

ON BEHALF OF A NEW DIDACTICS OF HISTORY
IN PORTUGAL

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At least from the 1930's on, it has been very common the expression "new history". It makes sense that to a "new history" will correspond a "new didactics of history". As Dr. P. F. M. Fontaine pointed out, "a new didactics of history-which renders services to the science of history, history teaching and the training of history teachers, but which is itself an autonomous science - may be defined as mediation between history and people".¹

So history didactics, in improving itself, must also be adapted to the evolution suffered by history as well as by people.

I would like to emphasize some points which I consider very important.

1. PRACTICE AND THEORY

In Portugal the history didactics has been mostly connected with practice, I mean in teaching situations. Even if it's taught from long time ago in teachers training for primary schools, there is little research and literature on the subject. However I hope we are now in a turning point as far as history didactics is concerned. In fact not only the New Universities and the Higher Schools of Education have dedicated some attention to teaching formation - for instance, in the social studies subject matter - as also the Faculties of Arts probably will start shortly to teach history didactics, as an academic discipline.² It's known that the same happened in Germany, where some "universities instituted special chairs of history didactics."³ How does this experience work? Is it possible to get more information about its results?

Thus in future students attending courses of history at the Faculties of Arts can learn history itself, history research and some of them - those who choose the educational formation - history teaching. I think it's worthwhile to join the three levels in the integrated process during the initial formation of the history teachers training.⁴ Those levels may be identified by answering to these questions: What is history? How to study and research in history? How to teach history?

Portuguese Faculties of Arts got a meaningful tradition in researching on several subject matters of their courses. Accordingly one expects that teaching of history didactics will be mainly based on original research. Conditions should be created in order to achieve the mentioned goal.

2. HISTORY AS A SCIENCE AND HISTORY DIDACTICS

Like other sciences history has evidenced a positive evolution in the last decades. As I have already mentioned the main features of that evolution in my book A História como Ciência,⁵ I would like to refer just a few characteristics which can interest to history didactics.

First of all it's usually accepted that history requires theory and comprehension and not only description. It means that history consciousness,⁶ time and space concepts, links between the past and the present, as well as between the present and the future should deserve special attention. It is not enough to know how. Preferably we must know why, putting different type of questions.

It is also important, according to conceptions of new history or new history didactics, the interdisciplinary approach. So the historian and the history teacher have recourse to other disciplines, from several points of view (concepts, methods, didactic material). Some of the most useful disciplines may be: geography, sociology, psychology, economics, ethnology, anthropology and statistics.

As far as the historical documents are concerned, I would like to emphasize that they complement each other. We are far away from the positivistic theory which appreciated almost only the written sources. Nowadays we are looking for various types of evidence, that is written, but also visual and oral.⁷

Finally the field of history has been becoming larger and larger. Political history, religious history, economic and social history are just some of the many possible approaches. Battles, discoveries, treaties or other meaningful facts are studied. However, even everyday events or anonymous people behaviours deserve study and research.⁸

From history didactics viewpoint, there are diversified material, examples and all kind of evidence which can be used in the classroom situations.

3. POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT AND HISTORY DIDACTICS

In a way, each generation re-writes its history. Some authors have already conformed it. Certainly it has some effects on history didactics. A few examples can be taken from the Portuguese history and didactics viewpoint.

Portuguese Discoveries have a very special place in Portuguese, European and even in the world history. Nevertheless those events can be analyzed and taught from several points of view. Before 1974 (April 24th), in the Portuguese schools it was usually stressed the individual, chronological and factual factors. It was a didactical strategy going with apologetic history.

However, as Discoveries are a complex subject, they should be studied and taught considering other viewpoints as well. One could mention for instance: technological, economic, social, military and religious factors. A controversial point has been the causes and motivations of the geographical Discoveries. Several questions may be asked about it, as such: what were the main causes, the immediate as well as the mediate ones? Who were the men involved in the enterprise? What were the most important motivations from the economic, political, social and ideological viewpoint?⁹

Another subject was accurately studied, Middle Ages. Nevertheless XIX and XX centuries only occasionally were taken into account to be studied. In the last years things have been changing. In fact, if sometimes teachers do not deal with the history from the sixteenth century on,¹⁰ "contemporary" history (XIX and XX centuries) has been deserving much more attention. According to it James Harvey Robinson pointed out: "the New History proclaimed that history was all that we know about everything that man has ever done or thought or hoped or felt".¹¹

