

History didactics and the competence of meaning attribution: a study from the methodology of history education¹

Didática da história e a competência de atribuição de sentido: um estudo a partir da metodologia da educação histórica

Marlene Cainelli*

ABSTRACT

In this article, starting from the methodology of investigation with intercultural researches based on the application of open and/or closed surveys (BORRIES & ANGVIK, 1997) with exploratory studies carried on by the project, with teachers from four Brazilian states: Paraná, São Paulo, Goiás and Bahia, we present how it was possible to reach the results of this study; which sought to understand what are the needs of orientation that indicate the ways teachers follow whose establish their choices concerning the historiographic content and the teaching method. What are the demands from the past? Which experiences and feelings? We have analyzed the dialogue established by the teachers and the notion of history through a narrative presented in a closed survey about the discovery of Brazil. On this research, we work with Peter Seixas (2016) aiming to perceive what is the place of history education in the knowledge production inside the school and

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* State University of Londrina. Masters and Doctorate Program in Education. Londrina, Paraná, Brasil. E-mail: cainelli@uel.br. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9709-3834>.

in historical thought formation, creating a strategy of treating data along with the theoretical conceptions and the speech of the subjects we have analyzed.

Keywords: History education. Historical meaning. Lack of orientation. History teachers.

RESUMO

Neste artigo apresentamos como, a partir da metodologia de investigação com pesquisas interculturais baseadas na aplicação de questionários fechados e/ou abertos (BORRIES & ANGVIK, 1997), com estudos exploratórios realizados pelo projeto, com professores de quatro Estados do Brasil: Paraná, São Paulo, Goiás e Bahia, nos foi possível chegar aos resultados que apresentamos neste estudo, que procurou entender quais são as carências de orientação que indicam os caminhos que os professores seguem que determinam suas escolhas de conteúdo historiográfico e do método de ensino. Quais demandas do passado? Quais experiências e sentimentos? Analisamos o diálogo estabelecido pelos professores com a concepção de história a partir de uma narrativa apresentada em questionário fechado sobre o descobrimento do Brasil. Nesta pesquisa trabalhamos com Peter Seixas (2016) com o objetivo de perceber qual o lugar da educação histórica na produção de conhecimento na escola e na formação do pensamento histórico criando uma estratégia de tratamento dos dados em conjunto entre as concepções teóricas e a fala dos sujeitos analisados.

Palavras-chave: Educação histórica. Sentido histórico. Carências de orientação. Professores de história.

Introduction

It is vitally important to comprehend the notions built by teachers about history, teaching and the relation they establish between the history that is produced and the history that is taught, so we can understand how teachers attribute meaning to history from the way they appropriate the substantive contents. What are or would be the lack of orientations that indicate the ways teachers from basic education follow that determinate the choices they make when teaching history? Hypothetically, we have suggested that teachers, just like all of us, are, no doubt, tied to the past, to our experiences, to our feelings.

This way, the perspective from which we deal with the past is responsible for what Rüsen (2009, p. 164) warns, “it is the future in motion that demands a

critical review of the concepts of history and memory developed so far”. Because of that, the choices we make about what to remember from the past lead us to a perspective of the desired future as an orientation of the present life ongoing.

The way history is or would be taught today could become a fundamental reference to understand this path of constitution of a new paradigm for the theory and methodology of history teaching and learning. On one hand, it engages questions related to meta-history as a way to constitute reflection about the historical thinking. On the other hand, explains the relation that is established in the formation of historical thinking with the past from the understanding of multi-perspectivity in history of evidence, of empathy and of the historical consciousness formed from the interpretation of the sources, of the evidences, of the historical content developed.

In our research, we have chosen to investigate with teachers from elementary and high school, with the perspective of forming an important board of epistemological and methodological discussions in the configuration field of what we understand today as history teaching and learning, specifically within the theory of historical consciousness. What is it like to teach history today? What are the assumptions of history didactics? What are the foundations that support the choices of content and of the way of thinking about the history that is going to be taught in Brazilian schools in the 21st century?

The observation and the investigation of the teacher’s ideas can lead us to notice, through the narratives, the external and internal daily interferences in the production of historical knowledge. It should be highlighted that the teacher’s thought was used in this investigation in a way that respected their ideas and beliefs, not only about the taught contents but also regarding the teaching methodologies. In this way, we agree with Carlota Boto’s thoughts, when she says teachers are intellectuals “because they have in teaching a vital part of their existence” (BOTO, 2005, p. 42). And also, professor Maria Auxiliadora Schmidt, who supports, together with her research group², the idea of a researcher teacher.

