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Is teaching history actually aiming at citizenship?

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Since the end of the 19th century history has been taught in primary schools in France as a support for collective identity and citizenship. The same aims have been assigned to history in the secondary schools since 1902, where it was particularly important, because there was no civic education in secondary school during most of the 20th century, and none in upper secondary schools before 2000[1]. Current official curriculum texts framing history and geography teaching[2] have the same goals for pupils from 8 to 18 years, and these are largely the same as during the Third Republic: "the civic aims have been defined in the introduction to the curriculum of primary school: …understanding the present world and acting on it as a free and responsible individual, being actively present in politics, requires knowledge of the world, of its diversity and evolution. The curricula in *collège* as in *lycée* have no other prospects"[3] (author's translation). Although the meaning of 'citizenship' has evolved during the century and is still a controversial issue in France, this paper focuses on what teachers do with and for such goals, considering research either directed in the INRP (National Institute for Pedagogical Research) or in the IUFM of Lyon.

When asked about the objectives of school history, secondary teachers frequently mention its civic function (80% according to Lautier, 1997): understanding history would evolve 'naturally' into developing attitudes relating to power, to culture, to otherness; learning

[1] It is a little difficult to define 'secondary school' for the whole century. For the first half of the 20th century, 'primary school' was devoted to the children from less well-off families, who went to school from age 6 to 12/14; only a few went on to attend what was called 'upper primary'; while the 'secondary schools' welcomed the children of the well-off from ages 6-18. The two streams were not successive but parallel educational systems. This changed during the second part of the 20th century: France now has primary schools (6-11), middle secondary schools (*college*) (11-15), and upper secondary schools (*lycée*) for children from 15-18, or the alternative vocational schools.

[2] In France both are taught by the same teacher; the content is different, but the aims and general teaching methods are common to both subjects.

[3] les finalités civiques ont été définies dans l'introduction aux programmes de l'école primaire : 'comprendre le monde contemporain et agir sur lui en personne libre et responsable, être présent et actif au sein de la cité, exigent la connaissance du monde dans sa diversité et son évolution'. Les programmes du collège et ceux du lycée n'ont pas d'autres perspectives', *histoire, géographie, éducation civique, programmes et accompagnements*, réédition 2000, ministère de l'éducation nationale, p.14

history is learning about Human rights[4]. This adherence to the civic aim and function of history is emphasised far less by primary teachers, who prefer to see in history a support for developing curiosity and sharing pleasure through discovering topics chosen for their interest, or because of some local link[5]. In this context, civic aims are subsidiary, or neglected. When interviewed, up to 50% of primary teachers do not make any reference to objectives at all. It is suggested that this difference between secondary and primary teachers, may be connected to their professional identities, with the secondary teachers more concerned with passing on the importance, interest and taste of history, and the primary teachers more focussed on educating children and developing their abilities. The conception of history may also vary between the two, e.g. for primary teachers, history is knowledge of the past but it is *not* a social science.

Looking more precisely at teachers' attitudes to the civic aims of school history, we found another contrast, but one not divided on primary/secondary basis, perpendicular to the former one. Some teachers seemed deeply and personally committed to those aims; they refer to the values of democracy and of the Republic, and to the necessity for everyone (both in France and more generally in Europe) to develop such values as a basis for social and political common life; they also refer to the necessity of transmitting these values in schools and in their own lessons. Other teachers reject such an aim, asserting that it is opposed to individual liberties (especially of thought), that values are a matter of private choice, and that they as teachers must respect their pupils' privacy. As a teacher trainer, I have often heard students or young teachers speak like that, although not all are disturbed by the official command, addressed to all teachers of all subjects, to promote common democratic values through teaching[6].

It is difficult to draw even a general conclusion about whether teachers adhere to the civic goals of history teaching. It can be noted that teacher training in France does not always include reflection on the ethical and political aspects of teaching, which may be optional, integrated into other themes or omitted, but the research suggests that the perspectives give in interviews seemed to depend more on personal attitudes and experiences than on the training courses.

History in the French classroom

In French primary schools, the main work is based on documents (pedagogical or 'historical', but presented in ways that can be understood by children aged from 8 to 11) in which pupils look for precise, selective information, guided by questions from their teacher. The answers to questions are proposed, sometimes collated and discussed, always corrected; finally jointly-composed sentences containing the most important information are recorded in notebooks. In secondary schools also, the most usual way to teach is using

[4] There is not always a clear distinction made between the rights as human being and the rights as citizen: the political specificities of the last may be blurred.

[5] Of course there are contents prescribed for history in primary school as at other levels and in other subjects; but a large study has shown that most teachers allow themselves to choose, or even to study other topics§ (Audigier & Tutiaux-Guillon).

[6] Loi d`orientation du 10 juillet 1989

documents, albeit more historical, to support the teacher's presentation, interpretation and explanation of the past. The teacher imparts information and then asks question about a relevant document; pupils are expected to confirm and corroborate what s/he has said. The dialogue is always very quick; if answers are not forthcoming, the question is changed for an easier one or the teacher gives the answer. Both teacher's and pupils' contributions are based on 'facts' - figures, examples, realistic details, quotations from witness which are thought of as 'true' reports etc. The pupils either record what seems important to them (mostly what the teacher says), or what is proposed in the discussion. This process minimises any analysis of the documents used.

