Κείμενα Παιδείας

Historical Literacy and the Structuring Process of Historical Knowledge in Students

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Abstract

In the 19th century, history emerged as a professional cognitive faculty and historians tried to exempt historical writing from its rhetorical elements and literary features[1]. According to Ricoeur, historical narration[2] is defined as the logical organisation[3] of heterogeneous elements, so that actors, actions, means and unpredictable events are transformed into a constitutionally organized whole with a plot, namely into a history (Kavvoura-Sissoura, 2011). History is not just the narration of war or definite events, but the attempt to restructure the past with the aim to interpret the past and maybe to predict the future. In the educational framework, historical knowledge does not include only the learning of events, as well as the development of skills that will make a person historically literate.

School history, with the contribution of the interpretive method, is a study of the historical past, the space and time, the intentionality and causality. It also records the historical context, so that students become historically literate. The main purpose of historical literacy is the distinction and understanding of historical knowledge, which is developed through historical description, narration and interpreting of text with the aim to obtain historical thinking, historical reasoning and historical consciousness.

Key words: history, historical literacy, historical knowledge

Περίληψη

Στην παρούσα εργασία επιχειρούμε να παρουσιάσουμε την έννοια του ιστορικού εγγραμματισμού, καθώς και τον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι μαθητές του Δημοτικού κατακτούν την ιστορική γνώση. Η συγκρότηση ιστορικής σκέψης και συνείδησης είναι μια δύσκολη και πολύπλοκη διαδικασία για τους μαθητές, στην οποία καθοριστικό ρόλο παίζει η γλώσσα των κειμένων, καθώς μεταφέρουν τις πηγές του παρελθόντος στο σήμερα.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: ιστορία, ιστορικός εγγραμματισμός, ιστορική γνώση

1. The conceptual definition of "historical literacy"

The term "historical literacy" is associated with the ability of learning subjects to be self defined in space, time and in relation with "the others", to structure their

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[1] Although in every language, including the scientific one, it inevitably has a rhetorical dimension.

[2] For narration and historical process (temporalisation, fiction and objectivities) see Babounis, H. (2012). Historical Narration and Sources. Athens: Papazisi.

[3] Ricoeur does not support the temporal organisation of history (Kavvoura-Sissoura, 2011).

own identity and personality [4] and acquire the skills to understand the modern social reality (Kavvoura-Sissoura, 2011). More specifically, historical literacy is defined by the terms "historical knowledge", "historical thinking", "historical consciousness" and "historical reasoning" (Mamoura, 2016:214).

The acquisition of historical knowledge contributes to the development of critical mind by an individual, by using strategies to build up the new knowledge, and creates skills for the participation to the society as a whole, contributing, as a result, to the creation of a dialectic relationship between the person and the world (Repousi, 2004). Historical knowledge is constructed actively and is achieved through the intermediation of sources, their interpretation by the historians, as well as the use of these sources (Chourdakis, 2001:170). The way historical knowledge is structured is addressed below in detail.

As far as historical thinking is concerned, this requires the understanding of historical facts, which have been caused by certain circumstances and lead to specific results (Chourdakis, 2001:162). Historical thinking can be formed with a. the comprehension of historical importance, b. the recognition and determination of the concepts of continuity and change, c. the analysis of causality and consequences, and d. the understanding of the social dimension of history (Repousi, 2007). The different forms of historical thinking establish a conceptual thinking framework, which functions and becomes meaningful and significant depending on the historical content (Seixas, 2006). As a result, since someone has acquired a historical thinking, they can easily acquire historical consciousness as well, which means the "*understanding of the individual and collective initiative in space and time and comprehension that the present is a product of the action of people of the past and that the present will become the chargeable factor of the future*". Unlike historical thinking, the acquisition of "historical consciousness" indicates the understanding of human behaviour in specific situations and the formation of opinions and attitudes. The structure of historical consciousness includes a. the sentience of time, which means that a person places the events in the "past-present-future" time axis, understands that events last for a period of time, distants itself from "the others, once and somewhere else" and narrates the developments in the course of time (Chourdakis, 2001:163), b. the consciousness of the reality, when the person distinguishes the real events from the mythical one and c. the consciousness of historicity, which is the result of the previous two types of consciousness and is associated with historical thinking, since the perception of the historicity of the past entails the perception of the historicity of the present and the future (Chourdakis, 2001:163).

