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Chapter 11. The historical learning for a culture of democracy, coexistence and cooperation

Introduction

Nous vivons en utopie, et pourtant...

Se plonger dans l'histoire des utopies, c'est suivre le fleuve sinueux des lendemains – dont-on – le rêvait. Et dériver jusqu'à l'infini océan du Monde d'après (Testot, 2022, p. 6).

This sense of, when working in the present with our students, simultaneously thinking about the construction of a future, is crucial when dealing with Education and its contents. The most recent UNESCO report (2021) emphasises the importance of *Reimagining our futures together*, highlighting the prospective and plural vision, *for a new social contract for education*. In turn, the Council of Europe, in its *Quality History Education in the 21st Century: Principles and Guidelines* (2018), showed how that discipline can contribute to this future of peaceful and solidary coexistence, regardless of past traumas.

Without underestimating some attempts to dilute the scientific specificity of History within the scope of Social Sciences (refer to, for example, the manual for “Cycle 3” edited by Retz, in 2022, “Apprendre aux élèves à décrypter la société”, by Leo Lecardonnet, G r me Truc, and Benoit Falaize), it is important to clarify how a competent history didactics can irreplaceably contribute to a true European citizenship.

Theoretical frame

Contextualising across a broad spectrum

Schools must be protected as spaces where students encounter challenges and possibilities not available elsewhere. [...] We must ensure that schools bring together diverse groups of people to learn from each other (UNESCO, 2021, p. 101).

Documents and reports from public and private official bodies highlight the need for change: at the level of educational agents, the syllabus, the organisation

of school time, the type of sessions (otherwise called classes), the role of students and teachers, the processes of teaching and learning, means and resources, pedagogies to be implemented, educational purposes, ...

Once again, as main topics for reflection, the Council of Europe (2018, p. 9) chose eight points that should cover the teaching of History in European countries:

1. Flexible curriculum plans and interactive pedagogies that recognise cultural differences;
2. Teach and learn about the complex history of democracy;
3. Reflect on how the activities of common individuals and groups have shaped the history of societies;
4. Recognise that people from different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds are rooted in societies;
5. Valuing the multiple identities of others;
6. Provide tools to analyse historical sources and fight against manipulative propaganda;
7. Address issues that may be sensitive or controversial;
8. Balancing the cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions in the teaching and learning of history.

When thinking about a resource laboratory for teaching in Europe, choosing relevant topics, selecting materials and pedagogical-didactic processes, promoting thinking skills which allow meaningful learning, we must bear in mind these general objectives and purposes to, in each country, feel that we are working for a common good, taking advantage of the potential of the discipline of History.

It is important to remember this aspect, because other initiatives have already been started in the past and did not yet have this more general and regulatory perspective, although never standardising. We would highlight three: the elaboration of the monumental work *Europa-Notre Histoire*, under the direction of Étienne François and Thomas Serrier, in 2017; the creation of a History of Europe textbook, prepared by twelve historians and published in 1992, in France, and later translated in some countries (in 1992 in Portugal); or a more literary one, but with obvious ramifications for History – *Lettres Européennes* –, also published in 1992. None of the above objectively aimed to enter the classroom and make resources and activities available with a common objective, for students of compulsory education from different countries. Naturally, they never took into account the new approaches to pedagogy and didactics resulting from the evolution of research in the field of Historical Education. They were never able to notice issues that are visible today with regard to the exercise of citizenship, concerns with inclusion or, for example, the introduction of technological resources, currently more democratised and accessible.

Faced with these changes, some more disruptive than others, the different countries have also adapted, creating regulatory mechanisms and ambitious goals for the short, medium and long term. Using the Portuguese case as an example, from the PASEO (*Perfil dos Alunos à Saída Escolaridade Obrigatória*),

to the *Digital Education – Action Plan* (2021–2027), to the National Education Strategy for Citizenship, to the *Estratégia Nacional da Educação para a Cidadania*, ao *Referencial da Dimensão Europeia da Educação* ou ao *Regime Jurídico da Educação Inclusiva*¹, all decisions converge with the concerns highlighted by European macro-educational spheres. In fact, the OECD, when preparing its report – *Review of Inclusion Education in Portugal* (2022) –, praises the path, sometimes anticipatory (for example in the case of technologies, with decisions prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), carried out by Portugal, as well as the referential and legal framework created and implemented at the level of initial and continuous training of teachers and, in certain cases, of guardians.

