#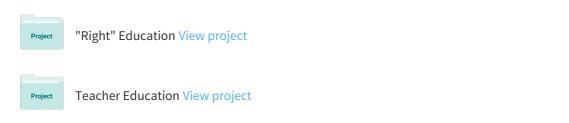 Psaltis, C., McCully, A., Agbaria, A., Makriyianni, C., Pingel, F., Karahasan, H., Carretero, M., Oguz, M., Choplarou, R., Philippou...

12 authors, including:

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project   "Right" Education View project

Project   Teacher Education View project

Recommendations for the History Teaching of Intergroup Conflicts

How do we teach the history of intergroup conflicts?

The way recent and old intergroup conflicts are presented around the world[1] in curricula, textbooks, civil society and social representations can be characterised by four main approaches. In the first approach, a moratorium is imposed and any reference to the conflictual past is avoided; the second is a selective approach where nation-states or groups keep silent about aspects that involve wrongdoing of one's own group, here called "ingroup", and offer either a positive presentation of the "ingroup" or a preservation of the memory of the conflict by reiterating master narratives of one-sided victimisation of the "ingroup". Both of these approaches are highly problematic as they become an obstacle to conflict transformation by peaceful means and the cultivation of historical thinking[2]. A third approach attempts to overcome conflict by a simplistic understanding of a single peaceful narrative of co-existence, which often follows outdated and unhistorical conceptions of essentialist identities as a tool for nation- building. Finally, there is the interdisciplinary approach of *transformative history teaching,* which attempts a critical understanding of the conflictual past through the cultivation of historical thinking, empathy, an overcoming of ethnocentric narratives and the promotion of multiperspectivity. The transformative history teaching approach is the basis on which we situate the present recommendations.

Given the well-established finding that educators often find it difficult to deal with the conflictual past as it is considered a sensitive or controversial topic[3], our aim with the present recommendations is to contribute to the enhancement of the capacity of educators to successfully overcome this obstacle.

More particularly, we propose a powerful set of suggestions for teaching practices that follow inquiry-based constructivist approaches in history education. These approaches primarily aim at developing historical literacy [4],

enriched by the findings of research on history teaching in post-conflict contexts[5] and recent social psychological findings in the field of the study of intergroup conflict[6]. We understand history teaching as the parallel development of a) substantive knowledge (i.e. What has happened in the past, how, and why?), b) reflexive and disciplinary understanding (i.e. how do we know about the past), and c) mastery of a 'toolbox' of social psychological theories of intergroup conflict and how they relate to representations of the past. This toolbox stimulates reflection on causal links between past and present in the historical consciousness of historical subjects, including the students themselves. It also allows for a better understanding of historical culture[7], which results from the interactions between academic history, school history, and popular history.

Teaching in history should provide students with opportunities to engage in explorations of the past and its different versions in ways that will allow them to develop an understanding of both the content and the epistemology of the discipline. Constructivist inquiry-based approaches of history teaching gravitate around the development of students' understandings, abilities, and dispositions in relation to the following areas: a) how we think about the past, b) interpretations of specific events and issues of the past, c) historical inquiry, and d) organization and communication of the results of historical enquiry.[8]

The present history teaching recommendations aim at showcasing the way social psychological theories and empirical findings can contribute to the development of all four of these abilities and dispositions. These recommendations are mostly based on work initiated in the context of the COST Action IS1205[9]. The aim of this Action was to advance knowledge of the role played by social representations of history in processes of ethnic, national, and European identities construction

and intergroup conflicts. The main areas of interest of the Action were 1) the psychological antecedents of lay representations of history; 2) their content and structure; 3) their transmission through history textbooks and other media; and 4) their social psychological effects in shaping intergroup attitudes.

The present recommendations are the outcome of the work of an interdisciplinary working group that was tasked to produce history teaching guidelines. The group comprised academic historians, social psychologists, history teachers, anthropologists and curriculum experts from various European countries and experts in history teaching.

"TEACHING IN HISTORY SHOULD PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE IN EXPLORATIONS OF THE PAST AND ITS DIFFERENT VERSIONS IN WAYS THAT WILL ALLOW THEM TO DEVELOP AN UNDER-STANDING OF BOTH THE CONTENT AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE DISCIPLINE."

Cost

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is Europe's longest-running intergovernmental framework for cooperation in science and technology funding cooperative scientific projects called "COST Actions". With a successful history of implementing scientific networking projects for over 40 years, COST offers scientists the opportunity to embark upon bottom-up, multidisciplinary and collaborative networks across all science and technology domains.

