

Crossing Voices: History seen by Portuguese teachers

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Abstract—This paper discusses findings of two different studies, made within a five years interval, of Portuguese history teachers' conceptions. Some similarities emerged: to the teachers in the first study, History is a science, open to renewal and based on evidence confrontation (new sources) and is mainly concerned with their students' skills in the classroom. In the second study, different conceptions of historical accounts appeared: several teachers appealed to consensus, to truth in a logic of absolute neutrality; others think that is necessary to support divergence to achieve cohesion. Some teachers accept as legitimate and natural the existence of different perspectives in History, but impartiality is desirable as an ideal, in a perspective of absolute neutrality. However, looking into students' historical competence, the hypothesis presented in this quantitative study - that history teachers had not adhered to work proposals with a traditional perspective because they considered them educationally undesirable—is confirmed. The second study was made under the aegis of the HiCon Project I and this paper aims to consider the results of these two Portuguese studies on history teachers' conceptions.

Keywords—Historical Accounts; Historical competences; History teachers.

Introduction

Historical education seems to share the conception that learning History is an experience/process involving historical inquiry in a continuum. Historical literacy is developed taking into account the personal experiences of daily life that are confronted systematically with problematic historical situations that need solving in more complex ways. From this perspective historical education is thought as one of the motors that develop historical consciousness of people and societies. Different studies worldwide suggest the existence of different profiles of thought among students as well as history teachers.

The development of the complex process of historical competence must be supervised by reflexive History teachers, aware of their beliefs, values, and attitudes—taking seriously their responsibility as educators. Teacher education needs to promote articulate reflection on epistemological conceptions and the development of historical experience in classrooms so as to increase the teacher's professionalism in applying the transformative logic of education as growth. Teachers' education needs to change the focus from a purely pedagogical practice to the wider complexity of teaching as practice. Offering to teachers in training a wide range of learning opportunities as well as familiarizing them with different ways to reflect about their practice will promote the development of their own cultural and educational pedagogic practice that they will implement at classroom level. Zeichner (2005) pointed out that teacher education must "help them to learn about experience and help them to learn by experience."

The perspective in this paper is that different levels of reflection are connected to a realistic approach to teacher education. Here both the theoretical dimension and how this can be articulated are emphasised and reconstructed in the pedagogic process by teachers or/and students. Teacher educators must help teachers and future teachers to think about their transpersonal concerns as well as accompanying and orientating them towards different stages of reflection. Educational research findings suggest that if our goal is to develop intellectual literacy then the teaching-learning process must be articulated within the specific theoretical framework chosen. Therefore historical literacy must be interfaced with meta-historical conceptions.

The Studies

Research questions

The first study was designed to contribute to our understanding of some aspects of the way (or ways) in which History teachers connect themselves with their subject, either practically or theoretically, how they conceive the subject and what intellectual challenges it brings.

The second study, made five years later, is globally focused on the different conceptual profiles history teachers present in using historical narrative as one of the facets of historical consciousness. In this study, some of the findings related to the articulation between the epistemological conceptions of History, historical accounts and teachers concerns about students' historical competence are outlined.

Research methodology

For the first study, a pilot inquiry was used as the method to assemble the necessary data. The questionnaire was specially designed for this research following a series of semi-structured exploratory interviews with History teachers. The interviews were mainly about different conceptions of History and any perceived difference between History as a by-product of the academic discipline and the History that is taught. These interviews were also used to establish the importance that the interviewed teachers gave to aspects like chronology and narrative in the teaching of history, as well as the need or interest they felt for reflection on the nature of historical knowledge. The aim of these interviews was to find conceptions that could be explored in the future. From the results/analysis of the interviews a questionnaire was created and mailed to all teachers belonging to the target-group.

The questionnaire was divided in four parts—

- 1) personal and professional data
- 2) History
- 3) History teaching
- 4) a specific classroom situation.

Using the first part of the questionnaire we hoped to construct professional profiles from data such as professional background, career situation, political positioning and also age and gender.

In the second part of the questionnaire, sixteen statements [quotations] about History were chosen by the subjects. These quotations were from authors belonging to different historical schools of thought, such as Ranke's classical positivism, the Annales school and Popper's anti-positivist scepticism. The third part of the questionnaire presented thirty statements about History teaching which aimed to reflect issues and problems of history education. The fourth part presented sources and materials for teaching the theme of the Renaissance and some statements on how the teachers would teach the topic in the classroom (15) including what could be demanded of the students (17). 96 teachers answered the questionnaire (33.1% of the target population). The questionnaire data was subjected to appropriate statistical analysis.

