

History teaching and peace education in a time of crisis

How can we build a shared future based on dialogue and peace?

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In the current crisis, in which xenophobic and racist attitudes are growing, peace education, the process of recovery of democratic memory, and the teaching of history all have to work together, with the aim of helping to build a more just and peaceful world. The experience of two world wars and the Spanish Civil War have led the educational community to reconsider the purpose of history on the teaching curriculum, leading to a convergence with the principles of peace education. Thus, the patriotic elements of school history, which produce a negative view of others, have been replaced by more social contents. However, it seems appropriate to make proposals for actions which can improve the situation and make it possible, through educational activity within school history and in peace education, to build a shared future based on peace and dialogue between peoples.

Context

The analysis of the relationship between the teaching of history and peace education, mainly in the European context and over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is particularly relevant in the current situation of crisis, where we are seeing the growth of racist and xenophobic attitudes.

In the late nineteenth century, the first public compulsory school systems gave history the function of propaganda about the greatness of the fatherland and its heroes — often warlords and military leaders who had distinguished themselves in the fight against the country's enemies. The aim of history was to mythologise and glorify the nation's past. School history books were a tool for justifying the frontiers between states and ended up predisposing people towards war. Educating people only in their own ethnic pride implied ignoring the rights and the values of other peoples, who were sometimes deliberately disparaged or, in some cases, negated or attacked. Geography helped history in the achievement of these aims. This climate of love only for one's own country was a key factor in enabling European countries' participation in the First and Second World Wars.

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the present day, the educational goals and objectives attributed to history in the school curriculum have changed massively. Currently, despite a certain revival of nationalist rhetoric, most European countries emphasise a school history which could share the same goals as education for peace and democracy.

In today's curriculums the objectives of history teaching are to help children and young people to understand the social environment, to teach them democratic values and to acquire a mature moral and intellectual critical vision. In Catalonia, these objectives are laid down in the current curriculum for competencies, dating from 2007: "Understanding the social reality they live in; dealing with coexistence and conflicts using ethical judgment based on democratic values and practices, and exercising citizenship while acting with their own judgment, contributing to the construction of peace and democracy, and maintaining a constructive and responsible attitude, based on solidarity, with respect to the fulfilment of civil rights and obligations" (Curriculum for Obligatory Secondary Education, Decree 143 / 2007 DOG no 4915).

Analysis

The teaching of history

Teaching methods in school history are based on a set of theories which make up the foundations of curriculum design in the area of social sciences. These theories relate the discipline — the question of what has to be taught as history — with when to teach it and how to do so. Specifying what should be taught entails analysing the evolution of history, which in only a few decades has gone from a focus on political and military issues to contents involving social and economic history.

What history should be taught?

The first history textbooks reflected a positivist and descriptive history. This was a history that had to be memorised, full of the dates of battles and the names of kings. The selection of contents reflected the traditional paradigm of romantic historiography, which praised the founding myths and the warriors of the fatherland: Viriathus, Don Pelayo, the Visigoth kings, the Reconquest of Spain, the Catholic Kings, El Cid... The student accepted passively and obediently this history which was presented to him or her as closed and dogmatic knowledge, transmitted through the teacher and the textbook. This teacher centred model led to a diachronic view of history, which became a mere pile of encyclopaedic facts.

The climate of love only for one's own country was a key factor in encouraging the participation of the European countries in the first and second world wars.

While after the Second World War the democratic countries of Western Europe introduced social and economic history into textbooks, in Spain the traditional model was kept alive and was supplemented by the manipulated version of the Second Republic and the Civil War — the winners' view of the war, which dominated Francoist history books.

Over the last few decades a vision of the discipline has grown which explains the evolution of humanity and we have witnessed the gradual democratisation of the subject of history. This process has partially displaced political history, progressively replacing it with social

and economic history. The textbooks have incorporated social groups which were until recently invisible or marginalised (women, the poor, children, workers...) as well as questions of everyday life, which present the evolution of humanity as an inclusive social process in which ordinary people can feel they play a role. The new contents are conducive to students seeing themselves as protagonists of history and, if participatory teaching methods are used, they can also see themselves as protagonists of the learning process.

Currently, the history curriculum is presented differently in primary and secondary education. In primary education it is taught as part of a holistic view of the natural and social environment from an ecohumanist point of view in which the interaction between humans and nature determines the contents. However, in secondary education, history appears as a distinct subject, thus giving a fragmented view of social knowledge, divided up between different social sciences.

