

ARTIGO

Between curriculum requirements and teaching practices: the humanities programme and primary education in Quebec***Entre a prescrição curricular e as práticas docentes: o currículo de Ciências Humanas da escola do Quebec e o seu ensino no primário***Guilherme Moerbeck^a

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ABSTRACT

The debates regarding the conception of the subject of history in the *Programme de Formation de l'École Québécoise* (PFEQ) for primary education (*primaire*) began long before its publication in 2001 (Québec, 2006). Now after 20 years, what can be said about the relationship between the conceptions of history and historical thinking manifested in the PFEQ and those expressed by primary school teachers? This question encourages our analysis, offering a comparative evaluation based on different types of sources. Using data from semi-structured interviews conducted with thirteen primary school teachers, associated to a planned and implemented teaching-learning activity, this article endeavours to discern how historical thinking is mobilized by teachers in their classes and, to what extent, this is compatible or contrasting with the conceptions of history observed in the PFEQ.

Keywords: Social Universe. Teaching History. Historical Thinking. Curriculum. Teaching-learning.

RESUMO

Os debates em torno da concepção da disciplina História no *Programme de Formation de l'École Québécoise* (PFEQ) para o primeiro segmento do ensino fundamental (*primaire*) começaram muito antes de sua publicação em 2001 (Québec, 2006). Passados 20 anos, o que dizer da relação entre as concepções de história e do pensamento histórico veiculadas no PFEQ e aquelas expressas por professores do primário? Essa é a pergunta que anima nossa reflexão, que oferece uma análise comparativa a partir de fontes de diferentes naturezas. Utilizando-se de dados provenientes de entrevistas semidirigidas realizadas com 13 professores do ensino básico, relativas a uma atividade de ensino-aprendizagem planejada e implementada, este artigo tem como objetivo conhecer a articulação do pensamento histórico mobilizado pelos professores em suas aulas e, em que medida, ela é complementar ou divergente no que diz respeito às concepções de História veiculadas no PFEQ.

Palavras-chave: Universo Social. Didática da História. Pensamento Histórico. Currículo. Ensino-aprendizagem.

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Introduction: context, issues and methodology used

This article intends to analyse the conceptual perceptions of primary¹ school teachers in the province of Quebec concerning the teaching of History since 2001², drawing parallels, when necessary, with the *Programme de Formation de l'École Québécoise: éducation préscolaire; enseignement primaire*³, from now on the PFEQ, implemented by the Ministry of Education in 2001. This programme, currently in effect, has received criticisms since its beginnings; not very different, in fact, from the severe analysis of the Brazilian National Curriculum⁴, particularly of secondary school education and of the teaching of history in primary and secondary education, since its appearance in 2018. There is no need to talk at length about how the discussions concerning curricula end up expressing specific projects of power, as well as conflicting narratives of society (Goodson, 2007; Laville, 1999).

It is generally accepted that curricula are social constructs. Undoubtedly, this is expressed in practice in the subjects that are and are not included, – the golden question is: what knowledge is considered socially valid to be taught to future generations? (Silva, 2007, p. 148). It is not uncommon that many in the academic world are left unsatisfied with the political channels through which the school programmes are approved (Lebrun, 2014; Araújo-Oliveira, 2021). We underscore the question: what part of history should be taught at school? Concerning this, although still little known to say the least, the programme entitled *Culture et citoyenneté québécoise* was recently approved and will replace the course Ethics and Culture (ECR) from the school year of 2024-2025. It should be noted that in various regions of the world citizenship education is an integral part of the teaching of history as a school subject and, when this does not happen, the relations and controversies between history and citizenship education are deeply debated (Bouvier; Chamberland; Belleville, 2013). Some authors have already stressed the need for the teaching of humanities to overcome its “patrimonial role” – which privileges above all feelings of identity and belonging in society (Araújo-Oliveira, 2019, p. 178). Furthermore, this time however regarding secondary education teacher training, other researchers have highlighted the importance of the discursive field, of thinking about production and teaching of history, therefore “the conflicts that intersect the history of a people or of a nation

¹ We kept the term primary (*primaire*), once used in Brazil, and what is a lot like the first segment of *ensino fundamental* (basic education). In Quebec, it includes the education of children between the age from 6 to 12. This research was funded by the CRSH - Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines (Canada), by FAPERJ - Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro and by UERJ – through the Prociência programme (Brazil). All the interviews are registered and preserved in the digital archives of the Université du Québec à Montréal – UQÀM.

