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## COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND MEDIA

### The Observatory on History Teaching in Europe

Rapporteur: Mr Bertrand BOUYX, France, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

#### Expert report

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#### The challenges for history education in a wider context of democratic citizenship

*“Teaching and learning history today is a difficult but important task. Ignorance leaves people vulnerable to manipulation, while the critical understanding of history helps learners keep an open mind, form their own opinions and exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Teachers and learners need to understand how others see the world and respect the cultural diversity that marks contemporary societies, and history education has a particular contribution to make in this desideratum.”<sup>2</sup>*

#### 1. Developing flexible curricula for history education.

##### 1.1. Curriculum structuring concepts

1. The curriculum is the sum of all that is taught, and learnt, whether intentionally or not in an educational setting. It incorporates the *formal curriculum*, which varies from rigid to flexible guidance and typically includes subject content, time allotted, learning outcomes, teaching options, and assessment. Teachers interpret the official curriculum to adapt and organise their own lessons, therefore there are differences between the formal curriculum and the learned or *experienced curriculum*. The formal curriculum, at its different levels of implementation, is *not neutral*, and constitutes a preponderant form of maintaining the existing power distribution in society. Implementing curriculum decisions affects the context where the learning takes place, i.e., the classroom, conveying values and promoting behaviours via the authority of the teacher, the selected learning resources, the rules governing the different relationships, etc.

2. The *hidden curriculum* includes all the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, behaviours and perspectives that learners learn in school and influences learners above and beyond the official curriculum and the learning activities. The *null curriculum* refers to what is *not taught* in the classroom, whether deliberately or not, as it is impossible to teach everything in schools. The null curriculum is more evident than the hidden curriculum, and is the underlying basis, for example, of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recently adopting a Recommendation<sup>3</sup> that for the first time ever calls on its 47 member States to include the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials.

3. A curriculum necessarily implies a selection, but this selection should be relevant to learners' educational and social experiences. What is not taught sends learners two subtle messages, one that states what is not important, and another that reveals what is to be valued.

<sup>1</sup> All opinions expressed in this text are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council of Europe.

<sup>2</sup> Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy, Council of Europe.

<sup>3</sup> The Recommendation calls for countering persistent anti-Gypsyism by offering a balanced and contextualised teaching of Roma and/or Travellers' history, reflecting both their national presence and historical context and their common history as a people present in Europe for centuries.

[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee48c](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee48c).

## 1.2. The specificity of disciplinary history

4. There is no European consensus about how history curricula should be structured and there is a number of curriculum frameworks in practice. Regardless of the criteria the curriculum is based on it is generally overloaded. The situation is similar concerning the number of hours allotted to history education, the pedagogical approaches, the discrete- or the over- use of school textbooks and the degree of autonomy or trust given to the teacher. The overloaded curricula prevent deeper exploration of certain topics and in particular hinder the full development of analytical and critical thinking skills, multiperspectivity, etc.

5. That said, decisions on what should be included or excluded in the history curriculum derive from the power distribution in society, a complex, dynamic and heterogeneous structure.<sup>4</sup> Examining *what* and *whose* history learners have opportunities to learn about in schools corroborates what was selected and included in the curriculum which varies according to what was defined as *historically significant*. Typically, those events considered foundational of a nation or that resulted in great change over long periods of time for large numbers of people. The selection of historically significant events has been changing from the one sided account of political, military and economic achievements of a nation, that fed the *grand historical narratives*, to the widening of the actions of people in the past, individually or collectively, that made a difference to the world, e.g., the role of particular groups in relation to the abolition of slavery, the emancipation of women or the extension of franchise - these are the general traits with variations and resistances, from educationalists, parents, teachers, political actors, etc., which echoed in the media and more acutely in social media.

6. History as a discipline does not compare with mathematics, science or languages, as it lacks a clear developmental learning pattern. However, there are models of what progression in history learning looks like and familiarisation with and discussion of different models of progression should be part of the professional development of history teachers.

7. Today, the learning of history is considered a complex enterprise, more difficult than previously thought. It involves the acquisition and use of a set of domain specific cognitive strategies, by which the past is learned and understood, a process termed as *historical thinking*, grounded on the notion that history is for the most part an *interpretative discipline*. Still, it is generally accepted that learners study history in order to learn about and understand the world they live in and the forces, movements, and events that have shaped it. However, history teaching in schools does not always help learners understand the processes of change in time and *in relation to themselves*.<sup>5</sup>

8. Today, and as a result of the work developed by history teachers' associations, namely by EuroClio, and with the rapid digital dissemination of information, history education in many Teacher Training Institutions, and in schools across Europe has relied on the Historical Thinking Project, as a viable rationale. The influence of this project in Europe has been extensive and has allowed teachers to have a common conceptual ground. There is still a lot of work to be done, especially with regard to teachers' professional development (since the current generation of history teachers is ageing), the revision of overloaded curricula and evaluation methods in order to achieve a coherent whole, to benefit learners and teachers.