Our interest is close to Peter Seixas’ discussions aiming to research and “examine experiences beyond the simple question ‘which (or whose) history is being told’” (SEIXAS, 2016, p. 4) by History teachers, textbooks and school curricula? This helps to understand the meaning of the ways in which History is taught in schools. . Was it destined to shape the collective memory? To promote the students’ subject competencies? To reproduce the official curricula embodied in the textbooks evaluated and distributed by the Ministry of Education? What is the role of Historiography and the role of the history that is institutionalized on

2 Research Group Lapeduh – Laboratory of Research in Historical Education.

the curricula on the daily decisions of teachers, on the annual repetitions of the contents, on the choices of textbooks, on the contents elaborated for evaluation?

During our analysis of the material collected in our study, we have made some approaches on the idea of noticing how teachers address epistemologically the contents that are taught. Starting from the teacher's understanding of what History is. What is the past, which is the concept of historical source, of historical fact? We have also moved around the possibility of, through the presented narratives, perceive the methodologies used in classroom. How do they use it, if they use it, the previous knowledge, how do they work with documents, expository lessons, texts discussions?

And this way noticing if there is any meaning within the contents and the history that is taught. We have also thought about the results of the European study called "Youth and History Project", in which the researches intended to research how young students appropriate the historical past, that is, the "historical consciousness" (Borries & Angvik, 1997), coming to the conclusion that the young Europeans who have been researched did not value history beyond the fact that it is a school subject. Here, it is worth quoting one of the speeches of the researcher Bodo Von Borries, cited by Kazumi Munakata, commenting on the difference of understanding about history of young people from different countries:

We should keep in mind that this is the normative expression of what history could generally mean. These theoretical concepts could simply reflect different cultures and national conventions and cannot be confused with the performance, the activities and the students' real applications. (...) It is never too much to say, however, that different types of interpretation should be elucidated to the students during History classes (BORRIES, 200: 256, *apud* MUNAKATA. 2015).

Teachers also envisage a type of history to teach. As well, would the young Europeans also understand History as merely a subject to be taught? Would they understand this History with a meaning for life? Would the meta-historical concepts be present in the content choices? According to Ronaldo Alves,

Evidence, empathy, comprehension, explanation, significance and so many other meta-historical concepts could be worked in History classes, gradually and increasingly, as ways to build the historical thinking.

Even more. They could be used to show students that History must be understood as a vital area of knowledge to create thinking and rethinking about human experiences. Interpreted past, meaningful present, oriented future. Learning History with a meaning for Life. (ALVES, 2015, p. 340).

The study

The teachers who took part in this study live and work in four regions of Brazil: south, southeast, central-west and northeast, in the cities of São Paulo – Capital and Assis, Paraná – Londrina, Maringá, Jacarezinho and Irati, Bahia – Vitória da Conquista and Caetitê and Goiás – Goiânia. A total of 70 surveys were answered. The teachers that participated in the research have different teaching times. All of them teach at public elementary and high schools. They have mostly (99%) finished their studies in public institutions.

The chart below illustrates the amount of surveys answered by the respective states:

CHART 1 – TOTALITY OF TEACHERS BY STATE:

Paraná	46
São Paulo	8
Bahia	12
Goiás	4
Total:	70

SOURCE: Organized by the author.

The gathering of empirical data happened through a survey designed by the team who participated in the project. The data collection instrument (survey/exploratory study), applied to the History teachers, was elaborated in three parts. The first part is characterized by the identification of the teacher who has been interviewed. The second part was composed by four questions and answered through narratives.

How would you explain the immigration process in Brazil, considering your relationship with local History?

How would you explain Brazil's discovery process to a 7th grade class? Develop a narrative.

Analyze and interpret the following phrase about History: If I was an antiquarian, I would only have eyes for old stuff. But I am a historian, and that is why I love life.

What is your opinion on the following phrase: Almost every young person today grows up in a sort of continuous present, with no organic relation with the public past from the time they live.

These questions aimed to materialize, in the teacher's narrative, the forms of the methodological and theoretical work of contents' use in classroom. We also have had the intention to notice how the teacher establishes a relation with the progression of knowledge as the school years pass. A feature we have noticed in other researches is the naturalization of the scholar historical content in a single content presented in different years, and the age difference or cognitive perspective did not claim a different form of treatment of the historical content in school.

What is the meaning of using the narrative? In our investigations we have noticed the richness of the narrative work for the research in history education.

According to Rösen

Historical thought, in all its forms and versions, is conditioned by a certain mental procedure of man interpreting himself and his world: the narrative of a story. To narrate is a cultural practice of time interpretation, anthropologically universal. The plenitude of the past, whose becoming present is due to an intellectual activity which we call "history" can be characterized, categorically, as narrative. The "history" as past made present takes on, as a matter of principle, the form of a narrative. This thesis is treated, in history theory, as the narrativist paradigm. (RÜSEN: 2001, p. 149).