The point of arrival will have to be the development of skills for a culture of democracy, as it is reminded by the Council of Europe. The image below, authored by the CE, shows the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to be taken into account for this greater objective, if the role of History is fulfilled.

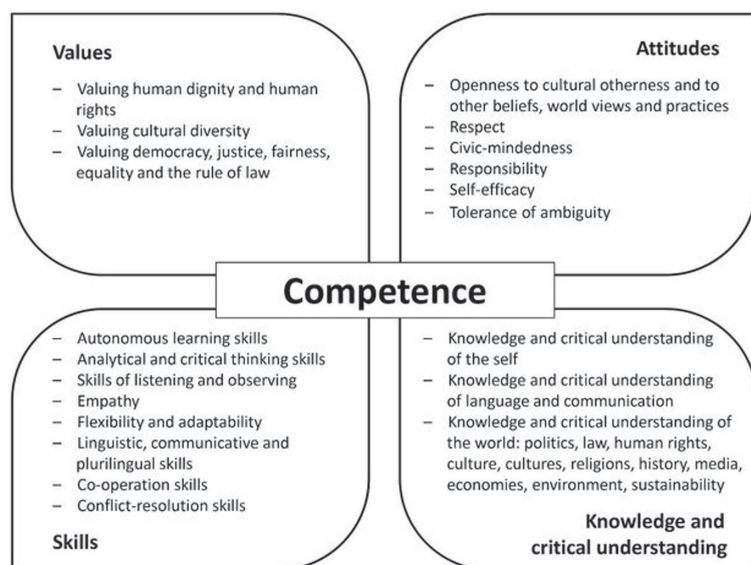


Figure 1. Competences for democratic culture

Source: Council of Europe, 2018.

1 All these, and other documents, can be consulted on the website of the Directorate-General for Education of the Portuguese Ministry of Education: <https://www.dge.mec.pt/>.

Based on this general framework, we seek to design certain types of pedagogical proposals within the scope of different topics. However, we also had to privilege another approach: the sustained perspectives arising from research in Historical Education. In the following lines, we seek to explore this dimension.

Didactic assumptions: From tacit ideas to argumentation

[...] Problem- and project-based educational approaches can be more participatory and collaborative than conventional classes. Inquiry-based and action-research-based pedagogies can engage students in the acquisition, application, and creation of knowledge. (UNESCO, 2021, p. 97).

The presuppositions for theorising the role of the discipline of History, and the type of didactics that must be implemented to fulfill it fits in what the German Jörn Rüsen referred to as dimensions of the Philosophy of History.

Its manifestations encompass the “materialist philosophy of History as a comprehensive theory about human life forms” (Rüsen, 2021, p. 13), in the sense of establishing a correlation between past events and human experience over time. In this perspective, knowledge of the past should constitute an extension of experience about what we cannot live or face, but understand, developing empathy and argumentation skills.

“The formal philosophy of history thematises the specific way of thinking, where the past is approached as history” (Rüsen, 2021, p. 14), thus associating itself with the theory of historical narrative (whose characteristics we enumerate below), as a material consequence the way in which meaning and explanatory coherence are given to the facts of the past, the present and even to the horizons of expectation, and based on the clarity and epistemological depth of its production.

Furthermore, “the functional philosophy of history guarantees a cultural orientation that has the past as a reference and where memory plays an important role” (Rüsen, 2021, pp. 14–15), assuming a critical sense of the use of memory, that is, the clarification of the foundations and principles that give it sense and meaning.

This three-dimensional Philosophy of History must be at the service of an effective historical consciousness, known as “the orientation of human life over time” (Gago, 2016, p. 159)². Therefore, with regard to the educational practice

2 References to an interview conducted by Marília Gago, in 2016, with Jörn Rüsen, whose ideas resulted from a deepening of her perspectives shaped in *Teoria da História – uma teoria da história como ciência* (2015) and *JörnRüsen e o Ensino de História* (2010).

associated with that curricular component at school, we must take into account the “philosophy of history or the epistemology of historical thinking” (Gago, 2016, p. 160), namely from the research already carried out on the subject. There are several research subjects that can be taken into account, such as historical sources and their interpretive possibilities, official narratives and those with divergent meanings, the multiperspective in relation to historical facts, amongst many others. In this way, perhaps the learning of History, in the classroom, “as an organised process of development of historical awareness” and, also as a promoter of “rational argumentation as a mode of communication” (Gago, 2016, p. 160). Figure 2 systematises, in a very clear way, these principles of historical sense.