9. The **Historical Thinking Project**<sup>6</sup> was designed to foster a new approach to history education — with the potential to shift how teachers teach and how learners learn, in line with recent international research on history learning. It revolves around the proposition that historical thinking — like scientific thinking in science instruction and mathematical thinking in maths instruction — is central to history instruction and that learners should become more competent as historical thinkers as they progress through their schooling.

10. The project developed a framework of **six historical thinking concepts** to provide a way of communicating complex ideas to a broad and varied audience of potential users.

- a. Establish historical significance
- b. Use primary source evidence
- c. Identify continuity and change
- d. Analyse cause and consequence
- e. Take historical perspectives, and
- f. Understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations

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<sup>4</sup> George Orwell in his book *1984* stated that *the control of the present and the future depended to a great extent on the control over the past*.

<sup>5</sup> ARKELL Tom (1988) History's role in the school curriculum, *Journal of Education Policy*, 3:1, 23-38, DOI: [10.1080/0268093880030103](https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093880030103) (Accessed 20.11.2020).

<sup>6</sup> Originating in Canada and directed by Professor Peter Seixas <http://historicalthinking.ca/>.

11. Taken together, these concepts tie “historical thinking” to competences in “historical literacy.” In this case, “historical literacy” means gaining a deep understanding of historical events and processes through active engagement with historical texts.

12. Historically literate citizens can assess the legitimacy of claims that there was no Holocaust, that slavery wasn't so bad for African Americans (...). They have thoughtful ways to tackle these debates. They can interrogate historical sources. They know that a historical film can look “realistic” without being accurate. For history to be meaningful there is an ethical judgment involved. We should expect to learn something from the past that helps us to face the ethical issues of today.

13. Learning to think using these concepts is no small task. Because the past is difficult to penetrate from the *locus* of the present, evidence is often sparse, and any attempt to construct a history of events operates on a necessary connection between a past reality and present interpretations of that reality. This connection is, however, denied because there is no method for bringing that past reality back to life to establish the full accuracy of a contemporary interpretation. Learning to use the strategies of thinking historically that enable an understanding of the past depend on the cultivation of a number of such counter-intuitive cognitive processes.<sup>7</sup> Yet, history education, for this very reason, allows for the development of tolerance of ambiguity, with the notion that there are no absolutely established historical facts, of analytical and critical thinking skills when engaging with historical sources, and of a deeper work on difficult terms and concepts such as post-truth, alternative facts, parallel realities, etc. thus building resilience to misinformation.

14. History education provides the answers to critically understand the present, by teaching that any feature of the past must be interpreted in its historical context and by raising awareness that historical interpretation is a matter of debate. The thinking processes and skills acquired through the study of history constitute a *standard of judgement that is transferable to any subject*. It is evidence based and encompasses an ethical dimension: learners are expected to learn something from the past that helps them face the ethical issues of today. Moreover, history education instils a sense of citizenship, and reminds learners of questions to ask, especially about evidence. Hence, historical knowledge and critical understanding of political, social, cultural and economic systems intersects with the democratic culture necessary for active citizenship and prepares learners **for** democracy, i.e., for engaging with democratic society, including politics, the media, civil society, the economy and the law. Therefore, history and citizenship education are subjects closely related, but they are not interchangeable. *Whereas school history can contribute to citizenship education, education for citizenship does not necessarily support or rely on the standards, procedures, and rationale of history*<sup>8</sup> — in fact, history education and its methods allow learners to confront the current political, cultural and social challenges, as it fosters the ability to interrogate differing, even conflicting, narratives, requiring that arguments are supported by evidence, and recognizing that both historians' interpretations and their own can change in the light of new evidence.

### 1.3. Flexible history curricula

15. History education, to the extent it tackles *what- and whose- history* and promotes a learner centred pedagogy, has a relevant role in promoting social inclusion and social cohesion, and this dimension needs to be addressed.

16. The main concerns of a *history flexible curriculum* are to avoid curriculum overload and obsolescence, to meet learners' needs and to revise history pedagogy. *Flexible learning is learner-centred*, encourages greater independence and autonomy on the part of the learners and prepares learners to navigate the rapidly changing society. Its ethos is to enable and empower learners by giving them greater control of their learning, in other words providing for rather than constraining learners' success and progression. A flexible curriculum is a competence-based curriculum.

