complete process of historical learning, from perception via exploring and interpretation to orientation (Gautschi, 2015: 51): While working with the app, students create their

own testimony in an album in which they collect, organize and comment on materials. Their results are documented in a PDF file.

4. Finally, the young people should be able to establish a relationship with the selected people, either because the stories are set in their own life-worlds, or because young people's big questions about, for example, love, trust, school, family or leisure are addressed.

### **The video game 'When We Disappear'**

The video game 'When We Disappear'<sup>6</sup> was jointly designed and developed for teaching purposes, as well as for free use by Inlusio Interactive and the Institute of History Education and Memory Cultures of the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (PHLU).

In this game, in the first chapter, the students are transferred to Amsterdam in 1943. There they take on the perspective of a persecuted girl trying to escape the threat of deportation. The escape leads across Europe, through Belgium, France, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal. During it the girl and the gamers have to cope with countless dangerous situations. They have to flee from an occupied house, sneak past persecutors across a street, climb up drainpipes onto a roof and from there down to the street again, sprint over guarded bridges and overcome dilemmas: should they hide in Amsterdam or flee from it?

The story as depicted is based on the narrated and researched circumstances of hundreds of children and young people who fled across Europe during the Second World War in order to save themselves from persecution and murder by the Nazis. Some of them were hidden by escape organizations or were brought to safety on escape routes and others were supported by resistance fighters, but many disappeared, were betrayed, discovered, captured, deported and/or murdered. To escape successfully, the gamers need support and information. These they acquire, among other things, from the fact that in the game the girl's sister tries to find out what exactly happens to the refugees while on the run. Through her memories, which are faded into the game, she helps the gamers to escape their pursuers.

First, 'When We Disappear' uses the opportunities offered by digitization to create new mediation offers. In this way, especially in school mediation contexts, a culture of digitality is built up (Stalder, 2016), understood as the interweaving of digital and analogue realities which thus influence life-worlds and make education possible. Second, 'When We Disappear' uses the opportunities offered by

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6 <https://www.whenwedisappear.com/edu> (8.6.2022).

gamification (Gautschi, 2018). Here the story of a girl's escape becomes an 'as-if action'. The gamers are activated, involved in the story, and they are given the 'power of action' (agency) (Hewson, 2010). McCall has called this 'participatory public history' (McCall, 2019: 38), where trial action becomes possible. 'When We Disappear' is a laboratory for fleeing. It simulates the situation in 1943 of young people in Amsterdam and constantly confronts gamers with the consequences of their actions. Thus, they are drawn into the situation, have to weigh things up, and are emotionally touched. In the act of playing the game, users dive into the vast field of history and construct history (Giere, 2019: 51).

Dealing with both the app 'Fleeing the Holocaust' and the video game 'When We Disappear' enables history education first, because the users encounter a section from the universe of history and thus history, and secondly, because they deal with relevant and current social issues, and because this confrontation with historicity and sociality also has something to do with themselves. So that dealing with these three dimensions happens in a particularly profitable way, it is important that learners appropriate history and use it to make their own meanings and produce their own stories. In the app 'Fleeing the Holocaust' the users develop their own testimony – an email and an album – and they send this to others. In the video game 'When We Disappear', the gamers create the story line themselves right away through their own decisions. This is how 'Prod-using History in a Broad Present' works.

## 5. Why history education?

Why history education? The answer is simple: people should be educated. They should be able to deal competently with history, responsibly with society and reflectively with themselves. But the answer is complicated too: while this statement suggests the existence of a general, structural order, the concrete implementation of education is not yet specified because it depends in particular on what we understand by history and on the influence that dealing with history should have on dealing with individuals and dealing with society.

Because this understanding can be completely different, individual history lessons also differ substantially. They differ not only from country to country, but also from school location to school location, and even from class to class (Gautschi, 2015). Even if the same topic is taught with exactly the same teaching materials at the same school location with comparable students, substantial differences can be observed. In 2008 and 2010, Bernhard C. Schär and Vera Sperisen interviewed twenty history teachers from the German-speaking part of Switzerland about

how they interpret, evaluate and use the history teaching material 'Hinschauen und Nachfragen: Die Schweiz und die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus im Licht aktueller Fragen' (Bonhage, Gautschi, Hodel and Spuhler, 2006) in their classes. In addition, the two researchers visited six teachers in the classroom when these teaching materials were being used. They concluded that 'teachers can very much shape and change both the content and the didactic concept of teaching materials based on their own ideas' (Schär and Sperisen, 2011: 133). The study showed that 'teachers' professional habitual dispositions are more relevant to teachers' instructional actions than textbook concepts' (Schär and Sperisen, 2011: 125).

Following Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the two scholars understand 'teachers' professional habitual dispositions' to mean 'fundamental ideas about history' (Bourdieu, 1976: 165), general goals of history teaching, didactic guiding ideas and ideas about the needs of students (Schär and Sperisen, 2011: 127). In this way, they confirm what the New Zealand educationalist John Hattie stated in 2003: 'Teachers Make a Difference' (Hattie, 2003). It all depends on the teachers!

But what guides the teachers' actions? It seems to us that there are didactic positions in history that essentially determine the planning and teaching of history teachers.

Since the publication of *Geschichte und ihre Didaktik* (History and its Didactics) by Joachim Rohlfes in 1986, four didactic positions have been distinguished in history didactics, which can be well located within the didactic triangle: Those who follow (1.) the subject- and science-guided approaches focus on the content, on narratives and topics. In (2.) the learning- and instruction-related approaches, the teaching-learning culture is the primary focus. (3.) The student-, educator-, and education-oriented conceptions focus on the learners. And (4.) the present- and society-oriented approach focuses in particular on the culture of interaction and relationships, as well as on the context, society and politics.

Differences in the implementation of history education also become clear when we observe different history lessons on the same topic – for example 'Switzerland in the Cold War' – and find relevant differences in orientation and objectives (Christophe, Gautschi and Thorp, 2019; Furrer and Gautschi, 2017). In some history lessons, it seems important for teachers that their students learn to compare different sources. They want them to see the value of critical thinking. These teachers' history lessons are staged in a science-oriented way. For other teachers it seems to be important that history lessons create identity or serve as civic education and are useful for understanding current problems. And yet for other teachers, history is a narrative about the past.



After studying the theory, based on classroom observations in the projects ‘The Cold War in the Classroom’ and ‘The Teaching of the History of One’s Own Country’, as well as in numerous professional discussions,<sup>7</sup> the assumption is that four different didactic positions in history can be located. These didactic positions can also be referred to as ‘beliefs’. We understand teachers’ history-specific beliefs as relatively stable, judgmental and powerful opinions about what history is and what it is for.<sup>8</sup> The four beliefs are:

- History as a Social Science
- History as an Identity Builder
- History as a Teacher for the Present and the Future
- History as a Narrative about the Past

However, empirical validation is needed in order to prove whether these four postulated constructs actually exist.

## 6. Empirical exploration of the different history-specific beliefs of teachers

The question to be tested in the first empirical exploration of the postulated beliefs (see above) was: Can the four theoretically postulated constructs (‘History as a Social Science’, ‘History as an Identity Builder’, ‘History as a Teacher for the Present and the Future’ and ‘History as a Narrative about the Past’) be operationalized by means of a questionnaire freshly developed for this purpose?

### Questionnaire

After a general introduction, the phrase ‘I am convinced that ...’ was followed by thirty statements/items (e.g., ‘... history helps us to better understand the present.’). The response format was a six-point Lickert scale: (1) ‘Strongly agree’, (2) ‘Agree’, (3) ‘Somewhat agree’, (4) ‘Somewhat disagree’, (5) ‘Disagree’, (6) ‘Strongly disagree’.

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7 We especially thank Nadine Fink, Nicole Riedweg, Michel Charrière and Jasmine Steger, as well as the students of the research workshop on History Didactics in the spring semester of 2022 at the UTE Lucerne for their many suggestions.

8 We have dealt with the terminology in more detail and explained it in N. Riedweg and P. Gautschi (2020): *Der Einfluss geschichtsspezifischer Überzeugungen von Lehrpersonen auf die Vermittlung der Geschichte des eigenen Landes.*

## Sample

The sample was  $N = 161$  persons (teachers:  $n = 80$ , students:  $n = 81$ ). After excluding all persons with one or more missing values,  $N = 150$  persons remained in the analyses (teachers:  $n = 71$ , students:  $n = 79$ ).

## Statistical procedure

Descriptive analyses were performed in a first step, exploratory factor analyses (principal axis analyses, oblique rotation (direct oblimin)) in a second step, and reliabilities were calculated (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) in a third step. All analyses were performed with IBM SPSS 27.

## Results

The descriptive analyses showed that the majority of the items had a positively skewed distribution, i.e., they were not approximately normally distributed. Respondents tended to agree rather than disagree with the statements. The assumption of (approximately) normal distribution plays a minor role in the present case, since there was no intention to generalize the results of the exploratory factor analyses to other samples than the present one at this point in time; likewise, significance tests did not play a role currently (cf. Field, 2013).

An initial exploratory factor analysis with all thirty items suggested a six-factor solution based on both Kaiser's criterion of 1 and the scree plot. An examination of the factor loadings after rotation led to the exclusion of five items. Three of these items had no clear loadings on any factor and, in addition, all loadings were rather low. Two items loaded highly on the fifth and sixth factors, but hardly at all on the other factors.

A further exploratory factor analysis with the remaining 25 items indicated a five-factor solution according to Kaiser's criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1). However, the eigenvalue of the fifth factor, 1.02, was only slightly above 1. The scree plot, on the other hand, clearly indicated a four-factor solution. The four-factor solution was preferred, and this is presented in some detail below.

The four factors in combination explained 59.60% of the variance. According to Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure indicates 'middling' to 'meritorious' sample adequacy for the analysis,  $KMO = .78$ . All  $KMO$  values for individual items were greater than .68, which is above the acceptable limit of .50 (Field, 2013). Table 1 shows the factor loadings after rotation, the eigenvalues and the explained variance, and the reliability of the four factors.

Stevens (2002) recommends interpreting factor loadings starting at an absolute value of .40. All major loadings on the respective factors (bold) are well above this value, and all minor loadings on other factors are well below. The items that cluster on the same factor suggest that factor 1 represents 'History as an Identity Builder', factor 2 represents 'History as Narrative about the Past', factor 3 'History as a Social Science' and factor 4 'History as a Teacher for the Present and the Future'.

The correlation matrix of the four factors showed values of between  $r = -.33$  and  $r = .09$ . That is, the factors are not completely independent of each other, but the correlations are rather small. From a theoretical conception, one would have expected independent factors (cf. Fig. 4), but this is hardly ever the case for psychological constructs such as beliefs (Field, 2013).

The unidimensionality of the four factors was also tested and confirmed. In all four cases, the Kaiser's criterion as well as the screen plot indicate a unidimensional solution. Table 1 shows that the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of all four factors are above .80, which indicates good reliability (Kline, 1999). The item-total statistic (corrected item-total correlation) of the four factors makes it clear that in all cases the values are well above .30, which is considered the lower limit for using one item together with the others (Field, 2013).

Items	Rotated Factor Loadings			
	History as an Identity Builder	History as a Narrative about the Past	History as a Social Science	History as a Teacher for the Present and the Future
I am convinced that ...				
... history helps us to understand the present better.	-08	-04	.10	-.72
... history makes it possible to establish a meaningful connection between the past, present and future.	-.01	.11	-.02	-.69
... history explains how contemporary societies came into being.	.19	-.02	.00	-.63
... history offers us orientation for the future.	.23	.21	-.11	-.64
... history is useful for understanding current problems.	.00	-.14	.06	-.83

... history is our teacher.	.18	.18	-.13	<b>-.58</b>
... history enables us to understand the causes and consequences of events.	-.11	.03	<b>.72</b>	-.17
... history helps to identify fake news.	.07	<b>-.08</b>	<b>.64</b>	.00
... you have to compare different sources to get a coherent picture of the past.	.09	.01	<b>.75</b>	-.03
... past events must be researched using scientific methods.	.07	-.04	<b>.73</b>	.05
... history is created when we analyse sources, check them and transform them into a narrative.	.08	.14	<b>.51</b>	.20
... dealing with history promotes critical thinking.	-.07	.02	<b>.72</b>	-.08
... knowledge of history is important for a good general education.	-.14	<b>.58</b>	.18	-.09
... history shows us how it used to be.	-.04	<b>.68</b>	-.13	-.25
... contemporary witnesses contribute to the understanding of history.	-.13	<b>.62</b>	-.08	.08
... we find in history a number of educational stories.	.15	<b>.74</b>	.00	.00
... history gives us knowledge about the past.	-.03	<b>.64</b>	.17	.02
... we need to know many facts from the past to understand history.	.04	<b>.64</b>	.02	.05
... through history the consciousness of nations is formed	.13	<b>.66</b>	-.09	-.01
... history shows us how we have become what we are.	<b>.60</b>	.09	.10	-.19
... values are conveyed through history.	<b>.75</b>	.04	.04	-.04
... history promotes awareness of being a member of an international community.	<b>.68</b>	-.02	.04	-.05
... History explains to us which values are important for us.	<b>.80</b>	.08	.06	.02
... History creates identity.	<b>.72</b>	-.14	.02	-.05
... history promotes the awareness of belonging to a community.	<b>.81</b>	-.04	-.09	.06
Eigenvalues	5.80	3.49	3.42	2.19
% of variance	23.22	13.94	13.68	8.77
$\alpha$	.88	.83	.83	.86
Corrected Item-Total Correlation	.63–.73	.49–.65	.51–.68	.58–.76

**Table 1: Summary of exploratory factor analysis results of the four-factor solution**

## Conclusion

We succeeded in clearly identifying and reliably measuring the four theoretically postulated constructs in the underlying sample, namely:

- History as a Social Science
- History as an Identity Builder
- History as a Teacher for the Present and the Future
- History as a Narrative about the Past

## Discussion

Overall, we consider the result of this first trial to be very encouraging with a view to further development of the instrument. Two things in particular should be noted here. First, in order to be able to use more sophisticated analytical procedures (e.g., confirmatory factor analyses), the sample would have to be significantly enlarged. Second, skewed distributions are a problem that could possibly be addressed by parcelling (see e.g. Bandalos and Finney, 2001; Little, Cunningham, Shahar and Widaman, 2002; Matsunaga, 2008). However, this would probably require even more items per construct. Nine or more items per construct would be desirable.

For us and others – e.g. Thorp (2016), Karlsson (2018), Nitsche (2019) or Bernhard (2022) – it seems to be extremely important to get to the bottom of teachers' subject-specific beliefs, because these beliefs have a great influence on the practice of conveying historical knowledge in general and an impact on the knowledge and attitudes of students in particular. In this sense, it should be asked whether, in addition to the four beliefs mentioned above, there are other beliefs that are likely to guide teachers in their teaching of history. One could also think of beliefs with objectives such as indoctrination, myth-making, etc.

Moreover, it could be theoretically interesting and fruitful for empirical analyses to try to map the different beliefs into dimensional structures, as McAuley, Duncan and Russell (1992) have done in the case of causal attributions. This would have the advantage, for example, that in certain cases more parsimonious analytical models could be used. Following this idea, in the case of the present four beliefs, two dimensions could be taken as a basis. First, history education is oriented towards the fundamental dimension of history, namely time. History education focuses either more on the past or more on the present and future. Second, history education is oriented with basic categories of pedagogy and focuses either more on qualification or more on enculturation. This then results in the following model:

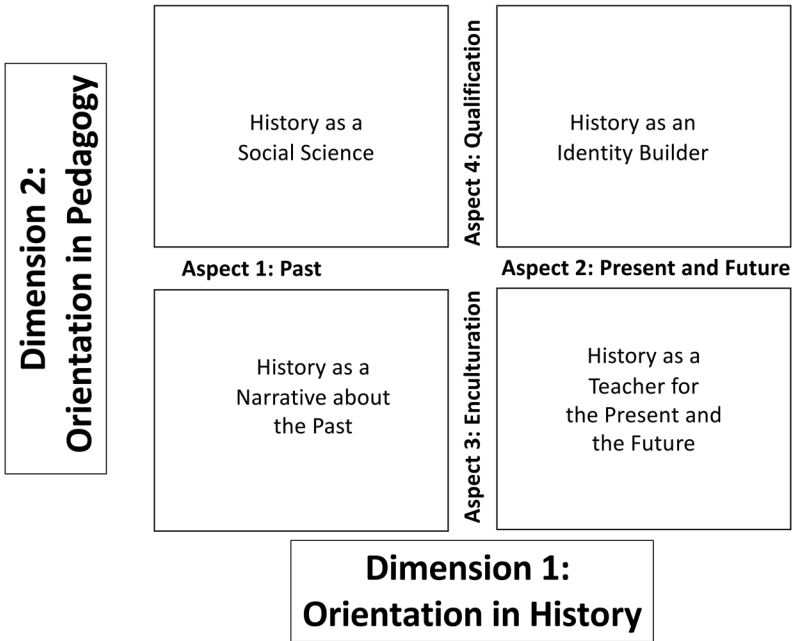


Figure 3: Model of different history-specific beliefs of teachers<sup>9</sup>

Of course, further research is needed to determine whether the different history-specific beliefs of teachers can be demonstrated in other studies and how these different beliefs are related and interrelated. Equally important, however, is to continue to think about the question of why history should be taught in schools and to the public. On the one hand, knowledge about the diversity of possible answers puts one’s own position into perspective. On the other hand, knowledge broadens the view and opens up new perspectives. These are undoubtedly necessary for history education in the future.

9 We especially thank Nadine Fink for the many discussions we held with her about the architecture of the model. Without her thinking along with us, this model could not be presented like it is now.

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## Why Do We Teach History?

### Multiperspectivity on the Past From the Teachers' Point of View



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### Abstract

Why do we teach history? Asking this question means questioning the purposes assigned to school history. These have been multiple over time, as well as diverse in accordance with their assignment by the educational and political authorities, the academic sphere or even the public space. In this contribution, we give voice to teachers in French-speaking Switzerland in support of a collective research project entitled 'The teaching of the history of one's own country.' It is in this context that we conducted twelve interviews with teachers and observed fifteen lessons in the cantons of Vaud, Neuchâtel and Fribourg. Our empirical results enable us to show that the ways in which contents are conveyed is mostly subordinated to the aims teachers assign to school history.

## 1. Introduction

*History?* ‘Sometimes I feel like saying it’s useless’ is an answer from a French-speaking Swiss teacher interviewed in the context of our research<sup>1</sup> on the teaching of the history of one’s own country<sup>2</sup> at the lower and upper secondary levels.

What is the importance of history? Asking this question means, among other things, questioning the purposes attributed to history at school and, more widely, its function in a school that is struggling with utilitarian injunctions. In this contribution, we choose to give the floor to teachers to be, in a way, the spokespersons for history. It is through their words that we put forward a few answers referring more particularly to the teaching of history in their own country, in our case, Switzerland. It is therefore a question of relating their words to the aims assigned to history as a school subject, of showing how they play with the school framework and its constraints in order to implement their conception of history with regard to their personal convictions and their own relationship to history, as well as to the challenges of its transmission in classes.

The data on which our analyses are based were produced as part of an international comparative research project on the teaching of the history of one’s own country in different national multilingual contexts at secondary levels I and II (Fink, Furrer and Gautschi, 2020). The aim of the project was to analyse and compare the processes of history teaching by looking at the phenomena and actions that occur during a teaching sequence. The aim was to find out how teachers in different national plurilingual and pluricultural contexts deal with the plurality of perspectives and experiences in the past when teaching the history of their own country. The notion of the plurality of perspectives in history teaching is correlated with the idea of multiperspectivity developed by Stradling, according to whom the plural view of history can be ensured by the ability to link different viewpoints while aiming at three objectives:

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- 1 This research was funded by Swiss universities within the framework of the project ‘Development of scientific competence in the field of disciplinary didactics 2017–2020’. It is among the projects deployed within the *Centre de Compétences Romand de Didactique Disciplinaire* (2Cr2D). We would like to thank Andy Maître, a former collaborator in our team, for his participation in the literature review, the production of the data and the initial analyses.
  - 2 The choice of terminology: ‘history of one’s own country’ rather than ‘national history’ is based on the historical reference to a space considered over the long term, before the formation of nation states in the nineteenth century until the present day. See Fink, Furrer and Gautschi (2020: 35).

*A broader and more comprehensive understanding of historical events and developments, taking into account the converging and diverging narratives and viewpoints of all stakeholders; a deeper understanding of the historical relationships between nations, between neighboring countries, or between majorities and minorities within national borders; a clearer view of the dynamics of events through the study of the interactions between the individuals and groups involved, their interdependence. (2001: 152–153)*

The author mentions several factors favoring multiperspectivity: the description of the same historical event from different viewpoints (political, actor, witness, journalist, etc.); highlighting these viewpoints as pieces of a puzzle that can only be understood as a whole; the contextualization of each action, i.e., the apprehension of the present of the past of the actors in history (Koselleck, 1990); or again, the fact of showing the diversity of interpretations of the same event by different historians; to make the subjectivity of historical sources understood; and to apprehend the multiplicity of identities that define the actors in history, and the role of these actors in the latter. Many authors have theorized and explained the didactic interest of an approach that articulates multiple perspectives and cross-views, bringing actors and interpretations into dialogue when teaching history.<sup>3</sup> Their work points to the importance of thinking about complexity in history, of varying the scales of analysis and interpretative points of view, of approaching sources and historical narratives from the angle of the processes of constructing narratives. These are all necessary components for learning a critical posture.

However, the question arises as to how we can take multiperspectivity into account in the process of didactic transposition when teaching the history of our own country. Is the national frame an aid or an obstacle in the teaching of an open history that refers to multiperspectivity? The present chapter therefore proposes to report on some analytical results aimed at understanding the conceptions expressed by history teachers in French-speaking Switzerland about multiperspectivity in the history of one's own country.

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3 On this subject, see among others Fink (2014), Hassani Idrissi (2005), Heimberg (2002), Heimberg and Opériol (2012), Martineau (1999), Seixas (2000) and Wineburg (2001).

### Dataset and method of analysis

The analysis is based mainly on observations of ordinary history lessons and semi-structured interviews with the teachers who taught them. This is an exploratory corpus in so far as it cannot be considered representative of the Swiss-French teaching profession. It consists of a total of twelve interviews and fifteen observations of classroom lessons, the details of which are presented below (Table 1). We conducted semi-structured interviews to ask participants about their teaching of history in general and Swiss history in particular. We then conducted observations of history lessons on Swiss history. Observations allow us to have access to what happens in the classroom in order to relate the discourses (interviews) to the way teachers implement their conceptions of history. We used a thematic and content analysis that allows us to identify emerging themes from cross-readings of the transcripts. In this way, we place ourselves in a qualitative and interpretative perspective (Bardin, 1993; Savoie-Zajc, 2011).

Teachers	Number of classroom observations	Experience (years)	Canton	Level
<b>A</b>	<b>1</b>	16	Vaud	sec. I
<b>B</b>	<b>1</b>	8	Vaud	sec. I
<b>C</b>	<b>1</b>	18	Vaud	sec. I
<b>F</b>	<b>2</b>	4	Vaud	sec. I
<b>G</b>	<b>0</b>	12	Fribourg	sec. II
<b>H</b>	<b>0</b>	10	Fribourg	sec. II
<b>I</b>	<b>1</b>	17	Vaud	sec. II
<b>J</b>	<b>3</b>	1	Vaud	sec. II
<b>K</b>	<b>0</b>	20	Vaud	sec. II
<b>L</b>	<b>1</b>	28	Vaud	sec. II
<b>M</b>	<b>2</b>	16	Neuchâtel	sec. II
<b>N</b>	<b>1</b>	22	Neuchâtel	sec. II
<b>O</b>	<b>2</b>	10	Fribourg	sec. II

**Table 1: Description of the corpus**

Our data were processed with the help of Nvivo software, which led us to establish different categories of analysis. First of all, we analysed the teachers' statements of intent: the thematic choices of the sequences, the subjects dealt with, the overall perspective of the teaching (values/finalities attributed to national history and actual weight in the lesson observed) and lexical field related to the teaching of history. Then we categorized the observations made, i.e., the actual practices: explanatory schemes mobilized during the teaching, teaching strategies deployed, documents used in the classroom. Finally, we triangulated the analyses in order to articulate the discourses on teaching ('what I think and what I say I do') with the discourses underlying the actual practices ('what I say, explicitly or implicitly, in doing as I do'). The aim is not to pass judgement on teachers, but to highlight the weight of their individual positions in the process of didactic transposition.

Among the categories of analysis applied in Nvivo that ultimately proved to be effective were the teaching strategies envisaged and/or adopted, the aims assigned to history by the teachers, the choice of themes, their explicit and/or implicit definitions of national history, the spatial scales mentioned, and the teachers' personal relationship to history. Explanatory patterns about the past (the question of taking into account the plurality of perspectives) were analysed in the classroom interactions and at the level of the sources and documents used. Analysis of the data by units defined by our categories allowed us to highlight the key ideas and themes that structure teachers' discourses and classroom practices. We took great care not to extend our findings to all the teachers interviewed in the form of a univocal discourse, but rather to describe a variety of discourses and practices.

We will therefore first discuss how national history can have an effect leveraging multiperspectivity, while highlighting other adjuncts of the latter in the observed discourses and practices, and before stating some constraints and limits to this multiperspectivity. The comments we quote are mainly drawn from the interviews.

## **2. National history as an agent of multiperspectivity**

### **2.1 Freedom to choose**

The conception of national history put forward by the teachers is part of an institutional framework that the majority of our panel described as flexible, especially at the upper secondary level. In a federal structural context in which each canton



retains its prerogatives in their own areas of education, teachers at the secondary II level report that their study plans and programs are usually not very restrictive:

*The study plan is not restrictive. We have compulsory passages. We have a compulsory chronology. We start in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and end in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, we are very free, because we can give more or less importance to this or that subject ... And then, apart from the compulsory subjects, such as the Industrial Revolution or the Second World War, we can develop personal subjects, such as the history of sport, for example. So, we don't have a stifling straitjacket. (N)*

While they did report an often chronological program and a few unavoidable themes, the flexibility they retained allowed them to be flexible in terms of the subjects they covered. Only one teacher in upper secondary reported a strict program:

*The programs are clear. So, you go to [the school's website], the programs are well defined, and fortunately they are well defined, because there is a framework, and it is within this framework that we work each year. Because if a teacher goes overboard, it's going to be repetitive, and it doesn't make sense. (L)*

Some themes in Swiss history cannot be omitted, as they are linked to the construction of so-called modern Switzerland and its main actors, for example, to the genesis of Switzerland and to myths about figures such as William Tell, the Burgundian Wars, Nicholas de Flüe, the Great Discoveries, the Renaissance, the Reformation, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Napoleon in Switzerland, the Sonderbund and the great events of contemporary history (the Industrial Revolution, the First and Second World Wars, totalitarianism, Nazism and the Shoah).

Freedom allowed by the flexibility of the study plans opens up the range of topics covered such as absolutism, the patrician families of Fribourg, neutrality, the right of asylum, the opening up of the country, refugees, mercenaries, the link between Switzerland and foreigners, propaganda, political life, witches, the history of sport, waves of foreign immigration, net migration, or federal votes. All these elements and approaches are summarized by teacher H. in a formula that is indicative of a questioning of national history: 'There is no Swiss history. Each teacher does as he or she wishes, but I try to make links with current events in Switzerland'.

In interrogating the emerging conceptions of teachers' discourses, we have identified a variety of spatial scales involved in teaching the history of one's own country.

## 2.2 A variety of possibilities in terms of spatial scales

The spatial scales that teachers deal with are varied. Most of them say that they teach the history of all countries, European ones in particular, but also of other countries further afield: 'I cover all countries. I cover Germany, the Empire, Switzerland, France, England' (A). In talking about the Reformation, for example, F extends the Swiss view to a more general European trend. Some of them also mention famous European figures such as Diderot, Catherine II of Russia, the Duke of Berry or the great explorers. Although we can see that history is taught in a manner that is open to other civilizations, it should be noted that the themes covered remain essentially focused on Europe. The history that is taught is intended to be sufficiently global so as not to saturate pupils with Swiss history.

*So, I'll use stories about Switzerland, and enrich them with elements from the history of France or even from my home region, Alsace, or from regions I've visited. [...] And moreover, it forces them to think, to be aware of the simultaneity in history. Something is happening in one place, whereas something else was happening in another place. And it's a hard job. It's something that somehow disturbs them. That we didn't have potatoes in Europe, and that the Incas didn't have the wheel, for example. (B)*

Switzerland sometimes becomes 'a specific case study in order to understand a more general process' (F). This technique allows teachers and students to go into a process of decentering, of opening up, in other words the first step towards taking multiperspectivity into account.

*In my teaching, it's true that my purpose is rather to link Switzerland with general history. And to ... As a matter of fact, if we take into account the three last years I've been teaching, it's rather history based on Europe, the Mediterranean, well, roughly speaking, centred on Western societies. But I also feel concerned about other things, for example, about the independence of India and the study of the film Gandhi, etc. So, I don't let my whole year be overwhelmed by Swiss history. (I)*

While Swiss history is still considered as a separate syllabus, most teachers try to avoid the juxtaposition effect of talking about a topic and then adding the part Switzerland played in it. Thus, the majority of teachers perceive Swiss history as very connected to the rest of the world, and use this connection to make links:

*For example, if we study today's migrations, we can recall that Switzerland has not always been a country of migration, or a host country, but that it's only recently that the Swiss stay in their own country, apart from the internationals who obviously leave. And the migratory balance is positive in Switzerland. [...] Switzerland has not always been a rich country. We can, from time to time, make comparisons between a previous situation and the situation we have today in Switzerland. (N)*

However, the history of one's own country begins with a history that is geographically linked with the history of the canton, the history of the region, the history of a building whose materiality the pupils can understand thanks to the proximity of the lesson being taught. Thus, many of the comments they made evoke the history of Payerne Abbey, the Broye, Fribourg, Neuchâtel, or even Morat and Grandson. The teachers reported that the pupils are more receptive to the history of their immediate environment.

*My aim is always the following: to link historical events with local history. For example, last week I started with the end of the Roman Empire, etc., the fourth century, and then we carried on with Emperor Maximin and the massacre of the Theban legion which took place in Saint-Maurice. So, the aim is to select a theme to start with and try to stick to the local as much as possible. I try to do that as often as possible. [...] Because I sense that the students are more interested in that than in being taught conceptual things, very distant ones in terms of time and space. A proximity, which can also awaken a new interest. (K)*

As can be seen here, it is a question of integrating a local event into a more global history in order to put the history of one's own country into perspective.

One difficulty remains, however: faced with the variety of scales of history taught in what is a federal and multicultural country, teachers aim for a so-called equitable ratio between all histories. This aspiration is challenged by the time constraint: 'I try to find a ratio between Swiss history, European history, world history, which reflects a little the importance that Swiss history can have in my eyes' (M). Moreover, the effect of juxtaposing histories remains difficult to avoid:

*There are so many things that are fairly complicated in Switzerland. Therefore, it will just be a blink of an eye. Switzerland in the Korean War, Switzerland's role on the Korean border. It's obvious that after the Second World War we are more at the level of a blink of an eye. (G)*

An analysis of these comments leads us to admit that the teachers can play on the different scales that teaching the history of their own country allows them: 'I make more links to Swiss history than I really teach Swiss history' (J). This conception, which is defined mainly in terms of links and not in terms of discourse on a specific topic, shows an open but above all a plural redefinition of national history teaching.

### 2.3 A plural definition of so-called national history

The analysis of our data shows that there are almost as many conceptions of history teaching as there are teachers.

In a conception inherited from nineteenth-century historiography, the teaching of the history of one's own country is often conceived around themes that are declined according to a chronological logic that draws an idealized portrait of it: the foundation of Switzerland in the Middle Ages, the birth of modern Switzerland in 1848, the political particularity of a nation born of the will of the people (Willensnation): 'A planetary particularity with a few fundamental rights: initiative, referendum, not just one leader but seven [...]. This makes us very stable; and we don't have strikes every other day' (F).

The interest in teaching the history of Switzerland is generally also referred to the desire to deal with understanding contemporary democratic institutions: '[It is the history] of a political organization of the country and the way in which the cantons are aggregated [...]. A way of settling conflicts, both military conflicts [...]. And then labour peace' (C). Thus, dealing with Swiss history becomes synonymous with understanding a series of values that would underlie its identity around the notions of neutrality and direct democracy: 'Switzerland is a country of a certain stability compared to the other great powers. And this neutrality means that we did not go to war during the two World Wars' (L). This reading also applies to the way in which social tensions are calmed:

*I like it because I think it is very rich, quite subtle, with agreements often being created, a concord that exists among the Confederates. Even if there are tensions, we can get excellent results, and problems are solved peacefully.* (N)

The idea of the *Sonderfall* or special case is prominent here, although it may also be subject to more critical questioning:

*I find it difficult to teach anything but political history in Switzerland. [...]. This means that it is very much about neutrality, the place of Switzerland in the political world. And I think other aspects are therefore neglected, such as cultural Switzerland. Who*

*are the Swiss artists? What about scientific Switzerland, Swiss industry? [...] This is a deliberate choice, but shouldn't we look for other pieces of interest than those? (H)*

Instead of focusing on themes and concepts that are linked to an idealized image of Switzerland, discourses also emerge that invite decentering. Teacher B., who is originally from France, explained the undeniable advantage of not being from the country when teaching its history, thereby distancing himself from concepts of national history that he often finds 'patriotic' in French-speaking Switzerland:

*Patriotic here in the wrong sense of the word: we/they, can be dangerous. It took me a long time to understand the danger of the we/they, and I often have the feeling that ... now I'm not teaching in France but in Switzerland, perhaps the we/they will be greatly attenuated. (B)*

Thus, several teachers would like to adopt a cultural approach when teaching history, thus aiming to undermine nationalism:

*I often say to myself that in Switzerland, if you teach Swiss history, it's because you want to deal with nationalism or try to push your students to be good patriots somehow [...]. I therefore find it important to take up this subject, to undermine the myths, to discuss how Switzerland was built. (J)*

Finally, the prevailing concept that emerges from these speeches remains that of a very thematic history, linked to general history subjects to which incursions into Swiss history are added. With themes such as the Enlightenment, the French Revolution or the World Wars, teachers open windows on to Swiss history. The history of their own country is not seen as isolated from others, but rather as connected with a more global and longer term history:

*The history of my country ... To be very sincere, I don't think that national history is more important. What is important, as I said earlier, is that they feel they belong to a space-time continuum, that they are parts of history. So, we have to work on our local history and then create these links (C)*

Encouraging links, considering national history as part of a broader global destiny, perceiving Swiss history as connected and therefore revealing general tendencies were all elements emphasized by most of the teachers we interviewed. National history is often perceived as too episodic to be an object in itself. The

national anchorage is thus more a teaching strategy to meet their teaching objectives, rather than expressing a desire for identity:

*So that the students may discover certain things about the place where they live. [...] I insist on the fact that what we are going to study allows us to understand the framework in which we live. And I think that's what is eventually at stake. (I)*

These analyses support the idea of talking about the history of one's own country rather than national history. In the majority of the collected comments, the teachers go beyond the Swiss national framework *stricto sensu*. According to our observations, this leads them to take into account multiperspectivity in the way they deal with themes in Swiss history.

### 3. A plurality of purposes towards multiperspectivity

The various aims assigned to the teaching of history find numerous occurrences in the teachers' discourses, which we develop here according to the three categories of the typology developed by Riedweg and Gautschi (2020).

#### 3.1 History as knowledge of the past

For many teachers, the aim of history is indeed to convey knowledge of unavoidable subjects while developing teaching strategies capable of arousing the interest of pupils:

*I would say that the essential objective [...] is to enable them to acquire a sound general knowledge in history, with a few references, so that we understand what we are talking about when we talk about democracy, legislative power, etc. (M)*

This acquisition of knowledge is coupled with the development of skills, a process that is intended to develop students' critical thinking skills:

*What I want to develop in the students is the skill, the critical sense. It's the very basic skill of going to look for information and confronting it. To make them reason about it. And at the end of the day, it will perhaps make them reach a good level of knowledge. Competences are in order to reach a basic knowledge. (K)*

This desire to develop students' critical thinking skills while at the same time developing their knowledge of the past leads teachers to deal with the darker

aspects of national history. Most of them talked about the controversy over the role of the Swiss authorities during the Second World War. Although teachers find the subject sensitive, they are mostly in favour of teaching this controversy in history class: 'After the Bergier Commission, the curtain was lifted a little. It's a bit tricky. [...] It's delicate, but it must be said. We mustn't leave them as we were, encouraged in illusion' (A).

These teachers deviate from what various studies have pointed out: a so-called preference for conveying a positive image of their country's history, rather than dealing with alternative histories (Levstik, 2000), that is, the avoidance of controversial topics in history for fear of undermining national identity (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2016; Nikander and Virta, 2014). However, while the understanding of multiperspectivity should be a learning process throughout schooling and in relation to all periods of history, it remains essentially limited to contemporary history topics, especially those dealt with towards the end of the school career.

### 3.2 History as a social science

For our teachers, treating history as a social science allows students to acquire a critical sense. This is the purpose for which we have encountered the most frequent occurrences in the analysed discourses:

*That they can effectively develop a certain critical sense with regard to information. [...] Then there is also curiosity. [...] To have little elements here and there that make them want to dig deeper. [...] To give them a critical look at 'us'. [...] Who are 'we'? And 'us', 'them'. Where does that come from? (B)*

Observation of the past should foster a certain humility and a sense of otherness. The inclusion of human history in the long term, the highlighting of processes still at work today, the exploration of other ways of living, thinking and acting in other past societies are all factors valued by teachers.

*It's also a question of humility, of seeing that we haven't been around for long, that there are quite a few people before us who have done a lot of things and that we still believe we are at the cutting edge of progress – this idea of being a bit humble with our systems, our values, and not believing that we hold the truth in many things. If we look at history, there have been many ways of living and all that, and I think that's interesting to explain to students [...] Yes, to respect the different values, the different ideas, the different times, in the sense that, yes, we are in Switzerland, in Europe, in 2018,*

*but to know that there are other ways of conceiving many things. So, when someone has another idea, another opinion, whether it's political or anything else, first let's try to understand what they are saying before saying 'I don't like it'. To understand what's going on. And then to be able to say, 'I don't like it', but with knowledge of the facts. So, a critical mind, but open. I appreciate when they give their opinion, when there is a fierce debate, when they listen to the other person and say why they don't agree. And that interests me a lot, in fact. (H)*

History is considered to help understanding the complexity of the world, of the phenomena, but also the agency of people in the past. The essential aim of history teaching remains that of achieving a critical look at anachronism, various interpretations, information and the sources of this same information, tending towards a certain multiperspectivity by coming closer to the profession of historian:

*So, whether it's graphs, photos or texts, the work of the historian is the ABC of source criticism. That's one of the things I make them aware of. I also make them aware of the profession of historian. What are the difficulties encountered by the historian, apart from the questions of criticism and ... of language that the historian has to approach with a critical eye ... the anachronisms, the interpretations of sources, the lack of sources too, the choice of sources that is made. So here I am raising awareness ... I think that this can be useful for other subjects ... through the work of the historian, the historian's criticism of documents. (N)*

### **3.3 History as a guide for the present and the future**

From this perspective, history also has the function of enabling memory work, i.e., taking into account the past in the way we consider the present.

*You come from a place, so it's quite important to know your own history, for the sake of living together. You can understand your region and your country far better. [...] Why we have this institution, why we have that tradition, why our founding myths. (G)*

Forgetting all that would make you run the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past: 'The aim is also not to repeat the past. And a slightly more concrete objective is to make a compilation of events to prevent forgetting' (M).

The main issue raised is that of linking events between past and present in order to understand contemporary societal processes and phenomena. This sometimes leads teachers into the realm of current affairs. They deal with current



issues, sometimes by choice, sometimes because current events burst into the classroom. For example, teacher H was confronted with certain tensions around the Armenian genocide or the Serbian-Bosnian conflict:

*It's interesting to see already why there's this tension, how it is that nationalisms are like that. So, we have to start with all they have to say about it and then build a more objective knowledge. (H)*

#### 4. Forms of teaching and affective dimension as obstacles to multiperspectivity

In the practices we observed, we noted that the narrative remains the preferred form of conveying information in class. While the prospect of opening up teaching to practices other than lectures appealed to the majority of the teachers interviewed, in the event they emphasized their difficulties in putting them into practice. Thus, the transmission of knowledge through a lecture and the telling of a story still seems to them to be the quickest and most effective way of transmitting knowledge:

*We try to show the complexity, by simplifying. We try to show the complexity, and simplify it. Because if we remain too complex, they won't understand. So, we have to simplify by showing that it's more complicated than what we're trying to show. (G)*

The teachers' fears of complexity are also expressed in the difficulties they often assume they have in implementing new practices in their classes. For example, repetition is one of the preferred methods of teacher A, while investigative devices seem too complex to implement for teacher C, who prefers lectures.

Similarly, although the history of one's own country within the framework of Switzerland can be a real help in opening up history to multiple and plural scales, for some teachers it is also synonymous with a specific history that is too complicated to teach:

*It's true that it's a complicated history, often with local and cantonal specificities. We know that the history of Neuchâtel is very different from the history of the Valais. However, we don't even go into that level of detail'. (N)*

Thus, despite a choice of content and of teaching methods that favour pupils' acquisition of relevant modes of reflection and analysis to approach historical events from an open, transnational and comparative perspective, numerous constraints limit their implementation in everyday school life.

The teachers we interviewed also expressed strong emotional feelings about the history they teach. It is not only a question of bringing pupils into contact with plural visions of history, but above all of making them aware of otherness, of breaking out of the us/them dialectic. Teaching the history of one's own country is complicated by the fact that it is often associated with a positive or negative, and therefore emotional, vision, which is also inclusive in a form of 'us' that makes it impossible not to oppose it with a 'them'. The very positive view held by some teachers can be an obstacle to a plural vision of history in that it sets up the national point of view as a positive point of view, and the way of functioning as an idealization of the Swiss way of life.

*I learned about Swiss history, and I thought it was great. The castles, the battles, the pictures with the halberds. That kind of heroism. It was deliberate. It made you dream. You talk about the French Revolution, it's less mythical. [...] You say that they are losing. Suspense, then you say here comes Winkelried. He is also a legendary being. And you hear these sighs. They won. That's my team. It's the Swiss! (A)*

Conversely, the teaching of one's own country's history is also subject to negative rejections of anything related to its teaching. Some of the teachers in our corpus mentioned pupils who found this teaching boring, who said they had heard too much about it, or who thought they had nothing to learn from it: 'If we talk about Switzerland a bit too often, it's a bit of an overdose, so I reserve the right to talk about Switzerland later in the year. I say to myself, I'll spare them a little' (F).

Finally, teaching the history of one's own country also opens the door to an identification through the 'we', far from the critical distance that is envisaged. This can be seen in the following statements, which are representative of a lexical field of 'us/them', which is very present in our observation data: 'Our friend Zwingli [...] in our Waldstätten' (B), or again: 'The Swiss get along well in all circumstances, even if the Schwyzerdütsch sometimes gets on our nerves' (F).

Analyses of the data produced during class observations show a strong propensity to make value judgements about past events and actors: 'And then we go and see the Habsburgs, they're bad guys' (B). As to whether this propensity is exacerbated by the nature of one's own country's history, a study including control

classes where general history topics are taught would be necessary. However, value judgements can be an obstacle to multiperspectivity. Classroom observations also show the limits between saying (interviews) and doing (observations). It is this articulation that needs to be investigated further so that answers to ‘Why history education?’ can be documented at the level not only of explicit intentions, but above all of the discourses that are implicit in teaching moments.

## 5. In conclusion

The overall arrangement of the survey and the data analysed on teaching the history of one’s own country allowed us to provide answers to the question ‘Why do we teach history?’ from the perspective of the teachers. They talked about the history of their own country as a plurality of narratives in the context of a multilingual, multi-confessional, federal country. They showed a strong sensitivity towards highlighting the diversity and complexity of past and present societies. They are careful to articulate a plurality of spatial scales when dealing with themes related to Swiss history. But they are also caught up in the chronological exposition and juxtaposition of themes that are treated separately from each other.

Although in the last section we underlined the limits of teaching the history of one’s own country, limits relating to emotional investment and value judgements, in the end the many examples of the variety of histories offered by this teaching in the context of our study confirm that it is not so much the theme chosen – national history, for example – that is a brake on multiperspectivity, but the way in which it is approached and the form of teaching that is chosen. We observe that the teachers’ discourse and practices incorporate one or more of the elements of a plural vision of history like that set out in the introduction to this chapter. Thus, in spite of some of the limitations pointed out in the teachers’ statements, we maintain that their ambitions and practices tend towards a history that integrates multiperspectivity as an answer to the question of ‘Why do we teach history?’. The history of one’s own country even seems to be a lever to introduce students to the plurality of perspectives in and about the past.

Lastly, there is a significant desire to develop a critical stance – defined as the ability to be open to other points of view in the present as well as in the past – as an understanding of the complexity of the societal processes at work. These are all central elements of multiperspectivity, but the conditions of possibility for a real didactic transposition in the daily life of the classroom still need to be explored.

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## Why History Makes No Sense



Wolfgang Hasberg

### Abstract

History does not make sense: it only transports sense, which it takes from its associated contemporary culture and combines it with whatever information is known about the past. This thesis is developed by starting from an example, the historiography of the twentieth century, which is described by historians in very different ways. The reason is that the past (which must be distinguished from history) has neither sense or meaning nor structure, as is shown with the help of the philosopher Thomas Lessing. Didactically it follows that students have to learn how sense comes into history. This is easier to learn in de-constructing historical narratives than in the process of re-constructing history, because in the latter case students have to make abstractions from their own prior judgments. In de-constructing, they deal with stories that others have created. This makes it easier to discover the traces that cultural meaning has left in them.

### 1. Introduction

Leaving this title without a question mark, but regarding it instead as a statement, makes it somewhat provocative. And the statement that history makes no sense is also highly problematic from the point of view of history didactics. After all, why should something that makes no sense be taught?

Therefore, two questions shall be addressed in this article. The first concerns explaining the thesis that history does not make sense. In this context it is indis-

pensable to look theoretically at how history can be defined. Second, therefore, before this problem can be tackled, we need to determine what follows from a positive evaluation of the thesis for history didactics and history education.

## 2. Making sense or making no sense – that’s the question

That makes sense! or on the contrary: That makes no sense! is a phrase often heard in German-language conversations currently. It is not a (scientific) notion, but a trivial everyday term, which means that one agrees or disagrees with the reading or interpretation of a given situation. What it actually means is that one can extract a meaning from a description of supposed reality, which may or may not be significant for orientation in the present. To what extent this sense or, more simply, this opinion can be backed up by argumentation often seems completely irrelevant in such conversations. It is more an intuitive performance of orientation than the result of intellectual recognition.

It has been known since the initiation of the sociology of knowledge (*Wissenssoziologie*) by P. Berger and T. Luckmann at the latest that reality is not perceived as such, but is constructed by the recognizing subject.<sup>1</sup> The description and evaluation of the present reality is a construct that is based partly on the social conventions that the individual adopts, and partly on the subjective experiences which the individual inevitably transfers into his description and evaluation of reality. If this is already true for the present reality, how much more true would it be for the past realities that historians deal with?

Is there any sense in the past that historians can find? Is there any sense in their descriptions of the past? The thesis is that the past has no inherent sense, but sense is created by telling stories about the past or by making history out of it through narration.<sup>2</sup> More precisely, it is not history that makes sense, nor the historian; rather, in historical narratives, sense is transported.<sup>3</sup> However, this gives rise to the question of how sense comes into history.

This problematic will first be developed and then illuminated with respect to its didactical consequences by starting with a particular historiographical example, before the theoretical explanation follows and the historic-didactical consequences are drawn at the end.

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1 Berger/Luckmann, 1969; also Schröter, 2004.

2 Cf. Danto, 1968.

3 With regard to this last point, cf. already Hasberg, 2019, and in more detail Hasberg, 2022c.

### 3. History: a senseless narration?

#### 3.1 Narrating the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The story begins in 1914, and more precisely at the end of July 1914.<sup>4</sup> However, this is already a determination, and a meaningful determination, one might state. And it is already obvious what the story is about: the First World War. However, while some would rather say *First World War*, others would call it the *Great War* or *La Grande Guerre*, rather than *World War I* or *Première Guerre* or *Guerre Mondiale*.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, everyone thinks they know what the story is about: it is about the war that began in 1914 and ended in 1918. However, this is not quite true either, because it ended earlier in Russia (1917) and later in other parts of Europe and the world. Perhaps one might nonetheless consider that Poland, for example, and other areas voted on affiliation in 1921 or that in 1923 the Ruhr area of Germany was still occupied by the French. In a voluminous, recently published book which thematizes the “over-burdened peace” of Versailles, the German historian J. Leonhard argues quite similarly when, in his subtitle, he dates the period to 1918–1923 and emphasizes that it is not possible to determine a precise end to the war because the peace treaties were not only negotiated and concluded at different dates (up to 1923), they were also perceived and evaluated by the participants in different ways, as well as being appreciated quite differently in the present, depending on one’s own local or national point of view.<sup>6</sup> Just as there was no definite beginning, so there is no definite end. Have the peace treaties and the resulting reorganization ceased to count as parts of the war we call World War I?

One can take the view that this makes sense. Then the occupation period would simply be included in the war period. This would mean that for parts of the left bank of the Rhine the war would not have ended before 1929, because only then were the Allied troops withdrawn. Or perhaps it was the abandonment of the demilitarization of the Rhineland, which took place in 1936 by a unilateral act on the orders of Adolf Hitler, that brought World War I to its end.<sup>7</sup>

One might object that this is to go too far. After all, our narrative has long since arrived at the time that the German-speaking world regards as the

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4 See the successful book by Clark, 2012; also Clark, 2013.

5 Hasberg, 2021b and Hasberg, 2021a; cf. Büren et al., 2019.

6 Leonhard, 2019.

7 Instead of the numerous special studies, see the dense description in Toland, 1977: 519–521.



*Zwischenkriegszeit* (interwar period), or the time between the wars. This is a notion or concept that, firstly, is not at all familiar in other European countries, and secondly, presupposes that there was a Second World War – which, of course, those living in 1936 could not yet have known, nor even more precisely before 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939. So, when did World War I begin? When did it end? And was there an interwar period? Or is there coherence from 1914 to 1949, a fall into Hell, to quote the German translation of I. Kershaw's book?<sup>8</sup>

In fact, however, we can continue to tell the story that supposedly began in July 1914 as much as we like, right up to the present day. Because to talk about the interwar period implies that after the First World War a Second World War had to follow, almost inevitably. And we think we know what was the consequence of World War II: the Cold War, and the division of the Western and Eastern worlds for at least forty years. It was a division that was partially abolished in 1989/90, but whose consequences are still having their impact on us today. Above all, history is said to have ended with the turn of 1989/90, as F. Fukuyama prophesied as early as 1989.<sup>9</sup> Whether he was right is just as debatable as whether history can ever have an end – unless the world itself were to end one day.

Did all this begin with World War I? Or did the First World War also have reasons that reach far into the time before 1914? Of course, the latter is the case, for example, the alliance policy of the European states, which created the constellations that led in 1914 to their sleepwalking into the war (C. Clark).<sup>10</sup> At stake was the balance of power, which had been severely disrupted by colonialism, as well as by the establishment of the German Empire, which also began to act as a colonial power. Is the First World War perhaps not the great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century, that G. F. Kennan spoke about?<sup>11</sup> It is just an age of extremes, as E. Hobsbawm stated in the same century.<sup>12</sup> But is it really? Is the twentieth century an age of extremes and the First World War its catastrophic origin? Are the First and the Second World Wars not only links in a chain of wars, from which Europe has learned to make peace, as D. Langewiesche has recently suggested?<sup>13</sup>

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**8** Kershaw, 2016. The original title of the English version (Kershaw, 2015) is *To Hell and Back*.

**9** Fukuyama, 1992; cf. critiques by Rother, 1993 and Jordan, 2009.

**10** Clark, 2012, 2013.

**11** Kennan, 1979: 3. How trend-setting Kennan has become is shown by Mommsen, 2002; cf. also Schulin, 1994 and Reimann, 2004.

**12** Hobsbawm, 2019.

**13** Langewiesche, 2019.

We can always cut up the twentieth century differently and place the individual events and happenings and their respective actors in it differently. Nothing emerges from the past, nor does it allow us to see how it was structured – if it was structured at all – nor what significance individual actions, events, persons or institutions had. On closer examination, the past is like a great ocean in which time is tossed like waves against the surf of the present. But nobody knows by whom the waves are ruled – not even by the British<sup>14</sup> – nor which rules they follow. Of course, some conditions are known: the tides, the influence of the wind and more. Nevertheless, no one can predict what wave will strike at what time at what place on which beach.

It is quite similar with time. The past cannot be calculated any more than the present. And no one knows what from the past, which event or which movement, which structure or which actor, is being washed back into the memory of the present.

Analogous to this metaphorical image, history depends on two main conditions:

1. Only what is handed down from the past to the present, precisely what is preserved in sources until today, can give information about events in the past. The question of the “tradition” of sources (*Überlieferung*) is often neglected in didactic contexts, although all that should or can be taught in history classes depends on the resilience of the sources.<sup>15</sup>
2. A second condition is remembrance. Only what exists in the recent memory can become a subject of research or education. Also, this condition should not be underestimated in history education, because the public memory of historical culture is the bridge on which pupils and teachers encounter history in their everyday lives.

### 3.2 History – making sense of a senseless past

Let us return to the question of whether history makes sense and come back to the example of the twentieth-century narrative. This can be seen as meaningless at all, considering the great and numerous wars. Or one can regard it as a time when Europeans learned how valuable peace is. But this is not the point that shall be treated here. Here a more fundamental insight shall be observed. According to Theodor Lessing (1872–1933), a nearly forgotten and, outside of

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<sup>14</sup> In allusion to the famous song *Rule, Britannia! Britannia rule the waves*, according to which Britain is to rule the course of (world) history.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hasberg, 2022a: 217 f.

Germany, largely unknown Jewish philosopher who was murdered in 1933,<sup>16</sup> history is a matter of *making sense of the senseless*. So reads the title of his monograph, first published in 1919. This book is a criticism of historical recognition (or historicism). According to it, the past as a subject of historical thinking can only be a reflection on past reality. History cannot perceive the past itself. The imaginative idea of the past cannot be realized in any other way than by using imagination.

This insight does not seem to be surprising today, unlike at the beginning of the twentieth century. Lessing emphasized the contingency of what happened in the past and concluded that history was a *logificatio post festum*, and therefore a logification after the events. This conclusion is important because it gives rise to the question of the rules whereby this logification works and what the concepts and categories are that give a structure to the structureless past or that arrange the senseless past to become a useful history filled with sense. Lessing is sure that there is no hidden sense in history:

*But by no means is a hidden sense, a causal connection, a development in the time per se revealed by history [i.e. the past, W.H.]; but history is historiography, that is, the foundation of this sense, the setting of this causal connection, the invention of this development. It does not find the sense of the world; it gives it.<sup>17</sup>*

Therefore, history, first of all, is a reflection of the one who is busy with the past – either the individual or the human being as such. It is not possible to enter into contact with the past reality. So far, the considerations are near to the common sense of analytical philosophy when it deals with historical thinking nowadays.<sup>18</sup>

Only two more aspects of this amazing book will be emphasized here: history as willingness (*Willenshaft*) and history as ideal (important for education).

1. The first is concerned with the question of how sense is given to the past – which must certainly first be derived from the sources. That facts do not exist at all is an insight for which Lessing has not yet been recognized. At this point, our interest has to be focused on how sense becomes a part of history. According to Lessing, it is not a science

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<sup>16</sup> On the person see Marwedel, 1987, Beßlich, 2003 and the anthology of Kotokowski, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Lessing, 1921: 6 (translated by W.H.).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the book by Danto, 1968, as well as its reception in German-language discourse. To name just two examples, see Acham, 1974 or Röttgers, 1982. Differing from them, see the more recent considerations by Gerber, 2012.

(Wissenschaft) but a willingness (Willenshaft). This is because ‘The rethinking science puts a new reality behind the immediate appearance of the reality of the senses. Behind this a second, third, fourth ... The reinterpreting willingness, on the other hand, interweaves the concepts of the appearances to a temporal connection of points of view (desired images).’<sup>19</sup> The sciences are also in search of a second reality and try to explain perceptible phenomena. But it is different with history, because it cannot perceive its object, the past reality, at all. The past and history are parts of the noumenal world.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, historians must try to reconstruct the past from the sources. Only through this bridge (of sources) can they look for explanations of the life and behaviour of people in the past. But since it cannot (directly) perceive life and behaviour in the past, it inevitably runs the risk of first describing it according to today’s ideas and then interpreting it with today’s terms and categories.

2. So, we can move on to the second point: the ideals. Once more Lessing shall be quoted: *Already Vico has expressed the strange thought that the coming into being of historical legends must have its origin in the incapacity for conceptuality, in that man transforms knowledge that he is not able to grasp with his spirit into a sensual event and expresses it through parables, whereby the content of knowledge finally disappears and only the mummy (caput mortuum) of the sensual history remains. ... Thus, history is ... and almost – I would like to say – an erotic unification of life and truth to reality, an organic interpenetration of the temporal sensuous earthly event with timeless truth to that, which ... has never happened and always will.*<sup>21</sup>

According to Lessing, the past becomes history by being enriched with timeless sense (values, theories, beliefs etc.). These values are, of course, themselves products of the time in which they are applied, but the historian regards them as eternally valid, and valid for humanity as a whole. Stories about the past are told that are ideal for something. Therefore, they can be used for historical education in the best possible way. But there is certainly a danger here because it describes less the past than the present!

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<sup>19</sup> Lessing, 1921: 185 is speaking of Wunschdenken (translated by W.H.).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Kant, 2005b: 303 f.

<sup>21</sup> Lessing, 19221: 192 (translated by W.H.).

The ideal stories of the past, which are usually called history, are ruled – that is the result – by ideas, and more precisely by eternal ideas that cover the past when it mutates into history. And these ideas come not from the past but from the present, and especially from the culture which itself is a product of development in time. However, this is not realized by all historians or by those who deal with the past or history.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 Culture makes sense to history

Resuming the question of where the sense that is taken as a basis for the stories comes from, the answer is obvious: it flows out of the culture. It is not that the stories or narratives about the past make sense, but they absorb sense and connect it with what in the sources can be considered to be the past. In Lessing's words, the result of this process is an intimate (or even erotic) union of events detectable in the past (*histoire événementielle*) with ideas of meaning (world views, philosophical systems, ideologies, theories, values, etc.), so that ideas of the past come into being in the first place. These ideas of meaning are also the products of temporal development and are therefore changeable, but they are much more constant than the events, i.e. they change much more slowly (*longue durée* or *moyenne durée*).

It is hard to deny that, in the process of fabricating thoughts or ideas (*Verfertigung des Gedankens*), pre-existing sense undergoes modifications.<sup>23</sup> However, it can be denied that new sense is produced in the process of historical narration, or that history or stories make sense. Narratives about the past reproduce the meaning and ideas that can be found in respective contemporary cultures, which their authors want to perpetuate because they have an interest in them, for whatever reason. Consequently, historical narratives transport culturally existing sense and ideas by linking them with data that are considered to be authenticated by the sources.

This gives the impression that there is a meaning to be found in culture that flows into historical stories, and that their authors are the authorities who determine what sense goes into them – if not, the recipients will do so in the end. This sounds radical-constructivist, if not post-structuralist, which would remove the basis for a common understanding about the past, or better, about the present meaning of past events. However, those who do not want to strip constructivism of its own historicity cannot follow such a view. On the one hand – which cannot

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. the anthology by Rüsen, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> S. Kleist, 1986.

be pursued further here – the ideas and essentials of constructivism themselves emerged in time. On the other hand – and of primary importance in the present context – the content-related and formal criteria of sense that are historiographically applied themselves result from cultural processes. Therefore, they have a temporal character *per se* and are changeable.<sup>24</sup> And this makes the culturally represented sense itself subject to the verdict of temporal fragility.<sup>25</sup>

The more or less dominant historiographical discourses have a sense-giving influence on historiography, as do much more fundamental elements of culture. First and foremost, language, with all its far-reaching implications, makes statements about the past and history, and indeed the visualization of the past, possible in the first place.<sup>26</sup> Without language, history would have no basis for existence. And stories can only be told if they correspond to what can be said or what is permitted to say, i.e. if they are discursive in the sense that they address what is (socially) permissible<sup>27</sup> and make use of linguistic forms that are (culturally) available on the one hand and (culturally) understandable on the other hand.<sup>28</sup> What can be said about the past, i.e. the past and history, depends on the available language, which itself is a fundamental component of cultural development and thus of culture, from which stories about the past derive their meaning and form – which stand in a reciprocal relationship. The close connection between language and history was therefore still clear to educational theorists.<sup>29</sup>

Only one further field of the cultural network of the conditions of historical narrative will be discussed in the following: the categories and principles of historical thinking that have a lasting influence on the formation of historical sense, and which are considered more or less adequate to the (desired) historical thinking within the framework of a specific cultural structure.<sup>30</sup> They, too, have emerged in time and therefore are changeable. Principles of historical thinking such as alterity, reciprocity, constructivity, selectivity, perspectivity, multi-causality and theme orientation (and others) are culturally conditioned variables, which, in

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24 Cf. Dux, 2005.

25 On the representation of knowledge see Sandkühler, 2009: 56–67.

26 This includes lexis as well as syntax to plot structures that are essential to storytelling.

27 On the fundamentals of discourse theory, see Foucault, 2012: 11–30, and in more detail Foucault, 1981. Regarding history, see Sarasin, 2003 and Landwehr, 2018.

28 Cf. the publications of White, 1973; White, 1987 and White, 2010.

29 In particular Litt, 1918.

30 The application of these principles and the use of these categories represent conventions that have become established in historical scholarship and beyond. In the graduation model of FUER Geschichtsbewusstsein they have become the benchmark for graduation, see Körber, 2007.

relation to the Western world, have experienced their “conventional” expression above all within the framework of the Enlightenment, as O. Brunner, W. Conze, OR. Koselleck and their comrades-in-arms have repeatedly emphasized.<sup>31</sup>

	Second order concepts I: Formal Principles and Categories		
	<b>Principles of historical thinking</b>	<b>Formal Categories of historical thinking</b>	
Third order concept: Historical Consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alterity,</li> <li>• reciprocity,</li> <li>• reconstructiveness,</li> <li>• perspectivity,</li> <li>• multicausality</li> <li>...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time</li> <li>• space,</li> <li>• duration and change,</li> <li>• simultaneity and non-simultaneity in time</li> <li>...</li> </ul>	First order concept: Historical Events
	Second order concepts II: Content Categories and Theories		
	<b>Content Categories</b> (dimensions of historical perception the past)	<b>Content Theories</b> (not depending on concrete events)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• politics</li> <li>• economy,</li> <li>• culture,</li> <li>• religion,</li> <li>• race</li> <li>• class,</li> <li>• gender,</li> <li>• ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal theories like narrative schemes (e.g. ascent and fall, cycles, longue durée),</li> <li>• formal theories above concrete events,</li> <li>• epochal concepts, e.g. Middle Ages, ...</li> <li>• content concepts, e.g. post-colonialism, migration ...</li> </ul>	

**Figure 1: Concept orders of History Didactics**

A typical example is perspectivity, which was not rediscovered in the 1970s by K. Bergmann (1938–2002) for the didactic discourse on history,<sup>32</sup> but which, as the “doctrine of the point of view” (*Lehre vom Sehepunkt*), already played a prominent role among the principles of historical thinking in the general science of history by J. M. Chladenius (1710–1759) and represents a general principle of thinking that goes far beyond the realm of the historical.<sup>33</sup> The insight into the perspectivity of human cognition is a cultural achievement, which was transferred to and trained in historical thinking in the eighteenth century.

Similar are the categories used in thinking, telling and communicating history (historical categories, genre and structural terms, historical theories, concept

<sup>31</sup> Brunner et al., 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Bergmann, 1972, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Chladenius, 1985.

and proper names).<sup>34</sup> In the form they are used today, they were also primarily developed in the eighteenth century and have been in use ever since. Historical thinking is guided by such categories and principles, not only in historical science, but also far beyond. Although they were developed within the framework of historical science, and although their application belongs to disciplinary conventions (keyword: paradigm),<sup>35</sup> they have long since become standards which – in an adapted form – have found their way into the teaching of history and are also applied in other fields of the intentional mediation of history.<sup>36</sup> In these ways, they have an effect on the formation of historical sense by individuals and collectives. Without any reliable empirical findings, it can be assumed that they have a lasting effect or – expressed in terms of discourse theory – they belong to the elements of the *dispositive* that has gained historical-cultural attention in Western societies.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, apart from the abstract but content-related values, the principles and categories of historical thinking permeate the historical formation of meaning; a multitude of others could be added, of which the most important are probably language and its forms. Humans experience all these values, contents and forms of (historical) sense-making strategies in the more or less reflected contact with the culture that surrounds them. In so far as humans thereby consider the temporal depth dimensions of culture, it is historical experience that influences their orientations and actions in a sense-forming way. This can be called ‘functioning sense-making’. ‘On this level, sense is not ‘constructed’, but it takes place, it happens; it is part of the reality of human life. It is operative in the institutions and processes of education, in political culture, and in many other areas of life practice.’<sup>38</sup> This observation does not, as it might seem at first sight, limit the knowledge-sociological insight of the construction of the present reality, but emphasizes that reality – or what is taken for it – is effective in so far as it forms in its constructivity the framework (or the system?) of the whole of

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34 The historical-theoretical efforts to define the conceptual structure of history as a science are quite limited; cf. the not entirely satisfactory overview by Jordan, 2016. A now almost forgotten theory, but worth reading in this respect, comes from Faber, 1982.

35 In addition to the basic explanations from Kuhn, 1962 and Kuhn, 1978, with regard to the science of history, see Rösen, 2013: 66–96, where a threefold division of the paradigm (factors, practices, levels of meaning) is made, the derivation of which is not further substantiated.

36 Cf. Hasberg, 2019.

37 On the role of dispositives in public history, see Hasberg, 2018: 66–70. On the dispositive, see Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 2014 and Deleuze, 1991.

38 Rösen, 2013: 90 (translated W.H.).



the conceivable, which curtails the potentially unlimited possibilities of (historical) sense-making. Whether the effective potency of a working story is properly called ‘working sense-making’ must be doubted. One could just as well speak of *traditions* that become effective in the present. After all, individuals and collectives are the ones who form sense. For this, culture in the form of *functioning history* only provides the ingredients from which, among other things, sense is formed in the mode of history. In so far as the formation of historical meaning is subject to this cultural framework of conditions, which itself changes or is changed in time,<sup>39</sup> a cultural-scientific approach to history is required that does not negate, but takes into account its own cultural effectiveness, which admittedly cannot be conceptually grasped as such.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.4 An interim conclusion

Coming to an interim conclusion, one can state the following: history makes no sense, it only transports sense, which is given to it by cultural ideas, theories, concepts etc. From this point of view, history is used as a vehicle for transporting ideas and values, therefore it is not science, in Lessing’s opinion, but willingness. Perhaps it is sometimes used in this form in history classes, and more often elsewhere, when narratives about the past are used to convey ideas and values (possibly with the best of intentions) to be integrated into society. After all, this is the function of history lessons and of other institutions of historical culture, too.

It may also be such ideas and values that one can agree with: for example, learning to think historically. The critical approach to history, which follows something of the standards of historicism, of J.G. Droysen (1808–1884), for example,<sup>41</sup> is finally a *regulative idea* in the sense of I. Kant (1724–1804),<sup>42</sup> which was created in time (namely only in the nineteenth century), but which we bring into use as a maxim today, without constantly considering the time-boundness and the resulting changeability. Rather, we often use this *regulative idea* as a time-transcending, quasi-eternal idea.

This is also true for categories of content, which take over the function of historical signs (*Geschichtszeichen*) in Kant’s work. Thus, the French Revolution became one such historical sign because it itself represented the idea of repub-

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Dux, 2005, as well as the relevant anthologies of Rösen, 2002, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Hasberg, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Droysen, 1977–2020.

<sup>42</sup> See Kant, 2005b: 563–582, on the regulative use of ideas.

licanism, behind which the course of historiography could no longer retreat.<sup>43</sup> Do we not often use history in such a way in educational contexts? Do we not charge history lessons with ideals of form and content when historical thinking becomes the goal and content becomes the object on which very specific developments are to be shown that are considered desirable or worth rejecting for a desired shape of the present? Is it not precisely intentional historical education that is susceptible to turning history into willpower?

#### 4. Historical-didactical consequences

In the German-language discourse of history didactics, the issues outlined in the preceding with Lessing's help are largely known and widely consensual. In the didactics of history, however, this approach has found its way only in the 1970s.<sup>44</sup> This was despite the fact that the constructive character of history was almost universally known among historians who had been dealing with problems of historical theory since the middle of the eighteenth century. In other discourses of history didactics, the thesis may be still be provocative that history, understood as meaningful narrations about the past, makes no sense, but transports sense. However, the theoretical insight into the analytic philosophy of history has probably developed a resonance in the teaching of history in the German-speaking countries, in so far as it has certainly been included in curricula. Whether it is consciously perceived and implemented as such by the teachers, however, may well be doubted. Otherwise, the teaching of history would have to proceed differently than it is currently observed.

An arbitrary examination of some school history textbooks for the Federal Republic of Germany, in which stories of the twentieth century or of the First World War appear, has shown that none of the stories sketched in the first section is presented in them: no coherent narration is provided.<sup>45</sup> The development

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<sup>43</sup> Kant, 2005a: 357–362, especially 361, where, not least of all, he develops the idea of progress.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Heuer et al., 2020.

<sup>45</sup> In this regard, the textbooks for transition class 10 (between secondary levels I and II) have especially missed a chance. According to the curricula for Nord-Rhein-Westphalia, next to Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages, the history of the modern era is to be thematized on the one hand as the Enlightenment (since 1500), and on the other hand as the development of democracy and human rights (from 1789). The curriculum does not use the opportunity to tell coherent stories, but subdivides the three topics into sub-topics, so that a system is created that allows historical developments to be recognized at best in individual fields, but by no means as holistic developments. Background narratives such as the (Christian) Middle Ages,

is not given as a whole, but separated into several, often short chapters. This corresponds to an assumption that Hans-Jürgen Pandel already made a decade ago, despite the lack of empirical substantiation: namely, that there is hardly any historical narration, if any at all, in history lessons.<sup>46</sup> He meant by this that events in the past were dealt with in history lessons, but not with developments in time, which would then also become the subject of the lessons.

If there is no or less longer-term narration in the textbooks, how can pupils learn that historical narratives are created by combing (a) information extracted from sources (b) enriched by the sense (value, theories etc.) of the current culture? How can they learn that historical narrations do not make sense but transport sense?

Basically there are two ways to do this.

On the one hand, they can be guided to make their own history from the sources. Then one must ensure that in the course of this process they recognize how they are using their own ideas to (a) select sources (usually, however, these are provided by the textbook or the teacher), (b) extract information from them, (c) weigh them, and finally (d) arrange them into a chronological progression and thus into a story.

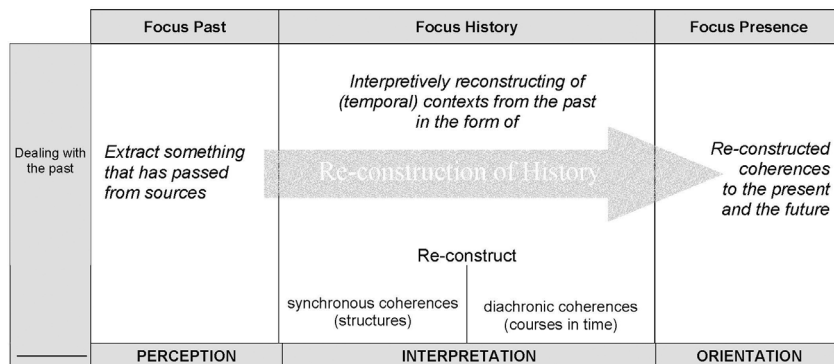


Figure 2: Re-constructing History

the Enlightenment and the development of democracy are assumed. See e.g. Barricelli et al., 2010; Baumgärtner/Fieberg, 2011; Lenzian, 2011; Lanzinner, 2014. For one example from the first stage of grammar school, where in Nord-Rhein-Westphalia the twentieth century is dealt with in the annual program of stage 10, see Bergmann et al., 2004. Within it too, different phases of development are set and described, without allowing an overall view or a problematization through which to criticize the settings that have been made.

<sup>46</sup> Pandel, 2010: 9.

This method of working with sources is generally known and has been practiced in history classes in many countries since the 1970s (keyword: New History).<sup>47</sup> However, to tell long-term stories that span an entire century or time spans such as those described in the first section would require an enormous effort.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, latent ideas about time courses of such large scope are occasionally already present. Students have already heard about them (e.g. World War I, the twentieth century), and with these ideas about the past, they have already formed attitudes about how to assess them. The background narratives they have at their disposal have long been charged with meaning. To realize this and to consciously reflect it in the process of re-constructing history is a highly ambitious undertaking, because the learner as a recognizing subject has to account for the preconditions of his own thinking. From a developmental-psychological point of view, this distancing from one's own ego can hardly be expected of students in secondary schools, who are struggling for their own identities beyond puberty.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, from these considerations a threefold consequence follows:

1. Pupils have to be confronted with coherent narratives into which ideas and theories, beliefs and values, have flowed to give sense. Obviously, they cannot read one of the extensive volumes mentioned in the beginning. But they can deal with literature especially written for the young, for example, Jacques Le Goff's history of Europe.<sup>50</sup> The texts need not be extensive, but must offer coherent explanations of developments in time. If texts are used that are excerpted from longer texts, then the excerpt must proportionally correspond to the narrative plan of the original.
2. The pupils' way to learn how sense enriches the past and becomes part of history is to de-construct historical narratives by discovering what sense, theories, beliefs etc. are being influential in the background (normative plausibility), what forms (which influence the historical argumentation) are used in telling stories about the past (narrative plausibility) and in what ways the events are chosen and arranged in the narration (empirical plausibility).<sup>51</sup>

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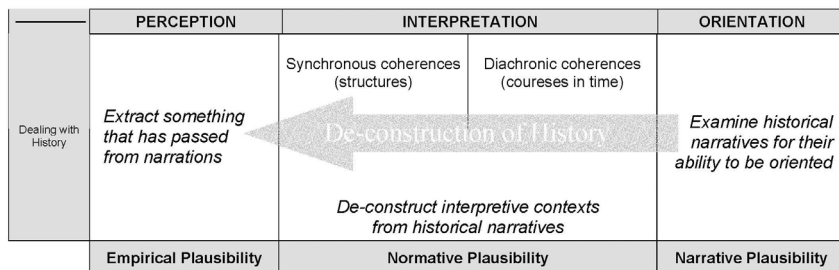
**47** Reconstructing history from sources is a method that has been considered in history didactics throughout Europe since the 1970s and has been integrated into the teaching of history; cf. Erdmann and Hasberg 2011.

**48** Examples have already been presented by Hasberg and Seidenfuß, 2003.

**49** See the classic clinical investigations of Erikson, 1973.

**50** Le Goff, 1996.

**51** See the continuation and practical application of different examples in Hasberg, 2022, according to Rösen, 1983: 90–116.



**Figure 3: De-constructing History**

3. De-construction is more than criticism of ideologies or in short: ideas as connecting links of a chain called history.<sup>52</sup> The aim of de-constructing historical narratives in educational frameworks is to recognize that history is constructive. In this way, pupils learn how sense comes into history by
- examining historical narratives from a formal point of view (e.g. genre and laws of genre, linguistic forms etc.) in order to make the intentions associated with the form transparent and thus test the historical narrative for its ability to provide orientation (narrative plausibility)
  - revealing contexts of use in historical narratives, i.e. revealing explicit or implicit (normative) contents of meaning; examining discursivity, making transparent the statement's intent (normative plausibility);
  - filtering past events from historical narratives, as well as their selection and arrangement, to determine the extent to which selection and arrangement depend on meaning that is not given by the past (empirical plausibility).

The process of deconstructing, based on these guidelines (Fig. 3), seems complicated at first glance. In reality, however, it can be learned from simple, short stories in which only the obvious features of a story are discussed, for example, those that follow a simple (possibly tendentious) statement of intent that is easy to recognize. Possibly they also occur in poems or songs in which historical stories are told, in which the meaning of the form (H. White) is easily recognizable if they are presented in rhyme form, for example. In such narratives it is also easy to

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Munslow, 2006 whose approach differs in some points from that established in German history didactics since 1997 (Hasberg, 1997) when, through the discussion of H. White's approach (cf. note 26), the Triftigkeitsanalyse (plausibility analysis) was introduced following Rösen, 1983: 90–116.

recognize that they mention only a limited selection of events, persons etc. from the past. Only gradually, when the process has been carried out several times, will it become clear how the single elements (perception of the past, interpreting the past by making coherence and telling stories) intermesh and how in this way meaning flows into the story, which its author wants to convey to his recipients (consciously or unconsciously).

Doing history in this way, by realizing the *senselessness of the past* and recognizing *history as constructing charged with sense*, becomes very sensefull!