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Social PSYCHOLOGY and the study of intergroup relations

Research in social psychology covers a wide range of areas, like self -regulation, pro- and anti- social behaviour, attitudes, social influence and persuasion, the self, interpersonal relationships, language and communication, attribution, group processes and intergroup relations and social representations. The study of Intergroup relations is currently one of the most rapidly expanding areas in social psychology and has made great contributions during the 20th and 21st centuries in the way we understand the phenomena of peace and conflict.

Social Psychological findings and
their relevance to history teaching

Social psychology and particularly the researchers of COST IS 1205 have been doing research on many themes directly or indirectly related to representations of the past and issues arising during history teaching.

1. Social and National Identity
2. Ingroup Glorification
3. Threats
4. Trust
5. Prejudice
6. Stereotypes
7. Collective Memory
8. Intergroup Contact
9. Collective Guilt/Shame/Regret
10. Apologies
11. Group Emotions
12. Collective action
13. Moral disengagement
14. Reconciliation
15. Social Representations of the past

Below are some of the social psychological findings structured under key concepts suggested by a disciplinary approach to history education. These social psychological findings suggest various ways in which historical thinking is usually damaged in post-conflict settings

Procedural concepts related to how we think about the past

Procedural concepts refer to: a) time, change and continuity, b) causes and consequences, and c) historical empathy.

"Time, change and continuity" describes a process whereby students construct interpretations of changes and continuities between and within historical periods. They construct interpretations of

connections between events and phenomena that take place within a specific period or in different ones. In contexts in which master narratives of conflict dominate history teaching, it is expected that the understanding of time, change and continuity will be negatively influenced through the use of simplistic circular, rise-and-fall or linear progression views of history.

Such representations of the past also create a very problematic interpretation of the relationship between past and present[11], which often takes three forms: (a) Collapsing past and present; (b) The past is idealized in a way that the present is viewed as a decadent version of the past; and (c) Relating the past to a teleological end.

Causes and consequences

Students construct interpretations of the complex relations that exist between events, phenomena, and changes and continuities in history and their causes. Adherence[12] to master narratives of conflict lead to the obstruction of the understanding of causality through the use of romantic or heroic narrations of great men, the use of simplistic historical analogies and deterministic schemes that fail to capture contingence, randomness and multi-causality[13]. An attribution style of causality which is characterised by its ingroup- serving bias and its pernicious effects is what has been described as the *ultimate attribution*

error[14]. For example, groups often tend to explain their negative past actions by referring to external constraints, whereas they invoke their intrinsic qualities when explaining their past positive achievement. The reverse is true when judging past actions of other groups.

A very problematic form of causal thinking in this context is conspiracy theories, which can be considered as a form of "lay history[15]" to the extent that they involve ascribing causality (and a very specific form of it: the intention of a malevolent group of people) to a series of past events that are often fortuitous and contingent. Conspiracy theories can be caused by the experience or salience of group victimization, especially for students who strongly identify with their group. Additionally, academic historians' depictions of war events are also sometimes influenced by such conspiracy mentalities.

Historical empathy

Making sense of behaviours, practices, and institutions of the past requires taking into consideration the ideas and beliefs of the historical agents, and the context in which they lived.

Perspective- taking becomes very difficult in post-conflict settings when this empathy has to do with the experience of "outgroupers". From the perspective of conflict transformation, it is important to be able to experience feelings of empathy for "outgroup" suffering and regret not only for harm done by the "outgroup" to the "ingroup", but also for past wrong-doings of the "ingroup" towards the "outgroup". This historical thinking skill is obstructed by moral disen-gagement from past wrongdoings of the "ingroup"[16] through either moral justification of the act, denial, displacement, diffusion of responsibility, disregarding, minimizing the negative consequences of the violent acts, and attribution of blame to the victim or circum-stances. This specific form of historical empathy is also harmed by the feeling of inter-group competitive victimhood[6], which describes the efforts of members of groups involved in violent conflicts to establish that their group has suffered more than their adversarial

group. This mindset not only obstructs historical empathy, but also reconciliation efforts and the support for peace processes.

Interpretations of the past

Sources and historical accounts

Students in history classes are expected to compare different representations and interpretations of the same event, phenomenon, historical figure, etc. They also have to make distinctions between events and interpretations in sources, and provide explanations for different interpretations of the phenomenon.