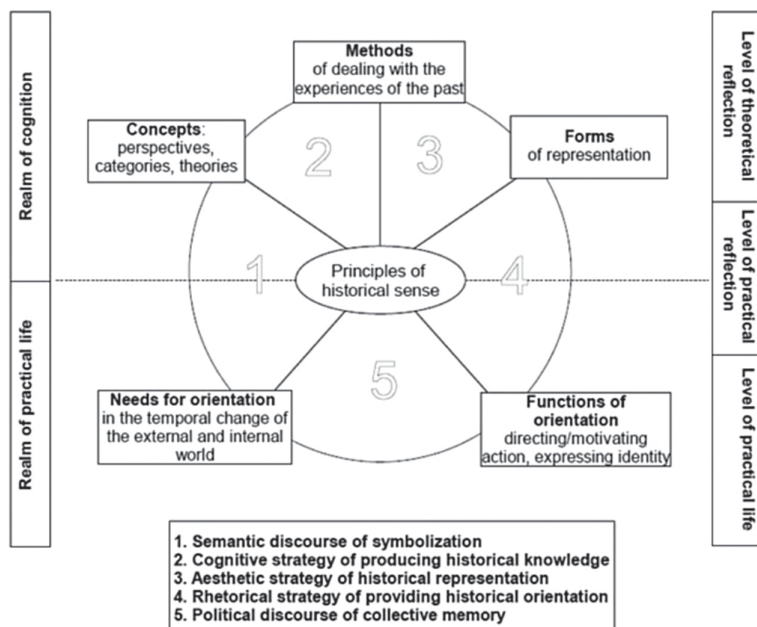


Figure 2. Matrix of historical thought, according to Jörn Rüsen.

Source: *História Hoje*, 2016.

This systematisation becomes even more relevant if we consider the transposition of such conceptual constructs to the didactic process. As Ana Monteiro warns (in: Schmidt, 2021, p. 54):

an important contribution of studies based on didactic transposition is the change to the understanding that teaching implies a process with its own characteristics, corroborating the idea that the principles of teaching cannot derive from the study of learning.

In this regard, we need to find a way that, considering the specificities of students, teachers, and contexts, incorporates ways of organising teaching and learning that are also based on conceptions arising from research in Historical Education and provide the production of narratives (communication) guidelines for an intervention in everyday life that reflects a consistent historical culture.

Answering to the question – *how could History make sense to students today?* – Rügen, in the aforementioned interview with Marília Gago, states:

to teach history it is necessary to base it on a connection between the present and its future and the past. This relationship can be conceptualised (in meta-history) by a historical anthropology. [...] This is the synthesis of the universal characteristics of human life and the idea of change and development. When teaching history in school, one has to emphasise this synthesis so that students find a common and basic similarity in the forms of human life and basic differences due to variables and changed circumstances. (Gago, 2016, p. 165).

This didactic of intertemporality, bearing in mind the concept of historical time in its plurality (short, medium or long), the correct perception of the different spaces, and their specificities, where the historical events took place, the multiple narratives that were built on them and shared, need to be transposed into the teaching and learning process in the classroom, so that young people improve (historical) thinking skills essential for the subsequent realisation of conscious and consistent actions in the daily life of spaces and times in which live.

This is also why, through their work, Rügen, Bodo von Borries, Peter Lee or Isabel Barca have underlined the

need to build projects and proposals for curricular guidelines that emphasise working with the mental operations of historical consciousness that develop the narrative, because it is only from this that knowledge becomes conscious and the student increases his/her ability to see the past as historical past and not just as a practical past or a dead past (Schmidt, 2021, p. 52).

As that first author clarifies, “metahistory provides a concept of historical identity and the didactics of history transforms it into a context for the development of historical awareness through learning” (Gago, 2016, p. 166).

In the Portuguese case, the creation of the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* of the discipline of History for the various levels of education sought to operationalise this formative sense, identifying:

the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are intended to be achieved and constitute a basic curricular document for planning, carrying out and evaluating teaching and learning, contributing to the achievement of the *Perfil dos Alunos à Saída Escolaridade Obrigatória*. By identifying the AE, it is possible to deepen topics, interdisciplinary explorations and the mobilisation of local components of the curriculum³ (2018, p. 1).