The third part (section) of the data collection survey was designed with questions about the methodology inside the classroom and the evaluation. This section was organized from numeric correspondences to the questions 6 to 10, and they should use, in every topic asked, answers from items 1 to 5. Number 1 is total agreement and number 5 is total disagreement. Therefore, we have set the methodology of empiric data collection for each Brazilian region. Each researcher was responsible for the collection in their respective states. It was also the researcher's responsibility to choose how many teachers would answer the surveys.

In the initial questions of our main study, we have worried with the substantive contents in order to understand how they are developed by the teachers. The researches that are developed in the area of history education work with theoretical frames which divide the historical contents developed by curricula, teachers, textbooks and students in two types: a) analysis concerning the substantive ideas; b) analysis concerning second order ideas. According to Germinari:

Second order ideas seek to comprehend the historical thought according to criteria of quality, anchored in the recent debates about the philosophy and theory of History. In this approach, we are not interested in the questions related to the quantity or merely correction of factual information about the past, but we are interested in the questions related to reasoning and historical logic. The analysis of substantive ideas is focused on reflections about the historical concepts, involves general notions (revolution, migrations...) and particular notions related to specific contexts in time and space (example: national, regional and local histories). These analyses also use quality criteria highlighting values and motivations associated with the substantive concepts in History (GERMINARI, 2012, p. 56).

We start here from the invisible and visible texts, most of the times markedly represented in the narratives presented by the surveyed. We have opted for two substantive contents worked by the teachers in basic education: Immigration in Brazil and the discovery process. In this article, we will dedicate ourselves to the narrative about the discovery of Brazil. We have also decided to establish a specific school year to notice if the teacher would make any distinction among the proposals in terms of progression of knowledge. For the content of immigration, we have established, to the teacher, that it would be the 9th year of elementary school, and for the content of the discovery of Brazil, the 7th year.

As stated by Schmidt and Urban

The learning process of the historical concepts or substantive concepts, related to the contents that are taught, is of great value in the development of historical consciousness. Therefore, to investigate how these concepts or contents are present in the school culture, in the form of “visible texts”, like textbooks and curricula, or “invisible texts”, like the ideas of students and teachers, can contribute to unveil and to improve the History teaching (SCHMIDT; URBAN, 2016, p.34).

During our preliminary studies, we have analyzed how the questions were understood by the teachers through the way that the narratives were presented. The process of analysis of the teachers' narratives have had, as a starting point, meetings with the researchers, and the joint decision of creating categories that would allow us to see important questions to understand how the teachers work in classroom with this substantive content.

How do they think what is important to teach to kids and teenagers? Why do they think the predetermined content? How do they organize the content from their daily experiences and feelings? Concerning the question of Historical Narrative, we have selected the following understanding possibilities of the narrative elaborated by the teacher, which, in general, we present it in the following chart and it can evidence some of these categories. We are going to share, in this article, some of the narratives presented by teachers from the state of Paraná. We have had answers to 46 surveys from teachers from basic education.

Understanding the narrative as a way to practice history, we have sought to understand how teachers articulate their historiographic knowledge and how they attribute meaning to the set of factors that mean a certain substantive content, for example: the facts, the temporality, the second order contents which gravitate around the proposed theme. We assume, with Husbunds (2003) that the historical narratives idea is built from the way the past is thought by historians, teachers and even students.

The researcher Regina Ribeiro, using Rösen's thoughts, argues that

In Rösen's (2007) perspective, so the past can gain visibility on us, in our practical life and become history, it is necessary to create a historical representation that serves as guide to our intentionality. This representation has a shape of "narrative" as its concrete face. It is known that not every narrative about the past are "historical narratives", because the variety of human experiences produces many ways to offer visibility to the past, and the bigger part leads to narratives grounded in "other rationalities", thus rising mythological, advertising narratives and the most diverse textual constructions of literary fiction. (RIBEIRO, 2013, p. 2)

The researcher continues to dialogue with Rösen's (2007) thought about narrative:

To Rösen, when they narrate, the individuals build summaries of experiences and rules that create an interpretation of the course of time,

connecting the past to the future. And more, when correlating experience, interpretation and orientation, the narratives produce a “master idea” (the meaning) or the direction of history, which condition its beginning, middle and end. Through Rösen’s narrativist theory, this meaning can be identified by the public, by the objectives it has when searching for this or that narrative, by the conjunction between meanings/senses allocated in an objective way and/or subjectively. (RIBEIRO, 2013, p.8)

Based on the theoretical discussion about the perspective of the historical narrative as an important promoter of senses and meanings to the understanding of the individuals’ lack of orientation, and in the face of our research with History teachers, we have elaborated some categories to identify these meanings on the theoretical chart of subjective contents.

CHART 2: CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS OF SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT NARRATIVES PRESENTED BY THE TEACHERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH (70 SURVEYS)

Uses temporal markers (dates/periods)	8
Markers attached to historical facts... great events	20
Substantive contents with temporal markers	25
Epistemological approach	4

SOURCE: Organized by the author.