² In Quebec, the situation of teachers is tainted by various challenges and issues. The teachers often face difficult working conditions, with overcrowded classrooms and with an increasing administrative load. The Québécois teacher's wages are also a point of controversy, frequently seen as inferior to those of their colleagues in other Canadian provinces. Furthermore, there is a shortage of teachers, worsened by the retirement of many teachers and the lack of young teachers. The trade unions struggle for better working conditions, wage increases and a more support to attend to the student's needs. The situation has led to tense negotiations with the provincial government and to occasional strikes. The most recent being in 2024, lasting more than a month.

³ “Quebec school curriculum: preschool education; primary education”.

⁴ “Base Nacional Comum Curricular” – BNCC.

do not only make up culture, they are also integrated in the tradition of the discourses that have an impact on this history” (Bouvier; Martineau, 2020, p. 61).

This paper is the outcome of research that was initiated and coordinated by Anderson Araújo-Oliveira, entitled *L'intervention éducative en sciences humaines au primaire quinze ans après la refonte curriculaire et la réforme de la formation enseignante*⁵. During the first stage, which came before the work that gave rise to this paper, thirteen interviews were carried out, in which each teacher trained after the 2001 reforms answered twenty-seven questions⁶.

For those that are less familiar with this paper's context, it is important to stress that it is possible to talk of a Québécois education, because in Canada the design of school programmes is a provincial responsibility. It is important to make clear that the reflections presented in this text are restricted to the dialogue with the humanities' school programme created in 2001. Some would say social science, others simply humanities, the fact is that, in Quebec, history and geography were merged with citizenship education in the aim to create a single subject called social universe (Québec, 2006, p. 170–186). As this paper does not intend to join those that debated the programme of 2001, we will simply say that in the case of primary education the content of history is intimately interwoven with those of geography in a type of “Braudelian style” geo-history to which we will come back to later. It is important, however, to emphasise that the social universe subject works less with the analysis of long duration temporalities and more through the exercise of comparatism, to use Marcel Detienne's term, of geographic space and different historical times (Detienne, 2008). All of this creates a unit of chronotope analysis, in other words, something that encourages comparisons, interrelations and analysis of the forms of connectivity between different civilisations, one moment in the same space, but in distinct temporalities: the next in different spaces, but at the same time. Therefore, from the outset of primary school, the students are encouraged to understand the fundamental milestones to “interpret the mechanisms that organize territorial dynamics and to understand how they are constructed over time” (Québec, 2006, p. 163).

Of the twenty-seven questions, only three were selected here for in-depth analysis in this article. These were chosen because they highlight how specific subject content is addressed, capturing the meaning the teachers give to teaching of social universe⁷, a school subject that, like others, implies choices about temporalities, themes, and the framing of objects. Therefore, it is about the type of intellectual work that encourages the teacher to reflect on what he chooses to teach and the way he intends to teach it. At the end of the day, does what is taught really matter?

The teachers were asked the following questions: 1) Which content of the social universe will you address in this activity? Could you give us a brief description? 2) Why did you choose to address this content in particular? 3) What questions did you ask yourself when you were planning this activity? About what topic, and why?

We endeavour at the same time as interpreting the interviews, although in the background, to understand to what extent the teacher's different forms of expression of historical concepts are

⁵ “Educational intervention in the humanities at primary level fifteen years after the restructuring of the curriculum and the reform of teacher training”. This research started in 2017.

⁶ There was another stage of observation and filming of school practices. This data won't be analysed here.