By replacing other documents that have fallen into disuse – *Programas* or *Metas Curriculares* –, those learnings summon History to its role of contributing to a more current understanding of the World, in an intertemporal perspective and based precisely on the functional philosophy of History. In turn, by privileging competences to “use” in everyday life, within a community like Europe, the borders of nationalist history are broken and the culture of democracy and cooperation visible in the main European documents is highlighted.

Furthermore, the most current document incorporates in its basic philosophy, and in its operationalisation, the concept of Humanism as a structuring element for the creation of a certain historical meaning. Moreover, along the same lines:

the demand to humanise the human species should be carried out in historical teaching and learning. The didactics of history should give itself a humanistic form. In this way, the challenge of intercultural communication in our era of globalisation could be tackled. (Gago, 2016, p. 166).

Armed with a set of concepts that today mark the panorama of research in Historical Education – historical thinking, historical awareness, intertemporal orientation, historical learning, narrative, humanism, empathy, amongst others -, we seek to incorporate and materialise them by via the activities described below, with the ultimate objective that students who experience them are able to then assume the exercise of European citizenship, denouncing a historical learning understood in this way.

We know that “each subject builds a particular conception of History from what is told, read, heard, seen or reconstructed” (cit. by Moreira, 2018, p. 41). We are aware that what is processed in the classroom is a crucial element for a historically consistent reasoning in its humanistic insertion in the present; tolerant of the most painful pasts (living with them); critical, assertively, in the face of propagandistic manipulation; claiming an active individual role in the defense of Human Rights.

3 This document can be consulted on the website of the Directorate-General for Education of the Portuguese Ministry of Education: <http://www.dge.mec.pt/aprendizagens-essenciais-0>.

Activities to apply historical thinking competencies

After this brief theoretical framework, it makes sense to move on to the description of the activities proposed for the teaching and learning of certain historical topics, seeking to make them profitable for the development of specific historical thinking skills.

Activity 1. The War from within: Weapons, soldiers and war spaces

It is important to recognise, from the outset, that the study, in a school context, of the phenomenon of war and its contours (parties involved, weapons, circumstances, ...) allows students to learn about colonisation processes, border changes over time and in different latitudes, more or less immediate causes and consequences, situations of disrespect for Human Rights.

In the words of Jean-Vincent Holeindre and Testot (2014, p. 13):

la guerre est la plus extreme des violences et sembleé chapper à toute tentative de rationalisation. Elle apparaît souvent comme une défaite de la raison, ou de moins comme une victoire des passions violentes (haine, ressentiment, volonté de domination...) sur la partie raisonnable de notreême. Cependant, la guerre n'est pas qu'instinct de mort et desolation. C'est aussi l'un des domaines d'action oùs 'exprime' ingéniosité humaine.

First of all, there are at least three ideas that it is important to keep in mind: violence with its corresponding trauma and the need to incorporate it into a coexistence without resentment (Ferro, 2009); the timelessness of phenomena that occur in different contexts and deprive it of the character of innovation or occurrence that it victimises in the present (Holeindre & Testot, 2014); the ingenious capacity of the human being that can be channeled for evil as well as for good (Galor, 2022).

In this context, and if the main objective is the development of historical thinking as enlightened, elaborate and honest reasoning, then the mobilisation of diversified didactic resources, as well as the option for varied work strategies can be a starting point to take into account.

Theoretical, encouraging the construction of (historical) knowledge based on evidence, namely to support assumed perspectives, is an idea that permeates the suggestion of the following activity.

With regard to the topic “The war from within – weapons soldiers and war spaces”, it is suggested to be held five classes of 50 minutes each, during which the assessment, by the teacher, should be formative and based on descriptive items of the actions to be carried out and/or the skills to be developed by the students.

The first class, and in the logic of raising the students’ tacit ideas and conceptions regarding “war”, starts with the writing of that word on the board, by the teacher,

asking students to reflect autonomously and silently on feelings, perceptions or other words that link to the word “war”. In addition to inventorying the different perceptions of the concept, carrying out the task in silence prevents the probable contamination of one over the other. The divergence is important for the didactic richness to be better explored.