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ALAIN LAMASSOURE

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## History Teaching

### What Are the Stakes Today?



Alain Lamassoure

### Abstract

The title for this contribution is taken from the keynote speech given by the French European politician Alain Lamassoure at the conference “Why History Education?” He asks about the challenges for history education today and tomorrow, as it is currently in crisis. The causes are shown to vary and are systematically presented. It is obvious that history education is taught differently from country to country in Europe. The author therefore sees the creation of the “Observatory on History Teaching in Europe” under the auspices of the Council of Europe as a way to advance history teaching in Europe. The aim is to initiate a debate on the content and methods of history teaching on the basis of surveys in order to promote it throughout Europe.

### 1. Introduction

History education is a hot topic in professional discourse and public debates. This is evident in many discussions surrounding the topic. For example, historians face the question of what should be researched and taught, and history educators face the problem of how history lessons should be designed and structured. Today, ‘national history’ is considered highly suspect in many places; the national has acquired a dubious reputation. Measured by our present ethical

standards, there are no longer any 'great men' or great seminal events. Therefore, we limit ourselves to an overarching, detached history, composed of important economic, social and cultural phenomena. These may well be interesting, but they do not give young people sufficient foundations to develop a kind of social identity. If we want to counter the danger of creating a generation with collective amnesia, the question arises: Is it possible to build a national history that is not nationalistic, i.e., that is not characterized by hatred of others or of one's own ancestors?

This question also concerns politics. It is from this experience that I will try to answer the following question: In teaching history today and tomorrow, what are the stakes?

## 2. History education in crisis

The professional discourse and the public debates over the teaching of history demonstrate abundantly how numerous the stakes are. But they can be encapsulated in one single word: peace. Peace within our national societies, whatever the number and diversity of their component parts; and peace among our states, as what has been achieved on the Western part of the European continent for decades, and which other parts of Europe and the rest of the world are dreaming of or craving for.

History teaching is suffering a crisis almost everywhere. This was not the case until the middle of the twentieth century. As a discipline to be taught at primary and secondary levels to pupils and students, history was very simply devised in the nineteenth century: it was expected to foster, strengthen, justify, sometimes even create national identity, an identity displayed as a unique source of pride. The young were encouraged to be proud of their nation. And the nation was singled out, either as the once dominant power on the continent or even in the world, or as a martyr, only subdued by force or betrayal, a sacrifice that saved the rest of civilization from the barbarians. The narrative entailed an implicit, sometimes even explicit, guideline: "Whatever the time, whatever the event, wright or wrong, it's my country and I am proud of it". In the twentieth century, those countries dominated by totalitarian ideologies, be it communism or fascism, complemented or replaced the *nation* by the *doctrine*, and that was it.

Two World Wars on, after a flurry of genocides, the Holocaust, the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima, the horrors generated by nationalism, racism and communism, the colonization and decolonization of three quarters of the planet, the construction of a European and World Order based on hopefully universal

values of human dignity, human rights, freedom, democracy and the rule of law, and a solemn pledge to renounce violence in international relations – the background is dramatically different. To mention but one example, the numerous recommendations passed by the Council of Europe have repeatedly urged member states to re-orient and even re-found the contents and ways of history teaching.

Consequently, what used to be a straightforward issue – to tell a story to children – has become apparently inextricable.

Some causes are common to all our countries.

- The tsunami of information now on offer through the internet, and the unlimited capacity for exchanging documents and viewpoints online, for scientists and teachers, as well as students. The good old textbook has long since lost its monopoly. For didactics and pedagogy, it is both a bonanza and a nightmare.
- The ongoing progress of historical research, due to the discovery or exploration of new sources, new public and private archives, and the ever-wider scope of historians' pursuits: local customs, mores and garments, daily lives, births and burials, sexuality, superstitions, local pilgrimages, craft knowhow and materials, rural architecture, barter pre-currencies, landscapes, climate, biodiversity, vanished peoples and languages, weight and measures. Such versatility is bound to dig deeper and deeper into the chasm between university and school. Too much information and excessively all-encompassing accounts can hardly trickle down to the classroom.
- The multiple and sometimes conflicting aims assigned to history teaching. Granted, our common goal is to train would-be good citizens – but citizens of the nation, of the state, of Europe, and/or of the world? Or rather, members of a social community, irrespective of the national, legal and political frameworks? Are our future citizens expected first to abide by the social order, or to try and improve it through their own judgment and creativity?
- The competition between disciplines, especially between the soft and hard sciences. Like other human and social sciences, including the law, history suffers from a sly side-effect of the PISA tests regularly released by the OECD. Their first publication, twenty years ago, came as a shock everywhere. When proud, sometimes conceited countries realised their poor ranking in maths, they tended to overreact by boosting the hard sciences to the detriment of the social ones, starting with history. This ominous development has never been completely compensated for ever since.
- Lastly, let's not forget this specificity of history among all school disciplines: in practice, pupils and students learn more outside school than inside, on the

street or at home, by reading books or watching movies, documentaries, or political debates, on the TV and social media, and not forgetting official celebrations. France boasts 36,000 cities and villages – our “communes”. After 1918 each of them erected a war memorial, with the names of all the fallen engraved in the stone for the sake of remembrance. Throughout my time at school, every year, on November 11<sup>th</sup>, Armistice Day, I was compelled to go with my teachers and schoolmates to our city’s war memorial, to pay tribute to the martyrs, listen to addresses by local worthies, observe a minute’s silence. Do believe me: this kind of pedagogy was far more telling than any classroom presentation.

Less obviously, another complicating development has been the explosion of the main source of public information. Two decades ago, the great religious or ideological narratives had already faded away, but the evening TV news, broadcast at 8 pm in France, was a daily rendezvous, a kind of huge national secular mass, attended by the whole country. There were different channels, the reports were various, and the comments were duly contradictory, but the topics were common, the same pieces of news hit the front page, and everybody enjoyed the same overall framework, the same bearings or hallmarks, which provided a common basis for the public debate. Now, when discussing current news, even in the same family, those aged 60, 40, 30 and 20 do not speak of the same topics, do not share the same concerns at all, let alone the same references, in judging events and characters. They discover events in very different media, most of them on digital platforms for the younger generations, without any one of these providers having been able to prevail across the board. As a result, teachers and students – and politicians, by the way – are no longer able to build on with same *Weltanschauung* as that supplied by the world of the adults. There is no common background, either for the present or the future, and even less for the past. The young and adults are easily distraught, and are more vulnerable to the most emotional and dramatic news, especially fake news or conspiracy theories.

### 3. History and nations: a difficult field

Beyond these awkward shared features, certain countries are hindered by difficulties of their own due to their national history.

Admittedly, education – organization, establishments, disciplines, curricula, teacher training, textbooks, etc. – is decided upon by national or regional authorities in every state. But we tend to be misled by the convenient phrase “nation state”, which is far from universal.

- Some *old* nations are *young* independent states, brand new or reborn. Germany and Italy were the great examples in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Croatia recovered the status of an independent state after five centuries of subjection to the Habsburgs and later to Yugoslavia. In the early Middle Ages, Ireland was a feudal nation governing itself oddly, a congeries of clans without a king, then it was placed under English rule for a millennium before conquering its full independence a hundred years ago.
- Some *very young* nations felt and expressed a national sentiment relatively belatedly. Latvia did not even have a name before the late nineteenth century, and the Young Estonians Movement stood up out of the blue a few decades later, unlike Lithuania, which was an ancient, glorious entity, the Grand Duchy.
- Slovakia and Slovenia are other cases of territories which were long since intent on being recognized as nations – by the Habsburg Empire, the Czechoslovak Republic or Yugoslavia – but which originally did not contemplate fully fledged independence.
- Who, among politicians, can be sure of the definitive statute, statehood and final borders of European countries that are still concerned by a so-called “frozen conflict”? Do you realise that there are as many as twelve of them on this continent alone? For instance, what about the life in common of three strife-prone communities in the improbable two-part federation of BiH masterminded at Dayton in 1995? Will the very different histories of Ireland and Cyprus merge with the reunification of both islands, or only one of them, or neither? In the meantime, what is to be taught to the children about the “Troubles,” or to the mourners of the ghost-city of Famagusta?
- And we can also come across states *whose creation preceded that of the nation*. That category comprises a lot of countries generated by colonization and decolonization. Again, each case is different. If Algeria has forged its nationhood in its independence war against France, several Sahelian states still match the definition that a French politician once applied to one of them: “This is a country defined by its neighbours’ borders”.

For these countries, devising a narrative of the past is far more difficult than in century-old ones. And still, for their children, the need to know, to understand, to spot, to pinpoint themselves on the world map and in the great book of history is all the higher.

But let’s not believe that the task is that simple for all the older nation states.

The larger ones feel on their shoulders the burden of all the tragedies of history and of the great mystery of Evil. How come that the continent of the

Enlightenment, which covered itself with a white mantel of huge cathedrals dedicated to a god of love, which discovered science, human rights, the rule of law inside and of international law outside, how this continent failed to apply these high-minded principles to other peoples before ditching them all to set about perpetrating the worst crimes ever against humanity?

The challenge to comprehend and explain is all the more demanding that, in our classrooms, an ever-increasing number of pupils and students come from other parts of the world. The history of their respective families' countries was very different from ours. When these histories mingled, it was to leave very bad memories, and these children are naturally keen on combining both cultures, that of their ancestors and that of their home country. In a time of extreme tensions among minorities and religious propaganda, some classrooms are witnessing a kind of war of civilizations. One year ago, near Paris, a teacher was slaughtered and beheaded by a student in front of his school. Without reaching such tragic extremes, raucous controversies at school have become a fact of daily life, particularly in areas populated by families of recent non-European foreign origins.

So that, at the end of the day, very few countries are satisfied with their teaching of history, and many have engaged in an ongoing process of reforming it.

All nations were generated by war, devised for war, legitimized through war. No nation can be sure of being able to survive the demise of war when humanity becomes wise enough to eschew collective violence. So, everybody is facing the same trial: in our message to our children, how should we combine two contradictory requirements?

- On the one hand, attachment to the nation and knowledge of its past, including pride in its past achievements. Each of us needs to know his or her ancestors, family, tribe, city, canton, nation, fellow human beings. The need for a common identity has never been so high, as we can all check it at each national election.
- And, on the other hand, the strong political will to sharpen the critical judgement of the students, and to ensure that our different regional or national narratives are compatible with each other. The final goal is not to come up with one single, common, European account, even less a global account, but to make sure that everyone listens to their neighbours' accounts: the multi-perspectivity, the crossing of looks.



#### 4. Observatory on History Teaching in Europe: an important perspective

This quandary was at the origin of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTÉ), set up in 2021 under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The main role of the Observatory is to establish the state of play of history teaching in the member states. It may sound modest: just a picture, a photograph of the landscape. The Scientific Advisory Council will collect the data, check their accuracy and comprehensiveness, translate them into all national languages, and display them in an overall table, laid out to facilitate comparisons.

This overall report will be updated and released, not every year, but on a regular basis, like PISA, and for the first time in Autumn 2023. Established in a multinational framework, backed up by the Council of Europe and their usual partners (e.g. the Euroclio network), and complying with all scientific requirements, this survey is intended to be an unquestionable basis for all debates on the subject.

Simultaneously, we will stage a number of debates, conferences, symposia, or seminars – no matter what their names – to comment on the findings of the photograph. Various circles are included – academies, universities, teachers' unions, NGOs, media, and parliaments – so that all stakeholders can have their say and exchange views.

For instance, among the facts that are bound to come out dramatically:

- In one third of the member states of the Council of Europe, history is no longer a mandatory discipline at secondary level.
- In some countries, history is meant to be an acquisition of knowledge; elsewhere it is expected to deliver competences.
- Chronology is taken as the guideline in some countries, and just as definitely repudiated in others.
- Curricula may be decided upon by teachers, by civil servants in education, by the political authorities, or by a combination of them.
- The publication and edition of textbooks are free of regulation in some countries, submitted to an administrative certification of compliance with the curriculum elsewhere, or limited to one single book by class level.
- Within the same country, notably federal ones, the account of the same national events differ, oddly and awkwardly, according to jurisdiction. Needless to say, this occurrence is more frequent between neighbouring countries. There are even cases where national parliaments have stepped in to legislate

on controversial events in the past, conferring legal force on contradictory interpretations.

- History may be linked to, and coordinated with, other disciplines, like geography, civic education or literature, or it may be taught single-handedly, as it were. By the way, why, but for routine, should teaching the past be the monopoly of one category of exclusively dedicated experts? Some countries take pains to make sure that the historical dimension is taken on board in other disciplines like philosophy, the hard sciences and the fine arts, thus complementing the economic, social, diplomatic, military and political narrative of the history course. And still, too often, we note a disconnect between the hard sciences and social sciences, as though the methods and frame of mind learnt through the former did not apply to the latter, nor to current news. Had that not been the case, we would not have witnessed this implausible rise in conspiracy believers, even among post-graduates.
- Certain countries or regions ignore the past of their geographical environment, focussing exclusively on their national travails and destiny. At the other end of the spectrum, others are keen on dedicating most of the curriculum to the widest possible relevant part of the world.
- In half of the European Union's member states, in the chapter on contemporary history, the European treaties, the European organization and its so-called founding fathers are hardly mentioned, if at all.
- Hardly anywhere is the average level of knowledge of history at the end of secondary education properly measured – whereas almost everybody everywhere complains of a poor and still declining level.

Such observations are bound to raise lots of questions, debates, advice, and criticisms. And our bet is that, from these debates, the pressure will increase to improve the contents and methods of history teaching in many different places. It is an indirect strategy, a long-term prospect, but it is the only possible way if we want to respect national sovereignties, which are particularly sensitive on this issue, and rightly so.

# Objectives and Practices



SYLVAIN DOUSSOT

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# The Teaching of History and Political Education

## Didactic Analysis of Immigration History in French Curricula



Sylvain Doussot

### Abstract

The teaching of history does not serve to train future historians, but future citizens. The historical study of the past must therefore be at the service of a political education, understood here in a broad sense, as the capacity to participate autonomously, and therefore critically, in collective life and its democratic development. From this point of view, I examine the teaching of migration issues in the French curriculum with regard to the foundational work of the historian G. Noiriel, *Le creuset français*, in order to relate the political stakes of a history book to those of the teaching of history, morality and civics in secondary education. Between history as a life lesson and history as a methodology, the possibility of a critical school history anchored in the idea of transforming the specific investigation of historians emerges.

### 1. Introduction

The teaching of history does not serve to train future historians, but rather future citizens. The *historical* study of the past must therefore be placed at the service of a political education. Talking about political education rather than citizenship education has two objectives. On the one hand, it is a matter of questioning

school history and not the ‘school discipline’ called ‘education for citizenship’ (Audigier, 2008). On the other hand, it is the dimensions of ‘education to power’ and ‘to the exercise of freedoms’, rather than ‘feelings of belonging’ (Audigier, 2007: 248), that are addressed in this text. However, the idea of education associated with the discipline of history does refer to ‘knowledge of current societies and the ability to take part in their permanent invention. It therefore also refers to practices’ (ibid.): that is, here the teaching of history is considered from the angle of the practices that are implied by the discipline, particularly the practice of historical inquiry. Ensuring a political education through the teaching of history can be envisaged in two ways. The first is that of instructive examples, like the *topos* of the *Historia Magistra Vitae* (Forchtner, 2014), whereby, based on a realist epistemology, the content of past human experience indicates that events recounted according to representations validated by historians serve to educate new generations. This approach is often developed from the perspective of national history, of edifying accounts of the ‘construction’ of the country testifying to what it is today a present that thus gives meaning to the life of the citizens.<sup>1</sup> The circular nature of the links between the teaching of national history and the training of citizens can thus have effects on the history taught in schools and be understood as a ‘national myth’<sup>2</sup> (Citron, 1984; De Cock and Picard, 2009). The second form of this political education through the teaching of history – which can also be deployed in a national framework – concerns the development of critical thinking, in particular the ability to understand sources critically in order to construct controlled facts. The historical study of the past thus aims to develop the capacity to think historically (Lautier, 1997; Wineburg, 2001), this capacity being transposable to contemporary political issues (Audigier, 2003).

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- 1 The current history and geography curricula used in French secondary schools present and justify the central place accorded to the study of France as follows: ‘Studying France throughout secondary school, placing it within a wider context, so that future citizens are aware of the issues at stake and of their possibilities for action. [...] The study of France in the last three years of secondary school is also an opportunity to raise awareness among pupils that France is affected by the changes studied and that these changes in turn affect their daily lives. As future citizens, they will have to act in a world and a France that are in constant evolution’ (French Ministry of Education, Special Official Gazette no.1 of 19 January 2019).
  - 2 Source: French Ministry of Education, Special Official Gazette no.1 of 19 January 2019, available here: <https://www.education.gouv.fr/media/7859/download> (340–348 for the part that interests us). We quote in our paper under the title ‘Official Instructions’, the appendix *Programme d’histoire-géographie, géopolitique et sciences politiques de première générale* according to the pagination of the version available here: <https://eduscol.education.fr/document/23647/download> (10.8.2022).

Citizens thus armed are able to thwart alternative facts and conspiracy narratives by drawing on well-constructed facts in a process that is similar to the journalistic discourse of fact-checking.

However, epistemologically both forms of political education through the teaching of history are of questionable validity. The *edifying narratives* born in Antiquity that flourished in the Middle Ages are based on the idea of cyclical time, and therefore of a clash with modernity, which posits the uniqueness of the historical process (Koselleck, 1990): events are never reproduced identically in relation to each other. In the social world, the same causes do not produce the same effects, as they are never isolated from the contexts that determine them; these causes are not laboratory variables. In the case of *critical thinking*, the black box of the passage from the study of the past to that of the citizen's political present raises the question of whether a current problem in a complex world can be understood using the same approaches and tools as those employed for the study of the past. This hiatus leaves teachers unaware of the conditions for using critical historical thinking to deal with contemporary political issues, for which sources and distance are lacking. Two contradictory common-sense approaches to the past thus coexist. On the one hand, the past provides lessons for the present, thereby justifying the duty of remembrance and the teaching of historical narratives. On the other hand, it is a well-known fact that historical analogies are imperfect and that a certain methodology is needed to discern the truth. Behind the duality, therefore, lie the relationships between the two terms of the alternative.

This text aims to clarify the conditions under which they are structured through a reflection within the field of didactic research. This research can be understood as exploring the conditions of operation of the didactic system that relates the knowledge and know-how targeted by the teaching, those implemented through teachers' systems and actions, and those implemented and contributed by pupils, both within the school and social contexts (Doussot and Fink, 2022). The two forms of the use of the historical teaching of the past with a view to educating future citizens will be compared with the practices of implementing knowledge that can be deduced from the instructions provided to teachers by the French Ministry of Education. By broaching the issue of the relationship between the teaching of history and political education through the notion of *knowledge practices*, the didactic perspective aims to go beyond the duality of knowledge and know-how (notably pedagogical) that presides over the alternative in question. Indeed, this alternative separates the idea that there is identical knowledge that can be applied mechanically to analogous situations

from the idea whereby there are sufficiently general ways of understanding that can explain any political situation. On the basis of going beyond this duality, it is a question of shedding light on certain conditions for a teaching of history that is relevant to political education.

I start by studying a case that compares these theoretical issues with empirical data. The latter focus on the official instructions and resources on the subject of immigration (2019) provided to history teachers in secondary schools by the French Ministry of Education. This object of study, presented in the first part, is significant with respect to our questioning for two reasons. Firstly, being very present in the political arena, it highlights its depoliticization, underpinned by official programmes. Secondly, it directly compares the lives of individuals with political decisions that engage the democratic nation in which the pupils are gradually learning to participate. It is a question of characterizing the targeted knowledge and know-how, and the ways in which they are implemented by teachers and, where appropriate, by pupils. In the second part, this characterization is deployed by means of a didactic approach that mobilizes a dual framework guided by the epistemology of history, particularly that developed around the concept of historical enquiry, and by historiography, essentially that of Gérard Noiriel's seminal work on immigration in France (1988). A detailed reading of this reference work reveals the ways in which historians develop explanations over time that become objects of criticism within the field of research itself. These criticisms are informed by new facts and concepts in a comparative process that spans both time and space. The history of immigration thus moves from a rejection outside national history to the integration of 'immigrants' as an 'internal' object of that same history. This process and the concepts that accompany it lead, in the last part, to the provision of reference points for the indirect deployment of a didactic analysis of the conditions of a school history of immigration that is conducive to the pupils' political education. My investigation of the different points of view on this object of study – those of migrants, governments, official instructions, teachers, pupils, etc. – constitutes the framework for describing an education aimed at the development of pupils who actively learn and who are *exacting* listeners when it comes to political discourses, i.e. who are capable of demanding guarantees about what is being stated and proposed.



## 2. Curricula focused on the problems of people in society rather than on historical problems

Concerning the subject of immigration, a reading of the official instructions<sup>3</sup> that teachers are required to comply with, as well as the resources<sup>4</sup> provided to help them implement these instructions, reveals a didactic paradox. The subject of study is explicitly presented as having a strong political content, but this presentation tends to depoliticize the way in which teachers deal with this subject in class. However, the knowledge produced in the field of francophone didactics puts this surprising discovery into perspective. Indeed, Audigier (1993; 1995) has shown that the failure to address political issues is a constant in the teaching of history, which he has modelled as a ‘refusal of politics’. Immigration thus does not escape this rule of the profession – in the sense of its regularity – while constituting a relevant case for our questioning of the relationship between history and politics.

This topic is historical and also rooted in current issues, and should officially be covered at both levels. It is offered in the second last year of secondary school (*‘Première’*) as part of a ‘speciality’ and multidisciplinary course covering the fields of history, geography, geopolitics and political science. An optional subject for the pupils, it represents a significant weighting in their curriculum and offers ‘a political discussion, at the national and international levels, of major issues with a historical dimension’ (p. 2). The issue of migration is dealt with in ‘Theme 3. Studying the political divisions of the world: borders’, and more particularly in the ‘concluding’ part, which deals with the European Union (EU), notably through the question of ‘coming to Europe, crossing the border’.

In the document’s concluding section, the issue of migration to the EU is presented in explicit connection with the geopolitical subject matter, which deals with the present time (‘this milestone makes it possible to introduce the part of the problematic dedicated to geopolitical issues’, Resource: 19), and re-

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3 Source: French Ministry of Education, Special Official Gazette no.1 of 19 January 2019, available here: <https://www.education.gouv.fr/media/7859/download> (340–348 for the part that interests us). We quote in our paper, under the term ‘Official Instructions’, the appendix *‘Programme d’histoire-géographie, géopolitique et sciences politiques de première générale’* according to the pagination of the version available here: <https://eduscol.education.fr/document/23647/download> (10.8.2022).

4 Source: *‘Thème 3 – Étudier les divisions politiques du monde : les frontières’* (October 2019), text available on the website of the French Ministry of Education, which we refer to in our paper as a ‘Resource’: <https://eduscol.education.fr/document/23659/download> (10.8.2022).

quiring a historical approach ('identify that, as enlargements take place, the external borders of the Schengen Area are becoming more and more numerous', Resource: 19). But the imposition of a primarily geopolitical viewpoint frames the possible historical problematizations theoretically and radically ('Geopolitics considers the rivalries and power issues between territories considered in their historical depth, as well as the representations that accompany them', Official Instructions, p. 2). From the perspective of the political education of citizens, approaching the migration issue solely at the level of relations between 'territories', and in particular international relations (this is how the 'political science' perspective is defined in the Official Instructions, p. 2), means ruling out any questioning of the actors and the relations between them and the states or other political institutions. It is from this point of view that the hypothesis of a *depoliticization*, at least partially, of the historical discussion of immigration induced by these official instructions can be posited. This imposed international scale relegates the actors of these migrations and the citizens of EU countries to the background, with all the explanatory models of past and present situations being based on disembodied entities (states, countries, groups of countries).

This depoliticization is also discernible in the detail of what the resource provides as guidelines for implementation, at least at three levels. Firstly, the teaching methods are described using impersonal formulations: 'the teacher notably presents the multiplication of fences and walls and the setting up of the Frontex Agency' (Resource: 19), without knowing by whom and by which processes these walls and this Agency were decided. Similarly, it is 'the crisis', an undefined entity, that 'is responsible for the deaths of several thousand people by drowning each year' (Resource: 19). This disembodiment of political decisions is then reinforced by the scale of the state that is chosen to present them. It pits the 'EU countries' against each other ('Visegrád Group' and other countries) as if the populations of these countries were unanimous in respect of these decisions and as if every citizen of this political entity that is the EU was not, by definition in democracies, concerned by these decisions ('The border countries of southern Europe are experiencing a major crisis with the arrival of large numbers of migrants ...', Resource: 19). This point highlights the absence – a corollary of this disembodiment – of any political issue in the relationship between citizens and political institutions (both national and European), whether it is a question of voting methods, the relationships between the executive and the legislature, or differences in the distribution of powers between regions and countries. Finally, the migration issue, that of the causes of population movements, although at the heart of the question that structures this part of the curriculum ('coming to

Europe, crossing the border’) and echoing the political realities of the last few years (‘a major crisis’), is posed only from the technical perspective of the ‘control’ of population flows. In particular, the ‘debate’ within the EU that is announced is seen as a very closed issue rather than an opening up of the various concerns: some defend ‘very strict policies of migration control, while other countries take a different approach’ (Resource: 19). In other words, the explanatory models that the teachers can mobilize are not political in nature but merely technocratic: the aim is not classwork on the possible choices in terms of migration policies and their consequences, but rather on the different ways of managing a choice that already exists.

This depoliticization of the study of immigration is very likely to prevent pupils from learning to apply critical thinking to the abundant news on immigration. The discrepancy is huge between the pupils’ perception of immigration in the public arena – the high media coverage of a given migration crisis showing men, women and children suffering, dying or being rescued – and the way it is dealt with in school. Moreover, the public arena is not short of political debates centred on the relationship between countries or European bodies and individuals and groups, as in the case of Germany’s decision in 2017 to welcome a large number of migrants, in contrast to the prevailing positions taken at that time by other EU countries. Similarly, a controversy initiated in the autumn of 2021 by a French presidential candidate opened up the debate at a political level. This candidate proposed that France should prohibit the transfer of money to countries that do not cooperate in preventing departures of migrants to Europe. The resulting political controversy stemmed from the lack of consideration to the effects on the populations concerned, namely immigrants in France and their families elsewhere. This can also be seen in the example of a film from 2021<sup>5</sup> presented at the Cannes Film Festival, which stages and thus subjects to public criticism the journalistic and political perspectives on migratory movements to Europe. These perspectives radicalize the juxtaposition of very general and disembodied but potentially very polemical ideas (for example, immigration as a danger or as wealth) and images of quite singular events (such as a sequence of television reports on board a boat in the Mediterranean illegally transporting migrants, about which the viewer knows nothing) staged to illustrate these ex-

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5 The film is entitled *France* (Dumont Bruno, 2021, France-Germany-Italy-Belgium, 3B Productions). For the first name of the journalist who is the main character in this work of fiction, this choice of title certainly aims to put into perspective the facts as reported and the responsibility of the French nation.

periences, which are incomprehensible to the viewer, but constitute facts that are incapable of challenging these general ideas.

We can posit at this point that this cinematographic representation caricatures the dominant mode of political debate in the public arena on this type of object, an arena to which secondary-school pupils have access. We can see how it is structured and how it complements the depoliticization of official approaches to the teaching of history. For although the latter, as we have seen, deal with immigration from the perspective of history and other approaches in the social sciences, they do so only in relation to technical and international issues, without questioning the political choices themselves. And conversely, the public debate deals with these political issues by means of general ideas and singular facts, which are never compared with each other, as a scientific approach to the social world would require. In other words, there is a division between the lay world and the academic world (Ethier et al., 2018) to the detriment of learning to critically analyse and understand political issues, referred to what it means to investigate political issues historically. It is not that the lay world is devoid of critical references, but these can hardly be considered educational in themselves. In a world that has become problematic (Fabre, 2011, 2019), media associations of *facts* and general ideas that explain phenomena are often presented in relativistic or dogmatic guises that result in inextricably false problems. We can therefore assume that the education of the coming generations depends above all on their ability to deal with facts and ideas that are in flux but that influence each other in order to *re-construct problems* that are more politically productive. Above all, this education depends on learning to investigate political issues in the sense of Dewey (1990, 1993), i.e. developing a democratic autonomy in which everyone participates in the definition of common rules and submits to them because they have access to a well-founded knowledge of political issues. We will now examine how a seminal historical investigation into immigration can provide benchmarks for this work of facts and ideas in schools.

### **3. Constructing a historical issue around immigration: epistemological lessons for educational purposes**

We will now take a slight detour to look at a historical and seminal work on immigration in France (Noiriel, 1988). This historiographical detour forms part of an approach to the research field of the didactics of history (Fink and Dousot, 2021), which considers historians' knowledge as a source for modelling the conditions of the historical study of the past, a modelling that, in turn, needs

to be confronted with such educational objects as the official instructions and resources described above.

Noiriel's book is all the more suitable for this task, as the author clearly explains the epistemological and historiographical stakes of the study in question<sup>6</sup> in relation to the inclusion of historians in the public and therefore political arena. The back cover states that, 'in the passionate debate that this theme arouses, Gérard Noiriel makes the voice of history and of reason heard'. The book was published in 1988, at the beginning of the inclusion of migration issues in political debates in France, particularly with the establishment of Jean-Marie Le Pen's political party (the *Front National*, which became the *Rassemblement National* in 2018) in the electoral landscape following the 1984 European elections. But more than that, in contrast to the historiography that preceded it, the book constructs its problematic in direct relation to the history of the French nation: for the author, it is a question of seeing immigration 'as a problem *internal* to the history of contemporary French society' (Noiriel, 1988: 10). In so doing, the history of the groups (notably ethnic groups) and individuals in question – their movements, border crossings, etc. – no longer makes sense outside of the history of France. The book itself therefore questions 'those overlooked in Republican history [in the sense of the French Republic]' (ibid.: 11).

Noiriel's relevance to our didactic questioning is therefore direct, since his book explicitly assumes the contemporaneity of the historical investigation approach. It links the historian's questioning of the political present with events and sources from the past in order to produce new conceptual categories that are more likely to account for past and present migratory phenomena. In so doing, the duality that presides over our questioning – between *Historia Magistra Vitae* and critical documentary methodology – is here overcome by a dialectic between past and present based on a comparative approach referred in particular to Bloch (1928), and which implements the 'praise for anachronism' advocated by Loraux (1993) as a historical means of concept production. The latter unfolds a process that compares ideas from the historian's present with facts relating to a situated event, then with other events of the same object in order to test these explanatory ideas in a different way and thus elucidate them, and finally to return to the current questioning. This is demonstrated in the very organization of Noiriel's book: two parts (4 and 5) describe the phenomenon according to different mo-

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6 Noiriel concludes Chapter 1 on the state of historiographical knowledge as follows: 'If to date immigration has never been an established object of historical research, this is also due to reasons of an epistemological nature' (Noiriel, 1988: 50).

ments that give rise to comparison, which in the last part makes it possible to characterize the ‘constants’ in the history of French immigration. Even the title of the book underscores this comparative process by drawing on American historiography, much more developed than its French equivalent, to give meaning to characteristics that are actually much more closely related than American society to this metaphor of the *melting pot*.

It is therefore possible to understand Noiriél’s epistemological choices as going beyond our initial alternative of the forms of relationship between the teaching of history and political education. The author turns the content of the country’s history (the first form, that of instructive narratives) into a content open to new investigations (the second form, that of critical ways of understanding), which opens up the debate on the possible versions of this history from an initial, immediate understanding of events. For Noiriél, the first historiographical sense – the state of knowledge – of immigration in France is that of a view that is ‘external’ to the history of the nation, that of separate groups with logics that were independent of that of France. This can be considered as the main explanation for the weakness of this historiography (Noiriél, 1988: 22–27), which only very belatedly managed to tie in with an ‘internal’ perspective, a historiography centred on the nation, which remains the dominant historiography. Applied to an educational framework, the dominance of the national historiographical perspective is expressed in the form of the ‘national myth’ and thus explains certain features of the official instructions and resources used in secondary schools. While the national myth is updated into a kind of ‘European myth’, the idea of ‘myth’ persists in its meaning of edifying and unquestionable stories of the nation’s past that serve as a reference for thinking and acting. The same internal/external relationship can thus explain the notable absence of individuals and groups concerned by immigration in the school texts studied. Indeed, the various choices of EU countries are developed, but never become the subject of the migrants themselves, who are relegated to a radical exteriority; either they are in the process of migrating and are not yet included in the history of the EU, or they are integrated into it and are thus no longer considered migrants.

With regard to the epistemological relationship between general ideas on immigration and specific facts, Noiriél (1988: 7) identifies two types of discourse that circulate on this controversial political issue: the opposition between ‘immigration that is ‘worrying’ or even ‘frightening’ in its novelty (new populations, concentration in ‘ghettos’ and communitarianism), and immigration as an ‘enrichment’ of France. This opposition between two narratives, each of which is intended to be edifying for the present, leads to ‘tumult’ because the voices of

historians are excluded. The latter must 'not refuse the apostrophes of current events, but claim the right to reflect on them differently, the right to the autonomy of scientific reflection' (Noiriel, 1988: 8). From this point of view, historical knowledge is different in nature from the two discourses of the political context within which it is constructed. These general discourses take a stand on a moral level, that of values. In this type of judgement, the *facts* are used to support the *ideas* defended; they do not enter into a reciprocal confrontation with these *ideas*, but rather illustrate them in order to be more convincing. In contrast to these moral judgements, historians make factual judgements about what happened in order to establish the facts on the one hand, and to devise (essentially conceptual) instruments for thinking about them on the other:

*Through his work, he [...] helps [...] to go beyond conjectural analysis by highlighting the recurrence of phenomena, which is the only way to identify 'laws' or at least constants, the only way also to understand what is really 'new' in the current context* (Noiriel, 1988: 8).

The 'scientific reflection' that Noiriel thus implements is an investigation that forces itself to confront facts and ideas in order to explore alternative explanations to those imposed in the (national) environment of historians (beyond the external approach that imposes the false problem of anxiety or enrichment through immigration) and to evaluate the respective probabilities of these other possible explanations. In so doing, the singular events studied by historians contribute to the construction of the 'constants' of the phenomenon, as well as to its variations over time. Hence the choice of the title, which symbolizes, through the concept of the *melting pot*, the passage from the exterior to the interior of French immigration history by bringing to light regularities produced by his investigation: it is a long process that inscribes immigrants within the nation. With regard to the notion of the border, Noiriel identifies 'three causes that can be followed over the long term', which constitute explanatory ideas that function as hypotheses, for investigating historians, to observe different occurrences of the phenomenon:

*The spiral that leads to the current polemics, and including the legislation of the Vichy government,<sup>7</sup> can be explained in a first analysis (but we will come back to this) by*

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7 The French government that emerged in 1940 following the invasion of France by Nazi Germany, and which suspended the French Third Republic and its democratic functioning.

*three causes that can be followed over the long term. Firstly, we should mention the intensification of international relations. [...] To this must be added the fact that the main parties involved, excluded by definition from any participation in the politics that concern them ... have only one way of contesting measures that they do not like, namely to flee. The creation of legality in fact entails the possibility of illegality, i.e. the existence of 'clandestine' immigration. [...] Finally, in times of crisis, measures aimed at closing the labour market to foreigners become widespread (Noiriel, 1988: 87).*

Through the process of enquiry that leads to the comparison of these hypotheses with sources, the alternatives of *instructive content* and *critical thinking* for considering the use of history in understanding the present disappears in favour of a type of epistemological relationship between singular facts (past and present) and the concepts that can explain them. In the case of immigration, the challenge is to move away from a logic 'that focuses on the study of specific cases [such and such a human group] without worrying about the whole' (8–9), in order to attempt 'to see in what way each of these examples can contribute to the construction of the "immigration" object as such' (9). However, when it comes to the social world, this construction cannot be achieved, as it can in the experimental sciences, by manipulating an object that is anchored in non-reproducible contexts, but rather by multiplying the points of view concerning it.

#### **4. Enquiry in education as a quest for possible points of view on a political object**

Designing a classroom activity by means of a didactic transposition of a historical enquiry can be done from the perspective of the search for possible points of view: those of the migrants in addition to those of the countries (i.e. the governments) to which they migrate, as well as those of the didactic system itself. Indeed, just as historians are contemporaries of their political periods, pupils and teachers are immersed in their present. The transposition of the enquiry presents a way to set the conditions for exiting the initial duality concerning the relationship between the teaching of history and political education. It is also a way of discussing the didactic notion of multiperspectivity. This notion accounts for phenomena of history teaching that reduce the apprehension of the plurality of points of view on the historical situations studied. It is not that the idea of a point of view is absent from the classroom or from the social experience of the pupils, but it often does not constitute an explicit conceptual instrument for studying these situations. The concept of multiperspectivity, according



to Stradling (2001), makes it possible to think of history teaching as a place where various points of view on the same historical object are brought into play, notably according to the multiple historiographical perspectives that exist and whose results the teacher can transmit. But such an approach says nothing about the teacher's own point of view, suggesting that there is an overarching point of view. It may then be useful to apply multiperspectivity in a more targeted way to the epistemological function of the notion of the point of view. It holds a major place in the scientific apprehension of the social world, upstream of the results produced, in the very construction of the categories of social groups and of their specific views. It is this function that denaturalizes the descriptive categories of these groups and views to make them objects of study and debate. In other words, the singular historical inquiry, which chooses and makes explicit its own perspective, is the only one capable of fighting against the tendency to 'objectivism [which] always encloses the virtuality of essentialism' (Bourdieu, 1972: 229). This means that multiperspectivity must not only lead to the identification of the groups (social, ethnic, gender, etc.) at stake in the situation and in its analysis, it must simultaneously constitute them as an object of study in order to confront the immediate categories (of the pupils) and the categories of the past. In this essential operation, historiography plays a central role. It is from this angle that we take up our analyses of the case of immigration. Firstly, the 'internal' problematic that Noiriel deploys with regard to the history of immigration in France, between the history of individuals, groups and the nation, leads to the characterization of the *point of view implemented* by these depoliticized texts. The national perspective of this programme is not explained, even though France, through its laws and actions, is positioning itself in the internal 'debate' within the EU concerning the degree of severity of 'controls'. Can France be considered one of the 'southern' countries, even though it is less exposed to migratory flows than Greece, Italy or Spain, for example? Has its position changed over recent decades? This implicit national viewpoint contained in the official instructions may have all the more effect on pupils' learning as they are also subjected to the influence of national issues during their history studies (see footnote 1). It also leaves in the shadows debates within France that are also present in the political public arena regarding this position, i.e. groups and individuals who defend various positions within the French Republic. Moreover, this part of the history curriculum is, as we have mentioned, contained within the 'history, geography, geopolitics and political science' speciality. This grouping of subject matters has practical reasons, notably the lack of specialized teachers in the last two of them, unlike sociology and economics, which form a single subject matter in French

secondary schools. But it has important epistemological implications. Noiriel builds his scientific approach on the complementarity between history and sociology in order to emphasize the importance of taking into account the perspective of migrants at the scale of their experience, with a view to comparing it with that of the state, the law and those responsible for managing them, as well as with the voluntarily overarching and disembodied view of sociologists or historians. For example, if in the official instructions and resources the 'protective function' (Resource: 19) of the border is only mentioned from the point of view of Europeans, the introduction in class of the migratory events that affect these individuals and groups is likely to raise the question of the border from the perspective of the migrants as potentially destructive and deadly. Conversely, adding geopolitics to history (highlighted in this part of the curriculum) reinforces these tendencies to favour points of view that are far removed from the experiences of the actors. And yet the description proposed at the national level seems to impose the problematic, i.e. the type of questioning possible, despite the call – unrealistic at an epistemological level – for 'a problematization at the crossroads of disciplinary fields' (Official Instructions: 3).

Secondly, the necessarily multiple perspectives of pupils in French secondary schools are not mentioned in these official instructions. Some may come directly from these recent 'crisis' migratory movements, others from older but family and socially alive displacements through an 'origin myth', and yet others may be very distant from them (Tutiaux-Guillon, 2021). How does this diversity of pupils influence the teachers' implementation of the curriculum in terms of the relationship between historical (and geopolitical) analysis and political education? From this didactic perspective – i.e. one that introduces the pupil, or rather *all* pupils, to the analysis of the teacher/pupil relationship, which dominates in the official instructions – Noiriel's work leads to a consideration of this teaching issue as an *internal* problem in French schools: the pupils are themselves more or less linked to immigration.

Thirdly, the didactic reflection based on these epistemological and historiographical references can guide teachers in the construction of a *didactic perspective* on the question of the relationship between the teaching of history and political education. Like historians immersed in the tumult of the political present, it is a question of helping teachers to 'think differently' in an 'autonomous' way about the differences between two discourses founded on radically opposed values – the discourse of anxiety and the discourse of enrichment – which the depoliticization of the official instructions seeks to ignore, but which cannot but invade the imagination of the pupils outside the classroom. How can teachers

*deal with* such a polarization of political discourses, to which is potentially added the discourse of an ‘origin myth’ for some pupils? This is certainly the central form of the didactic issue that emerges from our questioning of the relationship between the teaching of history and political education, which can be examined, once again, through epistemology and historiography.

This didactic question can first be considered from the perspective of the epistemological compass, referring to an activity of ‘negotiation’ between different possible narratives (Levisohn, 2010). Indeed, pupils are often confronted with inherited and very prevalent political antagonisms that are imposed on them by the multitude of discourses that convey them or refer to them. The main operation of a historian-type enquiry that corresponds to this situation thus consists in starting from the ready-made narratives, not in directly underestimating the value of one over the other from a postmodern perspective – which Seixas (2000) radicalizes for purposes of analysis and confrontation with a ‘disciplinary’ perspective – but rather to examine in detail the way in which each structures facts and ideas with reference to a model of historical enquiry (Doussot, 2017). We find here again the notion of multiperspectivity in its requirement of a critical historical construction of categories of present and past points of view, of plural actors and observers. The work of constructing possible points of view is a means of situating the one(s) chosen in class. Pupils then become less apprentice-investigators than demanding apprentice-auditors; they hold the history-makers to account, demanding to know on what facts explanatory ideas are based, and *vice versa*.

If epistemology serves as a compass for teachers, historiography provides them with content that, much like landmarks on a map, helps them ‘locate, orient, discriminate’ (Fabre, 2011: 44) their didactic choices. This is the case, for example, with the *border* object. Noiriel (1988: 154–159) considers that the border is not just a line of passage, but rather a place of ‘setting apart’: ‘the history of immigration is also in fact the history of a “setting apart”, if not of a “taking to task”: isolation in a determined place with a view to undergoing an entrance exam’. By evoking ‘camps and encampments’ as a constant in this history, Noiriel shows the emergence of a historical problem that is relevant to this part of the curriculum: the tension between the discourse of assimilation and the actions of ‘setting apart’, the effective conditions of which deprive migrants of the usual means of taking part in the host society (work, schooling, etc.). This shows how the introduction by teachers of concepts such as ‘setting apart’ can constitute an incentive leading to a more demanding reading of imposed political discourses: why do the two dominant discourses say nothing about

this *ostracism* from society and the nation, whether direct (camps) or indirect (neighbourhoods)?

## 5. Conclusion

Thus, teaching the history of immigration is a productive example of the possible uses of teaching history for the political education of future citizens. In the French-speaking world, the topicality of this theme could easily place it in the didactic category of socially relevant issues (Legardez, 2017), i.e. relevant in society, at school and in the scientific world. Our study takes an epistemological and historiographical sidestep to specify what can be understood by socially relevant issues for history through the structure of these three places of questioning. The movement of historiography to detach itself from its national anchoring, which *externalizes* the question of immigration, informs the broader and older didactic question of the anchoring of school history within a national history. Within such a scientific and academic understanding of the past, Noiriel's explanation of the epistemological and historiographical choices of his historical work in order to structure it around the political issues of his time constitutes reference points for the reflection that designs the work of school history and political education. Thus, when he dismisses the historians of reference in the national history of France – Michelet, Vidal de la Blache, Braudel, Chaunu (Noiriel, 1988: 127) – it is a question for him of 'breaking with the beautiful, tranquil, restful, even reassuring writings of history, these writings of consensus' in order to hear 'the richness of the "other France"' (ibid.: 136). How can we not see in this an analogous question for teachers, faced with the diversity of pupils and public narratives, of breaking with similarly restful and reassuring official instructions?

In this sense, the history of one's own country (Fink et al., 2020) offers a powerful didactic potential for forming citizens because the latter exist only in relation to political institutions defined by borders that delimit a political body. But this potentiality increases even more when this history of one's own country takes as its object that which questions the country's very delimitation. Immigration thus proves to be conducive to analogous and convergent problematizations on the history and political actuality of citizens. However, as we have seen, the realization of this potential cannot be satisfied with edifying accounts, even when they convey varied points of view. From a didactic perspective, it is necessary for these points of view to be confronted by the principles of an enquiry which alone can do more than juxtapose them. Taking into account the 'diversity of cultural perspectives' (Moisan et al., 2020), which we would like to

see in teaching, is conditional not on the recognition that multiple points of view exist, but on the ability to identify, and even characterize, all possible points of view on a given object.

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VÁCLAV SIXTA

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## Creating a Historical Textbook

### The Current Challenges



Václav Sixta

### Abstract

This text deals first with the issue of making a constructivist history textbook. It presents a project of developing a textbook for Czech lower secondary schools between 2018 and 2021. A second theme is to evaluate teachers' reactions to the textbook. The focus is first on the theory of the project: it presents its conceptual sources and their appropriation to Czech circumstances and to the medium of the textbook. The answer is illustrated using the example of two different chapters. In the second part of the paper the results of a year-long piloting of the textbook are discussed. The emphasis is especially on acceptance of the concept of the textbook by piloting teachers. In conclusion, both parts of the text are connected to an argument on the importance of constructivist textbooks at the present day.

### 1. Introduction

The author of the Palestinian-Israeli history textbook Eyal Naveh (2017) said at a conference at the POLIN museum that constructivist approaches have passed through the first phase of their birth and development into the phase of wrestling with the obstacles to their implementation. This means there is a broad consensus on constructivist pedagogy as an appropriate approach for contemporary

schools on the level of academic debate. At the moment, however, the key issues lay in various levels of the implementation process.

This text uses the same idea of two phases as its starting point. It is based on the shared conviction among leading authorities in history pedagogy that the sense and usefulness of historical education lies in developing student's historical literacy, which I understand as the introduction of the principles of constructivist pedagogy into history education. The question of 'Why history education?' is more pressing in the sphere of everyday teaching practice than in academic debate. It is important to search for a justification for each lesson plan or learning app, for every teacher and for every local circumstance. Are these materials compatible with the principles of historical literacy? Where are the obstructions to achieving the pedagogical objectives? How can we communicate the principles of historical literacy to the pupils, parents and stakeholders?

The following text intervenes in this space, which is positioned between contemporary theories of historical literacy and the everyday teaching of history. It focuses on the project of a new history textbook developed in the Czech Republic between 2018 and 2021. It deals with two issues. First, it opens up the experience of implementing the theoretical background of contemporary history pedagogy and historiography into the concept of a textbook. This text aims to present the concept of the textbook to the international academic audience, and to make it accessible to critical discussion. Are there any tensions between the traditional medium of the textbook and the principles of historical literacy?

The second topic deals with the reactions obtained from piloting the textbook. How did teachers accept the concept of the textbook? In this part of the text, I will sum up the information we gained about the relationship of the history teachers to the principles of historical literacy from the year-long piloting process.

In short, I sum up how this project can help answer the following question: Do we still need history textbooks in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? The medium of the textbook might be considered an old-fashioned medium that will be replaced by numerous online resources and teaching materials. I will uncover arguments for why textbooks should remain a part of history education in the final part of the text.

## **2. Local context: history education in the Czech Republic**

Before I address the first topic, I will briefly describe the main features of the field of history teaching in the Czech Republic. The first one is the curriculum. Since



2005, the Czech Republic has had a competence-based curriculum, which does not require teachers to cover ‘all of history,’ from prehistory until today (www.nuv.cz). However, beyond the required competences, the history curriculum also includes a section called ‘subject matter,’ which represents the traditional content of history from prehistory to the end of the twentieth century. As a consequence of this two-fold curriculum, most of the schools avoided innovating with their teaching plans because they preferred the content-centred part of the curriculum over its competence-based parts. Therefore, the new textbook enters a field dominated by the content-based approach (Činát, Najbert and Ripka, 2021: 51).

The second piece of context is the regulated nature of the market for textbooks. Each textbook for lower secondary school must be approved by the Ministry of Education before it can be offered to schools. The schools then decide which textbook to use. A lack of money often leads to old textbooks being used in schools. For the development of new textbooks, this means that using public money to co-fund the process can create the conditions for implementing innovative approaches into a new textbook. Otherwise, I suggest that no publishing house is likely to invest in the innovation.

The last piece of context is the tradition of Czech history education. Since the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, history education has served to create loyal citizens of the Czech lands (Cvrček, 2020; Kasper, Kasperová and Pánková, 2018). Textbooks often present a national master narrative to be shared by the majority of citizens (Märc 2010: 9–15; Zajda, Tsyrlina-Spady and Lovorn, 2017: 53–72). This also holds true for the political regimes of twentieth-century Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, including textbooks developed after 1989. From this point of view, it is clear that a constructivist textbook has to deal with this tradition and persuade teachers of the advantages of historical literacy as an appropriate and functional approach to history teaching.

### **The textbook project**

The textbook for lower secondary schools (ISCED 2011 level 2) that I discuss here was developed in cooperation between the Educational Department of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the private publishing house Fraus. Its ambition is to prepare a constructivist textbook of contemporary history that will be anchored in inquiry-based learning and interaction with primary sources and will develop the historical literacy of its users.

The process of development was based on teamwork among a group of six main authors, who were responsible for the chapters and the concept of the textbook itself. Each chapter also had its own guarantor – usually a historian

and expert in the field. Together, all of the guarantors formed the textbooks' advisory board. The chapters were tested in schools, and the feedback was then incorporated into the final version of each chapter. The author of the present text is also a member of the authorial team. The team has been led by Jaroslav Pinkas and Roman Anýž, Kamil Činát, Jaroslav Najbert, Peter Sokol and the present author were also involved.

### 3. Historical literacy: sources for the textbook project

There are several concepts that develop the idea of historical literacy differently, but they stand on the same ground (Levesque, 2011; Levesque and Clark, 2020: 120–133, Najbert, 2022). This common ground is based on the importance of procedural knowledge and the active participation of pupils in historical interpretations: doing history (Levesque, 2011: 117). In this framework, historical education is metaphorically about students learning the rules of the game and playing the game, rather than observing others playing the game and learning the results of games they did not play (Levesque, 2011: 116–119).

These shared features have been developed in various national frameworks since the 1970s, and they differ in emphasis and in their particular formulations. Stéphane Levesque and Penny Clark argue that, 'While English scholarship defined historical thinking as a disciplinary way of knowing in reference to a model of cognition centred on the understanding of substantive history and second order, procedural ideas, the German contribution has relied more broadly on the integrative notion of historical consciousness' (Levesque and Clark, 2020: 124). Historical consciousness is, in short, understood as an ability to compare and criticize different historical narratives and the competence to create one's own credible narrative (Rüsen, 2005; Lücke, Tibbits, Engel and Fenner, 2016: 42–44).

In Canada, a historical thinking concept developed by Peter Seixas emerged and garnered widespread acceptance (Levesque and Clark, 2020: 128). This approach is based on six main concepts: historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, perspective-taking and the ethical dimension (Seixas and Morton, 2013). Extended beyond their implementation into the Canadian history curriculum, these concepts became very influential across many national approaches to history education.

In the United States, the leading scholar of historical literacy is Samuel Wineburg. His approach is based on three components of historical thinking: sourcing, contextualization and corroboration (Wineburg, 2001). These concepts

should, according to Wineburg, connect everyday history teaching with the practice of academic historians in an accessible way. In recent years, Wineburg and his colleagues from the Stanford History Education Group have focused on the influence of digital technologies on historical education and its concepts (Wineburg, 2018).

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to note that a sufficiently established concept of historical literacy that could be used for the textbook did not exist in the Czech Republic. Aside from some older attempts in the 1980s (Najbert, 2022), the tradition of the transmissive approach prevailed in Czech history pedagogy. The curriculum itself was (and still is) a supportive element because of its constructivist notion, but on the level of particular subjects there was no clear idea of the pedagogical objectives of teaching history. The task was not only to create a history textbook, but also to develop a pedagogical concept for it. The textbook's authorial team tried to transfer the aforementioned concepts of historical literacy into the Czech context.

#### **4. Historical literacy for the textbook: the '4+1' model**

The aforementioned approaches also created the conceptual reservoir for the development of the textbook. The task was to transform this field into both the context of the Czech Republic and the medium of a textbook. Based on many debates and readings, on experiences in creating numerous sets of learning materials and on organizing teacher training for many years (Najbert, 2022), we created a concept that followed historical literacy, which is based mostly on Seixas's Historical Thinking Project.

The model is composed of two segments. The first is called 'inquiry-process sub-skills' or, in short, 'skills'. This set of competences combines what Peter Seixas calls evidence, Wineburg's sourcing and the German research group FUER's procedural model of historical education (Körber, 2007: 54–86; Havlůjová and Najbert, 2017). These skills represent the basics of the craft of historical interpretation: looking for appropriate sources, describing the form and content of the source, reconstructing its message and taking into consideration the person or institution of the author, etc.

The sub-skills of the inquiry process have their own place in the concept because pupils need them in every single contact with the past. In comparison to Seixas, it is not one concept between the others, but instead it creates a separate category. From the pedagogical point of view, each of these skills should be helpful in answering the inquiry-based question and should be criterially evaluated.

This helps teachers give feedback to their students effectively. For example, when the student does not take the historical context into consideration, his or her answer would be probably less developed than the answers of classmates who do so. The teacher is best at explaining to him or her where the problem with the work lies. This is enabled by what Najbert emphasizes, that these skills have been developed in close contact with student work and continuous teacher training (Najbert, 2022).

Four second-order concepts of historical thinking make up the second part of the model of historical literacy. Three of them, along with their description through a set of 'guideposts', come from Seixas's Historical Thinking project. The concepts that are being translated into the Czech context are Historical Perspective, Continuity and Change, and Cause and Consequences. The only change was to add new guideposts to Cause and Consequences in the following formulations:

- Human actions influence not only concrete conditions, but also period ideas about the past and the future.
- Understanding causes and consequences allows us to plan better for the future.
- The environment is also part of the relationship between causes and consequences.

The goal was to underscore the importance of the changing notions of time and the relationship between history and the environment.

The last concept, Relationship to the Past, is specific to the second order concept developed for the purpose of the Czech textbook. It connects Seixas's Ethical Dimension with Historical Significance. This attempt to innovate the concepts of historical literacy draws on contemporary research in cultural memory studies (Erl, 2010) and media memory studies (Hoskins, 2017). Authors from both fields present contemporary cultures of memory as multidirectional and as strongly influenced by particular media. The second reason for this step was based on the observation that students participate in this multidirectional and cosmopolitan memory in their everyday lives by consuming popular culture, whether by visiting historical sites on holidays or seeing it on their social media feeds (Stav výuky soudobých dějin 2012).

The guideposts to the Relationship to the Past were defined as follows:

- We always relate to the past from our contemporary point of view. In various periods and situations, various events and themes are thus considered to be significant.
- Every text about the past contains implicit or explicit value judgements.

- We relate to the past not only as individuals, but also as a society. Various institutions that approach the past for various reasons and in different ways contribute to this.
- It is impossible to come to a definitive viewpoint on the past. Controversy is a part of relating oneself to the past.
- The past does not repeat itself, nor does it offer simple lessons. At the same time, we can better imagine our future based on our awareness of the past.

### Historical Inquiry Skills

Evidence (Seixas et al.)  
 Sourcing, corroboration, contextualization, close reading (SHEG)  
 Skills (IB History, The Australian History Curriculum)  
 Metacognition

### Historical Thinking Concepts

– Causes and Consequences  
 – Continuity and Change  
 – Historical Perspectives  
 – Relationship to the past  
 (Significance, Judgement, Ethical dimension,  
 Understanding memory practices)

**Figure 1: The '4+1' model and its conceptual sources**

With reference to Seixas's Big Six, we call our model of historical literacy Four plus One. The 'Four' represents the second order concepts, and the 'one' represents the sub-skills of the inquiry process. In my view, there are three key features of this Four plus One concept that distinguish it from other conceptualizations of historical literacy. The first is the reduction of the second-order concepts to a set of four, which makes them more understandable for teachers. The second is moving Evidence to the inquiry-process sub-skills area, because this is an inevitable skill for dealing with the past in general. The third is elaborating the new concept of Relationship to the Past, which refers to all kinds of uses of the past in contemporary societies, including its ethical dimension. It enables us to incorporate recent cultures of memory fully into history education.

## 5. Historical literacy in the textbook

In the following paragraphs, I will describe how we transformed this theory into a textbook. The key building block of the textbook is a chapter, which covers one double-page. Each chapter consists of a set of questions and sources and is organized around one precisely formulated inquiry question. The inquiry question is determined by one of the second-order concepts from the set of four. In other words, an inquiry question is an intersection between the concept of historical thinking, the historical topic and the content of the chapter.

Every chapter opens with an evocative picture. It is a dominant visual element of the chapter, and it usually reflects current or period memory practices related to the topic. These include pictures of monuments, demonstrations, iconic photos and re-enactments. The textbook texts represented an important change. Until now, Czech textbooks have consisted mostly of explanatory texts accompanied by some illustrations (Průchová, 2018). In our textbook, we have dramatically reduced the narrative text to one or two paragraphs at most. But the changes refer not only to the length of the text, but also to its purpose. The text does not present a historical narrative in its definitive shape, but instead explains and justifies the inquiry question. This exposure also includes the basic historical context, which might help students understand the topic and interpret the sources.

The core of the chapter is a set of approximately four sources accompanied by an interpretive question. The textbook contains various kinds of sources. The audio-visual ones are connected to the printed textbook in the online environment, indicated with a numerical code. The basic idea of the textbook is that the students will work with the particular sources and then answer the inquiry question at the end of the lesson. All of the chapters are designed for a 45-minute lesson, but the teacher can elect to extend it to 90 minutes.

Every chapter also includes an activity in the digital learning app HistoryLab.cz (Historylab.cz; Činátl, Najbert and Ripka, 2021). HistoryLab.cz is a digital educational tool for teaching with primary sources based on student's active interactions with the sources. One quarter of the chapters has this activity incorporated as a compulsory part of the inquiry process, and it is optional in the rest. This enables teachers to choose their own way of teaching the topics without departing from the concept of the chapter and the method of inquiry-based learning. From this perspective, we can talk about the textbook's hybrid form, which combines a printed book with online tools developed for educational purposes.

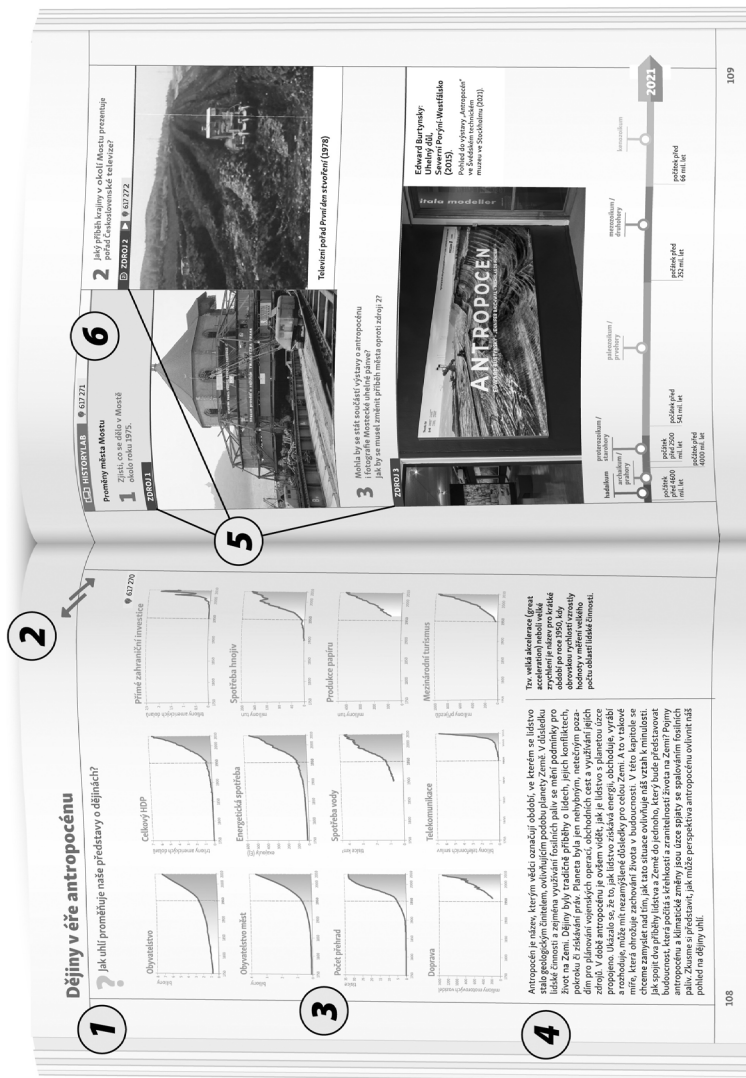


Figure 2: Example of a textbook chapter dealing with the concept of the Anthropocene Legend: 1. Inquiry question; 2. The icon of one second-order historical thinking concept (here: Continuity and Change); 3. Evocation; 4. Textbook narrative reduced; 5. Primary sources; 6. HistoryLab.cz here as the compulsory part of the lesson.

One example I will present here is a chapter from the final part of the textbook, dealing with the concept of the Anthropocene (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016). Its objective is to help pupils to acquire the concept as a useful perspective on history. This abstract and still discussed concept is connected with the story of the city of Most in northern Bohemia, which was resettled during the 1970s because of coal mining (Spurný, 2019; Glassheim, 2016: 123–147).

The Great Acceleration set of graphs serves as an evocative picture (Steffen, 2015). The students are guided to discuss what made the great acceleration possible (e.g. burning fossil fuels) and what this phenomenon brought to mankind. They can then relate their answers to the text, which explains the term ‘Anthropocene’ and its relation to coal. After that, they focus on the case study of the city of Most and the role of coal in its history. A geological timeline is also added into this chapter which helps students acquire a better orientation in what geological time means and to imagine the time scale that is in play in the Anthropocene. There is no set of instructions for the timeline – it works together with the introductory text as a support for pupils.

The students first examine what happened to the city during the 1970s in the HistoryLab application. They learn that the mediaeval city was built on a coal deposit. In the 1970s, the original city was destroyed, and its inhabitants were moved to the newly built city nearby. Only the old mediaeval church was transported to the new city.

In the next step, pupils watch a documentary from the socialist era (1978), which tells the story of Most in terms of its productivity and the power of men and technology to create a new, healthy, productive environment. They have to reconstruct the ideology behind the story presented in the documentary. In the last part of the lesson, students work with a photo from Edward Burtynsky’s ‘Anthropocene’ exhibition (2015), in which a coal mine in Germany is a dominant theme. They are asked to think how the story of Most would have to change to become a part of the Anthropocene exhibition.

In this comparison, students can recognize that the Anthropocene offers a different perspective on the story of Most. There have been two dominant stories of the city in recent years: the first is the original socialist modernist story about the creation of new modern life through scientific knowledge and industry, represented by the documentary in the chapter. The second is an ecological story about how the communists destroyed the environment and a mediaeval city, the story that has prevailed in recent public discourse.

From the perspective of the Anthropocene, pupils can see that the story of the city of Most could be a part of global history. They can compare Most



with other cities influenced by mining and look for similar stories in Western countries or in the Global South, regardless of whether they were part of the socialist or the capitalist alliance during the Cold War. This sensibility to new connections could very well represent the Anthropocene in a textbook for lower secondary schools as an educational objective.

## **6. 'Skill-builder' chapters**

Before I evaluate the teacher's reactions to the textbooks concept, it is necessary to mention another important aspect of this issue, as there is also one important conceptual layer. Besides regular chapters, the textbook includes five chapters focused on the development of student's inquiry skills. These 'skill-builders' are structured according to particular media: propaganda posters, photography, film, eye-witnesses and the public space. This layer is another element of the textbook based on recent research in the field of memory studies, which emphasizes the role of media in contemporary cultures of history (Hoskins, 2017; Erll, 2010). In these chapters, students elaborate on the nature of particular media and its ability to communicate the past.

**1** Jak film ukazuje historické události?

**2** Co je naším cílem

**3** Jakým významem má scéna ve zdroji? Jak filmová úkážka zobrazuje událost? Kde můžeme najít příklady filmové úkážky ve zdroji 1.

**4** Jaký význam má scéna ve zdroji 2? Jak filmová úkážka zobrazuje událost? Kde můžeme najít příklady filmové úkážky ve zdroji 1.

**5** Podívej se na úkážku ze současněho dokumentu (zdroj 3), jaký je podle tebe nášer tvůrčí dokument na tvorbu vojčtška jasněho 250. letích 20. století?

**6** Přti práci s filmem nebo filmovou úkážkou postupujeme následujícím způsobem:

**7** Lidce ve filmu

**8** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**9** Mým jme se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**10** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**11** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**12** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**13** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**14** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**15** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**16** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**17** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**18** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**19** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

**20** Když jsem se ze zřinutva díval na film, tak mi bylo smutno, protože jsem musel vidět, jak se lidé filmový obraz z roku 1974 do dnešenz roku 2017

Figure 3: The skill-builder chapter dealing with a film as medium and a primary source

Legend: 1. Inquiry question; 2. The icon of the skill-builder chapter; 3. Introductory text describing the importance of film as a medium; 4. Description of the objective of the chapter: to compare different depictions of the same event.; 5. Primary sources; 6. The process of interpreting a film.

For example, the skill-builder chapter dealing with film should develop the student's critical approach to this medium. The introductory text emphasizes that film is not a realistic depiction of life in the past. According to the textbook, film is rather a representation of the values and ideas of the time the film was produced. The students' work is based on a comparison of three different depictions of the collectivization of agriculture in 1950s Czechoslovakia. There is a clip from a propaganda film, a critical approach from 1967 and a contemporary film from 2004. Students should identify the differences between the narratives of particular clips. They also can add biographical information about the director and the political context of their considerations.

All skill-builders also include a description of the process of interpreting the medium. This is presented in step-by-step form, and it describes the particular analytical and interpretative operations related to the medium. In the case of film, students are led to 1) reflect on their emotions; 2) describe the clip; 3) investigate and explain the message of the source; 4) draw conclusions, and 5) establish a critical distance from the source. The case of the collectivization of agriculture serves as example of the sort of material that helps students acquire a set of skills that they can also use in other cases.

Although skills development is present in all of the chapters through the students' work with primary sources, skill-builder chapters underscore the importance of mediality in interpreting sources. In this perspective, each medium requires a different approach in achieving a critical distance. Skill-builder chapters create a space for reflecting on the mediality of historical sources in the classroom.

In the preceding text, I have presented the textbooks concept from the authorial team's perspective, the goal being to present the concept to a broader audience and to make it accessible for a critical discussion. However, it is even more important to investigate the perspective of the textbook's main users: Czech history teachers. In the following section, I will present the results of piloting the textbook.

## **7. An experience: piloting an inquiry-based textbook**

The data I draw on here originates from the year-long process of piloting the whole textbook. The goal of this piloting was to figure out how the textbook works in the regular learning process and how teachers and students react to inquiry-based activities in a longer-term horizon. Only five teachers participated in the piloting because particular chapters had been tested earlier, and to manage

a year-long contact with teachers would have required a lot of time and money. The teachers undertook the piloting voluntarily, all of them had prior experience with inquiry-based learning, and they all received a monetary compensation. Three were women and two men; two were from Prague, two from towns with three and four thousand inhabitants, and one from a school in a small village.

The textbook's authorial team collected the following data during the 2020/2021 school year: recordings from two focus groups with the teachers (one in December and another in May), notes from sitting in on classes, students' workbooks, questionnaires collected from the teachers and teachers' diaries. The COVID-19 pandemic and the temporary closures of Czech schools that followed affected the piloting process. Some lessons were taught in distance learning mode, and the teachers suffered more than usual from a lack of time. The result of this was that teachers managed to pilot approximately 75% of the chapters by the end of the school year.

The first to publish data from the piloting process was Jaroslav Pinkas, a leader of the textbook team, the main author of the textbooks concept and one of the leading scholars in Czech history pedagogy (Pinkas 2021). In his broadly conceived study, Pinkas focuses mostly on the inquiry process in the classroom. According to his text, we can make the following important propositions.

First, teachers confirmed that accepting the textbook as the prevailing or exclusive material for their teaching demanded a change in their teaching habits (Pinkas, 2021: 101–104). Although teachers had previous experience with inquiry-based learning, the textbook forced them to re-think their pedagogical style, their means of communication with the students and the evaluation of the student's outputs. Secondly, the most sensitive point in working with the textbook was the inquiry question. For all the teachers, according to Pinkas (2021: 103–104), it was hard to incorporate the questions into their lessons and guide students to formulate an answer to them. Pinkas concludes that, for the teachers, inquiry-based learning is mostly reduced to the student's interpretations of particular sources and the discussion in the classroom. On the other hand, teachers are limited in their understanding of the whole process of historical inquiry and in giving feedback to their pupils – for example, in cases of false interpretations. This leads to an under-estimation of the inquiry question, as the chapters then seem to be only a very freely connected set of sources. In this context, another of Pinkas's conclusions is also important: there was a discrepancy between the teachers' verbal acceptance of inquiry-based learning and its unsatisfactory realization in the classroom.

From the aforementioned thesis, it follows that I will focus on the teacher's reflections on the chapters, sources and situations that happened in the classrooms, rather than on their explicit declarations about the concept of the textbook. The focus will be mostly on those situations that teachers evaluated as negative, problematic or in other ways unsatisfactory. I will also look for claims whereby the teachers formulate a recommendation to the authorial team. I also regard this as a space for expressing opinions about the concept of the textbook.

## 8. Teachers and the concept of the textbook

In general, teachers involved in the year-long piloting process reacted to the concept of the textbook differently but consistently across all kinds of data-collection. The goal of the piloting was to prove that the textbook functions during regular work in the classroom and to obtain feedback from the teachers focused mostly on the concept and their descriptions of how work with the textbook developed over the course of the school year. The secondary goal was to obtain data on how teachers react to historical literacy in the textbooks and how this material influences the learning process.

The data from piloting the textbook enables us to describe different reactions to the experience of piloting among the teachers. The quantitative data about the numbers of teachers representing each kind of reaction is not as important as the language they use to describe their experiences with the textbook. I will quote some of these descriptions anonymously, which the teachers agreed to. To identify the sources, I use identifiers in the form (D for diary, FG I and FG II for focus groups, Q for questionnaire, and S for notes from sitting in on a class) in combination with a code for the teachers (T1 to T5; I use the generic masculine for both men and women to preserve teachers' anonymity) and the date or page. This code enables us to identify the sources, which are archived in the Department of Education of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes.

I call the first kind of reaction 'missing the concept of the textbook'. This happened with one teacher. A persistence in using the language of the transmissive teaching approach typified his reflections. He speaks about 'learning particular topics', 'revision of the subject matter', 'managing topics' and other terms linked in the Czech language to the transmissive approach (T1, D: e.g. 1.2.2021, 14.12.2020, 3.5.2021). According to him, discussion in the classroom serves to go over the basic facts with the students. He answered the inquiry question as follows: 'The students did not have any problems. But I did, because I wasn't able

to check whether they were making notes during the online lesson. With some of them we had to fill in the workbook completely after the return to school' (T1, Q: Block 2).

He did not reflect on any changes that an inquiry-based textbook could bring to his lessons. On the contrary, he managed to go through the whole school year with just the textbook. There were some complaints about several particular chapters that were, according to him, 'too hard for students', but he did not offer any complex criticism of the textbook itself. This, in my opinion, is a double-edged phenomenon. On the one hand, it seems that the inquiry-based textbook did not depend on any previous acceptance or basic understanding of its concept. On the other hand, it could also mean that an inquiry-based textbook does not necessarily lead to inquiry-based lessons.

On the opposite part of the scale of the typology is an approach characterized by a recognition and acceptance of the concept. We can see this in two teachers' responses. The most important point in their reflections was the necessity of a change in their teaching. One of these teachers wrote this in his diary at the very beginning of the piloting: 'Children are not used to this concept, the pace is slower than normal, and a small part of the activities was assigned as homework. It was my first live lesson (in this mode – VS). There is actually a kind of reprogramming in the children's heads. The children enjoyed the work very much' (T3, D: 20. 10.). This quotation illustrates this teacher's attitude very well. He was conscious that the textbook necessitates a complex change in pedagogical approach. He supports this, but also describes some problems: the work went slowly, and some parts were assigned as homework.

These two teachers often focus on the inquiry questions as a key aspect of the textbook. I consider this to be proof of their understanding of the concept as a whole. We can find one of the most critical points in the diary of one of these teachers regarding the set of chapters dealing with the Second World War: 'In general I did not like this part of the textbook, and the work went poorly. I don't know whether it is because of the children's age, but the inquiry questions are formulated in such a way that the students don't understand them, and they actually don't know why they should answer these questions' (T4, D: Evaluation of block 4). This reflection reveals the sensitive nature of the inquiry question as a key point of the chapter, or rather the concept of the textbook. Teachers with a lower level of understanding of the concepts often focus on particular sources or on the topic in general rather than on the inquiry question.

In between the reactions described above is a third one, which displays a special focus on the inquiry process. This approach is also represented by two

teachers. Their reflections are focused mostly on particular sources and on the student's reactions, the flow of discussion in the classroom, and the quality of the answers in particular activities. We can compare the same box in the teacher's diary as the critical point to the inquiry questions mentioned above: 'Students liked the topic of the resistance and collaboration (with Nazism – VS), except they agreed that it is too long in the workbook. Some pupils elaborated on the activity in HistoryLab, which led them to watch topical feature films and documentaries. In general, my students liked to work with textual sources. The problems were with analysing photographs' (T2, D: evaluation of block 3).

It is obvious that this teacher has a good awareness of his students' reactions and how they work, and he knows about their strengths and weaknesses very well. He can identify problems with photographs as a historical source. But in his reflections, we do not find any reactions to the inquiry questions or the other important features of the textbook.

The second teacher in this group is a slightly different case. His reactions develop over time. In the very beginning of the piloting, he carefully reflects on every activity, question and task in the textbook. He states that inquiry-based learning is usually practised in his school, and he uses this experience to evaluate the particular activities.

In the first half of the piloting, we gradually find more reflections related to the inquiry questions, which culminated in the first focus group, where he reflects: 'Actually the work with sources is often more important for us (than inquiry question – VS) and we do not want to interrupt it' (T5, FG I: 1:03). Half a year later, in the second focus group, he confirmed that for him the inquiry question is an important part of the textbook that should not be abandoned.

Based on these two teachers, we might suppose that the inquiry process itself has the potential to attract many teachers. The textbook creates a space for them to actively work with students, guiding them through the chapters. The inquiry process incorporated into the chapter could lead to a lesson that would follow the concept of the textbook, even in cases where teachers do not reflect on the pedagogical background of the textbook. It also seems that, in the longer-term perspective, teachers might start to ask questions about the more abstract parts of the textbook's concept.

Besides the scale of the reactions described above, there is also another source indicating how teachers reacted to the concept of the textbook. There was a direct question on second-order concepts during the first focus group. The questioner asked how teachers worked with the icons representing second-order

concepts that were present in every chapter. The result was a whole range of uncertain answers and doubts about two issues (FGI: 02:30 – 02:40).

First, teachers were uncertain whether they had understood the four concepts themselves. Most of them did not understand the actual question. They found it hard to connect the icons to any sort of conceptual background. Second, they could not imagine how they would incorporate them into their teaching. Only one teacher mentioned that he was glad to have the icons there as a reminder that there is something more abstract to which he can relate.

This ultimately rather embarrassing situation indicates that teachers do not need to be deeply educated in second-order concepts or instructed in the whole concept of the textbook before they start using it. The experience with the piloting process shows that teachers were able to teach in conformity with the textbook even without understanding the '4+1' model.

## 9. Conclusion

I have presented the pedagogical concept of the new inquiry-based history textbook for Czech lower secondary schools in the first part of the text. I emphasized its relation to recent debates in history pedagogy, especially its appropriation of historical thinking concepts into the national framework of the Czech school system.

From the reactions of the teachers, we can say that there are no causal relations between understanding the textbook's concept and the ability to teach with it. It is also possible to teach in a transmissive mode with a constructivist textbook, although there are some difficulties in doing so. On the other hand, it is possible to teach in a constructivist way with only an intuitive acceptance of the textbook. The latter case was observed more frequently.

The key feature of the textbook that can make a difference is the inquiry question. Its formulation can either guide teachers through the chapter or discourage them. From the pedagogical point of view, it is in fact a place where the second-order concept is incorporated into the historical topic. Its acceptance and understanding by the teacher are key conditions for successful work with the textbook.

Do we still need history textbooks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Yes, but we have to change our notions of what 'history' is and what a 'textbook' is. History should not be a collection of facts subordinated to just one narrative, but rather the field in which doing history is practised. I propose that we take the critical discussion



in this text as a starting point for a possible way of incorporating these principles into a history textbook.

In my opinion, a more significant change should happen in the notion of the textbook as a medium. The experience of the piloting shows that the discussions could be focused on completely different issues than with classical narrative textbooks. The teachers shared a lot of experiences from the classroom, descriptions of discussions with the students, the student's interpretations and controversies or uncertainties from their classrooms with the authorial team.