17. However, a flexible competence-based history curriculum needs to tackle issues related to assessment. This is rather complex, as learning history and performance are usually associated in education systems. Learner's performance is what usually teachers are asked to measure when grading learners, but does performance convert to learning? What is performance in history education? Is it linked to how well a learner remembers facts? There can be considerable learning in the absence of observable changes in performance

<sup>7</sup> Cf. This paragraph and the previous were drawn from VANSLEDRIGHT, Bruce A., *History, learning of, teaching of*, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2048/History.html>.

<sup>8</sup> LEVESQUE, Stéphane.(2008) *Thinking Historically: Educating Learners for the 21st Century* (p. 28-29). University of Toronto Press. Kindle edition.

and conversely it is possible to have improvements in performing without results in learning.<sup>9</sup> Learning is something that can be inferred from performance, though not observed directly. Thus, the models of progression are important tools to supporting teachers' inferences on the progression of history learners.

The introduction of flexible curricula in **Portugal**, a recent experience that OECD has positively analysed<sup>10</sup> has stressed (a) that giving learners, teachers and school leaders more autonomy, choice and responsibility encourages changes in both mind-sets and behaviours, accommodates diversity, innovation and personalisation that eliminates barriers to access; (b) that allowing schools and teachers to adopt interdisciplinary approaches and create new learning opportunities increases the quality of learning experiences for learners and makes learning more accessible and relevant to more learners, thereby creating a more inclusive school; and, (c) allocating 0-25% of weekly instructional time to curriculum autonomy allows schools to choose how to best structure time according to their contexts and strategic plans to meet learners' needs and aspirations.

18. Over the last two decades, European education systems have been widely adopting competence-based approaches and setting aside the most traditional concepts of knowledge-based curricula (declarative knowledge). In parallel, the Council of Europe has developed a Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture [RFCDC], built on principles common to democratic societies, applying to all *areas and levels of education, with 20 competences organised around four clusters: values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding*. RFCDC upholds the development of open, tolerant and diverse societies — and history education has an important contribution to make in delivering that commitment, if *what* (and *whose*), history is taught, *how* it is taught, and the quality of the available resources enabling it to do so.

19. The CDC framework perceives curriculum as a plan for learning. It puts the learner and the learning at the centre of the curriculum. *Ergo*, the significance and value of *flexible history curricula* lies in its potential to include and acknowledge cultural differences and to accommodate the integration and understanding of societal systemic change, allowing for all learners to develop a sense of belonging to their school community<sup>11</sup> and to make their own positive contributions to that very community and, later, to the democratic societies in which they will live.

20. Flexible curricula and interactive pedagogies sensitive to socio-cultural diversity allow young people to find their strengths and interests and to develop interdisciplinary perspectives needed to address the key issues facing society, such as stereotyping based on gender, ethnicity, language, social status, etc. In fact, a curriculum reflecting only the history and culture of the dominant group in society constrains learners outside the majority to engage with it. They may perceive it to be personally meaningless and at times offensive, therefore, the hidden practices and messages of the curriculum need to be addressed. Also, a curriculum reflecting only the history and culture of the dominant group in society also denies the majority group from learning about others.

## 2. Preparing learners for democracy by teaching the complex history of democracy

21. When teaching *about* democracy, history teaching contributes to an understanding and development of democratic values, by promoting the analysis and critical understanding of the historical struggles for democracy and freedom, or of the development of democratic institutions and values; furthermore, such teaching and learning takes place in classrooms where learners participate in decision making, experience collaborative learning, express their own views and interpretations, listen to contrasting views in a reasoned and respectful manner and learn to take part in classroom discussions – learners are learning *through* democracy, acquiring behaviours that respect democratic values and attitudes. Thus, history education plays a key role in preparing learners *for* democracy as it empowers learners to become autonomous participants in democracy and in intercultural dialogue.

22. History education that prepares *for* democracy acknowledges that the mono-cultural curriculum was part of a cultural dominant model that viewed difference as dangerous and divisive. History education should not overlook the existing diversity, nor be limited to the national narrative coinciding with the history of the largest or dominant linguistic and cultural community. All learners should be helped to understand the various ways in which people from diverse cultures and communities have in the past contributed to developments at local, national and global levels.

<sup>9</sup> Professor Robert A Bjork, YOUTUBE on dissociation learning from performance <https://youtu.be/MMixjUDJVlw>

<sup>10</sup> Curriculum Flexibility and Autonomy in Portugal - an OECD Review, p.27-28.

<https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/Curriculum-Flexibility-and-Autonomy-in-Portugal-an-OECD-Review.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Belonging allows for, and mediates, meaningful relationships.

23. In fact, and as mentioned above, history education and its methods allow learners to confront the current political, cultural and social challenges, and learn about the complex history of democracy. It allows the discussion of issues related to human rights, the exercise of democracy, the quality of democracy, citizenship, etc. and no other discipline links present and past in a pedagogically proactive way: learners learn how to tackle these debates.

