

WHAT IS IN AN (ENGLISH) NAME?

Regular readers of this periodical will remember that, a few issues back, our fellow-member Charles Hannam, now also a member of the Board, raised the question of our English name. He felt that 'didactics' might, perhaps, not be the most appropriate word since, in English, 'didactical' has connotations of pedantry; it reminds people of the less pleasant side of the schoolmaster. Some other members in Britain and the US took his side. Therefore, the matter was brought up in meetings of the Board. It was finally decided that I would address myself to all native English speakers of the Society, asking them two questions. These were : 1. Do you agree with the present English name of 'Society for History Didactics?'; 2. If not, which other name would you suggest? On September 27, 1987, I sent out forty letters to as many members of our Society in Great Britain, the USA and Ireland. I received twenty-three answers which, in my opinion, is not a bad result. Before going on I must thank all those members who responded to my query, especially those of them who took the trouble to send me letters in order to explain their choice. On November 18, 1987, I was able to report the results to the Board.

The responses may be specified thus :

1. keep the present name	8
2. Society for History Teaching (including 1 Study and Teaching)	9
3. Education in History	3
4. Society of History Teachers	1
5. Society of Pedagogy in History	1
6. Society for Teaching and Learning of History	1

I am afraid that this result reveals that there are some grave misunderstandings about the nature of our Society rampant among its members. If they are not dispelled, they may obscure its aims and objectives and obstruct its functioning. First of all, we are decidedly not an association of history teachers. In many countries these teachers have organizations of their own; ours is not a rival one. As a rule we do, therefore, not accept history teachers as members, unless they are especially interested in history didactics (which is something different from history teaching proper). Some of the members are, indeed, teachers. We are also not an association for the teaching of history. True enough, history teaching is an important part of history didactics, but 'didactics' involves a lot more. In this context I refer to the inquiry 'What is History Didactics' that proved that its crucial subject is not teaching but historical consciousness. Still

less we are an association for the study of history. In many countries there exist scholarly associations that are devoted to the study of history and its results. Again this does not exclude that an academic historian might become a member of our Society, but still on the condition that he or she takes a great interest in the educational side of history.

'Education or Pedagogy in History' would be much nearer guesses, I believe. 'Pedagogics' of history has, however, I presume, a too pedagogical ring; it reminds people too much of school. Although 'education' comes very near to what we now mean by 'history didactics' (without, however, being identical with it), this term too would remind adult people too much of their youth and of the school--desk. A further objection is, in my opinion, that 'education' certainly covers a lot of what we understand by 'didactics' but not all of it, perhaps not even the most important part of it (not, for instance, historical consciousness as a separate subject).

I cannot help believing that this enquiry did not yield a really satisfying alternative. I laid the matter before an English professor of English and American linguistics and literature. He understood our predicament very well, and after having considered it carefully he pronounced as his verdict that we must stick to 'didactics', there being no good alternative. After all, this is also the word that is common for our discipline in all other European languages. Add to this that 35 % of the respondents suggested keeping the present name. Richard Wilson wrote to me that Anglosaxons would be wise to 'bastardize' it, and Ronald Bretsch that, since every language develops, the English language has to take on this word too. Theo Schulte remarked that 'the alternatives are far from precise ... The use of 'didactics' in other languages is more precise". May I add as a final consideration that the unfavourable connotation of the word is attached not so much to 'didactics' as rather to 'didactical'.

The Board agreed with my conclusion that we must keep the present English name. But, as always, comments from members are welcome.

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