4. HISTORY DIDACTICS AND UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Before becoming a teaching subject or a specific course, history didactics has been a practice in the Faculties of Arts. Unfortunately,

university teachers usually are concerned mainly with their subject matters and do not pay enough attention to didactic aspects. For most of them, it is very important what to teach, not how to teach. We do not have statistic studies for Portugal. But even in the United States of America the situation is so: "Studies made by individual scholars as well as by groups within historical associations indicate that up to 90 % of history Ph. D.s. go into teaching, yet very few have received instruction in how to teach".¹²

Since Portuguese Faculties of Arts will go into teachers training for Middle and High Schools, they have to improve their teaching methods. If they don't one will ask: "How can they be expected to teach others to do what they cannot do well themselves?".¹³

It should be worthwhile to work the numbers of some informal experiences, mainly in the last years (from 1974 on). As a matter of fact some scholars could try unlike methods: discussion method, lecture method, participative methods, and so on. Every method has its side-effects. It depends on the goals that we would like to achieve. Those goals are likely to be according to the situation. However, we should always remember that "our task therefore is to help students to think, systematically, about the past and about its relationship with the present, and in doing so, we provide them with the best of all general educations".¹⁴ It will be easier to do that if theory and practice can be side by side.¹⁵

R E F E R E N C E S

1. P. F. M. Fontaine, "An international workplane for history teaching and history didactics. Proposals for European co-operation on history teaching", p. 21 (mimeog.)
2. The mentioned teaching has already started (1987 - 1988).
3. "What is history didactics? The second round", Informations, International Society for History Didactics, 1987, nº 1, p. 16.
4. Adelino de Carvalho Martins, "O projecto do sistema escolar português e a formação dos professores de história", Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia, nova série, ano V, 1971, nº 1, p. 140.
5. José Maria Amado Mendes, A história como Ciência. Fontes, metodologia e teorização, Coimbra, Coimbra Editora, 1987.
6. As Christian Laville pointed out: "La didactique de de l'histoire serait la science de la conscience historique; la didactique de l'histoire serait la science de l'enseignement de l'histoire à l'école: c'est vers l'une ou l'autre de ces deux êtremes que tendent, à des degrés divers, les réponses obtenus par le professeur Fontaine dans la première phase de son enquête" (Informations, International Society for History Didactics, 1987, nº 1, p. 18).
7. "The largest body evidence is made up of materials that are written, either in manuscript or in some printed form. There are other categories and it is convenient to distinguish written, visual and oral types of evidence" (Richard Brown and Christopher W. Daniels, Learnig History. A Guide to Advanced Study, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1986, p. 34).
8. In connection with anonymous people Marcel Reinhard has written: "Evidentemente que se têm posto sempre em primeiro plano os "grandes homens" - talvez até excessivamente - mas interessaria apresentar também o homem medio porque não basta fundi-lo anonimamente nas massas ou classes sociais" (Marcel Reinhard, O ensino da história e os seus problemas (trad. do francês), Coimbra, Atlântica Editora, s. d., p. 99)
9. Cf. "El motivo de los Descubrimientos geográficos. Seminario de la didáctica de la historia", Hacer Historia. Primera fase de investigación, Barcelona, Instituto de Ciências de la Educación de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 1982.
10. As it was pointed out: "Sabemos que na maior parte das escolas (do Ciclo Preparatório) e na melhor das hipóteses, a História de Portugal é estudada até aos finais do século XVI, apesar do programa prever o estudo da História de Pátria desde as origens da nacionalidade até aos nossos dias" (Inês A. de Castro e Rosa Maria de Carvalho, "Uma proposta de gestao do programa de História no Ensino Preparatório", O Professor, nº 62, 1984, p. 46)

11. Jerom L. Rodnitzky, "History and Relevance", Improving College and University Teaching, vol. XXIII, n^o 2, 1975, p. 76.
 12. Walter Ehrlich, "The Role of the University Scholar in the Training of High School Teachers", Improving College and University Teaching, vol. XXV, n^o 4, 1977, p. 234.
 13. W. Ehrlich, idem, p. 235.
 14. John Cannon, Teaching History at University, "Teaching of History Series", 56, London, The Historical Association, 1985, p. 11.
 15. See other bibliography in Karl Pellens et al., Geschichtskultur - Geschichtsdidaktik. Internationale Bibliographie, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984.
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The Board of the International Society of History Didactics regrets to announce that our fellow-member Raymond Davies, of Reading GB, died in February of this year. May he rest in peace.