### 3. Identifying common historical themes in Europe from similar or different perspectives

*“A growing number of individuals, especially young people, have multiple cultural affiliations to enjoy, but also to manage, on a daily basis. Their ‘composite identity’ can no longer be restricted to a ‘collective identity’ related to a particular ethnic or religious group.”<sup>12</sup>*

24. The task of identifying common historical themes across Europe to be included in the history curricula of Council of Europe member States seems to be increasingly difficult. In 2014, to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, the Council of Europe published *Shared Histories for a Europe without dividing lines*,<sup>13</sup> the end product of a four-year intergovernmental project that focused aspects of European history which had left their imprint on the whole European space.<sup>14</sup> *Shared Histories* laid an emphasis on *shared experiences*, exploring the idea that “*your history is also our history and our history is also the history of the other*”.<sup>15</sup> This method allowed for the deconstruction of stereotypes, myths of identity and negative visions of the other and approached history in its full complexity, taking into consideration all the dimensions of an historical event, all the interactions, convergences and conflicts, by promoting a dialectic interplay of all elements involved in an historical event.

25. Rather than attempting to tackle history exhaustively, a careful *selection of themes* with a potential to concern a maximum number of member States might be a more beneficial procedure and respond to the need of young people to understand the world they live in and the forces, movements, and events that have shaped it. For example, the impact of the industrial revolution, the development of education, the complex history of democracy, human rights as reflected in the history of art, Europe and the world – themes developed in the *Shared Histories* project, or others, such as, the Cold War, Decolonisation and Post-Colonial Societies, Revolutions, Democracy, Gender, Migrations etc. It is critical to understand that history education offers a learning based on analytical and critical thinking skills that is unique, engaging, cross-cutting and provides lifelong tools for navigating modern democratic societies.

26. A major obstacle for a more general use of the publications and tools offered by the Council of Europe is the language. If inspiring practices and research could be shared in multiple languages, the impact would be wider. It is a fact that different teachers will be looking for different elements, some will need sources, some will be looking for different ways for teaching and learning. Still, the possibilities are often limited to the time available in the curricula, both for teaching and preparing lessons in line with the assessment methods.

27. That said, exploring shared histories can be approached by different or similar perspectives, as learners look at similar or different resources, mental structures or geographies, related to the shared theme, to *think historically* to reach interpretations and share findings. Shared histories accommodate the composite identity of today’s young people and lend themselves both to *interdisciplinary approaches* and project-based learning.

28. *Interdisciplinary learning* involves exploring content or solving a problem by integrating more than one discipline and drawing information from different fields. It is a holistic approach that helps young people to look at bigger pictures and requires close collaboration of teachers to create a more integrated, enhanced learning experience for learners. Interdisciplinary learning is congruent with flexible curricula.

29. *Project work*, or learning through developing projects, is a pedagogical approach appropriate for the development both of history and the Competences for Democratic Culture CDC, because it contributes to acquiring a combination of attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding, as well as to developing values. It can be used within a specific history topic, but it is also appropriate for an interdisciplinary approach.

<sup>12</sup> Identities and diversity within intercultural societies, Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 2005, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Shared Histories is an interactive e-book with links to external sources. It includes a set of exemplar teaching and learning materials, primarily intended for teacher education.

[https://asp\\_zone-secure.net/v2/index.jsp?id=6423/8544/44168&lng=en](https://asp_zone-secure.net/v2/index.jsp?id=6423/8544/44168&lng=en).

<sup>14</sup> Of all signatories to the European Cultural Convention in 1954.

<sup>15</sup> Shared but not the same as.



#### 4. Evaluation of historical sources

*“The most critical question facing young people today is not how to find information. Google has done a great job with that. We’re bombarded by stuff. The real question is whether that information, once found, should be believed. And according to some recent studies young people are not doing so well in that department. The first thing that historical study teaches us is that there is no such thing as free-floating information. Information comes from somewhere.”<sup>16</sup>*

30. Past events happened in the past and will not be repeated. Of many such events there is a historical record, and only some of it is revealed to us by the work of historians. Written history, or historiography, represents a very small part of the past.

31. Humans have the aptitude to think back and forth in time; the concept of historical consciousness ‘is defined as the understanding of the temporality of historical experience, that is how past, present and future are thought to be connected for the sake of producing historical knowledge’.<sup>17</sup>This ongoing dialogue is shaped using a lot of inputs from a lot of sources, typically, ‘it refers both to the ways people orient themselves in time, and how they are bound by the historical and cultural contexts which shape their sense of temporality and collective memory’.<sup>18</sup>

32. History education allows for organising different information, process it in a systematic way, preparing learners to understand the nature of historical knowledge, how it is a construct, and how such knowledge is transformed by different generations with different dialogues between the three dimensions of time. Learners also learn to differentiate what are facts, memories, interpretations, perspectives and, importantly, how to detect propaganda. This is one of the contributions of history education to democratic citizenship. By asking fundamental questions, history education shows learners models of good and responsible citizenship, facilitates learning from the mistakes of others, furthers critical understanding of change and societal development.