⁷ Although we must stress that this this paper is above all interested in issues of a historical character.

aligned with those of the PFEQ of 2001. These form correlations are based on the following variables: a) the topics, concepts, justifications and objectives that appear in both the PFEQ and the teachers' answers; b) the concept of history in the PFEQ and the teacher's answers (factual, processual, critical, thematic, chronological etc.⁸; c) the articulation of some elements of historical thinking, such as: perspective, consciousness, empathy, secondary concepts, other than the heuristic skills in the treatment of historical sources in the classroom. It is important to highlight that, historical thinking, historical literacy, historical proficiency, despite the semantic and lexical nuances, seem to point in the same direction, to the concern about how young people learn history and what is relevant to be learnt beyond the traditional forms of instilling chronological-factual content. In short, we seek to think about the ways in which each teacher organizes their conceptual frameworks and the objectives in teaching of social universe and, if they encourage their students to construct an scientific approach in their studies⁹ (Araújo-Oliveira, 2014, 2019; Jadouille, 2014; Laville, 1993; Lebrun, 2014; Lenoir, 2014; Martineau, 1998; Moerbeck; Araújo-Oliveira, 2022; Ségal, 1990a; 1990b).

Although the questions asked in these interviews refer to school practices carried out over a relatively brief period¹⁰ and, even though everything was recorded (audio-visuals), we could not refrain from taking into consideration the subjective mechanisms of memory that emerge on several occasions during this process. Questions like the following are unavoidable: in what ways do the teachers connect what they say to situations that they experienced in more distant pasts? In some cases, as for teachers (1), (2), (6) and (13), having studied in different courses was mentioned, having passed through courses such as sociology, history, school adaptation and even in areas further from humanities. This narrative is an element of each teacher's consciousness and of the discursive strategies created to give meaning to the selected historical knowledge that will be worked on in the classroom. This information points to the interesting fact that the central training in education combined with other academic routes established a polyphony in the development of each individual in particular and in a more concrete form, in their role as a teacher.

Therefore, a hermeneutics of these interviews must give special attention to the intellectual interconnection of these teachers with their own temporality, with the perception of their experience of time in order to organize their memories. As Paul Ricoeur reminds us, temporality is the "existential precondition of memory and history's reference to the past" (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 184). Consequently, we are interested, albeit subsidiarily, in understanding the quite selective experience of individual memory and of their collective articulations in relation to teaching history at school (Gadamer, 2015; Rousso, 1998). On numerous occasions, in this process, we had to rely on the remnants of orality, on clues, and on indirect knowledge par excellence (Ginzburg, 2011; Pierce, 1975).

⁸ It can be noted that such categorisations are like Weberian ideal types, and it is unlikely that they will be found in a pure form, either in the teacher's answers, or in the programme itself. So, by approximation, the aim is to evaluate to what extent these conceptions are prevalent. In brief, the central ideal of the ideal-type is a comparison, between an ideal abstraction and a reality in the making (Ringer, 2004, p. 115).

⁹ This idea, generally, refers to the development of historical thinking through the development of a combination of intellectual (not innate) skills of the students. In this specific case, where the mediation of knowledge is at play, that is, educational intervention that is organised through a methodology that is very similar to that which is used by historians in the selection, organisation and treatment of their sources.

¹⁰ Each interview lasted roughly 45 minutes and each classroom activity lasted one hour.

From an epistemological view of history, we agree with Carlo Ginzburg who advocated the possibility of historical knowledge through its vestiges, its clues. Although it would be impossible to resume here its nuances, such thinking comes from a long debate that re-established the foundations of knowledge in history through a new paradigm, which values what can be called “marginal remnants or facts”. In short, the evidential paradigm resides in the dimension of experience, in the understanding of the world through practical concreteness, this is why it is so relevant (Espada Lima, 2006). Moreover, Ginzburg himself, more than once, helped us to think about cultural history and its anchors in empirical referents, for example, in approaching the sensitive topic of the “extermination of the Jews and the principle of reality” (Ginzburg, 2006, p. 211). Despite understanding history as a representation, that is, as a practice of writing that constructs its meaning through a narrative, through a space of representation (Certeau, 1982), we distance ourselves from whatever radical subjectivisms and relativisms that reduce history and its empirical referents to the problem of discursive efficiency, as Hayden White has stressed several times (Ginzburg, 2006, p. 223)¹¹. This helps us to avoid the perils of historical revisionism, on one hand, and to consider any interpretation as possible on the other (Vidal-Naquet, 2005; Rousso, 1987; Eco, 2005). To sum up, recalling two important anthropologists who helped historians to rethink their own subject, we must affirm that the past is a scarce resource, and its plasticity is limited (Appadurai, 1981). So, there is something true on the horizon of the historian, there “outside”, and this cannot be reduced to the literary effects of the production of the genre (Trouillot 2016, p. 38-9). Note that even the scepticism of Paul Veyne about historical truth does not stop him from affirming that “history is a narrative of happenings” (Veyne, 1971, p. 14-15).

