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**HISTORY EDUCATION UNDER THE NEW EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN SPAIN: NEW WINE
IN OLD BOTTLES**

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the current Spanish school history scene and the responses of the new Spanish curriculum to the problems detected. As in other countries in Europe, the government of Spain has just revised the pre – university history curriculum in order to correct its weaknesses and to offer a better history education which is capable of combining both an understanding of the past and the promotion of critical thinking. However, the changes seem to be insufficient and the responsibility for school history education again seems to depend the efforts and expertise of practitioners. Through a study of the recent practice in classrooms application bibliography this article offers some small insights into the problems of and hopes for history teaching in Spain.

Keywords: History Education, Spanish curriculum, Historical Thinking, Civic Education.

Introduction

In a recent article by Professor López-Facal (2010), in which he analyses the textbooks used in secondary education in Spain from the 70's to the present, a very interesting and revealing in-depth analysis is made about the problems that history education in Spain is facing. This author observes both a serious lack of educational strategies and also that the history taught to pupils is closer to the historical discourse of the 19th century than to the current reality of the Spanish society.

Regarding the problem of teaching methods, the textbooks which were analyzed do not contain activities designed to promote the development of historical competencies and skills. There are few tasks that involve a variety of documentary sources, in which historical problems and proposals for researching them are set out, or information is given to be analysed from different points of view. In fact, these types of practical and engaging activities that lead to historical thinking are marginal in comparison with those based on historical knowledge. As regards the history that is taught, the textbooks present a prescriptive content of the school history inherited from the 19th century bourgeoisie culture, according to which the history that is being taught is still essentially nationalistic and Eurocentric, with a chronological structure justified by the purposes it serves and which is clearly male-dominated (López-Facal, 2010).

Obviously, the situation described above is a real matter of concern, since it reproduces a historical discourse that is obsolete and led by a way of teaching that is far from the basic principles of historical thinking (Seixas & Morton, 2013). It implies that the educational aims of history can be hardly reached, that is to develop in students the necessary critical attitude to form responsible democratic citizens, who are ready to actively participate in contemporary plural societies (Audigier, 1999; Barton and Levstik, 2004).

However, in Spain we are currently in the middle of an educational reform process. In December 2013 the Parliament approved (although it will be carried out over the following years) the 'Fundamental Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Educational, known by its acronyms in Spanish as LOMCE. It is the seventh reform carried out in primary and secondary education

since democracy was reestablished in the Seventies. Since 1980, with the approval of the Fundamental Law of Schools Statutes (LOECE in its acronyms in Spanish), through which the organization of schools was standardized, seven fundamental laws on school education have been passed and four more on higher education.

The LOMCE was created aiming to be a ground-breaking law, different from the current system; in the words of the legal text itself, 'it aims to adapt the educational system to the dramatic changes that current society is facing'. Having said that, in the case of history teaching, could it be a useful tool to solve the problems that have been pointed out repeatedly by teachers and researchers? Or is it just a new reform with more ideological connotation than pedagogical improvement? Unfortunately, the answer seems to be the latter.

This paper aims to show, on one hand, the little interest that this reform seems to have in eliminating the major problems observed in the history education in Spain at the compulsory educational levels. On the other hand, it aims to demonstrate that despite the obstacles that educational laws have to face, in many cases, there are several examples of educational innovation projects carried out currently in Spain by history educators in schools, and this is a good indicator that there is a wide sector of teachers at those educational levels willing to overcome the problem. There is still hope.

Unsolved problems in Spanish History Education

Theoretically, the problems observed nowadays in history teaching are due to the way in which the educational legislation addresses this discipline. This leads us to analyze the current situation. Since 1990 there has been no change in the way that history education is organized at pre university levels has been organized in the same way, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Pre university stages and subjects in which history is taught

Educational stage	Age	subject	Hours week
Infant Education (not mandatory)	3-5	Immediate Natural and Cultural Environment	8
Primary school	6-11	Natural and Cultural Environment	4
Secondary School	12-15	Social Sciences. Geography and History	3
Upper secondary school (not mandatory)	16-17	<i>Optional</i> : Contemporary History (first year)	3
		<i>Mandatory</i> : Spanish History (second year)	4

In infant education the historical content is included in the subject 'Immediate Natural and Cultural, one of the three areas of knowledge in which this stage is structured. This subject is organized in three blocks of content, two of them focused on natural science, for example, 'Natural environment: elements, relations and measures' and 'Discovering the nature', and one that includes all the content aimed to develop social thinking; 'Culture and living in society'. It is in this latter block of content in which topics related to historical issues are taught, although they are not as relevant as those focused on describing social relations. In fact, the introduction of the historical dimension seems to be reduced to serve as an illustrative or comparative element to explain current society (children's daily life), which is, after all, the main goal of the block (Miralles & Molina, 2011a).