33. The fast development of ICT has made information, communication and knowledge more globalised and the rise of social media increased the amount of e-information available. Online media platforms and social media in particular, shape learners’ perceptions of reality and the way they see the world: young people are one of the most vulnerable groups, being disproportionately affected by the new technologies.

34. While the historical impact of rumours and fabricated content have been well documented, we are witnessing something new: information pollution at a global scale; a complex web of motivations for creating, disseminating and consuming these polluted messages; a myriad of content types and techniques for amplifying content; innumerable platforms hosting and reproducing this content; and breakneck speeds of communication between trusted peers.<sup>19</sup> It should be stressed that visuals can be far more persuasive than other forms of communication, which can make them more powerful vehicles for mis- and disinformation. It is important to support learners to critically understand and deconstruct the messages of visual resources and the power of such images to manipulate and persuade. The way learners understand visuals is fundamentally different to how they think about texts

35. For navigating effectively through digital visual and written materials learners make use of the historian’s toolbox. By applying analytical and critical thinking skills to interpret and evaluate sources, learners must find, comprehend, select and use key historical information, to make well informed judgements:

- Being able to assess and judge motive, utility, reliability, trustworthiness is an important step in building resilience and preventing manipulation when accessing historical sources and interpretations.
- The use of diverse and contradictory sources shows that historical interpretations are provisional and liable to reassessment, an essential safeguard against the misuse of history, as it works against too ready an acceptance of accounts seeking to promote intolerant and ultra-nationalistic, xenophobic or racist ideas.

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<sup>16</sup> Sam WINEBURG’s keynote address to the 2015 AASLH annual meeting in Louisville. For full audio of his talk, go to <https://soundcloud.com/aaslh-podcasts/2015-sam-wineburg-keynote-address>.

<sup>17</sup> GLENCROSS, Andrew (2010), Historical Consciousness in International Relations Theory: A Hidden Disciplinary Dialogue, University of Aberdeen, Millennium Conference. <https://millenniumjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/glencross-andrew-historical-consciousness-in-ir-theory-a-hidden-disciplinary-dialogue.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> SEIXAS, Peter (2006) “What Is Historical Consciousness?”, *Into the Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada*, edited by Ruth Sandwell, 11–22. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p.15.

<sup>19</sup> Claire WARDLE, and Hossein DERAKHSHAN, with support from Anne BURNS and Nic DIAS (2017) *Information Disorder. Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe.

- The greater accessibility of visual sources reinforces the need for learners to be able to critically read a photograph, a documentary film or a broadcast video and distinguish between what the image(s) depict, and the message that the author of the image wishes to convey.
- Learners make judgements that differentiate the ethical dimension (is this a positive and forward move?) and the historical dimension (what does this tell us about what really happened?).

## 5. Multiperspectivity in history education

36. In the context of history education, the notion of multiperspectivity refers to the epistemological idea that *history is interpretational and subjective*, with multiple coexisting narratives about particular historical events, rather than history being objectively represented by one *closed* narrative<sup>20</sup>. Such an interpretational approach to history education should go beyond relativism by teaching learners to judge and compare the validity of different narratives using disciplinary criteria. Societies become more ethically and culturally diverse which makes an exploration of different perspectives a valuable and necessary way for learners to find mutual understanding of different cultures and become responsible democratic citizens.<sup>21</sup>

37. Multiperspectivity, like the analysis of sources, is a vital aspect of understanding the historical dimension of any event. All historical accounts are provisional, and it is unusual to have a single correct version of a historical event. Thus, multiperspectivity entails distinguishing facts from opinions and understanding that there is no universal historical truth, rather a number of diverse interpretations of a given event. The same historical event can be described and explained in different ways, depending on the standpoint of the historian, politician, journalist, television producer, eyewitness, etc.

38. Although multiperspectivity is increasingly emphasized as essential, research has shown that many history teachers struggle with addressing multiple coexisting perspectives.<sup>22</sup> Teachers need to possess deep knowledge of their discipline, have limited time, limited access to resources, overloaded curricula, and they are responsible to prepare the learners for exams. It is important that teachers incorporate a multi-perspective approach to enable learners to engage with different views to build a more informed understanding, reflect critically and empathise with people of the time being studied. For example, an empathetic assignment might explore motivation by asking learners to compare and contrast two or more perspectives of people relating to a historical event and identify the likely motives driving the sources. Explaining and justifying their decisions is key: learners should be able to spell out their historical thinking around causation and motive.