Apart from the aforementioned concepts, historical literacy is tightly associated with the sense of historical reasoning, which is defined as the process during which a person has been taught historical knowledge and is able to deploy it to interpret the past and the future (Mamoura, 2016:214). Historical reasoning can be achieved when someone mentally organizes the information received through historical knowledge and then uses it to describe, compare and explain the facts of the past or the present. However, this activity requires someone's ability to state historical questions, use meta-concepts of history and present arguments (Mamoura, 2016: 214). In short, historical reasoning is interpreted as the transformation of knowledge and information included in historical texts, so that a person can argue about thematic

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[4] The development of individual and social cultural identity requires historical knowledge and critical thinking, which will lead to the critical processing of the data of the past and the present (Husbands, 2004).

units of history and be mindful about the effect of the past to the formation of the present.

The main axes of historical literacy are:

1. understanding the structure of history
2. knowing, understanding and being aware of the importance of historical facts
3. learning of fact-finding methods, information evaluating and critical thinking
4. connecting the reading ability of historical texts with the ability of thinking (Repousi, 2007).

Creative utilisation of historical literacy in education requires the comprehension and use of language, since it is formed verbally, as well as the historical concepts of communicative, methodological and organisational character. However, this also requires a. the evocation of historical knowledge and its association with historical knowledge, b. the definition of historical concept and c. the distinction among similar historical concepts. Furthermore, the senses of time, space, change, consistency, sequence, as well as causality are also remarkable (Repousi, 2007).

As a consequence, the historical literate human is able to: a. understand the language of a historical text, b. comprehend and conquer the conceptual structure of language, c. restructure and interpret historical events, d. reflect and assess, e. use the Information and Communication Technologies when searching for historical material, f. process and evaluate information, g. raise questions and assumptions, and f. compose argumentation and participate in scientific dialogues. Moniot claims that "historical thinking" means "individualise" (individualiser) and "generalise" (généraliser), based on historical evidence (Moniot, 2002:66).

2. Historical knowledge at school

History learning at school gives students the opportunity to be initiated into historical literacy and acquire a structured historical knowledge, fully in line with the science of history. The rational approach of the past, leads students to the structure of a cohesive cognitive scheme about history, and contributes to the reinforcement of the process of historical research of past times and the development of aspects of the intended historical literacy aspects (Moniot, 2002· Repousi, 2007). The changes in the face of school history as a subject module, as well as the definition of history teaching as an independent, yet interdisciplinary, object, create new learning conditions for historical education, always in the framework of rapid scientific changes made in the current technological era (Angelakos & Kokkinos, 2004). The modern methodological strategies are focused on the approach of human activity, the enhancement of structural elements of historical science and the utilisation of historical sources by using constructive learning approaches.

The writing of didactic textbooks for the history lesson has been based on the principles and the philosophy of the Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework and the Curriculum and on modern pedagogical, educational and historical aspects and views that emphasize the need for teaching[5] to serve the main purpose of a lesson, which is the cultivation of historical consciousness and historical thinking in students, making them historically literate. Specifically, the aim history teaching, according to the Interdisciplinary Uniform Curriculum Framework is "*the development of historical thinking and historical consciousness. The development of historical thinking*

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[5] By "teaching', we mean the selection, presentation and processing of the syllabus.

concerns the understanding of historical events through the examination of causes and results, while the cultivation of historical consciousness is about the comprehension of human behaviour in specific situations and the formation of principles and attitudes leading to the expression of responsible behaviour in the present and the future. So, with teaching of History, the student can obtain not only the knowledge that the modern world is a continuation of the past, but also the perception that the modern historical horizon directly associated with his life. Thus, the purpose of historical thinking and historical consciousness is associated with the overall aim of education, which is the creation of responsible citizens" (Ministry of Education and Religions & Pedagogical Institute, 2003²).

According to the Curriculum of History, emphasis is given to the upbuilding of historical, declarative, procedural and conceptual knowledge, the development of skills and the conceptual structure, elements that lead students to "learn how to learn", which means to discover knowledge through active methods, such as the utilisation of sources and the structure of projects and not to receive it ready. Students should 1. Conquer the basic conceptual structure of history (concepts, correlations, generalisations), 2. be able to understand the language of a historical text, written in historical codes, 3. Acquire, to some extent, the way of thinking of a historian, to develop similar skills through the utilisation of historical sources and build principles, attitudes and behaviours that are commonly acceptable by the society.