After this initial moment, students must write down, using the *Mentimeter* application, the terms they thought, forming a virtual word cloud that is visible to the whole class. Exploring the ethical dimension adopted by each one, the teacher can, from the observed image, encourage the sharing of individual opinions on the meaning(s) given to the phenomenon of war in general.

The use of available technologies, in addition to being a resource for the didactic process, also bears in mind that:

The evolution of the human brain was the main impetus for humanity’s unique advancement, and it is not of little importance that it has helped to precipitate *technological progress* – that is, to discover ever more sophisticated ways of transforming natural materials and resources around us for our benefit. These advances have shaped future evolutionary processes, allowing humans to adapt more effectively to their changing environments and to constantly develop and use new technologies, a repetitive and intensified mechanism that has led to ever greater technological advances. (Galor, 2022, p. 29).

In this sense, every moment is important to monetise means associated with motivation and to explain, in a world dominated by technologies, the good use that can be made of them in achieving different goals (scholar or not). It also helps the development of digital literacy, in addition to promoting a critical feeling about its disorderly use.

To end the class, and already anticipating the work to be carried out during the next session, the teacher proposes to organise the class into six groups of three or four elements and distribute digital historical resources (in different formats) referring to soldiers, weapons and war contexts in Europe. The characters and historical events considered will be the following:

1. *Hoplites* | *Greco-Persian Wars*
2. *Legionaries* | *Roman expansion*
3. *Crusaders* | *Crusades*
4. *Napoleonic soldier* | *Napoleonic Wars*
5. *World War I Soldier* | *WWI*
6. *World War II Soldier* | *WWII*

In the second class, the required actions refer to a collaborative work strategy, since each group of students formed in the previous class must start an online research, not forgetting the *HistoryLab's digital library*, to collect fundamental evidence for the creation of an infographic using the *Canva* application. Focusing the investigation on various historical sources, it allows students to understand the relevance of temporal and spatial location in their argumentation, based on the evidence available in historical and/or historiographical documents. Their infographic, in the end, will include the identification of weapons, other equipment, military tactics, in a combination of text and images.

The third class should be used by the groups to continue/finish their infographics in digital format, using the aforementioned *Canva* application, improving their skills in the intentional handling of information and communication technologies. In the end, the work is handed over to the teacher, who takes responsibility, using another application, *Padlet*, to form a digital wall that, in a chronological line, clarifies which soldiers, weapons of war, other equipment were involved in the selected conflicts.

Session four aims to explain, by the students, the main facts related to the war included in the infographics created, and in this class released by the teacher after his compilation work. Each group must then select an element to present the final result (about 5 minutes of oral presentation), and to answer the doubts and/or questions raised by classmates. In a more or less explicit sense, the competence of causality is explored here, with the aim that students are able to highlight different causes and consequences inherent to the war scenarios framed and characterised.

The last class transports the phenomenon of war to the present day. Thus, in order for students to develop the competence of historical thinking inherent in understanding changes and continuities over time, the teacher presents a set of current news about ongoing wars. The large group dialogue is intended to enhance reflection on changes and permanence regarding the ways of “making war” and, also, a broader debate on the contemporary dangers underlying the use of nuclear and biological weapons in of armed conflict. At the end of the class, it will be important for students to record, in their notebook, a conceptual map of the debate.

Finally, it is important to justify some of the assumptions in this session:

1. As Rösen tells us (2021, p. 18), “the past is made effective when it is seen and learnt as History that prevails everywhere. Its vitality manifests itself in different ways: in historical circumstances that determine the lives of students [...]”.

2. History is a powerful subject to develop students' critical thinking, as long as they are provided with the (real) diversity of existing sources and perspectives, in line with the principles advocated by the Council of Europe (2018).
3. "The Education 2030 Framework for Action programme proposes a perspective of education that goes beyond its utilitarian sense, being rather an approach that seeks to integrate the multiple dimensions of human existence" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 5).
4. One cannot ignore "a model of education: centered on the student and not on the teacher; that attends to the development of skills and does not just conform to the memoristic repetition of information; that seeks the harmonious development of all dimensions of the person and not just intellectuals" (Ontoria et al., 1994, p. 28). A perspective that corroborates the idea that new knowledge is incorporated in a substantive, non-arbitrary way, in the knowledge already held by the students.