## 6. Should difficult history be included in the curriculum?

39. Whereas controversial issues may be absent from the curriculum, controversy may arise unexpectedly during any time in a lesson. When learners are used to applying historical enquiry as an everyday method, controversy is most welcome as it promotes the ability of the learners to approach the past, or any question, objectively. Controversy is engaging and motivating, learners learn by actively debating and trying to make meaning for their questions and doubts around the issue that is being debated.

40. The inclusion of controversial and sensitive issues in history lessons enhances democratic culture, as the critical understanding of controversy facilitates the respect for different opinions, the acceptance of disagreement promotes tolerance of ambiguity, and the confirmation that heterogeneity is part of the world we live in.

41. In fact, *how* the learning experience of discussing such issues is organised is key in the success of the learning process. Learning is not passive, when learners learn they are linking the new information to what is already acquired. The recourse to estrangement methodological approaches to discussion of controversies allow for each individual learner to engage in the discussion and collectively reach a new understanding of what was discussed, a complex and holistic process, involving individual and collective meaning making of the discussion, which develops the *cognitive, emotional and social* dimensions of learning.<sup>23</sup>

42. This is of particular significance in the context of studying the more recent past and relating it to

<sup>20</sup> STRADLING, Robert, *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: A Guide for Teachers*, Council of Europe, 2003, <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680493c9e>.

<sup>21</sup> Bjorn WANSINK, Sanne AKKERMAN, Itzél ZUIKER & Theo WUBBELS (2018) *Where Does Teaching Multiperspectivity in History Education Begin and End? An Analysis of the Uses of Temporality*, *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 46:4, 495-527, DOI: [10.1080/00933104.2018.1480439](https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2018.1480439).

<sup>22</sup> *Idem*, *ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> ILLERIS, K. (2002) *The three dimensions of learning: Contemporary learning theory in the tension field between the cognitive, the emotional and the social*. NIACE, Leicester.

contemporary events and concerns, enabling learners to consider their own allegiances, their multiple interests and identities, recognise that it is possible to be both the insider or outsider to something and that own beliefs can be conflicting and change. Being aware of one's own prejudices and stereotypes, how they can be embedded in thinking patterns, how they pass down through the generations, help learners detect myths and bias and foster tolerance within the classroom.

43. The skills and mindset required both for historical understanding and for future engagement in a participatory democracy cannot be acquired by teaching approaches where the learner's role is confined to that of a mere passive recipient of knowledge. More is needed, in particular independent, active and interactive learning strategies which involve learners in doing things and in thinking about what they are doing.

44. It is critical that discussions occur in *supportive environments*.<sup>24</sup> Addressing sensitive and controversial issues requires maintaining a classroom atmosphere in which all learners, even if in a minority, have confidence that it is safe to express their view and argue their case. Discussion has to be managed in ways that promote controlled, informed dialogue and respectful interaction.

## 7. Is teaching history a dangerous profession?

45. History is a rich discipline, full of twists and turns, that can trigger abundant and rich reflections, and therefore cannot be reduced to learning a sequence of dates or facts. The objective is to support learners to develop critical thinking skills and a culture of their own by studying mankind over time — one can only understand the present and conceive of the future by critically understanding the events of the past. This dimension emphasises the importance of history as a discipline and as a *source of knowledge construction for all other disciplines*.

46. Although historical facts need to be learned for engaging in historical debates, history education goes beyond the single narrative that excludes different interpretations of historical events. Learning about and analysing different perspectives of past events promotes attitudes of openness to cultural otherness, other beliefs, world views and practices, enables the development of critical thinking skills and in the long run promotes more tolerant and egalitarian societies. However, even if no agenda is being consciously or subconsciously pursued, learners are often presented with (over)simplified information in history, due to limited time allotted to history education, limited and/or age-related intellectual capacity of learners, the limited knowledge of many teachers and the sometimes still persuasive conception that teachers' main task is to prepare learners for exams. And importantly, the *non-disclosed awareness* that the context in which one is teaching is not always favourable to the introduction of historically sensitive subjects, plays an important role in what and how history education is delivered.

47. When history is misused and becomes partial, fallacious or propagandistic, it does not shed light on the past nor contributes to developing analytical and critical thinking skills. That said, in some schools across Europe there are situations of interference both by school management and/or by parents questioning the content of a lesson, the teacher's choice of resources or the learning promoted.

48. The discipline of history is particularly under scrutiny, and history teachers today question what freedom they have, or what risks they run, when they use certain methods or select some resources.<sup>25</sup> This happens for a number of reasons, because parents do not understand the current scope of the discipline, they defend the *unquestionable truth* of the one-sided narrative they have learned and exert pressure on the school Board; but on the background of these interferences is today's more divided and violent society, where teachers become targets to accuse and hold accountable for what goes wrong.