However, to achieve text comprehension, the texts should be the first to fulfill the criteria of language cohesion and conceptual coherence. Without these, speech is not a uniform and structured text with language and conceptual sequence, but it may be similar to a phone directory, a shopping list, a price list or the ingredients list of a recipe (Matsagouras, 2007). Language cohesion refers to different language means (grammatical, lexilogical, phonological), with which the text connects its superficial components (words, phrases, sentences) in a structural level in order to construct large units of speech (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2011· Archakis, 2005).

The modern socio-political changes showcase new contexts and new types of texts. Depending on the communication situation, there are everyday texts and texts of administration, science and technology. Normality is observed in communicative situations, which are predictable, serve specific social functions and therefore they form specific text structures with recognizable characteristics as regards structure, vocabulary, syntax and style. These text forms are called genres, which are divided into subcategories called text types [6] (Matsagouras, 2007· Matsagouras, 2001). As a result, factors should be sought that make a text effective in the fulfillment of its purpose in the specific communicative situation. These factors are: a. the structure and lexical-grammatical form of the text must be in line with the objectives it intends to achieve in that specific communicative situation and b. its language elements must be clearly connected with the conceptual ones (Koutsoulelou-Michou, 1997).

The texts included in the History textbooks in primary schools (Katsoulakos et al, 2012· Glentis et al. 2012· Koliopoulos et al. 2012) are classified with regard to a. Their purpose in the informational or referential speech, as with the surrounding reality being the reference point, they represent the facts to inform the readers, b. their gender, they belong to the narrative and descriptive speech, c. their stylistic characteristics, they belong to the scientific world and specifically to the category of historical speech with the specific text types of the historical narration of events and

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[6] For example, in the text genre of journalist speech the text types identified are the interview, the reportage and the serial.

the historical interpretation of situations (Matsagouras, 2007· Koutsoulelou-Michou, 1997). Students are exercised in the identification and understanding of their text data and then to the speech production, both oral and written.

In an attempt to create a broader framework, we could say that textuality [7] in history is formed depending on the historical sources, as they organized texts that mediate between historical events and their recording. "Historical being" is recorded as a complex language process, as sources are not "neutral" language structures, but verbal and conceptual equities that are ideologically and politically charged. The sources or documents used as sources are language structures, namely texts using rhetorical strategies to show something[8]. They are then followed by the interpretations of primordial texts by the historians and history teachers, who form a manifold and diverse language text, through which they transfer historical knowledge to the present (Kokkinos, 1998:38-41).

3. The structuring process of historical knowledge

Historical knowledge is structured based on the sources, namely those that have truly happened (res gestae), as well as those that the source writers chose to record (intentio auctoris), the interpretations of historians (intentio lectoris), as well as the use of these sources at the present with a specific purpose (intentio operis) (Chourdakis, 2001:170). In time, historians have supported their main commitment regarding "historical integrity", such as Ranke, who worked having in mind that objective knowledge is possible. However, Novick suggested that objectivity in history is impossible, since historical narration is associated with a reality, which the historian tries to approach in the most direct way possible. As a result, historians accept that historical texts refer to the reality, however, every historical report is a structure resulting from the dialogue of the historian with the past, carried out according to specific criteria commonly accepted by historians (Novick, 1988). With the guidance of scientific research and scientific speech, sources are interpreted as narrative situations that re-establish the reality, because in no case can they transfer reality directly (Iggers, 1999, 162-165).

As a result, historical sources, both primary and secondary, are texts transporting the past to the present. These diverse sources, combined with another teaching material, printed, optical or acoustic, are used in the teaching process and constitute a multi-modal learning environment for the creation of representations and comprehension skills of historical knowledge (Repousi, 2004). The remnants of the past [9] stimulate the approach of the past, not as a self-evident and non-negotiable entity, but as a subject of systematic study. Nevertheless, the study of the past can in no case be achieved by memorizing historical information, but, in contrary, it requires the active involvement of the reader in complex processes of mental structure and interpretation (Repousi, 2004).