From this perspective, we are able to highlight that teachers link the substantive contents as temporal markers and the temporalities to the contents that are identified by the events studied in the period. These characteristics show that, when selecting historical and temporal markers, characters and events, teachers support their narratives in contents from the school universe already settled in the shape and structure of the textbook.

We are going to share, in this text, some narratives elaborated by teachers from Paraná to the question: “How would you explain Brazil’s discovery process to a 7th grade class? Develop a narrative.” We have made a selection of the narratives based on the time they have been teaching, trying to notice if there would be any difference in the content placement and in the methodological approach.

Teacher with 20 years of experience:

“The discovery of Brazil is linked to the Great Navigations and discoveries dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, when Portugal and Spain were

the most powerful nations of the world and launched themselves in the sea searching for new lands”

Another teacher with 15 years of work constructed her narrative:

“The discovery of Brazil by the Portuguese happened in the period of the great navigations, started in the beginning of the 15th century. Portugal and Spain, searching for new lands and trying to maintain trade with India, country that had the so desired spices like pepper, clove, cinnamon, ginger; among other products, decided to sail the oceans. In this way, Pedro Alvares Cabral reached Brazil with his caravels, but here there were millions of Indians, many were decimated and slaved, then I question. Who discovered Brazil, Portuguese people or Indians?”

Teacher with less than 10 years of classroom:

“I make a deconstruction of the idea of discovery, making it clear that Brazil was already inhabited and what happened was a European invasion, I highlight the Indian historical view in this process!”

Another teacher, also with less than 10 years of teaching:

“First, analyze the concept of discovery, aiming to reflect about it and deconstruct it. I believe it is of vital importance to observe the historical concepts, linking them to the context in which they are inserted. Question the students about what they think of the first inhabitants (Indians) and then draw a comparison between Indians and non-Indians (Europeans), leading them to reflect about the stereotypes that there are barbarians and civilized people.”

The next teacher has 5 years of experience and approaches the subject in the following way:

“I would start problematizing: Has Brazil been discovered or invaded? After listening and taking notes of the students’ ideas, I would ask them to investigate the question through the analysis of the following documents: Excerpt from Caminha’s letter, which describes the presence of people on the land and the interest of the Portuguese for the wealth. Excerpt from Luis Colombini’s text: The other discoveries of Brazil, which talks about Duarte Pacheco Pereira’s trip to Brazil, 1448. Excerpt from Eduardo Bueno’s book Brazil, Land Ahoy!, which talks about the intentionality of Cabral’s trip.”

Teacher graduated in 2004. Makes the following questioning:

“It has been agreed to use the term “discovery” to talk about the moment that Portuguese people formalized their relationship with the native people who lived here, other terms can be used, including for you researchers, like meeting, conquer, invasion, disagreement, etc. It all depends on the view of the person who is analyzing the fact.”

Some narratives consider the argument of a divergent historiographical hypothesis that has already been widely debated and still remains in the school’s sphere. The question of the coincidence or intention of the Portuguese’s arrival to the Brazilian territory. We understand that, in this case, even if the historiographical question is outdated, this type of approach moves and activates the thought of who is learning, creating a doubt in the argument, giving students an active role in the learning when they dedicated themselves to solve a problem placed.

In the narrative of the substantive contents, we have inferred that they would have been provided by the textbooks and also by the teachers’ experience from repeating a certain content every year, we can state this bearing in mind the chronological and canonical speech of the events that led to the discovery of Brazil, the great navigations, Cabral’s arrival, the meeting with the Indians, the attempt do reach the Indies, the discovery of gold and the rivalry with the Spanish.

The separation of the narratives by the teacher’s graduation time allowed to evidence that teachers with more years of experience opt for the substantive contents, based on an idea of a predetermined history that needs to be taught. In the case of teachers with less time of experience, the idea of a content deconstruction is present in their narratives, as well as an attempt of critical history. However, all teachers argue basing on the fact. It is the indicated event

that translates the way of teaching, either by the maintenance of History or by its deconstruction.

Some narratives search a historiographic discussion relying on a historiography of the period that would have reviewed, in the last few years, the way of teaching the discovery of Brazil. We can also notice some attempts to work with concepts and with historiographical problematizations: “Has Brazil been discovered?”.

During our first studies, it was clear that we needed to investigate more which contextual factors influence on the teachers’ choices and decisions. Which objective and subjective factors guide the meaning attribution to the chosen contents and the way of teaching them? The historiographical knowledge keeps being worked in a unique way and with a truthful destiny. The use of sources, of the previous knowledge of many methodologies have the purpose of leading students to understand a true history and reach this knowledge. There is no possible multiplicity of perspectives in History with the interpretation and analysis of different sources, but there is the use of many sources that reach the same content.

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