The minimal presence of historical scope in Infant education clearly seems to be caused by the fact that curriculum designers consider children at this age are not able to properly understand social change neither to reach historical reasoning. This is contrary to what is done in surrounding countries (Cuenca, 2008), such as the United Kingdom, where basic historical contents are taught and temporal orientation is worked out as one of the main objectives in Infant education and primary education first stage (Cooper, 2002; O'Hara & O'Hara, 2001). Therefore, the first pupils' contact with history education is scarce, partial and it is very far from what is being carried out in surrounding countries.

In primary education the content relevant to history is also included under the title, Natural and Cultural Environment, in which the content related to social sciences and natural sciences are taught together but not in an interrelated way. The content of this theme is divided into seven blocks, of which four are related to natural sciences and three to social sciences. In the social sciences block one part covers geography and is named 'The environment and its conservation'. Another block is called 'People, cultures and social organization' and includes economy, anthropology, law, demographics, political science and sociology. The last block of social sciences is named History: changes over time' is the one intended for teaching history education. In this case the problem reported by several authors (Trepas, 2008, Prats, 2010) is not just that historical content does not get enough attention, but the fact that they do not have their specific space as they are 'mixed' with contents that are essentially very different. Likewise, a minimal presence of topics related to the history of art at this stage has been pointed out as a problem (Ávila, 2003). And last, but not least, this block has been criticized for the gradual replacement of procedural content with conceptual content. In other words, just in the first two out of three key stages in primary education (the four first years) themes related to the concept of time —such as the course of time, the use of the calendar, basic historical chronology, dating conventions, etc.— pay little attention to methods used in historical enquiry (the use of primary sources, image analysis...). However, in the last key stage (years five and six), when the study of historical periods is introduced (ancient civilizations, changes and continuities, significant historical accounts and basic aspects of the Spanish history...), the method becomes more traditional. The students role in history teaching is passive.

History is taught as a given and learned by heart. A good example of this is shown when analysing the exams to evaluate the learning process of students of this key stage. Tests are designed almost exclusively to find out whether students have memorized facts and dates, but not to know if they have developed more complex cognitive skills (Gómez & Miralles, 2013). In addition to that, researches on textbooks and tests in this last two years of primary education show that content is absolutely chronological and almost exclusively national (Gómez, Rodríguez & Simón, 2013). This means that little attention is paid to world history, to construct informed responses using relevant historical information or to understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources.

In secondary education history is part, along with geography and history of art, of the subject so called 'Social Sciences: Geography and History' as we showed in Table 1. In this educational stage researchers' conclusions show that problems observed are similar to the ones described in the earlier stages: poor planning of the way both historical methods and historical discussion are taught (Sáiz, 2013). Empirical analysis of secondary history education is not as abundant as we would like (Miralles, Molina & Ortuño, 2011), and the majority of analyses are focused on learners' memories about the school history they have been taught, assessment of historical knowledge, the resources used in history lessons and analysis of textbooks, rather than on pedagogical practice (Merchán, 2007). Nevertheless, all of them show that pupils are evaluated,

mainly, through written exams, based on questions about very specific content (dates, facts) in the history of Spain, in which procedural methods are barely required (Merchán, 2005; Monteagudo, 2013). The analysis of textbooks does not show better results in the selection of content and the design of activities (Valls, 2001 & 2008, Sáiz, 2011; Gomez, Ortuño & Gandía, 2013), along with a lack of historical-artistic knowledge that is a matter of concern (Fontal, 2006; Gómez, Molina & Pagán, 2012).

In short, the history that is currently taught during compulsory educational and the way in which it is taught does not seem to be the most appropriate way to develop democratic citizens capable of critical thinking, as noted by (Molina, Miralles & Ortuño, 2013). Therefore, one question arises: is history education going to improve with the new educational reform which is planned?

LOMCE: the same old song

Firstly in the new LOMCE no changes are proposed in infant education, so the insufficiencies and weaknesses observed at this stage are going to continue in the coming up years.

In primary education the subject *Natural and Cultural Environment* is divided into two new subjects: *Social Sciences: Geography and History* on one hand and *Natural Sciences* on the other. This measure does not seem to be useful at all to solve the problems detected above due to a very simple reason: considering the curriculum¹, the content to be covered in this new area is basically the same as before.