49. The Recommendation 1880 (2009) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe<sup>26</sup> on teaching history in post-conflict areas refers to the need to "support a change in how "the other" is presented

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<sup>24</sup> Parents also play a major role and can put pressure on schools and teachers when learners are exposed to views they disagree with. Classrooms should be supportive. Societies as well. Populism has added pressure on teachers, cf. <https://www.euroclio.eu/2019/07/18/safe-schools-and-spying-learners/>.

<sup>25</sup> On 16 October 2020, Samuel Paty (1973–2020), a history and geography teacher, was beheaded in France; at stake were the freedom of expression and the resources used in the classroom.

[EuroClio - European Association of History Educators](#) statement on this assassination can be downloaded [here](#).

For further Europe and world-wide information please refer to the [Network of Concerned Historians](#).

Established at the History Department of the University of Groningen, Netherlands, it serves as a small observatory and provides a bridge between international human-rights organizations campaigning for persecuted historians and the global community of historians. It publishes an Annual Report, the 2020 report concerns 91 countries and can be downloaded [here](#).

<sup>26</sup> <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=17765&lang=en>.



in history classes. This involves interventions relating to both what is taught and how it is taught. Considerable investment in skills building for teachers, today's and tomorrow's, to encourage them to move to a new style of curriculum and teaching, must continue. This process is progressive and therefore has implications for initial and in-service teacher training." EuroClio also has worked with the local history teachers' associations on a set of Recommendations for responsible teaching of the wars in Yugoslavia and its successor states,<sup>27</sup> which is a *bottom-up* initiative to "foster history teaching that aims to nurture a critical understanding of the wars through cultivation of historical thinking as we find this essential for challenging manipulation and myths, as well as prejudices and stereotypes arising from them. We believe that history teaching should have a transformative role." Lastly, it should be mentioned that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/ High Commissioner on National Minorities [OSCE/HCNM] office is recognising history and memory as a potential source conflict.<sup>28</sup>

50. It is unquestionable that history education has a transformative role in building sustainable and resilient democratic societies and in the rehabilitation of post conflict societies the role of history education is crucial. Still, teachers need professional development and continuous training opportunities. Well-performing teachers are the most important resources in any educational system as teachers are key in the learning process. In addition to supportive professional development teachers — beginners and experienced alike - also need time and resources to study, reflect, and prepare their practice.

51. Learning the specific history of a people, a country or a cultural/ethnic or international group is an absolute necessity for the cognitive and social development of young people. History education in schools, in its content, pedagogy and learning materials, needs a thorough dusting off in order to stimulate interest in this subject, perhaps even risking the fate of disaffection.

## 8. Using ICT in history education

52. Information and communication technology (ICT) can be used to provide considerable support to the development of learners' historical thinking and understanding, and in ways which also promote education for democracy and diversity. In moving beyond content delivery, technology-supported learning affords opportunities for:

- Expanding intercultural interaction by enabling learners to communicate directly with those from other schools, countries and cultures.
- Building and enhancing cooperative learning, including international collaboration supported by tools such as cloud computing, videoconferencing, interactive online platforms, wikis and blogs.
- Using simulations and educational game-playing, allowing the study of subject matter that would be almost impossible otherwise, or exploring complex historical processes and decision making in a more dynamic way ('*epistemic games*', for example, are based on testing how well learners are able to think and operate like an expert - in this case an historian).

## 9. Bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education

53. Across Europe learners visit museums where they have the opportunity to deepen aspects of history that have already been dealt with in the classroom or learn about specific topics that the museum is exhibiting through a selection of objects and trying to fit such objects in the historical bigger picture. Usually, mediators and teachers plan the visits to enhance specific aspects of learning. A visit to the Parliament for learners to attend a session is usually organised as part of the history discipline. This type of activity only makes sense if previously planned and discussed in class. Watching films (in part or in full), using Internet resources, listening to podcasts and excerpts of radio broadcasts are commonplace in many history classes across Europe.

54. To complement the out of school activities, inviting historians, authors, protagonists from various fields, linked to history, arts, literature, human rights associations or NGOs to come to the history class and share experiences with learners also occurs. The world outside the classroom can send powerful messages of inclusion and respect for diversity to the cohort of learners. Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices helps learners make sense of the world they live in.

55. However, such activities depend more on the teachers involved, the school location and culture, and easier to organise within urban settings; the regional more distant schools have more difficulties.

56. To broaden the field beyond history education in schools and consider also innovative roles undertaken

<sup>27</sup> [https://euroclio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Making-sense-of-the-past-that-refuses-to-pass\\_final-English.pdf](https://euroclio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Making-sense-of-the-past-that-refuses-to-pass_final-English.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/b/415121\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/b/415121_0.pdf).

by other stakeholders, a partnership between the Council of Europe and the International Council of Museums - Portugal [ICOM] was developed within the project *Shared Histories for a Europe without Dividing Lines*. Its aim was to bring together history educators and museum mediators to share experiences and practices and acknowledge the educational complementarity of their functions and the potential for their co-operation.