Students, as lay historians, are particularly vulnerable to framing their interpretations relating to the history of conflict from a position in the representational field[18] that largely adheres to collective memory, popular culture, and official narratives of conflict. This is due to one-sided contents included in curricula and textbooks and to influences from parents and peers.

Master narratives usually have six common features[19]: (a) exclusion-inclusion as a logical operation contributing to the establishment of the historical subject; (b) identification processes that function as both cognitive and affective anchors; (c) frequent presence of mythical and heroic characters and motives, (d) search for freedom or territory as a main and common narrative theme, (e) inclusion of a moral orientation and (f) a romantic and essentialist concept of both the national or cultural group and the nationals. Any primary or secondary source that directly or indirectly relates to national identity, territorial claims, or the inclusion or exclusion criteria of citizenship claims will thus be judged against this master narrative. Any content that challenges the master narrative is bound to lead to resistance[20] and emotional reactions that could block their fair assessment. The narratives of conflict also support simplistic accounts premised on a temporal sense of continuity, especially when students feel collectively threatened by the "outgroup"[21]. This sense of continuity is closely related to self-identification processes. Groups generally tend to have an understanding of their

ethnic and national identities as entities that possess a past, a present and a future[22]. However, this sense of continuity supports accounts that predict a heightened sense of threat, distrust and prejudice towards various "outgroups"[23]. It is also closely related to autochthony beliefs of the kind "We were here first"[24] and which, from a historical-thinking perspective, is highly problematic because it projects an unhistorical, homogeneous, essentialist and unchanging collectivity that is claiming an empty space (which is rarely the case) by choosing an arbitrary point in history as its beginning[25].

Historical significance

Students are expected to assess the significance of historical events, people, causes and consequences, changes and continuities, etc. They are required to provide explanations of different judgments of historical significance.

When we study the history of intergroup conflict, what usually happens is that significance is distorted in favour of events and characters relating to what is perceived as the "ingroup".[26] Moreover, there is a general tendency for the lay historian to seek to explain the beginnings of historical events and conflicts rather than the end of these events with peace agreements. In this way, more emphasis is placed on negative aspects of intergroup conflict than on positive aspects of transformation and resolution.

Representations of the past are in fact replete with both ethnocentric and, in the case of European countries, Eurocentric views of the past. Representations of old conflicts like WW1 and WW2 often share many of the elements of what was described earlier as master narratives, therefore ignoring dark pages of the colonial past of many European countries.

Historical inquiry

Evidence

Students are expected, in history classes, to identify, combine, evaluate and interpret sources to answer historical questions. They must also suggest, design and apply their own historical investigations.

In post-conflict and divided societies, proper historical enquiry is often obstructed by the inaccessibility of crucial sources of information or archives due to linguistic, physical, legal or mental barriers . This situation reinforces the mono-perspectival master narratives in a single community and hinders the emergence of counter-narratives or alternative representations of the past. Alternative representations would otherwise be made possible through intergroup contact between "ingroup" and "outgroup" members, or through their perspectives in textbooks and curricula.

In such a context, the epistemological understanding of history also suffers from a naïve realist standpoint where fact and interpretation are collapsed into a single "truth". Such naïve epistemologies are particularly vivid in situations of intractable conflicts not only among students, but also often among teachers themselves[27]. Directly challenging such naïve realist views not only facilitates the cultivation of historical thinking, but it also allows for questioning master narratives, with their pernicious effects in terms of prejudice and distrust.

Given that students' historical consciousness is influenced by popular history, it is also important to understand that other media, beyond textbooks and curricula, play a fundamental role in the production and transformation of representations, as well as in the presentation of competing representations of the past. To this effect, press coverage of selected historical events (e.g. WW1 and colonial past), novels, docufictions, and movies need to be studied and reflected upon through content and narrative analyses[28].

Organization and communication

People communicate their historical knowledge and the results of their investigations in a variety of ways, taking into consideration both the topic and the audience they are addressing. They choose and use historical and chronological terms and conventions. And they provide arguments grounded on historical evidence to support their own interpretations of the past.

In the case of historical enquiry concerning past conflicts, both the organization and communication of historical knowledge suffer from censorship by school authorities, families, peers or politicians who engage in a process of labelling certain contents as "sensitive". In this way, emotionally loaded language from the field of political discourse is transferred down to the level of classroom practices[29] that make the communication of the findings of historical enquiry problematic. Some adventurous teachers[30] or students sometimes take the risk of engaging with sensitive issues, but more often they submit to self-censoring, for fear of marginalisation by the "ingroup".

