

Research on history didactics of a teacher as an example of an intercultural approach to historical consciousness in Brazilian academia.

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Introduction

My master's research examined the historical identity of a history teacher in public schools in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil (Knoll, 2014). Starting with the hypothesis that the didactic choices of teachers are based on the time relations that they make with their own teaching practice, I designed a theoretical framework by mapping the research on the practice of history teachers that had been undertaken in Brazilian public universities added by the concepts of historical consciousness, historical narrative and historical identity (Rüsen, 2001, 2012), and experience and expectation (Koselleck, 2004). The framework served as a methodological tool that could make such time relations of the teaching practice explicit through historical narratives in order to reveal the historical identity of the teacher.

Analysis of the state of the Art

The first step for the theoretical framework was to historicize the concept of identity. After analyzing the uses of this concept in academia, I chose Rüsen's concept of Historical Identity (Rüsen, 2012, 2012a) as the tools used by the author, especially historical consciousness and historical narrative, enable History to have a more humanist social function in relation to ethnocentrism, which Rüsen claims to be the most serious issue in the studies of identity and that can only be overcome with identity appropriations based on historical consciousness and genetic narratives. The next step was to demonstrate that the academic thinking that developed the concept of historical identity is the same one that has become a new paradigm in research in Brazilian universities that examine the practice of History teachers. This conclusion was reached after a state of the art focusing on the publications of research groups which highlighted that many of the studies carried out until the year 2000 were based on the new paradigm of history teachers called History Didactics. One example is the analysis of Droysen's works by Hartog (2011) that demonstrated that History Didactics considers History itself as the combination of research about the past, the orientation to the present by the past, and the ways of representation of History. This idea was the philosophical basis to the design of the research methodology.

Building the methodology

For the research, I used a Likert questionnaire, two semistructured interviews, analysis of class plans, and classroom observations of the teacher. A qualitative microanalysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1997) was adapted by using the main principles of the theoretical framework, i.e. Kuhn's paradigm (Kuhn, 1970), Rüsen's historical consciousness, historical narrative, and historical identity, and Koselleck's experience and expectation, as well as contributions of other authors who used the same concepts, such as Seixas, Lee and Borries. The construction of identity was examined by looking at how people learn history, either in formal education or by living in society. This learning was historicized by using the concepts of historical formation and historical learning as presented by Rüsen (2001, 2010a, 2010c, 2012a), and the ways that this cognitive process occurs was demonstrated through the disciplinary matrix of historical thinking. The matrix itself is not enough to fully explain how historical learning happens, so in order to justify some of its moves, especially the transformation of lack of orientation for ideas, I used the concept of experience and expectation in Koselleck (2004). With these concepts it was possible to analyse the teacher's practice starting from the principle that every human action arises from an interest based on a future expectation. This action is always chosen through a repertoire acquired throughout life experiences. The teacher's didactics, like all human action, is also formed through these time relations. Therefore, the questionnaire was created with elements of the historical consciousness of the teacher that could be useful for the methodological tools to apprehend the historical identity. Rüsen (2012a) has advised some steps for such questionnaire and Angvik & Borries (1997) were the first ones to create such tool. At the same time that I was careful to follow the notes of other authors who adapted the questionnaire to their own contexts, such as Lee (2002) and Cerri (2011), my research also adapted the questionnaire to the context that I investigated.

Findings and implications

The purpose of the Likert questionnaire was to generate data about the teacher, such as years of work and experience, expectations in relation to the students, opinions about History and about what students think about History. The questionnaire was the first step to generate the semistructured interview, which was used so that the teacher's responses could be analyzed as a historical narrative. The analysis of the narrative was done based on Rüsen (2001), Koselleck (2004), Seixas (2013) and Lee (2003). In the narrative, the teacher revealed what she focuses on her teaching practice, she showed what she thinks about the students, what she believes it is best for them and how she works to contribute to their improvement based on what she considers to be important to be improved. This information was confirmed by analyzing her class plans.

At this point, I examined the school that seemed to be more challenging for the teacher to work because I thought the time relations that I was investigating would be more explicit. I used Rüsen's disciplinary matrix for this analysis, though it was not appropriate to issues of school didactics and it needed some resignifications, as claimed by Rüsen (2001). The resignification originated a new matrix that I named Matrix of History Teaching and that I used as a philosophical basis for class observations. Class observations were audio recorded. After the initial observation, the narrative of the teacher was confirmed however, the school context was very unique and we both made the decision to observe her classes in another school and compare with the initial data. After the observation in the second school, another semistructured interview was conducted to confront my findings and thus creating another narrative. That was the most important narrative of the research and changing it into data was a challenging task. First, time was analyzed in the narrative as per Rüsen (2004, 2012a), Bruner (2001) and Koselleck (2006). With grounded theory, the statements of the narrative were categorized into past, present and future, and I observed that the teacher uses these categories in a dynamic way, always using the experience of the past and the expectation of the future to justify her present speech. I used Rüsen's typology of historical narratives (Rüsen, 2001, 2012a) and I concluded that the articulation of the time could be categorized as genetic. At the end of the investigation, the Matrix of History Teaching was used once more with each statement of the narrative and compared with the Disciplinary Matrix, which helped me see that the teacher focuses more on the political aspects of her practice and conclude that her Historical Identity is essentially political.

The reflections on the scientific paradigm of history Didactics enabled me to develop a new way to analyze the work of teachers. In this sense, the Teacher's Historical Identity could be inferred through this qualitative research method that I developed, by using a framework build through History Theory in this paradigm that is growing in Brazil.

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