This experience needs pedagogical supervision rather than a historian checking whether classroom interpretations are correct or not. In this respect, we can understand the piloting of the textbook as an unintended, specific type of teacher training. This could be productively used in re-thinking the medium of the textbook. In this framework, the textbook serves not only to educate pupils but also to educate teachers. Based on step-by-step principles, teachers can start with basic interpretations of particular sources and gradually develop more sophisticated teaching habits. As we can see with one teacher (T5), he started to ask questions on the conceptual background of the textbook during the piloting. The teachers can thus acquire the principles of historical literacy on their own.

In general, I believe that the textbook should not be understood as a separate learning material, but rather in a holistic way as an intervention into the ecology of the educational system, which could initiate far more changes than expected.

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## Teaching History in Slovakia

### An Uncertain School Subject?



Barnabás Vajda

### Abstract

For history didacticians, the question ‘Why do we teach / learn history at school?’ has a special significance, and it is perhaps the most vital question to which we are obliged to have proper answers. In the Introduction, this study offers an overview on the question of what is the ‘sense’ of teaching history at schools in general and in Slovakia in particular. In its second and third sections, the study analyses the question from the point of view of Slovakia’s state regulations by describing two state school curricula as the most decisive documents on the issue: the ‘old’ Slovak school curriculum, which has been in use since 2011, and a ‘new’ one which is currently under preparation by the Slovak Ministry of Education. The task of evaluating the state’s core curricula from the point of view of its main purpose seems to be all the more interesting given that, in 2022, Slovakia started a new round of curriculum reforms, the main intentions and most relevant goals of which are reforming or transforming upper elementary education, including history. These intentions and goals are being widely discussed right at the time of writing of this study, as is done also in the second section of this study. In the fourth section, the author considers the international links that inform Slovakian history didactics, and argues for history as a school subject that is fundamentally a combination of important skills used by historians and a school subject with clear social goals.

## 1. Introduction

The question 'Why do we teach/learn history at school?' is more actual than ever.<sup>1</sup> To illustrate the weight of this question, it is perhaps enough to mention that in recent years, in my own experience, several scholarly studies have been written and at least three wide-ranging international conferences held on and about this fundamental question.<sup>2</sup>

The question, Why do we teach / learn history at school? is not new, as it is well understood.<sup>3</sup> If we go back to the recent past, to the 1960s and 1970s, in Western Europe we already saw significant attempts at change. In these decades, especially in Germany, there was, for example, a shift from knowledge to skills, which represented an attempt to relaunch history teaching on a fresh basis. It was a movement to bring in 'skills' rather than 'learning by memorizing', as well as being an attempt to overcome a crisis by teaching/learning facts and skills combined.<sup>4</sup> From the Slovakian point of view, another important attempt to re-calibrate the goals of history teaching followed in 1989, when the teaching

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- 1 The Slovak Ministry of Education launched its comprehensive project, entitled 'Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century', in mid-January 2022. At the same time, it published plans and documents for public debate ['public consultations'] as well as doing so on several occasions for professional debate. Most of these documents are accessible in the Slovak language at [<https://vzdelavanie21.sk/>]. Our esteemed colleague at the ISHD, Associate Professor Viliam Kratochvíl, was placed in professional charge of history as a school subject within the educational field of 'People and Society'.
  - 2 Except for the Lucerne Conference organized by the International Society for History Didactics in September 2021, the Graz Conference from 11 November to 14 November 2020 (*Historical Consciousness Historical Thinking, Historical Culture: Core Concepts of History Didactics and Historical Education in Intercultural Perspectives Reflections on Achievements – Challenges for the New Generation*) and the Budapest Conference on 16–17 April 2021 (*Perspectives – International and National Trends in the Theory and the Practice of History Teaching*) were also devoted to this question.
  - 3 From the very rich scholarly output, I refer only to one of my favorite texts, Rogers 1986.
  - 4 Gyertyánfy, A. (2017) Kompetenciák a történelemtanításban – kritikai megközelítésben [Competences in history teaching: a critical approach], *Történelemtanítás Online történelemdidaktika folyóirat* (LII). Új folyam VIII. (1–2); also Körber, A. (2011) 'German history didactics: from historical consciousness to historical competencies – and beyond?', in H. Bierg, C. Lenz and E. Thortensen (eds) *Historicizing the Uses of the Past: Scandinavian Perspectives on History Culture. Historical Consciousness and Didactics of History Related to World War II*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 145–164.

systems of Western and Eastern Europe gradually converged after a long period of political and ideological separation.<sup>5</sup>

The question, 'Why do we teach / learn history at school?' pops up regularly among both pupils and in-service teachers. Teachers from everyday school practice also report similar situations from time to time when they face pupils demanding answers to their provocative question, 'What is the point in learning history?'

To make the problem even more complex, we have to acknowledge that the issue has a wide spectrum of legitimate perspectives, such as pupils' needs and teachers' opinions; the aims of local school communities, including parents; the views of the authorities, including regional and/or state official regulators; the attitudes of scholars, especially professional historians; and perhaps more. Clearly, there are, at least in Slovakia, some pupils and some teachers, and perhaps some parents too, who see no point in learning history. Some even consider history as a school subject useless. Of course, we understand that for young people in general it is 'the present' that matters the most, probably under the influence of the rapid flows of information, news streams, etc. that they receive and send with an immediacy and speed never before seen. Clearly, we are witnessing a clash between 'tradition' and 'modernity', the 'eternal' and the 'temporary', the 'here and now' and 'eternal values', etc. On the other hand, we also find that pupils regard history as an 'interesting' and even 'attractive' subject. Also, we have been witnessing an upsurge and boom in the presence of history, ranging from fully historicized political speeches to the genre of very popular historical reminiscences in fiction (e.g. in Dan Brown's novels), and so forth.<sup>6</sup>

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- 5 F. Dárdai, Á. (2006) *Történelmi megismerés, történelmi gondolkodás [Historical Cognition, Historical Thinking]*, Pécs: ELTE BTK/MTT; Wojdon, J. (2017) *Textbooks as Propaganda. Poland under Communist Rule, 1944–1989*, New York: Routledge; Kratochvíl, V. and Vajda, B. (2015) 'History Didactics in the Slovak Republic', in E. Erdmann and W. Hasberg (eds) *History Teacher Education: Global Interrelations*, Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau Verlag, 63–74.
- 6 Erdmann, E. and Hasberg, W. (eds) (2015) *History teacher education: Global interrelations*, Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau Verlag; also Leeuw-Roord, J. van der (ed) (2004) *History Changes: Facts and figures about history education in Europe since 1989*, The Hague: Publication of Euroclio, the European Standing Conference of History teachers' Associations; also Beneš, Z. (2010) 'Mezi dějinami, dějepiscetvím a pamětí' [Between history, historiography and memory], in J. Šubr (ed) *Historické vědomí jako předmět badatelského zájmu: teorie a výzkum. Historická sociologie – Knižní edice*, Kolín: Nezávislé centrum pro studium politiky, ARC – Vysoká škola politických a společenských věd, 11–20.

We can test this problem by asking other questions. Why do we learn other school subjects, such as mathematics, biology, languages, etc.? Pupils tend to ask personalized questions: What does this subject give to me? How can I benefit from it? How can I benefit from learning mathematics? How can I benefit from learning languages? And parents ask these questions too – at least this commonly happens in Slovakia. Why do we learn biology? We do not necessarily do so to become a doctor, but at least we have some knowledge of, for instance, digestion problems or bleeding fingers. Questions in the form of ‘What is the point in learning English or Information Technology?’ seem the easiest ones to answer, since one can refer to a job market where both English and IT skills (especially in their combination) are almost a guarantee for a successful job application, at least in Slovakia.

Pure utilitarianism, however, is not a good way of thinking, especially where a school subject dealing with human society is concerned. As V. Kratochvíl puts it,

*‘[Then] the subject of historical teaching is not only “historical reality” itself, but also students’ historical consciousness, which turns out to be formative for their thinking.’*<sup>7</sup>

We may make strong professional and philosophical arguments. As a start let us simply ask some practical questions: How would a lack of learning history affect tourism, where millions of tourists worldwide are attracted by visiting historical places, places of cultural heritage? How would it affect attendance at museums, especially where museum pedagogy is involved in the business profile of a certain institution?

As one of the consequences of the uncertainties over answering these legitimate but annoying questions, history teachers from the field, at least in Slovakia, seem to be perplexed or uncertain. Since there are no reliable surveys on the issue (for instance, in the form of formal interviews with teachers), we are left to assume that some teachers are losing confidence in their profession.

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7 In the Slovak original: [Potom] predmetom dejepisnej výučby nie je len samotná historická skutočnosť, ale aj historické vedomie žiakov a žiačok, ktoré sa pre ich myslenie ukazuje ako formotvorné. Kratochvíl, V. (2019) *Metafora stromu ako model didaktiky dejpisu k predpokladom výučby*, Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Raabe, 16.

## 2. The 'Old' Slovak National Curriculum from History

One of the major documents through which we can analyze the core goals of history teaching in Slovakia is the National Curriculum. The 'Old' Slovak National Curriculum for History is the curriculum that has been in use since 2011, which at the time of writing this study is still the compulsory National Curriculum for History.<sup>8</sup>

When we analyze the curriculum itself, its structure, content and goals from the perspective of the main aims of history teaching, what we first discover is that history as a school subject at the lower secondary level has been part of a broader educational field for almost fifteen years now. Since 2008, history as a school subject has belonged to the educational field of 'People and Society' as one of a trio of school subjects, namely history, geography and civic education.<sup>9</sup> This integrated structure is the same for both the lower secondary level (10–15 years old pupils) and upper secondary level (15–19 years old young adult).

Those who have been following processes of history teaching in the European context might not be surprised that 'merging' or 'integrating' history into a broader group of school subjects has already been going on for some decades in Slovakia. We have learned about this ongoing process from scholarly literature and surveys (see e.g. Pingel, 2000 or Leeuw-Roord, 2004), as well as from direct reports from the field. Recently, this issue was raised at the 2021 international conference of the International Society for History Didactics (ISHD) in Lucerne, where we heard some lectures devoted to the threats history teaching has been facing. For instance, this was the main theme of Elisabeth Erdmann's lecture, *History as an independent subject or in a subject network?*; Urte Kocka's lecture, *Historical Consciousness and Change*; and also Andrea Brait's lecture, *Teaching History in Subject Combinations: The Example of Austria*.<sup>10</sup>

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8 The current Slovak National Curriculum from History and other subjects can be accessed here: [https://www.statpedu.sk/sk/svp/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/inovovany-svp-2.stupen-zs/\(10.1.2022\)](https://www.statpedu.sk/sk/svp/inovovany-statny-vzdelavaci-program/inovovany-svp-2.stupen-zs/(10.1.2022)).

9 In Slovak: Vzdelávacia oblasť Človek a spoločnosť, predmety Dejepis, Geografia a Občianska náuka.

10 All three lectures were presented at the Lucerne Conference on 'Why History Education?' that took place from 16 September to 19 September 2021 as an international virtual conference, organized by the International Society for History Didactics, by Prof. Markus Furrer, Prof. Peter Gautschi and Prof. Dr. Nadine Fink, and hosted by the Pädagogische Hochschule Luzern and the Haute École Pédagogique Vaud.



Returning to the specific case of Slovakia, if we look carefully at the content of some other school subjects, such as Slovak literature, geography and civic education, or even arts and music education, they are also rich in historical topics that are usually dealt with in history lessons as well. Beyond this, the reduction of history lessons in schools, or their merger into larger school subject units, is also linked to the appearance of 'rival', and usually brand new school subjects, very often introduced at the cost of history. In Slovakia, these new 'rival subjects' include 'Media Culture', 'Environmental Education', 'Economic Culture', 'Financial Consciousness', 'Cyber Security', 'Traffic Safety Skills', and even 'Stop Corruption' (yes, there really are plans to introduce such a school subject in Slovakia!). At this moment, these new subjects are only plans designated to cope with new environmental, social, economic and intercultural challenges.

All in all, from the information available, a significant decrease in the time-frame devoted to history in curricula, as well as the 'integration' of our subject into a larger group of school subjects, has led to a significant reduction in the number of lessons available for history throughout Europe, including most definitely in Slovakia. Of course, this reduction is only an indirect sign, yet it is undoubtedly an obvious marker for a potential decrease in the importance accorded to our school subject.

After establishing the time frame devoted to history, let us consider the content of history teaching in Slovakia. When we look at the content of the 'old' Slovak National Curriculum and its specific parts on history, 'What is the main goal of teaching history at school?', in the Introduction part of the main document, we find the following explicit statement:

*'The main function of [teaching] history is to cultivate the historical consciousness of the pupil as a holistic personality, and to preserve the continuity of historical remembrance, i.e. handing down / passing on historical experiences from local, regional, Slovakian, European or World perspectives. Part of this handing down is first and foremost a gradual recognition of such historical events, phenomena and processes in [historical] time and [geographical] space, which had fundamentally influenced the development of both the Slovak and World societies, and which [events, phenomena and processes] were reflected in the picture of our present [times].'<sup>11</sup>*

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11 In the Slovak original: Hlavnou funkciou dejepisu je kultivovanie historického vedomia žiakov ako celistvých osobností a uchovávanie kontinuity historickej pamäti v zmysle odovzdávania historických skúseností či už z miestnej, regionálnej, celoslovenskej, európskej alebo svetovej perspektívy. Súčasťou jej odovzdávania je predovšetkým postupné poznávanie takých his-

From these words, it is quite clear what the Slovak national curriculum considers to be the purpose of history teaching. It is basically national remembrance, and some core factual information which the Slovak state, in the form of its legitimate state authorities, consider the spiritual glue for nation cohesion. In other words: history is our story, our unique Slovak story, our history as embedded in its European context. We should learn it to know what we are collectively speaking about when we pronounce certain names, dates, places and events from history, such as *Alea iacta est*; *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*; Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš; the Battle of the Somme; the Declaration of Rights of Humans and Citizens; Marshall Kutuzov, etc. These names, dates, places and events, and of course many others from our collective memory, create ‘cultural cohesion’, at least in the intentions of our state authorities. This approach is based on the notion that historical culture is one of the main means whereby individual pupils are expected to be connected to their nation and the wider European community.

Even though the ‘old’ Slovak school curriculum does not refer explicitly to ‘the nation’, the concept set out in the text above can be easily interpreted as forming a common national bond and can be easily put into real school practice in this ‘national context’ under synonymous terms such as ‘patriotism’, ‘heritage’, ‘identity’, ‘national values’, etc. Let us not be shy in saying that, in many Slovakian schools, history teaching is traditionally linked to nationalism, and is instrumentalized for reinforcing national consciousness. This kind of thinking fits tightly into a traditional pattern that is well known from international scholarly discourse. To the question, ‘What objectives does history teaching pursue when one’s own nation is the subject of discussion?’, raised by the editors of a recent scholarly volume that is based on wide international research and experience, the answer in the Slovak case is exactly what the editors conclude in their summary: ‘The building of social identities is expected to be achieved [...]and] international studies have also pursued this issue more strongly in the last few years.’<sup>12</sup>

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torických udalostí, javov a procesov v čase a priestore, ktoré zásadným spôsobom ovplyvnili vývoj slovenskej i celosvetovej spoločnosti a premietli sa do obrazu našej prítomnosti.

- 12 Fink, N., Furrer, M. and Gautschi, P. (eds) (2020) *The teaching of the history of one’s own country: international experiences in a comparative perspective*, Frankfurt/M.: Wochenschau Verlag, 48–49.

### 3. The 'New' Slovak National Curriculum for History

In mid-January 2022, the Slovak Ministry of Education announced the start of a new round of school reforms that would reach their complete form in 2026. The Ministry of Education has also published some fundamental documents elaborating the comprehensive aims and basic intentions of the reform in order to develop a 'modern state curriculum'. The most fundamental document of the project so far published is entitled 'Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century', which sets out a framework for all educational fields, including 'People and Society', where history belongs.<sup>13</sup> According to the document, in comparison with the 'old' curriculum, the range of school subjects included in People and Society would soon be extended. Beyond the current trio of school subjects, namely history, geography and civic education, in the future the 'People and Society' educational field is expected to include Religious Studies and Ethics as well.

As to the key concept, the document speaks of 'knowledge' as well as 'skills or competences'. This is nothing new, since the 'old' Slovakian curriculum has been advocating for this approach since 2011. What is very new, however, can be found right in the beginning of the chapter on 'People and Society', in the introduction to which we read: 'The basic starting point of the educational field People and Society is to reveal and enhance pupils' experienced relationships with the human world and its social, historical, cultural, natural, moral and religious phenomena.'<sup>14</sup> The document also speaks of a world that pupils are supposed to be able 'to watch, research, orientate themselves in, evaluate and act on' as a consequence of the education process.<sup>15</sup> Our good feeling is further reinforced when we look carefully at the terminological glossary (in Slovak *Terminologický slovník*), a supplementary document attached to the main documents describing the reform. Here, among others, we can discover brand new phrases such as facilitator, multimodal text/source, etc.

Since the documents published so far do not include the details of any particular school subjects as yet (it deals consistently with educational fields and not with specific school subjects), it is not possible to analyze its intentions regarding

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**13** Plans and documents for public discourse are accessible in the Slovak language at [https://vzdelavanie21.sk/\(24.1.2022\)](https://vzdelavanie21.sk/(24.1.2022)).

**14** In the Slovak original: Základným východiskom vzdelávacej oblasti Človek a spoločnosť je odkryvanie a rozvíjanie žitého prítomného vzťahu žiakov k ľudskému svetu, k sociálnym, historickým, kultúrnym, prírodným, morálnym a náboženským fenoménom, 68.

**15** In the Slovak original: Tento svet sa žiaci postupne učia pozorovať, skúmať, orientovať sa v ňom, hodnotiť ho a konať, 68.

history specifically. Nevertheless, the document speaks so clearly and eloquently on the general aims, including those of People and Society, that it indeed gives us an insight into the main directions of the reform. In its most specific part, where history teaching is dealt with in the most detail, the document speaks of a ‘democratic state and democratic citizenship’ acknowledging the dignity and equality of all people, the rule of law, and basic human rights and liberties as far as the main aims of education in general and teaching history in particular are concerned.<sup>16</sup> This is also the only point (in fact, in the last paragraph) where the document refers to the ‘nation’: ‘The expression of the aforementioned categories is the pupils’ ability to express themselves in a civilized way from the perspective of “we” and “the others”. This allows them to dive into the problem of knowing their own nation and other nations in their cultural diversity.’<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to observe the lack of any mention of the ‘nation’ in this document. In comparison with the ‘old’ Slovakian curriculum, in which the word ‘nation’ (Slovak *národ*) appears at least 27 times, in the history part (such as nations, modern nations, Slovak nation, national movements, etc.) of the ‘new’ document<sup>18</sup> the word ‘nation’ appears in the People and Society chapter only once (‘understanding our own nation’), and even in the whole 112–page document only a dozen times, mainly in the chapters on Language and Communication, and Arts and Culture. Nevertheless, if we look up the concept of ‘society’ in the Glossary, we find a definition which pretty much resembles (equals?) the definition of the ‘nation’ (at least to me).<sup>19</sup> Would this expression fit the definition of the nation with exactly the same wording if we swapped the words society and nation? Is ‘society’ not the old concept of the nation with a different title?

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16 In the Slovak original: Predpokladom na to je pochopenie potreby mechanizmu delby moci s jej jednotlivými súčasťami, dôstojnosti človeka a rovnosti medzi ľuďmi, existencie práva a koncepcie uplatňovania základných ľudských práv a slobôd, a to aj v kontexte ich historického vývoja, 75.

17 In the Slovak original: Výrazom uvedených kategórií je schopnosť žiakov a žiačok sa kultívovane vyjadrovať z perspektívy “my” o tých druhých. Takto prenikajú do problematiky poznávania vlastného národa a iných národov v ich kultúrnej rozmanitosti, 75.

18 In the Slovak original: Východiská zmien vo vzdelávacích oblastiach. Charakteristika a ciele vzdelávacích oblastí, pre základné vzdelávanie. Verzia na verejnú konzultáciu. ŠPÚ: [https://www.statpedu.sk/sk/\(24.1.2022\)](https://www.statpedu.sk/sk/(24.1.2022)).

19 In the Slovak original: Spoločnosť (ČaS) – trvalo vzájomne prepojená skupina ľudí, ktorú zvyčajne spája jazyk ako najdôležitejší prostriedok komunikácie, istá predstava správania a mravov, spoločná minulosť a tradície, fyzická blízkosť a množstvo skutočných stretávaní, často zdieľané ciele a hodnoty.

It seems that in the ‘new’ Slovak curriculum the Slovak state’s legislation is trying to take a step toward a less nation-oriented approach in history teaching. As the international scholarly literature shows, ‘these days, more than ever, the question arises as to how history teaching can contribute to critically conveying and reflecting on history in general and the history of one’s own country in particular’.<sup>20</sup> Judging from the text of the ‘new’ Slovak curriculum, this has been set as a new goal for the next round of Slovakian school reforms. Indeed, the ‘new’ curriculum shows signs of shifting away from a nation-oriented approach and moving toward a form of history teaching that is expected to promote a different type of social cohesion, basically within the limits of ‘promoting social cohesion’.<sup>21</sup>

We may regard this as a new approach to history education, and we might be delighted to see a much more generous and much more humanistic approach than has been expressed ever before in Slovakia. The fundamental documents published recently by the Slovak Ministry of Education which we have just analyzed contain very up-to-date and very comprehensive aims, as well as highly civilized intentions, in order to enhance a ‘modern state curriculum’ for Slovakia. As this new round of school reform is being initiated and launched by the Slovak Ministry of Education, any long-lasting process can only be successful if and when our communities, scholars and practical teachers work together. On the one hand, Slovakia is a country which has been running a rather centralized school system, including a rather closed schoolbook system, with just a single state-approved school textbook for each grade.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, no strict control is exerted over educational content, and even less on the methodology of history teaching. Therefore, how exactly the goals and intentions most recently laid down by the state authorities are going to be carried out and implemented in actual everyday school practice will rely to a large extent on the schoolbooks

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20 Fink, N., Furrer, M. and Gautschi, P. (eds) (2020) *The Teaching of the History of One’s Own Country. International Experiences in a Comparative Perspective*, Frankfurt/M.: Wochenschau Verlag, 11.

21 Fink, N., Furrer, M. and Gautschi, P. (eds) (2020) *The Teaching of the History of One’s Own Country. International Experiences in a Comparative Perspective*, Frankfurt/M.: Wochenschau Verlag, 55.

22 About the limits of school textbooks, see e.g. Kratochvíl, V. (2019) *Metafora stromu ako model didaktiky dejpisu k predpokladom výučby*, Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Raabe; or Gautschi, P. (2021) *School History Textbooks in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*: [https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/9-2021-2/history-textbooks-21st-century/\(24.1.2022\)](https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/9-2021-2/history-textbooks-21st-century/(24.1.2022)).

themselves.<sup>23</sup> If the words in these essential documents are not going to be implemented by teachers and educators into practice, then the whole project may prove to be a case of ‘much ado about nothing’.

#### 4. Do we speak the same professional language?

For history didacticians, the question ‘Why do we teach / learn history at school?’ has a special significance, and it is perhaps the most vital question to which we are obliged to have proper answers. My fellow history didactician, Viliam Kratochvíl, who is one of the authors of the Slovak National Curriculum for History, even admits that setting new and progressive goals for history teaching is easier than achieving them. A certain group of history teachers and history didacticians, under the influence of their Western scholarly contacts,<sup>24</sup> are convinced that the ultimate goal of history teaching is to cultivate historical culture, historical thinking and historical consciousness in pupils and young adults.<sup>25</sup> Based on our mutual experiences, we can rightly state that, both theoretically and conceptually, schools in East Central Europe could be ready for fundamental changes if need be, if and when scholars are able to cooperate with school communities and history teachers.

As a related matter, we should certainly put more stress on future potential history teachers, such as history undergraduates, in order to be better prepared for the new challenges. We have to keep asking undergraduates annoying questions, such as: ‘For what purposes do you think we teach history?’ To what extent do you identify yourself with statements like: ‘We teach/learn history in order to be better citizens?’ or ‘We teach/learn history in order to preserve our national

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23 Fekete, Á. (2021) ‘Digitális szövegértési képességek mérése a történelem tantárgy keretén belül az általános iskola 8. évfolyamában’ [Measuring digital text-understanding in History ...], *Történelemtanítás Online történelemdidaktika folyóirat* (LVI.) Új folyam XII (3); also Gyertyánfy, A. (2017) Kompetenciák a történelemtanításban – kritikai megközelítésben [Competencies in history teaching – in critical approach], *Történelemtanítás Online történelemdidaktika folyóirat* (LII.) Új folyam VIII., 1–2.

24 We could name a long list of scholars as our esteemed colleagues in Western Europe whose ideas and approaches regarding history teaching have been implemented in the history teaching of East Central Europe in the last decades, such as J. Rüsen, P. Seixas, P. Gautschi, P. Lee, A. Körber, S. Lévesque, and many others.

25 Rüsen, J. (2006) ‘Historical Consciousness: Narrative, Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development’, in P. Seixas (ed) *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press; also Kojanitz, L. (2021) *A történelmi gondolkodás fejlesztése. Válogatott tanulmányok* [Enhancing historical thinking], Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale.

identity?’<sup>26</sup>. One possible way of implementing didactical thinking into practice is by asking questions continuously and openly at teacher training programs regarding the ultimate goal of history teaching. Do we learn history ‘not to forget’? Do we learn explicitly and deliberately ‘to remember’ specific events? Do we want to ‘learn from history’? Are there or should there be topics that should be neglected in order to forget them?

Of course, the answers are not at all easy, and sometimes final answers are not even possible. By consistently asking proper questions during in-service teacher training undergraduate programmes, more focus should be put on developing historical thinking. Undergraduates should be provided with help in understanding how historical thinking can be properly developed in the school environment, with the hope that they become more confident in their profession. And if they become more confident, there will be less and less doubt about the significance or goal of teaching or learning history.

History as a school subject is fundamentally part of history as an academic science.<sup>26</sup> This subject should be taught and learnt in history in order to gain important skills used by historians, such as using historical sources when dealing with the past; deep reading or interpretation of sources, be it written, iconic or physical sources; learning the multi-perspective and argumentative character of all historical events; and being able to engage in civilized argumentation, even when our positions differ from each other. Despite annoying doubts that occur around the sense of history teaching, we still have very strong counter-questions to our original questions: Which other school subject teaches us to weigh reliability, if not history? Which school subject other than history trains us to discover one-sidedness or bias? Which other school subject teaches us to tolerate different viewpoints, if not history?<sup>27</sup>

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26 Beneš, Z. (2010) ‘Mezi dějinami, dějepisectvím a pamětí’ [Between history, historiography and memory], in J. Šubr (ed) *Historické vědomí jako předmět badatelského zájmu: teorie a výzkum. Historická sociologie – Knižní edice*, Kolín: Nezávislé centrum pro studium politiky, ARC – Vysoká škola politických a společenských věd, 11–20; also F. Dárdai, Á. (2006) *Történelmi megismerés, történelmi gondolkodás* [Historical Cognition, Historical Thinking], Pécs: ELTE BTK/MTT.

27 Lee, P.J. (2005) ‘Putting principles into practice: understanding history’, in: M. S. Donovan and J. D. Bransford (eds) *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, Washington: National Academies Press, 85–86.

The Slovakian members of the International Society for History Didactics have long been advocating this kind of professional stance,<sup>28</sup> which was firmly expressed in a Communiqué of the International Society for History Didactics, adopted in Tutzing in September 2003, when numerous professionals in history didactics from different countries on four continents made the following statement:

*[...] history education should have as its goal the formation of a free individual, capable of independent democratic and socially responsible judgement, rather than purposes of overt and covert indoctrination [...] A new historical awareness is needed today to understand how the world came to the present state, to bridge the past and present cleavages, to articulate understanding and comprehension for cultural differences, and to make the world a safer and better place to live in.*<sup>29</sup>

Since in Slovakia there is a plural pedagogical system, especially regarding the teaching methods that are used in classroom, the system has many positive elements. We can regard it as a positive sign that in Slovakia in the last twenty years we have been witnessing a significant shift toward a more balanced history teaching which concentrates on something other than the ‘nation’. It is also good news that this idea is included in the Slovakian National Curriculum, both in the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ ones alike: ‘The main function of history is to cultivate the historical consciousness of the pupil as a *holistic personality*.’

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**28** Kratochvíl, V. and Vajda, B. (2015) ‘History Didactics in the Slovak Republic’, in E. Erdmann and W. Hasberg (eds) *History Teacher Education: Global Interrelations*, Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau Verlag, 63–74.

**29** The Communiqué of the ISHD was later published in E. Erdmann, R. Maier and S. Popp (eds) (2006) *Worldwide Teaching of History: Present and Future*, Hanover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 379. As a reaction to the current Slovakian school reform, in March 2023, the Slovak Historical Society [SHS] published a ‘Statement on the current school reform’ in which the SHS had basically denounced the basic intentions of the reform specifically on the field of history.



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JAN LÖFSTRÖM

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## What Students See as Generally Important and Personally Interesting in the History Classroom, and How It Matches the History Curriculum

Notes From a Finnish Pilot Study



Jan Löfström

### Abstract

In this paper I report the results of a pilot study in which Finnish Grade 8 students answered a survey and, using a Likert scale, said how much they considered specific activities in the history classroom to be generally important or personally interesting. The activities included, for example, discussing the morality of specific past events, discussing topics that are important in the history of the student's own family, and reflecting on the basis of history what may happen in the future. An exploratory analysis was carried out with the focus on the numerical mean value of the students' answers and the correlation between the students' views on the importance and interest of the specific activity. Attention was paid only to the extreme values, given the methodological limitations of the study. The aim of the study was to determine whether distinguishing between the students' judgments of the general importance and/or personal interest of the selected history classroom activities yields relevant information about how their interests meet the formal history curriculum.

## 1. Why history? Setting the research questions<sup>1</sup>

One way of approaching the question, ‘Why learn history in school?’, is to ask what kinds of themes should be addressed and what kinds of activities should take place in the history classroom. This has been asked in a number of studies of what students and teachers think of history as both a school subject and a field of knowledge. The framing of the issue of history in these studies varies, as is shown in the diversity of the keywords: the question of the place of history as a school subject has been posed in terms of history’s ‘purpose’ (Nuttall, 2021), ‘importance’ (Tallavaara and Rautiainen, 2020), ‘interest’, ‘usefulness’ (Ouakrim-Soivio and Kuusela, 2012; Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2020), ‘objectives’ (Rautiainen et al., 2019), ‘significance’ (Bergman, 2020), ‘relevance’ (Berg, 2019), ‘like’, ‘dislike’, ‘enjoyment’, ‘engagement’ (Harris and Haydn, 2006), ‘enjoyment’ and ‘purpose’ (Harris and Reynolds, 2014). In the European Youth and History survey of 1995, the question posed was what ‘history’ meant to the fifteen-year-old respondents, the alternatives including that history is a collection of exciting and colourful stories, explanations for why the world is now what it is, a source of moral guidance, and a form of knowledge for its own sake (Angvik and Borries, 1997).

What may have remained less clear in these studies is whether the students have commented on the value of learning history from the perspective of what they thought is generally important to society or that they themselves find personally interesting and appealing. This distinction has some relevance. What we think history as a school subject or a field of knowledge can offer to society is not necessarily what we find personally and subjectively rewarding in history. We can grasp self-reflectively the difference between the two and acknowledge that there is some ‘greater purpose’ in learning history, even though it may not appeal to us personally. However, the appeal can be important as a motivational factor and thus needs to be considered (see Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2020).

Moisan et al. (2020) and Penney Clark and Roland Case (2008) have drawn up a conceptual model that presents a refined picture of what was referred to above as a distinction between general importance and personal interest. In their model, two axes form the major dimensions in the aims of history and social studies teaching. One of them goes from socialization to social transformation,

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the other from intellectual to personal development (Moisan et al., 2020: *développement personnel*). Whereas the content of the first dimension is familiar from the philosophy and sociology of education, the latter needs some clarification. Intellectual development concerns the student's ability to understand the complexity of the world and to recognize the intellectual tools that are used for that purpose, such as historical knowledge. Personal development is a matter of the student developing his or her potential and personality, or even, one might say, his or her character. In this model, intellectual development can be supportive of both socialization and social transformation, but in any case it appears it is closely related to how history teaching and learning serve the aim of educating the student as a citizen. In the case of personal development, the focus seems to be more on the subjective meaning history has for the student. The key phrase is 'education of the student as a person', which is entirely compatible with educating him or her as a citizen, but there is a distinction in emphasis. The phrase 'general importance', as used above, can be seen as equivalent to intellectual development as defined by Moisan et al. (2020).

To find out how students judge history as a school subject in terms of its general importance and personal interest, in 2021 a pilot study was carried out among Finnish Grade 8 students in a school. The research questions were the following:

- What do the students think is generally important in studying history?
- What do the students think is personally interesting to them in studying history?
- What similarities or differences are found in the students' answers to these two questions?

The relationship between the general importance or social relevance of studying history and the students' personal interest or personal meaning in studying history is relevant to consider when developing a history curriculum. Here the results of the pilot study are set against the relief of how the general aims, the learning objectives and the content of history teaching and learning are described in Finland's national history curriculum. Although the formal curriculum is an authoritative statement on what is central to history teaching and learning, what congruence is there between what the formal curriculum says and what the students see as generally important and subjectively interesting? This question is also addressed in this paper:

- How do the students' survey responses meet the current history curriculum in basic education in Finland?

The focus is deliberately placed on the formal, written curriculum and not on 'the implemented' or 'the experienced' curriculum that says what takes place in the classroom and how students interpret it (on this terminology, see Goodlad, 1979). Including the implemented and experienced curriculum in the analysis would require a more extensive study.

In the next sections of the paper I describe how the research questions have been approached, what data have been collected and how they have been analysed. The findings are presented by answering the three 'what?' questions listed above, and the findings are discussed from the point of view of what degree of fit there is between the students' answers and the descriptions of the general aims, learning objectives and content of history teaching and learning in the core curriculum for history. The implications of these results are briefly discussed at the end.

## 2. Methods and materials

To collect materials for answering the research questions, a survey questionnaire was designed. The first version was kindly commented on by Dr Lauri Kempainen (University of Turku) and Dr Juha Vanttinen (Turku University Teacher Training School). The questionnaire was designed using the Webropol survey tool.

In the questionnaire students were asked to answer two sets of questions after following the guidelines (in Finnish), using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (option 0 was also available):

*'In history lessons the following activities can be done. Tick a box on every line according to how important to everybody you think it would be to include the activity mentioned on that line in the history lessons. 1= not important at all, 5= very important.' The option '0= I don't know' was also available.*

*'Tick a box on every line according to how interesting to you yourself it would be to engage in history lessons in the activity mentioned in that line. 1= not interesting at all, 5= very interesting.' Option '0= I don't know' was also available.*

Thirteen history classroom activities were listed, and the students used the Likert scale from 1 to 5 to indicate generally how important and how personally interesting to themselves they consider each activity to be as part of the history lessons. The activities are the following:

- to discuss historical topics that are important in the history of my family
- to discuss historical topics that are important in the history my country
- to reflect what deeds have been good and evil in history
- to consider whether a good knowledge of history can help prevent wrongdoing in the world
- to discuss how history is present in games and films
- to discuss how politicians use history as justification in their talk
- to learn about the history of ordinary people and everyday life
- to learn to know different cultures and understand their traditions
- to learn about important events and people in history
- to discuss the historical background and causes relating to the present-day world
- to consider on the basis of history what may happen in the future
- to discuss questions about historical events by analysing sources
- to discuss in what different ways knowledge about the past can be acquired.

The survey was administered to Grade 8 students in basic education. The school selected for the pilot is not representative of Finnish schools in terms of its student core, but it was considered useful to test the questionnaire in a basic education context and in this school. In the future wider study it will be interesting to focus on students in basic education in which the whole age cohort participates. In basic education in Finland, history is taught in Grades 5–8. As it is unusual for history to be taught in Grade 9, the final year of basic education, it is usually Grade 8 students who are the most advanced in history in their basic education. The school in this pilot is located in urban surroundings in southern Finland and has a multi-ethnic student core: over 70% of the students speak some other language than Finnish or Swedish as their first language. Considering this diversity, it was seen as interesting in its own right to see the results of the pilot and later on to compare them with data from other schools. Most of the students in this school come from an area that is socio-economically less advantaged.

In the study, research ethics were followed as stipulated in the guidelines of the University of Turku. The students answered the electronic questionnaire anonymously and were not asked to give any personal information. The survey was carried out during the history lesson, and participation was voluntary. The number of students who participated was seventy-seven, or ca. 70% of the total number of students in Grade 8 in the school.

The students' answers were analysed by giving the answers a numerical value and comparing the aggregated mean in each classroom activity. Here the Likert

scale was treated as an interval scale (see Tähtinen et al., 2020: 32–33). Correlation between the students' views of the general importance and personal interest regarding each activity was calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Also a single-tailed paired t-test was conducted on the difference of the means.

It must be emphasised these statistical operations served an exploratory function rather than constituting a robust analysis that requires a more sophisticated method and a real sample. Hence, in the results of the analyses, it is not the absolute figures but the highest and lowest means and correlations and the result of the t-test that are interesting. The findings can serve as a basis for hypotheses for a future, more extensive study. The analysis in this paper is exploratory and should be taken as an example of what information this approach can produce.

The results of the survey are commented on from the perspective of how they meet the descriptions in the section on history in the *Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014*, the current national curriculum for basic education in Finland. The students who participated in the pilot study had studied history according to this core curriculum.

### 3. The students' answers

The results of the survey are presented in Table 1. For each item the mean of the students' score in the two questions in the Likert scale from 1 to 5 and the standard deviation (SD) of the scores are given. To the right is the correlation between the students' respective scores on the importance and personal interest of the item. The correlation was calculated using a Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ). The answers in the category '0= I don't know' were removed before the analysis. To the right can be found the p-value of the single-tailed paired t-test on the statistical significance of the difference of the means. These calculations were assisted by Arto Anttila.



	In the his- tory lessons it would be generally im- portant ...	SD	In the his- tory lessons it would be personally interesting to me ...	SD	r	p- value in the t-test
to discuss historical topics that are important in the history of my family	3.4	1.2	3.7	1.2	0.61	0.01
to discuss historical topics that are important in the history my country	4.1	0.9	4.1	1.0	0.62	0.28
to reflect what deeds have been good and evil in history	4.3	0.9	4.2	1.0	0.58	0.14
to consider if a good knowledge of history can help prevent wrongdoing in the world	3.8	1.1	3.7	0.9	0.49	0.25
to discuss how history is present in games and films	3.4	1.1	3.6	1.2	0.62	0.09
to discuss how politicians use history as justification in their talk	3.4	1.0	3.1	1,2	0.66	0.04
to learn about the history of ordinary people and everyday-life	3.8	1.0	3.8	1.1	0.54	0.41
to learn to know different cultures and understand their traditions	4.3	1.0	4.3	1.0	0.62	0.50
to learn about important events and people in history	4.2	0,9	4.0	1.0	0.67	0.09
to discuss the historical back-ground and causes of today's world	4.0	0.8	3.9	1.0	0.41	0.22
to reflect on the basis of history what may happen in the future	3.8	1.0	3.9	1.1	0.68	0.44
to discuss questions about historical events through analysing sources	3.7	1.0	3.5	1.2	0.52	0.08
to discuss the different ways in which knowledge about the past can be acquired	3.8	1.0	3.8	1.0	0.63	0.45

**Table 1: The mean of the numerical values of the students' answers in the Likert scale (1–5); the standard deviation (SD) of the scores; the correlation (r) of the scores on general importance and personal interest of the classroom activity; and the p-value in the t-test on the difference of the means. (N= 76–77)**

In studying Table 1, one must bear in mind the small number of students in the pilot: small numerical differences are not relevant to consider. Attention is given here to the highest and the lowest means and the result of the t-test. Also the lowest correlations are commented on.

Looking at the students' answers on the general importance of the activities, it can be seen that the lowest score (3,4) is for the activities: to discuss historical topics that are important in the history of my family; to discuss how history is present in games and films; and to discuss how politicians use history as justification in their talk. The highest score (4,3) appears for two activities: to reflect what deeds have been good and evil in history; and to learn to know different cultures and understand their traditions. Among the highest is also the score for the activity: to learn about important events and people in history (4,2).

In the answers regarding the student's personal interest in the activities, the lowest score is for the activity: to discuss how politicians use history as justification in their talk (3,1). The next lowest scores are for the activities: to discuss questions about historical events through analysing sources (3,5); and to discuss how history is present in games and films (3,6). The highest scores are for the activities: to reflect what deeds have been good and evil in history (4,2); to learn to know different cultures and understand their traditions (4,3); and to discuss historical topics that are important in the history of my country (4,1).

The correlation between the students' scores on the general importance and personal interest of the individual activities is, apart from two activities, between 0,52–0,68, and the effect size can be judged as high (see, Tähtinen et al., 2020, p. 49). The lowest correlation is found for the activity: to discuss the historical background and causes of today's world (0,41), where the effect size can be judged to stand between average and high. The single-tailed paired t-test gives the lowest p-values for the activities: to discuss historical topics that are important in the history of my family (0,01); and to discuss how politicians use history as justification in their talk (0,04). It is worth noting that among the lowest p-values ( $< 0,1$ ) are also those for the following activities: to learn about important events and people in history (0,09); to discuss how history is present in games and films (0,09); and to discuss questions about historical events by analysing sources (0,08).

#### **4. Reflections and tentative explanations of the results**

The aim of the survey was to shed light on how the students thought that the activities given in the questionnaire would be generally important and personally

interesting to themselves as part of their history lessons. It was also relevant to look at the degree of correlation between how the students evaluated an individual activity from the perspective of its general importance and personal interest respectively. As noted earlier, as the analysis is exploratory, strong conclusions will not be made, though some tentative explanations are suggested.

For all the classroom activities in the questionnaire there is a positive correlation, so that the more a specific activity was considered generally important by the student, the more it was also considered personally interesting. The correlations in the data can be regarded as strong in effect size. That the student's views of the general importance and personal interest of a specific activity converge rather than diverge is perhaps not surprising, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that the students found that the social relevance and personal appeal of these activities go hand in hand. A situation can be imagined in which the students find some history classroom activity personally less interesting the more they think it has general importance, and vice versa. This would present a challenge to the teacher and the curriculum developer, but the activities in this questionnaire did not contradict the students in that way.

The clearly weakest correlation in Table 1 is for the activity, 'to discuss the historical background and causes of today's world' (0,41). Although, the p-value in the t-test indicates that the difference between the students' view of the general importance and their personal interest of this activity is not statistically significant. A situation in which the students find this activity generally important but personally not very interesting is perfectly conceivable. In earlier research it has been found that Finnish Grade 8 students readily say that history can explain the current state of the world but that they have difficulties in giving concrete examples of what this means. This suggests that the students may subscribe superficially to the notion that history is good to know as providing the background to the present-day, but that the implications of this on the personal level are less relevant to the students and hence not extensively processed (Löfström and Hakkari, 2003).

Historical content that connects one with one's family history and analyses of the historical elements in games and films and in politicians' talk were not seen as particularly important generally. The result regarding family history matches an earlier study where Finnish Grade 8 students did not easily see the history of private lives as 'proper history' (Hakkari, 2005; Löfström and Hakkari, 2003). Various earlier studies have also found that the students' view of what history is all about is rather conventional, focusing on the factual knowledge of past events (Hakkari, 2005; Angvik and Borries, 1997). Also in this pilot, the

students saw learning about important events and people in the past as one of the generally most important activities in the history lessons (mean value 4,2 in the Likert scale).

Politicians' talk has been found to have relatively little credibility as an account of the past among Finnish Grade 8 students (Hakkari, 2005; Angvik and Borries, 1997), thus it is not surprising that here too the analysis of politicians' use of history in their talk was seen as generally less important than other listed activities in the questionnaire. Also this was judged as the personally least interesting activity of them all. It is possible that this reflects a more general lack of interest in politics among young people in Finland (on this topic see, Mehtäläinen, 2017).

It is more surprising perhaps that the activity 'to discuss how history is present in games and films' is among the least important and least interesting activities in the students' answers. Possibly this can be understood against the finding in earlier studies that students do not consider films to be very reliable sources of historical knowledge (Hakkari, 2005), hence they may be seen as less important to discuss in the history classroom. The mean value in the personal interest of the activity is higher than the mean value in its general importance, and since the p-value is only 0,09, the difference in the mean values may be statistically significant. Discussing films and games in history lessons may indeed appeal to the students for personal rather than general educational reasons, as might also be anticipated.

It is noteworthy that the mean value in the personal interest in discussing questions about historical events by analysing sources is low, in fact the second lowest in the survey. The mean value in the general importance of this specific activity is a little higher, and as the p-value for the difference between the two mean values is only 0.08, the difference may be statistically significant. The reason why the only meagre personal interest in this activity is noteworthy is that working with sources has had a prominent place in the pedagogical literature on history teaching and learning, including in Finland (Rantala et al., 2020). History educators have seen the use of sources as an important part of learning how historical knowledge is constructed and assessed. The students in the survey invested this activity with rather modest general importance but did not find the activity personally appealing. The material does not tell if the students' answers are a reflection of, for example, experiences of uninspiring exercises in working with historical sources, but clearly the analysis of historical sources does not reflect well the students' subjective interests.

Learning about different cultures and understanding their traditions in history lessons is among the most important and the most interesting activities in the students' answers. This may be related to the ethnic diversity in the school where the survey was carried out. Most of the students have an ethnic background that is not Finnish, and it can be assumed that for them it is particularly relevant that the topics in the history lessons range more widely than Finnish or European history alone (see Virta, 2006). Discussing topics that are 'important in the history of my country' is also among the activities that were seen as the most interesting by the students. In earlier studies native Finnish students have given the history of Finland a high priority as a topic in their history lessons (Hakkari, 2005). However, what the history of 'my country' means to the people culturally and psychologically and what is 'my country' in the first place can differ between indigenous students and students with other ethnic backgrounds (Virta, 2006). The students' motives for giving this specific activity a high score in the survey may have been diverse in accordance with their own cultural backgrounds and identities.

Discussing the morality of what people have done in the past is regarded by the students as one of the generally most important and most personally interesting activities in their history lessons. In earlier studies too, Finnish students have seen history very much as a source of educational stories of good and evil (Hakkari, 2005; Angvik and Borries, 1997). In a recent study two-thirds of Finnish Grade 8 students answered positively the question whether moral questions should be discussed in history lessons, and three-quarters supported the view that one can make moral judgments of the past on the basis of one's knowledge of history (Löfström et al., 2020; Ammert et al., 2022). In a study of Finnish upper secondary school students, the moral relevance of history was readily acknowledged by the students, who enjoyed the opportunity to discuss questions of historical moral responsibility and stated that this was a topic that had not been addressed in the history classroom (Löfström, 2014). The appeal of discussions of morality in history lessons has also been noted in research elsewhere (e.g. Ammert, 2015). The moral dimension of history appears central to the students in this survey both in terms of its social and personal relevance. In the light of earlier research, this is not a surprising result.

The result of the t-test shows that discussions of historical topics that are important to the history of one's own family is the activity where the difference in the mean values between the students' view of the activity's general importance and their own personal interest is statistically the most significant ( $p=0,01$ ). Not quite unexpectedly, the personal interest in this activity was considered greater

than its general importance, and the p-value strongly suggests there is a real difference in how the students judged between the two aspects. The next lowest p-values in Table 1 are 0,04 (discussing how politicians use history in their talk), 0.08 (discussing questions about historical events through analysing sources), and 0,09 (learning about important events and people in history, and discussing history in films and games). In most of these activities, the mean value for the activity's general importance is higher than the mean value for its personal interest. As this is an exploratory and not a confirmatory analysis, the p-values below 0,1 can be interpreted so that the difference in the mean values between the students' view of the general importance and the personal interest of the activity is statistically significant; in other words the difference is not merely an artefact.

Keeping the aforementioned methodological reservations in mind, it appears that the main result of this pilot study is that the general importance and personal interest of the selected classroom activities converge quite clearly in the students' answers. In some activities the difference in the mean value of the students' view of its general importance and its personal interest may be statistically significant, and in one activity (discussing historical topics that are important in the history of my family) the difference is unequivocally statistically significant.

## 5. What match is there between the students' answers and the formal history curriculum?

How do the views expressed in the students' answers match the content in the history section in the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014* and in the *Criteria of Final Assessment in Basic Education 2020* that are now in force? The parts of the curriculum documents that are relevant here are the general aims, learning objectives, content and criteria of assessment in teaching and learning history in Grades 7–9 in basic education (*NCC 2014=National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014*, 415–418; *Criteria of final assessment*, 245–252).

In these documents, history is referred to as supporting the student's personal interests and values, including their identity work and relationship with history. In the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014* the aim of history teaching and learning is described as follows: 'The aim is to support the pupils in building their identity and to promote their growth to become active members of the society who understand diversity' (*NCC 2014*, 415). It is also stated: 'In the key content areas, attention is paid to the history of the pupil's family, region and local area when appropriate' (*NCC 2014*, 416). Discussing historical topics that are 'important in the history of my family' was scored low

for its general importance by the students in the pilot study but a little higher for its personal interest, while discussing historical topics that are ‘important in the history of my country’ and learning ‘to know different cultures and understand their traditions’ were scored high in terms of general importance as well as personal interest. Thus the students’ responses seem to converge with the content in the formal curriculum in some respects (understand diversity – know different cultures and traditions; attention to local area/region – discuss history important to my country) but less in others (attention to the history of the pupil’s family – discuss history important to my family).

In the criteria for final assessment, no reference is made to history supporting the student’s identity work, except when stating that the student is ‘guided to reflect on his/her experiences [of history as identity work] as part of self-assessment’ (*Criteria of Final Assessment*, 245–252), which effectively may relegate the topic to rather a marginal place in history teaching and learning. In the contents of the history courses, no reference is made to the development of students’ identity. If students, like those in this pilot study, are not quite convinced of the general importance of discussing topics important to their family’s history in the history lessons, they will not find reasons in the assessment criteria or the description of the course content leading them to reconsider their view, even though their personal interest in such an activity in the history classroom would be modestly higher and worth more encouragement in the curriculum texts as well.

One of the most highly valued activities in the students’ answers in the pilot study in terms of both its general importance and its personal interest is discussing the morality of what has taken place in the past. In the curriculum texts ethical reflections on history are not visible except indirectly where the general aim of teaching is described: ‘History teaching helps students identify society’s values, value tensions, and changes within these in different time periods’ (*NCC 2014*, 415). Thus here is a distance between what is found in the curriculum texts and what the students in the pilot study think would be pertinent and also personally appealing to do in the history classroom. Note also that, in a recent study of Finnish Grade 8 students, no less than two-thirds of the students answered positively the question whether moral questions should be discussed in the history classroom (Löfström et al., 2020; Ammert et al., 2022).

The formal, enacted and implemented curricula are different levels of reality (Goodlad, 1979). Finnish history teachers too may well discuss themes and topics in the classroom that are not explicitly raised in the limited space of the written formal curriculum. But one can assume that the description of

the learning objectives, the content and the criteria of assessment in history in the national core curriculum very much influence the enacted curriculum. This is largely because the formal curriculum serves as the road-map for textbook authors, whose textbooks are widely used in history teaching, at least in basic education (Ouakrim-Soivio and Kuusela, 2012). In fact, moral questions are posed in some new history textbooks as a topic for classroom discussion, but such cases are rare and sporadic. The relevance of addressing moral questions in the history classroom has been stated in the history education literature (Seixas and Morton, 2013; Barton and Levstik, 2009; Ammert et al., 2022). Also the students in the pilot study would clearly seem to welcome such questions being included in history teaching. This gives reason to suggest that the moral and ethical dimensions of history should be explicitly and centrally included in the national core curriculum for history in Finland as they have been in Australia, for example (*National Curriculum Board*, 2009: 6, 13).

In Finland, as in many other countries, teaching and learning the skills of historical reasoning have been given a lot of attention in the formal history curriculum. The skills of analysing historical sources critically and constructing well-grounded multi-perspectival interpretations of the past on the basis of working with sources are mentioned in the objectives, content and assessment criteria of history teaching and learning. However, it seems that the tradition of teachers focusing on accounts of factual history in the history classroom remains strong (Rantala et al., 2020; Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020). But it is also noteworthy that in the pilot study the activity ‘to discuss questions about historical events by analysing sources’ is one of the least interesting to the students personally, although they also accorded it a modest general importance. It is possible that the question was not properly understood, but the result also raises the question of whether the activity in itself or some uninspiring experiences of this activity in school explain the low score the students gave it. As pointed out by David Rosenlund (2015), source criticism as a content of history teaching may often be an empiricist technical exercise rather than a socially relevant exploration in analysing different and competing narratives in a “post-structuralist” spirit. If the empiricist, epistemology-focused approach in working with sources is adopted in the classroom, the students may find the activity rather dull. The challenge, as Rosenlund realizes, is how to make this activity more interesting to the students.

The point is not that the aims and content of history teaching should be adjusted straightforwardly to students’ priorities and preferences. The point is rather that those priorities and preferences are crucial to take into consideration



when making sense of what takes place in the history classroom and why some aims of history learning are reached more easily than others. Fundamentally it is a question of what the student finds relevant in the teaching and learning of history. The disciplinary approach, where the focus is on developing the student's skills in historical reasoning, is important, but there is a risk that Kenneth Nordgren (2017: 669) has identified in his discussion of what is powerful knowledge in history education: the disciplinary approach may reduce history teaching and learning to exercises that the student does not connect with "something living and meaningful". In the formal history curriculum, the focus was traditionally on what the student must know of history, and later the focus moved more into what the students should be able to execute in the field of historical reasoning. What remains in the margins in the current national curriculum for history, in Finland at least, is the student's personal meaning-making. There can be many reasons why the student finds a specific activity personally interesting in the history classroom. But to pose the question about the personal interest in history, as distinct from its general importance, to the student may be one important step in recognizing the student as a meaning-making agent and bringing meaning-making "third-order" concepts into the history curriculum (Löfström, 2023). Such concepts in the general aims, contents and assessment criteria of history teaching and learning could help move the focus in history education more into how the study of history would better support the students' understanding of themselves. Given that, in a study by Moisan et al. (2020), for example, none of the interviewed history teachers emphasized the student's personal development as an aim of teaching history, it is perhaps not only a Finnish challenge to pay more attention to this aspect in teaching history.

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## Testing the Understanding of Historical Significance Among Pre-service Teachers in Ghana



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### Abstract

This study examines how pre-service teachers understand historical significance as a second-order concept. Two objectives have guided the study. The first is to determine which events and personalities pre-service teachers have regarded as significant in Ghana's history. The second is to identify the criteria pre-service teachers employ in attributing significance to events and personalities in history. A descriptive case-study research design was employed for the study. The census method used all final-year history pre-service teachers in two public universities in Ghana. A questionnaire and a Think-Aloud Protocol were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, while data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions formed the analytic framework for the qualitative data. The findings established the following events as significant in Ghana's history: Ghana's independence; the introduction of cocoa into Ghana; and the abolition of the slave trade by the British in 1807. In terms of personalities, Dr Kwame Nkrumah (the first President of Ghana), Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings and Yaa Asantewaa were regarded as significant in the history of Ghana. Again, the findings showed that history pre-service

teachers employed the criteria of ‘relevance’ and ‘importance’ to ascribe significance to events and personalities in the past.

## 1. Introduction

In February 2019, the Government of Ghana re-introduced history as a school subject at the basic school through the Ministry of Education. The *History of Ghana curriculum*, which was borne out of the 2017 reforms, integrates substantive and procedural historical knowledge to develop students’ ability to think historically. The rationale for the integration is to inculcate into students the ability to develop imaginative and critical thinking skills, which are critical information-processing skills in the twenty-first century (NaCCA, 2019). In the history classroom, students are asked to analyse, evaluate and interpret past events carefully so they can make informed decisions and ‘become useful national and global citizens’. More importantly, teachers are expected to promote higher-order thinking among students by emphasizing historical concepts such as context and chronology; significance; cause and consequence; continuity and change; and evidence (NaCCA, 2019). Since these procedural concepts have been endorsed in the curriculum, research to ascertain whether pre-service teachers possess knowledge of these procedural concepts, particularly historical significance, has not been investigated in Ghana.

Historical significance as a critical concept of historical thinking provides a framework for determining significant events of the past that merit reconstruction. The element of historical significance refers to what historians, history teachers and students recognize as significant in history (Seixas and Peck, 2004). In practice, historians go through a process of sifting and drawing relationships to make sense of the past, a process that leads to identification of the ‘worthwhileness’ of the past. The significant events that are identified form the fulcrum around which historians provide narratives to reflect the past. Similarly, history teachers are called upon to teach students to think historically through the gaze of historical significance.

However, historical significance has been regarded as ‘the forgotten key element’ in the history curriculum (Hunt, 2000). This is because the concept has been considered less meaningful and been inadequately theorized (Philips, 2002). However, Seixas (1994) argues that attending to students’ understanding of significance as a concept is fundamental since it enhances the teaching and learning of history and requires teachers’ support in history teaching (Levesque, 2008). Therefore, history teachers and pre-service teachers’ understanding of his-

torical significance becomes essential in history classroom instruction. History pre-service teachers' understanding of historical significance has not received research attention, particularly in Ghana. Understanding what pre-service teachers attribute significance to in history is a good starting point for history educators and curriculum developers (Seixas, 1997). This study aims to identify the events and personalities in Ghana's history that pre-service teachers ascribe significance to in studying history. Further, we seek to understand the criteria these pre-service teachers use to ascribe significance to the events and personalities selected.

## 2. Research on historical significance

Historical significance looks at the criteria historians adopt to select what, who, when and where should be studied. This is a fundamental concept in historical reconstruction because historians cannot study everything about the past. In determining what is historically significant in the classroom, Lévesque (2008) recommends Partington's (1980) criteria, which include essence, profundity, quantity, durability and relevance.

Lévesque (2008) explains the importance criterion as one which entails appreciating the importance of a historic event in context and considering what happened in the past as important for those who lived at the time, regardless of whether their opinions on the importance of the event were justified or not. The profundity criterion looks at how intensely the incident affected individuals who lived in the past. It asks questions such as 'Was the event superficial or deeply affecting' or 'How were people's lives affected' (Lévesque, 2008: 46). The quantity criterion relates to how many individuals are affected by an event. Questions such as 'How many victims?' 'How many survivors?' 'How many more were affected by this event than another one?' are asked to ascribe significance to events in the past (Lévesque, 2008). Using the relevance criterion, the idea of 'significance' in history refers to when the event was felt as a current concern (Lévesque, 2008). It refers to the extent to which the event has contributed to historical understanding or meaning-making. The durability criterion deals with how long people have been affected by the event. These variables (importance, profundity, quantity, durability and relevance) have influenced research on historical significance across the globe.

For instance, Seixas (1994) investigated 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students' understanding of historical significance in Canada. The findings showed that the students used two predominant forms of reasoning to understand historical significance: the narrative and the analogical. Seixas (1994) explained that narrative reasoning is

where students ascribe significance to the past by noting how the present grew out of the past. Analogical forms of reasoning refer to explanations that point to how past events provide lessons for the present. Seixas's research suggests that students may ascribe significance to a historical event due to its consequence in the present. It also shows that the lessons derived from the past influence students' attribution of significance to the past. In another study, Seixas (1997) mapped the terrain of historical significance to determine how a diverse group of high-school students in Canada identified and understood events of historical significance. He found that the students' orientation toward the appraisal of historical significance lies in two fundamental positions, 'subjective orientation' and 'objective orientation'. 'Subjective orientation' is the students' appraisal of historical significance in the context of personal interest. 'Objective orientation', on the other hand, focuses on assessing instances of historical significance whereby students' interests and social locations have not influenced their choice of a historical event. Seixas (1997) also noted that many students could develop and use a 'legitimate intellectual' set of assessment criteria, which include considerations of the impact of an event on a large number of people.

In an experimental study, Phillips (2002) showed how the GREAT (Ground-breaking; Remembered; far-reaching Effects; Affecting the future; Terrifying) mnemonic can be used to assist students in explaining the significance of the First World War. The mnemonic was used as a simple set of criteria to assist students in articulating the significance of a historical event. The study found that the mnemonic (GREAT) can be used to plan effective inquiry questions, providing students and teachers with a meaningful understanding of the past. Phillips' study provides teachers with a criterion (GREAT) to support experimentation on how to teach the concept of significance to students.

Drawing on well-known theoretical debates by philosophers and historians on the concept of significance in history, Cercadillo (2001) compared progression in understanding historical significance among third-grade students in Spain and England. The aim was to explore and map students' understanding of historical significance as a concept. The study revealed five different ways in which students understood historical significance. These include contemporary significance (the event is significant to people who live at the time of the event); causal significance (the significance of the event has to do with what caused it); pattern significance (the event is part of a larger pattern of change); symbolic significance (the significance is tied to how the past is used in the present); and present /future significance (the event is seen as significant to the present and the future). Cercadillo (2001) noted that younger students tend to employ

contemporary and causal significance in establishing the significance of events, whilst older students used symbolic present/future and pattern typology in ascribing significance to a historical event. The findings suggest that students use different schemas when ascribing significance to historical events, development or an actor. It also shows that the age of students plays a major role in determining what is significant in the past. However, this research merely provides insights into the structure students use in explaining the past: it does not provide details about the substantive content of their reasoning.

Counsell (2004) also used the story of a nineteenth-century campaigner against contagious disease acts, Josephine Butler, to help teachers scaffold the teaching and learning of historical significance in a disciplinary manner. In the study, Counsell (2004) offered the five 'R' criteria: Remarkable (the event/development was remarked upon by people at the time or since); Remembered (the event/development was important at some stage in history within the collective memory of a group or groups); Resonant (people like to make analogies with it; it is possible to connect with experiences, beliefs or situations across time and space); Resulting in change (it had consequences for the future); and Revealing (it reveals some other aspect of the past) that could be used to increase students' understanding of the various ascriptions of significance. Though there are gaps in Counsell's criteria, it provides a model of how students can be assisted in establishing their own set of criteria in thinking historically. It also provides a criterion for which student-teachers' understanding of historical thinking can be categorized.

Yeager, Foster, and Greer (2002) investigated the views of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the United States and the United Kingdom on historical significance. Their findings indicated that students in the United States ascribe significance to events that highlight their national identity. The study also noted that ethnic identities formed the basis of students' choices in the United Kingdom. The study's findings show that students are likely to use their ethnic or national identities to attribute historical significance to an event or personality. In another study, Barton (2005) investigated Catholic and Protestant students' ideas about historical significance in Northern Ireland. The study found that both groups of students' reasonings about historical significance stressed the importance of community conflict and remembrance. Despite this, whilst the Catholic students emphasized fairness and equal rights as the reasons for ascribing significance to past actions in Northern Ireland, Protestant students emphasized the political origin and status of past actors in Northern Ireland. Barton's study revealed that societal context plays a crucial role in developing frameworks for students' understanding of significance in history.



In another study, Foo (2014) employed Cercadillo's (2001) typology to study how students attribute significance to events and developments in Singapore's history. The results showed that the students used more than one criterion to assess the significance of an event. Again, causal and contemporary significance were the most frequent criteria students used to ascribe significance to events in Singapore's history. Also, pattern significance, symbolic significance and significance for the present and the future ranked as the third, fourth and fifth criteria that the respondents used in attributing significance. Foo's (2014) findings show that most students employ different criteria to ascribe significance to past events. The ascription of students was also based on how people who lived at the time of the event perceived it. Aligning this finding with Lévesque's (2008) criteria for ascribing significance, it presupposes that Foo's respondents often use the importance criterion to attribute significance to past events.

Avaroğulları and Kolcu (2016) also conducted a study to determine how 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Grade students in Turkey select and employ professional standards in ascribing historical significance. The findings revealed that three of the ten significant individuals the students identified were founders of different Turkish states. At the same time, two of them respectively launched the imperial and reform eras in Ottoman history. It also revealed that female figures in Turkish history were underrepresented. Again, the study showed that students do not employ professional standards in distinguishing significant figures from those who are not significant. Instead, they use personal and subjective means to select their choices of significant individuals. The underrepresentation of women in the students' list suggests that women may be underrepresented in most history curricula.

Literature on historical significance has shown that several frames of reference exist to explain how students ascribe significance to past events and personalities. Seixas's (1994, 1997) and Cercadillo's (2000) studies, for instance, showed the criteria students use to ascribe significance to past events but do not examine the events and personalities students consider significant in the past. This current study combines the processes of historical reasoning and the substantive content to which pre-service teachers ascribe significance to explain how pre-service teachers understand historical significance as a procedural concept. From the studies by Cercadillo (2001), Philip (2002) and Counsell (2004), it also appears that some research has been done to explore the ways in which students can build their understanding of historical significance by applying different sets of criteria. Since these criteria were meant for use in classrooms, not enough research has been done to determine whether students adhere to such

criteria when left on their own to think about historical significance. Also, the review of literature on historical significance shows that most scholarly works have concentrated on students at the lower level. There is little or no research to understand how pre-service teachers attribute historical significance or the criteria they use to do so in Ghana. The aim of this study is to find out what events and personalities pre-service teachers regard as significant and the criteria they use in ascribing significance to such events and personalities in the history of Ghana using Partington's (1980) model.

### 3. Methods

The study employed a descriptive case-study design which enabled the researchers to delve deep and use various sources of information to obtain a full image of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). One-hundred and thirty-five (135) final-year history education pre-service teachers in the University of Cape Coast (UCC) and University of Education Winneba (UEW) were used for the study. The census method made use of all final-year history education pre-service teachers in these two public universities. A questionnaire and a Think-Aloud Protocol were used for data collection.

The history of Ghana courses offered in the two universities (UCC and UEW) and the Senior High School (SHS) history syllabus informed the selection of forty historical events and personalities for our research purposes. The pre-service teachers were tasked with selecting five personalities and five events from the forty events and personalities provided and to justify their choices. One common method used by researchers in history education (e.g. Barton, 2005; Lévesque, 2005; Levstik and Groth, 2005; Peck, 2009, 2010) is to study significance as a concept in history. The lottery method was used to select the twenty events and twenty personalities from a list of historical events and personalities in Ghana's history. The lottery method was used because it is free from preconceptions and unfairness.

Some of the respondents were later selected to partake in a Think-Aloud session. Fifteen pre-service teachers were involved in three Think-Aloud sessions. Consent to record the interaction was sought before it was done. The number of participants in each group discussion was five (Krueger and Casey, 2000). At the start of the discussion, the researchers introduced themselves to the respondents, informed them about the purposes of the research, and established trust and rapport in the discussion (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). In terms of confidentiality, participants were permitted to use pseudonyms if they preferred. Each member

of the group was asked the same question. To give every respondent a chance to be heard, every respondent answered the same question before any other person could add more comments. The entire Think-Aloud session took close to one and a half hours (1hr 30min) for both sessions.

Microsoft Excel (MS Excel) was used to analyse the quantitative data gathered from the study. A combination of frequencies and percentages was used to analyse the data obtained through the questionnaire. Transcribed responses recorded from the Think-Aloud discussion were first processed through an open coding system. Responses were examined to generate numerous categories of codes (Charmaz, 2006). After this, axial and selective coding methods, as advocated by Strauss (1987), were used to re-examine and combine similar codes into themes and sub-themes. The issues raised supported some of the findings gathered from the field.

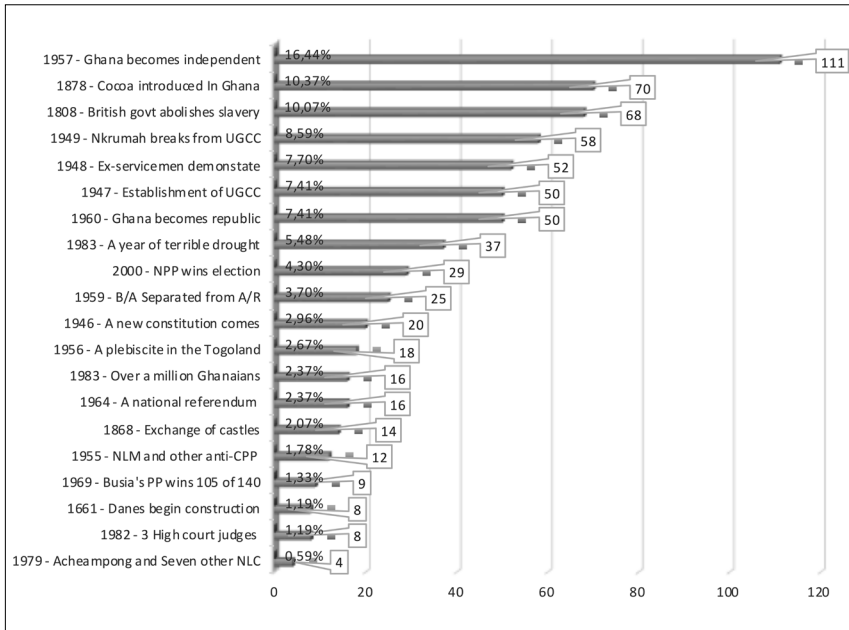
## 4. Results

The results of the study are presented in two (2) sections. First, the events and personalities pre-service teachers ascribe significance to in Ghana's history are presented. Second, the pre-service teachers' criteria for ascribing significance to these events and personalities are discussed.

### 4.1 Events and personalities pre-service teachers regarded as significant in Ghana's history

#### Most 'Significant' Events in Ghanaian History

Results from Figure 1 show that 111 (16.44%) pre-service teachers selected 'Ghana becomes independent' as a significant event in the history of Ghana. This is followed respectively by 'the introduction of cocoa into Ghana' (70 student-teachers or 10.37%) and 'the abolition of the slave trade by the British in 1807' (68 student-teachers or 10.07%). Nkrumah's break away from the 'UGCC' (58 student-teachers or 8.59%) ranked fourth, while a demonstration by ex-servicemen (52 student-teachers or 7.70%) and the establishment of the UGCC (50 student-teachers or 7.41%) ranked fifth and sixth respectively. Least significant among the events selected by the respondents were 'Busia's PP winning 105 of 140 seats in parliament' (9 student-teachers or 1.33%); 'the killing of the 'three high court judges' (8 student-teachers or 1.19%); 'the Danes begin construction of the Christiansburg Castle' (8 student-teachers or 1.19%) and the murder of Acheampong and seven others of the NLC (4 student-teachers or 0.59%).



**Figure 1: Significant Events (field data, 2021)**

The results from the Think-Aloud session corroborated the results from the questionnaire. Discussants mentioned events such as ‘Ghana becomes independent’, ‘Nkrumah’s break away from the UGCC’, ‘the introduction of cocoa in Ghana’ and ‘the demonstration by the ex-servicemen’ as ‘significant’ events in the history of Ghana. In the case of ‘Ghana becomes independent’, for instance, pre-service teachers appraised the event based on how it supported national unity and freedom. One student-teacher said:

*Ghana’s independence is one big step for the whole country. First, it is the basis of the entire country becoming one under our leadership because, before colonialism, the ethnic groups which constitute modern Ghana today were not together. Still, the independence brought them together to form one nation state. Hence, independence is significant because, since 1957, we have been governing ourselves. [Discussant C, TA 2]*

This statement shows that the pre-service teachers’ ascription of significance to the independence of Ghana stems from how the event united Ghana into one nation state led by a single political leader. In a different think-aloud group, the

pre-service teachers justified their position for choosing 'Ghana becomes independent' as a significant event by indicating that the struggle for independence gave freedom to the country, which was extended across Ghana's borders to other African states. This finding suggests that historical issues that promoted unity and freedom count most as significant among the student-teachers.

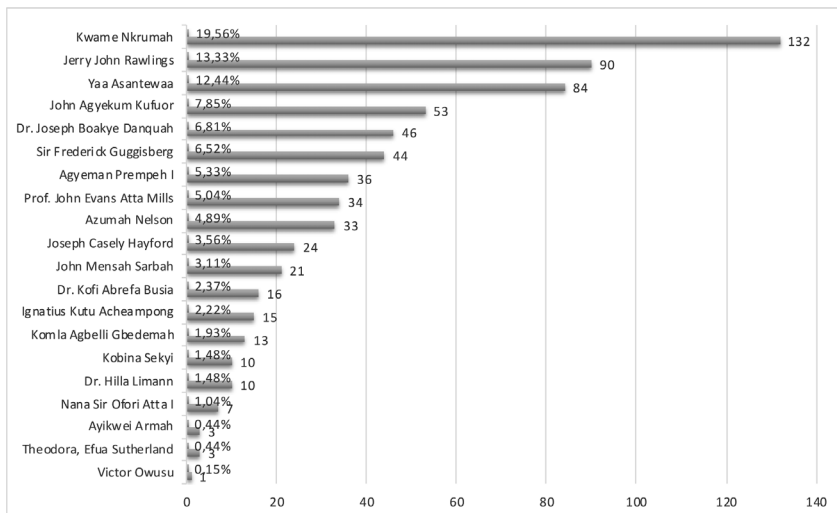
With the introduction of cocoa in Ghana, pre-service teachers' explanations were based on Ghana's economic benefits. The view of one discussant summarized these responses:

*Introducing cocoa to Ghana by Tetteh Quarshie is a significant event. Since the introduction of cocoa into Ghana, the cocoa industry has been a game-changer in the country's socio-economic development. The reason is that cocoa has been the leading foreign-exchange earner for the country. This has propelled us to develop our infrastructure, and it has also helped the country secure loans ... [Discussant C, TA 2]*

It can be inferred that pre-service teachers regarded 'significant' events as events that impacted on the country. The pre-service teachers viewed the effect of the events through socio-economic and political lenses. Indeed, as noted in the responses, the events regarded as significant had social, economic and political impacts on Ghana.

### **Most Significant Personalities in Ghanaian History**

The results on significant personalities in the history of Ghana placed Dr Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, first. In all, 132 (19.56%) pre-service teachers considered him the most significant personality. Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, chosen by 90 student-teachers (13.3%), the founder of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the first President of the Fourth Republic, ranked second. The influential Asante Queen-Mother of Ejisu at the beginning of the twentieth century, Yaa Asantewaa, chosen by 84 student-teachers (12.44%) was the third significant personality.



**Figure 2: Significant Personalities (field data, 2021)**

The second former President of the Fourth Republic and first elected President of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), John Agyekum Kufour, 53 student-teachers (7.85 %) and Dr. J. B. Danquah, a lawyer and Politician, 46 student-teachers (6.8 %) were fourth and fifth, respectively. Interestingly, 44 (6.52 %) pre-service teachers mentioned Sir Fredrick Gordon Guggisberg, a British colonial administrator, as a significant personality compared to individuals such as Prof. John Evans Atta Mills (34 or 5.04%), Azumah Nelson (33 or 4.89 %) and Joseph Casely Hayford (24 or 3.56%). This choice may have been influenced by Guggisberg's significant socio-economic and political contributions to the development of the Gold Coast. Writers such as Ayikwei Armah (3 student-teachers or 0.4 %) and Theodora Efua Sutherland (3 student-teachers or 0.4 %) were chosen by a few pre-service teachers as significant in the history of Ghana.

Results from the Think-Aloud discussion showed that Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, Dr J. B Danquah, Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, Yaa Asantewaa and John Agyekum Kuffour are the significant personalities in the history of Ghana. The respondents explained that the role these individuals played in the country's socio-economic and political growth, emancipation and transformation influenced their selection. For instance, some discussants noted that:

... He (Nkrumah) is so significant to the history of Ghana in such a way that he was not only regarded as the 'founder' or one of the most outstanding political leaders in Ghana but also the African of the millennium[sic]. So, it is an outstanding achievement that cannot be forgotten. [Discussant C, TA 1]

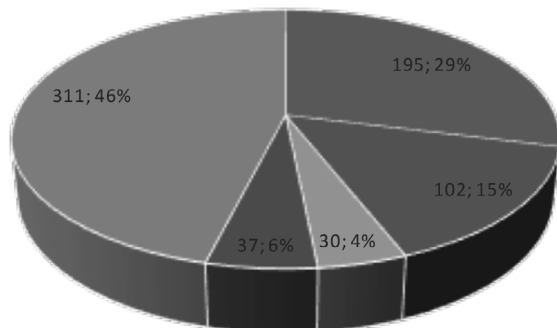
Guggisberg helped in the social-economic and political development of the country. Most especially in the area of education, he brought about reforms based on fifteen principles, and some of the content of the principles were the promotion of girl-child education, the promotion of university education, and the establishment of Achimota school, among others. [Discussant E, TA 3]

Yaa Asantewaa was one queen mother who, in the absence of men or when men were afraid to stand against British imperialism, stood up and led men and women to fight against the British. [Discussant B, TA 2]

From these responses, it can be seen that pre-service teachers regarded significant personalities as individuals who have made notable political contributions to the country.

#### 4.2 Criteria Pre-Service Teachers Use When Ascribing Significance to Historical Events and Personalities in Ghana's History

The results show that the pre-service teachers used 'relevance (46%)', 'importance (29%)', 'profundity (15%)', 'durability' (6%) and 'quantity (4%)' as criteria in attributing significance to the past.