Clarifying the assessment technique and instrument, the fact of opting for its formative intention requires considering items such as: adequate temporal and spatial location; careful selection of information; choice of relevant historical sources; exploration of the multiple potentialities of digital tools; adequate historical communication; sustained and respectful debate of ideas. In relation to each one of them, the teacher will be able to verify if each student has already improved that competence, if it is still in its development phase or if, perhaps, he shows difficulties, pointing it out in a registration table.

This systematisation prioritises the abilities and limitations of the student during the process, promoting, in a formative way, the creation of complementary strategies that guarantee an effective success in the context of the competences listed as the objective of this activity.

Activitiy 2. Narratives and uncomfortable heritage in Europe

The uncomfortable and controversial historical narratives, which are part of the collective memory, remain present over time.

The process of teaching and learning History, therefore, cannot neglect these socially alive issues, whether massacres, genocides or situations of "ethnic cleansing", older or more recent.

Alberto Manguel (2022, p. 32) reminds us that it is not enough to "study History to avoid the traps of the past. The grandchildren of the men and women murdered by the tyrants of the past are now filled with enthusiasm to crown the tyrants of the future." Along the same lines, Gurnah (2022, p. 44) challenges us to think that "no society accepts the crimes it has committed in the past", hence

it is so important that education in general, and school in particular, promote a didactic of *socially alive issues*. In fact, Simonneaux (2019, p. 10) states that “la didactique des QSV étudie les processus d’enseignement-apprentissage sur des objets porteurs de controverses et des débats dans la sphere scientifique, dans la société et les medias et donc dans la classe”.

In an excellent work recently published (Schurster et al., 2022), the various authors help us to reflect on topics as pertinent as they are traumatic and provide us with important clues to deal, scientifically and didactically, with these “new topics”:

Often due to its complexity, genocide becomes an interdicted, paralysing object, due to its difficulty of representation and discursive limits. Studies that can categorically distinguish what we would call mass crimes or systematic massacres committed by States or organisations become fundamental. One of the biggest interpretive difficulties of those who focused on the great massacres before 1948 (legal definition) was to understand and know ‘nameless crime.’ There is no doubt that the awakening of this field of study was painful. He was responsible for opening the wounds and socially problematising the guilt and responsibilities for the death of millions of individuals. (p. 17–18).

We have to dare to transport these topics to the classroom context, from more or less digital didactic resources, as a formative contribution to the development of historical thinking that is also intended to be elaborated from an ethical dimension, explained in a capacity for argumentation, and evidence-based counter-arguments, attentive to sources that provide clues for multi-perspective analysis.

The activity that is explained below intends, therefore, to meet this meaning given to historical learning in the present day of the 21st century.

Thus, in relation to the topic “Narratives and uncomfortable heritage in Europe”, we propose four lessons of 50 minutes each. Once again, throughout them, the teacher’s assessment should be formative and based on descriptive items of the actions to be carried out and/or the skills to be developed by the students.

The first session aims, in addition to defining structuring concepts, to survey students’ previous ideas about genocide, massacres or socially alive issues. After an initial dialogue, in a large group, which enhances the sharing of perspectives on the historical subject in question, the class is divided into six groups of three or four elements and, to each one, a single concept is assigned, amongst the discussed ones. The main objective underlying this distribution is the construction of a definition, with about 50 words, of the assigned concept. After their writing, the groups share it with the class, with the teacher making the same

record in the *lucidspark.com* application, in order to draw a collective conceptual map. Finally, students copy it into their daily notebook.

In class two, the teacher begins by historically contextualising the existence of massacres and other similar acts of violence. He then suggests that each group of students select a specific historical period, from Classical Antiquity to contemporary times, and carry out a research alluding to the subject under analysis at that chosen time. Using diversified historical sources, and working on their ability to give historical significance to certain events and characters, students must gather information in different formats (text, image, video, ...) for the subsequent construction of a digital timeline.

In the third class, exploring historical thinking that is able to understand multiple causes and multiple consequences inherent to historical facts, students will begin to shape the (collective) timeline using the *cdn.knightlab.com* application. This construction, which includes several examples of massacres and genocides that took place in the course of history, will combine the data provided by all the working groups into a single final product.

The last class related to the topic will be an essential contribution to promoting ethically enlightened debate amongst the students in the class. Sharing knowledge acquired during the previous sessions, they will be able to orally explain the phenomenon of systematic violence against specific ethnic groups, alerting to the necessary attention, nowadays, in the face of *socially alive issues* and the relevance of an active and responsible citizenship, oriented towards a just and healthy world.

