

Symposium: History textbooks: affordances and constraints for historical thinking and multiperspectivity

History education plays an important role in empowering new generations to critically examine historical representations, to (re)interpret difficult pasts and enhance dialogue and mutual understanding. In this context, scholars in the field of history education advocate the teaching of historical thinking and reasoning, which departs from the understanding of history as interpretation and which includes the exploration of multiple perspectives. History textbooks have an important role in mediating the learning of history. History textbooks, however, often provide nationalist or essentialist perspectives on history and in the history classroom the teaching of historical thinking and reasoning is not common practice.

This symposium brings together research that provides more insight into how history textbooks and teachers' use of textbooks afford or constrain multiperspectivity and historical thinking. The individual papers explore these questions in different contexts (The Netherlands, Austria, Syria). This symposium shows that important role of textbooks in history education, how teachers and students deal with textbooks and how textbooks can provide a one-sided perspective and become means of constructing national identities. Based upon their research, the presenters also provide suggestions for teachers and teacher educators for writing and using history textbooks in ways that enhance the development of students' historical thinking abilities and contribute to open and democratic societies.

History education and the construction of national identity in Syria: The need for a critical and emancipatory approach

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Abstract

Research (Foster, 2012) shows that in many countries, textbooks continue to adopt a single

nationalistic narrative of the past, where some perspectives are promoted, while others are ignored and silenced. Using critical discourse analysis, this study critically approaches the discourse on national identity in Syrian history textbooks. The research studies the 9th grade history textbook that is published by the Ministry of Education and the counterpart textbook that has been edited by an oppositional educational organization outside the country. The study problematizes the type of identity propagated in both textbooks and highlight the emancipatory potential of critical thinking and multiperspectivity in history education and the impact on the peace-building, transitional justice, and democratization of a country emerging from violence.

Keywords: History textbooks; National Identity; Multiperspectivity, Transitional Justice; Critical Discourse Analysis; Emancipation