The second study, a qualitative one, was designed based on Grounded Theory: as such it involved a constant process of analysing data. The sample was drawn from History teachers from the North and South of Portugal, with different lengths and experiences of teaching—(between 3 and 10 years; more than 10 years of experience), teaching in elementary and secondary private and public schools, prospective history teachers from two different universities (Minho University and Évora University) who were graduation students: a total of 48 participants (proportionally subdivided). A sample of British history teachers was also interviewed: these findings will be discussed elsewhere. The data collection technique used was a semi-structured interview and audio-video taping of interviews in 2003 and 2004.

First two different accounts were presented inspired by Lee (1996, 2002) and Gago (2005). The questions were designed to provide data about the conceptions of historical accounts and the orientation of students' historical understanding:

We have here two different accounts about the past. Do you think this kind of exercise benefits students' historical understanding?

In History we want to know what happened in the past, but historians can provide different versions of the same event. How can the use of different versions of the past help pupils to understand the present and the future?

Then the interviewer presented three written answers pupils aged 10 to 14 produced when asked to explain why there are two different accounts of the same episode of history.

a) Historians can have different perspectives of the same past. Each historian investigates the sources available and tries to answer different questions. All the historians give an explanation, but they use different criteria in explaining the past.

b) Historians provide different accounts because they must have seen different sources. Some historians rely on more sources than others and have more or less details, because they know more or less. But only one of these accounts is true, as there is only one past, and historians have to tell the truth.

c) Historians may have different opinions about the same episode of history. They have their own ideas, therefore when they analyse the sources they look at them in a particular way, according to what they already know and their national and personal identity. They have to be honest and historians should together decide which historical account is the correct one.

The teachers were asked to rank the pupils' answers with reference to the quality of their historical ideas and explain their rank order.

Findings

Quantitative study

The teachers who answered the questionnaire were mainly women (65.6%) History graduates (52.1%) and had been probationary teachers as the final part of their degrees (54.2%). They were mostly graduates of the University of Évora (50%). From a professional point of view, 46.9% were on the teaching staff of their schools. Many of them concluded their studies in the 1980s (40.6%) and started to teach in the same decade (44.8%). They were mainly between 34 and 43 years old (58.5%). Politically they stood mostly between the left and the centre, the majority being centre-left (72.7%).

From the analysis of the second part of the questionnaire that dealt with notions of History, some of the quotations were clearly rejected and others were fully accepted. To study the association between the quotation responses and the questionnaire data principal components analysis was used. This analysis showed a simple factorial structure, constituting six factors, corresponding to six different conceptions:

1. History as a positivistic science; factor
2. History as a non-science; factor
3. History as relative knowledge; factor
4. History as comprehensive science; factor
5. History as a social science; factor
6. History as a temporal science.

The results showed a clear rejection of two notions: history as relative knowledge (average acceptance 25%) and history as a non-science (average acceptance 20.7%). The positivist conception of History was also rejected, although to a lesser extent (average acceptance 37.4%). The idea of History as a temporal science had the highest average acceptance (79.6%). Considering the teachers' personal and professional backgrounds it was possible to make the following conclusions, concerning each of the six factors.

The acceptance of History as positivistic science seemed to be influenced by the political ideas of teachers; those who stood on the left did not comply with this notion, the ones who positioned themselves on the centre-right accepted it. The teachers who had concluded their probation before 1974 were likely to accept this notion, but there was no statistically meaningful difference. The same happened with the academic

qualifications: the teachers who didn't hold a History degree gave greater importance to the notion of History as a positivistic science.

The agreement with the conception of History as a non-science (average acceptance 20.7%) was influenced by the year during which the teachers had concluded their probation: the teachers that had accomplished it earlier disagreeing (average acceptance 8.3%) as opposed to those who finished it later (although this result was not statistically significant). The teachers who hadn't gone through probation also strongly rejected this conception (average acceptance 42%).

The conception of History as relative knowledge (average acceptance 25%) was influenced by the teachers' professional situation, but again this was not statistically significant. Trainees were more likely to accept this conception (average acceptance 40.4%). The teachers holding degrees, but not on the school staff list, disagreed the most (average acceptance 2.1%). This was consistent with the fact that the teachers who hadn't been on probation were farther from this notion (average acceptance 0%). The acceptance of History as a comprehensive science was not influenced by any of the variables considered, and the average of 54.3% shows a moderate acceptance from most teachers.

There was more modest agreement: with the conception of History as a social science (average acceptance 56.7%), but it correlated with teachers' age. The idea of History as a temporal science (average acceptance 79.6%) showed a high level of agreement from most teachers and was not influenced by any of the variables. This was predictable taking into consideration the near unanimous answers and therefore the small discriminative importance of this factor.