57. There was a Seminar in Lisbon, (March 2015) where history educators and museum mediators together reflected on ways that their cooperation could improve to strengthen history education. Below are some of the key findings:

- Using active methods and zooming on the world's diversity is important but time consuming; it is easier to focus these ideas when visiting a museum, when the museum mediator and the history teacher have planned the visit in advance to add pedagogical value to the lessons.
- Art museums can be “mirrors” of topics examined in the classroom, mediators can organise projects, programmes and all sort of activities to develop those topics, like raising awareness of long-standing cultural diversity.
- History education and museums can contribute to learners’ understanding of the concepts of the value of human life, autonomy and freedom of expression by stressing specific examples of the past whenever museums’ collections allow these dimensions of history to be explored.
- The teaching of history is not really open to what is outside the school space; nowadays history education is mostly centralised in history textbooks - syllabuses are too extensive, generalist and consciously or not convey an ideological weight.

**Good Practice: examples of partnerships between history educators and museum mediators**

1. The Centre of Didactics of History and Civics of Tallinn University ran a project – History lessons in Museum and Archive. The aim of the project was to compare history syllabus and possibilities of museums and archives for teaching and to work out different options to enlarge and diversify history teaching. Lessons were developed to learn the history of Estonia. As a result of this partnership, 90 lesson plans for history education were created. Topics were taken from the history syllabus; the precondition was that a specific objective should be attained in another setting with additional learning value.
2. The Forum of Slavic Cultures (FSC) aims to become a referential global platform of intercultural dialogue among Slavic cultures and a hub for Slavic arts and sciences. FSC has hosted together with the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts of Ljubljana University a seminar on interdisciplinary work joining museum mediators and teacher educators. Conclusions around *interdisciplinary, integrative teaching especially on topics regarding human rights, art, and social phenomena were very positive. Moreover, Slovenian museums regularly organise events outside the museums to reach the communities; the fact that Europe's population is aging is an enriching experience for schools and museums to organise activities for/with the older population.*
3. The network of archaeological clubs is a platform between schools and the National Museum of Archaeology (Lisbon) to disseminate effectively the museum collections, promote awareness about archaeology and cultural heritage and to allow new ways of learning. Due to the fact that archaeology is a cross cutting area all teachers from all curricular areas can develop activities, and all interested learners are welcome.
4. In a partnership with EMEE Eurovision Museum Exhibiting Europe the project enables a “change of perspective” on many levels: as European re-interpretation of objects, between museum experts and visitors (activation and participation), and in the process of international co-operation. The aim of the EMEE-project is to *make museums more accessible* in many ways: with an innovative and interdisciplinary approach developed by history didactics the project wants to re-interpret museum objects and put them into a broader context of national and transnational history. Visitors shall face objects not only on a regionally and nationally determined level of meaning but discover transnational and European perspectives using new means of presentation, performances and possibilities for participation.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Funded by the EU, EMEE is a project coordinated by the University of Augsburg, department of history didactics, The project was concluded in 2016. About the project: <https://www.uni-augsburg.de/de/fakultaet/philhist/professuren/geschichte/didaktik-der-geschichte/forschung/projekte/emee/about-emee-project/>.

## 10. Including the Competences for Democratic Culture in teacher education and professional development

58. The critical understanding of historical phenomena facilitates the process of acquiring CDC and the intersection of school history and education for democracy is evident. History education can gain from including and adapting the CDC pedagogical approaches to create a classroom climate where young people can actively explore historical questions to experience and learn about, through and for democratic culture.

59. Teachers should be aware and open about their own understanding of the past, their views, prejudices, stereotypes and biases, and promote inclusive environments where all learners feel confident to voice their thoughts and disagreements where difficult dialogues might occur — flexibility and adaptability on the part of the teacher is crucial. Teacher education and professional development should include CDC and intercultural education to sensitise about inclusion of *otherness* and resilience in dealing with insensitivity and inappropriate responses.

60. The CDC approach should be applied in a transversal way in teacher education and professional development; the successful inclusion of learning and teaching activities that seek to consider values and develop attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding for a culture of democracy in history education will ultimately depend on the ability of teachers to include CDC when planning and developing educational activities in accordance with the needs of their learners. The acquisition and development of CDC is not a linear progress, rather *a lifelong personal journey*, as individuals — teachers and learners alike — continually experience new and different contexts.

61. Including and adapting RFCDC is the responsibility of policy makers. Educating for democracy and diversity is necessarily an on-going task. It requires appropriate investment in schools and teachers both intellectually and in terms of resources.