Returning to the question of evaluation, its continuity during all activity sessions implies that items such as: adequate temporal and spatial location are taken into account; careful selection of information; choice of relevant historical sources; exploration of the multiple potentialities of digital tools; adequate historical communication. In relation to each one of them, the teacher will be able to verify if each student has already improved this competence, if it is still in its development phase or if, perhaps, he has difficulties, pointing it out in a registration table.

Activitiy 3. Propaganda and culture of war before and during armed conflicts in the History of Europe

The quote below appears as a preliminary clarification so that the teacher, from the outset, transports to the teaching of the topic with the students the timelessness of the same and the approaches in the different historical epochs that should be privileged. In fact:

La propagande est fille de la démocratie. L'expérience totalitaire d'une propagande poussée à son paroxysme, enconférant à cemo une connotation pejorative, a longtemps masqué cette réalité: c'est dans la démocratie athénienne et la République romaine qu'est apparue la première forme de propagande – entant qu'effort organise pour propager une croyance ou une doctrine particulière – c'est la Révolution française qui a posé les jalons de la propagande politique modern, et sont les démocraties en guerre entre 1914 et 1918 qui ontinventé la propagande de masse, reprise ensuite par les regimes autoritaires et totalitaires. La propagande n'estdonc pas le proper des regimes autoritaires, et encore moins l'envers de la démocratie (Colon, 2019, p. 9).

This perspective allows us to expand the temporal space of the analysis, encouraging students to explore the changes and continuities visible in the various processes of propaganda throughout the different periods, therefore fulfilling a first major objective – *To analyse the changes and continuities visible in propaganda through the ages.*

In a study that will have to choose, above all, the moments that led to or embodied major conflicts, the concept of “culture of war” as “the ability to adapt to the extreme conditions in which its protagonists lived, but also to justify some behaviours that are absolutely irrational to us” (Alves et al., 2016, p. 200), induced by military propaganda, must be present in the approach within this topic.

A more didactic component also forces us to consider the students' research, the multiple perspectives on the subject, the different narratives depending on the sides in conflict, encouraging the understanding of the subjectivity of the points of view, the natural incorporation of the multiperspective and the capacity for critical analysis that makes students potential researchers.

Within this pedagogical and didactic apparatus, it will make sense to privilege primary sources (today widely available in national or private archives and in libraries) and to clarify the meaning of causes and consequences, allowing the advancement of a superficial historical thought to another more consistent and based on core competencies.

In the first session the teacher shows a video (video 1 of the Complementary resources) about propaganda and how it has been used throughout the times. After ten minutes of debate, the teacher divides the students into groups of 4–5 people and, using the computers, the students research online and in the *History Lab's digital library* information about the use of propaganda since the Ancient Age until the present time.

This type of work refers us to the methodology of “class-workshop or class-colloquium”, conceived and applied by the Portuguese researcher Isabel Barca. She explains to us that:

if the teacher is committed to participating in an education for development, he/she will have to assume himself/herself as a social researcher: learning to interpret the conceptual world of his/her students, not to immediately classify it as right/wrong, complete/incomplete, but so that his/her understanding helps him/her to positively modify the students' conceptualisation, as proposed by social constructivism. In this model, the student is effectively seen as one of the agents of his own knowledge, the diversified and intellectually challenging class activities are carried out by them and the resulting products are integrated into the assessment. (Barca, 2004, p. 132).

In the second class, the teacher presents the template created on <https://www.wix.com/> to elaborate a website with the joined information collected by the students and explains how it works. The insertion of the contents should be done by the groups, in the page indicated by the teacher and related to the epoch investigated by the group.

In the next session, the students keep doing the insertion of the contents in the website.

In the last session, each group selects a student to give an oral presentation (approximately 5–10 minutes), allowing the group to respond to doubts, questions and comments raised by students from other groups.

In addition to knowledge and its support deriving from the use of reliable sources, the capacity for argumentation is also worked on, which is fundamental for realising the density of the process and the consolidation of knowledge. Chapman reminds us (2021, p. 26) that “an argument is a series of connected instructions designed to establish a proposition”; and adds that “analysing arguments presupposes the recognition of the arguments themselves. We then need to help students recognise the arguments in the stories they read and understand how historians' argumentation works.” In a topic like this, the necessity becomes more evident, since we need to provide students with tools to avoid the traps of a society that promotes “non-thinking”, in the happy synthesis of Rui Pereira (2019).