How to teach history and when to introduce historical content

In the knowledge society, the transmission model of education has become obsolete. Science is dynamic and is constantly evolving. Schooling should help to order and comprehend historical time, but we must be aware that students will have to acquire new knowledge throughout their adult life due to the continuous flow of new information. Thanks to information and communication technology, we have a lot of information, which the school has to help turn into knowledge. Rather than knowing lots of history, the objective of education should be a feeling for historical knowledge that allows students to learn to think historically.

Thinking historically means providing children with the intellectual, cognitive and emotional tools so that, through the comprehension of historical time, they can understand the ethical tension that exists between the past, present and future, and thus learn to locate their personal time within social time, and this in turn within the historical time shared with all humanity.

In the mid-twentieth century, Piaget's theory inspired the growth of a new way of teaching which oriented history towards the promotion of the ability to think and reason about social reality. During the early school years, teaching focused on concrete time concepts, from the nearby surroundings or environment, and gradually introduced more specific and abstract historical knowledge as pupils reached the formal operational stage in adolescence (11-14). According to the Piaget model (Hannoun, Luc, Rosa Sensat...) the stages of cognitive development determined the introduction of historical contents and

how these should be taught. Development came before learning. This approach to teaching dictated that history could only be taught in secondary school.

In the seventies, the constructivists' criticisms of Piaget changed the teaching of history. Vygotsky's contribution was incorporated and the socio-cultural paradigm became widespread: learning was more related to the cultural environment and social interaction than to the evolutionary stage and was idiosyncratic, though it was also an objectifiable social product. Ausubel and his followers argued that learning was an engine of development. Educational activity promoted children's learning and this helped them reach new stages of cognitive development. This change was enormously important for the teaching of history and made it possible to take on Bruner's maxim, by which he argued that history can be taught at any age, in an honest and coherent way, using narration, description or abstraction, and linking the content with what children already know, so that they can give sense and meaning to the new information.

Today, in order to teach history one needs an approach to the object of knowledge which is at the same time intellectual and emotional, and which integrates the what, the how and the when. The principles of this new way of teaching history can be summarised as:

- Approaching the issues of history through discovery learning, based on life experiences and experimentation, using fieldwork and direct observation, with all kinds of educational resources such as timelines, routes, field trips, visits to museums and archives, analysis of primary sources, documents and objects, organising role playing and simulations, debates and moral dilemmas, making dramatisations, using oral history and interview, etc.
- Presenting the results of the school research based on discovery learning, using a work process that involves prioritising and ordering concepts.
- Complementing this discovery learning with the study of some issues through reception learning, so as to foster meaningful learning and knowing how to make sense of what has been learnt.
- Taking advantage of the changed perception of the environment and the ease of access to information to promote information management processes, specifically the transformation of information into knowledge, and do this through methodologies based on meta learning and tutored teaching which encourage independent learning, and learning to learn.

- In primary education, the concentric programming of history teaching, proposed by Piaget — which follows in turn different territorial levels, according to age: in the initial years, the neighbourhood or town; in the intermediate years, the county or the region; and in the upper years, the state or nation— ceases to make sense.
- All the levels of study of an issue in history may be present at the different educational stages, in primary or secondary, depending on the issue and the prior knowledge that students may have.
- Proposing, with strategies appropriate to formal thought, small history research projects beginning from the early years of schooling. The tendency is to work a few issues in depth (synchrony), through discovery learning guided by the teacher (projects, research, etc.).
- Teachers have to promote the transfer of knowledge from one level to another: that which is observed and experienced in the local environment becomes a route to understanding a global problem. Discovery in the local environment acts as a laboratory for developing social and historical knowledge.
- Promoting an integrated vision of the natural and/or social environment (ecohumanism) and, due to the complexity and importance of present day problems (economic inequalities, wars, etc.), giving priority to the issues of contemporary history.

To sum up, in the first school years, to learn history, we have to start from what is concrete, simple and close by. In primary education we will work on historical knowledge related to the environment through experimental methods in order to consolidate basic historical concepts of historical time, a process that helps to develop students' cognitive and emotional structure and prepares them to locate themselves within historical time in secondary education. Thus, students learn to think historically and become conscious that the past determines the present and that individual and collective actions in the present affect the future of humanity.

Peace education

We understand peace education as a strategy for education in values across the whole curriculum, but we can also consider it from the point of view of history teaching. Peace education highlights the importance of talking about wars in the classroom, so as to make the students more sensitive and favourable towards peaceful values for the resolution of conflicts. In our country, that means recovering the memory of the Spanish Civil War and the post war, as a specific

expression of the great wars that ravaged Europe during the twentieth century.

