

CALL FOR PAPERS

**International Conference of the International Society for History
Didactics (ISHD)
at Gatineau/Ottawa (Canada)
2018, 8-10 October**

ENGLISH VERSION

Agency, Citizenship and Historical Thinking: Empirical Research

School education, which enables young people and future adults to play an active role in shaping democracy and society, has its foundations not least in history education.

Thinking about the world in order to act upon it – this is the intention characteristically underlying every educational enterprise and acting as a driving force for learning. Insofar as education is understood to serve emancipation, such an educational aim engages teachers, those involved in their training, but also as students. In fact, thinking the world in such a perspective calls for the exercise of substantive human agency, associated with free will, intentionality, choice, and initiative, as well freedom, and might be more precisely defined as a process of engagement, temporally situated, informed by the past and a praxis-oriented evaluation of the present, but turned to the future, notably in the ability to prospectively imagine a repertoire of possible alternatives.

This definition of agency calls upon the humanities and social sciences in particular, as the tools and skills required to be critically informed by the past, to evaluate the present to act on it, and to project oneself toward potential horizons of justice-oriented action. As such, learning history should allow students to develop citizenship skills indispensable for collective emancipation, and social and political action in favour of justice.

The tools and ways of thinking associated with the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences are not innately acquired, they must be rigorously developed and their development requires teacher support. In order to do this, teachers must also be trained to use disciplinary tools and ways of thinking, as well as being informed by results from empirical research relating to what they must put in place, in the classroom, in terms of practices, didactic methods, material, and approaches to support students and assess their progress.

This conference strives to gather researchers and graduate students concerned with the issue of developing the tools and ways of thinking required for substantive and emancipatory human and citizen agency. We await abstracts related to these issues, based upon empirical results in the academic disciplines of history didactics and/or citizenship education didactics.

Major themes of the conference's discussions:

Theme 1 - Development, progression, and assessment of historical thinking

A number of important questions and challenges arise from the issue of assessing learning in the history classroom. One such issue is the difficulty in defining and evaluating declarative or substantial knowledge (related to dates, facts, historical figures) which is generated through school. The increasing quantity of such knowledge objects and the surrounding debates about their historical relevance, their political meaning or their scientific value, at a time when social media offers easy access to a neverending stream of 'facts', but also to a vast spectrum of interpretations (both scientific and vernacular) also poses a specific challenge for developing and assessing historical thinking. In addition, the multiplication of innovative historiographical concepts and approaches in recent years appears to have pushed nation building and traditional views of history (as a series of political conflicts) to extra-scientific sites of debate.

Another important challenge is posed by the research on the development of the historical thinking, begun in the 1980s, and anchored in influential publications in many countries (e.g. Shemilt, Wineburg, VanSledright). This research approach has taken on the task of investigating an object at the heart of history education: historical thinking and how students can be made to develop a scientific way of thinking history, and as such, of perceiving history in its dimension as a practice of historical thinking. This scholarly practice of history involves attitudes, concepts, and processes relevant for the critique, interpretation and use of historical sources and presentations, aimed at answering questions formulated by students and debating the value of evidence and interpretations.

These challenges raise important questions. Among others:

- How do school programs and standardised or nation-wide assessments account for historiographical change and new historiographical approaches?
- How do recent didactic developments contribute to our understanding how students develop historical thinking? And what means are best suited for its assessment?
- What constitutes historical thinking? What categories, concepts, and benchmarks are suitable for defining it? What are the limits of this construct?
- How do history curricula and standardised assessment relate to historical thinking?

- How do students use historical knowledge objects outside of the classroom?
- How do in training and in-service teachers deal with these questions in their teaching practice?
- What epistemological, historiographical, or political issues arise from the didactic challenges presented above?
- Do these questions also resonate with issues in citizenship education?