To illustrate this, find below a chart (Table 2) with a comparison of content between the LOMCE's social science subject and the content that is being currently taught in Key Stage 3 of Primary education mentioned in the current Organic Law on Education (LOE in Spanish). As it can be observed, there are almost no differences.

Table 2. Comparison of key stage 3 Primary Education history contents between LOE (2007) and LOMCE (2014)

¹ The curriculum can be found (Spanish version) at <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2014/03/01/pdfs/BOE-A-2014-2222.pdf>

Primary Education Social Science Curriculum (LOMCE)	Primary Education Natural and Cultural Environment Curriculum (LOE²)
Block IV: Traces of time	Block 5: Changes over time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Historical time and its measure</i> • <i>Historical sources and its classification</i> • <i>Historical Epochs: length and remarkable accounts that date their duration</i> • <i>Spain in the Prehistory</i> • <i>Spain in the Ancient times</i> • <i>Spain in the Middle ages</i> • <i>Spanish Monarchy in the Modern history</i> • <i>Spanish Contemporary History (19th century)</i> • <i>Spanish Contemporary History (20th and 21st century).</i> • <i>"Our" cultural and historical heritage</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conventions on historical date and epochs</i> • <i>How to use techniques and methods to locate events over time: Duration, simultaneity and relation between historical accounts</i> • <i>Main features of historical civilizations (early, ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary civilizations)</i> • <i>Significant people and events in Spanish History</i> • <i>Identify and respect cultural heritage</i> • <i>How to use different historical, geographical and iconographical sources</i> • <i>History as a result of human actions and the role of women and men as history agents</i>

It is obvious that the history content in the new curriculum has national history as the centre, making almost no reference to world history, and giving too much emphasis on contemporary history over earlier historical epochs.

However, it is true, as a new development, in the first block of common content for geography, social sciences and history the procedural and attitudinal content is considered to be taken into account across the stage. There is content such as: 'Introduction to scientific knowledge and its application in social sciences' or 'Data gathering on the topic using different sources (primary and secondary)'. But considering the little attention paid to that first block in the current secondary school curriculum —where there already is a common block with similar characteristics, which is being ignored both in textbooks and in planning in schools, (Molina & Calderón, 2009)— it is likely that this will be omitted in the Primary education too.

The content proposed in Secondary education in LOMCE's draft curriculum (it is not yet developed) is the same as described in primary education curriculum. There is an additional problem: in this case the block of attitudinal and procedural contents — the use of maps, sources analysis and other methods— disappears. Therefore, there are no high expectations about the new law. However, despite the obstacles that legal texts might represent, not everything is lost: there are multiple innovative proposals in history education carried out by history teachers. This shows that teachers are totally aware of the problems outlined above and

2 The curriculum can be found (Spanish version) at <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/07/20/pdfs/A31487-31566.pdf>

they try to improve the quality of their history teaching guided by their own experience and expertise.

Improvements from the trenches: some examples of educational innovation proposals.

In infant education there are a lot of examples of educational innovations in which, contrary to the ideas assumed in the educational law, teachers do consider that pupils under 6 years old are capable of understanding historical topics. There are numerous publications containing teaching units, projects and even 'history corners' (Moltó & Carbonell, 2006; García & Miralles, 2009; Almagro & al., 2006) based on historical epochs and personalities (Prehistory, Middle Ages, Egypt, "El Cid", the time corner...) developed in different schools all over Spain. And all these educational innovations stress the high level of pupils' motivation and the learning goals reached. Likewise, there are numerous examples of field trips to museums, archeological sites, monuments or interpretation centres (Cuenca & Martín, 2009) that demonstrate the capability of children under 6 years old to understand basic historical concepts. Likewise, to make an inquiry based on family history reveals a strong didactic tool at these early stages (Ortuño, Molina & Miralles, 2012) which improves historical knowledge and thinking.

Among the educational innovations and experiences in history created by primary and secondary school teachers, we should highlight their emphasis on the acquisition of historical and social competencies. For example there are emerging experiences which combine history education and civic and citizenship education, through the analysis of relevant, contemporary issues from an historical perspective. This allows scope for interrelated social sciences and involves students in understanding the roots of issues that really matter to them (López Facal & Santidrián, 2011; Navarro, 2008; Ortuño, Gómez & Ortiz, 2012; Pagés, 2007).