One can speak of two starting points for peace education. The first, following the First World War, when educational reform movements, strongly affected by the destructive effects of the war, took up the slogan “Never Again”, which became widespread throughout Europe. The promoters set themselves the objective of building peace through educational activities, by changing the purpose of history in the curriculum. Their impact was, however, slight and they did not manage to impede the climate that led to the Second World War.

The Second World War arrived, fought like the First principally on European battlegrounds. It spread pessimism and scepticism in the educational field, and produced a generalised feeling of failure and impotence. After the war, a commission of historians was created in Western Europe to review the contents of history and geography textbooks. The aim was to eliminate the presence of militarism and to avoid negative visions of ‘the other’. The committee took great care over the phrasing of texts which concerned border disputes and made an effort to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts between peoples. The second foundation of peace education was in the sixties, with European society having been rebuilt from the immediate effects of World War II and now facing new problems (the risk of all out nuclear war, the Vietnam War, May 68, etc.). The attempt was made to disseminate the results of peace research and transform them into educational activity.

Some of the issues raised at that time are questions that educators still ask ourselves today. Which concept of peace are we working towards? A restricted concept (the absence of war) or a broad vision (justice, human rights, equality, etc.)? Must we act on the individual or on society? Is individual change enough? With what methods can we achieve change? Perhaps it is necessary to build a vision which brings together all the answers: working within the field of education so that later on adults act positively in favour of peace. And do it with experiential and integrative methods, being aware that educational activities can never replace social commitment.

In order to educate for peace we must speak of war and even today little is said in history classes of the wars of the twentieth century. We should be capable of putting into classroom practice the following actions, which summarise the ideas presented by various authors (A. Bastida, R. Grasa, P. Cascón, among others): break the taboo of war and talk about it openly so as to educate for peace; analyse the causes of wars and specifically of the Spanish Civil War; weigh up the consequences and impact of the war and show nonviolent ways of resolving conflicts on the basis of socio-affective methodology.

Peace education and historical memory

To avoid wars one has to know about them, explain their futility and the suffering they cause, and constantly remind people that in the twentieth century, the two world wars and the Spanish Civil War between them caused 80 million direct deaths and that the total number of deaths caused by these wars may exceed 100 million.

It is necessary to overcome the manipulated view promoted by the victors of the Spanish Civil War during the dictatorship, and overcome the amnesia about a senseless war that shaped and still shapes the present day. Knowing about the civil war has helped us educate for peace. It is necessary to recover a diversity of memories about the war, but above all the memory of the vanquished. I do not share the Francoist neorevisionist view which says that the past must be forgotten and which presents the dictatorship as a calm and peaceful period. These lies about the past do not help us to understand present day conflicts, nor to resolve them peacefully.

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Historical memory has the same objective in its educational use in schools as it has in civil society; to properly deal with democratic memory so as to strengthen the values of democracy and peace, to reconcile society and to restore dignity to the innocent victims of violence. Historical knowledge teaches us that people have different social identities, in terms of time and place, and helps people to learn social and civil abilities which arise from living together in the world; these objectives are shared by peace education.

Once democratic memory has been recovered, it is necessary to put the facts on record and construct the memorial sites that may be necessary. The recovery of historical memory must not be manipulated, neither emotionally or politically, and care must always be taken to avoid revenge and victimisation. Democratic memory should serve as an example for the population to avoid situations of violence, and as a route to resolving conflicts peacefully, through dialogue.

Thus the knowledge of the past — sad, cruel, sometimes tragic — must act as a vaccine for avoiding

confrontations and wars today, so that there are no more Yugoslavias or Spains. Although it may seem paradoxical, knowledge of the violent past can and must serve as a guarantee for the construction of a peaceful and democratic future. Currently, in the context of the social crisis we are living through, school history has to promote knowledge of the wars of the twentieth century so as to educate for peace and promote understanding between different nations.

The Spanish Civil War in textbooks

Textbooks sometimes don't help us to learn to think historically, to acquire a historical consciousness and to educate for peace. Some give a lot of descriptive information about the Civil War and a wealth of illustrations. Even today, the aspects of the Spanish Civil War which the textbooks most cover are the political, military and ideological sides, thus promoting an awareness of the main figures. Rarely do they address questions of everyday life, concerning the effects of war on ordinary, nameless individuals; if they did this, they would promote the idea that history is something we make together. Some textbook publishers and authors still teach confuse the teaching of history with teaching traditional positivist history.