Theme 2 - Classroom practices relating to agency, historical thinking and citizenship

The issue of human agency in general and of historical agency in particular has been an object of interest for researchers and teachers hoping to develop classroom practices likely to help students see themselves as historical actors and subjects, and to develop an epistemic agency associated with practicing history as science and historical thinking. How has research in history and citizenship education didactics informed classroom practices through which students and teachers use heuristics and deliberation required for the narrative (re)construction of the origins of historical and social phenomena and social inquiry in general? How can research support practices compatible with developing students' historical thinking, epistemic agency and virtue (moral values)?

How do teaching practices engage with issues relating to agency, notably with regard to:

- the development of historical thinking;
- the conception of oneself as both historical subject and actor;
- epistemological, ideological and praxeologic postures of students and teachers;
- effects of classroom learning activities on students' agency with and through knowledge objects (epistemic agency) and historical thinking?

Theme 3 - Teaching tools in the digital age

Even if the concept of Digital Natives is used to justify pedagogical and didactical choices in the classroom, it has been the subject of much critique, and, in some cases, rejected outright. The use of this term supposes that so-called Digital Natives learn differently and more easily with the help of digital tools because they have been interacting with them since early childhood. Such a conception is sometimes seen as discrediting traditional teaching practices and tools.

At the same time, media literacy envisioned as the capacity to critically read various informational and entertainment materials has become a critical if not urgent issue, particularly in respect to history, social sciences, and the liberal arts, which rely heavily upon a variety of documents.

Focusing on history online platforms, collaborative tools, serious games, film, traditional and digital didactic materials are experiencing exponential growth. However, little empirical research has been conducted on the subject, particularly concerning how students use and analyze and critique these emerging digital tools.

This raises the issue of traditional and digital teaching tools in history teaching and citizenship education.

- Which tools are used by teachers and students?
- How are they used?
- Which tools are best suited for learning history?
- Should the history classroom become more digital?
- Can the new tools be expected to sustainably promote a structured build-up of historical knowledge, historical thinking and historical judgement, or do they primarily act on the surface of those learning processes that are possible and desirable in the history classroom?

Without exception, these questions bring us back to the central question of history education: How do we learn?

Theme 4 - Initial and in-service teacher training

The teaching profession is often experienced through a series of successes, small victories, but also of constraints and teacher resilience. Recent research pertaining to didactics and practical teacher training has identified a number of challenges confronting teachers, while schools are assailed by supposed miracle 'best practices' tailored to meet managerial performance goals. History teachers are asked to fulfil their mission of teaching history and develop their students' skills, competencies, and agency, but in what context? Do history teachers feel competent and supported for accomplishing their daily work? Does initial and in-service teacher training help history teachers to develop their professional identity?

Abstracts submitted for this theme should aim to contribute to a discussion by identifying institutional constraints (e.g. curricular orientations and expectations, standardised testing, uneven and uncoordinated in-service training, deficient pedagogical support, etc.) which impact initial and in-service training in the field of history education. They should strive to address such questions as

- How can we better train and prepare future history teachers in training?
- How can we better support in-service teachers?
- How can we advocate for teaching conditions which focus more on educational success and less on results-based public management?

Other Topics

All papers have to propose a solidly argued commentary. Provided that the proposals can also consider the following topics:

- analysis of in-class practices (including action research) relevant to at least one of the conference topics;
- analysis of official documents, curricula, textbooks, assessment material, etc.
- theoretical reflections about the role of history education in society;
- theoretical reflections about the interdependencies between the development of new theoretical concepts and empirical approaches in History Didactics;
- theoretical reflections about interdisciplinary approaches in History Didactics;

- critical considerations on the role of empirical research in the current development of the discipline of History Didactics.

Proposals in English or in French can be submitted, since the conference languages are English and French (simultaneous translation).

All proposals have to be submitted by using the **application e-form** provided on the ISHD website

(<https://ishd.co/index.php/proposal-for-the-conference/>)

by February, 15, 2018.

The decision on acceptance of the proposals will be will be announced by email at the beginning of March 2018.

The board of the ISHD