Note: Total number of responses: 675

Figure 3. Percentage of responses for each type of significance (events and personalities) (field data, 2021)

■ IMPORTANCE ■ PROFUNDITY ■ QUANTITY ■ DURABILITY ■ RELEVANCE

Figure 3 shows that the contribution of an event to the present-day meaning-making and understanding of aspects of one's past (Relevance) formed a major basis for 311 pre-service teachers (46%) in their selection of events and personalities. Pre-service teachers believe that, for the past to be relevant and useful to their understanding, it must be tied to its contribution to present-day meaning-making. Thus, the significance of an event is shaped not only by the past itself but also by the successive importance of this event in relation to existing priorities and recent trends.

The second criterion that defined the pre-service teachers' choice of events and personalities in history was 'importance' (29%). The extent to which individuals were or have been greatly affected by an event or personality (profundity, 15%) ranked third, whereas the period for which the life of an individual has been impacted by an event (durability, 6%) ranked fourth. Pre-service teachers' last criterion in ascribing significance to historical events and personalities is quantity (30 teachers or 4%). This observation on the choice of events maybe based on the events selected by the researchers for the study.

Results from the Think Aloud Protocol were consistent with the questionnaire. 'Relevance' and 'importance' served as major criteria respondents used to justify selected historical events and personalities as significant. For instance, explaining the reason for choosing 'Ghana becomes independent' as a significant event, one discussant noted that:

*Ghana becoming independent in 1957 is very relevant not only for Ghanaians but for Africa as a continent ... Ghana became the beacon, the torchbearer in terms of fighting imperialism and colonialism on the continent ... So, when Ghana gained independence in 1957, you realize that the impact was felt in 1960, so by 1960, we had about ten African countries which gained independence, and the rest quickly followed. [Discussant C, TA 2]*

Instructively, the discussant's comment suggests that the event was selected based on its impact on those who lived in the past. The effect of Ghana's independence on the country and its spread across the African continent in the 1960s shows that pre-service teachers attempted to recognize the significance of the event from the point of view of those who lived during the period.

'Profundity', 'quantity' and 'durability' were the minor criteria pre-service teachers used to ascribe significance to historical events. These were some of the responses gathered from the discussion:



*... 1983 is the year that marked the hunger period in the history of Ghana. Due to the terrible drought and bushfires, farms were destroyed, leading to hunger and starvation.* [Discussant A, TA 1]

*... the slave trade was not going well with our human existence. It decreased our population as of then.* [Discussant B, TA 2]

*From pre-colonial through colonial to modern Ghana, Ghana's economy was based on cocoa production as the main cash crop that fetched an income ...* [Discussant C, TA 1]

From discussant A, it appears that this pre-service teacher justified the point by considering how deeply people's lives were affected by the 1983 drought. On the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade by the British government in 1807, the choice was influenced by the number of people affected by the slave trade. Hence their use of the quantity criterion in justifying the selection of the event. Discussant C explained the choice of the introduction of cocoa into Ghana from Fernando Po by Tetteh Quarshie based on how long cocoa has served as the backbone of Ghana's economy.

It can be seen that pre-service teachers have different reasons for ascribing significance to historical events. Most of the pre-service teachers used the extent to which an event has contributed to an increased understanding of present-day life and lessons drawn from contemporary events to justify their choice of events as significant.

## 5. Discussion

The results provide insights into pre-service teachers' understanding of history and the concept of historical significance. First, the results found the following events to be considered significant in Ghana's history: Ghana's independence; the introduction of cocoa into Ghana; and the abolition of the slave trade by the British in 1807. In terms of personalities, Dr Kwame Nkrumah (the first President of Ghana), Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings and Yaa Asantewaa were regarded as significant in the history of Ghana. Aligning the frame of reference student-teachers used in ascribing significance to historical events and personalities with Levesque's (2008) framework shows that the former, in order of frequency, used 'relevance', 'importance', 'profundity', 'quantity' and 'durability' as criteria in attributing significance to the past.

The presence of Dr Kwame Nkrumah and Dr J. B. Danquah among the first five significant personalities in the history of Ghana may be attributed to the role these personalities played in the struggle for Ghana's independence, particularly Nkrumah becoming the first President of Ghana and his international recognition. Again, the great ideological positions espoused by Dr Nkrumah and Dr Danquah may also account for their significant recognition by the respondents. Also, media discussions on whether Ghana as a country has 'Founders' or a 'Founder' may have influenced the choice of them both as significant figures.

In the case of Jerry John Rawlings<sup>1</sup> and John Agyekum Kufour,<sup>2</sup> it is not surprising that pre-service teachers selected them as important figures in Ghana's history. The age of the respondents may have influenced the choice of these personalities. These pre-service teachers, with ages ranging from twenty-one (21) to thirty-six (36) years, know about the leadership of these two individuals and their achievements. Perhaps, it may have been expected that the pre-service teachers would place Dr. Danquah ahead of Flt Rawlings and Kufour because of the unique and significant role Danquah played in the struggle for independence and his recognition as the 'Doyen' of Ghana's politics. However, the first two Presidents of the Fourth Republic were chosen ahead of Danquah because of the respondents' greater familiarity with Rawlings and Kufour as more contemporary personalities. Possibly, the pre-service teachers cherish the country's presidents above other political figures.

Recognizing these contemporary individuals as significant implies that pre-service teachers ascribe significance by using a present-oriented perspective (presentism) in history. Presentism however, poses a danger to the study of the discipline. It may lead students to appreciate the past as significant only when it is relevant to the present. Avarogullari and Kolcu (2016) explain that, though using present-oriented perspectives to understand the past may be an effective way to make history more attractive to students, overstressing the present can lead students to look back on the past and view the present as superior to the past. The present, however it is, is because of the past. Consequently, it is unfair to use present-day standards when ascribing significance to people in history. Students must appreciate events and actions in their respective contexts and make contextual judgments.

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1 President of the Republic of Ghana (1992–2000).

2 President of the Republic of Ghana (2000–2008).

The findings also offer evidence that school history in Ghana is about the 'big men' who played a pivotal role in its leadership. Naidoo (2014) defines 'big men' as role models in communities whose heroic deeds and virtuous conduct inspire their followers. Clay (1992) views 'big men' as leaders who managed to overcome their unstable and underdeveloped political systems through positive actions. These findings suggest that the pre-service teachers' selection of significant personalities was based on Naidoo's (2014) and Clay's (1992) definition of 'big men' in history. This view of the pre-service teachers is not peculiar to this research because many scholars have also alluded to the place of prominent men in history (Hutchins, 2011; Alridge, 2006). In instances where pre-service teachers had an opportunity to choose significant personalities of their own, they selected people with political connotations.

The dominance of political figures and statesmen in the list of prominent figures also reflects the content of the various history curricula across different grades in Ghana. It could be argued that political figures and the political history of Ghana dominate the content of the history curricula in Ghanaian schools. Essentially, school history has been the study of the deeds of great men in politics (Oppong, 2019). It is therefore hardly surprising that eminent writers such as Ayikwei Armah and Efua Sutherland are among the least preferred by pre-service teachers.

The 'relevance criterion' suggests that the pre-service teachers were interested in how historical events have affected their lives in the contemporary world. This corroborates Seixas's (1994) study, where students ascribed significance based on how past events influenced happenings in modern societies. Similarly, Foo's (2006) study in Singapore also established that students attribute significance to historical events based on the contribution of the historical event to present-day understanding. The use of the relevance criterion as an attribute of historical significance is also seen in Sheehan's (2011) study. Sheehan indicated that students often use the 'relevance' criterion to attribute significance to events in the history of New Zealand. This therefore denotes that, in selecting topics to teach students in the history classroom, priority must be given to topics that will enable them to understand contemporary life.

The results also reflect the position of idealist historians and suggest that the respondents ascribed significance to events and personalities that affected the people who lived during the event, a position espoused by the idealists. In a similar study, Oppong (2012) indicated that students' understanding of historical significance reflected the horizontal perspective which viewed significant historical events from the impact of the event on those living during the period.

Lévesque (2003) places this form of ascription under the ‘importance’ criterion. Under this criterion, students contextualized the past and considered it significant based on how important it was for those who lived at the time the event occurred. Cercadillo (2000) explains that students often use the ‘importance criterion’ to ascribe significance to history because it does not require students to reason very far away from the event itself: students only need to think from the perspective of those who lived within the period. Lévesque (2008) argues that using this criterion offers students a means to counter ‘presentism’. In this case, an attribution of significance in the past will need a more profound sense of contextualization in history that will help pre-service teachers develop empathy for those who lived in the past.

The findings also show that pre-service teachers used other criteria in ascribing significance to Ghanaian history. These included ‘how deeply an event or personality affected people’ (profundity), ‘how long an event or historical personality has endured over time’ (durability) and ‘how many individuals an event or personality affects’ (quantity). This shows that, depending on the historical event and the historical personality involved, pre-service teachers will employ different means to ascribe significance to them. Keegan (2001) and Lévesque (2008) warned that caution must be exercised in using the durability and quantity criteria to ascribe significance, since the temporary nature of an event cannot automatically be recognized as less significant. Citing the attack on the US on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, Lévesque argues that, if the duration of the event is used to ascribe significance, it may not qualify as an essential event (Lévesque, 2013). Nevertheless, this attack on the US significantly impacted both the US and the rest of the world. Therefore, to judge the significance the past, the emphasis should be placed not only on the duration of the event but on the historical contexts under which the event occurred. On quantity, Lévesque (2008) recommends that history educators exercise constraints since placing a value on the number of people affected by an event or individual to ascribe significance to them may lead to the perception that historical significance is about events and personalities that affected a large number of people.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has shown that student-teachers use different criteria to ascribe significance to historical events and personalities, including relevance, importance, profundity, quantity and durability. There is a tendency for student-teachers to expose their prospective students to different forms of assessing significant his-

torical events and personalities in the classroom. The different ways of assessing historical events will enable their prospective students to appreciate the concept of significance in its entirety. This is because students will understand that there are different ways of attributing events as significant in history. The study also revealed the following events as significant in Ghana's history: Ghana's independence, the introduction of cocoa into Ghana and the abolition of the slave trade by the British in 1807. In terms of personalities, Dr Kwame Nkrumah (the first President of Ghana), Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings and Yaa Asantewaa were regarded as significant in the history of Ghana. The recognition of significant events and personalities and the reasons for selecting them assure pre-service teachers' understanding of historical significance in history education. Pedagogically, this understanding would provide good leverage in classroom teaching.

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## The Views of South African History Teachers on Making the Subject Compulsory



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### Abstract

In this chapter, voice is given, by means of a small-scale case study, to South African history teachers on the proposal to make history compulsory up to Grade 12. What emerged is that polar opposite views existed on whether the subject should become compulsory. Those who opposed the proposal argued in a self-assured manner that history, as an analytical disciplinary discipline, need not become compulsory because in the process it will be devalued and become a political tool, in a manner reminiscent of the apartheid era. In contrast stood the views of those history teachers who supported the proposal to make the subject compulsory. To them compulsion meant an elevation in their personal and professional status and that of the subject. The history teachers who adopted this positionality favoured a memory-style, politically orientated history which would turn learners into good citizens knowledgeable about South African history. At the same time, the perceived generic value of the subject would be shared with parents, teachers and learners alike.



## 1. Introduction

‘Why school history?’<sup>1</sup> has been an enduring, divisive and polarising educational and political question in South Africa. Consequently, history curricula in South Africa, like elsewhere in the world, have been both educational and political documents constructed by those with political power. Since 2014, a range of developments related to school history have taken place. For the purposes of this chapter, we will focus on one key aspect related to these developments, namely the thinking related to making school history compulsory up to Grade 12. More specifically, in the manner of a case study, the lens will be focused on the views of secondary school history teachers on making the subject compulsory. In this chapter, we will therefore grapple with the following two research questions: What are the views of secondary school history teachers regarding making history compulsory up to Grade 12? And, why do secondary school history teachers hold the views they do on the possibility of making history compulsory up to Grade 12? In so doing, we are hoping to give a voice to history teachers who have thus far been marginalized, and sometimes completely silenced, in this debate about compulsion. We are also hoping to fill a gap in the existing scholarly literature. This will be done by drawing on the work of Mkhabela, conducted under the supervision of Wassermann and Iyer, so as to provide a lens into the views of history teachers on the proposal to make school history compulsory up to Grade 12 (Mkhabela, 2018).

## 2. Background and context to the proposal to make school history compulsory up to Grade 12

Under the racist apartheid policies of the National Party from 1948 onwards, school history was a brew of religion, politics and education. Based on ideas of Christian National Education, the subject was taught as the fulfilment of God’s decree that willed that separate and different nations should exist, each with their particular talents, tasks and gifts. In line with this, a patriotic history of the nation had to be taught so as to nurture an enduring love of what was regarded as ‘one’s own’ (Enslin, 1999: 104). Tangibly this translated into an Afrikaner nationalist school history which foregrounded an academic identity rooted in

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1 In this chapter, we use the term school history to distinguish it from academic history. The former is the recontextualized version of the latter via policies such as curricula and educational media such as textbooks.

memory history, especially the 'positive' role of white male politicians and the creation of the white South African state. This was tied in with a civil identity that rested on the understanding of a constructed White national school history with the aim of instilling a sense of origin, national pride and identity. In sum, racism and white supremacy were at the heart of school history and were taught by means of teacher-centeredness and rote learning. More to the point, school history under apartheid relied on powerful myths that Whites are superior to Blacks<sup>2</sup> (du Preez, 1983). As a result, Black people only tended to appear on the margins of school history as labourers in, troublemakers for, and interrupters of white society. In all of this history, teachers had no direct role in the creation of the curriculum, apart from implementing it in their heavily monitored apartheid classrooms so as to create very different racial identities for White and Black learners. This was the status quo till 1994, when the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in the first ever fully democratic elections in the country.

The ANC faced numerous daunting tasks, including dealing with the question of why school history? In spite of this, impatient expectations existed for school history to play its part in the construction of a non-racial South African identity. Siebörger (2000) articulated these expectations as follows: keeping the triumph over the evil of apartheid alive, memorializing past struggles against colonialism and apartheid, and working towards breaking down all remaining aspects of racism so as to give a legitimate school history to those who had previously been denied it. In the process, the three post-apartheid 'r's of reconstruction, redress and reconciliation were to be developed. Achieving this was easier said than done, and during the first two post-apartheid decades, an intense pedagogical and political struggle over the reasons for teaching school history took place. This was initially underpinned by a democratic consultative process for a new history curriculum which included public participation by teachers, parents and learners, a radical departure from how history curricula were developed under apartheid. The result was a myriad of submissions that had to be dealt with by a specially appointed committee. Concurrently with the above, polarising debates on school history raged. In one corner were those who took a dim view of school history based on how the subject was treated under apartheid so as to demean Black people. Those adopting this position argued that futuristic thinking was necessary so as to build a better, new South Africa. To do so school history

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2 For the purposes of this paper, the term 'Black' includes Africans, Coloureds and Indians. These apartheid-era designations have been retained by the post-apartheid state ostensibly for the purposes of redress.

needed to be abandoned because it was too problematic and out of sync with new visions of education, knowledge and society (Wassermann, 2018). Powerful support for such thinking about school history came from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the labour ally of the ruling ANC alliance, who argued for a merger of education and training. The result was a form of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) which severely marginalized school history (Siebörger, 2000). Accordingly, school history was merged with geography into social studies but soon found itself in serious trouble. These moves tied in with the early post-apartheid post-conflict South African thinking, which promoted, above all, the building of a rainbow nation by fostering collective amnesia in school history as it related to South Africa's racist past (Stolten, 2007). It is important to note that embedded in the membership of COSATU was the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which shared in the conceptual victory which led to the creation of the OBE Curriculum.

In the opposite corner in the 'why school history' debate were those who believed that post-apartheid South Africa desperately needed a school history. The reasons advanced for this included the necessity for the subject to make sense of a violent and racist past so as to bring about some understanding of it and to open up a process of healing (Stolten, 2007). In time the 'pro-school history' lobby started to sway the debate in their favour, and a radical shift in thinking started to take place. A key role-player in this process was the second post-apartheid Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, a former history teacher. Under the leadership of Asmal, who used a powerful history and archaeology panel to advise him, the importance of school history was established (Ministry of Education, 2000). Flowing out of this new thinking on why school history emerged, the subject developed a distinct identity that promoted the constitution and democracy, equality and nation-building that included learning about South Africa's racist past. In this regard, Asmal made it clear: 'The issues that teaching apartheid raises are not to be ducked or deleted, but are to be grappled with and faced up to' (Asmal, 2007). The ultimate outcome of the pro-school history lobby's manoeuvrings under the leadership of Asmal was the dismantling of the OBE-orientated Curriculum 2005 in favour of what became known as the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), whose implementation ended in 2014. CAPS history adopted an analytical model for the subject. In terms of academic identity, it promoted concepts of historical thinking such as causes, consequences, empathy, change and continuity over time, and the use of historical evidence. The latter was especially important because it foregrounded the notion that history is a construction based on historical evidence and

that certain interpretations thereof are more acceptable than others. All things considered, the overall narrative was regarded as of less importance, and the focus was on the history of both leaders and ordinary people. In terms of a civil identity, CAPS history embraced the idea of historical thinking and multi-perspectivity and encouraged the questioning of historical narratives as they related to historical accuracy (Kukard, 2017). However, criticism of the CAPS history curriculum did not stay out of the debate. Kallaway (2012) criticized the curriculum as legal and constitutional history mixed with political science. More worrying for the ‘why school history’ question post-1994 was the positionality of Black intellectuals, who had generally abandoned the idea of reconciliation and nation-building for a ‘more or less outspoken African nationalism’ (Stolten, 2007, 29). While in the past such thinking was drowned out by larger political ideals such as reconciliation and nation-building, the tide was turning. Numerous reasons can be attributed to the tide turning towards new thinking on ‘why school history?’ These include many schools, especially Afrikaans ones, no longer offering history up to Grade 12 (Meyer, Blignault, Braz and Bunt, 2012), a continuation of xenophobic attacks on Africans from other African countries, the ANC facing a youth rebellion while struggling to keep to its post-1994 post-liberation election promises, and CAPS history, with its emphasis on global themes and an analytical way of thinking, which did not treat the history of Black South Africans in a manner that found favour with African nationalists.

By the time CAPS history was fully implemented in 2014, powerful voices starting to ask questions about the nature and purpose of school history. The Public Service and Administration Minister, Lindiwe Sisulu, fired the first salvo by arguing that history should be a compulsory subject at school (Smillie, 2014). A judge, Thami Makhanya, gave meaning to the idea. To him, young people were ignorant about the past and hence apathetic. His solution to the perceived problem was, ‘Make South African history in its totality a compulsory subject in South Africa from grade 8 up until grade 12.’ In doing so, in his view, learners would understand the sacrifices made during the liberation struggle (Makhanya, 2014, no page number). The biggest impetus, however, came when SADTU, a trade union representing the majority of teachers, stated that history must be compulsory to produce patriotic young South Africans (Louw and Davids, 2014: 4). SADTU published a draft paper entitled *The importance of teaching history as a compulsory subject*, which highlighted why they believed history should be made a compulsory subject. Drawing on Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, SADTU stated: ‘Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.’ SADTU further claimed that South African history

is 'told by foreign minds who glorify colonialists and not the real heroes of the South African struggle against colonialism and apartheid' (SADTU, 2014: 1). SADTU made it clear that school history should be made a compulsory subject up to Grade 12 so that the 'lions themselves [tell] about the stories they witnessed in the forest of the past South Africa, not through research of settlers to glorify their own' (SADTU, 2014: 7).

Following the announcement by SADTU, the move towards making history compulsory up to Grade 12 gained momentum. In the process, SADTU brushed aside opposing views that the potential exists that the ANC will be using school history for ideological purposes as the National Party did under apartheid (Makinana, 2014) and that the envisaged compulsory history should be balanced and not ANC-centric (Louw and Davids, 2014). SADTU argued that these were the views of 'detractors who wish that our brutal past can be swept under the carpet and treated as bygone ... we are aware that of course that the beneficiaries of the apartheid's system of separate development would come out against this call' (Louw and Davids, 2014: 4).

On 5 May 2015, the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, announced that a seven-person 'History Ministerial Task Team' (MTT) had been constituted with the brief to research how best to make history compulsory up to Grade 12 (*Government Gazette*, No 39267, 9.10.2015: 4–5). At the time, Minister Motshekga optimistically declared that making history compulsory could enhance nation-building, national pride, patriotism, social cohesion and cultural heritage, thereby signalling a return to memory history (Wassermann, 2018).

However, critical voices persisted. Davids (2016) argued that complex phenomena such as nation-building cannot be resolved by making history compulsory. Instead, the focus should be on improving history teachers' pedagogical practices and historical knowledge, rather than on radical policy reform, which would, in all likelihood, serve to destabilize a large segment of the schooling system. To Davids, making the subject compulsory would be tantamount to gratuitous political interference with serious practical implications. Likewise, Nussey was not convinced that making history compulsory up to Grade 12, even by using an African nationalist paradigm informed by the framework of Ubuntu, would necessarily 'be a panacea for South Africa's social ills, especially as this proposal has reawakened fears of how history education was abused during apartheid.' Like Davids, Nussey saw rather a need to strengthen alternative reconciliation-orientated pedagogies (Nussey, 2018: 1).

It is against this backdrop that the MTT, consisting almost exclusively of academic historians, started its work. In 2018 it produced a 155-page *Report*

*of the History Ministerial Task Team* (Ndlovu, Lekgoathi, Esterhuysen, Mkhize, Weldon, Callinicos and Sithole, 2018). What the report made clear was that ‘compulsory history’ is not a question unique to South Africa (Ndlovu et al., 2018: 39–40). The report, drawing on case studies from around the world and a deep analysis of CAPS history, envisaged a new Afro-centric school history that, in name, would be analytical but which would be aligned with memory history. Most importantly in terms of the focus of this chapter, the MTT recommended ‘that History should be made compulsory’ as a stand-alone subject up to Grade 12 and should not become part of life orientation (LO)<sup>3</sup> (Ndlovu et al., 2018: 130). The MTT also recommended that social sciences, taught as a subject up to Grade 9, one of the relics of OBE, be done away with because, globally, history is a specific discipline (Ndlovu et al., 2018, 130).

The MTT Report was severely criticized in some academic quarters. Van Eeden and Warnich, in a no-holds-barred manner, bemoaned the fact that the report left history educationists in the dark about matters related to teacher training, as well as the financial and logistical implications of transforming school history into a compulsory subject. The conclusion the authors came to was that the report did not truly inform South African society in terms of thoughts, trends and statuses of compulsory history education globally. They further argued that the MTT was not a reliable indicator to use in taking an informed decision over making history compulsory up to Grade 12. As such, van Eeden and Warnich cast doubt on the Report as a whole (van Eeden and Warnich, 2018). Further scholarly criticism came from Coelho. She argued, with reference to compulsion, that ‘the imperatives for this unrealistic plan are more about cynical and parochial political objectives than educational and empowering objectives.’ She further argued that ‘the compulsory History policy proposal seeks more to construct learners as obedient and compliant citizens that support the current regime [ANC]’ (Coelho, 2018: i).

In all the debates on making history compulsory up to Grade 12, the voices of history teachers were silent. This was striking, for, after all, history teachers will have to carry out the curriculum should a decision be made to make history compulsory up to Grade 12. However, between 24 July and 4 August 2017, as part of the compilation of the report, the MTT did hold half-day workshops in each province attended by, among others, history teachers (Ndlovu et al., 2017).

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3 Life Orientation (LO) is a compulsory school subject that was introduced to the school curriculum post-1994. The focus of the subject is on the self in society, and more specifically, on the personal, social and physical development of learners as citizens in a democratic society.

The lead author attended the session on 2 August, which was experienced as an information session and not a workshop. In the interim, while the MTT Report was accepted, no final decision has yet been made on whether history will be compulsory up to Grade 12. On 6 May 2021, the Council of Education Ministers of the nine South African provinces were urged to make a pronouncement in this regard (Simelane, 2021). This has yet to happen.

### 3. Research design and methodology

For this chapter, a small-scale case-study research design was used. This was done because case studies are set in temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around them. In this regard Rule and John argue that a case study must have a case, a focus and a context (Rule and John, 2011). The case in this chapter was secondary school history teachers from a diverse range of schools and their views on the proposal to make school history compulsory up to Grade 12. The focus was to understand and explore the views of a range of secondary-school history teachers on making history compulsory up to Grade 12. The broad context for the study was the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa.

The secondary-school history teachers who participated in the study were representative of the demographic diversity of the KwaZulu-Natal province, as they taught in rural, township,<sup>4</sup> urban government schools and private schools. It was our hope that the diverse range of history teachers who participated would, based on their contexts, provide authentic views on the proposal to make school history a compulsory subject up to Grade 12.

As Merriam argues (2009), the selection criteria and selection of participating history teachers must be noted at the outset. As such, a list of the essential attributes participants must adhere to was created, and participants who matched it were then purposively identified. Thus, teachers must be qualified and have contemporary experience in working as secondary school history teachers or heads of human social sciences departments; the history teachers must be teaching the subject to Grade 10–12 learners; and the participating teachers must be representative of the different social, cultural and socio-economic schooling contexts found in Kwa-Zulu-Natal.

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4 Townships were designed under apartheid for the exclusive residential occupation by Africans, Coloureds and Indians. These residential areas continue to exist post-apartheid.

In line with the research design, qualitative research approach and interpretivist paradigmatic position, it was decided to use semi-structured individual interviews as well as focus groups to engage with the participating history teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six history teachers from rural, urban government and private schools across KwaZulu-Natal. The answers from the semi-structured interviews were augmented with two focus-group interviews consisting of four history teachers each. The same interview schedule was used in both instances, and the history teachers were asked for their views on the possibility of history becoming compulsory up to Grade 12, why they held those specific views, and their thoughts on the possible consequences should this change happen. The focus-group interviews served to probe the views expressed during the semi-structured interviews. So as to ensure the views expressed were authentic, all interviews were conducted before the release of the MTT Report.

The interview data were transcribed verbatim. Thereafter, the data were analysed in an open coding manner for themes, trends and patterns so as to propose possible answers to the research questions posed. As pointed out by Creswell (2009), the process of data analysis involved numerous steps, including preparing the data for analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and arriving at an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data of the case study.

#### **4. History teachers' views on making history compulsory up to Grade 12**

The majority of history teachers who participated in the study held a multifarious range of positive views about the possibility of school history becoming a compulsory subject. Foremost were views on how making school history compulsory would enhance the relevance and alter the perceptions of the subject. In this regard, one experienced urban history teacher pointed out that 'there is a perception that history is not relevant, but if it happens to be compulsory, it will now be given its preference.' Two novice history teachers, one from a rural and one from a township context, added a different dimension to the relevance argument by pointing out that their school's history is for learners who cannot cope with science and mathematics, the so-called 'under-performers'. However, by making history compulsory, it was believed that the stereotypical negative perceptions of the subject would fade away.

Several research participants had clear ideas on how making school history compulsory could change points of view. A teacher with moderate experience



of a private school argued that the mere act of compulsion would 'give learners an understanding of how important history is.' A similar view was expressed by an experienced urban teacher, who argued that making history compulsory will result in 'making learners understand why they must do history.' These points of view were shared by a novice history teacher from a rural school, who pointed out that in her school there is a 'stereotype that history is easy, and you do it because you couldn't make it to the science or commerce department'. Like her fellow teachers, she argued that compulsion will positively change the status of the subject for learners and teachers.

In the semi-structured and focus-group interviews, history teachers also argued that making school history compulsory up to Grade 12 will be relevant to learners' lives in several ways. In this regard, an experienced rural history teacher argued that the subject is relevant to individuals and their lives, identities, general knowledge of the world and how to relate to other people. Making school history compulsory was given a certain omnipresence: 'You need to know your history because eventually when you grow up the events that are going to happen in your life, most of them will be based on your history, it could be your country, your family, any form of history.'

In fact, knowing school history as an argument for making it compulsory was strongly foregrounded in various ways. Prominent amongst these views were teachers who argued, 'I am for history being made a compulsory subject because our learners are going to learn more about the history of our country' (a novice township history teacher); 'we must know where we came from and why we are here now and what happened in our country to get us here' (experienced township history teacher); and 'learners will learn more about our democracy, they will know, and they will appreciate ... understand where the country comes from' (novice township teacher). Likewise, an experienced township history teacher argued that history as a compulsory subject could 'help to build the people who belong ... the learners would belong to their country ... a rainbow nation, it belongs to everybody.' A strong refrain throughout was that all learners needed to do history because it was 'knowing the past to understand today' (experienced urban history teacher), and 'for history to become compulsory, it will be for people to understand why South Africa is the way it is today' (novice township history teacher).

Tied to these outlined views was thinking about how history as a compulsory subject could promote identity and roots. In the view of an experienced private school history teacher, we should 'allow learners to know their roots, know where they come from and be aware of the decisions that they may take in

life.' Knowing their roots, in the view of a novice township history teacher, would 'make learners aware of their identity.' The views held on compulsory school history and its relationship to roots and identity were extended by some history teachers who longed for a shared future based on a shared history, or 'a future that is more collective' if the past is understood in a similar manner, as a novice urban teacher argued. In his view, this held out the potential to heal the wounds of the past and create a better understanding of democracy.

Ideas on knowing political history as a positive outcome that makes the subject compulsory were also mooted. An experienced rural history teacher argued that making the subject compulsory could 'make learners conscious about the politics of South Africa.' A participating history teacher from a private school took this abstract thinking into the realm of practicality by linking the proposal to make history compulsory to learning about the ruling ANC: 'Currently, that is not the ANC that John Dube<sup>5</sup> started or Sobukwe<sup>6</sup> was involved in, that was a very different ANC, very different leadership, very different goals'. To understand South Africa, learners need 'to understand the history of the ANC, to have a more educated assessment of who the ANC as a party is ... so people can understand why South Africa is the way it is today.' An experienced history teacher at an urban school added to this by arguing in favour of making history compulsory so as to lay bare, in a Pan-Africanist way, the relationship between the ANC and other African states. For this teacher, all learners needed to understand the relationship between Black consciousness, African liberation, and African unity. Understanding this would, in the view of the teacher, prevent xenophobic attacks.

The history teachers who participated in this study also foregrounded other ideas on why school history in South Africa should become compulsory. On the one hand, school history was regarded as important enough to be made compulsory because it was like an interdisciplinary glue that 'connects with every single subject' (novice rural history teacher): 'including tourism, it has history, maths has history behind it, English has history, isiZulu has history.' On the other hand, making school history compulsory was viewed in a positive light because of the range of generic skills it was seen to promote. These included general analysis and interpretation skills and critical thinking skills needed for day-to-day living in any work learners would do, and at university (experienced

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5 John Langalibalele Dube was the founding president of the ANC in 1912.

6 Robert Sobukwe was a member of the ANC till 1957 when he left to find the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). He became the first president of the latter.

private school history teacher; experienced rural school history teacher; experienced township school history teacher). Of special importance to the history teachers who supported the thinking about making school history compulsory was how that would improve learners' English language skills. In this regard, a novice urban history teacher argued that compulsory history teaching will be good for 'writing essays for English, helping them with comprehension', while a novice township teacher argued that 'history teaches learners writing skills and essay writing.'

A very different set of views related to economics and making school history compulsory also emerged. Several history teachers argued that making history compulsory would be beneficial to them because they would have job security. In this regard, a novice history teacher from an urban school metaphorically proclaimed, 'I will never be without bread and butter'. This sentiment was shared by a teacher from a private school, who stated, 'I think it is fantastic ... it also means that I will never be without a job'. The view was also expressed that making history compulsory will mean job opportunities for history teachers to write textbooks and train other teachers during workshops.

It is important to note that many of the history teachers who supported some of the thinking behind making school history compulsory added a caveat: the subject is valuable enough to be made compulsory, but it must be taught properly, and the CAPS history content must be re-evaluated and made more contemporary. Such views had some of the participating history teachers reflecting on their own teaching. In this regard, a novice rural teacher stated: 'I will have to be more innovative in the way I teach and make history as important as accounting and economics and physics in a child's life.' An experienced rural history teacher, in turn, explained that, should history become compulsory, he would have to be 'more innovative ... more creative' so as to motivate the learners.

Most of the views of the history teachers who opposed school history being made compulsory centred around the possible political abuse of the subject by means of the manipulation of content and using it as a tool of indoctrination. In this regard, an experienced teacher from a private school asked, 'who will create the curriculum, what stories will be told and what stories are left out? ... many people would be concerned about whether it is going to be used as a tool'. An experienced township history teacher was more forthright in her views and claimed that compulsory school history up to Grade 12 would be tantamount to the government 'trying to force learners to learn the ANC's history'. A similar view was expressed by a novice history teacher in an urban school, who feared that 'learners will just be fed what the government wants them to learn.' If that

were to happen, in the view of an experienced history teacher at an urban school, it would not be new, since 'each government that comes to power is there to fulfil their own ideologies ... in the apartheid era, the National Party taught Christian National Education, and they used education as a tool to promote their propaganda.' To another experienced teacher in an urban school, this was par for the course because 'unfortunately with the South African education system it is political, and there is nothing we can do about it.' Several of the participating history teachers saw an even more sinister political agenda behind making the subject compulsory, namely to make 'learners more docile and more susceptible to just accepting what they have been taught, and understand history from the perspective of the teacher and the government' (experienced rural history teacher).

The participating history teachers who took a dim view of making the subject compulsory were also worried about the impact such a move could have on the status of the subject. This fear was expressed by an experienced rural history teacher, who thought that compulsion 'will destroy the subject ... learners won't value the subject'. More specifically it will become like Life Orientation. These sentiments were echoed by an experienced private school history teacher who argued that learners would not 'see the importance of it, so I am scared that the same might happen with history. It will end up and just be another subject like LO.' This sentiment was echoed by an experienced township teacher and the two focus groups.

How learners would receive school history as a compulsory subject up to Grade 12 was also foremost in the views of those teachers who opposed the idea. This was succinctly put by a novice history teacher from an urban school: 'not all learners have that desire ... it is not a subject that every learner is excited about.' This was a point of view shared by an experienced teacher from a township, who contended that learners would not support the idea, as they would fail to see the value of it all, and history would, as a result, suffer because 'learners will be forced now to do a subject that they have no interest in ... when you force a learner to do something, we know as teachers they just don't get interested ... I will have to deal now with learners who do not want to be doing history.' To an experienced urban history teacher, 'it is negative forcing all the learners to learn history'. She passionately argued that history should be a subject that is chosen by the learners up to Grade 12, and having it as a compulsory subject will mean infringing 'on their democratic right to make choices.'

Deep concern was also expressed about the human resources necessary to support the idea of making school history compulsory. The result would be, in the view of an experienced urban history teacher, that schools will 'take any person to teach the subject – a person who is not meant to be teaching history, and this will affect the subject and learners' understanding of the subject.' On top of that, as argued by a rural history teacher with more than thirty years experience '... if the implementation occurs and there are not enough history teachers ... this will lead to overloads of learners in a classroom'. This would be the case in the view of a novice history teacher at a township school because 'in history you need to have a lot of resources, time and focus on each learner in the class to prepare them with skills.'

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Having established the views of secondary-school history teachers regarding making history compulsory up to Grade 12, the lens will now be turned to why they held the views they did.

First and foremost, it became clear that the participating history teachers cared deeply about their subject, but in different ways. Those who supported the proposal that history should become compulsory up to Grade 12 saw it as an intervention by the state to vindicate their long-held beliefs that history is as valuable as mathematics and science. As a consequence, the view was that society as a whole, including parents, fellow teachers and learners, would now forcefully come to understand that history is important and has a value. The value of school history as a possible compulsory subject was lauded as being universal and omnipresent because it was viewed as having the ability to bind subjects together in an interdisciplinary manner and also teach learners generic thinking and reasoning, as well as giving them English literacy skills. In their view, compulsory school history also would help learners know their roots, identity, the history of their country, and where they come from. This would mean learning about the ANC and what it has achieved. The history teachers who foregrounded compulsion had a longing for a naïve nationalistic memory of history that all could subscribe to and embrace and that would turn learners into patriots and members of an imagined nation. They had few qualms about the proposed school history becoming overtly political as a continuation of the subject, a blend of political science and constitutional history (Kallaway, 2012). The external political confirmation from on high that history was valuable enough to consider making it compulsory spoke to the professional world of the history teachers, who were

teaching a subject that non-history teachers often viewed as of little worth and as the last resort for learners who could not do mathematics and science. This sentiment was confirmed by a study done by Dube (2018). To these teachers, making history compulsory would raise not only the status of their subject, but also their professional standing as history teachers.

Diametrically opposing views came from teachers who felt that history cannot be everything to everybody and that all that compulsion would achieve was to reduce the subject to the realm of LO, meaning another compulsory subject that could be taught by anyone. Compulsion would, in the view of these history teachers, mean devaluation and a return to the apartheid-era practices, when school history was abused for political gains (Wassermann, 2018). Hence, in the view of history teachers who opposed the proposal of compulsion, it was nothing but an exercise in politics masked as history education, or what Harris (2018) called a continuation of an old debate. In their view, learners would ultimately be forced to learn a certain political history laced with ANC propaganda so as to indoctrinate and pacify them into docile bodies in a manner not dissimilar to what happened under apartheid (Coelho, 2021). What was envisaged was learners who would come to resent the subject because they were forced to study it up to Grade 12.

Where the polar opposite views of all participants views merged was on who will be teaching the subject should it become compulsory. The universal fear was that history could end up being taught by any teacher because of the envisaged shortage of history teachers should the subject become compulsory.

The contrasting views held by history teachers on the possibility of making history compulsory up to Grade 12 revealed two very different epistemological positionalities on why history. Those who opposed the proposal viewed the subject as a self-standing discipline that is analytical in nature and that did not need government enforcement to be valued. In fact, they viewed any such moves as devaluing and mere politicking. The history teachers who held this view were seemingly also more confident in their identities as history teachers and the standing of the subject under CAPS. In epistemological contrast stood those who supported the proposal that history should become compulsory for all learners. To them, this would elevate history teachers and their subject and be an opportunity to shape, in a political manner, learners to be patriotic and to know South African history so as to build the nation. Teachers who held such views were, generally speaking, in agreement with the thinking in the MTT Report.

What was striking was that the participants paid scant attention in their arguments to the value of thinking historically. This is especially striking since

CAPS history foregrounded the idea of historical thinking and related concepts such as the causes, consequences, empathy, change and continuity over time, and the use of historical evidence (Kukard, 2017). In ignoring historical thinking, the history teachers invariably reduced the debate about making history compulsory to issues related to national history as factual content. A possible explanation for this can be found in the work done by Dube (2018), which revealed that history teachers had a limited understanding of what historical thinking entailed in spite of CAPS history foregrounding it. Reasons for this could be that, despite the intended nature of CAPS history, the Grade 12 school-leaving examination blunts historical thinking in favour of memory work. At the same time, CAPS history, in place since 2014, had a limited impact on the epistemological positioning of history for the history teachers who participated in this study. These positionings were shaped powerfully by history curricula and practices preceding CAPS history.

We fully accept that the findings from this small-scale case study from one province cannot be generalized to South Africa as a whole. However, we believe that, by giving history teachers a voice, a gap in the literature regarding the debates over making school history compulsory has been filled. At the same time, a porthole was provided into the divided, polar-opposite views of these teachers, regardless of whether they taught history at urban, rural, township or private schools, who will have to deliver the history curriculum should it become compulsory up to Grade 12. In so doing, issues related to national identity, methodological and educational approaches to school history, the value of the subject, and the political and ideological biases of concerned and interested parties were laid bare. Placed in an international context, the skirmishes around making history compulsory have not reached the level of the history wars in, for example, Australia (Clark and Macintyre, 2003) and England (Evans, 2013). But, with the political and educational processes in South Africa related to school history still in progress, more skirmishes are sure to follow.

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# Identity and Conflicts



TERRY HAYDN

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## The History Teacher's Dilemma

### 'Fundamental British Values' and Telling the Truth About the National Past



Terry Haydn

### Abstract

History education in schools has been going in different directions in various parts of the world. In some countries, increasing prominence has been given to issues of multi-perspectivity, global citizenship and transnational issues in developing young people's understanding of the past. In other countries, there are calls for a return to emphasising the transmission of substantive historical knowledge of the national past and a positive rendering of the national story. Over the past decade, England has followed the latter path. In 2014, the Department for Education stipulated that all teachers and schools must promote 'fundamental British values', defined as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual understanding of those with differing beliefs, and tolerance. In 2017, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools stated that 'pupils should learn how we became the country we are today and how our values make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness'. This chapter considers some of the implications of these developments for those involved in history education. Although the paper focuses predominantly on the British context, the issues are relevant to history educators in many other countries, given the high public profile of debates on the form, content and purposes of school history in many countries today.

## 1. Introduction

The stimulus for this chapter was a paper presented at the 2019 HEIRNET Conference in Vienna, at which Adele Nye and Jennifer Clarke (2019) talked about the challenges of teaching the history of migration in Australia, given the highly controversial nature of recent government policies in this area. They talked about the difficulties posed by dealing with such policies without any acknowledgement of the moral and ethical dimensions to teaching and discussing the issues involved and what they called ‘the blurred line between teaching and activism’.

Australia is not the only country to find that difficult and controversial aspects of its national past have ‘political’ dimensions. This raises the question of how history teachers should handle ‘difficult history’ that has the potential to paint a critical or questioning picture of the actions of current or previous government administrations and the reputation and record of the national past. One example of this is how history teachers and history educators in England should handle such historical legacies.

Although this chapter focuses predominantly on recent developments in England, this is a problem that affects history teachers in many countries. As Cohen (2022: 566) points out in a chapter entitled ‘Truth-telling versus Patriotism’, ‘there is scarcely a nation that has not to some degree massaged accounts of its history’. He provides numerous examples to demonstrate that it is a mistake to think that political pressures on school and public history exist only in autocracies and authoritarian regimes.

## 2. Context: recent changes and developments in history education policy in England

This issue or problem has been given added salience in England, given recent changes in education policy, and in society more generally. For many years, England had a tradition of granting very high levels of autonomy to schools and teachers over the school curriculum (a National Curriculum was only introduced in 1991). This was sometimes referred to as ‘the secret garden of the curriculum’ (Eccles 1962, quoted in James 2018), the idea that, as in medicine and law, such matters were best left to the professionals involved, without government interference. Professor Mary James, one of three lead members of the review of the National Curriculum in England commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, in 2009, charts the moves away from this autonomy:

*For the whole of the 1970s I taught in secondary schools. (I am that old!) At that time there was no national curriculum (NC), so teachers usually decided what to teach as well as how to teach'. (This corresponds to my own experience of teaching in English secondary schools in the 1970s – author.) Politicians of all stripes were increasingly uncomfortable with what they regarded as curriculum capture by the teaching profession and universities – what became known as the 'educational establishment'. In a democracy it seemed right that all stakeholders, including employers, parents, the general public and their elected representatives, should have a say. As early as 1962, David Eccles, then the Conservative secretary of state (SoS) for education, pledged to open up the 'secret garden of the curriculum'. This move was given a significant boost by the Labour prime minister, James Callaghan, who in 1976 initiated a 'great debate' on the school curriculum. But it was Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher and her Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, who really changed things through the Education Reform Act of 1988. (James 2018: 1)*

The inception of the National Curriculum in 1991 was the start of further centralization and government direction of the school curriculum (Fisher, 2008; Shah, 2018). One development which had a particularly important impact on history education in England was the government directive that 'all schools and teachers of all subjects have a responsibility to promote 'fundamental British values', defined as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect for those with different faiths and beliefs, and tolerance (Department for Education, 2014). This was a radical departure from previous statements on values regarding the school curriculum, which had been phrased in primarily human rather than national terms (Department for Children, Families and Schools, 2007).

Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (an important and influential figure in the English education system), made it clear that the promotion of 'fundamental British values' would be an important element of the school inspection system, and that it would not be enough to just 'put up a few Union Jack flags and pictures of the Queen'. The effectiveness and energy which schools put into promoting these 'national' values would be an important part of grading schools on their delivery of the National Curriculum. Spielman stated that 'pupils should learn how we became the country we are today and how our values make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness' (Spielman, 2017). Given that one of the important precepts of history as a discipline is that historians (and history educators) are supposed to 'tell the truth' about the past (or as accurate a truth as can be ascertained from the evidence available), this poses problems for history teachers. An examination of the historical record in

this field, from treatment of the Jews, Huguenots, Irish, Caribbean and, more recently, Eastern European migrants, reveals overwhelming evidence that there have always been large numbers of people in Britain, and some government administrations, that have been hostile to incomers and that Britain has *not* always been ‘a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness’ (see amongst many other examples, Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019; Gentleman, 2019; Gildea, 2019; Mehta, 2019; Olusoga, 2017; Phillips and Phillips, 2009).

One recent development which impacts on history teachers in schools and universities, is the increasingly strident and concerted attempts to alarm voters about the political neutrality of teachers, and to suggest that many history teachers are attempting to indoctrinate their pupils with left-wing and unpatriotic views. As Jonathan Mountstevens (2022) points out, ‘Accusations of anti-patriotism and threats of legal action have worrying implications for teachers of history’:

*When is it wrong to carry out historical research? According to the Common Sense Group of Conservative MPs, it is when it reveals material that questions the heroic status of ‘Britain’s greatest sons’, such as Winston Churchill. This is one of the charges laid in a letter to the Daily Telegraph, criticising a recent National Trust report into its properties’ connections with colonialism and slavery.*

In 2018, the Department for Education issued a public warning to teachers about ‘expressing political views’ (Adams, 2018), and in 2020 the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, ‘stressed the need for teachers to be politically neutral in the classroom’ (quoted in Weale, 2020). In February 2022, the government issued a government circular on ‘Political impartiality in schools’ (Department for Education, 2022a) and a separate pamphlet, ‘What you need to know about political impartiality in schools’ (Department for Education, 2022b). Minister for Equalities Kemi Badenoch has also praised the government’s focus on ‘improving impartiality in schools’ (Dathan, 2022), suggesting that this is a problem area and at least obliquely questioning the integrity of teachers. The right-wing press has also reported on ‘new safeguards in recent weeks designed to ensure that schools remain politically neutral’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 March 2022).

Such warnings are not limited to the teaching of history in schools; teaching and research at universities is also being called into question. In 2021, Williamson claimed that ‘some universities are pursuing a divisive agenda involving cancelling national heroes ... and politicizing their curricula’. The then Minister



for Culture, Oliver Dowden, publicly criticised the National Trust for some of its research and educational activities, which highlighted the role of slavery in providing much of the funding for many of Britain's stately homes and for pointing out that Winston Churchill was prime minister at the time of the Bengal famine 1943 (see Hargrave 2021 for a fuller explanation of these points). In a speech in February 2022 to the (right-wing) Heritage Foundation, Dowden warned of the dangers left-wing 'wokism' in education posed to western civilisation (see <https://www.conservatives.com/news/2022/standing-up-for-our-values> for the full text of his speech).

It is important to point out that the requirement for teachers not to promote 'partisan political views in the teaching of any subject' is enshrined in Section 406 of the Education Act of 1996. This requirement is clearly spelled out and emphasised in all pre-service history education courses of training, and there have been no recorded cases of teachers breaching this requirement in recent years. There is at least the inference in these pronouncements that parents *ought to be worried* about politically partisan history teachers, and some commentators have seen these pronouncements as a deliberate attempt by right-wing politicians and newspapers to promote an electorally popular 'culture war' to divert voters' attention from government difficulties and problems (see, for example, Hazell, 2022; Wagner, 2022). Although right-wing politicians probably genuinely dislike Winston Churchill's historical legacy being questioned or examined in schools, there is also perhaps the calculation that the majority of voters won't like it either, and that 'defending' Churchill will be electorally popular. (In a BBC programme to find out who viewers thought was the greatest ever Briton, Churchill came top.) A recent *Daily Mail* commentary suggested that 'Tackling the woke will be a ballot box winner, Prime Minister' (*Daily Mail*, 26 March 2022). *Byline Times* (2022), a more radical publication (albeit with a much smaller readership than *the Daily Mail*), ran a series of articles focusing on what they termed 'the weaponisation of Britain's past as a key tool in a dark project of division and distraction' (see *Byline Times*, 2022).

In recent years, the teaching of the British Empire in schools has been one of the most prominent 'fronts' in the culture wars. In March 2022, several government ministers spoke or wrote about the need for pupils to learn about the benefits of being part of the British Empire (see Dathan, 2022; Penna, 2022), with Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch describing this as part of the plan 'to overhaul the way history is taught in schools' (quoted in Dathan, 2022). Leaving aside the issue of whether it is historically rigorous to assume that there are two valid sides to every historical argument, there is at least the inference here that,

as things stand, pupils are only told about the negative aspects of empire. This is in spite of the fact that research on the way the history of the British Empire is taught in English schools suggests that many history departments in England have as their main focus of enquiry on this topic the question of whether the benefits of empire outweighed its disadvantages for those who were part of the empire (Haydn, 2019). During the same period, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss weighed into the debate about school history to call for ‘the constant self-questioning of Britain’s history to cease ...’ and that the UK’s response to the crisis in Ukraine should mean ‘a restoration of pride in Britain’s values’ (quoted in Daly, 2022). Badenoch’s statement that ‘History isn’t about trying to enforce a particular narrative or view: it’s about telling the truth, and that the design of a new model history curriculum would be left to a panel of experts’ (quoted in Dathan, 2022) ought to be reassuring. However, given the reality that the government would choose which experts were to be called upon to write the new history curriculum, this is a disingenuous statement. The erosion of non-partisan personnel in quasi-autonomous government organizations (such as oversight of the BBC, the school inspections agency, cultural trusts and the media) is not a new phenomenon, but the scale and pace of shamelessness in cherry-picking ‘friends (and even members) of the governing party’ has accelerated in recent years and has given rise to the term ‘cronyism’ (for an example, see Savage and Brooks, 2022).

Another recent development which has implications for the teaching of history in schools is the decline in respect for truth in what has been termed ‘the post-truth era’ (D’Ancona, 2017; Katutani, 2018; Mcintyre, 2018). In England, it has now become quite normal and routine for government ministers to give false and misleading statements to both parliament and the public (Osborne, 2021). Also, the past decade has seen radical changes in the ways in which young people gain access to information about the past, given the rise and amplification effects of social media. The ‘weaponization of history’ is not a new phenomenon. As Eric Hobsbawm noted in 2002, ‘History is being invented in vast quantities ... the world is today full of people inventing histories and lying about history.’ However, as Simon Schama (2020) notes, ‘What we have which has never happened before is the robust existence of a flourishing fantasy world. A world of systematically disseminated untruths and the technology to make those fantasies, conspiracies and untruths instantly, massively and widely available through the internet.’

The recent public debates about Brexit furnish numerous examples of what I have called ‘bad history’, that is to say, history which has been distorted and ma-

nipulated for present-day purposes in an unethical way (see Haydn, 2017, 2021 for a more detailed development of this term). This includes the promulgation in the UK popular press of the idea that it was ‘Britain Alone’ that defeated Hitler in World War II. MP Daniel Kawczynski’s insistence that the UK received no money from Marshall Aid after World War II and that all the money went to ‘Europe’ (BBC, 2019), alongside his refusal to back down on this claim, is a good example of ‘doubling down’ on a lie about the past. Numerous invocations of ‘The Blitz Spirit’, the heroic ‘victory’ at Dunkirk, the fetishization of the Union Jack and the old, pre-EU blue British passport, and newspaper headlines continually harking back to beating Germany in World Wars I and II (as well as in 1966) – all these are examples of the past being ‘shaped’ for present-day purposes.

### 3. The history teacher’s dilemma

How should history teachers and history educators respond in a principled and intelligent way to these developments? How should they handle situations where they are instructed to teach history in a way that goes against ‘the historical record’, and asked to teach things that are not true? As the study of the past inevitably and inextricably involves political issues, it is impossible for history teachers to avoid becoming involved with political aspects of the past. As Professor of Public Sociology Michael Burawoy (2021) has argued, professionals, including historians and history educators, are part of the world they live in – they are not ‘outside society’, nor are they detached and disinterested observers. They are entitled to have a concern for the health and well-being of the liberal democracies they are part of – ‘they have skin in the game’ (Taleb, 2019). As well as their concern for ‘the good society’ and ‘the common good’, they have a professional responsibility and commitment to adhere to the principles and moral postulates of their discipline. How are they to act when they encounter instances of history being traduced and distorted, lies being told about it, not in a naïve or ignorant way, but in a clever, pernicious and calculated way, in order (for instance) to foster hatred and fear of outsider groups, or as a form of ‘dead-cattling’ or gaslighting; to deliberately divert attention from issues that are problematic for unscrupulous politicians and the rich and powerful who control much of the print media and social media platforms, for whom ‘respect for truth’ is less high in their order of priorities. The responsibilities of the history teacher in addressing the ‘bad history’ emanating from fascist hate sites, clickbait conspiracy theories, tabloid newspapers and the botfarms of authoritarian governments are fairly clear cut, but perhaps less so when questionable history comes from dem-

ocratically elected politicians, especially in a climate where aspersions are being cast on the integrity and professionalism of history teachers.

#### 4. Principled and practical responses to ‘the history teacher’s dilemma’

Aldrich (2003) has argued that an important part of the duties of the historian, and those involved with the discipline of history, is to the truth, which might be defined as the ethical importance of making an honest attempt to provide the most accurate explanation of the past possible from the evidence available. Many other eminent historians have also emphasised the centrality of truth (and the importance of scholarship) to the discipline of history (amongst others, Appleby *et al.*, 1994; Evans, 1997; Tosh, 2007). In the words of Evans, ‘What is history? It’s not simply gathering facts about the past, it’s about searching for truth in them’ (Evans, 2003). This ‘duty to truth’ clearly ought to extend to those imparting and teaching history to young people.

A principled stand which history teachers can take to ensure that they teach history in a way that is congruent with the precepts of history as a discipline is always to keep in mind (and get across to pupils) the question, ‘What does the historical record say about this element of the past?’ This is also a matter of directing learners to ‘respectable’ history and of explaining to pupils what makes it ‘good history’. This places a responsibility on the history teacher to keep abreast of developments in the historiography of the topics they are teaching. An invaluable resource for history teachers in England is the Historical Association’s regular feature in its journal *Teaching History*: ‘What historians have been arguing about: helping history teachers update their subject knowledge’ (<https://www.history.org.uk/publications/module/8697/teaching-history-regular-features/9163/what-historians-have-been-arguing-about>). This also helps teachers to get pupils past the ‘naïve realism’ approach to the idea of truth in history: the belief that there is one definitive, ‘correct’ version of what happened in the past, and towards the understanding that it is quite normal for even respectable historians to have differing views about past events. Another unfortunate element of the current National Curriculum for history in England is the stipulation that all pupils ‘will know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day’ (Department for Education, 2013: 1). The idea that there is just one, single coherent narrative that can be woven from the histories of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales over a period of over two thousand years, which would be accepted as authorita-

tive by all academic historians, is naïve, and would lead to pupils leaving school not understanding what history is: a messy and contested business. As Lee and Ashby (2000: 200) point out, the attempt to impose a single master narrative on the nation's past or any other aspect of history does not equip pupils to deal with the fact that there are differing accounts of the past. 'Many stories are told, and they may contradict, compete with or complement one another, but this means that students should be equipped to deal with such relationships, not that any old story will do ... Students who understand sources as information are helpless when confronted by contradictory sources.'

Given the developments spelled out earlier in this chapter, particularly the extent to which much of the history which young people encounter in the tabloid press and on social media platforms is distorted and manipulated by powerful, well-resourced and influential groups, it is important that school history adapts to these challenges, rather than simply 'carrying on as before' as if nothing has changed. As it is not possible to shield young people from 'bad history', it is important to address explicitly the reasons why unethical actors sometimes knowingly misrepresent aspects of the past for present-day purposes, and to show them examples of 'corrupt' history, explaining to them how and why it is created, and the techniques and sophistries that are used to make it persuasive. This means drawing on all the forms of history that are in the public domain, and not *just* making use of the textbook and the work of academic historians. This is not to argue that students do not need a solid grounding of substantive historical knowledge, but young people also need to understand 'what is going on' with the use and deployment of history in relation to current issues and problems – what games are being played with it?

Given the high proportion of information about the past which young people access via social media sources which are unmediated by history teachers, history academics or history textbooks and monographs, it is essential that some time is spent developing the digital and information literacy of young people (or to use Wineburg's term (2018) 'civic literacy'). A recent Office of Communications report (a regulatory body supervising the communications industry) found that 30% of UK adults who go online (approximately 14.5 million people) 'are unsure about, or don't even consider, the truthfulness of online information. A further 6% – around one in every twenty internet users – believe everything they see online' (Ofcom, 2022: 1). The work of Breakstone et al. suggests that this is not a problem limited to England. (For an executive summary of the research, which details the scale of 'digital illiteracy' in the US, see <https://purl.stanford.edu/gf151tb4868>. If we want a society where citizens are discerning consumers

and users of history, young people need to understand the meaning of ‘digital concepts’ such as astroturfing, gaslighting, botfarms, clickbait, amplification and ‘backfire effect’, and political concepts such as ‘dog-whistle politics’, ‘outsider groups’, ‘playing the race card’, ‘the manufacture of consent’, ‘exceptionalism’, ‘populism’ and ‘demagogue’. If history teachers don’t address these issues, they will be sending students out into a treacherous world of misinformation hopelessly ill-equipped to make intelligent and well-informed judgements on the reliability of information about both the past and the present.

Developing students’ digital literacy is a necessary but not sufficient step towards cultivating discerning and intelligent citizens. Given the apparent decline in respect for truth which has arisen over the past decade and the fact that many adults do not regard lack of truthfulness as a major or decisive factor in casting their votes in elections (Horsthemke, 2019; Osborne, 2021), it is also important to educate students about the importance of truth as a civic virtue. In Aristotelian terms, this has been described as ‘Practical wisdom or the capacity or predisposition to act truthfully and with reason in matters of deliberation, thus with a strong ethical component’ (Aristotle, quoted in Oancea and Furlong, 2007). Students should be made aware of the fact that unprincipled and unethical manipulation of the past often has very bad consequences, from the ‘stab in the back’ legend which assisted Hitler’s rise to power to the more recent examples of ‘pseudo-history’ cited by Niall Ferguson, namely the violent break-up of Yugoslavia and the massacres perpetrated by believers of the ‘Great Replacement’ myth (Ferguson, 2019). It is also helpful to develop pupils’ understanding of the factors which can militate against telling a completely honest story about the national past – the desire to tell a ‘feelgood’ story, or a ‘heroes and villains’ story, or a sensationalized story that will draw attention and ‘sell copy’. And for politicians, the desire to tell a positive and celebratory story about the national past and its heroes in order to promote patriotism in the belief that it will promote social cohesion, sentiments exemplified in a speech given by former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove in 2009:

*There is no better way of building a modern, inclusive patriotism than by teaching all British citizens to take pride in this country’s historic achievements. Which is why the next Conservative Government will ensure the curriculum teaches the proper narrative of British History – so that every Briton can take pride in this nation.*

In the British context, nowhere is that more apparent than in current controversies about how history teachers should teach children about Winston Churchill.

There have been numerous articles in the right-wing press and statements from Conservative politicians unhappy about both public demonstrations against Churchill's statue, and about the ways in which pupils learn about Churchill in school, with some schools including negative aspects of Churchill's beliefs and policies (see, for example, *Daily Mail*, 10 September 2020, 15 January 2022). Hazell (2022) suggests that 'teachers will be told to think twice about contesting the legacies of historical figures such as Sir Winston Churchill, and not to advocate for groups like *Black lives matter* under new government rules aiming at clamping down on "woke" classrooms.' The Department for Education guidance (Department for Education, 2022b) states that 'It may be advisable to focus on teaching about what these figures are most renowned for and factual information about them if teachers think pupils may not be able to understand the contested nature of more complex analyses of their lives, beliefs and actions.' It could be argued that part of the aims of history education are to move pupils past simplistic readings of the past and towards more complex understandings, away from the idea that famous people in the past were either entirely good or entirely bad, and that the only history that matters is the study of great men and major political events. In the words of Grever and Nieuwenhuys (2020: 489), 'At the same time, sociocultural and civic aspects are included as well, such as an ethical dimension and building nuanced viewpoints with regard to societal challenges, underpinned with historical arguments.'

## 5. Conclusions

It is not possible to teach history in a meaningful way without becoming embroiled in political controversies. These controversies are particularly keenly contested when they relate to accounts of the nation's past. As the historian Margaret Macmillan points out: 'It can be dangerous to question the stories people tell themselves because so much of our identity is both shaped by and bound up with our history. That is why dealing with the past, in deciding which version we want, or on what we want to forget, can become so politically charged' (Macmillan 2009: 49).

Politicians are in a difficult position when making pronouncements about how history should be taught in schools. At one level, they are aware that you are supposed to tell an honest and accurate story about the past, based on the available evidence, hence the Foreign Secretary's acknowledgement that 'our history, *warts and all* (my italics), makes us what we are today' (Truss, 2022). On the other hand, they are keen that pupils should be presented with a history of

the national past which imbues citizens with a sense of pride in being British, with elements of national exceptionalism – ‘We live in a great country, a great democracy, and we should be proud of it’ (ibid.). The move towards promoting the idea of ‘fundamental British values’ as a central tenet of the school curriculum is a part of this agenda, although the idea that things like democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for those with different faiths and beliefs and tolerance are in some way particularly associated with Britain is a tendentious one. The public pronouncements of a range of British politicians about the way that British history is taught in schools reflects these tensions. There is discomfort and unease about, for example, the National Trust’s research showing the role that slavery played in the building of many of Britain’s stately homes, Admiral Nelson’s involvement in the slave trade, Churchill’s role in the Bengal Famine and racist statements made by Churchill, and critical questioning of the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. There has also been political unease over linking the past to present-day concerns and issues. The original National Curriculum introduced in 1991 (Department for Education and Science, 1991) contained ‘the 20-year rule’, which stipulated that the coverage of the national past should ‘end’ twenty years before the present day, while Michael Gove’s draft National Curriculum of February 2012 wanted coverage of history to end at the fall of the Berlin Wall and the accession to power of Margaret Thatcher (see Haydn, 2012 for further development of this point). As Carmel Gallagher wryly noted in 2002, ‘There are those who feel comfortable about teaching history, as long as it remains firmly about the past.’

The contortions of accommodating these beliefs have led several government ministers to suggest that pupils are being fed a diet of anti-patriotic history by left-leaning history teachers and that therefore moves to strengthen guidance on political impartiality are required. There is very little evidence to support this accusation. This is not to suggest that there have never been *any* teachers who have abused their privileged position in this way, but (as with voter fraud) very little evidence has been put forward to substantiate this charge. In the view of Hazell, education correspondent for *inews*, ‘There have indeed been cases where overzealous teachers have foisted their convictions onto students in a way that is inappropriate. But the vast majority of the profession take their duty to be politically impartial very seriously and keep their own views outside of the classroom (Hazell, 2022).

In relation to the Education Secretary’s plea that history teachers should give pupils a balanced view of the history of the British Empire, Kim Wagner, Professor of Global and Imperial History at Queen Mary University London,



questioned the sincerity of Zahavi's statement, arguing that it was 'part of the culture wars ineptly waged by the current British government', and also questioning the intellectual coherence of such an approach:

*While some people might prefer simplistic narratives according to which the past can be neatly arranged, according to whether it is deemed to be 'good' or 'bad', which then inevitably leads to an equally reductive attempt at tallying the balance sheet, that is simply not the way that history or the historian works. We do not fault, say, Richard Evans for focusing only on the bad things that the Nazis did, or expect him to suddenly pivot to a volume on the positives – all for the sake of balance. The study of the past is not about assigning blame or assigning guilt, and to study slavery and colonial violence, for instance, is no more political than studying colonial bureaucracy and the railways. The call 'to teach both sides' on the other hand, is explicitly intended to preserve a history of British exceptionalism and to minimise the discomfort that some experience, when faced with the indisputable facts of western imperialism. It should not be mistaken for a serious engagement with the past and it will certainly not produce any genuine historical insights. (Wagner, 2022)*

The attempt by British politicians of both main parties to tell a positive and celebratory story about the national past, to downplay or excise its less edifying moments, and to present a simplified and 'cleansed' picture of the complex personalities who have influenced its path may be well intentioned, but they are misguided. Shlaim (2014) warns of the dangers of attempting to impose 'patriotic history' on the nation:

*Patriotic history is by definition partial and partisan history. It is driven not by an objective search for truth but by a political agenda, and most commonly by the desire to rally all segments of society behind the ruling party and to present a positive image of the nation to the outside world ... it is the duty of the historian to hold a mirror to society, to convey uncomfortable home truths, and to speak truth to power.*

The same principles apply to the teaching of history in schools. History teachers should not be teaching students things that are not true, that are not honest attempts to tell as accurate a picture as possible of the national past (or whatever else they are teaching about). Part of the aim of school history should be to get students beyond what Michael Howard, the eminent British military historian, termed 'nursery history' (quoted in Shlaim, 2014).

The 2020 Ipsos Veracity index, which records levels of public trust in professions in the UK, would seem to lend some support Hazell's view that most teachers try to do their best to be politically impartial in their teaching, with 85 % of those surveyed reporting that they trusted teachers to be truthful. This compares with a figure of 16 % for government ministers and 23 % for journalists (Ipsos, 2020). It is better that young people get a version of the national past that draws its authority from the professional expertise and integrity of historians, history educators and history teachers rather than from dubious social media sites, politically partisan cable TV programmes, the tabloid press or politicians keen to use school history to support their political designs.

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## History Teaching, History Education and the Manipulation of History for Identity Construction in Cameroon<sup>1</sup>



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### Abstract

Although the teaching of history has been carried out in Cameroon from primary schools to colleges since the coming of European colonialism, history education has remained an unexplored area of research. Since its introduction, history teaching and learning have been based on government programmes, which also prescribe the subject's content, purpose and teaching methodology. Though aimed at developing patriotic goals and enhancing the intellectual and professional formation of learners, visible incongruities have arisen because the state

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1 We are extremely grateful to all our colleagues and secondary-school teachers, educational inspectors and other senior officials in the Ministry of Secondary Education (too many to be named here) who collaborated and cooperated with us in many ways during our research for the writing of this paper. We are also grateful to Professor John Nkemnji of the Faculty of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville U.S.A. for the sources and insights he put at our disposal. Above all, we thank the University of Teacher Education in Lucerne, Switzerland, for sponsoring our participation in the conferences that are ending with this contribution. Our special thanks go to the project's initiators: Prof. Dr. Peter Gautschi, Prof. Dr. Markus Furrer and Prof. Dr. Nadine Fink, and all conference panellists and collaborators.

authorities manipulate the presence of history on the curriculum for purposes of identity construction.

Using some practical examples, this contribution shows how state power and authority are used to influence the teaching and learning of Cameroonian history for the purposes of promoting narratives about identity construction and nation-building. Historical narratives, textbooks and teaching methodologies, especially on political issues, become flawed, as teachers and learners at various levels are unable to contribute meaningfully to articulations concerning important issues of national life.

## 1. Introduction

History as a discipline has been a part of the school curriculum in Cameroon since the introduction of formal western-style education during the period of colonial implantation in the early twentieth century. From the start, history was taught at all levels alongside some other subjects, such as arithmetic, geography, languages (European especially), rural science and religious knowledge. Responsibility for drawing up the curriculum lay initially with the German colonial government based in Berlin, and later, after the First World War, in London and Nigeria for the British Cameroons and in Paris for the French Cameroons. The specific content of each discipline was intentionally devised to meet the demands of a colonial education and to justify and enhance the relevance of the colonial presence in the area. History teaching was carried out by teachers who had acquired some basic training at the hands of initially, the colonial educators and later those who had undergone some training in the task of teaching at various levels of the educational ladder. The institutions for training these teachers and the programmes of study were set up by the administrations of the day, beginning with the colonial administrations prior to independence and later the ministries responsible for education in the period since independence (Fonkeng, 2007).

Colonial education was designed to enable the colonialists to achieve the aims of the 'civilizing mission' in general, but also and more importantly to prepare Africans to serve in the colonial work force and to propagate the expansion of European culture (*ibid.*: 39). In the specific case of history, its teaching was the avenue for the colonial authorities to seek to establish and strengthen attitudes of attachment and devotion to the colonial fatherland. In the case of Cameroon, this concerned initially Germany, and later Britain and France.

In the mindset of colonial educators, history was perceived in the very simple sense to be the study of the past with a view to understanding the present



to prepare for the future. Teaching history was considered to be important in the life of any colonial state (and eventually of the countries of today) because it provided knowledge about the country's past, its difficulties, its challenges, its accomplishments and its perspectives for the future. History studies spoke to the heart of nationalism and patriotism and provided the avenue through which to teach and reinforce concepts that instrumentalized the idea of the nation. It should be mentioned that ideas about nationalism which were taught to colonized peoples were circumscribed in colonialism. In other words, the talk of nationalism referred to attitudes to knowing about the German, British or French nations, as the case may be. The nations in question were not the artificial constructions that emanated from the colonial enterprise. They referred to the European nations from whence came the colonialists because many early Europeans in Africa held the now antiquated view that Africa had no history before the coming of Europeans. Simply put, no nations in the form of what exists today existed in Africa before colonial rule.<sup>2</sup>

The history that was taught in schools was therefore essentially the history of foreign peoples, rulers, lands and countries. It was from foreign, mostly European countries that historical examples were drawn and used to illustrate history lessons in Africa. This explains why the emphasis was on western civilizations, western statesmen, empire builders and more. Colonizing forces viewed such thematic orientations as containing models suitable for serving the stimulation of ideas about development and identity formation in Africa. In German Kamerun, for example, topics for history studies included the history of Germany after reunification in 1870. Later, in the British Cameroons, for example, topics for history instruction were mostly selected to extol the virtues of the clairvoyant leadership of British politicians, as well as the might and power of the British Empire. In the French Cameroons, the French Revolution and the leadership of Napoleon or the French monarchy before him informed historical studies. Colonially composed songs made reference to how European civilization had

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2 The country called Cameroon today was colonized by the Germans within the context of imperialism and colonialism. First known as Kamerun, the Germans lost the territory at the end of the First World War. Thereafter the territory passed under the control of Britain and France as mandated territories of the League of Nations and later as Trusteeship territories of the United Nations. The Cameroons under French administration first gained independence in 1961 and became the Republic of Cameroon. In 1961 the British Cameroons obtained independence by joining the Republic of Cameroon to become the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Some of the major challenges to Cameroonian nationhood are linked to the dual heritage on which the country is built.

come to save Africans from their own savagery. The meaning and relevance of history and the reasons for the discipline being taught remained encapsulated in this Eurocentric mould for a long time.<sup>3</sup>

Perceptible efforts to ‘de-europeanize’ and decolonize African history coincided with the period of political decolonization. Questioning attitudes towards the aims and content of historical studies developed both from within Africa and interestingly (though not surprisingly) from Europe and the United States. The language of decolonization provided a significant impetus toward the emergence of new insights, attitudes and perspectives in African historical studies. As a result, historical topics related to the development and strengthening of the state and the inculcation of attitudes of attachment to it were gradually but steadily re-directed to the new nations which eventually became new countries. For African countries, then – and as has been articulated in other parts of the world – the purpose of teaching history, namely, to help in the construction of colonial identities, began to be redirected towards the building of new identities in the post-independence period (Otto, 2018; Valentim and Miguel, 2018).

## 2. Definition of some useful terms

### History and historical knowledge

Historians agree that there are many definitions of history, even if all of them have as a common element the study of the past. ‘History was everything that had occurred from the beginning of time through the last elapsed instant’ (Gray, 1964: 2). The subject matter of history was therefore so vast and included what people thought, said, did or did not do. As the discipline evolved it developed a methodology of its own, including about how and why history was studied.

What happened in the past is known through a methodical investigation which uses evidence from that past. Professor Barraclough (Barraclough, 1975) presented history as the reconstruction of the past using fragmentary evidence, or in other words sources. E.H. Carr argued that the historian ‘can only write history through a careful, critical and analytical use of evidence’ (Carr, 1961: 24). Thus, history is not only about affirmations and the accumulation of hard facts,

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3 Although now obsolete, it is worth remembering that, according to this imperial historiography, Africa had no history, and therefore the Africans were a people without history. The image of Africa was that of the fabled ‘dark continent’. ... The colonial presence in Africa was therefore justified, among other things, by its ability to place Africa in the ‘path of history’.

it is also 'a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his or her facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past' (Were, 1979: 114–127). History is about the human being in all the domains which affect or impact on his or her existence and well-being.

History and historical knowledge must therefore be based on facts and verifiable evidence which have been studied and critically analysed using a clearly defined methodology. As a scientific discipline, history would have no place if it did not contribute towards understanding and dealing with the issues that plague human society. However, facts are always facts, but although they may live 'forever', they can be corrupted during their collection, interpretation, analysis and use because of human interests. For example, it is known that many African nations today are colonial constructs which, through their very creation, contain a diversity of peoples, cultures and histories. Attempts to disregard, deform, falsify or obliterate some of the facts and realities which had existed and were an inevitable ingredient in the construction of the colonial edifice are a misrepresentation of history. At once it becomes obvious that the past cannot be seen, understood or appreciated in narrow perspectives. That is why the teaching of the history of a country, of one's own country for that matter, can be very interesting and revealing but also challenging. It is interesting and revealing or enriching because it establishes the hard facts about the socio-economic and political constructions on which the present has been built. It is challenging because of the need to understand, appreciate and reconcile different viewpoints and approaches in the way people live and perceive the past (Fink, Furrer, Gautschi, 2020). Today it is widely accepted by historians that history must not be limited to the past alone. History is certainly about the past, but not only. In many ways it uses its knowledge about the past to provide meaningful, constructive and insightful perceptions into the variety of problems that affect society today, that continue to affect the present and that are likely to affect the future in various ways.

### **History and identity construction**

We do not pretend to offer any ground-breaking insights into the connection between history and identity construction because a lot has been written on the topic.<sup>4</sup> In fact, and as implied earlier, it may be said that history finds its place as a subject of study because of its relevance for building and understanding humankind and society and by so doing enhancing the understanding of identity,

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4 Our discussion of history and identity construction is heavily influenced by Mario Carretero, María Rodríguez-Moneo and Nikel Asensio, *History Education and the Construction of National Identity*, (2012) especially the first chapter.

since history helps foster a sense of belonging (Peck, 2018). Through history, one learns how past societies were built, how they functioned and how they have changed through time. History teaching in schools is built on narratives ‘about how we became what we are now’ (Rosa, 2010: 63). As Barton puts it, ‘the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century was linked to the creation of historical narratives that explained and justified emerging nation states’ (Barton, 2010: 93). Thus it is not easy to think of a nation without a history because ‘history justifies the very existence of a nation’ (ibid.). Yet although the relationship between history and the cementing of national consciousness and identity have been so well established in the past, some critical perspectives have since emerged that cannot be ignored. This is because there are new and changing ideas that question and open greater and more profound discussions about the way any country or nation is built and should think of itself. There are many varied and illuminating thematic discussions on this question (Metzger and Harris, 2018).

In the early days of colonialism, ideas about national identity were created and artificially grafted on to understandable contextual definitions and explanations, even if they were anchored on wrong premises. For example, Africans were taught to identify themselves with European nations and the identity thus procured, but there was no doubt that the backgrounds from which they came, whether cultural, ethnic, political, or religious, were important and could not be done away with. In fact, suppressed evidence about identity did not kill certain in-built or acquired feelings which students knew and brought with them from their homes. The discussion about identity construction and the goals of history education (cf. Lopez and Carretero, 2012: 139–150) provide one occasion when an attempt is made to deal with the way the teaching of history should address identity issues. It is difficult to teach identity issues focused only on a particular identity as such, even if that is the usual way history had dealt with the question in the past. It should be remembered that there are other identities that students have, which they bring with them into the classroom, identities that may be framed in religious, ethnic or other cultural realities (Wagner, Kello, Sakki, 2018). To acknowledge that fact can be very instructive and intellectually rewarding. It can facilitate the understanding of any attitudes which may be manifested through outward signs of resistance, civil disobedience, uprisings or outright rebellion such as those that have prevailed in Anglophone Cameroon since late 2016.<sup>5</sup>

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5 The Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon are generally referred to as the Anglophone regions of the country, a direct reference to the heritage of their colonial history

In Cameroon today, there are many overlapping and sometimes seemingly mutually exclusive layers or tiers of identity. The result is that constructing a national identity for the country is not an easy process (Fru and Wassermann, 2020: 57–76). It is to be remembered that, of all the identities which pre-existed the coming of colonialism, it is curiously the legacy of colonialism that frames people's perceptions of themselves after many years of independence. Why is this so? It is because the government-adopted approach to the construction of the nation and of identity appears to be very politically inspired, and for understandable reasons. For one thing, it is a very major, necessary and important goal to forge a new national identity as much as possible, one which is Cameroonian, though built on the ashes of colonialism. In so doing, the approach of the public authorities is perceived as insensitive to those other pre-existing identity signposts which the pupils introduce into their schools. The result is that identity construction initiatives are mistaken for the attainment of an objective by force. This underscores the point that certain historical narratives and positions which relate to the political history of the country are most susceptible to provoking and unleashing visible antagonisms, thus explaining in part the current instability in the two English-speaking regions of the country. Teachers and children get caught up in the *melée*, with outcomes that are destructive of the fabric of the country.

