

SYMPOSIUM ON “HISTORY TEACHING IN SECONDARY EDUCATION”

Elsinor, Denmark, 21 August - 1 September 1965

1 General questions concerning the teaching of history in secondary schools

1.1 The teaching of history should be the teaching of a synthesis, dealing not only with political and military history, but with all aspects (economic, artistic, cultural) of the societies of the past. Like the teaching of geography and civics, this teaching of history should be considered as a basis for the education of the citizen of Europe and of the world.

History ought to be taught in a substantial way in all classes and all parts of the secondary school, as well as of technical schools. In this connection, the Symposium views with concern the possibility that, in the coming years, the time devoted to the study of history in schools may be seriously restricted on account of the claims for time, in a crowded curriculum, of subjects whose practical usefulness may be more easily demonstrated. The Symposium wishes to emphasise that history has a value in the human education of youth which cannot be provided by other subjects.

While it may be desirable not to dwell too much on historical facts which may provoke misunderstanding or even hostility between the nations of Europe, as well as of the world, the participants are convinced that history will best contribute to international understanding if the teacher remains true to his task, the service of truth.

In the teaching of history, especially modern history, in all grades and for all ages, the development of science, technology and engineering is to be considered as subject matter of great importance.

Finally, the participants believe that world history must be taught, not only as part of the study of contemporary history, but also as essential for an adequate study of the past history of Europe.

1.2 The study of non-European civilisations of the past and the present - eg. the Steppe civilisations - and their influence on European countries (and vice versa) should not be neglected.

1.3 Under modern conditions contemporary history must necessarily form part of the school curriculum. It is very important that the problems of recent years be presented to the pupils.

In the teaching of contemporary history and the problems of recent years, it is necessary that we aim at maximum objectivity, presenting all relevant points of view.

1.4 The participants are glad to find that modern methods of history teaching are applied to European schools and hope that they will be applied to an even greater extent.

When dealing with controversial questions, the teacher ought to present all relevant points of view.

A certain minimum of dates must be learned, but it is more important to foster the faculty of understanding and of historical reasoning than to learn a lot of details. It is equally important to encourage and train pupils to use books and other material in order to find the information they need.

It might be desirable that the syllabus in history be modified according to the recommendations previously expressed and that teachers should be allowed to interpret them as broadly as they wished.

For the teachers of history, the participants recommend:

- (i) the use of a wide selection of authentic visual material and of written source material;
- (ii) maximum planned co-ordination with the teaching of geography and other relevant subjects.

In this connection, and in order to promote an understanding of Europe and the world, the participants suggest the preparation, by international organisations such as the Council of Europe or UNESCO, of teaching material assembled by international collaboration, for example bibliographies, texts, film-strips, recordings, etc.

2 The teaching of the history of Europe in secondary schools

In the teaching of history, a certain number of important facts which bear witness to the common culture of the peoples of Europe ought to be stressed.

There can be no question of a uniform teaching of history in the different countries. The "European themes" ought to be introduced with a proper regard to the conditions existing in the country concerned.

Whenever an opportunity arises, teachers ought to show their pupils the European importance

of, and the European influence on, the events of national history. In countries where the

syllabus tends to be exclusively national, European themes might be dealt with after the completion of the traditional syllabus. In all cases, the teachers' aim should be to stress the importance of these "European themes".

As far as possible, history should be presented from the European point of view. Some elements common to European history, influencing part or all of Europe, are especially suitable for this presentation, for example:

- What Europe owes to civilisations past and present, notably Greek, Roman, Byzantine, civilisations; to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc;
- The Great Migrations, in so far as they concern the history of Europe;
- Feudalism;
- The Church;
- Rural conditions and towns in the Middle Ages;
- The Crusades;
- Representative institutions and legal principles;
- Medieval thought and art;
- Humanism: the Renaissance;
- The religious reform movements;
- The voyages of discovery and expansion overseas;
- The development of Capitalism;
- The rise of modern states;

- Absolute government and representative government;
- Classicism and Baroque;
- The Age of Enlightenment;
- The Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions;
- The Revolutions of the 18th and 19th Centuries. Liberalism and Nationalism;
- Socialism;
- Intellectual and artistic, scientific and technical developments in the 19th and 20th Centuries;
- European expansion in the world and the formation of colonial empires;
- The two World Wars;
- Democracy, Communism and Fascism;
- Europe in the world today;
- Trends towards European unity in the different periods of the history of Europe.