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[7] This means the seven functions of a text: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, informativity, intertextuality, situationality, acceptability.

[8] For example, even statistical data are chosen and constructed.

[9] The Helladic space exudes a historicity, as we can see history everywhere around us, we walk and see street names that take us to the distant past, or monuments from the archaic or the roman period. The introduction of children into historical knowledge starts from the family environment, so that through familiar examples and references, students understand the notion of historicity. Marc Ferro thinks that "the image we have form the other peoples or for ourselves is associated with the history we were narrated when we were children. This history marks us for our entire life" (Ferro, 2001, 9)[9].

Today, the new teaching approach is not persistent to history as a narration (narrative), but as history that puzzles, searches and explains (Moniot, 2002), so that through the deconstruction of the concepts describing the past and the critical approach of it, students will be able to understand the diversity and change made in time (Chourdakis, 2001:170). According to the Curriculum and the Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework, new teaching methods are applies, such as empathy[10], which helps students put themselves in the position of the acting person of history and to interpret the human behaviour of the past using their sentiments, the historical method (collection, control and interpretation of the material), the comparative method, during which students observe the same event in different conditions and proceeds to comparisons, the interpretative approach, etc (Leontsinis, 2003). In addition, the unidimensional notion and approach is avoided and the multiprismatic, multidimensional and multi-level study is sought, within the framework of cross-cultural interactions, since human society is not being approached as an autonomous and closed group but, in contrary, as open, with multiple influences. At the same time, history revolves around a local, national, transnational and universal approach, aiming at the comprehension of the complexity of historical phaenomena (Repousi, 2004). Given the fact that the development of historical thinking is the ulterior motive of teaching, students are motivated to come into contact with primary historical material through the exploratory method, while the teaching strategies of memorisation and uncritical acceptance of narrations are avoided (Husbands, 2004· Moniot, 2002).

In our view, history textbooks in primary school have a rich thematic material, extending from the archaic period to the history of newer and modern world, and include not only political-military national events but also periods of peace. Their chapters showcase the ideas of freedom, creation and tradition, as well as the way of humans to conquer civilisation and offer to the society. In addition, an important emphasis is given to the description of the life, habits and occupations of humans. Thus, through history students can learn to understand, restructure, reflect, judge, research, interpret and discourse, as the knowledge and skills they already have are completed or restructured though historical knowledge and study (Ministry of Education and Religions & Pedagogical Institute, 2003²).

It should not be precluded that through the pedagogical and teaching design of History textbooks in primary education, the cross-thematic approach of history is adopted and the introduction of students into historical methodology through the use of learning experience and obtained knowledge[11] (Angelakos & Kokkinos, 2004). Through the approach of other cognitive subjects of the curriculum, such as Language, Physics and Geography, the educator creates the appropriate conditions so that he can pass historical knowledge multidimensionally in a special and creative way (Ministry of Education and Religions & Pedagogical Institute, 2003²).

As far as the role of teachers is concerned, they should use alternative teaching methods when approaching and understanding the historical subjects, in order to familiarize with historical notions, develop deductions and causal relationships,

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[10] According to Repousi (2007) the concept of "historical empathy" is controversial. This term is defined as someone's ability to exercise their imagination and the conscious placement of themselves to the position of another person, which aims to understand the other person and not to conclude emotional bonds and is different from empathy (Leontsinis, 2003). However, the question arising is whether the student can be put to the position of the people from the past, as the historical writer is the one who regenerates the events based on personal representations and experiences.

[11] Through guided dialogue, the personal participation of students is encouraged, the traditionally narrative way of teaching is abolished and the regenerative teaching is reinforced through historical analysis and narration.

integrate events into the adequate historical framework and organize information in a cohesive cognitive scheme (Repousi, 2004). Through a creatively organized teaching process, teachers can use the role play, support theatrical plays and exhibitions, collections, written physco-kinetic activities and use other lessons, such as literature. Teaching can be accompanied by audiovisual means, sources, videos, movies, slides, newspapers, printed material and maps that will have a complementary and helpful role combined with the school textbook. Besides, sensationalising historical subjects helps to the understanding and experiential approach of history. Finally, during the teaching process, teachers can use the Information and Communication Technologies, which contribute greatly to the organisation and handling of historical material and the knowledge of the historical past since the access to historical content is easier, the data processing is made better and the multiple representations of historical phaenomena is made possible.