The dominant conception of History seems to be one that emphasizes History's status as a science and its temporality; this is supported by the teachers' strong acceptance of that idea. It was also possible to verify that the teachers' personal and professional backgrounds didn't influence their dominant conception of History although, as explained above, it did affect their orientation.

The questionnaire's fourth part centred on the pedagogic presentation of the theme of the Renaissance and a number of historical sources and materials relevant to the teaching of this topic. To obtain this kind of information teachers were given lists of historical sources, materials or activities so that they would mark those they approved or they would use. They were asked to select the historical sources they would choose, what materials they would use, what actions they would take and what activities they would ask their students to perform. The collected data was treated using operational dichotomous scales, yes or no. In choosing historical sources, most teachers selected primary sources, both visual and written, rejecting historiographic texts. By statistical analysis it was possible to infer that the teachers' choices were made around a text by

Picco della Mirandola and a historiographic text: choosing one meant refusing the other. It is also important to stress that the teachers' choices seemed to be made according to the illustrative role of the documents, which would explain the rejection of the texts that might arouse controversy.

Among the offered materials, slides were preferred. This was consistent with the choice of visual sources and could be connected with the idea that the Renaissance was a good subject to use with resources of this kind. The statistical analysis revealed two groups of choices: the first could be called traditional and static, assembling schools' long known resources, such as maps, chronological charts or slides, and these usually served as means to introduce the issue under study, rather than an active work instrument for the students to use. A second group, more dynamic, could be divided into two sub-groups: a first containing audiovisual documents and historical films, and the second one gathering together media materials and computer games. Regarding teachers' requests to their students, again some degree of anxiety could be perceived towards the interpretation of pictures (which might be directly related to the choices of historical sources and materials).

Here too, statistical analysis showed three groups of activities; furthermore, their meaning was identical with those connected with teachers' teaching preferences. A first group preferred students' autonomous activities, like organizing debates or defending opinions; a second group chose activities to be completed under the teacher's guidance, but with students' engaged upon active work, like explaining documents or interpreting pictures; finally, a last group comprised proposals for student activities, but a more passive type of work, like copying schemes from the blackboard to their note-books or taking notes dictated by the teacher. These results are consistent with the ones obtained by Galindo (1997) and Guimerà (1992), and are congruent with constructive principles that consider familiarity with the tasks and previous experience to be important cognition factors.

Qualitative study

Different ideas emerged from the answers of the participants to provide some profiles of understanding History, historical accounts and students' historical knowledge developed in History classes. Some of the participants present a hostile attitude towards the use of different historical accounts in History teaching as underestimating the conceptual differences between the accounts presented. Their major concern is to "give" to students all of the historical content in the History National Curriculum. These History teachers and future History teachers defend ideas of the necessity of a consensual narrative in a positivist perspective of historical knowledge. Historical accounts must be tallied with reality, the truth in a perspective of absolute neutrality. Students' historical understanding is seen in a very homogeneous pattern. As Dalia with more than 10 years as History teacher of a school on North Portugal commented,

When narratives are very similar we don't have the need to explore them. It is a question of managing time and teaching the entire national curriculum.

Consensus is a difficult issue because each head has its own maxim, but we just have one truth.

The more reliable narrative is the one more close to reality. We have to look for the narrative that seems to be more consistent.

Other history teachers and future history teachers think that the use of different accounts is a difficult exercise for pupils in elementary school. Only students at the secondary levels have the skills to deal with so much information and to understand the difference of information by comparison. For these participants the relevance of this kind of exercise is focused on the historical content, the debate of divergence.

The variance of historical accounts is justified by the opinions of historians but consensus is desirable in the demand of the historical truth. This concern of historical truth appears connected to a pragmatic pedagogical perspective—simplify students' learning. Students' historical understanding is thought as heterogeneous justified by age. As Deolinda with more than 19 years as History teacher in a school in South Portugal stated,

If narratives are identical maybe they are not useful to the classroom. We need an accessible narrative. Two narratives only complicate matters with students of 5th and 7th year school [10 years, 12 years, respectively]. Perhaps it is best to do this kind of exercise with secondary students [15-17 years]. These two narratives allow students to understand the importance of Portugal in the European context and the relations between Portugal and England.

Historians have different perspectives but they could try to find some consensus.

Dalila, a prospective teacher of Évora University, reinforced this idea of consensus:

Consensus is impossible, each historian analyses the reality according to his point of view, although the existence of consensus would be something positive.