### History education

In many countries, history education is a rapidly growing field of research. Its spread is seen as the result of a growing interest in the way history and its teaching can be rendered more useful and relevant for humanity and society. Generally, education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs and habits for purposes of personal and/or community development. Being educated will include the acquisition of critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity skills (Metzger and Harris; 2018). From a historical perspective, we share the position that history education is about how history students can become agents of change through their use of

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under Britain. Made up of two of the ten regions of the country (with about 20% of the population), these Anglophone regions, as they are popularly known (hitherto known as the British Southern Cameroons) obtained independence in 1961 by joining the already independent Republic of Cameroon to become the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Despite all other pre-existing identities that were characteristic of the former British Cameroons, the colonial heritage of being Anglophone has provided and remained the bedrock of their nationalism.

historical knowledge. As the world grows into an increasingly inter-connected global community, there is an increasing need to render history more globally useful, that is, capable of playing a role in the resolution of the myriad problems that society faces. History education emerges as the ultimate implication of history when it comes to meaningfully and purposefully grappling with the problems of an ever-changing modern society.

The place of history as a major discipline through which concepts such as nationalism and patriotism can be dealt with is increasingly coming under scrutiny. For example, notions such as borders or frontiers are becoming increasingly fluid and are being questioned. Other issues such as race, migration, identity and group consciousness are taking on more varied and different meanings, thereby demonstrating that perceptions and approaches to the study of the past can no longer be unique, nor can they continue to be confined in well-defined compartments (Seixas, 2018: xiii). In fact, time continues to support the position that ‘events in the past increasingly get appreciated or understood differently by [even] members of the same society, meaning that the traditional methods and perspectives of dealing with history and historical knowledge are increasingly sounding inadequate and being challenged.’ So, what do teachers and students do with history, or again what develops out of students’ experiences with the history they learn in the classroom? In sum, history education broadens the scope of history as a subject. It enables young learners to re-conceptualize history and in so doing makes it more useful for civic and humanistic goals (Metzger and Harris, 2018: 2–6). It engages with ideological dissent, fosters alternative ways of framing historical issues, and in fact it is about charting the future of teaching, appreciating and using the past.

### **Identity construction**

Identity *is* perceived to be the main reference point around which people organize and evaluate their relationships with the rest of the world, whether in the past, present or future. It is a process in which human beings develop a clear and unique view of themselves and their identity. Constructing an identity is about a process of putting together, having or remembering common or shared life experiences, relationships and connections as a community. It combines internal factors within each group, as distinct or different from relations with other, possibly adversarial groups, and the social context of the groups’ interactions. Shared past experiences constitute a solid building block in identity construction, whether they are based on cultural, social, religious, ethnic, historical or racial grounds. Today there are elaborate discussions all over the world, especially in the contemporary period, about how communities adapt ‘in different ways to

the challenges raised by a globalization process that constantly creates cultural, social, economic and political connections between peoples and geographical areas' (Carretero, Rodríguez-Moneo and Asensio, 2012: 1), thus showing how fluid yet very enlightening the process of identity construction can be.

### **Historical narratives**

Historical narratives are about the popular discourses that connect the past, present and future of any group, community, people or organization. In fact, historical narratives provide a useful framework for analysing historical consciousness (Wertsch, 2004 in Epstein and Salinas, 2018: 49). Communities construct or build historical narratives to enable their members to appropriate and propagate what was done in the past as a way of providing identity links between the past and the present. In this way, historical narratives in their various versions form or provide a vital connection that links the past, present and future of those concerned. Historical narratives are generally about the various shades or instructive versions of opinions that are held in explanation or justification of past events or occurrences. In the world of today, with its many tensions and identity differences between peoples, attempts have been made to build up narratives that tell the story of various groups of people, whether cultural, ethnic or religious groups, in relation to another or to other groups. One main aim of a narrative is the attempt to lay claim to resources, whether imagined, authentic or fabricated, to explain or justify one occurrence to the exclusion of others. This is a very prevalent practice today, with the building of discourses that speak to inclusion and or difference. This is about establishing the difference between 'they' versus 'us', one might say.

Until recently, the dominant historical narrative in most communities was the story or the version of the strong, the view of those who wielded power. Power was used to suppress dissenting voices because they were often the vehicles by which alternative or dissenting discourses were held. In general, narratives are not unique; they only prevail or are dominant as long as they do not have alternatives that people find attractive, convincing and sensible. With the new diversity and highly effective methods of communication, including the destabilizing and manipulative role of social media, new and/or alternative narratives are emerging and circulating at a rapid pace in almost all societies. This is all the more reason why traditional historical methods are under intense scrutiny. The need to review and/or scrutinize historical knowledge, as well as methods of teaching, its meaning and its relevance for society, is urgent. History education is one way in which this could be achieved, and it speaks to the wider question of how to make history more relevant and useful in society.

### 3. State involvement in the organization and teaching of history in Cameroon

Earlier in this discussion, we pointed to the colonial origins of the state's involvement in the organization and teaching of history in Cameroon. Since independence, the government has continued to play more than just an oversight role in defining the content of what has to be taught, how it must be taught, who does the teaching and what the teaching methodologies are for the subject of history at all levels of the educational ladder. In the particular case of history, the government department in charge of education also carries out occasional reviews of the content of each subject matter.

#### Elaboration of school programmes in general and history programmes in particular

As noted, reviews of Cameroonian school programmes in general and of particular curricula are carried out at infrequent intervals at the behest of the ministerial department responsible for education. The reviews provide opportunities to update what is taught, why and how, as well as what learning outcomes are expected. The last review of the secondary-school curriculum in Cameroon was carried out in 2012 and re-stated the two essential purposes for the teaching of history at the level of the secondary school. In sum, history teaching was expected to contribute to the intellectual and professional development of learners who are empowered to 'become responsible and self-reliant citizens endowed with the capacity for reflection and critical thinking' (Cameroon Government, 2014: 2–5).

The aim of maintaining history in the curriculum was also 'to ensure that all students, young adult citizens, can integrate into social and professional life and thus identify with the Cameroonian nation regardless of their ethnic, linguistic, social or religious origin'. History studies should enhance the capacity of learners to participate in the quest for solutions to the difficulties facing Cameroonian society in its struggle for emergence. These include youth unemployment, corruption, poverty, tribalism and moral decay, but also environmental issues, identity crises, migration and other topics. If these are the challenges that Cameroon faces in following its path towards its emergence, how can history be taught so that it becomes an effective vehicle for passing on the knowledge and the competencies that are needed?

In Cameroon, deciding or selecting what history is taught in secondary schools is the outcome of many considerations. These include and arise from the



country's previous experiences, the challenges that face society and the utility value of the discipline. One specific orientation has been the development of a national consciousness and identity. For a long time, this has been a priority even more than the desire to develop subject-based knowledge and competence, which are sometimes described as intellectual and professional 'development' (Ehier and Lefrancois, 2012: 22).

The construction of school programmes is also influenced by the penchant to push through a political agenda which expresses the orientation of the country's main political philosophy, especially when the fragility of state institutions is so much in focus. All of the above are handled by appropriately designated experts who are responsible for explaining the 'hows' and 'whys', as well as the meanings and relevance, of the underlying political choices that are involved (Alpe, 2012: 22). It is therefore to be expected that subject experts do a lot of work so as to enhance the comprehension of the relationship between knowledge of the subject matter (subject teaching for its own sake) and other palpable outcomes (so-called patriotic goals). Experts glean knowledge from scholarly productions, but such texts still need to be simplified to make them suitable for school and imparting knowledge that can be passed on to learners. It becomes necessary to carry out an exercise that combines the process of ensuring the 'didactization' or 'teachability' of the subject matter as well as 'axiological development', which implies reflecting on values that are intended to be conveyed to arrive at the preferred or envisaged educational goals (Chevellard, 1985: 123).

The indispensable and inevitable sorting of knowledge alluded to above depends partly on ethical choices which are partly social and ideological. For example, in a country with a rich cultural diversity and multiple identities, the country's politicians and its political system have an influence on the content of history. Thus, where there exists a federation or a federal system, for example, history is taught so as to emphasize the multi-cultural citizenship paradigm, i.e. one that supports and seeks to integrate and keep alive identity-based differences. In supposedly unitary territories such as in Cameroon, a seemingly republican integrationist model, also known as the Jacobin model, becomes appealing. Here the ideologically preferred option is built on a combination of the principle of 'uniformed citizenship' (*modèle de citoyenneté uniforme*) with secularism. As can be seen, the models or patterns that influence the teaching of the history of one's own country depend on and take into consideration the prevailing political constructs in force within the country. Later in this contribution, the fallout of a politically inspired dogma about 'Cameroon being a country that is one and indivisible' will be examined.

The preceding discussion demonstrates why history programmes and their whole curriculum should preferably be written by subject specialists and informed actors in the field and not by politicians.<sup>6</sup> These would include history teachers, trained educationists and knowledgeable community activists. All these categories of actors are placed under the guidance of National and Regional Inspectors of Education and supervised by the Inspectorate General of Education representing the political supervisory body. In Cameroon the Inspectorate General of Education acts as the veritable mouthpiece for conveying the high-level instructions and directives of the central government or authority in charge to those effectively drawing up the curriculum. In this process, the state emerges as the overall authority responsible for the development of educational curricula.

### **What history is taught in Cameroon's schools?**

The history that is taught in Cameroon's schools is strongly informed by the country's own history. The country was 'created' in the colonial period as a German protectorate, and then passed under British and French administrations following the confiscation of the territory from Germany in the aftermath of World War One. The expropriated German territory was divided into two and placed under French and British administrations, first as Mandated Territories of the League of Nations, and later as Trust Territories of the United Nations (Le Vine, 1964; Ngoh, 1996; Abwa, 2010). This situation lasted throughout the Mandate and Trusteeship periods.

Cameroon under French administration obtained independence on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1960, and the new nation was baptized 'La République de Cameroun'. The area under British rule acceded to independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1961 'by joining' the already independent République de Cameroun to form the new nation thenceforth known in English as the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Kofe-

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6 Although government departments are responsible for the preparation of the history syllabus, there is no formal organization charged with the production of school history textbooks. Textbook writing is still very much subject to free enterprise. History textbooks are written by history teachers, and/or by individuals and groups of interested individuals and publishing houses. Authors are both nationals and foreigners. A National Book Commission exists, which meets annually to assess, evaluate and choose from all the titles submitted for review which books are used for each discipline and which are published in the National Booklist. The history programme, the history textbook and the history teacher serve as the principal avenues that influence or control how students understand their nation's past. Textbook authors are expected to construct narratives which serve national and sometimes ideological agendas.

le-Kale, 1980: 1). Since independence the colonial foundations of the state that was to become the Cameroonian nation have become one of the major nuisances in the country, if not the major one. Issues in the Cameroon history syllabus deal with Cameroon in the period both before its colonial creation and since. Understandably the orientation is geared towards constructing and sustaining narratives which reinforce nationalism and patriotism.

### **Content and method of teaching history**

What history is taught in Cameroon high schools, and how it is taught, once again brings out into the open the role of the state in the organization of history education. Due to the dual heritage that characterizes the educational milieu in Cameroon, two subsystems of education, the French and the English, exist side by side. The contents on the two sides of this cultural divide are not exactly the same, though there are also a number of history topics that are common to them both. The method of teaching highly contentious topics is overly indicative of the way the state manipulates and exploits the presence of history on the school curriculum to foster the development of historical discourses which inadvertently subvert the meaning of history, stall history education, and frustrate both teachers and learners.<sup>7</sup>

## **4. Manipulative designs for history teaching in Cameroon**

We refer here to the several strategies used by the state in order to control the content of history teaching and learning in Cameroon. In fact, many strategies are pursued with the clear if undeclared aim of keeping control of what is taught as history in Cameroon, especially Cameroonian history.

### **The imposition of 'official' history to the detriment of fact-based history**

This process originates and involves the imposition of history programmes by the Inspectorate in charge of Human Sciences, acting in the name of the ministry in charge of secondary education in this case. This imposition of curricula

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<sup>7</sup> In general, the main teaching method in Cameroon today is the competence-based approach, or CBA. Introduced since 2013, CBA highlights the importance of developing the competence of learners, meaning that learners should be able to act competently in relation to the real-life challenges within their immediate environment. The formulation of various competences is no easy task even for some trained teachers. However, the advantage is that one overall aim of history teaching is taken care of, namely, to enable students to use or apply their knowledge of history to deal with situations in their daily lives.

also affects the content to be taught; consequently, a very narrow margin is left to the teachers to restructure the said content following, for instance, the geographical location or other considerations which are particular to their profession. Besides, there is prior internal structuring of the same content, to the extent that the result is a uniform history produced nationwide that leaves little or no room for any critical thinking (despite the latter being officially emphasized) or open-mindedness on the part of both teachers and learners. In the end, we have an identical national history, much to the delight of the state authorities, but to the detriment of the discipline of history. Even more, regional or other variations in the content of the historical experiences of peoples and whole regions are deliberately or inadvertently excluded. This uniform national history largely underscores the egoism, ignorance and influence of the decision-makers or others who are in power.

### **Distortion of the facts concerning the role of Cameroon's historical figures**

Due to the chequered history of Cameroon's accession to independence, (Joseph, 1978), there has been a pernicious effort to side-line or better still undermine some of the popular figures who were involved in the independence struggle and the fight for the re-unification of Cameroon. For example, some personalities who actively contributed to the installation and imposition of colonial administrative and military domination are elevated to the rank of national heroes and presented to the young as role models. Such examples include Charles Atangana, Sultan Ibrahim Njoya and others. In this line of thinking, other historical figures who fought for the liberation, independence and reunification of the country were for decades portrayed as 'dangerous terrorists', or 'enemies of the new nation' and consequently not worthy to be taught about, known or recognized. Public authorities in fact forbade them to be mentioned by teachers in classrooms. Teachers who violated this dictate were officially charged with 'conspiracy against the nation' and seriously punished. Examples of such proscribed political figures abound and include Reuben Um Nyobé, Félix Moumié and Ernest Ouandié, all of them leaders of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC)* political party. Such figures were anathema to the government until their official rehabilitation in the 1990s. There is also a third category of historical actors, those who did little or nothing remarkable to liberate the country, but who are considered to have been installed in power by the former colonial masters. Interestingly these are presented as the 'true fathers of the nation' and are celebrated and portrayed in the current teaching programmes as national heroes.

### Changing historical reference points

Another saga in the manipulative construction of national history is the deliberate falsification of national reference points. Here, events are recalled or celebrated in total contradiction with the facts and events in the observed and recorded history of the country. The most illustrative example is the celebration of Cameroon's Independence Day.

Until the advent of the 'unitary' nation in 1972, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1960 was considered to be the day of Cameroon's independence. However, this date only corresponds to the end of the Trusteeship in French Cameroon, while the part under British Trusteeship remained in that status until 1 October 1961. In other words, serious consideration ought to be given to what date is actually the one to be celebrated as Cameroon's Independence Day. To fact-based historians, the date ought to correspond not only to the reunification of the two Cameroons, but to the day when colonial rule was ended on the whole of this formerly German territory. Today, unable to live with the embarrassment of its own political contradictions, there is hardly any talk about Independence Day in Cameroon. Since 1972, 20<sup>th</sup> May has been celebrated as National Day, seemingly as a subterfuge or substitute for Independence Day.

The few examples mentioned above, which illustrate government's control over the teaching and learning process, have many consequences. First, there is a lack of proper knowledge of the history of the country. Many students have only a rough idea of their country's history. Also there is confusion about dates and periods, as well as the historical importance and significance of major national or local events. Secondary-school pupils, and in fact the whole country, suffer from the absence of 'real reference figures' whom they could take as models for the building of their country, hence the trivialization of historical figures.

Second, history teachers who are subject experts to a large extent acquire frustrations and stage internal but subtle revolts because they are constrained by the official syllabuses and teaching and learning programmes for their subject. A few daring ones break the straightjacketed atmosphere and risk their careers through administrative sanctions or even imprisonment. In the end, the country suffers from the absence of a community of shared memories, the foundation of nation-building. The risks of dislocation are therefore many, the most challenging today being the socio-political crises which have engulfed the two Anglo-phone regions of the country since 2016 and to which no end is in sight.

## Promotion of ahistorical narratives in the teaching of Cameroonian history

In contemporary Cameroon, a select number of historical narratives and discourses have very pompously brought to the fore some of the issues that this paper has so far tried to highlight. The first narrative speaks to and lends support to the uniqueness and indivisibility of Cameroon. It indeed states that Cameroon is 'one and indivisible'. Our research concludes that this is a politically motivated statement which is intended to forge a sense of patriotism, unity and purpose in the country. The underlying premise is that, from the time the Germans carved out their protectorate in the area, the territory of Cameroon became one country. Therefore, any teaching which might expose the weakness of this position is not advisable. A second position that addresses the ethnic and linguistic composition of the country denies its ethnic diversity by stating, that in Cameroon 'there are no Bassa, Bamileke, Ewondo, Eton, Nweh, Bakweri, Kom or Nso.' Yet a third states that in Cameroon there are no francophones or anglophones, there are just Cameroonians (Abwa, 2015).

The first and second of these affirmations refer to the ethnic origins and foundations of the peoples of the country, whilst the third is a veiled attempt to deny the impact of the more than forty years of Anglo-French administration on the peoples of the Cameroons during the Mandate and Trusteeship periods. What emerges from these ahistorical discourses points to a high level of manipulation and distortion in the use of historical knowledge. Examined from a purely historical perspective, the stated positions smack of political rhetoric and demagoguery. Building nationalism or erecting patriotism using politically influenced constructions rather than historical reality could be prejudicial to the goals of history education.

## 5. Conclusion

Whereas the teaching of history as a subject in the curriculum in Cameroon has gone on since the introduction of formal western education at the end of the nineteenth century, research into history education is still in its infancy. The government exerts a significant influence over the choice of what history is taught, the aims of history teaching and the teaching methodology used. Understandably the pursuit of patriotic and nationalist goals remains primordial, as efforts are made to forge a national identity from a heterogeneous socio-cultural and historical admixture. The difficulties and challenges involved in applying historical knowledge against this background are not negligible and bring about

distorted and corrupted narratives which are at variance with fact-based history and history education. In many areas of national life, there are contradictions and visible discrepancies which compromise the goals of teaching the history of Cameroon in particular and of teaching history in general. What emerges clearly is the fact that the political authorities go to great lengths to control and influence what history is taught and why and how it is taught, the overall aim being to maintain, as far as possible, the construction of a tenuous image and identity for the country.

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KARL P. BENZIGER

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## Civil Society and the Resurrection of Strong State Politics, or ... *It Can't Happen Here*<sup>1</sup>



Karl P. Benziger

### Abstract

The emergence of strong state regimes poses a particular challenge to historians as their propagation of national myths stands in contrast to historical narratives. Narratives based on tragic loss produce an ethos of aggrievement in which victims and perpetrators can be clearly identified, setting the stage for a return to the nation's lost glory. Hungary and the United States have strong political undercurrents guided by 'lost cause' memory narratives that are deeply embedded in substantial parts of the polity. Hungary under Viktor Orbán currently proclaims itself an illiberal democracy, while the United States has experienced an attempted *coup d'état* staged by those loyal to former President Donald Trump. This paper studies the embedded 'lost cause' narratives that challenge civil society in both countries. What role can history education play in challenging 'lost cause' narratives? What is the meaning of civitas in the twenty-first century?

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1 Frank Zappa (1966) 'It Can't Happen Here', *Freak Out*, The Mothers of Invention, Hollywood: Verve 2683 004. I would like to thank the Rhode Island College, Committee for Faculty Scholarship and Development for their support of this project.

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of strong state regimes poses a particular challenge to historians, as their propagation of national myths stands in contrast to historical narratives that observe professional standards. Narratives based on tragic loss produce an ethos of aggrievement in which victims and perpetrators can be clearly identified, setting the stage for a return to the nation's lost glory. The strong man takes on a messianic role, unafraid to tear down rational legal institutions to usher in this past greatness. Hungary and the United States have strong political undercurrents guided by 'lost cause' memory narratives that are deeply embedded in substantial parts of the polity. Hungary under Viktor Orbán currently proclaims itself an illiberal democracy while the United States has experienced an attempted *coup d'état* staged by those loyal to the politics of former President Donald Trump. Though the historical context of the respective 'lost cause' narratives differs between the two countries, the thematic narratives are remarkably similar, as they are used to define and legitimize the strong state. This paper studies the embedded 'lost cause' narratives that challenge civil society in both countries. What role can history education play in challenging 'lost cause' narratives? How do we reconnect students to the moral imperative to explore history and thus counter the allure of the strong state? What is the meaning of civitas in the twenty-first century?

## 2. Strangers in [an increasingly] strange land

Hungary and the United States both provide fertile ground for a resurgence of authoritarian politics. The globalized economy, long dependent on neo-liberal notions of economics, assumed that deregulation of the economy would generate wealth accessible to all. Instead, it reveals a growing gap between winners and losers, especially regarding accumulated wealth. This has created a sense of dislocation for those left out of prosperity and provides a space for authoritarian politics to germinate. Hungary's dependent status in the semi-periphery of Central Europe exemplifies this problem. At the time of the transition to democracy in 1989, Hungary was obliged to follow the neo-liberal model of development. Without the support of a Marshal Plan, Hungary's transition to capitalism was marked by continued relations of dependence that left many previously employed workers either in unemployment or in the nether world of low wages that offered no way out. While those able to take advantage of the globalized economy were rewarded, domestic capitalists with no access to the

trans-national economy were left out. Over 400,000 Hungarians, 'mostly young and educated', had left the country by 2015 (Berend and Bugarcic, 2015: 771–772). Social welfare suffered, as Hungary struggled to right its economy, leaving many Hungarians with real grievances and open to Orbán's rhetoric promising to restore Hungary's former greatness. By forging alliances with those at the top through rewards such as tax breaks, low-wage labour, labour deregulation, and patronage, Orbán has been able to largely neutralize any meaningful opposition to the creation of a strong state. A mythic story line is utilized to shroud the fact that Orbán has further exacerbated the wealth gap in Hungary. The worker's state he advocates not only provides low-wage labour for transnational corporations, it also focuses on increasing low-skilled labour to satisfy the needs of the national economy. According to the political scientist Gábor Scheiring spending on education dropped from '5.4% of the GDP to 5.1% between 2009 and 2018. This has resulted in a 15% reduction in higher education enrollment' (Scheiring, 2020: 272–274).

Globalization has had negative impacts within the United States that mimics the desperation of the condition of the semi-periphery in Hungary. This can be seen in the increasing inequalities of wealth that have had a profound impact in polarizing American politics. According to the Pew Research Center the number of adults living in middle-class households fell from 61% in 1971 to 51% in 2019. There has been a distinct 'tilt to the top', as seen by an increase in the median net worth of the richest 5% of Americans. Between 1998 and 2007, median net worth increased 88% from 2.5 million to 4.6 million. Between 2001 and 2016 there has been a decrease in the median net worth of Americans living in both the middle and lower classes (Horowitz et al., 2020). Donald Trump has attracted many of those who have been marginalized by globalization while at the same time further accelerating the accumulation of wealth by those in the top tiers of the economy through tax cuts and deregulation. In a study of the 2020 presidential election produced by the Brookings Institute, Joseph Biden captured a more diverse polity that included more of the winners in the globalized economy. The 509 counties that he won accounted for 71% of American GDP. His voters tended to be more diverse and educated, 35% being non-white and 36% college educated. Conversely, the 2,584 counties Trump won accounted for only 29% of GDP, and his voters were less diverse, 16% being non-white and 25% college-educated (Muro et al., 2020). These are broad generalizations, but they highlight the clear divide between metropolitan centres enhanced by globalization and those left out in the periphery. Both the Hungarian and American cases involve chicanery that conceals the accumulation of political

and financial capital by the few while at the same time promising to make the nation great again, a story designed to attract the marginalized. The ability to intimidate opposition with real or perceived violence attests to the power of the myths propagated by both Orbán and Trump. One is reminded of David Apter's study of violence as a discourse that creates 'obligations and commitments' to aspirations that are 'millennial in character' (Apter, 1987: 40–42).

### 3. 'Lost cause', American style

The assault on the United States capital by Trump supporters attempting to prevent the United States Congress from certifying the election of President Joseph Biden subscribed to a rejuvenated 'lost cause' myth. The Congressional vote to impeach President Trump on charges of instigating insurrection failed: although the House of Representatives voted 232–197 and the Senate voted 57–43 to convict, the two thirds threshold needed in the Senate to convict was not reached. Nine out of ten Americans opposed the attack on the Capital, and seven out of ten believed that Donald Trump had at least some responsibility for it (Langer, 2021). Conversely, 35 % of Americans do not trust the recent election results (Santhanam, 2021). Trump asserted that his losing the 2020 election was due to fraud and a corrupt electoral process. This lie was debunked by his Justice Department, but he and his confederates intensified their claims after the election utilizing techniques perfected by the National Socialists in their calumnies against Jews and other 'enemies of the people', a term also embraced by Trump to describe the main-stream American Press (Stanley, 2018: 57; Cesarani, 2016: 18–19, 24–25). His embrace of the violent far-right extremist group the Proud Boys is only a recent iteration of his deep affection for white supremacy and neo-fascist ideology. The symbols carried by the insurrectionists included not only the slogans MAGA (Make America Great Again) and Stop the Steal on flags, hats and banners, but also the battle flag of the Confederate States of America. The inclusion of the flag is deliberate. Trump's remarks about a riot in Charlottesville, Virginia initiated by white supremacists on 12 August 2017, in which he claimed there were 'good people' on both sides, objectivized the virulent racism espoused at the event. Absent was any discussion of civic virtue. His comment conjured up memories of America's Jim Crow South and the efforts in several states to suppress the vote and further undo the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The State of Georgia recently enacted a new voting law empowering the state legislature, dominated by the Republican Party, to suspend county election officials and create a State Election Board. Voting has been made more difficult

by limiting drop boxes and polling places, and creating more stringent ID requirements (Carasaniti and Epstein, 2021).

The myth of the ‘lost cause’ developed in reaction to the federal victory in the Civil War and the addition of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution. These amendments ended slavery, defined citizenship, guaranteed equal access to the law, and ensured citizens the right to vote. Abraham Lincoln believed the war would usher in a ‘new birth of freedom’, and an attempt to institutionalize these new freedoms began during Reconstruction. Slavery had been the principal cause of the American Civil War and many southern elites viewed these newly expanded civil rights as a threat to the political order and an upending of racial hierarchies established since the introduction of slavery to the American colonies in 1619. In the wake of the proposed Fourteenth Amendment of 1866, white policemen and former confederate soldiers rioted in Memphis, Tennessee, leaving 41 African Americans dead and destroying twelve schools, four churches, and 89 houses of the Black community (Epps, 2006: 221–224). Writers like former Confederate General Jubal Early transformed the Civil War into a battle over state’s rights. Those in rebellion claimed legitimacy from their Revolutionary War forebear. The struggle was cast as a heroic battle against overwhelming odds. Ultimately, in a view adopted by many in the north, the heroic character of the war only fortified the virility of the nation. The narrative largely writes African Americans out of the narrative and consigns slavery to the sidelines. In this story, slaves had been well cared for by their masters, and ending slavery left them unprepared for real independence. African American participation in politics during Reconstruction had been a tragic mistake. The underlying racism and deliberate misrepresentation of the Civil War embodied by the ‘lost cause’ legitimized eugenics and a deliberate campaign to exclude African Americans from civil society. Films such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) went so far as to depict the Ku Klux Klan as saviours and preservers of the nation (Blight, 2001: 221–227, 360–361). Historians cast abolitionists as agitators and radicals on the margins of politics (Brooks, 2018: 291–292). Not surprisingly, Civil Rights activists and freedom movement politics have frequently been cast as radical to this very day.

The struggles to separate history from memory are epitomized by events such as Pickett’s Charge on 3 July 1863, which ended the Battle of Gettysburg. The myth of heroic struggle began with the South trying to reconcile defeat and the catastrophic casualties that resulted from the battle but that became emblematic of Southern valour in the aftermath of the war. In the ‘lost cause’ narrative, it became the high-water mark of the Confederacy. This story is found not

only in monuments that attest to this 'fact', but in the numerous gift shops that surround the National Park (Reardon, 1997: 62–83, 119–213). The 'lost cause' suited many interests within the American polity. Sidelining African Americans in politics served those in both the north and the south who wanted to maintain a racialized hierarchy out of a fear that the economic stability of the white population would be undermined. This sentiment, fortified by new immigrants from Europe and Asia, made the Democratic Party's 1868 motto 'This is a white man's country', seem prescient (Chernow, 2017: 619).

Immigration to the United States was curtailed and institutionalized racism vouchsafed. 1924 witnessed the march of over 20,000 Ku Klux Klansmen and women in Washington D.C. Violence ensuring compliance with Jim Crow was epitomized by lynching and incidents such as the riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 31 May to 1 June 1921. This riot, perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan, burned down 35 blocks in the African American Greenwood section of the city and claimed the lives of approximately 300 people (Tulsa Historical Society and Madigan, 2001). The Statue of Liberty that welcomed close to 14 million immigrants between 1886 and 1914 and that became a National Monument in 1924 stood in sharp contrast to the reality of the Johnson Reed Act, which limited total immigration to 165,000 per year. Between 1925 and 1927, 86.5% of all immigrants to the United States came from Western and Northern Europe (History Matters, 2019).

Historian Carole Emberton claims that despite substantial rethinking on the part of our profession examining the American Civil War, Reconstruction and the Freedom Movement, there remains substantial pushback from a public understanding of this history that continues to cling to stories of the 'lost cause' (Emberton, 2016: 377–378).

### **Hungary's lost cause**

Viktor Orbán has created an authoritarian state in Hungary. Orbán promised to create an 'illiberal democracy' because Hungary is beset by corrupt liberal values emanating from Western Europe that has 'forgotten about white workers'. He envisages building a 'state based on labor'. The financial crisis of 2008 demonstrated that the 'liberal democratic state did not protect public wealth and failed to protect families from falling into debt-bondage labour'. Though claiming that the new state 'does not deny the fundamental values of freedom', his emphasis on right-wing *Völkisch* politics creates a fear that Hungary is beset by enemies both within and outside and is used as an excuse to undermine liberal democracy. The values of work are stressed, and demographic decline is targeted. The fear of a loss of ethnic

dominance is paramount (*Magyar Nemzet Online*, 2014; Lendvai, 2012: 92).

The Hungarian National Anthem proclaims, 'Misfortune has punished them for a long time ... The nation has been penalized for the past and future'. The lost cause tradition in Hungary goes back to the defeat of the medieval Hungarian kingdom and its occupation by the Ottoman Turks (Hanebrink, 2006). Multiple disasters followed 1526, which included occupation by the Habsburgs, two world wars and finally occupation by the Soviet Union, all providing fertile ground for aggrieved narratives that explain the resilience of a victimized Hungarian nation. Though punctuated by two liberal revolutions, symbolic recovery of the lost kingdom sets Orbán's Hungary on an antidemocratic trajectory. History and myth come together to support these narratives.

The establishment of Austria-Hungary in 1867 enabled Hungarians to re-imagine the Hungarian Kingdom that held sway over significant portions of Central Europe in the fifteenth century. This imagined past was reflected in the Mátyás Templom, a Gothic church that was rebuilt during this period. Monuments prepared for the millennial celebrations of the Hungarian Kingdom in 1896 such as the Fisherman's Bastion and the central monument at Heroes' Square depicting the arrival of the Hungarian tribes in the Carpathian Basin refer to a past glory that is seemingly renewed by these new political arrangements (Lukacs, 1988: 32, 44, 71–72).

The liberal reforms initiated by Austria-Hungary enfranchised the Jews and prompted programs to industrialize the Habsburg State and help it compete on the global stage (Ranki, 1999: 75–82; Frank, 1990: 264–266). Modernization could be seen in urban centres such as Budapest. Enfranchisement of the Jews ensured that progressive liberal reform would continue, but it was viewed as a threat to the country's economic and political well-being by many of the Christian gentry who adhered to a rigid feudal hierarchy, fortifying a rural-urban dichotomy. Christian Nationalism provided a vehicle with which to express this dissatisfaction building on the previous church support of Habsburg efforts to suppress liberal reform. Preservation of the Christian-based nation became a moral imperative (Hadas, 2020: 136–138 and Hanebrink, 2006: 19–26). Nationalist sentiment trumpeted a past in which the Hungarian state and culture triumphed in Central Europe. These sentiments, found in literature, architecture and celebrations, shrouded the fact that, while Hungarians controlled their domestic politics, foreign policy and the economy remained in the hands of Habsburg Austria.

Despite the diverse ethnicities found in the nineteenth-century kingdom, Hungary embarked on a policy of *Magyarization* that forced non-Hungarians to

assimilate into Hungarian culture and society. The intense nationalism found in Hungary in the nineteenth century obscured the fact that the medieval kingdom had actively recruited non-Hungarians to settle in their kingdom. The introduction of farming techniques and material culture from Western Europe helped transform Hungary into a European state (Makkai, 1990: 23–33).

The nineteenth-century interpretation of the Hungarian kingdom persisted into the twentieth century and helps explain the trauma that was felt by Hungarians in the wake of World War I and the loss of two thirds of their territory through the Treaty of Trianon, 1920. The Lord Protector, Admiral Miklós Horthy, who ruled from 1920 to 1944, carefully manipulated these sentiments to legitimize his power. For him, the nation had been victimized by the West and by ideas foreign to the Hungarian body politic. The concept of *faj Magyar* (pure Hungarian) coupled eugenics with the chauvinistic Christian nationalism promoted by Horthy, promising to make Hungary great again. Bolshevism and Judaism were conflated, and along with the trade unions provided scapegoats that Hungarians could target both within and outside the borders of Hungary that explained why the Kingdom had once again been rent asunder (Hanebrink, 2006: 82–83, 106–107; Sakmyster, 1994: 162–165; Cornelius, 2011: 140–141; Kershaw, 2000: 362, 366). War and a genocide that claimed the lives of 560,000 Hungarian Jews followed. Territorial revision offered by the Axis seemed to confirm Hungary's status in Central Europe, but its alliance with them precipitated its ruin (Benziger, 2017: 68–69).

Orbán conflates the present-day Socialist Party with the two communist parties that ruled Hungary between 1948 and 1989. Yet in 1989, when the communists were ousted, it proved difficult to find anyone among the opposition parties who had not in some way been associated with or compromised by the communists at some time in their lives. Promotion in education and business almost always implied some type of association with the former communists. Orbán's call for a second revolution in the run-up to his successful seizure of power in 2010 was undergirded by such accusations, mimicking the strategies used by the opposition parties to oust the communists in 1989. When the Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány admitted lying to the Hungarian people about the state of the economy in the run-up to the 2006 elections, Orbán claimed, 'This will seal the fate of the government based on lies ... in a country twice tormented by the greatest lie of the twentieth century, Socialism!' (*Magyar Nemzet Online*, 2006; Benziger, 2008: 159–162).



#### 4. Christian nationalism and the enemy at the gate

Orbán has been methodical dismantling democracy in Hungary and turning it into a strong state based on a form of Christian Nationalist politics that mirrors the politics of the interwar years under Horthy. Claiming that majoritarian status in parliament legitimized this effort, the new constitution of 2011, known as the Fundamental Law, proclaims that Hungary is a Christian state and provides the mechanism for restricting freedom of the press through ‘detailed rules’ enforced by the National Media and Telecommunications Agency through licenses and fines. Judicial independence has also been compromised through early retirements that enabled Orbán to pack the courts to his liking (*Magyarország Alaptörvéne*, 2011).

These new laws ensure the government’s domination of the media. Paul Lendvai (2012: 218–220) claimed that by 2012 pro-government pronouncements already took up 75 % of political programming. In 2018 Hungary’s largest news website was purchased with the backing of the Hungarian government and handed over to one of Orbán’s cronies (Kingsley and Novak, 2018: 1, 10). Uncritical media enables Orbán to excoriate Western deviance and the failed liberal and economic policies of the European Union. Economic historian Iván T. Berend points out that it was EU funding that kept Hungarian banks from failing after the 2008 financial crisis and that provided massive funding to renovate Hungary’s infrastructure. The general recovery of Western Europe and Hungarian reliance on foreign investments are what allowed Orbán to reduce taxes. Orbán trumpets Hungary’s economic prowess while at the same time demonizing the EU (Berend, 2020: 288–290). His shift away from the EU and towards Russia is explicable not only with reference to his authoritarian ideology but also in practical terms, given Hungary’s dependence on Russia for energy. As Orbán recently explained, ‘If we have Russian gas, we can provide a cheap supply to Hungarian households’ (Novak and Higgins, 2022: 13).

The 1848 Liberal Revolution has therefore been transformed to a celebration of militant nationalism. Orbán has blamed the EU for ‘mass migration’ that allegedly threatened Christianity and Europe’s nation states. In a not too subtle nod to eugenics, he alluded to the danger of blending cultures and populations (*Hungary Today*, 2016). The nativist sentiment evoked by Orbán was fortified by the passage of close to 400,000 largely Muslim refugees through Hungary during the summer of 2015. As a result, a fence was erected to staunch the flow. On 2 October 2016 Hungarians went to the polls to vote on a referendum that asked Hungarians if they wanted the EU to determine the number of

non-Hungarians settling within the country without the approval of Parliament. Orbán claims that illegal immigrants, a term he uses interchangeably with refugees, have burdened public facilities meant for law-abiding citizens. These refugees should be placed in work camps for illegal immigrants (Lencsés, 2016: 3; Sarnyai, 2015; and Traynor, 2015). The referendum on October 2 failed, as only 43% of Hungarians voted on the measure, but Orbán declared a victory because 94% of those who did vote supported him (Kingsley, 2016).

The Hungarian born financier George Soros is an ideal target for Orbán. A long-time promoter of civil society, Soros has financed numerous academic efforts including the establishment of the Central European University (CEU) which became an affront to Hungary's authoritarian turn. In 2017 the Hungarian Parliament passed a higher education law that no longer acknowledged Guild Regulation and academic independence, ultimately forcing the CEU to move to a campus in Vienna in 2018 (Berend, 2019: 104–105). As Orbán continued to whip up a frenzy over immigration he launched a direct attack on Soros through a poster campaign during the summer of 2017. In one poster Soros was identified as an 'enemy of the state' and it was claimed that '99% [of Hungarians] are against illegal immigration ... Don't let Soros have the last laugh.' Soros is conflated with international cosmopolitanism hearkening back to Horthy's anti-Semitic diatribes. The Federation of Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz) demanded that the posters be taken down, but Orbán refused, claiming that 'Soros uses his money to bring waves of illegal immigrants into Europe' (Katona, 2017: 1). Not surprisingly, Donald Trump has launched personal attacks against Soros, claiming that he has not only financed politicians opposed to him, but that he supports research and academic efforts that contradict his claims of fake science and fake news (Vogel et al., 2018).

Christian Nationalism undergirds Trump's politics. He actively courts white evangelicals to strengthen his base. His 'America First' motto references Charles Lindbergh's isolationist speech of 1941 demonizing those deemed alien to the polity such as communists, intellectuals and Jews, whom he claimed controlled the mass media. These were the same 'aliens' that plagued Hitler's Germany. As historian Peter Fritzsche notes National Socialism provided an exemplar of how these 'evils' could be 'smashed' by the 'real American [polity]' (Fritzsche, 2020: 333–334; Stanley, 2018: 89). The slogan 'America First' fires up Trump's base. According to Gallup Polling Matters, nearly a quarter of American voters identify as evangelical and overwhelmingly voted for Trump: 78% of white evangelicals cast their votes for him (Newport, 2020; Smith, 2020). This sacralization of politics has created a *jihadi*-like enthusiasm among many who participated in

the 6 January 2021 insurrection, who see this as a 'life and death struggle' against Trump's enemies, who are characterized as 'Socialists' and non-believers (Dias and Healy, 2022).

In 2016 Donald Trump proclaimed that he would force the Republic of Mexico to pay for a border wall to keep out the 'attempted invasion of illegals' from Mexico and Central America. Courting white supremacists, he personified the migrants as criminals and rapists, a none too subtle reminder of Jim Crow and fears of miscegenation. On 3 August 2019, a gunman claimed the lives of 22 people asserting that he was mounting a defense against a 'Hispanic Invasion of Texas' (Peters et al., 2019: A-4). Americans remain uncomfortable with race and ethnicity. The Pew Research Center found that a majority believe that it should play no role in job hiring or promotion. Among Republicans, about half said they feel uncomfortable if they hear a language other than English spoken in public (Horowitz et al., 2019). Trump's conspiratorial questioning of President Barak Obama's citizenship gained him traction on the campaign trail. It was claimed that 'Without Birtherism there is no Trump presidency'. Framing African states as 'shithole countries' and political opponents as enemies to the American polity only strengthens belief in his message (Graham, 2019; Rucker and Parker, 2019: A-4).

Disregard for the law characterized the Trump administration from the beginning. His determination to up-end democratic institutions continues to this day. His executive orders to detain refugees and migrants violated both domestic and international law. In one facility shut down at the end of July 2019, 350 children were detained in conditions where the requirements for food and sanitation were not being met. The children were sleeping on the floor and suffering from exposure to extreme heat and cold. Seven children died while in American custody or directly thereafter (Holpuch, 2019). Trump's relationships with Russian oligarchs and Vladimir Putin raise serious questions about his campaign and personal finances, especially in wake of Russian meddling in the 2016 election. His first impeachment on charges of abuse of power and obstruction by the House of Representatives on 18 December 2019 demonstrated his lack of regard for the separation of powers that are the hallmark of the Republic. Failing to reach the two thirds threshold in the Senate ensured that he was not removed from office but at what cost?

## 5. Challenging myth in the classroom

In 1915 John Dewey wrote, ‘Education proceeds ultimately from the patterns furnished by institutions, customs, and laws. Only in a just state will these be such as to give the right education.’ Critical inquiry is the essential ingredient for the preservation of democracy and our profession (Dewey, 1916: 103, 207–218, 356–360). Orbán’s and Trump’s visions of the illiberal state poses a direct threat to rational legal institutions. The fact that they can mobilize a substantial part of their citizenry with their messages only underscores the role that history plays in support of civil society.

Countering the lost cause mythos is difficult given how these simplified stories have infiltrated public memory as exemplified by monuments at the Gettysburg National Park and in popular media (Hobsbaum, 1990: 12; Anderson, 1983: 159–162). Pickett’s Charge provides an intriguing exemplar of this process. In less than an hour the Confederate army suffered well over 6,200 casualties, and his Charge certainly helped mark the slow death spiral of the Confederate states (Guelzo, 2013: 441–444; Hess, 2001: 333–335). And yet it was soon transformed into a virile and noble effort that provided glory for both the north and the south, setting the stage for a narrative touting America’s ascent as a pre-eminent global power. In this story, the guilt and shame of slavery could be written out of the story of the Civil War. Carol Reardon details the story of how this myth evolved over time and serves as the basis for a series of exercises I have incorporated into a course I teach entitled ‘History Matters: Skills and Methods’ designed for incoming history majors.

Reardon begins her book by explaining how difficult telling the story of a battle is. Very few if any participants saw Pickett’s Charge as a whole. Problems of terrain, dense smoke and combat served to limit first-hand accounts (Reardon, 1997: 1–83, 131–153). The first exercise is based on accounts in the aftermath of the battle that sought to explain the disaster that befell the South. After the battle, Virginia newspapers began to circulate stories that Virginia’s soldiers in the division led by Pickett had been able to breach the Union line and that were it not for the premature retreat of soldiers in Pettigrew’s division, the attack would have succeeded. The newspapers called it Pickett’s Charge even though he was not in command of the assault. Both divisions under the command of James Longstreet had attacked fixed positions over an exposed front facing overwhelming cannon and musketry so that very few soldiers made it to the Union positions, let alone breached them. Longstreet told his commander Robert E. Lee that the position could not be taken, but was ignored. The newspaper accounts provided a more

easily digested story that posed the Virginians as heroes whose almost super-human qualities enabled them to carry out Lee's orders, only to have victory snatched from them. Many northern newspapers found the story intriguing, for if these Virginians were the cream of the Southern Army what did it say about the forces that repelled the attack? Many of the soldiers in Pettigrew's division were from North Carolina, but newspapers from North Carolina were slow to respond to the calumny. In the meantime, the story of Pickett's heroic charge had captured the popular imagination in both the North and the South. I ask my students to write point of view essays based on either the Virginian account of the assault or North Carolina's version based on accounts found in Reardon's book and documents I provide. The students present their essays in class, which presents an opportunity to examine how popular memory intervenes in the way we understand history. What parts of the story do these accounts leave in, and what is left out? Why is it hard to insert the more complex story of the assault into these accounts? How do these accounts help support the evolving 'lost cause' narrative that developed after the Civil War?

Reardon explains how the evolution of the Gettysburg National Park shaped popular interpretations of the battle. Monuments marking troop positions, including one marking the high-water mark of the confederacy, located where the Virginians assaulted the federal lines, helped further concretize the story of Pickett's Charge (Reardon, 1997: 108–130). The next assignment brings students closer to Pickett's Charge with reference to the point of view presented in Ted Turner's film *Gettysburg*. The viewing is followed by a critical film review. The story includes Longstreet's warnings to Lee, but is centered on the pathos of Pickett's Charge and the desperate heroism of the Virginians. In this version of the story, Pettigrew's division is left out. Why would the inclusion of the entire story disrupt the story line being presented? How does the presentation of public history reinforce the story found in the movie? In what ways do the ghosts of the 'lost cause' continue to haunt us?

Finally, students write a paper shaped by the central question: how has the search for a useable past shaped our understanding of Pickett's Charge? Here students bring the previous questions together and address the historiography to understand how the past is brought into the present to justify both past and present grievances. This exercise provides the context for a deep discussion of the 'lost cause' and the reaction to it by historians in the context of American debates about civil society. What role do historians play as enablers in the construction of narratives that are easily utilized to justify political ends? Many students find it

difficult to separate themselves from the popular story of Pickett's Charge which makes the exercises that much more interesting.

## 6. No easy way out

The slogan 'Making America Great Again' includes an attempt to rewrite history. A bill was recently introduced in Virginia that would restrict teaching any 'divisive concept, or helping students understand the role racism has played in the development of American institutions and culture.' The State of Texas seeks to promote 'patriotic education', minimizing the role that race and slavery played in the creation of the Republic (Cramer and Holpach, 2022; Romero, 2021). Both laws deflect attention from the complexity of the American narrative.

The manipulation of public history is a well-used trick. At night on 28 December 2018, a statue of Imre Nagy was removed from its place gazing at Parliament on a street leading directly into Freedom Square. Imre Nagy was the communist Prime Minister of Hungary who openly sided with the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its demands for a liberal republic. He was executed by the Soviet-backed communists for his support of the Revolution and its challenge to authoritarian rule. Like the communist regime under János Kádár that executed Nagy, Orbán's government fears Nagy's symbolism, who although an avowed communist, was indeed one of the great champions of the aborted liberal revolution (Kornis, 1996: 86, 89, 91). Reminiscent of *Damnatio Memoriae*, the government moved the statue to a site in front of the parliamentary office building once occupied by the statues of Marx and Lenin. The contradiction posed by Nagy is now out of Parliament's lines of sight.

Even more troubling is that on 31 May 2019 the government announced that the 56 Institute would be incorporated into the Veritas Historical Research Institute. The historian Gábor Gyáni asserted that the Veritas Institute enables the government to 'use history education to legitimize its power', as it is accountable to the government and not to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Miklos, 2014: 4–5, *Hungarian Spectrum*, 2 June 2019). Interestingly, it was at the funeral and reburial of Imre Nagy on 23 October 1989 that Orbán's political future was launched. Orbán has reburied the man he once eulogized.

The shift away from lawful revolution to Horthy's Kingdom was made manifest on 4 June 2020, the one hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon. László Kövér, Speaker of the Parliament, urged young Hungarians to 'engrave the lessons of Trianon in their hearts and minds' (Walker, 2020). On 4 June 2020 a new Monument of National Solidarity was unveiled that names all the

towns and villages of ‘historic’ Hungary, based on a 1910 census of the Hungarian Kingdom. The monument and its eternal flame points towards Parliament’s main entrance (Thorpe, 2020). For those with a propensity for illusion, the resurrection of the romanticized nineteenth century kingdom is complete. But history demonstrates the ultimate frailty of this type of revision.

On 15 March 2016, Orbán railed against the EU and its demands that Hungary adhere to the law, claiming they were undermining Hungary’s sovereignty. His message included the refrain from the *Nemzeti Dal* (National Verse), ‘Shall we be slaves or men set free?’ Hungarian children are taught this poem by the 1848 revolutionary poet Sándor Petőfi (Berend, 2020: 281). Absent from Orbán’s speech was the context as the poem was intimately connected to the demands for a liberal republic. Orbán’s selective use of historical narratives in the pursuit of an illiberal politics is attractive to part of the Hungarian polity but his use of them can also sow the seeds of his own undoing. Students in 1956 knew the story of 1848 full well and reiterated the same demands made by students 108 years previously at the risk of life and limb. Ultimately the curious will discover that Orbán and his confederates cannot separate themselves from their role in 1989, when demands for a liberal republic were based on those iterated by young people during the 1956 Revolution.

Orbán’s success can be seen as a bell weather for aspiring strongmen like Donald Trump. American institutions are strong and helped thwart the attempted coup on 6 January 2021, but their survival is dependent on a polity that has a functioning knowledge of history. The ‘lost cause’ narrative in the United States was substantially challenged by the great civil rights movement that exploded in the wake of World War II and promised a world driven by the norms of rational legal law. Though imperfect, it provides the fundamental basis of the world order found in international law and institutions, and the continued proliferation of non-governmental organizations. More importantly, it changed the way we write and teach history in the classroom. It is no accident that one of the chief critics of the world order is Vladimir Putin.

Why teach history? Economic changes that have left significant parts of the polity living on the periphery in both Hungary and the United States only fuel the uncertainty and wariness of the reality and possibility of the present. ‘Lost cause’ narratives help explain this loss and offer a path towards the restoration of past glory and new birth. The danger outlined in both cases is that the illiberal model encourages a retreat from rational legal institutions and the rule of law. The historian William Manchester contemplated the painfully slow acceptance of reason in a world dominated by a medieval mindset in which the unrestrained

egocentric impulses of rulers, both secular and clerical, brutally crushed the innovation and belief systems that differed from their own world views, which were ruled by superstition and blind faith (Manchester, 1992: 23, 44–45, 290–292). In both cases, Illiberalism demonstrates how easy it is to walk away from a world shaped by reason. History education at its best provides the learner with a way to critically assess ‘lost cause’ narratives that lead to the establishment of the strong state in order that they not be complicit in an illusion of silence that seemingly accepts this descent into barbarism (Fritzsche, 2020: 354–355).

The study of history must be made alluring to attract curious students. Students are both amused and frightened by adults clinging to myths and lies. Engaging students with ‘lost cause’ myths and providing significant time within the curriculum for a proper examination of this type of politicized history is paramount (Loewen, 1995: 308–309). Empowering them through inquiry-based learning provides them with the evidence and tools needed to pull these myths apart and speak truth to power.

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KAREL VAN NIEUWENHUYSE

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## History Education and Identities in Flanders

### Contradictory Expectations Between Historical and Canonical Thinking



Karel Van Nieuwenhuysse

#### Abstract

In 2019, the new Flemish government advocated the establishment of a historical canon of Flanders, to be used, among other things, in history education, in order to promote and support a Flemish identity. This plea was surprising, as since 2018 the newly reformed history education had taken an opposite direction, that of fostering historical thinking. This contribution analyses the relationship between history education and identity formation since the creation of Belgium in 1830. For that analysis, the framework on 'identity' of Brubaker and Cooper (2000) is used. The contribution examines, in particular, which identity (construction) was and is being pursued in history education in Belgium and Flanders, and how this relates to specific representations of the past being propagated in history education. The current tension between historical thinking and a canon of Flanders is discussed in detail, both related to identity construction and to approaches and understandings of the past.

## 1. Introduction: canonized history versus historical thinking

In early October 2019, a new Flemish government composed of Flemish nationalists, Christian Democrats and liberals was formed after the 26 May regional elections. The new Flemish coalition agreement included, among others, this statement:

*A shared society is only possible if our younger generations realize where we come from. It is essential that we can experience the Flemish identity in an uncomplicated way, including through shared symbols. Against this background, we ask a group of independent experts to draw up a Canon of Flanders on a scientific basis. This will be a list of anchor points from our Flemish culture, history and sciences, which will be used for support in education, as well as in the context of integration projects. We deal with the Flemish identity without complexes, with who we are and where we come from. Following the example of the Netherlands, we are drawing up a Canon of Flanders. This works with windows: people, events and cultural heritage together show the story of the historical and cultural development of Flanders as a European nation. [...] We live too much alongside and not with each other. This latent segregation fosters prejudice, creates ghettoization and reinforces mutual distrust. This prevents the construction of one inclusive, shared Flemish community.'* (Flemish Government, 2019: 25–26)

The Start Note of 12 August 2019, which initiated the negotiations leading to a new coalition agreement, already gave a hint of how the Flemish government saw the interpretation of such a canon:

*Flemings have always been capable of much. Our Flemish Masters like Van Eyck, Rubens and Bruegel are world-renowned. The world's first stock exchange is in Flanders. The Mercator projection is the gold standard in cartography. The Flemish textile industry has been a reference point for centuries. Flemings have made crucial contributions to technological innovations in shipbuilding, medicine and industry. We can take pride in that past.'* (De Wever, 2019: 4)

The Flemish government thus advocated the establishment of a Flemish historical canon in order to promote and support a Flemish identity in both civic integration programmes and (history) education. The way in which this ought to be done is by devoting attention to the achievements of Flemish people in the past. The historical figures that deserve a place in it all are mainly white, male and (allegedly) 'autochthonous' figures. Such a vision and instrumentalization of history

is not in itself new or original. Since the second half of the eighteenth century, the earliest history education, and by extension the entirety of popular historical culture, had been involved in processes of national identity construction, their content being shaped accordingly (Wils, 2009). Within the Flemish-Belgian context, this plea was nevertheless surprising. Not only did the constitutionally anchored freedom of education prevent successive governments from interfering too much in what (content) should be covered in education, but also any identity politics in history education had been at a very low ebb for several decades. What is more, since 2018, the newly reformed history education (approved by the Flemish government and parliament) had taken a completely different direction, that of fostering historical thinking (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020).

This contribution analyses the relationship between history education and identity formation since the establishment of Belgium in 1830. The central research question is which identity (construction) was and is being pursued in history education in Belgium and Flanders since the federalization of education in 1989, and how this is related to specific representations of the past that were propagated in history education. It does so in broad outlines, from the creation of Belgium in 1830 to the present; from 1989 onwards, with the regionalization of education, the contribution focuses on the situation in Flanders. The analysis leans on three types of sources. First, many primary sources have been examined, such as history curricula and standards, parliamentary proceedings, circulars, notes, history teacher journals and newspaper articles. These have been complemented by secondary sources stemming from historians working on the history of (history) education in Belgium. Third, the author has been able to draw on his own involvement in the latest major reform of history education in Flanders.

This contribution starts with an analysis of the concept of ‘identity’. This concept is often and quickly used in social and scientific debate, but analytical sharpness seems to be missing. Next, the relationship between history education and identity construction in Belgium and Flanders is analysed in historical perspective since the nineteenth century. After that, the tension between historical thinking and today’s Canon of Flanders will be discussed in more detail.

## 2. Identity: a complex concept

The concept of identity is derived from the Latin ‘idem’, meaning same or identical. When the concept began to be conceptualized in the seventeenth century by John Locke and others, the thinking focused primarily on personal identity and the extent to which identity was essentialist or constructed (Thiel, 2005).

In the course of the twentieth century, the conceptualization extended towards social identities (see, for instance, the important works of Allport, 1954, and Tajfel, 1978).

There are different conceptions of identity; on a continuum, certainly each of the extreme ends contains highly pronounced and problematic assumptions. Strong views of identity hold that identity is something that all individuals and groups have, even without being aware of it; it is then a given that has (imperative!) yet to be discovered (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 10–14). Some proponents of such strong views even go so far as to argue that (social) identity is innate. Amin Maalouf, a Lebanese writer living in France and a man with Christian roots, convincingly dismisses such strong views of identity when he writes:

*Imagine an infant removed immediately from its place of birth and set down in a different environment. Then compare the various “identities” the child might acquire in its new context, the battles it would now have to fight and those it would be spared. Needless to say, the child would have no recollection of his original religion, or of his country or language. And might he not one day find himself fighting to the death against those who ought to have been his nearest and dearest?* (Maalouf, 2003: 24–25)

A strong conception of identity implies strong notions of groupness and sameness among group members. Identity, here, is an imperative that is imposed: you have to identify with a particular group. The idea of ‘indifference’, as Tara Zahra (2010) put it in her work on national indifference, has no place here. She is referring to the fact that some people and groups, particularly in multinational states, show a complete indifference to (belonging to) the nation. The everyday notion of ‘identity’ is often closely aligned with such a view.

In contrast to this, there are weak conceptions of identity, which in fact hardly grant the concept any reality. Here, then, it is not clear why these conceptions are concerned with identity, since they often deny a minimum of sameness, so that it makes little sense to talk about identity anyhow. These conceptions become so weak that they are hardly useful to work with theoretically (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 10–14).

However, irrespective of these diametrically opposed views of ‘identity’, a more fundamental issue arises with the concept of ‘identity’ itself. This does not actually allow for a clear analysis of the aforementioned issues. After all, the concept is used in many different ways, which makes a thorough analysis difficult. What exactly is meant when one talks about ‘identity’? That is not clear. As a category of analysis, therefore, ‘identity’ is problematic: after all, the notion



is far too broad and pays no attention to the idea of multilayered identity, to who assumes or imposes an identity, to its individual or social character, to its salience (Burge and Stets, 2009: 47), to power relations in the process of identity formation, or to the process itself. It therefore seems necessary to develop an alternative vocabulary for identity in order to reflect on it more sharply and critically. This is what led sociologist Rogers Brubaker and historian Frederick Cooper (2000: 14–21) to distinguish three clusters of terms. All three deal with distinct parts of identity as an umbrella concept.

A first cluster concerns ‘self-understanding and social location’. This cluster takes into account the fact that each individual has a vague and rather cognitive understanding of who one is and of the social worlds in which one is situated. The second cluster, ‘identification and categorization’, refers to the active process in which an actor identifies: someone can identify oneself (describe oneself, situate oneself in relation to others), but also, someone can be identified by others. Both acts are situational and contextual. Moreover, there may be a mismatch between self-identification and identification by others. This is, among others, connected with power relations. After all, in a powerful position, one can appropriate an identification for oneself and/or attribute (impose) one on another. The result of identifying and categorizing does not necessarily have to result in a form of sameness. After all, one can identify and categorize oneself and others in several ways: this cluster recognizes the multilayered character of identity. At the same time, it does not deny that identifying or categorizing can lead to stereotyping and to in-group/out-group mechanisms. But then we are already in the third cluster of terms: ‘commonality, connectedness and groupness’, which deals with the social dimension of identity, with feeling connected to others and belonging to groups, in which gradations can be distinguished. ‘Commonality’ refers to sharing some common characteristics with others (e.g., being a woman, having red hair, having blue eyes, being a human being as such). ‘Connectedness’ indicates the relational ties that bind people together; in these cases, it usually involves a sometimes rather loose sense of affinity for others based on, for example, profession, illness, language, resident of a city, or shared humanity. ‘Groupness’ gives one a feeling of being part of a distinct, bounded, solidary group, clearly distinguishable from others. The latter is based on a rather strong conception of identity, whereby it is often considered essentialist, and sameness among group members is assumed as given and undeniable. This often involves feelings of solidarity and ‘feeling as one’ with the group on the one hand, and on the other a (perceived) sense of difference with or even antipathy towards specific others. This can then lead to mechanisms that have already been extensively

described by social psychologists: the creation of an in-group and an out-group. In this mechanism, people are reduced to one layer of their ‘being’ and are homogenized (without having any say in this themselves). Positive characteristics are attributed to the in-group, and negative characteristics to the out-group, which is stereotyped (Ford and Tonander, 1998).

### 3. ‘Identity’ and/in goals for history education

From the birth of history as an autonomous school subject, it was closely linked to ‘identity’. History education inherently carried and carries with it an identity dimension. The aforementioned conceptual framework makes it possible to analyse this dimension accurately and to link it to the general central aims of history education. Broadly speaking, history education is usually assigned objectives that are related to one of the clusters below (see Figure 1), with which a specific identity aspiration is linked (Van Nieuwenhuysen, 2018):

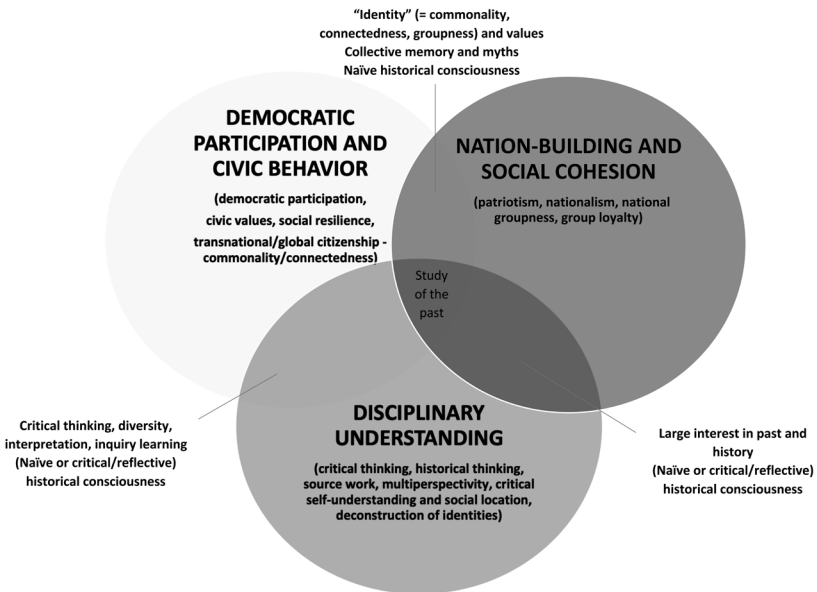


Figure 1: Three clusters of expectations of history education: the first cluster is ‘nation-building and social cohesion’, the second cluster is ‘democratic participation and civic behaviour’, and the third cluster is ‘disciplinary understanding’.

When the central goal of history education is to promote ‘nation-building and social cohesion’, it is obvious that the creation of a national groupness underlies the main pursuit of identity. The layer of national identity then takes precedence over everything else. Stimulating self-understanding and social location is not the goal here: rather, a national or other identification is imposed. The central goal of ‘democratic participation and civic behaviour’ shows a number of parallels with the previous one, to the extent that both can be considered two sides of the same coin. In ‘democratic participation and civic behaviour’, an affective feeling of connectedness is also pursued, but now on a global scale, and less in terms of a strong sense of groupness: rather, the underlying identity goal here is to create global commonality and connectedness; a national groupness is precisely rejected. The final goal of ‘disciplinary understanding’ does not constitute another side of the same coin so much as be another coin (Seixas, 2017). This goal differs fundamentally from the previous two goals. This can also be discerned in the pursuit of identity associated with it. Here, it is more about modest support for self-understanding and social location, as well as about a cautious exploration of an undefined commonality and connectedness, and actually even a critical deconstruction of identification processes. In Belgian and Flemish history education since the nineteenth century, shifts can clearly be observed between these three central objectives. They are discussed below.

#### **4. History education and ‘identity’ in Belgium/Flanders in historical perspective**

Right from the establishment of Belgium in 1830, the government actively encouraged identification processes in popular historical culture aimed at the development of a Belgian national groupness. This went hand in hand with an us-them thinking, initially directed against the Netherlands, from which the new country had separated itself. In history education, because of the freedom of education anchored in the constitution, the government could not simply direct history politics itself. The educational networks (with the free, Catholic network and state education as the two main ones) had a large amount of autonomy: they could shape the history curriculum autonomously. Nevertheless, they all formulated the construction of a national identity (in terms of groupness) and the teaching of patriotism as their main goals for history education. The history of Belgium was given an important place until the mid-twentieth century. Some one-third of the curriculum was devoted to it (Beyen and Majerus, 2008; Wils,

2009; Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2018, 2020). The government fostered this. A circular from the Ministry of Public Education (1900) read as follows:

*'May the teacher feel the love for the nation in his heart, and may he be persuaded of a deep respect for the national institutions and sincerely attached to the constitutional freedoms. If the teacher incorporates the living sources of patriotism, it will be easier for him to fulfil his duty; out of satisfaction and of duty, he will seize the opportunity to work at the patriotic upbringing of his pupils.'* History textbooks also promoted a national groupness. For example, a history textbook concluded as follows: *'May God bless the nation and its royal house!'* (Poukens, 1948: 330)

History education focused on a widely shared knowledge of the national past and a shared master narrative in order to contribute to the formation of a national identity and national cohesion (first cluster; see Figure 1). However, the canonization of the national past in a master narrative was no easy task. How could a coherent story be told about a territory that was characterized by a complete absence of geographical unity over time, and by constant regime changes, as a result of which the past of that territory formed above all an unstable history full of discontinuities (Beyen and Majerus, 2008)? Viewed from a historical-scientific perspective, the answers led to very ahistorical solutions. Some authors opted for a supra-historical, aprioristic and anachronistic solution. They defined a national genius, an unchanging set of qualities attributed to the Belgian people (the Belgians as being brave, loyal, artistic, etc.), whose development could be traced throughout history. This led to a very finalist representation of history: Belgian independence was the culmination of a Belgian uniqueness that some believed was already two thousand years old. The 'Belgians' described by Caesar and Tacitus were worthy ancestors of the contemporary Belgian people. The Belgian state founded in 1830 may have been young, but it incarnated an ancient homeland. Others worked rather from recurrent, negatively formulated themes, such as the idea that Belgium had been the battlefield of Europe, or had been constantly occupied by foreign rulers. In so doing, a master narrative of Belgium and the Belgians ('we') emerged as a small but brave nation that had had to resist foreign rulers ('they': the Romans, Spaniards, Austrians, French and Dutch) over and over again throughout the centuries until it gained its independence in 1830 (Beyen, 2011; Stengers, 1981). It was concretized through stories of brave, white, male military and political leaders whose examples merited imitation.

This frame was supposed to lead to national pride and from there to national cohesion. Measured against the broad collaboration with the German occupiers

in two World Wars, however, this national identity offensive was not particularly successful (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2018). This failure can partly be explained by a failure on the part of the Belgian political elite to acknowledge the social evolutions that had occurred throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. For in Belgium, led by a French-speaking elite, a Flemish movement arose, which initially advocated equal language rights between Dutch (the language of communication in Flanders) and French (the language of communication in Wallonia). Because the leading elite remained largely deaf to those demands, the Flemish movement gradually began to put broader demands to the fore. A specifically Flemish identity was increasingly emphasized, and a radicalizing wing of the Flemish movement went so far as to vehemently contest the existence of a Belgian identity and of the Belgian state itself. Together with widespread authoritarian views, this led, in two successive World Wars, to considerable collaboration with the German occupiers (Witte et al., 2009).

After each of the two World Wars, critical questions arose regarding what had made possible this collaboration, and more broadly, the horror of war itself. In those debates, reference was always made, among others, to history education, which was characterized as excessively patriotic and aimed too much at creating groupness. This had led, so the analysis continued, to us-them thinking and to images of the enemy, with all the consequences for war this had brought about. Whereas this critical evaluation did not really lead to thorough reforms after the First World War, it did after the Second. The call for a radical reform of history education became louder and louder, and a reform actually began in 1970 (Wils, 2009; Lobbes, 2012). The school subject of history was now to focus primarily on democratic participation and citizenship (second cluster; see Figure 1). In terms of identity formation, the patriotic path of fostering groupness was abandoned. In the eyes of politicians and educationalists on the left of the political spectrum in particular, history education had to contribute rather to self-understanding and social location, as well as to a global 'connectedness', related to the idea of a 'shared humanity' (Stuurman, 2017). The hunt for the wrong past was on: attention was focused on the dark pages of the past; slavery and colonialism in particular were severely condemned. Nationalism was also treated negatively. The national canon began to evaporate: less and less attention was paid to the national past. By contrast, more attention was paid to the history of non-Western cultures and to global history. In a journal for history teachers, the following was stated: 'We wish to participate with all our being in the concrete, real emancipation of man. The best and only way is the thoughtful atmosphere of a school in which our students, through the teaching of history, among other things, learn

to have an intimate and sincere respect for others, whatever their colour, faith, conviction, without therefore being an empty and sceptical head' (Flam, 1962: 839). And again: 'The environment of the child includes the whole world and all times' (Corijn, 1966: 11–12).

However, especially in the 1980s, this ambition soon provoked strong criticism from politicians and educationalists situated to the right of the political spectrum. They rejected a global orientation, though at the same time they did not long for a return to patriotism and the accompanying national narrative; they argued instead for an Occidentocentric (Western-oriented) history narrative, which had to support the propagation of a Western identity construction in terms of groupness. This groupness drew on, among other things, the Christian and modern character of the West, as well as on Western-perceived values such as freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. It was this orientation that would indeed prevail in history education (Lobbes, 2017).

In 1989, education in Belgium became regionalized. On both sides of the linguistic border, in the following years regional governments seized the opportunity to draw up standards for each subject, minimum goals that students had to meet at the end of each of the three stages of secondary education. In the second half of the 1990s, these standards were voted on in the regional parliaments (Wils, 2009). In what follows, this contribution concentrates on the situation in Dutch-speaking Belgium.

An interesting discrepancy can be noted between the respective positions of the Flemish government in popular historical culture and in history education. Whereas in historical culture the Flemish government conducted very active identity politics, it did not interfere in secondary history education. Mindful of the constitutional principle of freedom of education, the Flemish government left the development of standards primarily to the educational networks, academic experts in history education, history teachers and a few officials. However, the standards had to be officially ratified in the Flemish Parliament (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020).

The history standards in Flanders set a double goal (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2000). The school subject had to introduce students to the academic discipline of history, and it had to prepare them to become good citizens by imparting historical and cultural awareness to them, encouraging social resilience and supporting the process of identity formation among young people (in between the second and third cluster; see Figure 1). The standards themselves did not put forward a specific identity. Rather, they recognized that identity is multilayered, and they were aimed at supporting the identity construction of

young people in order to bring them to self-understanding and social location. In practice, the standards did not contribute to a national or regional groupness. The values underlying the history curriculum were not connected to nationalism or patriotism, but remained the Occidentocentric values of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. A Western-oriented connectedness, allowing an openness to non-Western societies, was propagated. This approach could also be clearly deduced from the historical content orientation of the standards, which only provided criteria for the selection of learning content, as it remained a matter for the teacher to determine the concrete learning content to be covered in the lessons. These criteria were mainly Occidentocentric, with predominant attention to Western societies.

## 5. History education and ‘identity’ in Flanders today: historical thinking versus canonical thinking

In the summer of 2014, preparations for a reform of secondary education in Flanders by renewing the standards started. After all, the standards were almost a quarter of a century old and in need of modernization. They had to be brought in line with 21<sup>st</sup>-century competences, as in the field of ICT, and adapted to the metropolitan multicultural context, which for the first time was recognized as such and taken into account in the development of standards and curricula. New standards also had to be established for history education; again, in light of the constitutional freedom of education, this was done by representatives of the educational networks, academic experts in history education, history teachers and a few officials. The political authorities did not intervene. However, the standards did have to be officially ratified again in the Flemish Parliament (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020). As a central goal for history education, the new standards put forward ‘historical thinking’ (third cluster; see Figure 1), as follows:

*‘Historical thinking is first and foremost about understanding and organizing information about the past, with the aim of describing, comparing and explaining historical phenomena (people, groups, events and developments from the past) in their historical context and in the long term. It is important, in this respect, to understand that past and present are fundamentally different. Therefore, historical thinking is also about understanding of and reflection on the complex relationship between past, present and future. This can, among others, be done by drawing analogies between the past and the present in search for similarities and differences. Historical thinking hence requires an understanding of both the past and historical practice, which are inextricably bound*

*up with each other. For one needs to know how knowledge of the past is constructed, and one needs to understand the tentative character of historical knowledge. Only then can one start thinking critically of (representations and uses of) the past.'* (Agency for Higher Education, 2017)

These standards leave great freedom to teachers in the choice of content. No specific historical phenomena or developments are prescribed to be covered. In response to the multicultural classroom composition, which is increasingly the norm in Flanders and Brussels, and in order to go beyond an exclusively Occidentocentric view of the past, attention is not only required to be paid to Western as well as non-Western societies, but also to the intercultural contacts between them from multiple perspectives. Historical thinking aims to provide students with a rich historical frame of reference, paying attention to different geographical levels (local, regional and national, Western and non-Western, and intercultural interaction), to multi-perspectivity and to viewing the past through different lenses, those of the nation state but equally of, for example, gender, interculturality, world view and the economy. This allows learners of very diverse ethnic-cultural backgrounds, both genders, different socio-economic statuses, etc. to experience a sense of belonging in history education.

All of the above makes it clear that, with regard to identity construction, the new standards primarily aim at supporting 'self-understanding and social location' among students. They recognize that identity is multilayered and that identification is dynamic and context-specific. Therefore, they do not aim to promote one specific (Western) identity layer, as was the case in the previous standards. By contrast, they leave room for students to give a place to the multiplicity of their own layers of identity. Moreover, the standards focus on the critical deconstruction of the mechanisms behind processes of identity formation. Students must learn to 'reflect critically on the use (and abuse) of the past, by themselves and by others, in processes of identity construction, group formation, and ideological and value formation' (Flemish government, 2018). The new standards explicitly draw attention to a critical analysis of collective memory, of mechanisms of us-them thinking, and of ethnocentrism. From here, they offer an understanding of how differences in some dimensions can nevertheless go hand in hand with 'commonality' and 'connectedness'.

These standards were approved in parliament, without causing any substantive discussion. Great was the surprise, then, when, upon the formation of a new Flemish government in the autumn of 2019 composed of the same political parties as the previous Flemish government, the idea of a historical canon of



Flanders was suddenly included in the coalition agreement completely out of the blue. Neither in society at large nor in education had there been any debate about it in previous years, let alone any demand for it. The idea of a canon lived only in the minds of a few Flemish nationalist politicians. On 11 July 2019, in a speech on the occasion of the Flemish holiday, Theo Francken, a leading Flemish-nationalist member of parliament, launched the idea of a canon for the first time:

*Being proud of yourself, your history and your culture are not a negative, but rather a positive and even an emancipatory thing. This is especially true for growing teenagers who are searching for who they are in a rapidly changing society like ours. Evading and underemphasizing a Flemish identity at school does not contribute one iota to solving the problem of society. Rather to the contrary. Newcomers integrate much more quickly into a community that is itself without complexes and proudly propagates its own achievements. Just look at what has been happening for hundreds of years in the United States – the preeminent migrant society. [...] We therefore need to change course. What we need is a Flemish education that introduces students to our Flemish language, culture and history in an uncomplicated and positive but nuanced way. This starts with a new canon of history, in which schools can pass on the achievements of our culture and history to the young in an open-minded way, without turning a blind eye to the dark pages of the own history. [...] By introducing our children to the shining examples from the arts, science and history within our own Flemish community, we can make students truly proud of Flanders in a positive way, whether they are newcomers or natives, and at the same time make them dream of more. That's where everything starts. (Francken, 2019)*

Francken argued that education was not sufficiently concerned with the mission itself of creating a Flemish identity. It was time to make students proud of their own history and culture. In this respect, and entirely in nineteenth-century style, he referred to examples of large, white, supposedly autochthonous men to be followed. This idea was adopted a few months later in the Start Note for the Flemish government's formation, and later also in the actual coalition agreement.

The surprise was all the greater because the idea of a Canon of Flanders is actually completely at odds with historical thinking, which the same political parties in the government approved as the final goal for history education only a year earlier (De Paepe et al., 2019).<sup>1</sup> After all, a historical canon does not offer

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1 Of course, a canon can be critically deconstructed by thinking historically, in terms of uses and misuses of the past. But to practice such understanding with students, a canon is not

a rich historical frame of reference, but seems to merge and solidify time, space and society into one homogeneous unit of society (a timeless 'Flanders') in the same place throughout time. In so doing, it approaches the past very ahistorically, anachronistically and teleologically. The idea of a historical canon wrongly projects a contemporary idea of Flanders back into a distant past. Flanders is a relatively recent construction, created within the Belgian state system after 1830. Flanders as it appears today was not written in the stars either. Historical Flanders was a contingent entity, with ever-changing boundaries and population groups. Until the end of the nineteenth century there was no Flemish national feeling within the region. In other words, ascribing the predicate 'Flemish' to historical figures who did often not even belong to the then county of Flanders, and who in any case had no sense of a national Flemish identity because there was no such thing, does not make any sense at all. A historical canon of Flanders as put forward in the coalition agreement is bathed in an outdated, romantic idea of history, which in fact bears great resemblance to initiatives dating from the nineteenth century to try and come up with a heroic story of Belgian history. The same difficulties, of a lack of continuity between past and present and a lack of geographical unity, reappear here. Also, the solution that the coalition agreement implicitly testifies to tends back to the 'Belgian' solution of the nineteenth century: a supra-historical, aprioristic solution, in which a Flemish national genius is presented as brave, artistic and great.

Moreover, this canon approaches the past in a very one-sided way (De Paepe et al., 2019). In the canonical representation of Flanders' past, it seems that 'the' Flemish society only took shape thanks to 'indigenous' contributions from within, and then only from white, great men. Women and 'ordinary' people and groups were not mentioned in the examples in Theo Francken's speech, nor in the Start Note. Influences 'from outside' that helped shape society in Flanders, such as contributions from people with roots in migration, were not mentioned at all.<sup>2</sup> This leads to a very homogenizing history, which moreover fosters very

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needed at all. Current events provide plenty of other examples of (mis)uses of the past, for example, in debates over how to deal with statues, holidays (what are we celebrating, and who can(not) celebrate), street names, etc.