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In history, information is necessary in building knowledge, but it is not enough. Information is the prior step for the analysis and interpretation that bring us conceptual organisation and this is what allows us to understand what happens in society. Often we have a lot of information and do not know how to make it understandable. In the case of wars, we must discover the causes and processes that triggered them, then go on to see how they developed, and finally look at the outcome and consequences. It is necessary to order the facts chronologically and build up the sequence of causes / events /consequences so as to process the information and construct knowledge. Thus, students can learn to relate facts and situations, and to organise cognitive structures that make the information comprehensible. And they learn to place the new knowledge on the diachronic axis of the life of humanity, made up of the relationship between the past and the present, and the ethical connection between the present and the future: what we do today will affect our descendants.

Understanding these relationships fosters the acquisition of historical consciousness and stimulates historical thinking. Adolescents can see that their personal time is part of collective time, and that individual actions and individual responsibility are integrated into collective action and social responsibility.

This view of history, which helps us to understand ourselves and our lives within society, ties in with the Annales School and gives educational and ethical value to historical knowledge. This is a vision which, as well as teaching historical content, helps the citizens of tomorrow to engage with history.

To achieve these goals we must talk in the classroom about wars— and specifically about the Spanish Civil War and post-war — and also work on elements of social history. We must investigate issues related to daily life, things that bring people together, experiences that any of us might go through; not just the great epic, political or military events, events which lead us back to the great historical figures, and away from ordinary people. Obviously, we have to know about the political and military leaders who were the key figures in the most important events of the Spanish Civil War, but it might well be through the experiences of a soldier, a war child, a refugee or a housewife that we grasp the effects of the war and the post-war on ordinary people: hunger, fear, violence, the arrival of displaced people, disease and malnutrition, the bombing of the civilian population, exile, repression and so on.

Peace education using the socio-affective methodology

The socio-affective methodology is in line with the educational value of history and with the principles of peace education. It facilitates comprehension and lived experience, through sequences of instruction that include both conceptual and emotional contents and use participatory and cooperative teaching strategies which promote reflection and critical thinking.

The socio-affective approach consists of “living things at first-hand” so as to achieve a direct personal experience that makes us feel and understand what we are talking about, motivating us to investigate it and develop an empathetic attitude which helps us change our values and the way we behave.

To bring out the affective and emotional aspect of social knowledge, it is necessary to use techniques that help us visualise the elements of the conflict, such as role-plays, simulation games and dramatisations, teaching strategies that help to: grasp the emotional aspect that shows us the viewpoints and attitudes towards the conflict; establish an

emotional distance that helps us to identify the different subjective positions with less partiality; put ourselves in the place of the other (empathy) so as to understand the various positions and predisposing all of us to negotiation; analyse the conflicts in depth (the root causes), highlighting the unfulfilled needs and interests that lie behind them, so as to prevent their cyclical reappearance, that is to say, their non resolution; and finally, cooperatively, to look for a way out. There are solutions, not just one solution.

Recommendations

In Western Europe, the different educational systems ought to share basic elements of democratic memory concerning the present day and the wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; tools that would help to educate for peace. These can be specified as:

1) *Common teaching tools*

It is important to have shared educational tools concerning the memory of the most tragic episodes of contemporary European history (the two world wars, the death camps and the Holocaust, the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, the wars in the Balkans) so as to bring students closer to these historical events in their own personal experience, through memorial sites, and working on them subsequently into the classroom.

2) *Shared contemporary history*

It should be possible to have a shared contemporary European history, agreed on by historians from different countries (the ideal thing would be to share an agreed world history).

3) *Construction of new identities*

In addition, there should be consideration of the process of construction of new identities, such as that of being European, so that the EU ceases to be just a market (the euro) and starts to be a political, cultural and human reality, without sacrificing the minority identities. Taking on such a new identity need not entail the loss of cultural diversity since one can share different identities and levels of belonging.

The educational use of historical memory through memorial sites and the presence of the most important issues of contemporary history in the curriculum should strengthen peace education, which has to be directed towards building a future that is more ethically and humanly habitable for our descendants.

Educating for peace entails reliving the sacrifice of the men and women who anonymously participated in the

struggle for democracy and freedom, knowing about the tragedy of wars, explaining what unites different peoples and giving importance to the historical role of those who are traditionally marginalised.

In the current context of crisis, these historical experiences and knowledge should be shared with the school population, but they must also reach the population at large, so as to enable a future where we learn to resolve conflicts peacefully, and where peace is the overriding element of our coexistence.

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