Several of the participants of this study think that the use of different historical accounts is desirable to develop critical thinking, question the received narrative, require cross referencing and promote the discussion of different points of view. The variation between historical accounts is justified by the author's point of view. Historical narrative is naturally a face with multiple perspectives. Students' historical understanding is thought to be heterogeneous justified by age and the years students have spent in school. As Dario, a 4th year student in the teaching of History from Minho University suggested:

Narratives from different authors are beneficial because students can understand that there can be different opinions concerning the same topic, and that this is valid. I think that it is interesting for students to acknowledge and compare the differences in order to reflect about the impact those differences can have in our days.

Sharing some ideas of Dario, Diana with 12 years as History teacher of a school on South Portugal pointed out:

I give students the narratives with a group of questions. Then I promote a debate about the conclusions, as you repeat this strategy the discussion increases teaching quality. I think the most important thing is to focus on time and place, the historical production context, who wrote, what are their nationalities. The pupils point out that the best narrative is the one they easier understand. The youngest maybe understand the narrative as true.

Conclusions

Data for these studies were collected within a five year period and from different parts of Portugal. However, teachers with different orientations and pedagogic practices from both cohorts seem to share similar conceptions of History, reflected in their teaching practices.

The existence of multiple historical accounts is accepted as a product of diverse contexts that shape and influence their production. These factors must be analysed and discussed with students. However, this discussion is strongly based on positivist views of historical understanding. History teachers and future History teachers pointed to the need to look for the truth, the neutral impartiality and consensus.

This conceptual image is in convergence with other research findings on Portuguese pupils' historical ideas about provisional historical explanation (Barca, 2005) and the variance in historical narrative (Gago, 2005). The majority of History teacher participants recognise different students' profiles of historical thought justified by age and/or by school year. This can eventually explain the coexistence of more traditional and mechanical students' activities (like taking notes or copying schemes from the blackboard to their note-books) and more dynamic tasks (like working with sources or organizing information). It seems that tasks leading to problem-solving to develop a "big picture" of the past are still at an early stage of teachers' educational concerns.

So, there is an urgent need to debate and to implement the questions related to the epistemology of social knowledge. The promotion of teacher reflection must be seen as a bridge between History teachers and the educators of History teachers, i.e. between school and university to achieve continuous professional growth in a transformative manner. This dimension must be articulated within graduate teacher education as well as in lifelong learning [professional development] so as to discuss in the process curricular questions, theoretical conceptions and their educational implementation.

The prevalence of profiles of thought clued to ideas of impartiality, neutrality and the desire of consensus could be related to the Annales Schools' conceptions which until the 1990s had a strong influence on different Portuguese Universities history departments and the Portuguese History National Curriculum. This cultural and curricular context significantly affected the historical understanding of Portuguese History teachers as shown in the quantitative study of Magalhães, where the participant History teachers see History as a science grounded in 'translation' with rigour of sources and also in Gago's qualitative study, where teachers stressed the importance of absolute neutrality in History.

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Constructing Identity through the Visual Image Memory, Identity, Belonging: History, Culture & Interpretive Frameworks

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Abstract—This is a visual paper in which the readers have to create their own interpretations of the story, narrative[s], that the images present. As such the paper is genuinely constructivist; drawing upon the genre theory of Kress, Martin & Halliday, the findings of Roland Barthes in creating understanding and the interpretive paradigm of visual images that Gombrich presents (Barthes; Cope & Kalantzis; Gombrich; Martin; Halliday). Constructivism relates to ideas of functional literacy in which the positioning of the author, the authorial conception of the audience, the form/defining features of the mode of communication, the substantive content and the cultural ambience are crucial. And, of course, in a semiotic context, the role of signs and symbols. As such, the paper relates to over-arching ideas in History and Citizenship Education such as narratives, master narratives, sub-narratives, culture, folk memory, media, identity, myths, tradition, values and beliefs and nationalism.

Keywords—Belief, Ceremony, Iconic, Identity, Myth, Narrative, Story, Symbols, Values.

The origins of the paper were grounded in the events surrounding the tenth anniversary of the death of a major international figure. In presenting the images, all drawn from the Internet, to the international audience of the Istanbul conference of the History Educators International Research Network conference, the audience received the following guidance.

In pairs, discuss what you think and feel about the picture[s] in terms of—

ceremony
 identity
 beliefs
 values
 ritual
 symbolism
 the media.

What story do they tell?

We tried to ensure that pairs consisted of colleagues from different countries and cultures—

The ensuing lively discussion revealed a range of deep-seated values and assumptions, grounded in the individual's orientation within their own complex and sophisticated cultural values, beliefs and attitudes, grounded in the story that they were able to construct from the images related to existing knowledge.