- 2 In this context, it is significant that the Start Note and the coalition agreement do not mention the contributions of non-Western people and groups to Flemish society. The Flemish nationalist politician and Flemish minister-president of the previous Flemish government, Geert Bourgeois (2015), however, had referred to this on 12 July 2015 in his so-called Iftarspeech on the occasion of the Flemish holiday: 'On our Flemish holiday we think about how we can strengthen our sense of community, how we can improve the cohesion

little historical understanding and historical thinking. A canon views the past only through the lens of the nation state and therefore strongly narrows the historical view. Historian Gérard Noiriel (2001) speaks in this context of ‘the dictatorship of the national’. Of course, in some instances, this lens is very useful in understanding the past and the uses of that past, but in other instances it is not. For many historical phenomena, other lenses such as those of gender, city-countryside, the economy, etc. are much more meaningful. Think, for instance, of migration movements in societies in Western Europe during the Middle Ages and the early modern period. It is not the boundaries between dukedoms and counties that are significant in this respect, but rather those of the urban walls. Even today, the tension between city and countryside plays an important role in migration processes, in part because it sometimes differs greatly not in physical, but in mental distances. A canon disregards the existence of multiple perspectives. It prevents critical-reflective thinking rather than stimulating it by presenting solidified representations of the past rather than exposing the constructive nature of history.

Such an approach to the past is of course related to the ultimate aspiration of a Canon of Flanders: to create a Flemish identity in terms of groupness. However, due to its very homogenizing and ethnocentric approach, this groupness risks becoming exclusive and fostering an us-them way of thinking, instead of working towards an ‘inclusive, shared Flemish community’ (Flemish Government, 2019: 26), as mentioned in the coalition agreement. After all, this Canon, conceived as mentioned above, offers many students in history education

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within our Flemish community. One of the greatest challenges is how to shape a newly composed community such as ours. [...] Fellow Flemish citizens, our Flemish nation has been influenced over time by numerous cultural and religious communities. Your ancestors have helped to determine the course of our history. [...] In short, Flemish Muslims are an inherent part of our Flemish nation. July 11 is also your holiday. Not only because you live here or were born here. July 11 is your holiday because you help shape this Flemish nation, as a free citizen with equal rights and obligations’. Bourgeois referred, among others, to the contributions of Al-Khwarismi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), all Arab scholars and philosophers from the Middle Ages, of Ahmet III (a Turkish sultan of the eighteenth century whose empire reached a peak in diplomacy and cultural exchange), of the multicultural presence at the western front in World War I, and of Moroccan and Turkish guest workers in the 1960–70s in the mining and other industrial sectors. Four years later, their contributions no longer seemed to matter for Flemish-nationalist politicians: in any case, they were no longer mentioned in the illustrations to the Canon of Flanders, which therefore showed itself to be hardly inclusive at all.

in Flanders hardly any starting point for experiencing a sense of belonging with this (very narrowly interpreted) 'Flemish' past.

## 6. By way of conclusion

The concept of identity and related representations of the past have experienced a clear evolution in history education over the past two centuries. From the propagation of a Belgian-national narrative and a Belgian groupness, both were toned down to the point where they were virtually ignored after the Second World War. An Occidentocentric representation of history and related identity construction initially took its place, apart from a brief, globally inspired interlude. Later, with the regionalization of education, the history standards issued by the Flemish government stated that history education should support students' self-understanding and social location, yet without putting forward any specific layer of identity. In practice, the first generation of standards mainly stimulated a Western connectedness. The new generation of standards takes a new direction by focusing on self-understanding and social location, and by putting more emphasis on the deconstruction of processes of identity formation and the use and abuse of the past in them. At odds with this was the sudden demand by the Flemish government for the creation of a historical Canon of Flanders in nineteenth-century style, which should underpin a Flemish sense of groupness.

In this twenty-first century, this raises new questions about how history education should best deal with processes of identity construction and, more broadly, with any instrumentalization of the past. A final and ideal answer to this question can, of course, never be formulated. Ultimately, how to deal with identity and history (education) is always the outcome of social debate. Nonetheless, it seems important to include in such a debate some important points of interest from the history of history education, such as what central goal is being pursued in history education (including its consequences in terms of identity construction and representation of the past), how realistic are the expectations with respect to history education, and to what extent has justice been done to the academic discipline of history. In the latter context, a public appeal and petition by French historians is particularly interesting. In 2005, a fierce media and political debate raged in France in response to a 23 February 2005 law that imposed an obligation to emphasize the 'positive role of France in colonization' in history education. The cream of the French historical world mobilized against this and put forward the following principles regarding how to deal with the past and with history (Azéma et al., 2005; based on a translation of Boone, 2021: 62–63):

1. History is not a religion. Historians accept no dogma, respect no prohibition, recognize no taboos. They can be quite annoying.
2. History is not morality. The role of historians is not to exalt, or to condemn. They explain.
3. History is not the slave of actuality. Historians do not project onto the past contemporary ideological schemes, nor do they smuggle contemporary sensibilities into the events of the past.
4. History does not equal memory. In a scientific exercise, historians collect the memories of people, compare them, corroborate them with testimonies, objects, traces, and in so doing establish facts. History takes memory into account, but does not allow itself to be reduced to it.
5. History is not a legal object. In a free state, it is not for Parliament, nor for legal authority, to define historical truth. The politics of the state, even motivated by the best of intentions, is not the politics of history.

These principles can equally be applied by history teachers in history education, for they relate very well to the idea of historical thinking, which aims to make students familiar with how historians work, how they approach and deal with the past, and how they build knowledge of the past.

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## Dealing With a Canon

### Teaching History in Flanders Using a Constructivist Approach to Heritage



Joris Van Doorselaere

#### Abstract

In September 2019, the new Flemish Government revealed plans to introduce a Flemish historical canon, intended for education. This chapter approaches the concept of a canon as an upcoming reality in Flanders, which, most likely, will be used in close relationship with history education. In this respect, this chapter shows that history teaching is crucial for the development of a critical attitude towards the past and for how it is described by different actors in the present. Considering the field of tension between canonizing history on the one hand and teaching historical thinking skills on the other, it seems necessary to reflect on ways to deal with such a canon in the classroom in a meaningful way. In doing so, this chapter draws on a constructivist approach to the notion of heritage and, subsequently, explores its relationship with historical thinking. Considering classroom practices, using heritage as part of a bottom-up approach, employing it as a social construct and looking at it from the perspective of historical significance could all prove useful when engaging with a canonical body of nation-oriented knowledge.



## 1. Introduction

In 2019, a curriculum reform was launched in Flanders, a Dutch-speaking region in Belgium, which is gradually being introduced in secondary education (12–18 years old). It is part of a new educational framework consisting of sixteen key competences and is roughly based on and derived from the eight key competences proposed and adopted by the European Commission (2006). As this EC list did not set out specific and extensively elaborated goals for history education, the responsible development committee appointed by the Flemish government, consisting of different stakeholders such as academic scholars, historians, pedagogues, representatives of different educational networks and history teachers, chose to elaborate one specific key competence. Even though this key competence has been named ‘historical consciousness’, its building blocks and attainment targets are focused on the didactic translation of the concept of historical thinking (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020).<sup>1</sup>

After decisions have been made on the macro-level in Flanders, certain educational networks, both public and private, are playing an intermediate role in their implementation. They possess a certain autonomy at the meso-level and have the right to combine or expand attainment targets and transfer them to school subjects of their own choice on the micro-level. At present, we can see that these networks are holding on to the stand-alone position of history as a subject and are rather focused on incorporating a selection of attainment targets concerning citizenship in the curricula (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020). So, although teaching history as a subject certainly came under pressure during past educational reforms in Flanders (De Wever and Verbruggen, 2013; Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020), it succeeded in consolidating itself as a significant part of the curriculum framework in the recent modernization of secondary education.

Interestingly, in September 2019, almost simultaneously with the implementation of the new curriculum in the first stage of secondary education, a new Flemish government was formed. During the negotiations over its formation, the Flemish nationalists claimed the policy areas of ‘culture’ and ‘education’. In

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1 When writing this chapter, the attainment targets meant for the second and third stages of secondary education were annulled by the Constitutional Court in June 2022. The Constitutional Court upheld the complaint of the Catholic and Steiner education umbrella organizations that these standards can be seen as a threat to their constitutional right to educational freedom. In a transitional phase, the standards for the second and third stages of secondary education will remain active until the end of the school year 2024–2025.

their plans, they proposed the development and introduction of a non-committal historical canon consisting of anchor points intended for education, which should be released during the first half of 2023. The proposal explicitly mentions the Dutch model, which had been conceived and introduced some ten years earlier (Flemish Government, 2019). According to the assignment letter from the Minister of Education, the canon has to follow the concept of ‘thematic windows’ – most likely fifty – and needs to present the history and culture that define the region of Flanders (Canon Van Vlaanderen, 2020).

In the Netherlands, the turn of the century was characterized by a strong public debate marked, among other things, by changing student populations. The advisory report of the Dutch Education Council (2005) observed a lack of interest in and knowledge about one’s ‘own’ past and suggested that this could be resolved by introducing a Dutch canon into education. However, the state of affairs in Flanders is rather different from that in the Netherlands. Neither in the master plan that formed the basis of the curriculum reforms, and which lists the strengths and weaknesses of the Flemish formal education system (Flemish Government, 2013), nor in the public inquiry preceding the development of the new curriculum framework (Van Lerensbelang, 2016) was there any evidence of a decrease in historical knowledge among students in Flanders. Nor was there any public debate over this. Thus, whereas the conception of the new curriculum framework in Flanders relied on a careful development process involving relevant stakeholders, the introduction of the historical canon can be seen as an isolated and rather political decision.

Much ink has been spilled on the question of whether or not a government may interfere in the curriculum of history education (De Paepe et al., 2019; Boone, 2021). Moreover, this decision seems to be at odds with the recent renewal of the curriculum and its emphasis on the concept of historical thinking. For this reason, the committee that elaborated the new key competence has not interfered with the development of this canonical body of nation-oriented knowledge of the past. To take up this daunting task, the Flemish historian Emmanuel Gerard was appointed as chair, after which he, in his turn, selected eight relevant experts active in fields such as (art) history, archaeology, moral sciences and literary studies. To provide support, a secretary and a public historian were recruited. Although this canon committee is pluralistic and composed of a wide range of relevant experts, and even though it has emphasized that it can sail an autonomous course free from political influence, there exists a somewhat conflictual situation. An extensive list of ‘thematic windows’ that define the region of Flanders is being developed that is specifically intended for formal and

non-formal educational purposes, without the input and expertise of the relevant stakeholders who designed the key competence on historical consciousness for education in the first place. In the end, it seems that the outcome will be rather fragmented. Learning standards based on the concept of historical thinking will come into effect. At the same time, a separate committee whose chairman was appointed by the government hopes to introduce a Flemish canon alongside these official standards as a non-committal tool. It is this field of tension that forms the main focus of this chapter.

In itself, the concept of a canon and how it relates to the teaching of history has been the topic of many theoretical deliberations (Grever and Stuurman, 2007; Symcox and Wilschut, 2009; Grever and van Boxtel, 2014). Although most of these critical reflections came about in the context of the Dutch canon, they seem to be applicable to the introduction of a canon roughly a decade later in Flanders too. In an attempt to tackle the problem of what and how to teach in history education, Wilschut (2009) distinguishes two approaches: a cultural approach, which determines the content and aim of history classes, and an educational approach, which relates to the method of their execution in classroom practice. Although the two approaches are closely connected, the cultural perspective does not seem to provide a solution. From a postmodernist perspective, different historical accounts can be valid at the same time, so Wilschut argues that it is very hard or even impossible to make a top-down selection of historical content. Therefore, he shifts his attention towards the educational approach and proposes teaching students 'historical thinking'. In seeking an answer to how to build such an awareness, Wilschut advocates using a historical framework. In this respect, he proposes to adopt an orientational framework that serves the educational purpose of teaching students to think in time, instead of a canonical framework that is meant to foster specific thoughts and attitudes. The former, he believes, should be furnished with recognizable and familiar content, including nation-oriented knowledge, mainly for associative reasons, and not, as is usually the case in a nationalistic framework, in order to raise nationalist sentiments or to influence students to accept fixed moral judgments.

Even though much more has undoubtedly been written about the canonization of history, in this chapter I only analyze Wilschut's theoretical reflection (2009), as it has served as a frame of reference for the newly conceived key competence on historical consciousness in Flanders. It is therefore relevant in discussing the field of tension between the drawing up of a canon and historical thinking skills. These tensions relate to the question of how the history of one's own country can be included and analysed in order to foster historical thinking

(Fink, Furrer and Gautschi, 2020). Moreover, rather than presenting a comprehensive overview of the pros and cons concerning the concept of a canon, looked at from various perspectives – and thus analyzing the issue on a more theoretical level – the canon needs to be approached as it is, namely as an upcoming educational reality in Flanders that will most likely be implemented into, or be used in close relationship with, history education. Hence, it is necessary to reflect on ways to deal with this canon, and above all to try to do this in a meaningful way.

Therefore, this chapter takes the introduction of the canon in Flanders as its point of departure. The main aim is to show that history teaching is important for the development of critical thinking skills and of a critical attitude towards the past and how it is described by different actors in the present, especially in light of this canonical body of nation-oriented knowledge that will be launched during the first half of 2023. In doing so, I draw on the educational opportunities of heritage. After answering the *why* question, I continue with two related sub-questions: (1) *what* heritage is to be taught, and (2) *how* can it be taught? Both questions will be looked at in the specific context of history education in Flanders.

In an attempt to develop a clearer understanding of these questions and to reflect upon the upcoming educational reality of the canon, this chapter first approaches them at a conceptual level. In this part, the notions of history and historical thinking are outlined. In addition, some more light is shed on heritage and the way this ambiguous concept is perceived and understood. Second, over the course of the past decade, the educational opportunities of heritage and historical thinking have been studied by various scholars. Therefore, the didactical relationship between the two concepts is explicated. Thirdly, I will take a closer look at the theoretical potential of heritage education and how it has found its way into the newly conceived curriculum framework in Flanders. Fourthly, I will scrutinize classroom practices and explore how the concepts and didactical opportunities that are discussed relate to the introduction of the Flemish canon. Here, following Wilschut's distinction between the cultural and educational approaches (2009), I will distinguish between the selection of relevant content for heritage education on the one hand and the didactical methods of engaging with a canon on the other hand. Finally, some practical issues for the implementation of heritage education in the specific context of Flanders are raised and discussed.

## 2. Building a conceptual framework

From an epistemological perspective, the past remains evermore something distant and unknown, as Lowenthal (2015) has made clear. This is the case, without

exception, for every person in the present, from students to professional historians. Nevertheless, the latter are equipped with a set of skills and methods allowing them to reconstruct the past critically. The past, however, can never be fully reconstructed, as its interpretation is shaped by the choices and interpretations of historians, based on the availability of historical sources. In the last few decades, the aim to initiate students into these disciplinary competences and insights has given rise to the didactical concept of historical thinking (Mathis and Parkes, 2020). The concept, albeit in different forms, has increasingly found its way into the curricula of Western countries (Luis and Rapanta, 2020). This broad notion is defined differently by various proponents, which has led to some geographical variations. When implementing the concept, Seixas (2017: 593–94) distinguishes three approaches, all influenced by and developed within the philosophical or historical traditions of their respective nations or regions. Therefore, when implementing the concept, we need to take the specific national or regional context into account. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this was also the case in Flanders.

The concept of historical thinking in education is based on two important ideas. On the one hand, it involves students acquiring insights into and expanding their knowledge about the past. On the other hand, it also aims to make students aware of the constructional nature of history by introducing them to how a historian works, often referred to as the ‘disciplinary’ or ‘procedural take’ (Seixas, 2017; VanSledright, 2010). In this respect, Van Nieuwenhuysse (2017, 2020) refers to ‘knowing history’ on the one hand and ‘doing history’ on the other. This can be understood as a symbiotic relationship. Developing substantive knowledge is only possible when the historian uses historical methods and epistemologies which constitute historical thinking. At the same time, historical thinking is impossible without sufficient factual knowledge. Seixas and Morton (2013: 4) note that:

*The six historical thinking concepts make no sense at all without the material, the topics, the substance, or what is often referred to as the ‘content’ of history.*

Nevertheless, according to Wineburg (2001), this way of thinking is difficult to reconcile with the spontaneous approach to the past that most people have. Therefore, he and many other proponents advocate the introduction of historical thinking skills to students in formal education.

While history is conceived as a way in which historians reconstruct knowledge about the past in the present, leading up to various interpretations and nar-

ratives, the concept of heritage is not only about the past, but also, and perhaps even more, about gaining insight into the present (Lowenthal, 2015). Heritage is continuously in motion, and, because of the various disciplines of which it is part, it seems neither desirable nor achievable to pin it down with an all-encompassing definition (Harvey, 2001; Winter, 2013). Thus, when looking at it from an epistemological point of view, we can distinguish many different ways of thinking about the multifaceted concept of heritage. However, we must take a pragmatic stance when considering the educational opportunities of the broad spectrum of ideas about heritage for history education.

Drawing on the influential conceptual outline of Loulanski (2006), two relevant approaches can be roughly distinguished. First, heritage can be seen as something that has remained unchanged over time, containing intrinsic values or fixed pieces of information that reflect certain moments in time and space and that remain unaltered by and independent of people (Loulanski, 2006). In other words, it contains valuable proof of the distant and strange past that Lowenthal (2015) referred to. Historians, in their turn, use it in an attempt to reconstruct that past by interpreting and constructing a narrative. In history education, teachers often, perhaps unknowingly, use this latter approach to heritage. For example, the Venus of Willendorf figurine can be used to examine critically prehistoric human beliefs and cultural-artistic behaviour and, with this purpose in mind, publishers generally include it in their textbooks. However, it is rarely presented as heritage separately.

The second approach follows the emerging human-centred perspective of heritage, as described by Loulanski (2006) and others. This way of thinking can be situated within the field of critical heritage studies. Here, heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is not merely seen as an unchangeable testimony to the past, but rather as a remnant of it that is shaped in the present and by actors in the present, and is firmly rooted in its contemporary uses (Graham, 2002). In this respect, heritage is to be understood as a remnant of the way in which people at a certain time and place have related to the past. In his critical reflection on the concept, Harrison (2013: 228–229) states that:

*Heritage is not a passive process, but an active assembling of a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future.*

Here, heritage is conceptualized as a nexus between the past, present and even the future. Labelling something as heritage always includes a certain idea or

vision of what communities deem it suitable or worthwhile to preserve (Frijhoff, 2007). As heritage takes shape within social interactions (Smith, 2006) and is therefore created as a result of human agency, this approach can be seen as a form of social constructivism (Loulanski, 2006).

It has to be stated that, concerning educational contexts, both approaches entail a number of challenges, which arise from the close connections of heritage with identity. In this respect, Grever and van Boxtel (2014: 16) state that ‘heritage is constructed because communities in the present classify certain traces of the past as “heritage” in order to transfer an identity to the future’.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, therefore, conceiving heritage as passive or one-sided can provide a foundation for the development of essentialist narratives that may lead to social exclusion (van Boxtel, 2011). The second approach, on the other hand, allows people to attribute meaning actively to remnants of the past. Nevertheless, as various individuals, groups, or communities will give meaning differently, heritage takes shape through meaningful negotiations (Smith, 2006). Handling heritage thus demands a much-needed openness and tolerance towards different perspectives. For this reason, cultural historians use the term ‘dynamic approach’ in order to create an open stance to how others connect aspects of the past to their own identities (Frijhoff, 2007; Grever, van Boxtel and Klein, 2016). In a way, this resembles the intrinsic conceptual features that Loulanski (2006: 227) noted: ‘dynamism, elasticity, and multiplicity’.

The two approaches do not necessarily exclude each other. Moreover, both appear useful when teaching history. However, the use of the second approach seems a prerequisite, as it allows the development of a critical attitude towards the past and how it is described by various actors in the present. Therefore, in light of the upcoming release of the Flemish canon, and given that its conceptualization relies on a rather one-sided and essentializing definition, this chapter builds further on the second approach. It reflects on the specific educational context in which this canon will be employed and takes into account the didactical opportunities of heritage in relation to historical thinking skills.

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2 Own translation of: ‘De constructie van erfgoed komt tot stand doordat gemeenschappen in het heden bepaalde sporen uit het verleden als ‘erfgoed’ classificeren om daarmee met het oog op de toekomst een identiteit over te dragen.’ (Grever and van Boxtel, 2014, 16).

### 3. Digging deeper into the didactical relationship between heritage and history education

Over the course of the past decade, the various educational opportunities of heritage and, more specifically, its uses in relation to the concept of historical thinking have increasingly become the topic of research. Löwenthal (2015) has described the mutual relationship of history and heritage as complex due to the fact that they serve different purposes. A disciplinary approach to history intends a critical study of the past, whereas heritage is conceived rather as a social construct formed in the present, being thus inherently biased by a contemporary lens, and used or misused for various reasons. However, from a didactical point of view, these contrasting perspectives seem to be reconcilable. When it comes down to classroom practice, Levstik and Barton (2004) problematize the whole idea of dichotomous relations, such as that between ‘history’ and ‘heritage’, as they inhibit a productive dialogue. Instead, when reflecting on the purpose and relevance of history education, both history and heritage focus on goals that serve humanistic and democratic values.

Referring to Canada’s national narrative, Seixas (2016) pushes the dichotomous account in a more dialectic direction. Aware of heritage’s close connections to personal and collective identity and the associated risk of evoking ‘us versus them’ sentiments, he emphasizes the potential of critical historical thinking skills and heritage education. Barton (2016) deconstructs this dichotomy further by stating that heritage can be effectively employed to understand in what ways actors in the present attribute meaning to the past and to what extent this leads to deliberate misrepresentations of the past. For example, while investigating transatlantic slavery exhibitions in the light of heritage canons in the Netherlands, Grever, De Bruijn and van Boxtel (2012) argue that heritage education seems useful in reflecting on the ‘presentism’ in heritage practices, thus contributing to historical thinking skills. In sum, when introducing heritage into the classroom, we should actively and critically engage students with assessing how and why the past, the present and the future continuously interact.

Fully aware of the essentialism that heritage often becomes entangled in, Grever, van Boxtel and Klein (2015) draw attention to its relevance in the history classroom. Since tangible and intangible heritage, as well as the related public debates about it, surround students in their everyday lives, the end goal of learning historical thinking skills ideally lies in a transfer beyond the school context. Despite the fact that engaging with heritage depends on a rather affective dimension of the past, empirical studies (Pinto and Zarbato, 2017; Pinto



and Ibañez-Etxeberria, 2018) argue that heritage does not necessarily stand in the way of acquiring critical thinking skills. Moreover, Castro-Calviño, Rodríguez-Martínez and López-Facal (2020) conclude that integrating local heritage into history education has the potential to make the curriculum more interesting for students, and in addition, it can contribute to a raised awareness of heritage – or the sentiments and attitudes involved – in their own environment. To summarize, Figure 1 presents a visualization of the mutual relationship between history education and heritage based on the theoretical reflections described above.

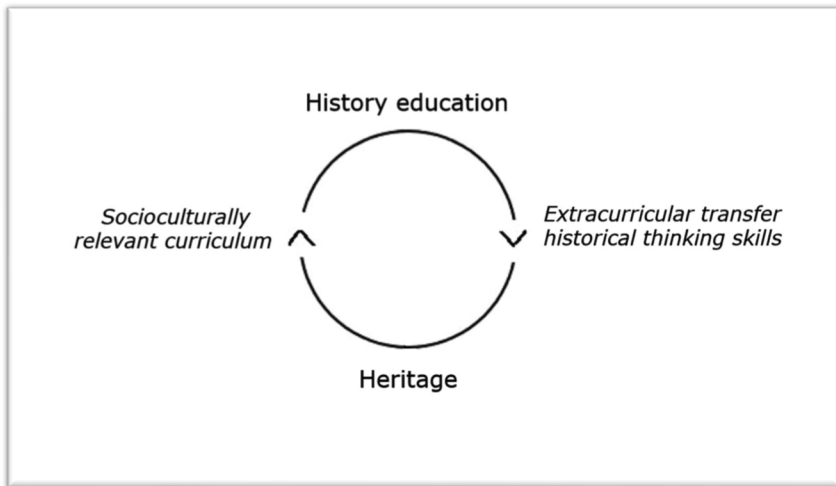


Figure 1: Visualization of the relationship between history education and heritage

#### 4. Heritage education in the new curriculum framework

In Flanders, as stated above, the newly conceived key competence in historical consciousness is built around the broad concept of historical thinking. However, next to the insights of Wineburg (2001) and the six didactic concepts of Seixas and Morton (2013), which are based on a more disciplinary approach, the development committee also took into account the model of historical reasoning of van Boxtel and Van Drie (2013). It is noteworthy that, besides the acknowledgment of insights from other disciplines such as cultural history and public history, some theoretical foundations of the educational field of socio-constructivism found their way into the key competence as well. Moreover, according to Stoel,

Van Drie and van Boxtel (2017), the educational standards should follow the principles of explicit teaching so that students should be made familiar with the concepts and fully engage with them in an explicit manner. All this, added to the personal experience and results of educational research of the development committee, led to a didactical translation of the concept of historical thinking at the intersection of disciplinary and citizenship expectations (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020). This has resulted in a set of standards that seem to correspond with the plea to develop further the concept of historical thinking to promote democratic values (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Wilschut, 2016; Thorp and Persson, 2020).

The key competence in historical consciousness (Flemish Government, 2018) comprises four building blocks: (1) 'situating historical phenomena in a historical frame of reference,' (2) 'critical reasoning with and about historical sources,' (3) 'developing substantiated historical representations from multiple perspectives,' and (4) 'reflecting upon and interpreting the complex relationship between past, present, and future'. Although heritage education is not explicitly conceptualized in the framework, opportunities are undoubtedly present. For example, different types of heritage, such as manuscript fragments, oral traditions, statues or paintings, can be included as historical sources and as part of the historical inquiries in building blocks two and three.

In addition, building blocks one and four offer many opportunities for reflecting on heritage and gaining insights into the concept itself. The historical frame of reference in building block one is Western and European. Yet it refrains from imposing specific factual knowledge (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2020). The framework merely offers a workable chronology to situate and understand historical phenomena in accordance with certain temporal, spatial and social dimensions. Nonetheless, being a construction itself, it strives to be open to criticism, as one of the associated attainment targets proposes. The openness of the reference framework invites one to select, include and contextualize diverse kinds of heritage manifestations, from mainstream, much discussed or even controversial to smaller, more local and personal ones. For instance, when reflecting on the concept of 'oral tradition' in the context of medieval culture, it is possible for the teacher to select one well-known example. However, this might just as well be done by encouraging the students to find examples in their personal lives. Building block four encourages reflection on the relationship between past, present and future. In a way, it allows one to take a meta-perspective and to become aware of history as an interpretation and construction that is subject to various influences. In line with this approach, heritage can be considered as a construct as well, one that is shaped by present beliefs and human sentiments, and which

is closely connected to identity-building processes. Although the meta-concept of historical significance, which could prove useful when reflecting on heritage, is not mentioned explicitly, it is implicitly woven into building block four.

## 5. Selection process: what heritage is to be taught?

Although heritage can provide a sense of social and cultural relevance to the history curricula, it seems difficult to integrate it into the curriculum framework either nationally or regionally. One reason for this is that it strongly depends on the contexts in which it is employed when following the socio-constructivist approach to the concept. Finding out how others give meaning to the past in the present – sometimes in very different ways – can have its merits in educational settings. However, those ‘others’ do not have to be inside the classroom per se, but may just as well be members of society in general. In this regard, it seems in line with what Grever, van Boxtel and Klein (2015) have argued, namely that the purpose of learning historical thinking skills lies beyond the school context, or what Barton and Levstik (2004) and Wilschut (2009, 2016) had in mind when claiming that one of the main goals of history education lies in learning to partake in modern democratic societies. Reflecting upon the what and why of selecting content, Wilschut (2009: 136) states:

*This is the reason why we should teach an outline of western history to our students, mentioning names with which they are familiar, names and dates from their own country's history or the region where they happen to live. The reason to do this, however, has nothing to do with making them feel proud citizens of their country, or teaching them some politically correct view of past or present. The reason is rather to help them to think in historical time, which is the most crucial thing that can be taught in history lessons.*

Wils (2009: 28) picks up on this and goes on to say:

*The contents of a framework of orientational knowledge should not be determined by a 'canonizing' committee, but should (especially in a country like Belgium where there are no central examinations) be left to the wisdom of individual teachers, even though textbooks do in reality play an important canonizing role. In theory the teacher can adapt the frame of reference to the actual content of the lessons, which, ideally, should also be determined by the profile of the group of pupils in the classroom.*

Recognizability, social relevance and teacher autonomy appear to be keywords in the selection process. However, it is not always easy for a teacher to assess which aspects of the past have meaning – to a greater or lesser extent – for the different students inside the classroom. This may put teachers in a practical predicament. On the one hand, the risk seems immanent that the selection of heritage will be adapted to the culturally dominant mainstream while excluding other perspectives. On the other hand, teachers may tend to select content to meet the needs of specific groups or ethnic minorities in the classroom. As Wilschut (2016) has described the situation, based on a variety of empirical investigations, this is not without risk, as it might reinforce ‘us’ versus ‘them’ sentiments. Taking this into account, history education that is centred around learning how to deal with the diversity of contemporary views of the past should transcend such a selection process. Or, as Ribbens (Grever et al., 2006: 101) has put it in his reflections on the introduction of the Dutch canon, history should be made relevant for contemporary society by incorporating content that considers the common interest, so that everyone feels connected to that history.

However, this does not prevent schools and teachers from engaging with heritage content in a dynamic and participatory way in their educational practices. I use the term ‘heritage content’, as it can just as well encompass ongoing public discourses, without actually bringing the selected heritage (digitally) inside the history classroom or engaging with it outside the school context. As I have made conceptually clear above, heritage is not only conceived as a tangible or intangible remnant of the past, but also as an affective present-day relationship with the past and with others who may or may not share this same relationship. For example, in 2020, the decision of the city council in Ghent to make structural and visual adjustments to the Gravensteen, a castle with medieval roots in the city centre, stirred up debate. While in these discussions various actors can take up the microphone, the reasons for their involvement can be quite different. Accessibility, sustainability, profitability and identity may all be possible motives related to heritage. Therefore, recent newspaper articles or sometimes fierce comments on social media can just as well serve as a way to explore how people relate to the past and, while doing so, to work on citizenship goals, such as taking a personal stance or engaging in a meaningful dialogue. Although the Gravensteen in Ghent can be seen as a well-known example of heritage in Flanders, more small-scale or local and personally meaningful examples of tangible or intangible heritage can undoubtedly provide the same insights.

As familiarity and recognizability are key when orienting oneself in time, teachers seem to have no reason to steer away from the canonized content com-

pletely. The last thing history teachers should do is to shield their students from initiatives and events outside the school context. However, next to this top-down model, which attributes meaning to the past through the lens of the nation-state, I suggest approaching the selection process of heritage content as bottom-up and participatory, as visualized in Figure 2. Most likely, the top-down Flemish canon will somewhat allow for opportunities to engage with other meaningful interpretations and perspectives or constructed narratives as well. The real difference between the bottom-up and top-down approaches can be found in their starting points. While the ‘thematic windows’ of the Flemish canon suggest specific content within a nation-oriented frame, after which other views and narratives are allowed to seep in, the bottom-up and participatory approach shifts the responsibility for making curricular choices towards the interaction between schools, teachers and students, in order to pursue sociocultural relevance (in the sense of orienting oneself in time) and to participate in a democratic society.

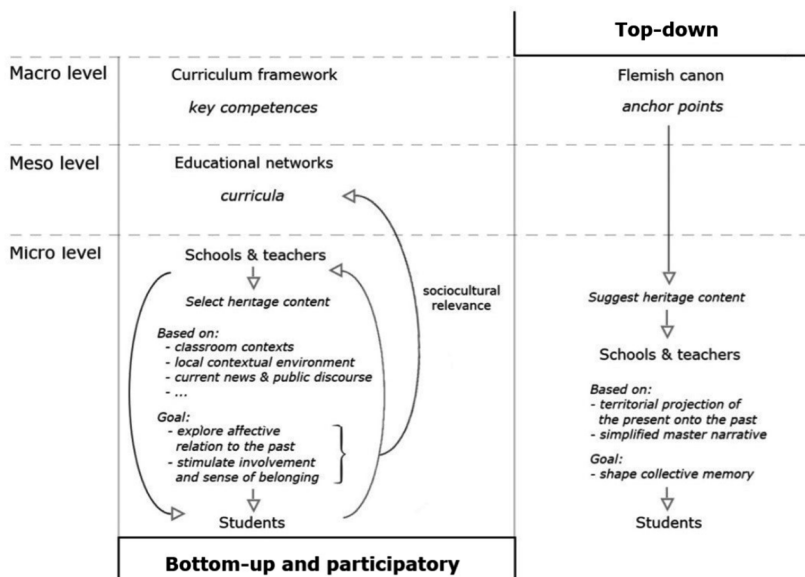


Figure 2: Visualization of the bottom-up, participatory approach and the top-down approach

## 6. Methods: how can heritage be taught?

In the next step, after the selection process of relevant content, the question arises of how teachers can integrate heritage effectively into their classroom practice. Evidently, different forms of heritage can be used as historical sources to be assessed critically, as part of a historical inquiry. Nevertheless, and in line with previous claims at the intersection of history and citizenship education, endeavours such as the development of a canon of the historical and cultural heritage of Flanders can become a topic in itself to discuss in the history classroom. After all, when a government or a designated committee selects anchor points from the past that, in their eyes, define the region's identity to be passed on to young people and to shape the collective memory or construct commonalities, they engage in heritage as a cultural practice (Smith, 2006). Critically questioning and discussing the motives or values at play in the decision-making process seems a valid and necessary undertaking in light of the humanistic and democratic purposes of the curriculum that have been put forward in this chapter.

How does this critical inquiry and discussion of a canon relate to the concept of historical thinking? In their reflections on the 'pragmatic hybrid' design of Seixas and Morton (2013), Thorp and Persson (2020) advocate extending this concept of historical thinking in such a way that it could serve a democratic society. In their conclusions, they state:

*[W]e have argued for a broader conception of historical thinking that pays attention to the existential and fundamental meaning-making aspects of historical accounts, and appreciates how history and historical knowledge are always culturally contingent and therefore dynamic and open to contestation and discussion.*

In this respect, and based on the findings of research done between 2009 and 2014, Grever, van Boxtel and Klein (2015) assert that heritage can be useful in assessing how students understand the way other people attribute meaning to certain aspects of the past. This touches upon the notion of historical significance, which was elaborated by Seixas and Morton (2013) as one of their six historical thinking concepts. They refer to the concept in response to the challenge that historians face when deciding what it is important to learn about the past. They go on to claim that students tend to believe that everything the teacher teaches, or the textbook states, is historically significant. Therefore, they should learn to assess themselves what is significant and what is not, and on what grounds certain choices have been made.

Evidently, this train of thought can be followed when analysing a historical canon as well, as it presents a deliberately simplified narrative through the lens of the nation state. Considering that the government and the development committee have attributed significance to certain persons, events and objects in the past, gaining insight into the notion of heritage could prove beneficial when discussing and contextualizing the items that made it on to the list. Their particular choices do not necessarily indicate historical significance, but rather reflect present perspectives. Therefore, this concept is denoted separately and labelled as 'present significance' (Savenije, van Boxtel and Grever, 2014; Grever, van Boxtel, Klein, 2015). To sum up, engaging with heritage's significance in the present first requires us to obtain a good understanding of the notion of heritage as a social construct, alongside dealing with heritage in a more explicit way.

## 7. Challenges for heritage education in Flanders

While the release of the historical canon draws closer, a couple of challenges remain. These challenges are to be found in the specific educational context of Flanders regarding the use of heritage and the tensions that arise between the bottom-up and top-down approaches.

When returning to the master plan (Flemish Government, 2013) which forms the basis of the recent curriculum reform, one of the concerns raised was a lack of social involvement by schools, which remain largely isolated from the local community. However, in order to engage in a bottom-up, participatory and socio-culturally relevant form of heritage education as an integral part of teaching history, making connections with the environment, including various local actors and stakeholders, is deemed crucial. Both the field research (Van der Auwera, Schramme and Jeurissen, 2007) and the report from the heritage sector that followed (Schoefs and Van Genechten, 2008) have made a plea to embed schools in a broader learning and living context.

Besides pointing out considerable challenges in the school context, the field research on heritage education (Van der Auwera, Schramme and Jeurissen, 2007) also reported that teachers in Flanders are not familiar with introducing heritage into the classroom. To this day, no new field research has been conducted, and little is known about the situation in contemporary class practices in general, nor in history education in particular. A study of cultural education in secondary schools in Flanders shows that the didactic use of heritage is lacking. No less than 71.6% of the teachers (N = 796) surveyed indicated that they have never referred to heritage in their lessons (Beunen, Siongers and Lievens,

2016). However, it remains unclear how either the researchers or the teachers in the survey conceived of the heritage concept, what the ratio of history teachers was in the survey, and why these teachers have refrained from a didactical use of heritage.

In this respect, future research should focus on how teachers conceptualize heritage and the practical and didactical hindrances they encounter when trying to integrate it into their classroom practice. Moreover, little is known about the students' perspective either. Ideally, therefore, additional research should shed light on how students attribute meaning to the past. Finally, the upcoming educational reality of the canon poses some new didactical challenges for teachers and students alike. For instance, how will (history) teachers deal with this non-committal canonical body of knowledge in their classroom practices, and how will their students perceive and receive it?

## 8. Conclusion

This chapter has approached the launch of a history canon in Flanders scheduled for the first half of 2023 as an upcoming educational reality, which will most likely be employed in, or in close relationship with, history education. Therefore, centrally, it has reflected on the relevance and purpose of teaching history and, more importantly, on how to deal with such a canon. In doing so, it has focused on the implications for classroom practice and has looked at the educational opportunities of the multifaceted and ambiguous concept of heritage. Considering a pragmatic stance on the broad spectrum of what is conceived as heritage from an educational perspective, I have distinguished two relevant approaches to the concept. While the first focuses on heritage as inherent and unalterable knowledge and values that reflect specific moments in time and space, the second relies on the social-constructivist idea that heritage is shaped in and mainly by the present. Although both seem useful when teaching history, the second approach has proved to be especially relevant in light of the upcoming introduction of the Flemish canon and the specific educational context in which it will be employed.

Looking at the central question, we can say that heritage is ubiquitous in present-day society. Ideally, the purpose of learning historical thinking skills lies beyond the school context (Grever, van Boxtel and Klein, 2015). The dichotomy between history and heritage has largely been eliminated and is being pushed into a more dialectic direction by research on the didactical relationship between heritage and historical thinking (Grever, van Boxtel and Klein, 2015; Barton,



2016; Seixas, 2016). Engaging with heritage can be effective when trying to comprehend in what way individuals, groups, communities, or associated institutions attribute meaning to the past. This seems to be in line with the claims of Grever (2006), Barton and Levstik (2004) and Wilschut (2009, 2016) that history education should focus on learning how to participate in modern democratic societies.

As the development of a canon in Flanders, initiated by the government, seems closely connected to identity politics, the objective of history education in the first place is to remain disconnected. However, this does not mean that history teachers should refrain from referring to the canon. As an instrument, it will be employed in other domains of society, and students will be introduced to it, for example as public history initiatives in museums or in content on social and other media channels. Therefore, it is up to the history teacher to contextualize this political undertaking sufficiently. Critically questioning or discussing the motives or values at play in the decision-making process seems a valid and necessary endeavour. In doing so, the concept of heritage could prove to be an interesting partner, as the government or the development committee engaged in heritage as a cultural practice.

Drawing further on the educational opportunities of heritage, this chapter has considered the two sub-questions of *what* heritage should be dealt with in the classroom and *how* in the specific context of history education in Flanders. Two recommendations came to the surface. First, I suggest approaching the selection process of heritage content as bottom-up and participatory and propose to shift the curricular choices primarily towards the interaction between schools, teachers and students in order to pursue sociocultural relevance and participation in a pluralist and democratic society. Second, I argue that the notion of heritage, ideally explicitly, should be employed as a social construct. Following on from this, the didactical concepts of historical significance and, even more importantly, of present significance could prove useful when engaging with a canonical body of nation-oriented knowledge. To conclude, these recommendations both seem to be in line with the main goal of history education and the associated historical thinking skills, which is to allow future generations to navigate their way through society while encountering a multitude of historical or cultural narratives and perspectives, or related initiatives, along the way.

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# Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity





SEBASTIAN BARSCH, ANDREAS HÜBNER

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## Concepts of Time in Science Education and History Didactics

Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Environmental History



Sebastian Barsch



Andreas Hübner

### Abstract

This article begins with what may seem like an obvious observation: time is an abstract concept which plays a central role in both the humanities and the sciences. In the Anthropocene, such observations take on additional relevance in history education: in order to be able to examine and discuss the climate crisis, students must develop competences that help them understand ‘time’ in its various dimensions. Against this background, the article stresses the importance of ‘making time for time’ in the history classroom. With regard to historical learning, an understanding of the current challenges requires interdisciplinary thinking as well as an interdisciplinary understanding of the concept of ‘time’. Thus, history education and didactics must soon develop empirical instruments and methods to assess students’ understanding of time.

## 1. The Anthropocene: an object of historical thinking and learning

### The human impact on comprehensive change

Climate change, our present ecological crisis, and the global rate of species extinction are increasingly topics of public discussion and political action. Environmental issues have a far-reaching influence on social discourses, and these discourses often refer to concepts that invoke temporality (the heritage of humanity, the future, destiny, etc.). The Anthropocene, the designation of an epoch in which humankind and its actions must be regarded as a geological factor, if not *the* decisive factor, has therefore long ceased to be a pure topic for the natural sciences (Dürbeck, 2015). Over twenty years have passed since the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and the diatom researcher Eugene Stoermer heralded this new geological epoch in a two-page article for the *Global Change Newsletter* (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000). In light of the steadily growing influence of human activities on Earth, the two natural scientists suggested that the current epoch should be characterized using the term ‘Anthropocene’. Two years later, Crutzen, a Nobel laureate, made these considerations more concrete by declaring the existence of a specific epoch of the ‘Geology of Mankind’ and emphasized the culture- and nature-shaping geological power that humans have applied to shape and change the Earth since the end of the eighteenth century (Crutzen, 2002: 23). Although Crutzen and Stoermer’s reflections have since trickled into the humanities, history education has so far dealt with the repercussions of the Anthropocene only rudimentarily, probably for methodological as well as epistemological reasons. Besides, it must be realized that the term ‘Anthropocene’ originates from a scientific discourse, while in the meantime also becoming a socio-cultural and political term in everyday language (Tanner, 2022). Some scholars have even criticized the Anthropocene as ‘a particular way of understanding the world and a normative guide to action’, that is, as an ideology in the sense of such thinkers as Gramsci and Ricoeur (Baskin, 2015: 10). For historical thinking and learning, all of these facets of the term are relevant.

### Climate change, the Anthropocene and history

In contrast, stories about climate change as a history of human conflict have been told for some time. These stories are currently mostly being written by climate researchers from the perspective of the natural sciences. Indeed, these climate researchers are working on a ‘new narrative about people and their past’

(Chakrabarty, 2011: 143). Until recently, few historians have dealt explicitly with the Anthropocene. Nonetheless, in historical scholarship, Dipesh Chakrabarty has wrought an extensive reception of the Anthropocene as a concept (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2021). In times of anthropogenic climate change, Chakrabarty has called into question the separation of natural from human history and called for a dialogue between the natural sciences and history in search of a historiography of the Anthropocene (Mauelshagen, 2012: 134–135). In recent years, a number of studies have been launched in the fields of environmental and climate history, which have produced exciting results for the historical climatologist. In some cases, these studies have attempted to record or historicize human-environment relations. Examples include the work of Christian Pfister, Franz Mauelshagen and Sam White (2018). Reference should also be made to a number of studies in the field of historical disaster research. Eleonora Rohland (2018) and Andy Horowitz (2020), for example, have published monographs on the hurricane history of the city of New Orleans. These monographs, like many other studies, explore the cultural conditionality of natural disasters, as well as the interconnectedness of disasters, crises and social inequalities. More recently, a collective of authors has published a volume that considers the construction of conceptualizations and categorizations in historical disaster research without losing sight of the historicity and temporality of natural disasters (van Bavel et al., 2020).

For history education – a discipline concerned not only with researching the past, but also with building a future of individual and collective historical consciousness – the Anthropocene opens up a vast field of research that has not yet been dealt with in any depth. ‘In seeking to attune history education to a relational, ecological and ethical future orientation’, only recently have historians Heather McGregor, Sara Karn and Jackson Pind (2020: 169–170) launched a project that aims at finding ‘ways of teaching and learning that respond more meaningfully to the precarity of our times.’ Drawing on indigenous studies, environmental history and education on climate change, McGregor, Karn and Pind (2021: 500–502) suggest a framework of teaching that emphasizes four *radical* theoretical touchstones: radical truth, radical hope, radical imagining and radical teaching. In this sense, they argue for an inquiry ‘into local and global environmental histories, and histories of human flexibility and resilience’ (2021: 500) (radical truth); ask ‘learners to identify, examine, and critique the assumptions (or mythologies/root metaphors) that underpin society’s current values, and then envision ways of living differently’ (2021: 500) (radical imagining); call for approaches in the history classroom that make space ‘for evidence, agency, perspec-

tives, and ethical questions that derive from more-than-human beings, and may result in increased connectedness with those beings' (2021: 500) (radical teaching); and advocate 'attending to eco-anxiety and the range of other emotional responses and complex aspects of climate change education' (2021: 500), as well as 'encouraging youth to write their own stories about the meaning of life as life changes' (2021: 501) (radical hope).

In a recent article, historian Kenneth Nordgren (2021) has taken a similar approach and argued that history education, while being aware of the ongoing crisis presented by the Anthropocene, still continues to fall back on anthropocentric narratives. Such narratives might help us understand present challenges, but, as Nordgren (2021) points out, 'crisis awareness must go beyond the present and take root in our historical consciousness; crisis is temporary but learning to live with the consequences will be long term.' Indeed, the Anthropocene will 'haunt' students long after they have left the history classroom: the environment is a burning issue that students will be confronted with in their lifeworld for many years to come.

Previous approaches to history didactics that view the environment from a historical perspective have clearly been focused on teaching pragmatics, hardly taking account of recent developments at all.<sup>1</sup> Today, approaches that combine environmental history and history education are mainly found in the fields of historical deforestation, the exploitation of nature or industrialization. However, these are usually limited to regional references, mostly without reflecting on the influence of these events on the present.

Empirical research on the place of the historical judgements of pupils in the context of environmental history has been completely missing so far. However, given that assessing the challenges associated with climate change requires more than historical expertise, it would be highly promising to explore the relationship between science literacy and historical thinking, given that understanding the Anthropocene requires understanding long time periods. Drawing on David Christian's *Big History* (2014), a few years ago the Big History Project was launched in the United States, albeit with a distinctly secondary school-

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1 See, for example, the special issue on "Umweltgeschichte" (1988), *Geschichte Lernen 4*; Borries, B. v. (2009) 'Wie vermittelt man Umweltgeschichte in der Schule?', in P. Masius, O. Sparenberg and J. Sprenger (eds) *Umweltgeschichte und Umweltzukunft: Zur gesellschaftlichen Relevanz einer jungen Disziplin*, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 241–258; Döpcke, I. and Reeken, D. v. (eds) (2015) *Umweltgeschichte lehren und lernen: keine Katastrophe*, Schwalbach am Taunus: Wochenschau Verlag.

based focus. The educational materials associated with the project, which are all open-access, are often designed to train historical thinking by embedding history, geology, biology (evolution) and physics (the universe) in a common narrative.

Against this background, the present article stresses the necessity of an empirical approach to the topic of environmental history in the context of historical learning. The basic assumption is that an understanding of the current challenges requires interdisciplinary thinking as well as an interdisciplinary understanding of the concept of 'time'. With regard to the climate crisis, it is evident that oversimplified observations lead to incorrect assessments. Climate change deniers often argue that the climate has always changed over the course of the Earth's history. In doing so, they invoke extremely long periods of time. The influence of humans on the climate, however, takes place in short periods of time that are historically tangible. It is thus difficult to argue one-dimensionally and solely based on historical analogies: floods, as described in medieval records, are not evidence of human-caused climate change. Industrialization, on the other hand, can be viewed historically as a factor influencing the present climate. In short, the phenomenon of climate change and the decline of biodiversity that can now be perceived are due to the misconduct of humans over the past 150 years or so. They can no longer be stopped. Social changes, e.g., regarding mobility behavior and energy turnaround, are now being made under high temporal pressure, since there is hardly any temporal leeway left to secure the future of human existence.

In reckoning with this crisis, 'deep time' and 'historical time' both come into play. Indeed, Bronislaw Szerszynski (2017) reflected upon this very issue when projecting that 'if the Anthropocene is to be accepted as a unit of Earth time, it will need its own monumental system to mediate the different temporal and spatial registers involved [...]. That is, rather than presenting the sheer power of geological forces and simply including human agency among them, and rather than presenting a singular story of civilizational progress (or disaster), an Anthropocene monumental system would surely have to challenge the viewer to wrestle with the paradoxes and responsibilities involved in being a member of a species that, albeit unevenly, is achieving geological consequentiality' (128).

Time is an abstract concept that plays a central role in both the subject of history (culturally shaped time) and the topics of the sciences (the history of living things; evolution). The consideration of time also represents a subject of psychology, since we ourselves move with and in time. No explicit connection is usually made in class between the thematization of the concept of time in different subjects, such as geography and history. It is therefore rather subject to chance whether a pupil recognizes such connections. In everyday life, an assess-

ment of change in environmental conditions is usually accomplished by using quotidian concepts of time. This appears to be extremely critical in view of the current crises faced by humanity, in the context of which an understanding of time is central. We argue, therefore, that in order to understand the climate crisis, students must develop the competences to understand ‘time’ in its various dimensions and must be able to fall back on concepts of time whenever necessary. History education and didactics must develop empirical instruments and methods to assess students’ (mis)understanding of time. To borrow from the geologist Marcia Bjornerud, pupils must ‘develop the habit of timefulness – a clear-eyed view of our place in Time, both the past that came long before us and the future that will elapse without us’ (2018: 17).

## 2. Concepts of time in history and geology

With the rise of the Anthropocene concept, historians have begun to reassess the concept of time. As a result of anthropogenic activities, a convergence of historical time and deep time has been assumed by scholars such as Chakrabarty (2009, 2015). Intertwined with this convergence is the observation that the Earth system and humanity are no longer clearly separated from each other. Thus, as Philip Hüpkes (2020: 1, translation SB/AH) has noted, historians have initiated a reconsideration of human and geological temporalities: ‘The concept of “deep time” is often used to adequately grasp the temporal dimension of geological and planetary scales in their anthropological, phenomenological and subjective implications.’

In broad terms, though geological time and deep time are often regarded as two sides of the same coin, they should be differentiated. Geological time refers to the temporal scale of geological processes that are materially measurable: ‘There remains a material side of time for geologists, for there is no geological time without geological objects. Ultimately, for the purposes of our discussion, this time is written into the strata of the planet’ (Chakrabarty, 2018: 22). The concept of deep time, as Hüpkes (2020: 1) has remarked, emphasizes a qualitative component implicit in the dimension of geological time. The conceptual difference between geological time and deep time is to be located between measurable time, that is, geological time, and (non-)understandable time, that is, deep time.

In other words, deep time may be measurable but, as it is based on an understanding of large-scale periods of time, humans may not be able to comprehend deep time fully. For the human imagination, the specific time interval between

geological time-spans is not immediately apparent (Hüpkes, 2020: 1). Geological and mathematical comprehensibility of magnitude alone is no longer helpful for the human imagination to establish an understanding of time: ‘Numbers do not seem to work with regard to deep time. Any number above a couple of thousand years – fifty thousand, fifty million – will with nearly equal effect awe the imagination’ (McPhee, 1981: 20).<sup>2</sup>

‘The concept of time: can it be fully realised and taught?’ – this question was posed by Truscott et al. in 2006, who concluded that especially geological ‘time or “deep time” is a clear example of the problems that students have in conceptualising time in contexts that do not relate to everyday situations.’ This finding can also apply to historical learning. Here, too, ‘the approved textbooks [...] presuppose an already developed differentiated formal concept of time, which is mostly not congruent with the students’ individual concepts of time’ (Hofmann-Reiter, 2015: 329, translation SB/AH). In addition to recommending that students’ individual concepts of time be diagnosed for each subject and that instruction be adjusted accordingly, Truscott et al. (2006: 23) make the following recommendations:

- ‘Consider making the teaching of time explicit or subliminal – “Making Time for Time” in the curriculum.
- Include techniques that embody representations of measurement by means of: visualisation; role play; real-time events; simulation; using space to represent time – Experiential/Active Learning.’

The plea to ‘make time for time’ also seems reasonable given that concepts of time are of great importance for various subjects but are rarely explicitly addressed in terms of their differences from one another. For history education, research on time concepts has been going on for a long time. Earlier studies were often based on Piaget’s developmental stages of the formation of the time concept, although the model itself was criticized early on for being inherently sceptical of children’s abilities (Lee, 2010; Vukelich and Thornton, 1990). It is striking that research on historical concepts of time has so far been conducted primarily with elementary school children. Despite arguments against inflexible psychological models such as Piaget’s, researchers seem to assume implicitly that the formation of a concept of time is completed early in one’s school career or even in early childhood education (Groot-Reuvekamp et al., 2014).

It is therefore not surprising to find that in this age group, on the one hand, great leaps in development are made, while on the other hand concepts of time

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2 Cited by Hüpkes, 2020: 1.

are primarily based on subjectively perceived time. On a more theoretical level, Arie Wilschut (2019), following Wineburg (1999) and Lee (2005), identifies two levels of temporal consciousness for teaching history: ‘temporal consciousness: the intuitive, spontaneous one, and the unnatural one represented by historical ways of thinking about time’ (Wilschut, 2019: 845). Both can also be considered culturally bound: ‘Thinking about (differences in) temporal awareness is part of an ongoing dialogue between western and ‘non-western’ cultures’ (Wilschut, 2019: 831). Across cultures, Wilschut (2019: 833) recognizes three types of spontaneous time perception:

‘[...] a cyclic-ecological awareness of time, caused by the annual sequence of seasons [...] linearly shaped time experience which may be defined as ‘social’ [...] Beyond ecological and social time, there is a mythical past, of which it is not known how long ago it has existed or how extensive its duration has been.’

As an ‘unnatural’ way of being conscious of time, he identifies six ‘Western’ acts of thinking:

- ‘anachronism
- historical distance
- contingency [...]
- historical narration
- chronology
- evidence as a bridge between past and present’ (Wilschut, 2019: 835–836).

The last point in particular is one that is connectable to concepts of time in the natural sciences. Concepts of time become relevant in social, geological and even biological thinking when they are connected to the topic of the ‘environment’. For example, ‘plastic packaging is often used for the transport of food because it has favorable properties such as low weight, flexibility, etc. However, plastic packaging and plastic bags are extremely short-lived products. Often, after a single use, they already become waste, which back in the ecosystems, especially in the oceans, becomes a problem due to the slow degradation of plastics of up to several hundred years. The time logic of consumer society, which is geared toward short-termism and speed, enters into a relationship of tension with the time dynamics of ecosystems, which are geared toward slowness and long-termism’ (Morgenroth, 2015: 36).

In biology education, the concept of time plays a major role, especially in the context of evolution. Here, too, time has a different effect. Variation-generating events (e.g., mutation and recombination) can affect the reproductive probabilities of individual organisms over minutes to years, and thus influence the population level over time scales of up to millions of years (Tibell and Harms,



2017: 960). Thinking about biology requires the use of ‘temporal scales ranging from essentially *instantaneous* to *deep time*’ (2017: 962).

‘Consequently, integration of multidimensional information across diverse temporal and spatial scales is required to understand natural selection’ (2017: 962). But ‘deep time’ also plays a major role in other scientific disciplines. In contrast to history didactics, there are numerous studies that explore older students’ and adults’ concepts of time. The focus has usually been on the difference between ‘conventional’ and ‘deep’ time. Some results suggest that many individuals form a concept of conventional time, but few develop a concept of deep time: ‘Knowledge of conventional time is insufficient in itself to guarantee a solid understanding of geologic time’ (Cheek, 2013: 1943). Thus, a promising approach seems to be to examine different conceptions of time and to study the possibilities of thinking associated with them in the classroom.

### 3. Conclusion and outlook

The global challenges associated with the Anthropocene require an understanding of time related to different time scales, historical time and ‘deep time’ in particular. This knowledge is important in assessing why people deny human-caused climate change (historical time) using ‘deep time’ arguments. To date, however, ‘making time for time’ and developing this kind of temporal thinking have not been priorities in the history classroom. Applying interdisciplinary approaches to temporality to history education – ‘making time for time’ – can serve to support the critical examination of arguments pertaining to the Anthropocene. History education could thus design interdisciplinary lessons in which different concepts of time are addressed and an understanding of current global processes is developed among students.

Returning to our initial hypothesis that students must understand ‘time’ in its various dimensions and be able to fall back on different time concepts in order to be able to understand the climate crisis, we believe that, first and foremost, basic research needs to determine how time concepts are expressed by individuals across the disciplines. From the perspective of history didactics, research has so far addressed only ‘historical’ concepts of time. Only when we understand in which situations and from which perspective students deploy certain concepts of time in their argumentation will it be possible to develop learning scenarios that promote subject-specific argumentation, and thus improve understanding. For research in history education, approaches from science didactics could be useful, where such questions have been focused for some time now when investigating

the extent to which evolution (that is, a long period of time) is explained by students with arguments drawn from biology and other disciplines (Basel et al., 2014). Ultimately, not only would interdisciplinarity finally find its way into everyday teaching, but students would also gain a much deeper understanding of the Anthropocene as a geological concept and an epoch, while preparing them for a future in which its effects are clearly going to be felt in historical, biological, physical, economic and political terms.

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## A Social Theory Framework for the Integration of History and Social Studies



Kaarel Haav

### Abstract

The author is currently working on a social-science curriculum for human development based on a system of general social-science concepts and enabling the integration of social studies with history. So far, most Estonian historians have focused on empirical descriptions of political and military events and have avoided social and economic history based on the social theory analysis. The main school textbooks have done the same. Estonian history and civics teachers have not received any adequate social theoretical qualifications. Both teachers and historians have formally abandoned the Soviet legacy, but they have not escaped the latter's authoritarian and functionalist foundations, nor have they proved either willing or able to accept the new framework. So far, they have not supported proposals to integrate civics with history on a scientific basis.

In this paper, the author implements the framework for a critical analysis of the foundations of the Soviet totalitarian ideology and its hidden influences on Estonian education.

### 1. Introduction: the role of history in schools

The background to this article is the author's elaboration of a scientific framework for social studies, which he has used in evaluating civics in education, its

syllabuses and textbooks (Haav, 2008; 2018b). The aim of this article is to assess critically some history textbooks in Estonia. Some Soviet ideas are still influential in Estonia today. The article focuses on a critical analysis of the theoretical foundations of Soviet ideology and history education. Estonian civics and history textbooks have yet to reject the authoritarian and functionalist foundations of civics and history that date from the Soviet era. Next, the paper describes the main social theoretical concepts that enable these authoritarian and functionalist ideas to be overcome and thus allow the integration of history and social studies, which will benefit from international experience (Gautschi, 2015; Fink, Furrer, Gautschi, 2020). Finally, the paper refers to certain history textbooks and demonstrates how they have been able to illuminate the economic and social mechanisms of the past. In this way, history can be integrated with civics and social sciences.

History teaching is not under any pressure at schools in Estonia, having been successfully instrumentalized for reinforcing patriotism and nationalism and encouraging the development of loyal and patriotic citizens. However, there is little formal interest in the question of how the study of history might contribute to understanding the functioning of present-day Estonian society. Some scholars have argued that school education should also facilitate the formation of critical attitudes and active participation in society. Democratic countries have discussed the balance between authoritarian and democratic citizenship for more than a century (Seixas, 2017), and there have been critical opinions in Estonia as well. Active citizens should criticize mistakes and the misuse of power by the authorities. This idea has been neglected and rejected in history and civic syllabuses, textbooks and teacher training, prompting the conclusion that educational policy is still focused on the creation of authoritarian-minded and obedient citizens.

## **2. Some historical facts**

The creation of obedient citizens has been the dominant function of mass education throughout history, including in Estonia. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the territory of Estonian tribes was conquered by German and Danish knights and crusaders. After that, churches and monasteries established the first schools for the training of new priests. Teaching was conducted in Latin, and later, in German. From 1721 to 1917, Estonia was annexed to the Russian Empire. History as a separate subject was introduced into Russian schools in the first half of the eighteenth century and was taught with the aid of Western

textbooks on general history. These books described political and military events, the lives of the kings and queens, etc. The pupils had to memorize historical facts and data, while the schools instilled in them obedience to the political and religious order and discouraged independent thinking. The textbooks also promoted positive examples of selfless service to the Russian Empire. The controversy between conservative practice and innovative ideas is still present in Estonia.

Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) was one of the first historians, theologians and philosophers to promote a wider approach to history writing. He saw history in terms of the slow but volatile evolution of humanity. In his book *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1784–1791), he claimed that social, cultural and intellectual history is more important than military history, politics, or diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> Similar ideas were expressed by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer in 1859 (Spencer, 1884). In Russia, some thinkers like Vissarion Belinski (1811–1848) also criticized history teaching in schools (Palamets, 1968).

In 1858, a priest, Johann Georg Schwartz, using some German examples, published the first Estonian history textbook, which insisted on loyalty to the Lutheran church, the Baltic German nobility and the Russian Emperor. In 1874 and 1878, new laws on education introduced history as a separate subject in southern and northern Estonia respectively. In independent Estonia (1918–1940), history education focused on national history more than before. The first national congress of history teachers (1923) criticized the traditional teaching practice (too many facts and too few generalizations) and promoted student-centered learning (Palamets, 1968: 103). Many Estonian educators investigated new pedagogical ideas about the teaching and management of schools in Germany. They complemented the traditional hierarchical school system with models stressing democracy and partnership. Partnerships between the main stakeholders were established at all levels, from the school and the local community to the nation. This Estonian educational system was unique in this period from 1920 to 1940 (Haav, 2004).<sup>2</sup>

In the new Communist Russia, history teaching experienced radical change. First, in a short period from 1920 to 1934, history courses were replaced by social

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1 From 1764 to 1769, Herder served as a priest in Livonia, then in Russia but now part of Latvia. His ideas had a strong influence on Estonia's national awakening in the second half of the nineteenth century.

2 Unfortunately, recent history and civics textbooks neither describe nor refer to this national experience.

studies<sup>3</sup> which relied on Marxist theory and described the social, economic and legal problems of society. In 1938, the ruling oligarchy published a Stalinist history of the Communist Party. In all higher education curricula, this justification of the Stalinist and communist regimes was obligatory until the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

### 3. The main concept of the Soviet model: the people as subordinated to the state

After the Stalinist occupation of the Baltic states, all national history textbooks were replaced by ones dealing with the Russian and Soviet Empires. History teachers had to disseminate Soviet ideology and justify rule by the Communist authorities. Until the mid-1950s the history of Estonia was a forbidden topic. Afterwards, the history of the Soviet Empire was complemented by a short course on Estonia's history. In 1962, a separate subject of civics was introduced into Soviet schools, and some Russian scholars compiled a textbook for it (Shahnazarov et al., 1963). In the same year, the textbook was also translated and published in Estonia, promoting the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that justified rule by the totalitarian Communist system. It therefore failed to provide students with relevant concepts for life (Haav, 2011). In the Soviet period, students of history (including myself) also obtained a qualification as civics teachers. From 1963 to 1968, I learned the foundations of the communist ideology (history of the Communist party, Marxist philosophy, political economy and scientific communism). The teacher training block contained five general courses: pedagogy, didactics, psychology, logic, history of philosophy, and foundations of the Soviet state and law. In the Soviet period, most school students experienced history as a collection of abstract facts, concepts and clichés (Liimets, 1988). Only a small minority expected history to explain the development of societies. Estonian schools abandoned their Communist textbooks at the end of the 1980s.

Estonian scholars have rid themselves of the Soviet-era's Marxist ideology. They have abandoned the dogmas of the supremacy of the Communist Party (oligarchy) and the unity of the Russian-dominated Soviet empire. Michael Gorbachov defended these principles until the very end of the empire. Contemporary social sciences focus on concepts of man and society, which have been treated as inter-related since the beginning of the nineteenth century in the

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3 Mikhail Pokrovsky, 1868–1932, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail\\_Pokrovsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Pokrovsky) (24.11.2022).



work of German idealist philosophers. The Soviet totalitarian regime also integrated the two concepts, while subordinating humans to society. Estonia's new ideology rejects this subordination. Still, the basis of the totalitarian ideology has neither been analyzed nor criticized in Estonia. The concept of man is no longer explicitly subordinated to that of society. Now, they are isolated from each other, a situation that favours autocracy. The system of integration, dichotomy and complementarity facilitates democracy (Haav, 2001: 316–317; 2002: 177–178), which the authoritarian elite ignores.

Second, the communists treated social controversies in democratic capitalist countries in an extremist way. They argued that capitalists and entrepreneurs invariably discriminate and exploit their workers. Concerning employment and power relations in Soviet state enterprises, the Communist ideology followed another extreme position, totally denying any discrimination and exploitation of workers in these state organizations. They justified this extremist position with reference to property relations. As the private property of the means of production was abolished and replaced by state property, Soviet managers did not earn any profit. After all, the administration collaborated and shared its power with the leaders of Communist Party organizations and the trade unions.

Since then, the previous position condemning total capitalist exploitation has been turned upside down in Estonian ideology. The very possibility of injustice in the new private firms is not acknowledged. This rejection is as total and extreme as was the Soviet claim of total exploitation. It is no longer recognized that some employers might sometimes discriminate against or exploit their employees. This one-sided implicit statement is now part of Estonia's mainstream ideology and is found in social science textbooks (Haav, 2005; 2006; 2008; 2018), which also neglect the very possibility of social inequality and injustice in both business and public organizations in Estonia. This ignorance was very clearly expressed by the chairman of the board of the Central Union of Estonian Employers, Kai Realo, in the central daily *Eesti Postimees* on 6 November 2019.<sup>4</sup> When the trade union leader Peep Peterson described cases of social and legal injustice in some private firms, Realo totally denied they existed (Realo, 2019). So far, nobody has challenged her one-sided opinions. Nor do history and civics textbooks recognize cases of injustice in some private firms. Instead they clandestinely disseminate justifications for authoritarian relations and ideology. For this reason, they neither describe nor criticize the theoretical foundations of the former Soviet Empire.

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4 <https://leht.postimees.ee/7103375/kai-realo-mis-voi-kes-aitaks-ametiuhingud-21-sajandisse> (24.11.2022).

#### 4. The failure of the Marxist model in Western countries

In democratic Western countries, relations between entrepreneurs and workers, between employers and employees, have been partly conflictual, but also partly complementary. In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx stressed the role of controversies and totally denied the existence of common interests. Recent centuries have demonstrated that he was wrong, as such conflicts have diminished, not increased. After all, private firms are not the only option, as democratic organizations of production (cooperatives) are also possible. Still, most employees prefer private firms, and the proportion of workers' cooperatives in national employment is less than 10%. If Marx were right, then the majority of workers would prefer democratic cooperatives in order to escape from capitalist exploitation.

New forms of organization and management invite employees to take part in organizational governance. Although management remains hierarchical, a lot of firms implement participatory democracy in many countries. In Germany, this is called co-determination (*Mitbestimmung*). In these cases, employee representatives are invited to sit on managerial boards, where they can make proposals for organizational improvements. This does not remove the owners' prerogatives, as they still have the final say. Nonetheless employee participation has starkly reduced the roles of both trade unions and industrial conflicts in most European countries since World War II. Although social equality and justice have increased, there are still cases of injustice and discrimination in some enterprises. Scholars of the social recognize these cases and describe them. According to some studies in the UK, if some employees have experienced some injustice, then about 90% of them will not complain. Nonetheless, at least 10 per cent do complain and turn to the courts for justice. Of these 10%, 90% win their cases. This history of management and employment relations can also be described and explained by using the concepts of social actors and structures.

The development of employment relations in Western countries is reflected inadequately in textbooks of both history and civics. Estonian authors present enterprises as unitary systems, avoiding all references to disputes and conflicts between employers and employees. They fail to mention that the Soviet ideology proclaimed such relations as antagonist. Now, many scholars have forgotten this and present enterprises as full of harmony.

## 5. Relations between employers and employees in Estonian education

This history of relations of capitalist employment is also reflected in Estonian history and civics textbooks. During the last two centuries, the differences between the main actors (employers, managers and employees) have declined, and their respective interests have seen improvements in integration by using new modern organizational structures and managerial techniques. Unfortunately, the history textbooks hardly address these issues. They fail to explain properly how communist Russia justified the abolition of private property. They describe Estonia's occupation by the Soviet Union in 1940 and the expropriation of entrepreneurs, but they do not refer to the ideological justification for this violent policy in either Soviet ideology or history textbooks. That is, they do not refer to arguments regarding capitalist exploitation.

Concerning the restoration of private enterprise and the market economy in the 1990s, the books describe these as empirical events but fail to illuminate them theoretically. What is to be seen as preferential and positive in private initiative? These books also neglect the very possibility of injustice in employment relations. They do not teach students as future employees how to protect themselves if something wrong happens to them in business or public organizations. The text on trade unions is also inadequate and biased. In sum, the textbooks have remained one-sided and superficial, not describing what has really happened in industrial relations. That means that the textbooks fail to provide students with the knowledge, concepts and theories that are necessary for coping in a market economy and a democratic society. In particular, they do not use concepts like social actors and structures that uncover problems in hierarchical organizations. They also fail to define explicitly the general concepts of man and society, citizens and the state. We can uncover their general concepts by analyzing their texts. Usually, they treat these main dichotomous concepts as isolated from each other and not as complimentary, complex and controversial. The concept of knowledge is still absolutist. It follows that such books are hardly adequate for the aims of the curriculum.

## 6. A system of social-science concepts for democracy and history education

I do not claim that all people should study history 'as it really happened'. This is unrealistic and unnecessary. The sheer range of historical facts and events is

unlimited. Instead, people should focus on a limited number of general concepts and learn how to use them for a description of both past and present. This idea has not been accepted in Estonia so far. Next, I review briefly what these main sociological concepts are and how they can be used in education.

I graduated from Tartu university as a historian and teacher of history and civics like all other Estonian historians and history teachers. Unlike other teachers, however, I started to study sociology and conduct research in the fields of organizational, labour, industrial, economic, political and educational sociology. Next, I relied on the main sociological concepts and turned them into a hierarchical system (Haav, 2001; 2002; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2015; 2018). The concept of the human is at the top and is related to the concepts of society and culture. Since the nineteenth century, German idealist philosophers have treated the concepts of man and society as complementary and dichotomous, this dichotomy being one of the central ones in sociology today (Layder, 1994). In semiotics, the central concepts are man and culture. The most abstract concepts should be complemented with less abstract ones like those of citizen and state, man and organization, etc. These concepts are still too general and do not describe the inequalities between people. In business organizations, the members have different opportunities to command other people as well. This variety can be reduced to three main types of actor: owners, managers and employees. The differences are determined by organizational structures and rely on laws. In sum, they could be defined as social structures. The concepts of actors and structures are also complementary and dichotomous. The latter dichotomy enables us to describe and uncover the social inequalities in power relations. These inequalities are put into effect by using the main models of decision-making, which are traditionally classified into autocratic and democratic models. They have been defined as exclusive ones and not as complementary and dichotomous. In a democracy, all members are equal, and the majority decides. In an autocracy, the members are unequal, and a minority or one member (the owner) decides. It is possible to overcome this exclusiveness and design a third model to make them complementary. I complemented the concept of individual actors with the notion of social ones. This is like the dialectic process proceeding from thesis (autocratic model) to antithesis (democratic model) to synthesis. I have defined this as the partnership model. As a result, there is a full typology. In an organization, individual members are unequal. In the management board, representatives of the main stakeholders (like owners, managers, employees, etc.) are equal as collective members. This combines the inequality of individual actors with the equality of social actors. It also enables them to combine autocracy and democracy, and

overcome their antagonism, providing an organizational basis for the integration of the main social actors. In practice the autocratic model predominates, but there are also democratic organizations and partnerships. From these concepts, the typology of decision-making and the dichotomy between social actors and structures are original.

In authoritarian organizations, the main social actors usually also have different value orientations (like individual success and well-being or social solidarity and well-being), political ideologies (like neo-liberal or social democratic) and scientific paradigms (like unitary and functional, or pluralist and conflictual). In hierarchical organizations, these inequalities are justified with reference to their social effectiveness. On the other hand, these inequalities might enable and cause social injustice. The concepts of social equality, effectiveness and justice are relativist. The main actors can define and interpret them differently, but the superior actors can also impose their opinions on the inferior ones. They can ignore others' opinions and declare their positions to be absolutist, to be the only possible truth. In these cases, there is a need for pluralist concepts of knowledge, truth and scientific paradigms. Usually, the superior actors prefer functionalist harmony, stating that all members do their best in relation to common interests. The inferior actors should prefer the pluralist paradigm, recognizing that different actors have different interests and that they should negotiate with each other and find an optimal solution for all parties. This conceptual system is beneficial for the inferior actors, as it enables them to protect themselves in cases of unfair conduct. In practice, the superior actors are willing to use their power for their own corporatist ends. They reject the conceptual system and argue that there is neither inequality nor injustice.

This conceptual system enables the description of both the functioning of society (Haav, 2001; 2002) and the development of history. The system enables us to describe the main periods of history. In the ancient empires, the main social actors were the nobility, commoners and slaves. Their statuses were determined by laws and reinforced by the state. Today, all people are treated as equal before the law, but there are still huge social differences between social actors such as employers, administrators and employees. The concepts of social equality, justice and effectiveness have undergone radical changes, but they can be used to analyse and compare different historical periods. Indeed, these ideas are today more actual than ever before. History textbooks should reveal the history of the main types of social actors and their interrelations. Students should use such textbooks for the formation of their historical, social and intellectual thinking and to develop their national, social and historical identities. If a student learns

the concept of man, then he starts by thinking about himself as a man. Who am I? How can I describe myself? What are my most important characteristics? He starts with his relations with other people (family, friends, classmates, etc.), which are mediated by language and communication and belong to culture. In teaching the main concepts, a competence model will be very helpful (Gautschi, Hodel, Utz, 2009). In this way, civics and history will be translated into the language of human development, as John Dewey recommended a hundred years ago (Dewey, 2016).

Between 2000 and 2015, I implemented these concepts in my social-science courses for national and international students at some universities in Tallinn and Tartu. Students learned how to implement them in their lives for participation in work organizations and political institutions. They became aware of the limits on their freedom that would be imposed if they started their careers as employees in private or public organizations. These concepts enable students to be prepared for possible injustices in their employment relations. They become aware of the possibilities for injustice in some organizations. They also realize that their ability to protect themselves is limited. These outlooks are small, but they are not lacking in anything. Some students would prefer to become entrepreneurs. They learn what the main problems are facing young businessmen and how to cope with them. Students also learn the main problems of democratic elections. How should they assess different policies, parties and candidates? If some of them try to become public figures and apply for positions in local and national bodies, then they will also be interested in political socialization and power struggles.

Both civic and history syllabuses and textbooks should rely on this framework. It could and should be a methodological device for selecting materials for civic and history courses. History should describe the main phases and institutions in the development of human beings, their communities and cultures (e.g. Harari, 2011). The description of historical events should merely be given secondary and complimentary significance. History textbooks should reveal how the main concepts have changed in the main periods of history.

## **7. The concepts of social subjects and structures in history textbooks**

Traditionally, all new textbooks are reviewed critically. So far, history books have been evaluated only by historians and history teachers, and not by scholars of the social or of education. This article is one of the first attempts to illuminate some

of the theoretical foundations of mainstream textbooks. The books describe the political changes in Estonia's recent past in empirical detail, but the references to its social, economic and ideological foundations remain shallow, superficial and inadequate. Mare Oja (2016) has described changes in Estonian history education but failed to reveal their theoretical foundations. The foundations of the communist totalitarian regime have been described and analyzed by many social scholars, some of whose books have also been published in Estonia (Solzhenitsyn, 1987; Pipes, 2001).

History teaching is concentric in Estonia. In the first centre, students learn both national and world history in four years (grades VI-IX). In the next centre, they do the same in two years (grades X and XI). I will focus on a collection of three textbooks for the gymnasium compiled by Mart Laar and Lauri Vahtre. Laar was originally a history teacher but later became the first prime minister of the revived state after the elections of 1992. Lauri Vahtre is the son of the prominent Estonian historian Sulev Vahtre. The textbooks for gymnasia should be more theoretical than those for basic schools, but they are not. The books describe how private property and free enterprise were forbidden during the Soviet annexation of Estonia. In the 1990s, the market economy and free enterprise were restored. First, history books should clarify the role of free markets in economic development. Second, they should explain the controversial roles of capitalist firms. Third, they should illuminate the reasons for the abolition of private property by Marxists and communists. Fourth, they should uncover the inadequacy of the command economy and state enterprises, of which the older generation, including historians, have extensive experience. Fifth, they should recognize the problems in the restoration of private firms and free markets. In fact, however, Estonian textbooks do not depict the economic past 'as it really happened'.