There are two important intermediaries in the teacher’s conceptions, those that involve the processes of categorisation and those of semantic organisation, both of which can be observed during the interviews. On the one hand, the university courses and their own programmes inevitably engage with the PFEQ, organising and hierarchically ordering knowledge for academic learning; and on the other hand, the daily relations at work, in life and in school practices, also model the teachers’ thoughts. Consequently, the ambitions of this article, which endeavours to think about the teaching of history in primary schools in Quebec by means of the teachers’ statements and curricular elements, are made possible through the interweaving of these levels of interpretation.

The majority of teaching practices, otherwise known as the concept of educational (pedagogical) intervention, applied to a specific disciplinary knowledge in the *stricto sensu* school universe (Araújo-Oliveira, 2019; Araújo-Oliveira; Lenoir, 2020) are sustained and tensioned by a combination of ideas that swing from academic knowledge to that of popular knowledge, functioning as integrative systems of reality (Lefrançois; Éthier; Demers, 2011). So, it is to be expected that the interviews collected make it possible to visualize, even if not always perspicuously and directly, how the teachers articulate between the conceptions that are clearly structured in scientific knowledge and those that are reproduced through other layers of relations or social representations (Cardoso,

¹¹ Whatever the case, the relevance of the concept of practical past in the issues related to cultural memory cannot be forgotten.

C. F.; Malerba, 2000; Jodelet, 1989). The analysis that follows tries to accompany Ariadne's thread¹² through the maze of memories and in the objectification of practices, endeavouring to find, at the end, the meanings employed in the statements of each of these subjects.

Social universe and its layers of meaning

Our first question concerns how each teacher established the spatial-temporal and thematic markers to work with them in the classroom. "1) Which content of social universe will you address in this activity? Could you give us a brief description?" To demonstrate this dimension to the reader, here follows a chart of reference:

Chart 1: Synthesis of the options chosen by each teacher¹³

Teacher	Topic	Emphasis/framing/detail
01	"Quebec's Society in 1905"	"Geography; (...) climate; (...) terrain; hydrography...".
02	"Nouvelle-France, (...) the transition between Nouvelle-France of 1745 and Canada in 1820"	"Territory, (...) economic activity, daily life, the people at that time, and politics. (...) important facts and people were addressed."
03	"The economy"	"The economy (...) fishing, at the bottom of the St Laurent River. The steel industry (...) Agriculture and the wood trade are addressed."
04	"Quebec's Society in the 1970s"	"The causes and consequences of a crisis, observing the evolution, therefore, the changes in society with the crisis, after the crisis".
05	"The Algonquians around 1500"	"We will talk more about territory (...) Where they were, therefore, the localisation in the territory. We are also going to talk about terrain. (...) lakes and rivers and different types of forest".
06	"The 1980s"	"Political aspects of Quebec (human rights have changed despite everything since the 1980s, (...) the homeless, people [with] mental health [problems] ... did not have the right to vote (...) the incarcerated)".
07	"Characteristics of the Algonquians or Iroquoians"	"(...) transportation (...) We dealt with their territory, their homes, and the society's organisation, which of the two were more patriarchal or matriarchal. In addition, seasonal activities".
08	"Politicians of the 1960s"	"Quebec society around 1960 (...) localisation of society in space and time (...) the election of Jean Lesage, the election of Robert Bourassa, (...) the election of René Lévesque (...) the adoption of the French Language Statute."
09	"Contemporary Political Institutions in Canada"	"(...) how the system works in the federal and provincial level (...) Today, there is the power and institutions, the executive, legislative and judicial, that apply these powers".
10	"What Canada was like before the arrival (of the colonizers), the native Americans, the Iroquois"	"(...) identify in a territory the civilisations, look at their lifestyle (...) In the territory, climate, economic life, all of the governmental system, lifestyle, population and everything. Religion...".
11	"A review about the Iroquoians and Algonquians"	"(...) territory, particularly the demography and distribution of the population, the occupied territory, how they lived, the number of inhabitants. Everything that has to do with the culture (...)"
12	"Statistics, populational characteristics"	"(...) the reality [of] society [sic] or population or demography... retain it is to know where the population is distributed in the territory [sic] (...) mainly along the St Laurent River"
13	"Inca life and organisation"	"We will address diet, what they ate; (...) transport networks; we will study, how can I put it, the use of the ecosystem for human subsistence (...)"

