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International Society for History Didactics / Société Internationale pour la didactique de l'histoire

Panel: *The present as challenge to the teaching of history*

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Chair: Kaat Wils

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General

This session deals with the complex relationship between past and present in the context of history education. The tension will be explored between the idea that the essence of historical thinking is to learn to detach oneself from the present and to be open to the otherness of the past (and, hence, to consider presentism as a trap to be avoided), and, on the other hand, pertinent societal expectations towards history education as an introduction into contemporary society. Both positions will, secondly, be contrasted with a third approach which stresses the importance for students to learn to understand the contemporary character of any (public or private, past or present) representation of the past, and which incites at explicitly integrating the complex relationship between the past and the present in the history curriculum.

Arja Virta (University of Turku, Finland)

About the past, at present, for the future?

Teacher students' interpretations about the various functions of history as a school subject

The paper draws on essays written by 23 prospective history teachers, in which they reflected on the functions of history as a school subject and elaborated their personal philosophies for teaching history. They also described, how their own relation to history had developed, during school and university studies. The essays were analyzed qualitatively, seeking different categories of beliefs about the role of history. Findings: history could be understood as direct information about the past, it could be given the role as related to citizenship education, or democratic education, but very often the student teachers underlined the training of historical thinking. They did not see these functions to exclude each other. The latter alternative included various approaches: historical empathy, critical analysis, and seeing the continuum and discontinuity between past and present. The interpretations were also classified according to Klafki's theory into classical, objectivistic, formal and categorical forms.

Stephan Klein (Erasmus University and University of Leiden)

Heritage education and history teaching: a present challenge

The word "heritage" has a connotation of presentism, commercialism and propaganda for group identities, whereas "disciplinary history" would be focused on analysis, contextualization and a sense of historical truth. The Dutch research-project *Heritage Education, Plurality of Narratives and Shared Historical Knowledge* investigates whether in the practice of teaching a more nuanced or dynamic approach is possible, one that builds on the strength of both sides of this supposed dichotomy. How would dynamic approaches look like in the context of multicultural classrooms? In this paper we report about the preliminary findings of this project from a teacher perspective. In research literature teachers are seen as 'curriculum makers' par excellence, so it makes sense to investigate which concepts they use and how they evaluate current heritage practices on the themes we focus on in the project: Christianization, Black Slave Trade and World War II.

Liliana Maggioni (*University of Maryland, College Park, USA*)

Between Facts and Opinions: An Exploration of Adolescents' Ideas about the Nature of Historical Knowledge

In studying the past, students cannot but start from themselves and their present. This study, building upon educational psychological literature on epistemic beliefs and historical thinking and using qualitative methodologies, explores conceptions of historical knowledge that influence student understanding of the past. Twelve high-school students participated in two structured interviews during which they were asked to explain their degree of agreement or disagreement with a set of 22 statements exemplifying different epistemic positions theoretically deduced from the literature. They also read two sets of six texts regarding two specific historical issues and completed two parallel constructed response tasks while thinking aloud. Although students demonstrated interest in discussing epistemic issues, analysis of the findings identified several ideas that may hinder student historical understanding, such as equating the historian's role to that of a chronicler and blurring the distinction between opinions and arguments based on evidence.

Arie Wilschut (*Hogeschool van Amsterdam/Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences*)

A Forgotten Key Concept? Time in teaching and learning history

Time is the only concept that distinguishes history from (other) social and cultural sciences. Yet, there are not many studies in teaching and learning history that take time as their point of departure or pivotal concept. Historical thinking and reasoning is rarely defined as thinking in terms of historical time, but rather as a version of social research. This paper explores historical reasoning from the point of view of thinking in terms of historical time. Psychological and anthropological studies indicate that thinking in terms of historical time might be highly artificial and unnatural, which implies that it could present a considerable learning problem for students - a learning problem which is usually ignored. Options for empirical research are explored around six central categories of thinking in historical time: the calendar, periodization, anachronism, contingency, generations and traces/documents.

Andrea Schampaert (*Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium*)

Detach or Attach? The tension between past and present in contemporary history education in Belgium

Contemporary society holds many expectations towards history education: it has to raise pupils to become tolerant, critical thinking citizens who can deal with the diversity of the multicultural society in a democratic way. These expectations are translated by the Belgian government into guidelines for the education of history. But this demand for social usefulness of history education and the explicit 'presentcenteredness' could easily obstruct the realization of other important goals of the teaching of history, mainly the ability to think historically. To achieve historical thinking, pupils need to be able to detach themselves from the present. They need to learn to understand the 'otherness' and 'strangeness' of the past. This demand for detachment can conflict with the social demand of attachment. History teachers do not always seem to be aware of this tension. This paper will focus on different forms of present- and pastcenteredness, and on their relationship with epistemological beliefs and teaching strategies of (future) history teachers. Firstly, I will elaborate on the research tools that have been developed to explore these relationships - namely a questionnaire and a set of performance tasks. Secondly, I will discuss the results of the research. And finally, I will elaborate on the usefulness and merits of this research for the teaching of history and more specifically for history teachers in secondary schools.