One of the textbooks on the recent history of gymnasia (Laar, Vahtre, 2014: 10–13) provides some shallow (superficial) and eclectic references to technical and organizational innovations like the free market and free trade, competition and protectionism, increases in production and productivity and Henry Ford's assembly line. They do not show how the capitalist market economy has boosted economic development in recent centuries. The progress of the capitalist economy relied on the freedom of people (abolition of serfdom) and their right to use their mental and material resources (private property) to improve their lives. The Estonian authors do not stress the significance of these factors. They do not describe the main economic and social mechanisms, like the competition of firms on the market, the division of labour, new forms of management (F. Taylor

and others), increases in productivity, the motivations of employees, or workers' participation in management. Laar and Vahtre also mention the improvements in workers' positions, but they still fail to describe, let alone criticize, Marxist arguments like the increasing capitalist exploitation, the antagonist relations between capitalists and proletarians, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The violent seizure of power and the abolition of private property by the terrorist Communist Party was based on these arguments.

Part II describes the Soviet economic system (Laar, Vahtre, 2007: 105, 127–128). This was also crucial in illuminating its economic, administrative and social foundations. It relied on the abolition of private property and the dictatorship of the Communist oligarchy (not that of the proletariat). Stalin extensively used authoritarian and violent methods, a combination of lies and violence, the deportations and executions of tens of millions, and slave labor (Solzhenitsyn, 1987). The command economy was focused on heavy industry and military production, not on workers' well-being. There was centralized administration, artificial socialist competition, party leadership and ideological manipulation, but a complete lack of adequate economic stimuli for enterprises and employees, etc. As a result, productivity was low, and people's living standards were miserable. All this has been studied earlier (e.g. Haav, 1988), but Laar and Vahtre (2014: 122–130; 2007) do little to describe these methods and mechanisms.

Laar (2017: 60–63) just refers to some of the difficulties in the restoration of free enterprise and the market economy. He describes the role of shock therapy, in the manner of the Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, in the privatization of state enterprises. The book ignores the role of power relations in hierarchical organizations and treats them in a simplified and idealized manner. It ignores and denies social inequality and the potential for social injustice and discrimination. As a result, this concept of power is as one-sided and totalitarian as the Marxist-Leninist idea that capitalists invariably discriminate and exploit their workers. Estonian education takes advantage of the absolutist concept of knowledge. Estonian educators do not use complex and controversial concepts for the investigation of unequal power relations. They ignore the fact that hierarchical power relations introduce social inequality, which might lead to social injustice. They consider these relations neutral. If there were power conflicts between some superiors and their subordinates, then Estonian media and textbooks treat them as psychological problems, problems in communication, or as misunderstandings between persons of equal status. For this reason, they do not use the concepts of social actors and structures.



## 8. Some conclusions and generalizations

Theoretically, the integration of history, civics and social studies is possible and can be carried out on a common social theoretical basis, which has already been elaborated. Now, there should be some relevant political will to put it into effect. This basis relies on the most general social scientific concepts (about twenty), and they are turned into a hierarchical system. The author of this article has also proved its applicability in practice in his teaching and research. He has also analyzed the frameworks for civics and social-science education in schools in Estonia and the rest of Europe. In his teaching, he has used this conceptual system as the basis for the development of students' social identities. This is crucial for a curriculum for student development and for a theory of the social scientific curriculum.

In this paper, these ideas have been used to make some critical comments about selected history textbooks. In Estonia, history education was already being complemented by civics courses sixty years ago (from 1962). Now the system is firmly established, but unfortunately it has been and remains isolated from the social sciences and curriculum theory.

History syllabuses and textbooks can also rely on social scientific and educational foundations and be integrated with other social subjects. Estonian historians have focused on political and military events and remain wedded to a one-sided treatment of history. The same situation characterizes history textbooks in that they try to depict the past, with Leopold von Ranke, 'as it really was'. The authors of textbooks do not rely on curriculum and educational theories and ignore the need for student (human) evolution. They don't stress the role of intellectual, social and economic turning points in history like inventions of language, writing and printing, and agricultural and industrial revolutions (Harari, 2011).

They have not thought very much about the formation of students' social, political and historical identities. What concepts, facts, events and experiences are most worth that? They neither illuminate nor criticize the foundations of the Soviet totalitarian regime and its history textbooks. They, too, rely on authoritarian and functionalist ideology. They do not use complex and controversial concepts for the analysis of power relations in contemporary societies. Naturally, they also ignore dichotomous concepts in social theory. Among other things, they avoid the concept of active and critical citizens, who criticize the mistakes and the misuse of power by the authorities.

School textbooks should prepare students for life. They should inform them about social inequalities and the potential for injustice and discrimination. Estonian history and civic textbooks do not do this: they neither warn young people about these social threats, nor prepare them for them. In this way, they fail to prepare students for life. This also means that the goals of education and of the curriculum have failed.

Education in Estonian history and civics is strongly biased toward the historical disciplines. The role of social science courses, by contrast, is next to nothing. As a result, teachers remain illiterate as regards social science, not grasping the general social and theoretical concepts and rejecting all of them. They are neither willing nor able to integrate history and social studies on the basis of a common scientific framework. This integration should start at a higher education level. Some social science institutions and scholars should take part in this, but they have not shown any interest in doing so thus far. Educational policy should support and facilitate this cooperation. Historians too are neither willing nor able to start collaborating with social scientists on the basis of the social-science framework.

The Ministry for Education and Science has protected this curriculum illiteracy so far, as is evident from the adoption of some strategic documents, like a recent curriculum campaign 2016–2022 and the new national Education Strategy 2021–2035. The curriculum campaign promised to link the conceptual systems (learning outcomes) of curriculum groups with students' identities and competencies (Kõiv et al., 2017). It promised to take advantage of all new studies in the fields of the curriculum, but rejected totally the social scientific system of concepts for students and the curriculum design. The Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035 also rejects all proposals and attempts to design social-science syllabuses and curricula on the basis of the social-science framework. The conclusion must therefore be that there is no political will to integrate history and social studies and use what results to support students' development in Estonia. It follows that the country's education policy implicitly aims at the creation of obedient citizens and employees.

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# Teaching History in Subject Combinations

## The Example of Austria: History and Social Studies/Civic Education



**Andrea Brait**

### **Abstract**

In Austria, as in several other countries, history education is organized in terms of a combination of subjects. The combination of historical and political learning that exists today is generally accepted. Based on the curriculum introduced in 2016, about one-third of teaching time in the subject is assigned to civic education. In a survey of Austrian junior high school history teachers (n=65) on this curriculum reform, it was found that the increased emphasis on civic education is largely viewed positively. Some respondents even attribute more importance to civic education than to history education, or justify the teaching of history with civic education. On the basis of various studies, however, it can be assumed that the majority of Austrian history teachers nevertheless devote most of the available time in the classroom to history education.

### **1. General considerations**

In the discourse on history didactics, one often has the impression that everyone is talking about the same type of teaching. However, this is not the case: teaching history is organized differently in every country (Erdmann, Maier and Popp, 2006). Students learn the subject at different ages and with different amounts of

teaching time. Of course, the objectives of history education were and are also different. Even within a nation, there can be differences between various school types and regions. In many cases, history is no longer taught as a single subject, but in combinations with other subjects (Ziegler, 2018: 35; Thyroff, Hedinger and Waldis, 2019: 93), a practice that is being controversially debated from the perspective of history didactics (Spieß, 2017: 34–35).

This article focuses on history teaching in Austria that is conducted in a subject combination with social studies and civic education. It deals with the question of how Austrian teachers, who teach the subject ‘History and Social Studies/Civic Education’ in junior high schools, evaluate teaching civic education in combination with history.

Teachers play a central role in shaping lessons (Hattie, 2010): they are not marginal figures with regard to what happens in the classroom, but rather are central to the learning opportunities offered to children (Schulz-Hageleit, 2014: 191). Teachers’ attitudes also influence the implementation of curriculum goals. In the Austrian case, teachers decide in what form and to what extent civic education is actually taught. In didactic research, teachers’ profession-related beliefs have increasingly attracted attention in recent years (Wilde and Kunter, 2016), most recently in history didactics (Nitsche, 2017; Bernhard, 2020) and civic education (Mittnik, 2017; Stornig, 2021). This research is based on the assumption that profession-related competences can be learned (König, 2016).

The data on which this article is based were collected as part of the project ‘Historical Learning Between School and Museum’, in which museum visits associated with history lessons were mainly researched. However, the current alignment of ‘regular’ history lessons also played a role in this research project, which is why this was thematized in the interviews with history teachers (n = 85) I conducted between January 2018 and December 2019. The analyses refer to the interviews with 65 teachers who teach in junior high schools (for details of the method, see Brait, 2020; Brait, 2022a).

However, before analyzing the data with regard to the research question (Chapter 3), it is necessary to examine the historical development of the current combination of subjects (Chapter 2), especially since it is known that history teaching as a whole is changing slowly and that new guidelines are being put into practice with a delay (Borries, 2021).

## 2. History and civic education in junior high schools in Austria

In Austria, the school system has traditionally been organized in a centralized way, starting with the reforms at the end of the eighteenth century (Seel, 2010: 33). As a result, the same curriculum per school type is valid for the entire country. In the Habsburg Monarchy, history was initially taught in conjunction with geography. In 1892 a new regulation separated the two subjects (Weigl, 1974: 68–72). At that time, two hours per week, spread over four school years from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade onwards, were scheduled for history lessons in junior high schools (Müller, 1970: 104–122). In the Republic of Austria after World War I, this structure remained largely unchanged, although the content and objectives of history education changed again and again, influenced by the changing political circumstances (Pfefferle, 2009: 78–95). Consequently, after 1918, students were taught history from the age of ten.

In 1962, the subject matter was expanded for the first time by the introduction of social studies (Engelbrecht, 1988: 500). In the junior high school curriculum, the goal of history teaching was defined as ‘education for a democratic mindset and Austrian state consciousness’. Students should ‘think independently and [...] form their own opinions’. At the same time, however, this curriculum still contained objectives from earlier curricula (Brait, 2022b). For example, history lessons should ‘awaken respect for the great achievements of individuals and entire nations’. In the curriculum, new topics linked to social studies were highlighted, such as ‘Development of Medieval Society’ or ‘Economic, Social and Spiritual Features of a Revolution’ (BGBl. 134/1963; BGBl. 163/1964). So, for the first time, history education dealt not only with rulers and wars, but also with society as a whole. Social studies were therefore interpreted as social history and were also no longer highlighted in subsequent curricula. Although the name of the subject still refers to the combination, the approach is not transdisciplinary – the subject boundaries were still not crossed (Arand, 2012: 309–310).

Over the years, there was a shift in teaching content in favour of contemporary history, which was given an increasing amount of time, and to the detriment of prehistory, the ancient world and medieval history (Wassermann, 2004: 37–42; Kühberger, 2021). This was reinforced by the overall reduction in teaching hours in the 1960s (BGBl. 134/1963; BGBl. 163/1964).

The curricula of 1985 stipulated that a ‘historical and political consciousness’ should be fostered in learners, ‘oriented to the principles of democracy and the rule of law, humanity and tolerance, openness to the world and readiness for understanding, justice and solidarity, love of freedom and peace’ (BGBl. 78/1985;



BGBI. 88/1985). Thus, for the first time a connection between historical and political learning was established, and it was pointed out that the boundaries between history and civic education are fluid (Weber, 2014: 10). After a fundamental decree published in 1978 stipulated a consideration of civic education in all subjects, the possibility of treating it as a separate subject was discussed for a long time, but in the end it was not realized (Wolf, 1998; Zeilner, 2011). After the introduction of civic education as a subject at various schools at secondary level II (Morawek, 2003: 177; Krammer, 2009: 98; Haidenhofer, 2004; Senhofer, 2004), the expansion of the subject in junior high schools finally became effective in 2008 (Ammerer, 2009). The immediate reason for this was the lowering of the voting age to 16 (Windischbauer and Kühberger, 2013: 178; Stornig, 2021: 40). Civic education was therefore included in the last year of junior high school. The curriculum stated that students should 'be able to recognize and perceive opportunities for political participation [...] in everyday school life, in the social environment and in democratic institutions' (BGBI. II 290/2008).

The historical-political learning aimed for in the curriculum (Lange, 2009: 5) emphasizes the connection between the two subject areas (Hellmuth and Klepp, 2010: 124), which is now recognized in the didactics of both disciplines, in that it is assumed that 'politics cannot be understood without history, [and] history cannot be understood without politics' (Schörken, 1999: 629). History education is seen as having a preparatory and complementary function in terms of achieving a reflected political consciousness (Hellmuth and Klepp, 2010: 132). Since 2008, this has been the second teaching objective in addition to the development of such reflective historical consciousness.

With this reform of the junior high school curriculum, subject-specific competence orientation was also incorporated for the first time in Austrian history education, with the intention of putting an end to the content orientation of teaching that had dominated until then (Ammerer, 2009: 2). On the one hand, the FUER competence model (Körber, Schreiber and Schöner, 2007) was used, while on the other hand, the Austrian competence model for civic education (Krammer, 2008), which had been developed shortly before, was implemented (Wirtitsch, 2013). The goal of civic education with regard to this competence model is the ability to allow students to participate in political life. According to Krammer (2008: 3), this includes the abilities, skills and readiness

- to make judgments independently and to question the judgments of others (political judgment competence),

- to articulate one's own political positions, to understand the political positions of others, and to participate in the solution of social problems (political acting competence),
- to acquire those procedures and methods that help one to understand and question political manifestations as well as to build one's own manifestations in order to support one's own expression of political will (political methodological competence);
- to critically understand political categories and their inherent concepts, and to be able develop them further (political subject matter competence).

The two competence models for history and civic education are certainly coordinated and complement one another. Hellmuth and Klepp (2010: 135) have therefore identified areas of overlap, such as historical deconstruction competence, for example, which overlaps with political judgement competence by helping students identify different political perspectives as expressions of particular historically grounded values and ideologies. Hellmuth (2014: 190–191) also mentions overlaps in the area of methods (e.g. textual analysis, argumentation techniques), as well as between historical orientation competence and political acting competence, especially since history shows possibilities for action.

However, it quickly became apparent that the change in teaching practice from content orientation to competence orientation which was a key feature of the new curriculum hardly took place. Various studies have shown that teachers are generally aware of the interdisciplinary discourse on competences, but not of subject-specific competence models (Bernhard, 2020: 114–143). In his 2014 survey of 89 history teachers working in the province of Carinthia, Pichler was able to show, among other things, that the majority of them do not consider working with sources or historical representations and that the targeted development of methodological competence was central. This failure to adopt the new approach was explained by a lack of time (Pichler, 2016: 16–27; Pichler, 2020). Even after more than ten years, numerous history teachers are unfamiliar with the FUER competence model, as Bernhard (2019: 68–69) was able to demonstrate in his study. Teachers do show an awareness of the fact that subject-specific competences should feature in teaching history, especially when the students are asked questions with predefined answers, but the work of Kipman and Kühberger (2019: 45–49 and 89–90) clearly shows that the implementation of such competences in the classroom is not yet done in the majority of cases. For example, 61.7% of the 277 teachers from three states surveyed in 2016 indicated that subject-specific competence orientation was important or very important, but 68.7% of the respondents admitted that they had not yet familiarized themselves with it in detail.

The conditions for drawing up a new curriculum were therefore certainly not favourable. The new curriculum for junior high schools in Austria, which was introduced in 2016 (BGBl. II 113/2016), not only incorporated a continuation of competence orientation, but also introduced a new structure. The 'subject matter' was summarized in nine topic-oriented learning blocks ('Module') per school year, in which the respective sub-competences to be promoted and the topics to be covered are clearly identified. Although a basically chronological structure is still planned for the three learning years, there are some learning blocks which require an analysis of topics such as 'Human Rights' over several centuries. New topics were also implemented with the new curriculum, above all global history.

Civic education was now anchored from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade onwards, based on scientific studies showing that 'awareness of democracy in Austria has been declining for years' (PH Wien). Two of the nine learning blocks per school year are dedicated to civic education, and one or two to historical-political education, such as 'Past and Present Forms of Governance' or 'Social Change in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. In the area of civic education, for example, 'opportunities for political action', 'elections and voting' and 'media and political communication' should be taught. However, the curriculum does not specify how much teaching time must be devoted to each learning block. Thus, teachers are free to decide how much time to devote to civic education.

### 3. Empirical findings

First of all, it should be noted that only some of the teachers I interviewed had implemented the 2016 curriculum. Some had heard about the new curriculum but had not been informed about it further. Finally, some did not know that a new curriculum had been introduced. All teachers in the sample who had taken a closer look at the 2016 curriculum reform had developed a clear opinion, which was expressed in most cases in the interviews (for details, see Brait, 2021). The procedure with regard to introducing this curriculum has led to a great deal of frustration, as a statement by a teacher from Lower Austria indicates: 'What has bothered me a lot recently, I have to say, is that some things, such as the new junior high school curriculum, have been introduced very surprisingly, without much preparation' (AHS\_NÖ\_4). This statement suggests that teachers seem to have received little or no information that there was a period for trialling this curriculum, nor that teachers were involved in it. In addition, not all teachers had been informed that a new curriculum had been introduced; other were informed, but very late. The speed of the introduction – the Federal Law Gazette dates

from May, and the curriculum was to be in force at the start of school in September, even though no textbooks had been approved – probably also led to the fact that quite a few teachers (initially) ignored the reform or felt overstrained.

In addition, the interviews clearly showed that some teachers do not want to change their teaching style or stop delivering the usual content. In particular, the structure of the topics, which in some cases do not follow the chronology, was rejected, as the statement of one teacher shows: ‘There is no structure. They can’t manage this jumping from one topic block to another because they lack any background knowledge’ (AHS\_Tirol\_4). Here, however, it becomes clear that some teachers are not worried about their personal preferences, but about the successful learning of their students.

However, there are also contrary positions in the sample. A teacher from Carinthia, for example, said: ‘I really like the new curriculum. I was a bit sceptical at first, but I actually like it because it is ... a modern curriculum that simply fits in well with my concept. [...] I also like the fact that civic education is promoted in this way!’ (NMS\_Ktn\_1). The promotion of civic education was also seen positively by other teachers and is an aspect of the curriculum that was also widely noticed, in contrast to the detailed focus on competences, for example.

A few history teachers also see an opportunity in the connection between historical and political approaches. A teacher from Vienna explained this as follows: ‘With civic education I simply mean [...] an awareness of what politics is and what democracy is, how that has developed’ (AHS\_Wien\_3). In contrast, some teachers are unsure whether or not political topics can be understood at the age of eleven. One teacher argues: ‘In the lower level, as I said, these things like competences that have to do with civic education are still difficult for me, I admit. Because they are still real children. That’s no excuse, but that’s the way it is. I still have to learn in any case’ (AHS\_NÖ\_4). However, there are also teachers who see no problem in this. One teacher is so strongly in favour of civic education that she uses one of the two weekly lessons for it. So many lessons on civic education are not scheduled in the curriculum, but the question is whether to criticize this teacher, whose central teaching concern is that students are prepared for life after school: ‘when we send them out, when they’re fourteen, fifteen, about to vote for the first time, that they think about, that they know how to think about, who to vote for’ (NMS\_Wien\_6).

Other teachers in the sample reported that it is very difficult to teach the various topics of the curriculum in such a limited number of lessons. This was the argument of a teacher from Vorarlberg: ‘[W]e have more and more content in the curriculum, and less and less time to teach it somehow’ (AHS\_Vbg\_1).

The curriculum provides for six hours per week, spread over three school years, though special arrangements may result in a reduction to five hours.

However, the importance of civic education to the teachers I interviewed was not only evident in relation to curriculum reform. At the beginning of the interviews, all teachers were asked about their most important goals when it comes to teaching history and, in response, some argued for the primacy of civic education. One teacher, for example, said: ‘My main goal is to preserve democracy. Yes, so preserving democracy, understanding democracy, understanding politics ... basic understanding of history. But the most important thing to me is really ... actually politics is more important to me than history’ (AHS\_Wien\_1). Another teacher stated: ‘And then it is simply also very important to me that they can simply express their opinion. So the political competences. That they can also understand other opinions and that they can analyse them and that they can simply express their opinion’ (NMS\_Wien\_1). If one follows the thoughts of these Austrian history teachers, then the question ‘Why history education?’ could perhaps soon be answered in Austria with ‘civic education’.

#### 4. Discussion

The creation of subject combinations is not an Austrian peculiarity (Brühne, 2014; Gautschi and Fink, 2016; Spieß, 2017: 32; Ziegler, 2018; Clark, 2019: 89–90; Thyroff et al., 2019; Witt, 2021). Arguing that shaping politics and economics, as well as solving current social problems, requires interdisciplinary approaches (Conrad, 2015: 5), the separation of subjects in a school curriculum created in the nineteenth century has repeatedly been criticized (Matzka, 2014: 35). With regard to history education, it was and still is argued that no practical benefit results from it for society (Arand, 2012: 314). Although history didactics in the German-speaking world succeeded in establishing a central subject-specific learning objective for teaching history in the form of historical consciousness (Jeismann, 1988), from the 1970s onwards, as a response to this criticism, history teaching was only partially able to maintain its position as an independent school subject (Grosch, 2014: 67).

Despite the introduction of several subject combinations throughout the German-speaking world since the 1970s, subject-integrative didactics has so far remained a desideratum (Germ, 2018: 9–10). Subject-specific didactics – and thus also history didactics – have traditionally been assigned to the respective subject departments in German-speaking countries; even the only ‘Department of Subject-Specific Education’ in Austria at the University of Innsbruck is only

partially interdisciplinary and is divided into three fields: 'Area of Science, Geography, Computer Science and Mathematics Education', 'Area of Language Education' and 'Area of History, Social Studies and Civic Education'. The combination of history and civic education is widely accepted in Austria (Stornig, 2021: 42), but the challenges for teacher training resulting from the combination of these subjects (Hellmuth and Zanaty, 2009; Hellmuth, 2013; Lechner-Amante and Sander, 2013; Stainer-Hämmerle, 2013) have not been solved as yet: civic education has so far been an appendage to history and is significantly underrepresented in university curricula (Stornig, 2021: 43). Teachers welcome the combination of subjects, but students take little notice of it (Danninger, 2019: 70). Transdisciplinary thinking has been declared a maxim in the form of a competence model (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen, 2015: 10) developed for one school type, but this has not yet gained widespread acceptance. This is not surprising, especially since any such attempt would be in contradiction to the subject-specific competence orientation in the aftermath of PISA (Bühl-Gramer, 2016: 36). In contrast, two subject-specific competency models are anchored in junior high schools in Austria for the two areas of history and civic education. This means that one precondition for a school subject mentioned by Gautschi (2019:10) has not been fulfilled.

My interviews with Austrian history teachers also revealed that they see history and civic education as two separate areas. However, how much teaching time the teachers give to civic education was not asked for, and therefore remains unclear, apart from teacher NMS\_Wien\_6, who dedicates about half of the available teaching time to civic education. Based on the study by Stornig (2021: 292), it can be assumed that most of the available teaching time (80%) is dedicated to history education, while in a survey conducted by Mittnik (2017: 54) every second history teacher stated that they do not have time for civic education because there are so many topics in the curriculum. In addition, a 2013 study of questions in the final exam showed that only 6.6% of the topics were related to civic education, the remainder being related to history (Mittnik, 2014: 30), suggesting a significant underrepresentation of the former in the classroom.

However, it is striking that the expansion of civic education that emerged in the 2016 curriculum reform is largely viewed positively by the respondents. There are still complaints from teachers that there are insufficient hours, which is completely understandable, especially since the addition of civic education has not led to an increase in the number of teaching hours overall. However, the combination of history and civics is not questioned in terms of content. From the point of view of history didactics, it should be pointed out in any case that

a reduction in terms of the competences associated with historical thinking is to be feared as a result of the extension of the subject without an expansion in the time available (Grosch, 2014: 69). This assumption, however, is not based on empirical findings (research results from Britain, which would support this thesis, are in fact more than 25 years old: see Borries, 2002: 26).

Similarly, there is a lack of empirical research findings with regard to any opportunities for transdisciplinary subjects (Waldis and Hellmuth, 2022), with the teachers interviewed seeing such chances in only a few cases. In contrast, textbooks already contain numerous tasks that focus on both historical and political competences. One example is the textbook *Bausteine 4* (Bachlechner, Benedik, Graf, Niederscheider and Senfter, 2018) for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Out of a total of 53 multi-part tasks – following the book's data – 45 refer to both historical and political competences, one only to historical competences, and seven only to political competences. Thus, in this textbook, political competences are also promoted in modules dedicated to history education. To what extent such a transdisciplinary approach can be established in practice will have to be shown by further studies.

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**VERORDNUNG** des Bundesministeriums für Unterricht vom 4. Juni 1963, mit welcher die Lehrpläne der Volksschule, der Hauptschule und der Sonderschulen erlassen werden (BGBl. 134/1963).

**ERLASSUNG** von Lehrplänen für die Unterstufe des Gymnasiums, des Realgymnasiums, des wirtschaftskundlichen Realgymnasiums für Mädchen und des Bundesgymnasiums für Slowenen sowie für die I. bis III. Klasse des musischpädagogischen Realgymnasiums; Bekanntmachung der Lehrpläne für den Religionsunterricht an diesen Schulen (BGBl. 163/1964).

**ÄNDERUNG** der Verordnung, mit welcher die Lehrpläne der Volksschule, der Hauptschule und der Sonderschule erlassen werden; Bekanntmachung von Lehrplänen für den Religionsunterricht (BGBl. 78/1985).

**LEHRPLÄNE** der allgemeinbildenden höheren Schulen; Bekanntmachung der Lehrpläne für den Religionsunterricht an diesen Schulen (BGBl. 88/1985).

**ÄNDERUNG** der Verordnungen über die Lehrpläne der Volksschule, der Sonderschulen, der Hauptschulen und der allgemein bildenden höheren Schulen (BGBl. II 290/2008).

**ÄNDERUNG** der Verordnung über die Lehrpläne der Hauptschulen, der Verordnung über die Lehrpläne der Neuen Mittelschulen sowie der Verordnung über die Lehrpläne der allgemein bildenden höheren Schulen (BGBl. II 113/2016).

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ELISABETH ERDMANN

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## History as an Independent Subject or in a Subject Group in Germany



Elisabeth Erdmann

### Abstract

Again and again the question is raised whether it would not make more sense to teach history no longer as an independent subject, but together with other subjects such as social studies and/or geography.

If one asks why, cognitive psychology and the need to network knowledge are often referred to. Less often savings are mentioned, although they also play an important role.

I was able to observe work on the curriculum, and introducing and implementing the subject known as G/S/E (today History, Politics and Geography) in Bavaria, as well as being able to talk to teachers about their experiences with this new subject. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, the integration of very different subjects does not make sense, as there are clearly defined limits to the transfer of skills. Despite this coordination is possible, though it requires a lot of work. Whether it is even possible must be thoroughly examined.

### 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, there has been a tendency no longer to teach school subjects, including history, as independent subjects, but to take them together with other subjects such as social studies and/or geography.

In the following, only the situation in Germany, and in particular in Bavaria, will be considered because even a glance at the other German states (the *Länder*) or France would go beyond the scope of this paper. In France, since the nineteenth century it has been usual for history and geography to be taught by one and the same teacher. In addition, there is EMC (*l'enseignement moral et civique*), as it has been called since 2015.<sup>1</sup> However, no link is made between the subjects, nor are they integrated (Garcia and Leduc, 2003: 278–281). It would be desirable to conduct a large-scale study to determine in which of the sixteen *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany and other European and non-European countries history has been taught as an independent subject or in combination with other subjects, and if so since when. However, this would require a considerable amount of time and research, which unfortunately cannot be expended within the framework of this contribution, quite apart from the scope that the presentation of this investigation would require.<sup>2</sup> It is nonetheless necessary for every discipline, including history and history didactics, to deal not only with its present, but also with its development and history.

## 2. Precursors of the development

The tendency to teach school subjects in a subject network has its predecessors, for example, in the Saarbrücken Framework Agreement of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of 1960, where ‘social studies’ was launched as a subject in combination with history and geography.<sup>3</sup> The aim was to reduce the number of school subjects in the last two grades and to promote the concentration of educational content. At least, that was the official justifica-

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1 <https://www.reseau-canope.fr/savoirscdi/metier/le-professeur-documentaliste-textes-reglementaires/acces-thematique-aux-textes-reglementaires/enseignement-moral-et-civique-emc.html> (10.1.2022).

2 The question of whether history is taught as an independent subject or as part of a group of subjects in the various European countries is addressed sporadically but not systematically in the individual country contributions in Elisabeth Erdmann and Wolfgang Hasberg (eds), *Facing, Mapping, Bridging Diversity. Foundation of a European Discourse on History Education, Part 1, Part 2*, Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau Verlag, 2011.

3 Excerpt printed in *Aufgabe und Gestaltung des Geschichtsunterrichts: Handreichungen für den Geschichtslehrer* (1967), founded by Kleinknecht, W. and Lohan, W., ed. by H. Krieger, new version, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Frankfurt/M., Berlin, Munich: Diesterweg, 433–434. Further recommendations and framework guidelines from 1961 and 1962 are printed at *ibid.*, 434–439.

tion. However, the subject combination launched in Saarbrücken was not clearly defined. In several federal states, the subjects involved were obliged to cooperate, but in others the subjects involved in ‘social studies’ (in German, Gemeinschaftskunde) retained their independence. The reason for this, apart from the unwillingness of those concerned to give up the principle of separate subjects, was the fact that there was no convincing model of subject integration (Kuss, 1994: 748–749; Erdmann/Hasberg, 2011: 315). The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (in German, Kultusministerkonferenz, abbreviated KMK) is still the body in which all the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the various *Länder* or the responsible senators of the individual City States in Germany have come together on a voluntary basis for coordination. Its decisions are not legally binding, as cultural sovereignty lies with the individual *Länder* or City States.<sup>4</sup>

A few years later, an attempt was made in the Hessian Framework Guidelines (1972) to integrate the previously independent or merely cooperating school subjects of history, social studies, geography and labour studies (in German, Arbeitslehre) into a unified learning subject of ‘social studies’ (in German, Gesellschaftslehre). This gave the impression that it was possible to go straight from the learning objectives to the subjects taught. ‘Situations relevant to learning’, by which conflicts were primarily understood, were to be distributed over four learning fields, namely socialization, the economy, public tasks and inter-societal conflicts. Here one can see a certain social-science systematics, while the other two disciplines involved, history and geography, were reduced to fields of work and aspects only. Scientific-theoretical and political arguments were put forward against the Hessian Framework Guidelines, with historians and history didacticists raising their voices against their implications; only the names of Thomas Nipperdey and Hermann Lübke, Karl-Ernst Jeismann and Erich Kosthorst, among others, should be mentioned. The plan to integrate the three school subjects proved a failure, the theoretical discussion of historical science had been amateurishly received, and a certain theory of history was given a monopoly out of political-ideological interest. Ultimately, the framework guidelines failed.<sup>5</sup>

4 <https://www.kmk.org/kmk/information-in-english.html> (10.9.2022).

5 Der Hessische Kultusminister (1972) Rahmenrichtlinien. Sekundarstufe I – Gesellschaftslehre. Frankfurt/M.: Diesterweg; Nipperdey, T. (1974) Konflikt – Einzige Wahrheit der Gesellschaft? Zur Kritik der hessischen Rahmenrichtlinien, Osnabrück: Fromm. In this book there is also printed together with H. Lübke, Das Gutachten (April 1973) zu den Rahmenrichtlinien Sekundarstufe I Gesellschaftslehre des hessischen Kultusministers, 38–116. Jeismann, K.-E. and Kosthorst, E. (1973) Geschichte und Gesellschaftslehre. Die Stellung

Without the political implications of the Hessian Framework Guidelines of 1972, since the beginning of the 1990s the political will in many federal states has been to merge subjects such as ‘history, social studies and geography’ (in German, *Geschichte/Sozialkunde/Erkunde*, abbreviated G/S/E) or science subjects such as ‘physics, chemistry and biology’ (in German, *Physik/Chemie/Biologie*, abbreviated P/C/B), as in Bavaria, or ‘matter, nature and technology’ (in German, *Materie-Natur-Technik*, abbreviated MNT), as in Baden-Württemberg etc.

When asked about the reasons for the introduction of an integrated subject, the official response pointed out that individual subjects limit the view, and that it is only by combining subjects that knowledge acquisition and education can take place in such a way that they are appropriate to the demands and conditions of present-day reality. The philosopher Jürgen Mittelstraß, for example, called for transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in all types of schools, although he did not define these two terms or distinguish between them. However, in his view, specialised knowledge should also retain its value. Mittelstraß did not make any suggestions as to what this might look like in concrete terms on the grounds that he was not a school theorist or a ‘teacher’ (in German, *Schulmann*).<sup>6</sup> It was often assumed that subject-wise teaching was outdated, that it imparted pigeonhole knowledge and did not allow what had been learned to be applied in practice.

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der Geschichte in den Rahmenrichtlinien für die Sekundarstufe I in Hessen und den Rahmenlehrplänen für die Gesamtschulen in Nordrhein-Westfalen. *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 24, 261–288, reprinted in: H. Süßmuth (ed) (1973) *Historisch-politischer Unterricht. Planung und Organisation (Anmerkungen und Argumente 7.1)*, 29–72, Stuttgart: Klett 1973 and in: B. Vogel (ed) (1974) *Schule am Scheideweg. Die Hessischen Rahmenrichtlinien in der Diskussion*, Munich: Olzog, 80–124.

- 6 Mittelstraß, J. (2010) Transdisziplinäre Herausforderungen begreifen. *Schulpädagogik heute*, 1(2) 1–4, now accessible at <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-opus-128769> (10.1.2022). Mittelstraß uses the word ‘Schulmann’, which primarily means someone who has a deeper insight into school matters, though it can also mean ‘teacher’. He uses the word in its former meaning (Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, digitalised version in the dictionary network of the Trier Center for Digital Humanities, version 01/21, <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB>, (19.9.2022). Cf. Mittelstraß J. (1987) ‘Die Stunde der Interdisziplinarität?’, in: *Interdisziplinarität. Praxis-Herausforderung-Ideologie*, ed. by J. Kocka, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp (Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft; 671), 152–158. Id.: *Transdisziplinarität-wissenschaftliche Zukunft und institutionelle Wirklichkeit*, Konstanz, Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 2003 (Konstanzer Universitätsreden).



### 3. Experiences with the G/S/E subject group in Bavaria

In the following, I would like to refer briefly to my experiences with the subject group ‘history/social studies/geography (G/S/E)’ in Bavaria. At the beginning of the 1990s, a resolution passed the Bavarian Landtag (federal state parliament) that so-called integration subjects should be introduced in the Hauptschule, namely for ‘history/social studies/geography’ (G/S/E) and for ‘physics/chemistry/biology’ (P/C/B). Corresponding curriculum commissions were also set up. After some time, it became known that in the fifth year, when the pupils are 10 or 11 years old, ‘Dealing with the disabled’ was planned as a cross-curricular topic in G/S/E. As a historical example, ‘Dealing with disabled people under National Socialism’ was to be dealt with. In this year group, history lessons begin, usually in chronological order, with the Stone Age; moreover, the topic did not seem appropriate for the age of the pupils. As a response to the resolution, a working group was formed that included not only history didacticians, but also subject specialists, Bavarian history associations, the Bavarian Philologists’ Association (in German, Der Philologenverband in Bayern) in which the grammar school teachers are represented and the Bavarian Teachers’ Association (in German, Bayerischer Lehrer- und Lehrerinnenverband, abbreviated BLLV) etc. After a press conference held on Bavarian Heritage Day (in German, Heimattag) on 26 June 1996, which has existed since 1949 and is a union of the Bavarian State Association for the Preservation of Local History, the BUND Nature Conservation Association in Bavaria and the Association of Bavarian History Societies, a critical article about the plans appeared in the *Abendzeitung*, a Munich tabloid. The Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs then invited the working group and the curriculum commission to the Ministry. We were promised that history would be the leading subject, and five people from the working group were asked to participate in future meetings of the curriculum commission.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, the five of us were among the ‘bad people’ who had ruined ‘our beautiful curriculum’; on the other hand, it became apparent in practice that not even the overarching themes lived up to the claim of integration. In the fifth grade, for

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7 In the following article all the names etc. and all the activities can be found: Tremel, M. (1997) ‘Lehrpläne für Geschichte, Erdkunde und Sozialkunde an den bayerischen Hauptschulen’ *Mitteilungen des Verbandes Bayerischer Geschichtsvereine*, 18, 68–74. The full text is also accessible: [https://www.verband-bayerischer-geschichtsvereine.de/fileadmin/Externe\\_Aktive/verband-bayerischer-geschichtsvereine/3\\_Zeitschrift/2019-11-18\\_PDFs/Mitteilungen\\_des\\_Verbandes\\_Bayerischer\\_Geschichtsvereine\\_\\_Nr.\\_18.pdf](https://www.verband-bayerischer-geschichtsvereine.de/fileadmin/Externe_Aktive/verband-bayerischer-geschichtsvereine/3_Zeitschrift/2019-11-18_PDFs/Mitteilungen_des_Verbandes_Bayerischer_Geschichtsvereine__Nr._18.pdf) (10.9.2022).

example, the cross-curricular educational task 'Disabled people', remained, but the teacher could choose between the topics 'Disabled people' and 'Life communities'. The historical reference for the former topic was now 'Authentic life accounts inform the pupils about the treatment of disabled people in earlier times'. No geographical reference was given. For the topic 'Life Communities', an attempt was made to introduce the geographical aspect by stating: 'Using various examples from everyday history and from other regions of the world, they will learn how the family has changed, e.g. in size, composition, function, tasks and importance.'<sup>8</sup>

In practice, it became apparent that the teachers had not studied all three subjects and were therefore teaching their own subjects more intensively. There were frequent complaints that the curriculum was overloaded, which was not surprising, since in reality there had been a reduction in hours; also, the curriculum contained a relatively large amount of material, and the teachers had difficulties in setting focal points. For these reasons the 1997 curriculum was revised and came into force in 2004.

The most extraordinary response was that the integrative educational tasks had disappeared.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, according to the examination regulations for teachers in 'Hauptschulen' or secondary schools, it was and still is not possible to study the three subjects of history, social studies and geography, i.e. teachers had to teach at least one of the three subjects outside their own subjects without having studied it regularly at the university like the other two subjects.

To put it bluntly, one cannot help thinking that, when the subjects were merged, it was assumed that it would be enough for the secondary school pupils if the teacher had read just two pages further in the book than the pupils.

These impressions were confirmed to me in interviews with teachers from various secondary schools (in German, Hauptschulen) in the regional vicinity of my university.<sup>10</sup> They complained that the pupils could not recognise the interdisciplinary connections between the three subjects history, social studies, and geography. The teachers were of the opinion that they themselves noticed the cross-curricular combination more in the separate subjects of German, art and

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8 [http://www.comenius.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php?title=Bayern:\\_Lehrplan\\_Geschichte/Sozialkunde/Erdkunde\\_Hauptschule\\_1997](http://www.comenius.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php?title=Bayern:_Lehrplan_Geschichte/Sozialkunde/Erdkunde_Hauptschule_1997) (10.9.2022).

9 [http://www.comenius.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php?title=Bayern:\\_Lehrplan\\_Alle\\_F%C3%A4cher\\_Hauptschule\\_2004a](http://www.comenius.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php?title=Bayern:_Lehrplan_Alle_F%C3%A4cher_Hauptschule_2004a) (10.9.2022).

10 Not published because a flood destroyed these records.

religion. In addition, they lacked methodological competence in at least one subject they had not studied, which is very important in teaching. The lack of time is noticeable, so regional and global topics are often neglected in the classroom.

#### 4. Cognitive psychology and interdisciplinarity

As early as 1995, the KMK (Conference of Ministers of Culture) Expert Commission, in its final report ‘Further Development of the Principles of the Upper Secondary School and the Abitur’, emphasised the achievements of the school subject in general and concluded: ‘In this respect, the school subject is the central condition for learning that is demanding in terms of content and the prerequisite for being able to think in a well-founded way about the possibilities of increasing it in lessons. Subject teaching simultaneously represents the place and status of professional competence and the medium of individual education’ (Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder, Expertenkommission, 1995: 97–99, quote: 99).

A few years later, Eckhard Klieme, the psychologist and educational scientist who heads the Department of Educational Quality and Evaluation at the Leibniz Institute for Educational Research and Information in Frankfurt, and his co-authors stated, ‘Simple messages – for example, that interdisciplinary competencies are best promoted through interdisciplinary project work – lack any empirical basis’ (Klieme et al., 2014: 218). In the expertise coordinated by Klieme on the ‘Development of National Educational Standards’, it becomes clear that competences are highly domain-specific. ‘Research even suggests that the development of cross-curricular competencies presupposes the existence of well-developed domain-specific competencies. The question of the scope of competency models cannot therefore be answered by contrasting “subject-related” versus “cross-disciplinary”. Rather, subject-related competencies provide a necessary foundation for cross-curricular competencies’ (Klieme et al., 2003: 75).

John R. Anderson, the author of the repeatedly revised and updated manual *Cognitive Psychology*, clearly states: ‘All available evidence, however, suggests that there are clearly defined limits to the transfer of skills and that becoming an expert in one domain [subject area, school subject, E. E.] yields very few benefits in the quest to become an expert even in a very different domain. Positive transfer occurs only to the extent that the two domains refer to the same facts, rules and patterns – that is, to the same knowledge’ (Anderson, 2007: 360). This statement refers to two domains, whereas subject alliances, such as those introduced in Bavaria or Baden-Württemberg, often refer to more than two subjects. In this

context, it should be mentioned that Baden-Württemberg has been introducing a new curriculum for lower secondary education successively since 2016. History, geography and social studies became independent subjects again, however, in grade 5/6 there is ‘Biology, Natural Phenomena and Technology’ (BNT), ‘Economic, Vocational and Study Orientation’ as well as ‘Everyday Culture, Nutrition, Social Issues’.<sup>11</sup>

In Bavaria, the Hauptschulen have been called Mittelschulen since the 2011/2012 school year, provided they meet certain criteria. The subject ‘G/S/E’ was renamed ‘History/Politics/Geography’ (in German now ‘Geographie’). Furthermore, the subject ‘P/C/B’ is gradually being replaced by ‘Nature and Technology’, which will be taught in the middle school from years 5 to 10. ‘Nature and Technology’ is also taught in grades 5–7 at the Gymnasium. In addition, there are various subject groups at the secondary schools, such as ‘Nutrition and Social Issues’, among others.<sup>12</sup>

According to the results of cognitive psychology, it is possible that a positive transfer can take place between two subjects to the extent that the two areas refer to the same facts, rules and patterns, i.e. to the same knowledge. In this respect, it is possible for historical and political education to be combined into one subject group.

## 5. What is meant by cooperative teaching?

More than forty years ago, the politics didactician Behrmann and the history didacticians Jeismann and Süßmuth proposed a curriculum for historical-political lessons at the orientation level (grades 5/6) and secondary level I (grades 7/8 and 9/10) in their book *Geschichte und Politik: Didaktische Grundlegung eines kooperativen Unterrichts* (Behrmann et al., 1978: 241–247). The proposal was based on the assumption that three lessons per week are available for ‘history/politics’. The arrangement and allocation of the teaching units for grades five to ten are an ideal-typical plan. Different types of topic are distinguished for history and politics. The main topics from history and politics often overlap, links with them mainly being given by the various supplementary topics or sub-topics. This is made clear by the graphic representations.

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11 <http://www.bildungsplaene-bw.de/,Lde/LS/BP2016BW/ALLG/EINFUEHRUNG> (10.1.2022).

12 <https://www.lehrplanplus.bayern.de/schulart/mittelschule/fach/gpg/inhalt/fachlehrplaene> (10.1.2022).









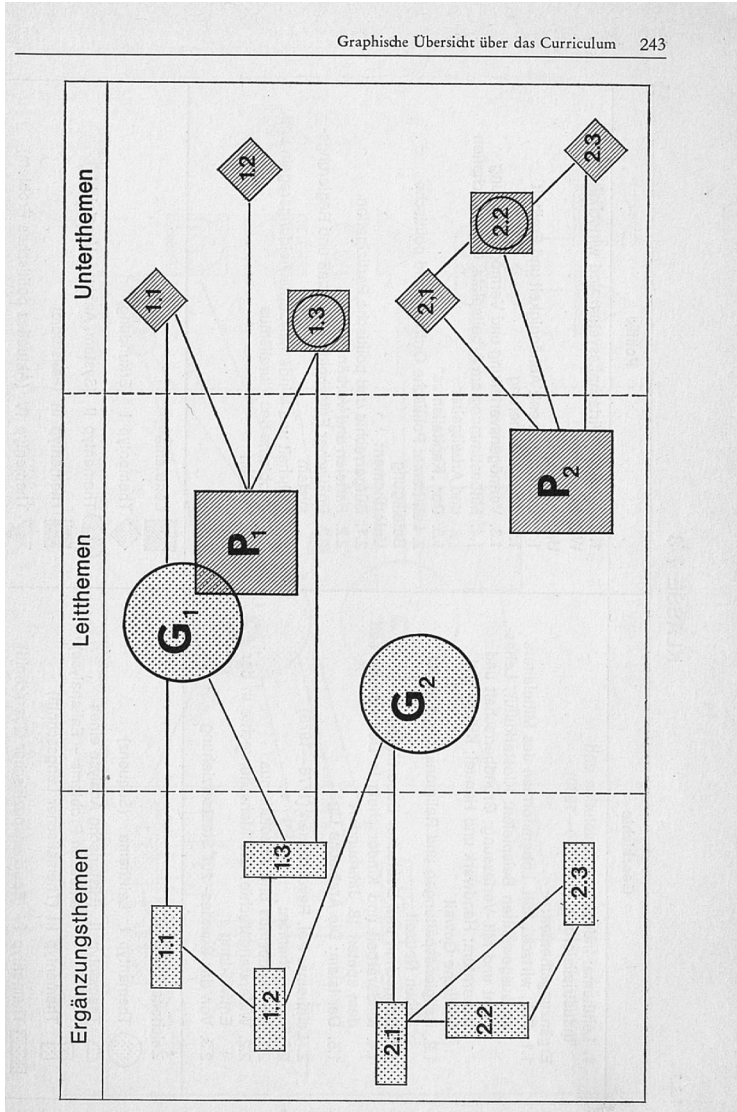
KLASSE 5/6	
Geschichte	Politik
<p>4.2.2</p> <p><b>1. Leitthema:</b> Die Stadt: Entstehung und Veränderung. (Lokal-regionalgesch. Längsschnitt)</p> <p><b>Ergänzungsthemen:</b></p> <p>1.1. Lebensformen der Ur- und Frühgeschichte  1.2. Die potamischen Hochkulturen (Beispiel: Ägypten)  1.3. Die technische Entwicklung des Verkehrs (Verkehrsmittel, Handelsgüter und -wege)</p> <p><b>2. Leitthema:</b> Athen und Rom: Polis und Metropole</p> <p><b>Ergänzungsthemen:</b></p> <p>2.1. Die Römer an Rhein und Donau  2.2. Völkerwanderungen/Entdeckungen/Kolonisation  2.3. Europa um 800</p> <p><b>Zeichenerklärung:</b></p> <p> Thementyp I Leitthema (Sequenz)   Thementyp II (Historische Analyse eines aktuellen Problems – Fallanalyse)   Thementyp III (Thematischer Längsschnitt)   Thementyp IV (Epochenspezifischer Querschnitt)</p>	<p><b>1. Leitthema:</b> Stadt-Gemeinde: Die sozialen Bereiche; Aufgaben und Abgrenzungen</p> <p><b>Unterthemen:</b></p> <p>1.1. Verwaltung und Gemeinderat  1.2. Wie werden wir informiert – wie können wir uns informieren?  1.3. Kommunale Infrastruktur am Beispiel der Verkehrspolitik</p> <p><b>2. Leitthema:</b> Soziokulturelle Unterschiede und soziale Ungleichheit</p> <p><b>Unterthemen:</b></p> <p>2.1. Wie leben andere? Familien in (aus) Entwicklungsländern  2.2. Andere Menschen – andere Sitten: Vorurteile  2.3. Soziale Rollen und Schichten: soziale Ungleichheit in der unmittelbaren Umwelt</p> <p><b>Leitthema</b></p> <p> Thementyp I (Erkundung)   Thementyp II (System, Analyse, Vergleich)   Thementyp III (Fallstudie)   Thementyp IV (Aktuelles politisches Problem)</p>

Table 1: Proposal of the curriculum History/Politics in grade 5/6 from 1978<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Proposal of the curriculum History/Politics in grade 5/6 in Behrmann et al. (1978), 242–243. I thank Prof. Dr. G. C. Behrmann for permission dated 21.1.2022 to print the graphs here. Unfortunately he passed away in April 2022.



A number of topics have also been published to fit this curriculum and for the different topic types, such as the guiding theme (sequence), the historical analysis of a current problem, case analysis, a thematic longitudinal section for history teaching and guiding theme, exploration, systematic analysis (comparison), case

study and current political problems in politics teaching. However, the learning objectives developed for history teaching (analysis, factual judgement, evaluation) and politics teaching (analysis, design, action) were concretized in terms of content down to the level of actual learning objectives in the published teaching units.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, a curriculum for the upper secondary level has not yet been developed.

## 6. Conclusions

Of course, this draft curriculum cannot be transferred to today. After all, no curriculum is designed for decades, let alone for longer, in our times. Nevertheless, I suggest it is important to refer to it because it becomes clear how carefully the cooperation between history and politics was planned in this case. The proposed content-related connections were considered possible by the authors, but not mandatory.

So if one wants to teach 'history/politics' as one subject today, one should take note of this attempt to introduce cooperative teaching and also deal with the similar and yet independent and different structures of the subjects as well as with the connections between their respective contents.

In my opinion, the following prerequisites must be met in order to contribute to success.

1. If a subject 'history/politics' or a comparable designation is introduced, student teachers who want to teach this subject later on must have not only the possibility but also the obligation to study both subjects.
2. The creation of a subject combination must not lead to a reduction in the hours previously available for the two subjects, thus saving teachers and teaching time.
3. The original subjects of 'history/politics' should not, as often happens, stand unconnected next to each other, but a cooperative curriculum should be developed.

Whether and how this succeeds is also a question of social and educational policy and will.

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<sup>14</sup> This series: *Geschichte. Politik.* edited by B. C. Behrmann, K.-E. Jeismann, E. Kosthorst, S. Quandt and H. Süsmuth, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, was published from 1976–1986. Each teaching unit was written by a different author as a teacher's booklet, material booklet and student workbook.

In the event that the aforementioned conditions are not met, it makes sense for the subjects of history and politics (or social studies) to remain as independent subjects.

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# Concepts and Access to History Education



SUN JOO KANG

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## School History in the Era of Deauthorization and Horizontality

Popular History, Digital Public History, and History Education in South Korea<sup>1</sup>



Sun Joo Kang

### Abstract

In the digital era, individuals without a training in history can have easy access to the historical source materials and literature of historians, challenging the mediation between history and the public by academic historians. The production and dissemination of history by fluent storytelling public historians have been competing with academic historians to influence the public's mind and emotions. Individuals practise their historical consciousness by creating their own history content or transferring and sharing the history content created by others from one site to another. Academic historians were concerned about the practice of history through new media such as YouTube and podcasts, as well as old media such as TV, by individuals without a training in history. The ecosystem of history production and dissemination, together with history learning and teaching practice, is being transformed.

This chapter seeks to answer the question why schools should teach history and what should be taught in school history in the digital era, which is characterized by deauthorization and horizontality. This chapter first examines who

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1 Some of the content in this chapter is adapted from Kang (2020b).

has mediated between history and the public, with a focus on popular history in Korea since the 1980s, presents observations on changes in the actors that affect the country's collective memory, and lastly suggests that school history help students learn to explore appropriate questions with historical literacy connected to digital literacy in everyday life while connecting the dots to view the big picture of historical change.

## 1. Introduction

In the Republic of Korea, South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea), schools and teachers have played a pivotal role in shaping collective memory and historical consciousness. Teachers have taught history by relying on textbooks based on the research achievements of academic historians. However, since the 1980s, popular history, written not only by history specialists but also by non-specialists, has affected the content and perspective of school history (Oh, 2019). In the 2000s, as digitalized historical primary sources became available to the public and communication through the internet developed, individuals, whether they were history specialists or not, emerged as actors forming or reforming collective memories without the intervention of academic history. Students who are digital natives also acquire, present, transfer and apply historical knowledge through social media<sup>2</sup> without the teachers' mediation, which calls into question the authority of history teachers and textbooks as reliable communicators of historical knowledge. The ecosystem of history production and dissemination, together with history learning and teaching practice, is being transformed. So why should schools teach history? And what should they teach?

This chapter first examines who has mediated between history and the public, with a focus on popular history in Korea since the 1980s, and presents observations on changes in the actors that affect the country's collective memory. In doing so, it seeks to answer the question why schools should teach history and what should be taught in school history in the digital era, which is characterized by deauthorization and horizontality.

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2 Social media are online tools or platforms that people use to share their opinions, thoughts, experiences, and viewpoints. Social media uses a combination of different content forms – text, images, audio, and video – and their typical forms of application are blogs, social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), message boards, podcasts, wikis, vlogs, UCC (YouTube), and micro-blogs (Twitter) (Hands-on IT Buzzwords 2008).

## 2. Academic historians' reshaping of collective memory with popular history

In Korea, since the 1980s, the movement for the popularization of history has become an important stimulus for changing the historical consciousness of the public. In the early 1980s, pursuing political democratization against authoritarian military rule, historians wrote and taught history from the perspective of the people's history, that is, the history of *minjung*. More particularly, a group of progressive academic historians who pursued *minjung* nationalism undertook the movement for the popularization of history to replace the heroic elite-centered history with the history of *minjung*, that is, the history from below or the people's history (Park, 1991). *Minjung* was imagined as the mass of the population being subordinated to the elite, while *minjung* nationalism pursued the national sovereignty and democratization of Korean society with *minjung* as the main agent (Kang, 2017b). The history of *minjung* told through popular history books made its own contribution to building the political consciousness, organization and practices required by the democratic social reform movement at that time (Park, 1991). In this history, *minjung*, a monolithic group with homogeneous aspirations and predicaments, was seen as the political actor that would bring about historical change (Hur, 2013; Kang, 2017b). The main actors in this movement for the popularization of history were progressive academic historians affiliated with research institutions and history teachers (Kang, 2020b). During the 1980s and the 1990s, academic historians dominated popular histories with the "politically correct" history of *minjung*, which attracted history teachers who were critical of the elitist perspective of school history taught using the Korean history textbook produced by the state.<sup>3</sup> They attempted to create or reconstruct collective memory by promoting popular history from the perspective of the history of *minjung* (Kang, 2020b). As a result, in the 1990s, the history of *minjung* began to permeate school curricula (Park, 2013).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, as the attacks of postmodernists and postnationalists on the nationalist perspective intensified and new research trends in the history of everyday life were introduced, academic historians began to draw public attention to the latter history by publishing popular books such as the series called *How They Lived*. During this period, academic historians boasted of the popularization of history as an expansion of the humanist tradition that

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3 By 2016, only Korean history textbooks had been developed under the state's auspices. World history was taught with textbooks developed under the state's adoption system.

non-specialists could easily access (Oh, 2016). However, historical terminology and academic grammar in their popular history books limited their influence to those non-specialists who were versed in history and to history educators who attempted to transcend elitist and nationalist perspectives. Specialists in history education sought to include the history of everyday life in school history curricula and textbooks to transcend nationalist male hero-centered history (Choi, 2004; Kang, 2005). As a result, history textbooks that were developed under the directions of history curricula revised in 2009 included the content and materials of the history of everyday life.

However, broader and more dramatic changes in the public's historical knowledge and historical consciousness were made not by academic historians or teachers but by writers of drama and films. In the 2000s, television bypassed the books of academic historians as the main mediator of historical knowledge. For example, a TV drama, *Daejanggeum* (2003) caused a sensation by telling the story of a medically knowledgeable lady of the court in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The drama writer created the character of *Deajanggeum* based on just a few lines in historical records. The drama dismantled the public perception that traditionally women only lived as housewives or maids without playing any social roles. The way *Daejanggeum* portrayed women as beings with their own experiences and interpretations of life was considered an excellent example of writing history from a feminist perspective (Ha, 2004). TV dramas starring historical women such as *Daejanggeum* and *Queen Seondeok* (2009) have contributed greatly to raising public interest in women's history in Korea. Other TV dramas also acted as leverage to popularize history from a perspective other than those of elitism and nationalism.

Another film called *Taegeukgi [Korean flag]: Brotherhood of War* (2004) described the Korean War (1950–1953) as family history and attempted to dilute the typical interpretation that the war was an ideological conflict. The film boldly revealed the 'difficult history' of the Korean War by illuminating the experiences of ordinary people who were indifferent to ideology but became victims of the war. The film made it possible for the public to talk about individual emotions and memories of the Korean War, which had been suppressed by ideological conflict. Another film, *Gorgeous Vacation* (2007), dealing with the democratization movement that took place in Gwangju in 1980, also contributed to open discussions from the viewpoint of Gwangju's citizens about the violence of the military, a topic rarely covered in history textbooks at that time (Kim, 2013).

A TV history show called *KBS [Korean Broadcasting System] History Special*, which started broadcasting in October 1998 and continued for over twenty

years, has also expanded the public's knowledge of Korean history, which was great and interesting, but was not included in textbooks (Kim, 2002). The show featured a wide range of themes from ideologically conservative to progressive, and from national greatness to ordinary people's love and friendship.

In sum, in the late 1980s and 1990s, academic historians disrupted the elitist perspective of textbook history with their own writings and teaching for a public audience. However, in the 2000s, historical drama, film and TV show and documentary writers and producers who were not necessarily trained in the discipline of history contributed to this expansion of the public's historical horizons. Students learned history from TV dramas and films (Yang, 2006; Kang, 2011). However, the creativity of popular history was mainly based on the achievements of academic historians, who had a major impact on reformulating public memory and historical consciousness.

### 3. The history war between the non-academic and academic history communities

Since the 2000s, diverse actors other than academic historians have produced and circulated history content, competing for the formation of collective memory and historical consciousness. In particular, ancient history and contemporary history were the venues of ideological conflicts.

Some prominent popular history writers, including university historians and social scientists, have propagated an extreme nationalist perspective through their writings about ancient Korean history since the 1970s. Their interpretation of the *Hwandangogi* (the four documents about Dangun,<sup>4</sup> the founder of the first Korean kingdom according to historical records)<sup>5</sup> has triggered the interest of people with nationalist attitudes and challenged the official narrative of Korean ancient history by the academic history community (Song, 2014 and 2016; Jeon, 2019; Oh, 2019). According to the *Hwandangogi*, in ancient times, Korea controlled a larger area and had more power than academic historians have interpreted.

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4 According to the historical record, *Samguk Yoosa*, written by a Buddhist monk, Il-Yeon, in the thirteenth century, Dangun founded the first Korean kingdom, called GoJoseon, in 2333 B.C. Although academic historians offer different interpretations of when GoJoseon took the form of a state, they generally speculate it was later than 2333 B.C. However, writers of extreme nationalist views treated the foundation of GoJoseon in 2333 B.C. as a fact.

5 The existence of documents called *Hwandangogi* became known in 1979. According to writers who interpret Korean ancient history based on the *Hwandangogi*, it was written in 1911.

However, academic historians have criticized *Hwandangogi* as neither credible nor reliable. Although many historians in the field of ancient history were aware of the extreme nationalist claims of these non-history specialists and their growing influence on political and cultural elites in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, during which nationalism overwhelmed the Korean public, academic historians did not respond to it (Song, 2014). In this period, some teachers who led the National Teachers Labor Union supported and disseminated the extreme nationalist version of Korean ancient history by promoting it as a way for history education to transcend Japanese colonialist historiography, ancient Korea having been influenced politically and culturally by powers in northeastern Asia and Japan (Lee, 2019).

In the 2000s and the early 2010s, the extreme nationalist perspective became prominent when KBS in 1999 and Yonhap Television News (YTN) in 2014 produced documentaries on ancient history that relied heavily on the *Hwandangogi*. In addition, an attempt was made to revise Korean ancient history in school textbooks from the extreme nationalist perspective. Responding to this, academic historians and some public historians<sup>6</sup> began to severely attack the extreme nationalist perspective, calling it pseudo-history.<sup>7</sup> In the latter half of the 2010s, the extreme nationalist version of ancient history was mostly absent from TV screens. However, ancient history from the extreme nationalist perspective has been spreading on social media. On YouTube in particular, creators of ancient history content have engaged in the debate over the reliability of *Hwandangogi* as primary source materials (Kim, 2017).

Meanwhile, in the early 2000s, new right-wing academicians with revisionist perspectives of their own also became prominent and challenged the narrative of Korean modern history based on the theory of internal development (Kang, 2017b). This theory was developed to refute Japanese colonialist theory, which attributed the modern transformation of Korea to Japanese colonial rule and in

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6 In this chapter, the phrase ‘public historians’ refers only to creators of history content with undergraduate- or graduate-level history education who produce, disseminate and apply history for non-specialist clientele outside the university.

7 Song, On the Dangers of the Recent Controversy over the ‘Korean Commercial Examination’; Song, Controversy over Ancient Korean History; Oh, On the Banality of the ‘Pseudo-History.’ In 2015, criticizing the extreme nationalist perspective, some young historians who are not necessarily affiliated with universities or research institutes organized a group called ‘Group of Young Historians’ to present ancient history content on social media. They also published a book, *Korean Ancient History and Pseudo-History* (Seoul, Yeoks-a-Bipyung Sa, 2017).



so doing justified Japanese colonialism. However, the new rightist revisionist account of modern and contemporary Korean history echoed the colonialist narrative plot of Japanese colonial rule (Lee, 2013; Kang, 2017b).

In addition, the controversy over the former presidents Rhee Seung Man and Park Jeong-Hee was intensified on YouTube. Some progressive historians highlight their suppression of human rights, while the new-rightists attributed the defense of liberal democracy against communist North Korea and Korea's miraculous economic development to these two regimes. To dispute the extreme nationalists and their new-rightist arguments, young public historians have organized groups and actively participated in the popularization of history in a way that is familiar to the public through social media.<sup>8</sup> Today, historical interpretations, intertwined with ideological conflicts, have competed for public recognition in the social media.

In the 2010s and 2020s, as the power shifted from ideologically progressive to conservative and back again, the perspective of Korean history in the national curriculum changed. In schools, modern and contemporary history has become too controversial and sensitive politically and socially for teachers and students to discuss. Some history teachers who count as ideological progressives actively promoted the teaching of controversial contemporary history in the form of a debate, which would, they believed, inculcate democratic values that can dispute new rightists (Kang, 2016). They called for a re-enactment of history writers' debate on controversial history in history class (Kang, 2016). However, in practice, it is not easy for teachers and students to discuss or debate contemporary history so openly because it can cause ideological conflict among students (Maeng, 2019).

Currently, some academic historians are trying to construct narratives about modern and contemporary history that are more nuanced, going beyond the dichotomy between coloniality and modernity, and recognizing the ambivalence of the colonial era (Choi, 2016; Yun, 2018). However, on social media, the debate over modern and contemporary history from different ideological stances within the dichotomies between coloniality and modernity, or ideologically progressive and conservative, has been intensifying.<sup>9</sup> YouTube has become the site of a history war in Korea.

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8 Criticizing the new-rightists' version of modern and contemporary history, public historians organized a group called *Everybody's Color Researcher Network*: Kim, 2017.

9 Han-young Lee, who was affiliated with institutions or memorial museums related to contemporary history, observed that the new rightists' accounts of the May 18 Gwangju democratization movement had spread on YouTube (Lee, 6.7.2020).

#### 4. Public historians' growing influence on the collective memory

Some online history instructors emerged as influencers on YouTube in the 2010s. They became influential by giving lectures to students preparing for Korean history in the college entrance examinations and the Korean history proficiency test in an easy-to-understand manner. Soon, they took over popular TV history shows and won enormous popularity. The producers of the TV history shows preferred to have these YouTube history instructors rather than academic historians host the shows because they were far more proficient than academic historians in using the sorts of terminology, grammar and narratives that attract viewers (Kang, 2020b). These history instructors are public historians. Viewers have identified them as reliable historians. This is proved by the great number of content views and subscribers to their channels, and the amounts of their books that have been sold. The instructors elicited the public's consensual sensibility by vividly describing the progress of events in an intriguing way and the psychological states of historical characters in exciting detail and clarifying the target value or ideology. However, Kim Bae-Bo, a historian, commented as follows:

*Considering the power of popularly recognized TV history show panelists, there is a great risk that misinformation can be injected into the public without filtering. Given that historical knowledge thus formed can also affect the history education of elementary and secondary schools and universities, the need for historians to actively intervene in the production of historical content as a 'consumer good' has increased (Kim, 2019a: 171).*

Academic historians have been concerned about the distortion of history and the nationalist view of public historians outside the academic history community (Kim, 2019b). Kim Bae-Bo contrasted the lectures by an academic specialist and a public historian about the French Revolution: in a TV show called *Different Class*, a specialist made statements about the French Revolution based on the results of academic research, encouraging viewers to reflect on some contemporary social issues such as democracy and modernity. However, in the TV show called *Crossing the Border*, a public historian gave a lecture that was very different from the academic historians' understanding (Kim, 2019a). In addition, Kim Bae-Bo pointed out that, while the academic historians recognized that their opinions were not absolute and tried to offer different opinions, the public historian did not (Kim, 2019a). Kim also complained that many public historians conveyed the 'wrong' information and told stories from a one-sided and biased perspective.

However, it is rare for either academic historians or public historians to provide viewers with a variety of historical arguments or narratives.

The problem with the epistemological and ideological gap between academic and non-academic history cannot be ascribed to these public historians alone, given that academic historians have also played an important role in popular history and occupied a distinct position both online and offline (Kang, 2020b). In the 2020s, academic historians are appearing more often than public historians on TV history shows such as *Different Class* and *Naked World History*. In these shows, historians tell stories about the past and quiz panelists using a variety of historical images, documents and videos as historical evidence, which enhances the authenticity of the historical interpretations and narratives presented by these shows. Celebrities as panelists in the shows participate in crafting the stories. In this way, these shows take on a new form of interactive communication with the non-specialists, rather than one-sided lectures by specialists. However, the structure of a TV history show does not allow tellers to discuss the complications or complexity of historical arguments (Kang, 2020b). In the show, history is a narrative from a specific perspective, not the process of constructing that narrative – a process of selection, comparative analysis, review, refutation and interpretation (Kang, 2020b). The history produced in such programmes is rapidly reproduced and circulated through social media and influences collective memory and historical consciousness.

## 5. Digital public history and the increase in individuals' practice of history in the public domain

In the 2000s and 2010s, the rise of social media brought about a fundamental change not only in the way historical knowledge was constructed and disseminated, but also in the system of dissemination itself (Go, 2010). In Korea, internet community sites first appeared in the early 2000s. Unlike the realm of experts, who provided content unilaterally to visitors, a community site was a nexus for the exchange of information and content. The community site's users could present their own content and copy and transfer content produced by other users from one site to another. In 2002, the Korean portal called *Naver* began to service a site called '*Jisik(Knowledge)iN(people)*', in which users can both ask and answer questions, even if they are not specialists. Soon, power-bloggers equipped with expert-level knowledge also grew rapidly. With the growth of such social media in the 2000s and 2010s, non-specialists in history emerged as influential creators of history content.

Many social media creators of history content have produced historical knowledge by exploring digitalized primary historical sources, rather than referring to knowledge produced by academic historians. Beginning in 1999, the Korean government has provided the public with primary historical sources translated into the contemporary Korean language and letters in digitalized forms. 'The era has come when non-specialists can produce and distribute historical knowledge on their own without the mediation of specialized historians' (Go, 2010: 188). The digitalization of historical sources has diversified the actors who present and apply history in the public sphere. The divisions between knowledge producers, disseminators and consumers, and between specialists and non-specialists, have become increasingly blurred. Digitalization has eroded the domain of academic history, which was once the sole mediator of historical knowledge. The internet has transformed the authoritative vertical hierarchy into a pluralistic horizontal network, and the autonomy, independence and influence of individuals as actors in knowledge creation and the public use of knowledge have significantly increased (Kang, 2020b).

Many people now deal with history in the public sphere, not to perform a profession but to engage in social participation or enjoyment (Kang, 2020b). In today's world, the internet, especially social media, is changing the meaning of the public (Kang, 2020b). According to one Korean historian, Baek Young-seo, the Korean term for 'public' was 'publicity', which was understood as being related to public affairs, commonly involving people, and open to anyone (Baek, 2010). In fact, the Korean term for public had the strong connotation of being a civil society, or society as an open space of communication in which everyone could share and participate. However, in the digital era the public sphere is creating synchronicity and complexity that makes it a challenge to distinguish between public and private, open and closed, communal and individual (Kang, 2020b). What we do in the public sphere as individuals always has public consequences in the digital era. In the public sphere created by digital media, people propose their own historical arguments by connecting themselves to the past of their own society and country. These arguments are joined together and interact with the collective memory of a specific perspective at any given moment (Kang, 2020b).

Individuals practise their historical consciousness by creating their own history content or transferring and sharing the history content created by others from one site to another. While admitting the considerable influence of each of the prominent creators of history content in broadcasting podcasts or YouTube channels and creators of webtoons and web novels, in Korea many are *Yeo-*

*kdeokhu*, that is, history aficionados with no academic training in history (Kim, 2018). They search for digitalized history resources and satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the public with their unique imaginations and interpretations. They also use both the terminology and diction of professionals and the everyday language of the public, but their history narratives are simpler and more interesting than those of academic historians (Lee, 2020). They actively participate in the struggle for recognition while arguing with other users on social media or modifying others' posts (Cho, 2019). They engage in historical debates on social media with people who disagree with them, and collectively practice or act with people who share their opinions (Kang, 2020b).

Historical academia has been concerned about the misuse, abuse and ill-use of history by *Yeo-kdeokhu* (Jeong, 2020). Go Won, a historian, criticized the fact that the historical knowledge of non-specialists in blogs, internet cafes, YouTube and podcasts was largely distorted and exaggerated due to the lack of methodological knowledge or the skills needed to select and verify reliable source materials, largely due to religion or political ideology (Go, 2010). He deplored the fact that 'wrong' historical knowledge was being widely disseminated on the internet without any filtering (Go, 2010). Likewise, historical academia worldwide recognizes as serious problems the distortion of historical knowledge, ideological conservatism, the reinforcement of prejudice and plagiarism in public history (especially digital public history) (Apostolidou, 2020).

However, this concern is not solely the domain of public history or non-professionals. The criticism of two British historians reads, 'Of course, there has always been some "bad history" and flawed history, both inside and outside the history classroom and the academy, but we would argue that there have never been so many intelligent and well-educated people and organizations writing about the past, who are professionally dedicated to manipulating and distorting evidence without conscience in order to use the past for their own, often unethical purposes' (Haydn and Ribbens, 2017).

History has been mobilized to glorify specific personages, create a heritage, mystify specific ruins, or make myths history (Kang, 2017a). However, recently the heritagization of digital public history has not only proceeded in a new form, its influence on collective memory formation is as great as that of academic history (Kang, 2020b). Historical academia has an institutional system of mutual review and criticism, which acts as a self-filtering mechanism. Therefore, some historians insist that non-academics who have no such mechanism should be subject to monitoring and criticism to address the abuse, misuse or ill-use of history (Jeong, 2020). Demantowsky (2018: 27) has argued that it was necessary to

review the ethical aspect of public history and has attempted to establish criteria for distinguishing between ‘bad’ and ‘good’ public history.

Already in the 1980s, Benson, Brier and Rosenzweig divided public history into three categories: a ‘slick form of public history’ as found in the media and dominated by commercial and political interests; ‘professional public history’ pursuing the employability of historians while overcoming the intolerance of academic research; and a ‘people’s history’ with progressive propensities (Howe and Kemp, 1987). However, how convincing would such a categorization sound to the public in today’s era of social media, which is characterized by deauthorization and horizontality? (Kang, 2020b).

‘Academic historiography has definitely lost its hegemonic power in the public sphere – if it ever had such a privileged position in the past’ (Fickers, 2012: 25). ‘After 2000 years, the ancient goal for history to be the guide to public life had collapsed’ (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 8). The claim that only academic historians or professionals can write and teach ‘correct’ and ‘accurate’ history is predicated on an antiquated elitism that fails to understand current social change (Kang, 2020b). Some historians have emphatically noted that now we must break away from the authoritarian attitude of seeing the public as an object of education and move forward to practise history together, communicating with it as collaborators or mediators (Yoon, 2020). Korean historians seek communication and collaboration with the public in various ways. However, it is difficult to narrow the gap with the public in terms of historical perspectives and historical consciousness.

## **6. Why history and what in history in the era of deauthorization and horizontality?**

We live in an era in which emotions or personal beliefs rather than objective facts greatly influence the shaping of public opinion. Today, instead of endeavouring to reveal the truth, people select what they want to believe to be true from the overflowing information on the internet. People tend to determine the claims of a particular person, organization, or group to be true or false based on the trust or distrust they place in them. That is, people pursue or deal with truth in a manner that is very different from the modern rational way of reasoning, through which people would arrive at the “truth.” To cope with this changing situation in approaching the truth, increasing numbers of scholars in the field of history education have attached importance to developing historical literacy in

schools so that students can interact better with popular, public history (Haydn and Ribbens, 2017; Kang, 2017a; Wineburg, 2018).

History is not merely fixed, absolute knowledge written or presented by historians, but the window through which to view the world, a way of thinking and solving problems. However, the history that people encounter in everyday social life consists of the images and dialogues of documentaries, dramas, movies and stories depicted in blogs or on YouTube, that is, history as a final product, not history as the process of thinking and solving problems (Kang, 2020a). This type of history reinforces the stereotyping of certain events and personages from the past, misleads people into believing that history from a specific viewpoint is the absolute truth, and hinders the perception of history as an interpretation based on evidence, which can be provisional or plural (Kang, 2020a). In particular, in the digital era, without a proper understanding of social media's mechanisms, practising history via social media can make people vulnerable to any or all of the following: the misuse or abuse of history (regardless of one's intentions), the instigation of a specific ideology through history, orchestrated exaggeration, diminution, concealment, the forgery of specific historical knowledge or memories, or becoming a victim of the same (Kang, 2020b). Furthermore, sharing, editing and transferring historical knowledge through social media can make people insensitive to the seriousness of plagiarism (Kang, 2020b). How does school history interact with this public history?

In the digital era, academic history has faced the challenge of giving up the authority to monopolize interpretations of historical truth and sharing the process of practising history with the public. Anyone can access primary sources without historians' mediation, which gives people the power to construct and share their past immediately. However, the abundance and overflow of historical source materials, knowledge, narratives and information make it difficult for non-specialists to judge the reliability or credibility of resources and information. As Rosenzweig wrote, "historians may be facing a fundamental paradigm shift from a culture of scarcity to a culture of abundance" (Rosenzweig, 2003: 739). The abundance is challenging not only for historians, but also for non-specialists. Furthermore, 'algorithms' can make people vulnerable to 'false information' and biased narratives of history, which can lead to 'digital propaganda' (Kang, 2022a: 9). Creators of history content induce viewers by mobilizing clear intertextuality and anachronism in the process of selecting and organizing topics of the content that are closely related to present-day historical and social issues, such as human rights, campaigns, immigrants, infectious diseases, homosexuality, and men's make-up and fashion (Kang, 2022b). Students are aware of how algo-

rhythms work and what high views in digital content mean, but in practice it is not easy for them to avoid the influence of algorithms or to resist the temptation of high viewer numbers. Few people are vigilant about algorithmic governance. A survey in Korea showed that high-school students judged whether to trust YouTube history content based on how famous the creators were and how many people had viewed the content and believed it uncritically (Kim, 2021).

'Digital natives' are the first generation to have much more knowledge than the previous generation (Tapscott, 2009), but they lack genuine experience in critical thinking to search for and evaluate credible information (Rothmann, 2016). Rather than learning knowledge through textbooks, books or interaction with adults, they acquire it through overflowing online content. Instead of taking the time to compare, analyse and explore different pieces of information, many digital natives prefer to choose from the wealth of knowledge stored on the internet (Kang, 2020b). Nevertheless, they are not passive readers or viewers of history content on social media, but active storytellers posting their comments on the content, disputing its creator's arguments and presenting different interpretations (Kang, 2022b). However, only a few viewers who are well-equipped with academic historical knowledge criticize the content's incorrectness or its biased perspective, while many uncritically take the content as true and express their appreciation for the content creators (Kang, 2022b).

To become critical consumers and producers of all forms of historical content and to participate in 'an ongoing conversation that yields not final truths, but an endless succession of discoveries that change our understanding not only of the past but of ourselves and of the times in which we live', as Moynihan wished (1996: 312), students need to be well equipped with historical literacy suitable for the digital era.