In the specific cases where students from the conflicting groups are taught in the same classroom[31], there is often an interesting interplay of asymmetries whereby marginalised voices, counter narratives, and alternative representations are obstructed from entering classroom discussion. But the teacher can facilitate their expression, either through the use of supplementary teaching material or textbooks that support multiperspectivity[32], or through an instructional design that diminishes the impact of asymmetries of status on communication in the classroom. As the literature on intergroup contacts[33] and their effect on prejudice reduction suggests, teaching about the "outgroup" and positive interactions between "ingroup" and "outgroup" members can both improve historical knowledge and lead to prejudice reduction and the building of trust.

The recommendations

Challenge entrenched and unsubstantiated positions, "myth-bust" and expose the abuse of history

Children and young people come to classrooms influenced by the history absorbed from the family and the streets. Their historical images and representations of the past are usually enwrapped in contemporary attitudes and politics. Students may express misunderstandings, make unsubstantiated assertions about historical events, or leave out aspects of the past that have been deemed inconvenient within their community. It is the role of the history teacher to challenge assumptions and myths by resorting to historical evidence and rational arguments and to help students recognise when history is being misused to denigrate the other.

Deconstruct master narratives

The common features of master narratives should be explicitly discussed in the classroom through a comparative approach to various other post-conflict settings so that students come to the position of reflecting on master narratives in their own context. The concepts of "continuity", "autochthony beliefs", "nostalgia", "realistic threat", "symbolic threat", "nation-building", "prejudice", "distrust", "intergroup contact" should be discussed both separately and together in the way they form a coherent whole in organizing intergroup conflicts and forming representations of the past.

Recognise complexity, initiate informed individual interpretations, and foster debate

Frequently, in the interests of accessibility, the teaching of history is simplified to a single narrative or to presenting perspectives of past divisions, which leads to stereotypical views of protagonists and group identities. In divided societies, there is a necessity to demonstrate that historical knowledge is provisional and discursive. Teachers have a responsibility to introduce students to

the full spectrum of past actions, including those of individuals who acted differently from the majority within their communities (for example, "ingroup" members who can act as moral exemplars although having rescued the lives of "outgroup" members).

Raise students' awareness of how their own backgrounds and allegiances might influence the way they interpret the past

In deeply divided societies and post-conflict settings, emotions can influence how young people (and teachers) encounter sensitive aspects of the past. Thus it is important that students be given opportunities to explore their own backgrounds and identities and how they might shape their historical understanding. This is a condition for being able to take a critical stance towards a sensitive history. In order to achieve this goal, teachers themselves should go through a similar self-distancing process

Involve students in a constant dialogue between the events of the past and the present

Arguably, the past only becomes contentious when it is linked to the present. Teachers sometimes wish to avoid controversy in the classroom by keeping the investigation firmly contained in the past. However, relevance is vital to giving meaning to history teaching. Teaching should be designed so that students are encouraged to make connections between the past and contemporary attitudes and situations in the way that it promotes: a) differentiating the past

from the present, b) de-idealize actions of the past, c) presenting action of the present as contingent but not predetermined result of the past. They should also understand how the past is used and abused for contemporary purposes.

Engage students in an explicit exploration of the relationship between national identity(ies) and history

National identities are constructed partly by drawing on historical events, real or imagined. Students should be given opportunity to reflect on the social construction of their own, and their community's sense of identity, to understand how history has contributed to changes that led to the evolution of identity over time – and that identity is neither fixed nor immutable. Invariable, fixed, closed and exclusive concepts of identities should be deconstructed. Importantly, students should be taught how to distinguish, on the one hand, versions of the past that

"CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COME TO CLASSROOMS INFLUENCED BY THE HISTORY ABSORBED IN THE FAMILY AND THE STREETS. THEIR HISTORICAL IMAGES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PAST ARE USUALLY ENWRAPPED IN CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES AND POLITICS.".

merely satisfy identity needs and distort facts and interpretations to this aim and, on the other hand, versions that bind their interpretation back to facts and methodologically controlled, rational argumentation.