The most important innovations suggested in teaching history come from a change in teaching methods going from teacher-centred to the use of primary sources and resources that encourage procedural learning, inquiries and the historian method. As regards methodology, problem based learning (PBL) is very useful in comparison to traditional expositive methods (Canals, 2001; Oller, 2011). Through PBL it is possible to distinguish what is less important from what is essential, using critical discourse which allows the organization and construction of historical information. Besides, simulation, debates and case studies on historical accounts allow students to establish a relationship between historical knowledge and metahistorical knowledge (different interpretations of events, what we know about the past, how historical narratives are created and so forth) helping in that way to reach the true historical literacy needed to understand how historical representations in the present influence how we orient ourselves to possible futures (Gil & Ibáñez, 2013; Prats, 2005; Miralles & Molina, 2011b). In the last decade, research on history teaching and social sciences pointed out the necessity of including Information and communications technology (ICT) in the classroom as this represents an opportunity for the teacher to recreate virtual images in space and time (Hernández, 2011). The use of these resources increases the options of experimentation, empathy and historical and social immersion (Martín, 2011). As Acosta (2010) states, history is at a disadvantage to experimental science, due to the impossibility of reproducing the historical conditions that drove an historical account (due to the loss of evidences and remains of the past) needed to understand what really happened and its aftermaths. The introduction of ICT gives teachers the opportunity to solve some of these problems.

The main advantages mentioned about the use of new technologies in history teaching are related to a meaningful process in which the pupil has an active participation. This is facilitated by ICT, the cooperation between students and between teachers and students, and the fact that

the learning process could be more individualized. Also, as stated by Hernández (2011) or Rivero (2011), the use of virtual images, and the interaction that new technologies facilitate or the use of expository multimedia, constitute the main elements that strengthen history teaching. In fact some authors such as Rivero (2010), point out that the new multimedia didactic tools allow a better access to primary sources which benefits the design of educational activities to promote understanding of how history is constructed. The use of blogs in history classes is another of the most important tools of innovation that has been introduced recently in Secondary education (Sobrino, 2013). As it is described, the majority of these innovations make it possible to introduce historical enquiry, in order to promote historical thinking, empathy and reflection on epistemology, history and social values. Innovations such as the ones described by Monfort et al. (2009), Prieto, Gómez & Miralles (2013) or Tribó (2005) bring positive results in a teaching scenario that encourages historical thinking and the creation of an interpretative attitude in learners in relation to the past and history. Critical thinking development is certainly a key element in democratic societies as it has been revealed in the recent international congress, *Think historically in times of globalization* (López- Facal et al., 2011) held in Santiago de Compostela in 2011. The use of primary sources and the development of historical thinking development help students to acquire the ability to analyse. As Prats & Santacana (2011, p. 29) said, history, as an exercise in the analysis of past human actions which conditioned the relations among people and between humans and the environment, help us to understand the complexity of any fact, any current socio-political phenomena and any historical process through analysis of causes and consequences. This is its best formative potential.

Conclusion: Challenges and perspectives

The latest lines of work developed in Spain by history educators and history teacher- training departments at Universities tend to emphasize history teaching as a kind of thinking, promoting inquisitive skills more than the learning of historical accounts (Miralles, Molina & Santisteban, 2011; Ortuño, Gómez & Ortiz, 2012). And it is really a surprise that those initiatives have not received much attention in the curriculum. But at least, there is a consolation in the extent to which curriculum takes on its full meaning when it is applied in the classroom by teachers. This brings enough hope to see that despite the legislators' efforts to present school history as it was in the 19th century, teachers persist in the idea of considering history as an useful subject for 21th century society.

However, there is still a long way ahead since, educational innovations still represent a minority within the current Spanish school history scene. This is corroborated in textbook analysis, the main educational resource in classrooms, and exams. Content is more important than any other elements. With some exceptions, there is still no room in history classes for historical interpretations; the work with historical sources and the methods used by historians are considered much too complex intellectually to be taught at pre-university stages; meta-historical knowledge is still a utopia; and the conception of historical thinking is considered superfluous from the moment history is taught simply as something that happened in the past.

Part of the problem is still the insufficient communication between Academia and schools. Some of the practical classroom applications are designed in Social Sciences and History Education departments at Universities, not transferring to school practice. Experiences carried out at schools are hardly spread to other places from the one where they were put into practice. The majority of textbooks are conceived without consulting teachers of history education departments in the universities. And laws on education are motivated by ideological interests rather than by the opinion of professionals in the field of education.

It is necessary once and for all to understand the role of history in democratic decision-making, since historical literacy allows us both to contextualize our decisions based on path dependencies and to critically review historical arguments related to relevant, current issues. The fact that certain content is taught does not mean that it is presented in a useful way for our society (or meaningfully). Learners should be allowed to understand how historical narrative is formed, in order to be aware of the implications of their dissemination. And overall, history education needs both historical knowledge and historical thinking in order to reach true historical literacy.

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