(Attention should be drawn to the place of Byzantine history in medieval civilisation. Byzantine culture should be examined, and common elements of, as well as differences between, Western and Eastern medieval history should be observed.)

This enumeration of themes should obviously not be considered exhaustive.

3 The teaching of civics in secondary schools

All education of future citizens aims at creating the desire and the capacity to understand the problems of the world of today and to participate actively in the political, economic and social life of the community. This community may be the municipality, the State, Europe or the world. As the teaching of civics should endeavour to give the pupils norms of social thought and behaviour, respect for fundamental values, love of one's country and the understanding of the community of Europe and of the world, some of the participants think that the aims of the teaching of civics are essentially educative. Others, however, think that civics ought to be considered a special intellectual discipline. However, these points of view are not irreconcilable.

As the aim of civics is not propaganda, but rather to enable the student to form an opinion of his own, there ought to be no indoctrination.

Very many delegates expressed the fear that history itself might be displaced by civics, and thought that the teaching of history should remain separated from the teaching of civics, as the aims and to some extent the methods of teaching are different. On the other hand, they recommended that the same teachers should teach both civics and history. At the very least a close co-operation between the respective teachers of history and civics is absolutely necessary. This for two reasons: firstly, because the understanding of the present is dependent on knowledge of the past; secondly, because a teaching of history which did not somehow end with the study of the problems of today could, sooner or later, be considered a depreciated subject in secondary schools.

It is essential that the university education of all civics teachers should include a general knowledge of history and some experience of historical method and practice.

Since human geography, like history, is one of the bases of the teaching of civics, and since the participants have felt some concern about certain information they have received, the participants insist that the teaching of human geography be maintained in secondary schools as well as in technical schools and be re-established if it has been abolished.

4 Secondary school teachers' training

4.1 The participants consider that the training of future secondary school teachers of history should take place at universities.

It is evident that the students cannot acquire a complete knowledge of the entire history of mankind, but they should, in any case, get a real understanding of the scientific methods used in history, and an introduction to historiography and to historical problems. A critical attitude to historical problems should be stimulated, as well as the desire for research. This can be done by an intensive study of special periods. A sufficient introduction to geography, economics and the study of modern society should be given to the students.

4.2 Pedagogical preparation - theoretical and especially practical - ought to form a considerable part of the education of history teachers. The pedagogical training ought to be given by school teachers and ought to be supervised. Secondary school teachers ought to share the work of the authorities which have to decide upon the fitness of students for teaching at school.

4.3 The participants think it very important that teachers already in service should bring their knowledge and training up to date and thus be able to include the results of modern research in the teaching of history in schools. The participants recommend that permanent contact be established between teachers already in service and university professors.

In this connection, they suggest that such contact might be provided through the initiative of the Council of Europe, or by UNESCO, or on a national level by the educational administrative authorities or representative non-governmental organisations (such as teachers' associations). The instruction might be given by university professors or by other qualified persons, perhaps from other countries.

4.4 The participants consider that an international teacher exchange system is highly desirable and should, if possible, be organised by international organisations in collaboration with the competent national authorities.

(Quelle: Council of Europe. (1995). *Against bias and prejudice. The Council of Europe's work on history teaching and history textbooks. Recommendations on history teaching and history textbooks adopted at the Council of Europe conferences and symposia, 1953-1995*. Strasbourg: Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC), S. 33-37.)