Help students understand the recent, violent past and critically examining personal experiences of those events

Avoidance of discussion of the recent violent past is a familiar characteristic of social interactions in societies emerging from conflict. Students are often not encouraged to enquire, yet they are often both curious and confused as to what has occurred and why. Amongst adults, there is a fear that such discussion will open up division. Yet, if it is the duty of educators to break the cycle of violence and move society forward, then young people must understand the nature of conflict and its consequences. Dealing with the legacy of conflict can be emotionally charged and uncomfortable, but it can also lead to rich learning. In a supportive environment, students should hear the genuinely told personal stories of those whose lives were affected by violence in one way or another, but also apply historical critique to what they hear. Conflict is rarely one dimensional, and there are often cases of intra-ethnic conflicts (that could be influenced by factors such as class and gender, among others). But they are often suppressed in favour of a narrative that favours ingroup homogenisation.

Engage students in a critical discussion of media reporting on topical political or military events

Conspiracy theories, as they refer to past events and conflicts, need to be explicitly discussed and reflected upon in the classroom, especially as they appear on the Internet. Media reporting, even by supposedly "independent" media, is very often tainted by the political, economic and ideological interests of media owners, newsroom culture and journalists, even unintentionally.

Students should be encouraged to compare mainstream media reporting with alternative media reporting by engaged individuals on the Internet, e.g. blogs. This should help them to learn to take a critical position vis-à-vis broadcast news as well as other sources, and to weigh the plausible veracity of news contents.

Place proper emphasis not only on the content of what is being taught but also on the processes through which historical knowledge is organized and communicated

Group work that engages "ingroup" and "outgroup" members in active dialogue should be encouraged as a privileged way to promote multiperspectivity and break the silence on "sensitive" issues. It is nevertheless important that such contexts of intergroup contact be well planned ahead, preferably by making use of the recent empirical findings of the social psychological literature on direct and indirect forms of intergroup contact so that the ground for critical enquiry is made possible without extreme emotional reactions.

Situate the place of teaching the history of intergroup conflict in a connected curriculum

History teaching builds the foundation for contemporary debate. In this sense, there should also be space elsewhere in the curriculum for engaging with the history of intergroup conflicts in a way that democratic exchange is developed and opportunities are given for ideas to be acted upon, be this through citizenship education or elsewhere in the curriculum like geography, social sciences, literature and related fields.

Footnotes

[1] Bentrovato, Korostelina & Schulze, 2016; Cole, 2007; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013; Paulson, 2015; Psaltis, Carretero & Cahajic-Clancy, Pingel, 2011.

[2] Carretero, 2011; Van Alphen & Carretero, 2015.

[3] Kello, 2012; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012.

[4] Lee, 2004; 2007; 2011.

[5] McCully, 2012; McCully & Barton, 2010; Goldberg, 2012, 2017; Chapman, Perikleous, Yakinthou & Celal,2011; Makriyianni & Psaltis, 2007; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012.

[6] Psaltis, Carretero & Cahajic-Clancy, 2017.

[7] Carretero, Berger & Grever, 2017.

[8] Chapman, Perikleous, Yakinthou, & Celal, 2011; Lee, 2005; Nichol, n.d.; Seixas, 1996.

[9] http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/IS1205

[10] The working group was led by Charis Psaltis, the rest of the team members are cited in alphabetical order.

[11] Van Alpen & Carretero, 2015.

[12] Licata & Mercy, 2015.

[13] Carretero, 2017.

[14] Pettigrew, 1979.

[15] Klein, 20139.

[16] Bandura, 1999; Bilali, 2013.

[17] Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi & Nadler, 2012.

[18] Liu & Hilton, 2005; Liu & Laszlo, 2007; Psaltis, 2012; 2016.

[19] Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Carretero, Lopez, Gonzalez, & Rodriguez-Moneo, 2012.

[20] Duveen, 2001.

[21] Smeekes, McKeown & Psaltis, 2017.

[22] Sani, Bowe, & Herrera, 2008.

[23] Psaltis et al.; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2015.

[24] Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013.

[25] Papadakis, 2008.

[26] Páez, Bobowic & Liu, 2016.

[27] Nasie et al., 2014; Psaltis, Lytras & Costache, 2011.

[28] Cabecinhas & Abadia, 2013; László, 2013.

[29] Kello, 2012; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012.

[30] Kitson, 2007.

[31] Goldberg, in press.

[32] Stradling,2003; Psaltis, 2015a,2015b.

[33] Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Vezzali et al., 2014.

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