Source: Digital Research Archive – Education Faculty – UQÀM.

¹² In love with Theseus, Ariadne, daughter of king Minos of Crete, borrows the knowledge of Dedalus and helps the young Athenian to get out of the maze after killing the Minotaur. The maze of memory and the thread of the interviews are perhaps good metaphors for the research being carried out here.

¹³ Here we are talking about the topics related to the 2nd and 3rd cycles of primary education.

There is, at least, one important element that should be highlighted from the teacher's choices. More than the topic itself, which corresponds in a more objective way to the school level, to the year in which the class was prepared and to the very PFEQ, the emphasis that interests us is how the teacher frames the object of study. First of all, the chart above shows a strong conformity with the PFEQ with its *Learning Progressions* (Québec, 2009). Therefore, there is no doubt that the teachers were engaged with the programme, endeavouring to include the characteristics of a geo-history expressed in it.

A short detour will be valuable at this point. In the PFEQ, there is no mention of Fernand Braudel¹⁴, imminent figure of the "Paris School" and of the *Annales* at least until the end of the 1960s. He was certainly one of the main theorists of a possible geo-history, in particular, the one devised for the Mediterranean and its connectivity (Braudel, 2013; Horden; Purcell, 2000). The lack of references is a curious omission, when thinking about the way in which the PFEQ structures the programme and its contents – organised synchronically, diachronically, and spatially. From Vidal de La Blache, passing through Braudel (Dosse, 2003) coming to Henri Lefebvre (2000), in both France and the Francophile communities, a great deal was discussed and reproduced about an epistemology of the Humanities which does not dispense of spatial dimensions in historical analysis¹⁵. Braudel himself, like Immanuel Wallerstein (2011), has been reused in recent academic studies of ancient history¹⁶ (Guarinello, 2013; Vlassopoulos, 2011), but, moreover, in macro theoretical reflections that shake the traditional structures of a Eurocentric history, supposedly universalist, in a 19th Century style (Moerbeck, 2021; Moerbeck E Sousa, 2019). With no intention to deal with this debate here, it still is important to remember that some school programmes, here and there, despite the incisive criticisms of the decolonial pedagogical thinking, still reproduce Eurocentric structures of the chronological and spatial frameworks (Walsh, 2014)¹⁷.

Despite the apparent theoretical fragility of the PFEQ and the fact that combining history and geography is not a novel approach¹⁸, the way that these subjects were merged with citizenship

¹⁴ The influence of geography originating from Vidal de La Blache on the career and thinking of Fernand Braudel, which privileges above all the relation between space and temporality in its analysis, is notorious (Lacoste, 1989).

¹⁵ It is good to remember that a type of history whose units of analysis are notably spatial is in vogue, at least since the end of the 20th Century. Terms such as "local, regional, global" and articles that discussed all sorts of topics were swarmed with their multiple connections. Also, some of them are very relevant to the teaching of history through the urban weaving and the processes connected to shared memories, whether it be of groups that lay claim to their identities, or those connected to political projects of the public authorities (Vassallo; Cicalo, 2015).

¹⁶ One of the articulatory concepts of this change in perspective was that of Mediterraneanisation (Morris, 2003). It let go of the more traditional dichotomies of the approach to Greek and Roman history, on the one hand, and the Oriental (or near-Oriental) on the other, demonstrating the importance of the connections, ecological relations and exchanges between the different Mediterranean peoples over a long period of time (Harris, 2005).

¹⁷ This type of debate and decolonial thinking in the area of Education are certainly more present in Brazil than they are in Quebec.