However, the difficulties that students face in the comprehension of historical concepts are due to the effect of the educational level of parents and the teacher's role on the one hand, and the language development of students on the other hand. According to Kokkinos, the linguistic competence of students influences and defines their problem solving, rationally thinking and produce reasoning production ability, depending on their linguistic skills (Kokkinos, 1998). Therefore, the cultivation of language is considered necessary, not only for the linguistic development of children, but also for the comprehension of history, as it is affected by the language knowledge and function. Language is used to describe and narrate historical texts, but it also contains many abstract concepts. Even those concepts that are considered as simple (peace, war, revolution), they are in fact not so much. It is not uncommon that the structure of sentences itself can confuse the students and a higher level of thinking might be required, to which they may not have reached yet (Husbands, 2004). Lastly, the problem of language is also associated with the way in which children create the concepts. In the case of primary school students, the understanding and assimilation of historical events is facilitated through the use of visual materials, as the linguistic expression of texts is often theoretical and abstract, which confuses students (Chourdakis, 2001:182). For example, primary education students find it hard to think only in words, while when images are inserted in the books, they contribute to the better capturing of the message. At the same time, the use of short texts with a clear and definite expression helps students to be initiated into the historical events (Chourdakis, 2001:182).

At this point, the importance of language in the production of multidimensional knowledge should be highlighted. The so-called "linguistic turn" in history, defined as the recognition of the importance of language or speech to the formation of societies that has influenced historiography, will focus on the fact that people interpret historical texts based on different linguistic and conceptual codes they use; therefore multiple interpretations might be observed. However, apart from the diverse interpretative suggestions, language contributes to the creation of a conceptual frame in history, which means the formation of a "rhetorical expression" (Chourdakis, 2001:182). For example, students are asked to narrate events, express thoughts and opinions or/and argue, so they will use relevant concepts and vocabulary depending on their linguistic knowledge.

It is worth mentioning that the impact of linguistic theory on historical studies has been major. Some historians regard history as semantics, according to which society is considered as culture and culture as a network of semantics, reminiscent of a literature text that is not associated with extra-textual reality. Other historians think

language as a tool to approach the social and cultural reality. For the most part, history as a whole does not have any inherent unity or cohesion, as the concept of history itself is a structure organized through language. Every text can be read and interpreted in various ways, because it expresses ambiguous intentions (Iggers, 1999: 162-165).

To summarise, students through the history lesson are asked to respond to the analysis of historical sources, develop forms of historical thinking and acquire historical consciousness. The oral and written skills of students have a leverage effect on the explanation of historical sources, the familiarisation with the distinctiveness of historical science and their participation in activities that stimulate the processes of comprehension and signification of a text (Repousi, 2007· Repousi, 2004).

Conclusion

The concept of historical literacy does not only refer to knowledge, but also to its application in environments of relative use, so that students are able to recall historical events to document their views. As a result, the structure of historical knowledge and development of historical thinking are the result of an active dialogue between the reader and the evidence of the past with language being the driving force.

Understanding the past is an active and, at the same time, difficult process that requires the use of interpretative language in order for conceptual and linguistic difficulties to be prevented. The rendering of historical ideas and concepts takes place through various types of linguistic expression, sometimes overlapping and sometimes separate including words of literal or metaphorical meaning that constitute texts with multiple meanings. Therefore, it is necessary to use a clear and accurate language that will activate the students' way of thinking, contribute to the spiritual cultivation and the expansion of their horizons. As a result, we consider it necessary that the text language in school books is clear and definite, without vagueness and dark places, so that language is transformed into an interpretative network that will restructure the past, activate the way of thinking of students and will contribute to their spiritual cultivation and expansion of spiritual horizons. Consequently, history is not just a read that could be taught by teachers of various specialties, but it requires special interpretation and deeper understanding, therefore it must be taught methodically by specialized scientists and not provided to students as something offered by the way.

Knowledge of history, not only Greek, but also European and Worldwide, is useful and necessary, so that students can understand and realise the world they live in, shape their own identity, socialize and later, act as responsible and democratic citizens of the world, themselves. Ignorance of history leads to defective historical education, if not to historical analphabetism, which allows stereotypes and dominance of myths against historical truth and reality.

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