In both primary and secondary schools facts are privileged over ideas, knowledge over attitudes or competencies (excepting the ability to extract a selective information from a document), and listening skills over reasoning. Citizenship is implicitly connected with a large store of knowledge, which provides references for comparing the present with the past, or a collection of interpretations. But it is not connected to the ability to judge, to debate, to develop a critical mind or problem-solving reflection. Secondary teachers asked about how they develop civic and historic consciousness through their teaching typically refer to content, and especially to political topics involving the *idea* of citizenship, such as 'Athens during the 5th century BC', 'the French revolution' or 'the building of the EU'. But, at least in the initial interviews that we have conducted in our new research in the IUFM of Lyon, they do not mention the way they teach or the work done in the classroom as a possible support to civic consciousness. Knowledge is first, and is sometimes all.

Focussing on knowledge induces the teacher to think only about which knowledge is important for which topic, or which knowledge is necessary for further topics; it does not make links between knowledge and civic aims. For example, when the teacher makes a reference to a news item or to the present world during a history course, it is usually to clarify vocabulary or attitudes, to evoke empathy, or to underline the contrast between past and present. Using the past as a means of understand the present, or examining the past from a current perspective, is very rare. This is a very positivistic conviction: that knowledge is sufficient for 'enlightening the citizen'[7], and that having learnt the 'truth', s/he will act knowingly, and so responsibly. Of course teachers recognise that this is not the immediate case for their pupils, but they express a real trust in a sort of natural development of the link between knowledge and reflective responsible action - "Now they don't, but they will", or "it needs the passing of time, but they will remember and later give sense to what they have learnt."[8] This conviction allows a simultaneous adherence to the civic goals of history teaching and an everyday practice focussed on knowledge that is actually dissociated from those aims. This general approach does not exclude the possibility that sometimes, in some lessons, knowledge and civic aims may be linked. Our research next year, which will be conducted in both primary and secondary schools, will

[7] The enlightened citizen (*le citoyen éclairé*) is a *topos* of school official texts.

[8] But several researches about civic and historical consciousness among the young do not find a lot of support for this conviction: 'later' seem to mean at least 'after school', if ever.

involve observing lessons that the teacher has chosen as, in her/his opinion, aiming at citizenship; we intend to identify the moments when this aim is explicitly addressed, and analyse how it is managed. We then intend to apply those analyses to teachers training.

If we believe that pupils learn something about social roles through school practices, then an analysis of the place and role allotted to them is of interest. Of course a school is not a democracy, nor a little republic, and neither is a history classroom. What is most important for learning is always said by the teacher; who controls what is asked, what is worthy of enquiry, what is to be studied; the teacher imposes the 'right' interpretation on any document, the 'right' answer (i.e. the answer which best serves his/her argument) to a question. Only in innovative lessons have we seen pupils allowed or required to develop hypotheses, to propose and debate interpretations. The teaching of history through problem-solving is exceptional. Very often matters which pupils are finding difficult is abandoned for easier material. This suits the need to teach to heterogeneous classes, to involve everyone and to keep the class obedient. As a teacher from a *lycée* said (author's translation) "a classroom full of active citizen is difficult to manage, is noisy and disorganised; it is frightening. We will train citizens, but at the same time passive or meek pupils in the classroom"'(Tutiaux-Guillon, 2000).

The pedagogical form of history teaching is grounded in the authority of the teacher, or better the 'master', both as the one 'who knows the truth' and the one 'who rules the classroom'. In lessons the pupils have no choice, no apparent freedom of thought, and no initiative. Debates (real ones which have some stake, and are not only a motivating introduction to a lesson) are scarce in secondary schools, because historical truth is 'not subject to debate'. Debates are immediately thought of as for/against debates, which may be appropriate for a matter involving a decision, but are not suited to the study of the past.

In primary schools debates must now be introduced (the 2002 curricula), but we do not know how it will be managed.[9] Completed argumentation has been introduced only recently in secondary schools as a new type of assessment imposed by the Ministry of Education. This allows the pupils to think for themselves rather than merely parroting the opinions of others, and perhaps to reflect on the past. This new requirement may introduce some diversity in the approaches to historical topics, whereas currently the main preoccupation is to get a consensus on the 'truth' (hence the role of documents). This ideal of consensus is not only for the young in schools: it is also an ideal of our political and social organisation - harmony grounded on sameness for the younger, and tolerance (and sometimes relativism) for the older, citizens - where conflict is regarded as a dysfunction. In history teaching, there is no distinction between difference of opinion and differences in knowledge, or between what can or cannot be discussed; no reflection on the difference between an affective conflict and a political one, etc. How effective is a training for citizenship and democracy when the clue to understanding is authority, when debate is excluded, and when the only 'right' society is a consensual one?

[9] In primary school, the debate is used often in civics, to reflect on and solve immediate or urgent problems in the classroom.

As a conclusion, I offer three questions:

- the first is 'ethical': how should we reconcile the goal of developing democratic young people who respect and exercise human and citizen rights with the principle of respecting their freedom of mind and tolerance of a diversity of values, especially non-occidental ones?
- secondly, a question which may be described as 'epistemological': Can we develop a citizenship that reflects on the type of history and of historical activities and reasoning and which also connects factual teleological history and problems and enquiries from today's history?
- my final question refers to learning and to the cognitive sciences: knowledge is considered necessary for a responsible citizenry. We do not contest this; but is it enough? Can we trust that what is learned in youth will be sufficient to provide a basis for action in maturity?

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