However, some Korean history teachers insist on saying, 'If we focus on cultivating historical thinking through reading primary source materials in history classes, not only do students lose interest but it is of no use in their daily lives' (Kang, 2017a: 90). Historical literacy in the digital era is not limited to the development of historical thinking through reading historical documents in history classes. Historical literacy today includes the ability to judge the reliability and credibility of abundant digital resources and information; make reasonable arguments with sufficient evidence; refute another's arguments on solid grounds; cite, revise and disseminate other's content while complying with digital ethics; and show the fluency of digital communication skills that could help people understand the complication and complexity of historical interpretation, but do so in a way that is more familiar and interesting to them. It should also teach the



meaning and the social and political impact of posting one's argument on social media and transferring one's writings from one domain to another, that is, the critical use of digital tools and resources to explore and communicate about the past. Today, historical literacy connected to digital literacy should be taught as a life application of the procedural methodological and epistemological knowledge of history so that students can realize history as being closely linked to their lives and apply it to problem-solving in everyday life.

The history that we encounter in daily life through diverse forms of media stimulates various kinds of inspiration in ways that are far different from those of academic history. It sometimes allows us to reimagine the geographical and cultural boundaries of historical narratives and thus encourage creativity beyond the limits of time (Kang, 2017a: x). However, the history content we read and watch in everyday life often depicts the past as a world featuring weirdos or myths or legends, and highlighting the bizarre taste of the antique and monumental value of the past. The content often obliterates the foreignness of the past by wrapping it up with today's emotions, beliefs, values and ideologies, thus disrupting meaningful connections between the past, present and future. 'History seems to be everywhere around us but ironically it isn't' (Kang, 2017a: x). History that is historical has the power to deal with the past as a foreign country. However, Korean students tend to understand the past in a timeless manner and explain and judge human behaviour in terms of the 'universal' human nature that they understand today (Kang, 2017a). To help students approach history content 'historically', school history should cultivate the habit of mind to think within a time-frame that distinguishes the past's point of view from the present's point of view. History in a well-organized class that is endeavouring to explore the foreignness of the past can encourage students to think beyond today's social and cultural practices with which they are familiar. Exploring and solving problems with the concept of time is one of the unique values of history.

History content on social media, which children and young people enjoy, is mostly fragmentary and rarely allows them to synthesize historical knowledge to understand long-term historical changes (Kang, 2022b). 'With the "telescoping of historical time", some history content, in a peculiar way, ceased to be historical' (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 8). 'History immerses us in examples of change from the ancient to the recent' and allows us to 'evaluate magnitudes of change or the differences between real shifts in direction and adjustment along existing trend lines' (Sterns and Collins, 2020: 9). To make the past serve the present and future, and therefore as one way to make school history relevant to students' lives, school history should help students learn to explore appropriate questions

while connecting the dots to view the big picture of historical change. The basic premise of recognizing and solving present-day problems and envisioning the future is an insight into historical change.

Change and continuity have been central concepts that the history education community has urged be taught in schools for a long time. However, Korean students are rarely given an opportunity to explore examples of change, track patterns of change, or ask about and identify the causes of change inside and outside schools. An opportunity to compare the changes in the meaning of life and death, power and powerlessness, class and social status, identity and community, reputation and honour, crime and punishment, morality and ethics, and so forth over time, while perceiving the historical distance between past and present, would help students gain insights into changing humanity, apply it to solving the problems of the past and the present, and reflect on one's own historical consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

History was a historian's research achievement that was considered authoritative, so teachers in schools naturally taught the substantial knowledge produced by historians. Academic history was the sole actor who not only represented the constructed official history but also brought about the formation and transformation of the collective memory. Popular history was a means by which academic historians enlightened and educated the public with their academic achievements. Although people felt an obligation to learn history, they always questioned the need for or usefulness of learning history. This is because history deals with 'then' and 'there', which is quite distant from 'now' and 'here', that is, our own lives.

Sometimes textbooks explain the value and usefulness of history:

*Only when we are conscious of the past can we understand the present and set a future direction.*

*We must know the past so that we do not repeat past mistakes.*

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**10** This allows the viewers to compare the past with the present and recognize that past and present life are the same or refer to past experiences when reflecting on present issues (Kang, 2017a).

*We can identify ourselves in history.*

*However, is that really the case?*

History 'is at the bottom simply a form of story-telling. It necessarily involves judgment and interpretation' (Winchester, 2021: 3). The framework for interpreting what happened in the past, what influenced the formation of the present, and what mistakes were made is shaped entirely by historians in the present. 'Far from being pure objective, it was, in a sense, a mirror in the shape of the present' (ibid.). Furthermore, there is no absolute image of the past: it changes as the society changes. We have witnessed historical figures who were once celebrated as heroes being criticized as racists or dictators, and past political decisions that were praised as honourable are reinterpreted as irrational and impractical today. Can we learn anything from the past when the present defines past mistakes and achievements? However, it must be realized that one of the best ways of recognizing and resolving current problems is to trace their roots and find past cases with which to interrogate the present.

History surely helps individuals understand who they are and makes them feel they belong. However, history has also been mobilized for exclusion and injustice, leading to othering and creating prejudice, and forming historical identities centred on certain groups. In addition, history has often been used for purposes of political incitement and to justify certain systems and cultural values as being superior to others. It is difficult to avoid heroism and mythology in politically mobilized history, and concealment or reduction takes place in the process. Isn't history harmful, then? However, it is also history that has exposed and criticized the limitations of such exclusion and prejudice, political mobilization, concealment and reduction in history from the perspective of post-nationalism and postcolonialism. The critical and reflective tradition of history allows us to recognize social change and to use it to drive social change. However, it has been done so far by well-trained academic historians.

In the digital era, individuals without a training in history can have easy access to the historical source materials and literature of historians, challenging the mediation between history and the public by academic historians. The production and dissemination of history by fluent storytelling public historians have been competing with academic historians to affect the public's mind and emotions. Academic historians were concerned about the practice of history through new media such as YouTube and podcasts, as well as old media such as TV, by public historians and individuals without a training in history. They

are concerned that in the digital public sphere, where an institutional filtration system does not govern, non-specialists can spread wrong historical knowledge and biased historical views. Some historians insist that academic history should evaluate and distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ history. However, this presupposes a long-standing elitism that has failed to read the transition to today’s network society, which is characterized by decentralization and horizontality (Kang, 2020b).

Today, the public views ‘good history’ as a story told by individuals who possess the fluency of storytelling that suits the taste of the public. Therefore, to help individuals as content creators and viewers critically approach the past, the peer-review, filtering system of history as an academic discipline should not remain the practice of academic historians alone. Individuals actively participate in the storytelling of history content on social media by pointing out mistakes, criticizing the limitations and bias of arguments and suggesting other stories. Therefore, it is important for individuals to develop the ability to distinguish ‘good’ history from ‘bad’ history on their own, based on the critical selection and analysis of evidence, a multifaceted literature review, and historical consciousness that goes beyond the fluency standard of storytelling in the content. The filtering system of history adapted for school history classes can help students become better participants of digital storytelling in the public sphere.

These days, competence education requires history to relate to students’ daily lives and thus prove its usefulness. Accordingly, some famous historians have tried to prove how history is directly helpful in real life or on the job front (Sterns and Collins, 2020). Nevertheless, academic history and textbook history in Korea have hardly solved the problem of relevance. Textbook history, which consists of events from prehistoric times to the present in chronological order, does not directly relate to the present-day individual’s life or society, but history content on social media that explains the historical causes of wars, terrorism and social conflicts that are currently taking place helps students understand the dynamics that affect their lives and society. Furthermore, the history of social media makes the past familiar to the public through an anachronistic method that uses dramatic images, music, terminology and grammar and that narrows the gap between the past and the present through the intertextuality of selecting and constructing topics (Kang, 2022b). This makes the viewers feel that the past is closely related to the present. Social media history ruptures the notion that history told in school textbooks is important and that history that does not appear in textbooks is not important.

Today, in the digital public sphere, individuals are directly learning and teaching history through social media without the intermediation of historians or teachers and are having a profound impact on the formation and destruction of collective memory and collective identity. However, history content posted on social media makes it difficult to distinguish between real history, fake history and propaganda, or to avoid attaching to them the stereotype of specific symbolic past events and characters. Therefore, what school history should teach in today's digital era is historical literacy connected to digital literacy that can help students understand the characteristics of the past that they encounter through diverse media and communicate better with it.

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KATJA GORBAHN

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# Historical Literacy and German Studies

How to Make Sense of History in a Foreign Language



Lars Kruse, AU Photo

Katja Gorbahn

## Abstract

Historical learning does not take place only in the context of school subjects such as history or the social sciences, but also in foreign language teaching, where the question of the relationship between history and language is particularly relevant. Against this background, the article discusses the connection between linguistic and historical thinking competences and addresses the concept of historical literacy. It argues that the ability to take a stance constitutes a central competence in the context of foreign-language study programs and provides insights into how Danish first-term students of German take a stance on German history in written texts. In doing so, the contribution explores methodical approaches that can be helpful in analysing learners' strategies of stancetaking in a corpus by making use of methods of digital analysis.

## 1. Introduction

'I think the description of Charlemagne's crown is relevant because it contains so much history. The history of the crown is interesting because it symbolizes the phases of German statehood. The crown also reflects centuries of disagreement

between France and Germany.’<sup>1</sup> This quote from a student’s essay, originally written in German, refers to a text on the Imperial Crown, the so-called ‘Crown of Charlemagne’. However, the reader may be puzzled by some inconsistencies that could cause uncertainties about the student’s age or competences. On the one hand, words like ‘symbolizes’, ‘statehood’ or ‘reflects’ indicate advanced conceptual knowledge and academic language skills, though their use may not be completely accurate. On the other hand, some wordings seem a little simplistic, such as the statement that the crown ‘contains so much history’. An important reason for these inconsistencies is the fact that the student is writing in a foreign language. The text comes from a Danish undergraduate student who is following a study program in German language, literature and culture at Aarhus University. The study program includes classes that deal with the history of the German-speaking countries and that use German as language of teaching and examination. In these classes, students not only experience a perspective that differs from the narrative they know from school: they also need to make sense of history in a foreign language. On the one hand, this adds an extra layer to the requirements the students have to cope with. On the other hand, it is a challenge for both teachers and researchers, since it raises the question of the relationship between competences in both historical and language learning.

The present article aims to contribute to this discussion. In a first step, I will present current research on the relation between linguistic and historical competences and address the concept of historical literacy. I will then discuss the role of history in foreign-language study programs and demonstrate that the ability to take a stance constitutes a central competence in this context. On this basis, I will provide insights into how Danish first-term students of German take a stance in written texts and explore methodical approaches that can be helpful in analysing the intersection of language and historical thinking in a corpus.

## 2. History education and language learning

The close relationship between history and language has been acknowledged since antiquity, and especially since the linguistic turn. For a long time, however, the language of history has not really been understood as subject-specific

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1 Original German version: ‘Ich finde, dass die Beschreibung der Karlskrone relevant ist, weil sie so viel Geschichte enthält. Die Geschichte der Krone ist interessant, weil sie die Phasen deutscher Staatlichkeit symbolisiert. Die Krone reflektiert auch Jahrhunderte Uneinigkeit zwischen Frankreich und Deutschland.’

language. Only during the last decades has research paid increasing attention to the relationship between history and language, for example, by trying to establish characteristics of the language of history by making use of approaches in linguistics that focus on the functionality of language (Dalton-Puffer, 2013). However, research in the area is quite diverse, since different disciplines, research communities and languages are involved.

In history didactics in the German-speaking countries, awareness has risen that the acquisition of subject-related and of linguistic competences are closely entangled (Schrader, 2019). This interest is reflected in a growing number of publications and in the establishment of language sensitivity as a central principle of history teaching and learning (Handro, 2015; Bertram and Kolpatzik, 2019; Grannemann et al., 2018; Schrader, 2021). Although processes of social change, such as migration and multilingualism, have certainly had an impact on the formation of this research field, the interest in the connection between historical and linguistic competences is more fundamental. As Handro and Kilimann point out, language sensitivity as a principle of teaching history aims at facilitating narrative competence through subject-specific reading, writing and discourse strategies, in which writing and reading processes are treated as integral epistemic processes of historical learning (Handro and Kilimann, 2020: 658).

Interest in the connection between language and subject learning has also been articulated from the perspective of language education and linguistics (Leisen, 2010), often with a focus on the natural sciences (Maak, 2017), but also taking social studies and history into account (Peuschel and Burkard, 2019). Research on language and subject-related learning draws on different linguistic approaches. In the German speaking context, concepts such as 'Bildungssprache' (academic language, Morek and Heller, 2012) or, stemming from functional pragmatics, 'Alltägliche Wissenschaftssprache' (everyday scientific language, Ehlich, 1999), have gained attention and are also relevant in the didactics of higher education, in particular in the context of German as a foreign or second language.

In international research too, the relationship between language and history in educational settings has been investigated from different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. Caroline Coffin has investigated history as a discursive practice (Coffin, 2003). Using systemic functional linguistics as a theoretical framework, she described historical discourse as the language of time, cause and evaluation, and established, based on an analysis of students' texts, three genre families: recording, explaining and arguing (Coffin, 2006b; Coffin, 2006a). Other approaches work with the concept of 'historical literacy', which has proved

very prolific in addressing the relationship between subject and language learning. ‘Literacy’ here does not simply refer to the ability to read and write, but is used in a broader sense to include also general notions of skills, abilities and knowledge (Lorenzo and Dalton-Puffer, 2016: 56–57). ‘Historical literacy’ as a concept is therefore particularly well suited to grasping the interdependence of linguistic and subject-specific competences as part of a social practice. Jeffery Nokes, for example, defines historical literacy as ‘the ability to construct meaning with multiple genres of print, non-print, visual, aural, video, audio, and multimodal historical texts; critically evaluate texts within the context of the work historians have previously done; use texts as evidence in the development of original interpretations of past events; and create multiple types of texts that meet discipline standards’ (Nokes, 2013: 20).

Such considerations are also very relevant in a variety of second-language or multilingual learning settings. Accordingly, Beacco outlined a procedure for creating a history curriculum which aimed at establishing a link to the Common European Framework of Reference’s (CEFR) descriptors, suggesting ‘historical communication’ as a concept (Beacco, 2010; Beacco et al., 2015). The connection between linguistic and historical competences has also been investigated in the context of bilingual history teaching (Heimes, 2011) and, of course, from a CLIL perspective.

In CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), the interconnectiveness of subject-specific and linguistic competences is crucial, since CLIL can be defined as ‘a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. That is, in the teaching and learning process, there is a focus not only on content, and not only on language. Each is interwoven, even if the emphasis is greater on one or the other at a given time’ (Coyle et al., 2010: 1). However, really integrating both sides poses a major challenge. In 2015 Meyer criticized CLIL by claiming that ‘academic, subject-specific language skills may not have received proper attention in classrooms’ (Meyer et al., 2015: 7). Still, CLIL research has attempted to theoretically conceptualize and empirically investigate the link between historical and language learning. For example, drawing on approaches from both history education and linguistic research, Dalton-Puffer has proposed a construct of cognitive discourse functions (CDFs). According to Dalton-Puffer, CDFs constitute ‘a zone of convergence as the cognitive processes involving subject-specific facts, concepts and categories are verbalized in recurring and patterned ways during the event of co-creating knowledge in the classroom’ (Dalton-Puffer, 2013: 216). Dalton-Puffer distinguishes seven CDF categories: *classify*, *define*,

*describe, evaluate, explain, explore* and *report* (Dalton-Puffer, 2013: 235). Based on an analysis of students' essays, Lorenzo has used these categories to establish cognitive discourse competencies for advanced historical thinking in bilingual settings, which can indicate highly developed historical literacy (Lorenzo, 2017: 40). Thus, historical literacy as a concept that grasps the interconnection between linguistic and historical thinking competences is not only relevant for school, but also for higher education in both monolingual and multilingual settings.

### 3. History as part of German language programs

At universities, history is not only taught in history departments, but is a well-established part of foreign-language programmes too. As for German as a foreign language, history has often been discussed in the framework of the so-called *Landeskunde*, while other research traditions use terms such as 'cultural studies', 'area studies' or 'culture pedagogy' (Koreik and Pietzuch, 2010). It is the socio-cultural dimension of language and language use that is at stake here, and accordingly *Landeskunde* comprises topics and approaches from different disciplines, such as social studies, politics or cultural studies. That historical elements constitute an essential element of this is widely accepted (Koreik and Pietzuch, 2010: 1478). However, it is necessary to reflect carefully on what contents and competences historical learning should focus on. In my view, the following aspects should particularly be taken into account:

1. *Language matters.* As discussed above, language is always at the centre of historical learning processes as both medium and obstacle. In the context of a language study programme, however, language competence is a main goal in itself, and historical competences must be linked to a language programme's main objectives, such as transcultural, intercultural or communicative competence.
2. *Present matters.* In 1990, the influential ABCD theses on the role of *Landeskunde* in teaching German as a foreign language stated: '*Landeskunde* is to a large extent also history in the present. Therefore, it is necessary to also deal with historical topics and texts in German lessons. Such texts should provide information about the connection between the past, the present and the future, about different evaluations and about the historicity of the evaluation itself'<sup>2</sup> (Fischer et al., 1990: 17). The ABCD theses thus not only

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2 'Landeskunde ist in hohem Maße auch Geschichte im Gegenwärtigen. Daher ergibt sich die Notwendigkeit, auch historische Themen und Texte im Deutschunterricht zu behandeln.

emphasized the crucial role of history for the teaching of German as a foreign language, they also established its relevance to the present as a central criterion for the selection of content. Working with historical topics in foreign language education must contribute to understanding current cultural phenomena and discourses, which makes history culture and memory particularly important topics.

3. *Establishing significance matters.* Selecting content with relevance to the present does not necessarily make students see this relevance. Rather, students must be able to establish historical significance, which, according to Seixas and Morton, constitutes one of six historical thinking concepts (Seixas and Morton, 2013; Seixas, 1997). If students are able to attribute meaning not only to historical facts, but also to historical narratives, if they can analyse the relationship of facts and discourses to the present and to the identity constructions of the relevant groups, then they can make sense of history and are able to decide what is worth learning about. Thus, they can also acquire what have been called 'orientation competences' (Kölbl and Konrad, 2015).

These aspects, of course, not only apply to history language programs, but also refer to central elements of historical thinking in general. However, they outline a focus area: time and credit points are scarce commodities, since students in German language programmes usually also have to work with e.g. linguistics and literature while also improving their practical language skills. Thus, it is not possible to train all competences that are relevant for history education. Working with sources, for instance, will be more in the background compared to history education at school or in history study programmes. It is thus all the more important that students are able to establish historical significance. To do so, they need to evaluate both factual knowledge and the historical narratives they meet. In other words, they need to be able to take a stance on history. This is demanding in terms of both historical thinking and language.

#### 4. Evaluating and stancetaking

Terminology in the field of evaluation can be confusing: in linguistic research, a wide range of terms is used to approach the phenomenon, such as attitude,

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Solche Texte sollten Aufschluß geben über den Zusammenhang von Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft, über unterschiedliche Bewertungen sowie über die Geschichtlichkeit der Bewertung selbst.'

evaluation, appraisal or stancetaking (Thompson and Hunston, 1999: 2–3). According to Dulton-Puffer, and from the perspective of CLIL, evaluating represents a category of cognitive discourse functions at the intersection between subject-specific and linguistic competences, which means, in a more linguistic terminology, that students need to be able to take a stance (Dalton-Puffer, 2013: 237). Stance can be defined as a ‘public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field’ (Du Bois, 2007: 163). Lorenzo argues that stancetaking as an academic skill ‘denotes active engagement in judgement and the full development of a voice’. This represents the cognitively and linguistically most demanding stage in historical discourse and is uncommon in less competent student texts (Lorenzo, 2017: 37). In the following, I will mainly use the term ‘stance’, but also include research on evaluation and appraisal.

Speakers can, according to Du Bois, position themselves along an affective or an epistemic scale, thereby taking an affective stance (I am glad), an epistemic stance (I know) or both (I am amazed) (Du Bois, 2007: 143). For example, research has emphasized that an individual’s epistemic stance is crucial to the way that individual makes sense of historical concepts (VanSledright and Reddy, 2014: 34), and a mature epistemic stance has been described as characteristic of a professional historian’s approach (Nokes, 2013: 26). In his study of historical literacy in bilingual settings, Lorenzo has identified epistemic stancetaking as a cognitive discourse competence that is characteristic of advanced historical thinking (Lorenzo, 2017: 40). In the following, I will analyse learning journals (Hübner et al., 2010: 19) written by Danish first-term students and provide insights into how the students try to take a stance on historical contents and narratives in German as a foreign language.

## 5. Stancetaking in students’ texts

Although ‘historical literacy’ as a concept is not specifically oriented towards written texts, writing plays an important role in related research and teaching practice. On the one hand, the analysis of students’ texts can provide insights into cognitive and linguistic structures and strategies. On the other hand, writing can significantly attribute to subject learning. This is especially the case when it is supported through metacognitive prompts (Klein et al., 2016), and it has been demonstrated that using writing tasks can elicit historical reasoning (Monte-Sa-

no and De La Paz, 2012). However, writing tasks should be designed to match the particular goal in focus, since ‘different genres and writing prompts enhance different kinds of historical reasoning’ (van Drie et al., 2014: 118). As to evaluative prompts, studies have shown their potential for historical reasoning, especially in the form of an authentic task (van Boxtel and van Drie, 2018: 163–164; van Drie et al., 2014). The students’ texts that I analyse in the following come from work with an evaluative task that was set in an authentic context.

The analysis corpus consists of thirty journals, written by students who followed a class on German history before 1945 in the second term of their study programme in ‘German language, literature and culture’. The language of instruction and of the course readings was German, since the study programme requires a certain language proficiency from the beginning: To be eligible for admission to the programme, students must have studied German in upper secondary school for at least three years altogether. In practice, however, students’ language skills vary considerably, covering students with a basic level corresponding to CEFR’s B1, as well as students with native speaker fluency. The same diversity applies to general academic skills, since some in the group already have academic experience of another major subject. Thus, the texts reflect highly heterogeneous competence levels.

During the semester, students had to keep a journal and to comment regularly on the course readings. The writing prompt required them to take a stance on the contents’ historical significance as well as the course readings’ narratives: ‘A German publisher wants to publish a textbook on German history aimed at students of German studies in Scandinavia. It must be decided which contents are relevant. You are asked for your opinion. Are the contents of the course readings relevant for the textbook? If so, in which parts? Do you have critical comments on the course readings, or are you suggesting additions? Give reasons for your opinion.’<sup>3</sup> While some students reflected and reasoned elaborately, others made only brief comments. As a consequence, the results varied considerably in length from 494 up to 2128 words, with an average of 1069 words.

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3 ‘Ein deutscher Verlag möchte ein Lehrbuch zur deutschen Geschichte herausgeben, das sich an Germanistikstudierende in Skandinavien richtet. Jetzt muss die Frage entschieden werden, welche Inhalte relevant sind. Du wirst um ein kleines Gutachten gebeten: Sind Inhalte, die im Vorbereitungstext angesprochen werden, relevant für ein solches Lehrbuch? Wenn ja, welche? Hast du kritische Bemerkungen zum Text oder schlägst du Ergänzungen vor? Begründe dein Urteil.’



Methodically, the analysis of stancetaking is challenging. Stance (or evaluation or appraisal) can be expressed by a variety of linguistic means and is realized through both lexis and grammar throughout the text (Thompson and Hunston, 1999; Martin and Rose, 2003; Martin and White, 2003). In the present analysis I will not be able to encompass stancetaking in all its facets. I will explore the phenomenon by investigating two selected aspects: 1) the use of (evaluative) adjectives, and 2) the use of the personal pronoun 'I'. I worked both quantitatively and qualitatively and supported my analysis with approaches to digital analysis taken from corpus linguistics. Digital analysis methods have a big potential in the analysis of learner texts, both quantitatively and qualitatively, making it possible to identify general patterns as well as differences between texts in order to detect individual learners' strategies. Besides, they are very helpful when quickly accessing relevant text passages for qualitative analysis (Bick et al., 2023).

## Adjectives

One way of expressing a stance is the use of evaluative adjectives. In his study of evaluation in peer reviews, Hewing differentiates between classifying and qualitative adjectives as broad semantic groups. In his corpus, he identifies eight groups of evaluative adjectives, which he understands as a subclass of qualitative adjectives: interest, suitability, comprehensibility, accuracy, importance, sufficiency, praiseworthiness and perceptiveness (Hewings, 2004). Though Hewing's study relates to academic English and to a specific text genre, it shows that the analysis of adjectives can be a useful approach to understanding strategies of stancetaking in a corpus.

For my analysis, I generated a list of all adjectives in the corpus, using ScetchEngine as a tool, which provides integrated grammatical analysis (so-called POS-tagging) and enables the user to find all the grammatical forms of a word (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). In a next step, I checked the concordances to remove adjectives that only referred to the contents and to investigate the remaining most frequent adjectives' use in context.

The most frequent adjective in the corpus is the word 'gut' ('good') in different grammatical forms (268 hits). It serves as a general evaluator of quality, and its use is often formulaic. 'Gut' is in many cases combined with other evaluative adjectives, e.g. 'interesting', and refers a lot to the richness of the information given in the course reading. For example, students emphasize repeatedly that a text provides the readers with a good overview. Another very general evaluator is 'interessant' ('interesting', 125 hits), a word that draws the attention to the reader's subjective perspective, though students often do not give reasons for

their evaluation. Finally, some students use the word 'schön' ('beautiful', 21 hits). This fulfils similar functions as 'good', but expresses a more personal attitude and indicates a lack of familiarity with the language register students should produce according to the writing task.

While 'gut', 'interessant' and 'schön' often are used for simple statements and in formulaic ways, other adjectives seem to be more strongly connected to historical reasoning. This is especially true for 'wichtig' ('important', 194 hits), whereupon students regularly give reasons for their evaluation, using concepts of historical thinking such as cause and consequences, relation to the present or use of history. The picture is a bit more mixed for 'relevant' ('relevant', 147 hits), which was part of the writing prompt: its use is often formulaic but not always. Besides, the reasons students give afterwards refer a lot to the course readings' comprehensibility.

Many of the students' evaluations actually deal not with the course content, but with the characteristics of the course readings. Comprehensibility is most in focus here with words like 'schwierig' ('difficult', 64 hits), 'leicht' ('easy', 59 hits) or 'verständlich' ('comprehensible', 18 hits). Besides, students also refer to other qualities of the texts with e.g. 'detailliert' ('detailed', 26 hits) or 'informativ' ('informative', 23 hits). Other, less frequent adjectives point to the fact that students in their journals refer to concepts of historical thinking such as change ('neu'/'new', 29 hits) or relevance for the present ('heutig, heute'/'contemporary, today', 29 hits). They also use adjectives that indicate which criteria students apply to the quality of a historical narrative. For instance, it should integrate many perspectives ('ander'/'other', 59 hits) and contribute to establishing a chronological understanding ('chronologisch'/'chronological', 20 hits). Besides, it is a good thing if a text is critical, as texts should also be read critically ('kritisch'/'critical', 20 hits).

However, a closer analysis reveals big differences between the journals. Individual students often prefer particular words, which indicates specific approaches and strategies. For example, while some students use 'difficult' a lot, thus mainly dealing with comprehensibility, others focus on the relation to the present, using, for example, 'heutig' ('contemporary') very frequently. The following example is taken from a journal with a very frequent use of both 'heutig' and 'heute' (today):

*'The year 1848 still plays an important role for Germany and the identity of many Germans. On the one hand, the colours of the German flag are determined here and, together with the national anthem, they become a symbol of the conflicts with the monarchies and principalities at that time. Although the flag and the anthem originally symbolised*

*freedom and democracy, today they are often associated with National Socialism, as Hitler misused the anthem for his propaganda. Today, the black-red-gold flag is the common German flag, but it is not used as often as it is, for example, in Denmark. Although the flag had a democratic function originally, its meaning has changed through history. Similarly, the third verse of the German song, no longer the first, is used as the national anthem, as national symbols can often be misunderstood due to history. Despite the events of history and the changes through the years, it is still important to talk about the revolution today because it points back to the origin of the democratic and national German state. Although Germany today consists of different federal states according to the principle of federalism, there are some elements of a common German identity that date back to 1848.’<sup>4</sup>*

In this passage, the student starts and ends by emphasizing that the topic in question (the revolution of 1848) is important. To support this evaluation, the student uses contemporary Germany as a point of reference and compares it with Denmark, making an extensive argument. He or she repeatedly connects the past to the present, as indicated by the frequent use of ‘heute’/‘today’. To do so, an elaborate concept of time and change is applied, linguistically expressed through words such as ‘noch’ (‘still’), ‘damaligen’ (‘at that time’), ‘ursprünglich, Ursprung’ (‘originally, origin’), ‘verändert, Veränderungen’ (‘changed, changes’), ‘nicht mehr’ (‘no longer’) and ‘zurückweist’ (‘points back’). Grammatically, this involves not only the use of different tempus forms, but also a complex syntax, including a rich repertoire of subordinate clauses. Stancetaking as a part of de-

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4 ‘Das Jahr 1848 spielt noch heute eine wichtige Rolle für Deutschland und die Identität vieler Deutschen. Zum Einen werden hier die Farben der deutschen Flagge bestimmt und zusammen mit der Nationalhymne werden sie ein Symbol der damaligen Auseinandersetzungen mit den Monarchien und Fürstentümern. Obwohl die Flagge sowie die Hymne damit ursprünglich Freiheit und Demokratie symbolisiert wird sie heute oft mit dem Nationalsozialismus assoziiert, da Hitler die Hymne für seine Propaganda missbraucht hat. Heute ist die schwarz-rot-golde Flagge die gemeinsame deutsche Flagge aber sie wird nicht so häufig verwendet wie es z.B. Dänemark der Fall ist. Obwohl die Flagge eine ursprüngliche demokratische Funktion hatte, hat ihre Bedeutung sich durch für Geschichte verändert. Ebenso wird heute nicht mehr die erste, sondern die dritte Strophe des Deutschen Liedes als Nationalhymne verwendet, da nationale Symbole aufgrund der Geschichte oft missverstanden werden können. Trotz der Ereignisse der Geschichte und die Veränderungen durch die Jahre ist es heute noch wichtig über die Revolution zu sprechen, weil sie auf den Ursprung der demokratischen und nationalen deutschen Staat zurückweist. Obwohl Deutschland heute aus verschiedenen Bundesländern besteht nach dem Prinzip des Föderalismus gibt es einige Elemente einer gemeinsamen deutschen Identität, das auf das Jahr 1848 zurückweist.’

veloped historical literacy thus requires rich historical reasoning and confronts learners with challenges, not only with respect to the competences of historical thinking, but also linguistically.

### The personal pronoun ‘ich’ (‘I’)

Since stance expresses an individual’s position, I investigated the way students mark their subjectivity through personal pronouns. In the corpus, the personal pronoun ‘ich’ (‘I’) appears 489 times, making it the sixth most frequent word overall. However, a comparative analysis shows that the use of the word varies greatly in the different students’ texts between 55 times and no mention at all, which indicates different writing strategies. A closer analysis of the word combinations shows that ‘ich’ is very much present in the word combination ‘ich finde’ (‘I find’) or (less frequent) in combinations such as ‘ich glaube’ (‘I believe’), ‘ich denke’ (‘I think’) and ‘ich meine’ (‘I mean’). Kärkkäinen points to the fact that explicitly personalized epistemic phrases such as ‘I think’ are the most frequent type of epistemic stance markers in everyday American English and can serve as highly formulaic ‘epistemic fragments’ (Kärkkäinen, 2010). This corresponds to the findings in the corpus: a very frequent use of ‘ich finde’ in a student’s text can be a sign of a formulaic approach that indicates difficulties with respect to both language proficiency and the use of historical concepts. This is evident in the following example, which shows a frequent use of ‘I found’, as well as a formulaic use of the adjectives and a focus on text comprehensibility and factual information.

*‘I found the language of the text very good, but now and then it can be difficult to keep track. In addition, I found it an informative map of Germany before and after the First World War. The part on hyperinflation I found very interesting. All in all, I found the text well suited for a textbook.’<sup>5</sup>*

A frequent use of ‘I’ can also indicate a strong emphasis on subjectivity, as in the following example, where the student comments on a chapter from a book by Neil MacGregor (MacGregor, 2015), in comparison to a text published on the website of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, bpb) (Gotthard, 2017).

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5 ‘Ich fand die Sprache des Texts sehr gut, aber ab und zu kann es schwierig sein, der Überblick zu behalten. Darüber hinaus fand ich es eine informative Karte von Deutschland vor und nach dem ersten Weltkrieg. Der Teil zur Hyperinflation fand ich sehr interessant. Alles in allem fand ich den Text gut geeignet für ein Lehrbuch.’

*I had already heard of Luther, so what MacGregor had written was no surprise. But I found it very interesting that some of the myths about Luther that MacGregor continues in his book are not true. They are simply false, and I didn't know that. The myths are dismissed in the article by BPD [sic!]. For example, Luther did not invent the German language and is not the creator of the Modern German written language. The dismissal of the myth has changed my knowledge of Luther and the Reformation, which I am glad about because I like it when general myths that we 'blindly trust' are dismissed. But this also shows how easy it is to form and hide something, then one can more easily promote their own message. And that scares me because so many truths and knowledge are lost.'*<sup>6</sup>

This student, who has some problems both with grammar and lexis, engages with important aspects of historical learning while working with a simplified understanding of 'true' and 'false'. The frequent use of 'I', which is also characteristic of other parts of this student's texts, is here a sign of a very personal or even emotional approach, or in other words of an affective stance.

In contrast, the following student does not use 'I' at all. He or she comments on MacGregor's text as follows:

*'While the text is very informative and describes important historical moments in German history, it seems as if the author is trying to put Luther in a favourable light. His role in German language change and history is exaggerated, and this contributes to the Luther myth. The aim in highlighting Luther is probably to make the story more interesting, which means that it becomes more digestible for lay people. But in an academic context, one has to be careful about that.'*<sup>7</sup>

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- 6 'Ich hatte schon von Luther gehört, sowas MacGregor geschrieben hatte, war keine Überraschung. Doch fand ich es sehr interessant, dass einige von den Mythos von Luther, die MacGregor auch weiter in seinem Buch führt, nicht stimmen zu. Sie sind einfach falsch und das wusste ich nicht. Die Mythos werden in dem Artikel von BPD [sic!] abgewiesen. Zum Beispiel hat Luther nicht das deutsche Sprache empfunden und ist dabei nicht dem Schöpfer der neuhochdeutschen Schriftsprache. Die Abweisung von den Mythos hat meine Wissen von Luther und der Reformation geändert, welche ich mich freue an, weil ich mag, wenn generellen Mythos, die wir 'blind vertrauen', abgewiesen werden. Aber das zeigt auch wie leicht es ist etwas zu prägen und verheimlichen, dann man leichter ihre eigene Botschaft fördern kann. Und das verschreckt mir, weil so viele Wahrheiten und Wissen verloren gehen.'
- 7 'Der Text ist zwar sehr informativ, und beschreibt wichtige historischen Zeitpunkte der deutschen Geschichte, aber es scheint so, als ob der Autor versucht Luther in ein günstiges Licht zu stellen. Seine Rolle in dem deutschen Sprachwandel und in der Geschichte wird übertrieben, und das kontribuiert zu dem Luther-Mythos. Das Ziel mit der Hervorhebung

This student deals not with the text's comprehensibility, but with its focus as well as with its function, thereby making sense of history – in this case not primarily of the historical content, but also of its discursive construction. Linguistically, this is achieved by, for example, epistemic modals such as 'seems' or 'probably' and through a more elaborate lexis as well as complex syntax. Thus, the student is able to express an individual voice and take a mature epistemic stance, thereby demonstrating a high level of historical literacy.

In order to support students in developing such competences, more research on the interconnection between historical thinking competences and linguistic competences is necessary, in particular with respect to foreign languages other than English. On this basis, approaches to training high-level competences such as historical stancetaking could be developed that are specifically suitable for foreign language students.

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von Luther, ist wahrscheinlich die Geschichte interessanter zu machen, was bedeutet, dass sie für Laien verdaulicher wird. In akademischem Kontext muss man aber darauf achten.'

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## Social Media as a Tool in Research on History Education



Joanna Wojdon

### Abstract

This chapter is based on an analysis of the contents (posts and comments) of the Polish-language Facebook group ‘Nauczyciele historii’ (History Teachers). With over five thousand members, the group provides a space for informal and semi-formal exchanges of ideas and opinions among practicing and prospective history teachers, mostly residing in Poland. The project was a pilot study performed, partly as an assignment for history teacher trainees from the University of Wrocław, on a relatively small sample which nevertheless allowed the main areas of interest and of communication and the teaching practices of Polish history teachers to be identified. In the course of the project, the methodological and ethical issues of using social media as a research tool in history didactics were also raised, as well as their potential for future research. The findings of the exercise seem to be transferable internationally.

### 1. Introduction

Social media evoke strong emotional reactions both inside and outside academia and schools. Their proponents perceive them as a tool of dynamic exchanges of information dominated by user-generated content (Selwyn and Stirling, 2016). One can share research results and achievements, ask questions, discuss prob-

lems, suggest solutions, propose strategies, raise doubts and participate in other kinds of exchange, thereby breaking the barriers of physical distance, time shifts or language (in)competence. On the other hand, sceptics and critics have reservations about the very nature of this kind of communication and its non-human character, as well as about misuse(s) and abuse(s) on the part of both providers and participants (Kamiński, 2021). Internal mechanisms of social media, they claim, introduce or help introduce control and manipulation. Spontaneity and independence are only an illusion: in reality, social media make it easier than ever before to spread disinformation, while AI mechanisms of data selection and distribution close people in information bubbles that work in favor of extremism and hinder independent thinking or true dialogue. These objections and fears are further reinforced by the activities of political and commercial giants in social media.

Enthusiastic or critical opinion notwithstanding, one can hardly ignore the role of social media in people's lives today, including in the lives of history educators. Based on my Facebook activities, which include managing and observing a couple of history-related groups and pages, I receive a number of history-related posts on daily basis, on top of a regular load of sweet cats and toddlers, beautiful landscapes of exotic places, household tips or culinary recipes. They include, among other things, historic photographs with comments, information on the anniversaries of historical events, calls for papers and ads of conferences, meetings and seminars, or newly published books or journals related to history or history education. They constantly compete for my attention, inviting me to participate or at least to 'share' or 'like' them. For the purposes of this paper, however, I have chosen not to contribute to social media content, but to analyse it and discuss the potential of social media research in the field of history didactics.

One of the groups that belongs to and at the same time shapes my 'information bubble' is *Nauczyciele historii*, or *History Teachers* in Polish. It is a closed, private Facebook group run by and addressed to practising and prospective history teachers. The group was created on 15 March 2015. Its character (private and closed) implies that one has to be member in order to be able to access the group's contents, and membership applications need to be approved by a group manager. No credentials have to be presented, however, and as long as the individual generally obeys the group's rules (detailed in Appendix 1), he or she is not removed. As for the autumn and winter of 2021/2022, when the research has been conducted, the group had almost five thousand members who engaged with – i.e. wrote, read, reacted to and commented on – from a few to over twenty posts a day.

I will argue that these posts may provide valuable data and at the same time help overcome some of the significant difficulties that researchers in the field of education experience. I will also draw attention to emerging doubts and challenges. This research is of a preliminary character. It sketches the research field and provides some analytical frameworks rather than offering any definite conclusions.

## 2. Methodology and findings

The data were collected in two phases. During the initial phase I browsed through the contents of the posts submitted to the group during a two-week period between 26 August 2021 and 5 September 2021, i.e. at the end of the summer holiday and the beginning of the new school year in 2021/2022. The main goal of this phase was to systematize my incidental impressions of the types of posts and topics covered, which I had gained previously in the course of my general, non-research-oriented presence on this social media platform.

A group of my history teacher trainees from the University of Wrocław was involved in the second phase of the research.<sup>1</sup> Their task was to study the activities of the *History Teachers* for another two weeks, preferably in the second half of October. Each student focused on one particular aspect of the content. In the third week they discussed their findings during a class on Information Technology as a Teacher's Tool, and eventually prepared reports with some basic statistics and their own comments.

In the first phase, 150 posts were taken into consideration.

- THU Aug 26 – 9
- FRI Aug 27 – 13
- SAT Aug 28 – 11
- SUN Aug 29 – 3
- MON Aug 30 – 14
- TUE Aug 31 – 9
- WED Sept 1 – 21

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1 They were Marcin Bernacki, Rafał Biernacki, Alicja Chałat, Szymon Chmielowiec, Grzegorz Cybula, Kamil Dobrzański, Jakub Dumański, Damian Gień, Martyna Górską, Aleksander Gwiazdowski, Joanna Kastelik, Sebastian Kowalewski, Mateusz Kurkowski, Piotr Malinowski, Daria Mikołajczyk, Karolina Olech, Dominika Pacuła, Alicja Szatkowska, Małgorzata Ząbek.

- THU Sept 2 – 21
- FRI Sept 3 – 12
- SAT Sept 4 – 9
- SUN Sept 5 – 28

Hardly any post received no feedback. The most engaging ones had up to 160 'likes' or other reactions (love, sad etc.) and up to 93 comments.

This preliminary phase let me distinguish six general types of such posts:

1. History-related information, such as direct explanations or links to academic and popular publications on events, processes and biographies.
2. Advertisements of professionally developed products, such as YouTube videos, podcasts or teaching materials (e.g. maps, tests).
3. Invitations to participate in in-service teacher training, announcements of events for the pupils, competitions or other projects dedicated to schools.
4. Requests for teaching aids, paperwork aids, tests, lesson plans, ideas, assessment criteria and others.
5. Questions from teachers.
6. Offers from teachers, including self-promotion.

Categories 4–6 are social media-specific, as they prioritize the voices of the public (in this case, the teachers), while in the posts in the first three categories, teachers are assigned the role of being a rather passive audience of content-providers who are using social media as a tool to reach out to wider circles of the intended recipients of their offer. In all cases teachers can use comments to express their opinions, demand or provide supplementary or alternative information, raise doubts or give support and encouragement.

In the second phase, the students were instructed to pay particular attention to the inputs that reflect teachers' views and attitudes while analysing thematically focused posts dealing with one of the pre-defined topics that the students had identified as significant or interesting prior to starting their on-line research:

- History textbooks
- Visual materials/images/illustrations
- Historical films
- History-related games
- History-related school events
- Class excursions
- Extracurricular reading
- Assessment
- Exams

- Lesson plans
- Teaching goals

In some cases, only one person was assigned to a particular topic, while in others two students dealt with one topic, though they worked independently. If someone was not satisfied with the number or quality of the posts in the default period (October 15–30) they could resort to earlier posts to corroborate or enhance their findings. Some of them did this, while others simply stated that they were not able to find relevant data or found only limited amounts of data. Since the students did not use any search tools, all of them had to browse through the entire pool of posts from the default period, which facilitated the discussion in the third week. Students were asked to provide in writing: (1) the number of posts and comments that fell into their category from the default period and of additional posts they included in their analysed sample (if any); (2) a brief summary of the contents of the analysed posts; and (3) their own preliminary reflections or conclusions. Subsequently, the findings were discussed during two class meetings, in two subgroups. Finally, I aggregated and structured data from students' written assignments and classroom discussions.

While discussing the results of students' observations, we reflected on the questions of what the posts and comments tell us not only about (1) the teachers themselves but also (2) about teaching history in Poland and (3) about Polish schools more generally, (4) with some highlights reflecting Polish society as a whole.

1. Regardless of the topic covered, teachers were eager to acquire ready-to-use teaching materials, preferably in an editable format, unconventional lesson ideas and easy-to-adapt paperwork samples that would facilitate their ever-growing bureaucratic tasks. Comments on educational offers (e.g. pupils' competitions organized by various institutions) and products (such as movies, books etc.) were also appreciated, as well as other concrete, practical advice. This gave us an overall impression of what Eric B. Freedman and Jongsung Kim call the 'frenetic work lives of teachers' (Freedman and Kim, 2019: 3), i.e. it showed teachers as very busy people overburdened with their professional duties who try to overcome teaching routines but at the same time aim at minimizing their effort. This latter factor may be one of the reasons why they concentrate on practicalities but avoid engaging in deeper reflections on the nature of the discipline, on teaching goals, or on students' and society's needs.
2. The Facebook observations confirm the findings from other research that school history in Poland is shaped by textbook publishers (Choińska-Mika, 2014: 227). Textbooks are used on daily basis and are trusted by the teachers,

who often also look for supplementary materials from the publishers, e.g. for good maps, exercises and tests. Some of them acknowledge the fact that commercially developed tests are easily, perhaps too easily, available on the Internet not only to teachers but also to pupils and parents. This does not prevent others from asking for copies of such materials.

3. Although the assessment sits at the core of the teaching (and not only history teaching, as we may know from other sources), its formative aspects and forms of positive feedback enjoyed a degree of attention and were promoted by at least some discussants.<sup>2</sup> However, they are still regarded as innovative and somewhat unnatural, thus confirming that in general Polish history teachers are rather traditional, even those who are present on social media. The fact that providing verbal feedback is more time-consuming than simple grading work does not work in favour of formative assessment, which once again confirms that teachers are pressed for time and try to minimize effort even if they themselves present other justifications, e.g. by referring to social justice or psychological factors of traditional assessment.

(more on 2) Attachment to tradition and a preference for limited workload may also explain why topics such as critical reading or argumentative writing are virtually absent from the analysed materials. For the lack of posts or comments, we could only make this approximation based on other discussions, but it fits with the vision of school history education as ‘history as memory’ if we followed the concepts of Peter Seixas (2000).

Requests for materials and advice on the structure of school events related to anniversary celebrations of various events, mostly associated with glorious or poignant moments in the history of Poland, confirm recent findings by Krzysztof Jaskułowski, Piotr Majewski and Adrianna Surmiak (2021), who argue that history at Polish schools is often used as a tool of nationalist upbringing. The Facebook group can serve as a barometer of current celebrations of this kind that depend mostly on the calendar, both within a particular year – they are concentrated around national holidays – and according to round anniversaries.

On the other hand, the fact that teachers are interested in unconventional forms of such events, and more generally in active teaching and learning methods and techniques, testifies to the fact that they pay attention to the attractiveness of history and of their own activities, and to the pupils’ sense

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2 Formative assessment was popularized in Poland by Danuta Sterna, *Ocenianie kształtujące w praktyce*, Warszawa: CEO, 2012.

of engagement. They seem to welcome public history, not only academic history, as one of the pillars of history education, especially what happens beyond the core lessons. Various kind of games (e.g. board, video, street), films (documentary and feature) and excursions (virtual and real) are regarded as useful teaching aids, especially during extra teaching hours and on other occasions when assessment is impossible. Once again, we can see that regular education is dominated by grades, which hinders its potential to engage pupils and to gain their interest in the subject. However, there are also windows for alternative methods and concepts, though teachers are less familiar with them than with textbooks, lecturing and tests.

4. As for insights into society as a whole, one could trace echoes of political debates reflected in the teachers' posts. The group rule that does not permit one to express or promote one's political views has been violated from time to time, although in general the discussions are less politicized than in many other Polish media, and when political remarks appear they usually refer to the current activities of the Ministry of Education.

## Discussion

The analysis of group activities did not produce any findings that would revolutionize our perception of history education in Polish schools. Rather, it confirmed our anecdotal knowledge and the results of studies conducted by others, though with the use of other methods. This situation should not be disillusioning, for it confirms that the 'History Teachers' Facebook group does reflect genuine school practices, which makes its analysis a promising research tool.

The main advantages of using the Facebook group as a source of empirical data are (1) the opportunity to observe teachers in their spontaneous peer-to-peer exchanges, (2) which are mostly practice-based and (3) present the situation 'as it is' rather than 'as it should be'.

1. In order to make sure the first condition is fulfilled, none of us interacted in any way with other members of the Facebook group. We did not initiate any threads, ask any questions, comment or even 'like' any posts or comments. Facebook allowed us to be almost completely transparent to the participants whose post we read, but only by peers who share their profession and therefore should be familiar with the issues and concerns discussed. We were aware that some exchanges were happening beyond our reach, in private messages that are sometimes announced ('I sent you a lesson scenario in a PM' or 'provide me with your e-mail address if you want to get a test'), but sometimes probably remain completely hidden.



This research approach raises *ethical questions* over whether it is fair to enter a closed group with the intention to conduct research but without announcing the fact. We assumed that we might be excused, as we were not going to use or reveal any personal data, any sensitive issues or even individual opinions. In a group of five thousand members, posts cannot be regarded as confidential or private. In other research methods the real study goals may be kept secret as well, in order not to distort the research sample. For example, Jaskułowski, Majewski and Surmiak (2021) asked teachers to talk about their textbooks while in reality they were interested in their respondents' attitudes towards nationalism and teachers' perceptions of history as a tool thereof.

Another doubt concerns *methods of data verification*. We cannot grant other researchers access to the posts we analysed because they would have to be admitted to the group first. But it is still not entirely impossible, especially if the researchers could claim their status as history educators (and read Polish). Moreover, some students supplemented their reports with screenshots of the posts they commented on, and such documents can be stored for future reference (upon anonymization), just as happens with lesson recordings, samples of pupils' work or other unique artifacts that other research methods are based on.

2. The fact that teachers' questions and the tips they receive are practice-oriented may help researchers to identify the *main issues of teachers' interest and concern or controversy*. We could observe teachers' priorities and how they changed in the course of time (e.g. materials related to the anniversary of the start of WWII in August and to Armistice Day in October; or paperwork tips on development programmes for pupils with special educational needs and on state-sponsored excursions to the places of memory as part of a newly announced ministerial programme at the beginning of the school year). Teachers' reactions tell us about their preferences and emotions, habits and mindsets. It can be a good starting point for further research or for developing training strategies or materials to be built on existing circumstances. For example, taking into consideration the demand and interest expressed in numerous posts, producers of educational media could immediately start designing historical maps dedicated to children at various educational levels.

In the course of the class discussions and the students' individual reflections, the following *potential topics for further research* were proposed where the posts from *Nauczyciele historii* could provide empirical data. However,

at least some of them would require more extensive post samples, collected from longer periods, and more developed analytical tools than the cursory reading we performed in our pilot study. Just as in our sample analysis, they can be grouped around the teachers themselves, teaching history, Polish schools and society at large. Research on *history teachers' needs, or on their habits and routines* (also, for example, their working times as indicated by the hours when the posts are posted) would fall into the first group. As for the second category, the posts contain *grassroots evaluations* of teaching materials (textbooks, atlases, on-line tools, movies, games) and of initiatives such as the competitions or activities of NGOs or the government. The mere frequency of their appearance in the posts testify to their popularity. The popularity of certain teaching strategies or pedagogical trends can be traced in a similar manner. *Innovative teaching ideas* can be sought out, as well as their reception, either in the form of peer reviews or mere 'likes'. Posts like 'which topic/period are you teaching now?' or questions regarding particular historical issues indicate the *pace of teaching*, provided that all the teachers follow similar curricula. Legally they are not obliged to do so, but the textbooks' structure, regardless of the publisher, follows that in the national curriculum, with an almost identical division of material between the years of schooling, and even between the parts and chapters of a particular book.<sup>3</sup> Moving from history education to the school as such, the posts can provide us with data on *the environment in which teaching is happening*, e.g. on the number of pupils in a class or the available technologies, equipment and materials, about the pupils' routines and habits, and, in the last two years, about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and on the challenges of on-line teaching and learning. They also illustrate *school bureaucracy* and its changing demands. They present, and often complain about, *the expectations* of school headmasters, pupils, parents or society in general. Even a cursory reading made it clear that history education is often perceived through the lenses of *'patriotic upbringing'*. More in-depth methods could help analyse its components and the reactions they evoke, while longitudinal studies may reveal changes and their trends, and possibly link them to larger socio-political processes, providing inputs into the debate on the links between history education and the *politics of history* (Stobiecki, 2021). Post topics, contents and comments can be helpful if we wanted to identify the trends of this latter phenomenon. They reflect currently celebrated anniversaries, media

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3 For more details on contemporary Polish textbooks, see: Roszak 2018.

campaigns and recently released historical movies and books, but also propose or introduce changes in legal regulations related to history education. On *the psychological side*, the phenomenon of leadership and other group roles can be analysed. For example, one of the students distinguished three categories of replies to requests for help regarding assessment procedures: they might present their impressions or confirm the need for the required action ('we also do it at our school'; 'it's a difficult task'), while others rejected the request as groundless ('there is no sense in developing it'), and ultimately there were those who provided tips, suggestions and literature references. We could identify 'stars' or 'mentors' whose posts enjoyed more attention than others' posts and who were even referred to in comments, but we were not able to easily explain what exactly builds up one's reputation in the group. These roles are not occupied by the group administrators, who usually remain behind the scenes. Reacting to questions and requests, expertise in legal and procedural issues as well as sounder theoretical background (especially in trendy areas) and providing original, innovative teaching ideas are some of the potential indicators. Teachers' psychological profiles, the impact of professional experience (e.g. education, place of employment, its duration) on their social media activities, the diversity of teachers and their pedagogical skills (including e.g. anger management) are other potential topics of research based on Facebook posts.

3. Although social media are notorious for their users pretending to be better, nicer or smarter than they really are, we could infer from most of the posts that in our case they do tell *stories of real school life*. Obviously, these are still stories and not first-hand lesson observations. Therefore, one is not able to see if the lessons really worked as they were presented, how the pupils reacted or how their time was managed (although some posts are supported by photographs taken during or immediately after the lesson).<sup>4</sup> No empirical research was conducted on the effectiveness of the methods and tools either. We cannot be sure if the pupils enjoyed the fancy visual materials developed by their teachers or if the materials indeed helped them in the learning process. Thus teachers' narratives should be approached as critically as any other testimony, e.g. presented in a face-to-face interview or in a written diary. Historians, who are trained in the analysis of historical sources, should be in a better position than representatives of other professions in approaching them.

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4 For examples of good practices of the form of research that focuses on real school practices, see Christophe, Gautschi and Thorp, 2019.

The advantage of Facebook testimonies lies in the fact that they help us grasp more examples of school practices than we would be able to attend in person. We are aware that the members of *Nauczyciele historii* are *not entirely representative* of the whole population of history teachers (counting in Poland about 30,000<sup>5</sup>). They must belong to the cohort that is engaged in professional development. Moreover, if they enrol in the group, it means that they are quite proficient in and enthusiastic about digital technology and social media. However, in the case of other research methods too, participating teachers are often selected from volunteers who are likely to outperform their peers in both theoretical reflections and their practical implementation of the teaching process. Researchers are never able to peek into every classroom, nor even into a random sample thereof, but must always rely on teachers' willingness to collaborate.

Facebook posts and comments are usually *less structured* than questionnaire responses or narratives provided on a researcher's request, but at the same time they are *more natural and probably less distorted* by the desire to address readers' expectations. On the other hand, the ambition to emphasize one's own competence may play a positive role in elaborating the teaching ideas into *clear presentations*.

### 3. Conclusion

With the development of social media, new channels of formal, informal and semi-formal exchanges of information, advice and opinions between history teachers have emerged and been developed. These may also serve as a research tool allowing researchers to 'eavesdrop' on teachers in their natural environment, without disturbing or embarrassing them, and thus obtain first-hand working knowledge of their attitudes and practices. The fact that posts from *Nauczyciele historii* confirm existing findings which were obtained with the use of data from other sources, while at the same time offering more flexibility of analysis and providing access to larger and more divergent pools of practices and opinions, makes them a potentially useful basis for dealing with areas where traditional

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5 According to statistical data from 2012–13 (Braunek, 2013: 12), there were 24552 teachers of history in lower and upper secondary education and 6753 teachers of 'history and society' at primary schools. I was not able to find more recent data. The overall number of teachers fell from over 660,000 in 2012/2013 (*ibid.*, 2) to fewer than 520,000 in 2020/2021 (GUS, 2021: 122).

methods have failed or proved difficult to implement. As always, asking relevant research questions and duly following other rules of academic methods are prerequisites for obtaining meaningful results. However, social media deserve more scholarly attention in education studies than only being a subject of critical assessment of their performance as a teaching-learning tool.

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## **Appendix: The group rules of *Nauczyciele historii***

1. Members can be active history teachers, but we will also accept those who are just preparing for an active profession (e.g. postgraduate studies)
2. Posts should refer to history lessons in primary school, junior high school, high school, technical school and vocational / trade school.
3. Posts advertising paid courses and trainings will be removed.
4. Before you submit a post about teaching, schools, education, internships, etc., check whether it may be better to put it in another group about teachers in general.
5. We help each other as far as anyone can and wants. We do not force anyone to send us their tests, scripts or ideas for classes if they do not want to.
6. General rules of netiquette and culture of expression apply.
7. Whenever possible, we tag posts to make it easier to find them.
8. Posts not related to teaching history or to history will be deleted. Although we understand the tragedies of animals, sick children, fire victims and victims of accidents, posts of this type will be removed because we would either become a group to support others or have to choose what to post.
9. Requests to complete surveys in connection with your studies – only those relating to history, teaching history or being a teacher in general. The rest will be deleted.
10. Comments that are vulgar, offensive and that promote political support will be removed (this does not apply to discussions about politics in history and how to teach about it while maintaining netiquette)
11. Please do not send me posts with a request for placements, approvals or opinion, as there are too many of them. Let everyone read the regulations and judge if they can insert the post here. I simply ignore such messages.

THOMAS METZGER

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## Transnational National History: Perspectives for History Education

Considerations for History Didactics and for the Situation in 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>  
Grade in the German-Speaking Part of Switzerland



Thomas Metzger

### Abstract

Transnational approaches have gained much importance in historical scholarship over the past two decades. These approaches also offer the teaching of didactic opportunities in history, for example, to promote multi-perspectivity and to break the notion of static national ‘containers.’ Contrary to research trends, transnational approaches have not found their way into the first common elementary school curriculum for the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades in German-speaking Switzerland. The new history teaching materials referring to the curriculum implemented in the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century feature elements of an entangled history to varying degrees. However, this is rarely used to provide a transnational extension of national history for Switzerland.

### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, transnational approaches have gained considerable importance in historical studies. They appear as *histoire croisée*, shared history or entangled history, and also play a central role in postcolonial studies (e.g. Werner and Zimmermann, 2002; Conrad and Eckert, 2007; Kiran, 2010). While classical

national history runs the risk of absolutizing processes of (national) distinction and ignoring entanglements, transnational approaches aim to show a complex interplay between entanglements and distinction.

Against the background of these developments in the historical sciences, the past two decades have seen a growing number of publications on Swiss history that are, for example, postcolonial in orientation and that reveal the political, economic, religious and social entanglements of a country that, although it did not possess colonies itself, was very much involved in colonial structures and influenced by colonialism (e.g. Zangger, 2011; Purtschert, Lüthi and Falk, 2012; Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné, 2015; Schär, 2015). As Bernhard C. Schär (2015: 13–14) emphasizes, Switzerland, like other states that did not have their own colonial empires, was not simply involved in colonialism as a nation. Rather, Switzerland's involvement in colonialism must be understood as the involvement of a locally anchored and globally networked bourgeois elite that was integrated into transimperial networks. Interestingly, the past two decades have also seen a whole series of publications, some of them very voluminous, which, in contrast to the last decades of the twentieth century, have again dared to take up the challenge of writing down a 'history of Switzerland.' However, these national histories of Switzerland did not focus on the transnational dimension but instead describe the history of Switzerland as the history of a clearly defined space (Maissen, 2010; Reinhardt, 2011; Church and Head, 2013; Kreis 2014). André Holenstein's (2015) monograph *'Mitten in Europa'* was an exception. Holenstein's history of Switzerland is told as a series of processes of entanglement and demarcation starting in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The transnational point of reference in this case, however, remains primarily Europe. There is no lack of postulates for a transnational opening for Swiss history (Dejung, 2014; Skenderovic, 2015; Schär, 2015; Eichenberger et al., 2017; Holenstein, 2018: 47–49).

This article discusses the added value of a transnational view of Swiss (national) history for teaching the history of one's own country in schools. Based on reflections on the relationship between the nation state and history education and general considerations on the advantages of global historical perspectives for history didactics, the remarks lead on the one hand to an analysis of the presence of transnational approaches in the teaching of Swiss history in the competence-oriented curriculum of elementary schooling from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the German-speaking part of Switzerland (Deutschschweizer Erziehungsdirektoren-Konferenz, 2016). On the other hand, the three textbooks published so far that are aligned with this new curriculum are examined for the presence of



transnational elements in the narratives that relate to Switzerland. This examination is based on two topics: mercenaryism and colonialism. These thematic areas were chosen as a sample because they have also been explored in recent years in Swiss historical research in terms of a history of entanglements (e.g. Minder, 2011; Hitz, 2015; Holenstein, 2015: 27–158; 175–177; Schär, 2015; Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné, 2015). The basic concepts of the three textbooks differ. *Gesellschaften im Wandel* (2017a) covers key topics quite broadly in two volumes for students. The ‘exploratory trails’ it contains can be used flexibly in the classroom. At the same time teachers are expected to set their own emphasis. *Durchblick* (2016–2017) and *zeitreise* (2017–2018) follow a more classic textbook approach with their chronological-content structure. *zeitreise*, which comprises three volumes for students – one volume for every year – is more closely oriented to the curriculum thematically, so that the topics are developed in less detail. The third teaching aid, *Durchblick*, is based on an established textbook from Germany enriched by a certain Swiss content. It therefore tends to be less up-to-date in terms of research (Ziegler and Nitsche, 2022: 5). It consists of two volumes, with one and a half school years being devoted to each volume. All three textbooks offer additional materials (analogue and digital) for teachers.

## 2. History and the nation state

From a European perspective, history as a science is closely intertwined with nation-building. This is true in terms of both the self-image of historical science and the functions attributed to it by society (Conrad and Eckert, 2007: 11; Grewe, 2017: 301). The historiographical current of historicism, effective well into the twentieth century, especially in German-speaking Europe, embodied this in exemplary fashion. In the case of Switzerland, as elsewhere, master narratives emerged that projected nation-building back into history and constructed a teleological progression toward the modern nation state (e.g. Marchal, 2006; Holenstein, 2015). These national conceptions focusing on demarcation continue to prove very persistent in Switzerland socially and to some extent also in political debates (Maissen, 2015). Since curricula are social constructs (McCulloch, Goodson and González-Delgado, 2019: 1) and as such say a lot about the society in which they are created, it is hardly surprising that elements of a ‘classical’, self-focusing national history continue to be found in curricula. And since teaching materials are often in a sense an exegesis of curricula, such a national history will be detectable there as well. Following Barbara Christophe (2014: 1), the categories as well as the patterns of thought and the interpretation of a soci-

ety are reflected in both curricula and teaching materials. Even today, education itself was and remains a promoter and a pillar of a state that defines itself as national. The efficacy of national discourses thus remains, and the hypothesis that it would be more than surprising if this did not continue to be the case does not seem presumptuous. For national histories always possess a political dimension. They are not only about historical images and cultures of memory, but also aim to help shape the future (Schär, 2016: 49). If transnational issues are taken into account, this does not mean that the effectiveness of the national framework is negated, but, as Sebastian Conrad and Andreas Eckert (2007: 34–35) point out, history does not only take place within the borders of the nation state. The latter is also a product of global processes.

In emphasizing the relevance of nation state interests for teaching curricula, however, it should not be forgotten that these are ultimately not only negotiated locally or nationally. Here too a transnational dimension and thus a relational process can be identified. International trends and exchange processes very much influence such curricula, even if they are interpreted or filtered locally or nationally (McCulloch, Goodson and González-Delgado, 2019: 3). With regard to the subject of history, for example, this means that international trends in historiography are incorporated into curricula and teaching materials, albeit with some inertia given their long life cycles. These trends also include approaches in global history. However, these approaches are not only historiographically ‘in vogue’, they also have didactic potential.

### 3. Considerations in history didactics

In the following, five opportunities for transnational approaches to history didactics will be highlighted without claiming to be exhaustive. Important points of reference here are research contributions by Uta Fenske and Bärbel P. Kuhn (2015), Bernd-Stefan Grewe (2017) and Philipp Marti (2021).

First, transnational approaches change, open and shift perspectives. With regard to the considerations made above on the possibility of a transnational national history, this means first and foremost that the basic national historical narrative is deconstructed and that national historical images are relativized (Fenske and Kuhn, 2015: 13). The perspective on a supposedly purposeful, incontrovertible process of becoming a nation is differentiated and relativized. The institution of the nation state and its emergence thus become, as already pointed out, a global product (Conrad and Eckert 2007: 34–35). At the same time, however, another firmly anchored perspective is shaken: Eurocentrism. This shift

in perspective does not mean that the nation, the nation state or Europe as frameworks should disappear. To demand this would be to ignore the fact that these frames are and remain very powerful, especially for politics and society. By shaking established perspectives, important desiderata of historical learning, multi-perspectivity and the ability to change or adopt perspectives should be redeemed at the same time (e.g. Fenske and Kuhn, 2015: 12–13; Bergmann, 2016: 65–66).

The second didactic opportunity is the students' understanding of space. This can be differentiated through transnational approaches. The nation should not be understood as a 'container' that clearly delimits a spatial unit and hermetically seals itself off from other (national) spaces that are equally clearly separated. Rather, transnational approaches are able to dynamize the spatial dimension by considering spaces as being in relation to or different from one another (Epple, 2012: 89; Kühberger, 2012; Schär, 2016: 52; Marti, 2021: 140). Spaces are connected, for example, through economic, cultural and social networks or by migration. Lifeworld and contemporary references are good ways of bringing entanglements into the focus of the investigation and thus making the global visible in the local.

Third, there is an opportunity for a differentiated understanding by historical actors. Who and what drives history? What kinds of actors have shaped our understanding of history? What actors' perspectives are missing from established perceptions? Ultimately, the didactic demand for multi-perspectivity comes into play here as well. A transnational view of national history thus demands the inclusion of actor perspectives that reach beyond the national 'container'. Actors of different world regions are to be considered as equally important in principle (Grewe, 2017: 303). Postcolonial historiography in particular offers interesting possibilities for connections.

Fourth, the differentiating examination of actors also sharpens the awareness of power structures through transnational perspectives (Marti, 2021: 142). Who has the power of interpretation? What perspectives determine the self-used categories in historical thinking (Grewe, 2018)? This should be perceived as a product of historical processes. Thoughts in this area are suitable for a more nuanced reflection on the constructed nature of historical images. Images of history are neither unrivalled nor unchangeable.

Fifth, on a meta-level, these four didactic opportunities in history contribute to a strengthening of deconstruction competence among students. The historical conditionality of identities and concepts is revealed. Static and essentializing conceptions can be counteracted. Nothing is ahistorical. Transnational perspec-

tives on history thus also counteract a reduction of complexity in the classroom and promote historical awareness.<sup>1</sup>

But transnational approaches cannot do everything either. Those who hope for a kind of world history or universal history are wrong. Transnational approaches have to be clearly distinguished from these two older concepts (Conrad and Eckart, 2007: 25–29; Epple, 2012: 90; Grewe, 2017: 302, 306). Transnational approaches do not provide a global master narrative because they do not take the space ‘world’ – understood as a ‘container’ – into account, but focus on the relationship between spaces. Nor should the relevance of transnationality be made absolute. As has already been emphasized twice, nation-state contexts remain quite effective and thus also worthy of being taught in school.

#### 4. Transnational national history in 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade

Teaching curricula have long developmental and life cycles. The same applies to teaching materials. Thus, they are not vehicles that can react quickly to trends or that are pioneering in character. This should be kept in mind when exploring the extent to which transnational approaches are reflected in the curriculum for elementary schools in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and in the newly developed history teaching materials based on the said curriculum. The curriculum of the elementary school, as well as the textbooks *zeitreise*, *Durchblick* and *Gesellschaften im Wandel* were fixed or published in the second half of the 2010s, but they all required several years of preparatory work. However, the growing importance of transnational issues for the historical sciences preceded their developmental cycles.

Harmonization of curricula has only begun in the past two decades in federalist and pluricultural Switzerland. The current curriculum for elementary schools in German-speaking Switzerland – including for the German-speaking part of the Swiss population in multilingual cantons, as well as in the neighbouring Principality of Liechtenstein – is a product of that harmonization and the first of its kind. The cantons involved have adopted cantonal curricula on the basis of this process, which were implemented in a staggered manner starting in the 2015/16 school year. Looking at the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades, Swiss history has gained in importance in this curriculum, but the subject of history itself has lost weight. Aspects of cultural history have also gained great relevance (Deutschschweizer

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1 For an overview of ‘historical consciousness,’ see Pandel (2013: 137–150).

Erziehungsdirektoren-Konferenz, 2016: RZG.5; RZG.7).<sup>2</sup> This reflects a central area of work on today's history didactics in the curriculum.

To begin with, explicitly transnationally oriented competences or contents cannot be identified. The historiographical trend towards transnational approaches is therefore not reflected in this currently valid curriculum. In practice, however, curricula are always a matter of interpretation. Thus, there is room for manoeuvre. One of three large areas of competence specifically oriented towards history focuses on 'Switzerland in Tradition and Change' (RZG.5) and presents a history of the origins of the modern Swiss federal state, which sees itself as a nation state. The differentiation of this area – and the curriculum is quite detailed for history as a subject – reveals that an internal perspective prevails here. Competence RZG.5.1, 'Students can explain the origins and development of Switzerland', corresponds to a narrow understanding of Swiss history. André Holenstein (2018: 8–9) characterizes this understanding as the starting point of all national histories. European contexts are thus only considered by the curriculum for the period after the French Revolution. But at least this offers a docking point for transnational perspectives, albeit with a European focus (e.g. RZG. 5.1b). Further points of contact are offered by isolated references to content, such as migration or nutrition. Research and research trends in the field of (Swiss) migration history or on food culture shaped by colonialism would provide good foundations for this (e.g. Skenderovic, 2015; Holenstein, Kury and Schulz, 2018; Purtschert, 2019: 122–165).

The 'World-historical continuities and changes,' which are taken into focus in the next area of competences (RZG.6), are also Europe-centred. The keywords 'voyages of discovery', 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' could be starting points for transnational approaches, even though they refer to a 'Western' perspective in the context of the curriculum. The fact that at one point the students are also required to trace the history of a region from modern times until today is not to be interpreted in the sense of a transnationally oriented global history but indicates an additive understanding in the sense of an older 'world history'. According to Bernd-Stefan Grewe (2017: 306), such an understanding leads to the fact that national historical narratives are only strung together and combined. To sum up, the following can be stated: links between the Swiss and global historical levels are delegated to the actual classroom.

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2 Thus, it has been merged with geography to form the subject 'Räume, Zeiten, Gesellschaften' ('Spaces, Times, Societies') and has received a lower lesson allocation in most cantons (Ritzer and Ziegler, 2022).

A further aspect which deserves more attention is scope: the scope opened up by a curriculum must be interpreted. Teaching aids provide this interpretation. With *zeitreise, Geschichte im Wandel* and *Durchblick*, three textbooks are now available which are based on the new curriculum, their aim being to enable teachers of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade to master the curriculum. Two topics serve as case studies for the analysis of these teaching materials, in which a transnational approach to Swiss national history is particularly productive and which at the same time can well be represented by the current state of research.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, as a mass phenomenon of labour migration, mercenaryism had an enormous economic, social and diplomatic significance for the so-called *corpus helveticum*, at the latest from the end of the Middle Ages until well into the eighteenth century. The high degree of entanglements in the context of the mercenary system led to strong dependencies; for example, in Catholic-influenced rural cantons of the Old Swiss Confederacy, sometimes significantly more than half the state budget was borne by subsidies from foreign partners of mercenary alliances. At the same time, these transfer payments and alliances stabilized the internal social and political structure of the loosely structured Old Swiss Confederacy. All in all, an exciting interaction between interdependence and demarcation became apparent. The latter also included the construction of self-images that could reflect both a positive incorporation of mercenaryism and its rejection (Holenstein, 2015: 27–193; Weber and Rogger, 2018).

On the other hand, the colonial entanglements of Switzerland and especially of its society and economy have been quite well-researched, including with regard to the repercussions of colonial territories on Switzerland. Thus, entanglements in the slave trade (David, Etemad and Schaufelbuehl, 2005; Fässler, 2005; Kuhn and Ziegler, 2009) and the great importance of Swiss trading ventures in colonial trade flows have become evident (e.g. Stettler, Haenger and Labhardt, 2004; Dejung, 2013). The activities of Protestant and Catholic missionary societies are also now an established area of research (e.g., Harries, 2007; Ratschiller, 2018). Most recently, the role of Swiss mercenaries in colonial power structures in Southeast Asia before the First World War is also examined in depth (Krauer, 2021).

In the more traditional German textbook, *Durchblick*, which has been adapted to Swiss conditions, the high relevance of mercenaryism for the Old Swiss Confederacy is not addressed. More generally, entanglements do not emerge in the relevant chapters on this phase of Swiss history (vol. 1: 188–189, 192–193).

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3 See also the introduction to this article.

The situation is different in the first volume of *zeitreise*, where the textbook turns to the Swiss mercenaries in a separate chapter (Ch. 2.15). However, the chapter does not explicitly address the transnational dimension. Privileges in trade and certain payments are mentioned, but not in the sense of an entangled history. The focus is on the internal social and economic motives for mercenaryism. No reference is made to the presence of Swiss mercenaries in colonial expansion. Mercenaryism remains incidental in *Gesellschaften im Wandel*. Although the chapter on ‘The Old Swiss Confederacy and Europe’ suggests a transnational perspective, it primarily discusses the internal political structure on the eve of the French Revolution (Ch. 6.3). There is one exception: mercenary service is presented as an important aspect of economic links with Europe that strengthened an economic elite in the Confederacy.

Contrary to these initial findings, the textbooks *zeitreise* and *Gesellschaften im Wandel* occasionally reveal transnational approaches (especially *Gesellschaften im Wandel*, 2017a: Ch. 5.7; *zeitreise*, 2016–2018: Ch. 6.4). The fact that Switzerland often occupies a marginal position in this context can be seen in the chapters dealing with the history of colonialism and imperialism. In *Gesellschaften im Wandel*, several chapters turn to these topics (especially Chs. 5.3–5.7; 9.4). An important role is played by sugar as a commodity (Ch. 5.2). This approach clearly refers to research in global history, which also focuses on the history of individual products such as cotton (e.g. Becker 2014), thereby recalling the influence of food on Europe. References to Switzerland, for instance, using chocolate as an example, are surprisingly absent (see Ch. 5.3; *Gesellschaften im Wandel*, 2017b: Ch. 5.1). Chocolate in particular represents an example of a product that is nationally and internationally associated with Switzerland, even though it is a colonial good and even today is primarily made from resources from former colonial territories (Purtschert, 2019: 122–165). In general, references to Switzerland remain weak. In the context of sugarcane plantations, Swiss plantation owners are mentioned as slaveholders (section 5.6).

Here, and even more so in the case of a poster depicting a ‘human zoo’ that existed in Basel from 1930 (Ch. 9.4), the text does not make any further reference to Switzerland’s involvement with colonialism and its participation in colonial regimes of thought and vision, as is evident from the examples. This is also not the case in the teachers’ manual, although the pastry ‘Mohrenkopf’ is presented there as an example of everyday racism (*Gesellschaften im Wandel*, 2017b: chap. 5.7). In the textbook *zeitreise*, the topics of colonialism and imperialism are also given some space (especially Chs. 6.1–6.3; 6.5), but it is not narrated as a story of entanglement. There is, however, one exception: the chapter

on ‘Colonial Switzerland’ (Ch. 6.4). Like *Gesellschaften im Wandel*, reference is made to colonial goods as well as, in particular, to the phenomenon of ‘human zoos,’ but here with specific reference to the Swiss context. ‘Human zoos’ have become an object of research in the last two decades, including in Switzerland (e.g. Minder, 2008; Brändle, 2013; Purtschert, 2019: 107–121). However, the missionary societies that were so relevant to Swiss involvement in colonialism remain surprisingly excluded from both textbooks. Likewise, the transnational approaches remain strongly limited to the European side. Swiss references in the chapters of *Durchblick* that deal with colonialism and decolonization (vol. 2: 12–21; 150–151) are missing. The explanations of these topics are primarily of a political-historical nature and ignore transnational entanglements, thus remaining in the tradition of older teaching materials that presented Switzerland as standing outside colonialism (Marti, 2016).

## 5. Unused potentials

The analysis of the elementary school curriculum of the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, as well as the two thematic samples in the examined textbooks *zeitreise*, *Gesellschaften im Wandel* and *Durchblick* show that the transnational perspective is not dealt with in the curriculum of the Swiss elementary school, but the content-related implementation of the curriculum by the textbooks reveals certain approaches to this perspective. Nonetheless the references to Switzerland remain low. The potential to teach a transnational national history of Switzerland thus remains unexploited. In view of recent historiographical and cultural studies research and the didactic advantages, transnational approaches in history teaching would not least offer a productive possibility to counteract thinking in national ‘containers’.

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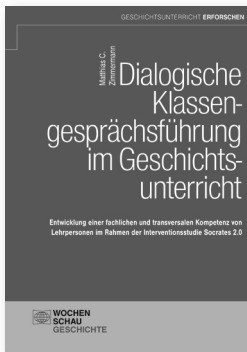
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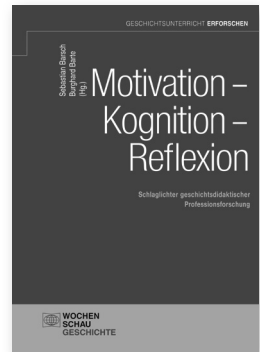
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