In the last session, the teacher shows a video about propaganda nowadays (watch video 2). After watching the video, the teacher creates the necessary environment for a debate about the dangers and the limits about the use of war propaganda these days, and register in the class board the main ideas achieved by students. The students should write in their notebooks the final conceptual map as the result of their opinions and thoughts.

The ideal would be that, later, the students could construct a historical narrative on the subject, in particular the ones of Secondary Education (age groups between 15 and 18 years), for the teacher to better observe the process of construction of their thinking and the their historical consciousness.

We assume, along the lines of Gago (2018, p. 71), that “historical narrative must be understood as a system of mental operations defining the field of historical consciousness”. And each of the narratives elaborated by the students would be associated with a type of historical consciousness, highlighting the evolution of individual (historical) reasoning. Based on the characterisation proposed by the same author – traditional, exemplary, critical or ontogenetic narrative⁴ (2018, pp. 72–74) – references emerge to understand the level of development of students’ historical awareness and eventually trigger other teaching and learning processes to overcome the identified gaps.

Simultaneously, through the writing carried out individually, the more or less improved skills of historical thinking will be perceived, as well as the training course to be followed in order to bring about a really enlightened, logical and conscious reasoning.

With the activities proposed within the scope of the three aforementioned topics, we hope, due to the diversity of subjects, but above all the outlined strategies outlined, and mobilised resources, to contribute to, around the (History of) Europe, the potential of the discipline of History to be used to form young people with a structure of (critical) thinking that helps them to deal with a world where they can intervene in a sustained and intentional way.

Conclusion

History seeks to understand the human being and his actions in different times and spaces. The dialogue between different perspectives, times and spaces is a key operation for the construction of sense and meaning of the realities that are sought to understand-explain. (Gago, 2021, p. 7).

This was clearly the path that the thematic and pedagogical-didactic proposals sought to follow.

Despite this point, regardless of the suggestions and materials available, teachers are particularly fond of incorporating the school manual into the teaching and learning process. Self-indulgence, but also often the lack of alternatives, drive us to the recurrent use of such an educational artifact. Its omnipresence should, however, be considered under the critical focus of its

4 Marília Gago thus characterises the four types of narrative, based on Jörn Rüsen’s (2010) proposal. The doctoral thesis carried out by Ana Isabel Moreira (2018), with Portuguese students of the 2nd cycle of Basic Education, showed that historical narratives of a critical and ontogenetic type are mainly expected in students at higher education levels.

quality, because “all specialists agree that the textbook is the most important tool in the teaching of History” (Schmidt et al., 2011, p. 109). But, after all, what is the “ideal textbook”?

The characteristics that distinguish a good textbook are essentially four: a clear and structured format; a clear didactic structure; a productive relationship with the student; a relationship with classroom practice (Schmidt et al., 2011, p. 115).

More than this exogenous format, for a project like *HistoryLab*, it is important to consider its usefulness for historical perception, and this aspect depends on three essential characteristics: “the way in which the materials are presented; the pluridimensionality in which the historical contents are presented; of the pluriperspectivity of the historical presentation”. Naturally, all in the service of “interpretations that correspond to the norms of historical science; able to highlight the processes in a multiperspective; with narratives that clearly elect evidence and convictions” (Schmidt et al., 2011, pp. 119–122).

Not defending the prevalence of textbooks in the most diverse didactic projects associated with History, in a preventive way, it is not possible to avoid them. As such, the most important thing will be not to forget the meaning of what is intended with the discipline and its contents, depending on such historical criticism of the process advisor – the teacher.

As José Pacheco and Ila Maia remind us – in line with the book by Neil Selwyn, *Should robots replace teachers?* (2019):

the nature of education is intrinsically human and only teachers, in the pedagogical context, are able to maintain a cognitive and social relationship with students. Only teachers have the ability to rethink a pedagogical situation and understand all of its variables, in addition to being the only ones who demonstrate the ability to improvise in an educational context marked by uncertainties. (2021, p. 87).

Only initial and continuous training, and above all professional reflexivity, can transform the most diverse resources into a means of operationalisation in the classroom, into a congruent historical thought, capable of accompanying citizens who are historically aware of the past and, therefore, more understanding in the face of to the future to reimagine, in the happy concept of the Unesco’s report.

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