¹⁸ Brazil has a version, *mutatis mutandis*, of this type of venture. In the unstable context of the military regime the creation of Social Studies was created, uniting geography, history and social and political organisation of Brazil (OSPB) in primary education. According to Beatriz Boclin Marques dos Santos: "Concerning the objectives of the subjects fixed by the Judgement/Evaluation 853/71, Social Studies had a integrative role, promoting the adjustment of the young person to their environment..." (Santos, 2014, p. 163).

education is still potentially an interesting step forward, specifically in the way it insists on a comparative methodology for teaching humanities.

Returning to the table above, it is evident that of the thirteen teachers, seven chose activities about geography (emphasising politics, economics, and physical issues), whilst the other six opted for historical topics (emphasizing political-institutional or political-factual issues, or social transformation). If, through diverse forms, the PFEQ intended to make the teachers work with the social universe dimension - understood as a field of spatial-temporal relations- our sample shows that it has been successful. From a qualitative point of view the question remains as to which theoretical conceptions the teacher's choices were based. The following questions should clarify these points.

Who fears historical consciousness?

Questions 2 and 3 connect on two levels: on one, the teachers must justify the way they framed the chosen topics; on the other they must speak about theory and practice. The aim is to identify the background issues, which criteria – theoretical, social, political, others – impact the emphasis given to the content? Why teach the chosen topic among so many other possibilities? What concepts, techniques, abilities, attitudes do they intend to develop in the study/activity at hand?

The answers to question 2 are quite varied but can be classified into two semantical schemes: a) that of the development of historical consciousness; b) the formal-pragmatic-normative.

“2) Why did you choose to address this content in particular?”

The first scheme corresponds to one of the central concerns of historians. Like, for teacher (1), “looking at the past, we can understand the present. In understanding the present, we can make gestures and act on it”. The same strategy is developed by teacher (5), although they emphasise spatial aspects, “it starts with the population, in their daily lives, in the way they moved around. So, before comparing them, we will see where they lived”. Here there is a progression in the specific content, starting from a geographical place to then go on to facts and historical issues. When talking about a fundamental right, the vote in particular, teacher (6) justifies their choice: “because it is a fundamental right. (...) the vote, why it is important... (...) Really, to interest them about what is around them at a political level”. Another important topic would be addressing causes, consequences and what we are like today, according to teacher (10), “to see also that what we are doing now impacts the future. That yes, there are changes. All the causes of changes, the advantages, and the inconveniences that this could cause”. Moreover, (9) “I really like this, and I noticed that my students observed the present time a lot, above all the present time (...) In short, it came from the interest of my students and my own”.

It is symptomatic, even worrying, that no teacher explicitly mentions the term “historical consciousness”, like the PFEQ also does not do. In other questions “consciousness” appears as an isolated term. But, in these examples, the term is used in a generic way, that recalls an old notion of consciousness as a flow, like self-perception of existence or relevance of something (Blackmore, 2017). The PFEQ repeats the term “consciousness” 72 times, often in a different meaning of the

term like “territorial consciousness” (Québec, 2006, p. 340), but never historical consciousness. The closest we get to this idea appears in the section on moral education: “as a member of a collective, this same individual becomes aware of their society’s realities and questions the points of reference that guide the actions of its members, as well as the values and projects that are presented to them” (Québec, 2006, p. 273).

The importance of the idea of historical consciousness and its use in practical life¹⁹ lies in daily life. According to the logic that comes from the German way of teaching history, at the very least the one under the influence of Jörn Rüsen, historical consciousness operates in a dynamic that emerges from the human need for guidance. The process of the direction within the temporal flow implies the appropriation of the past from the present. The recuperation of the past is a *sine qua non* condition for the cultural attribution of historical meaning - *historische sinnbildung* (Assis, 2010; Rüsen, 2001, 2020), in a relation that makes the intellectual flow between past, present and future inseparable for the establishment of narrative competency.

Within this framework lies an unfinished debate that is worth persevering with, even if just briefly. The imbroglio is about whether historical consciousness plays a part, that is, if it is incorporated in a large framework of historical thinking – thus, in this case, it could be a skill developed at school through historical literacy; or if it is, instead, an immanent cognitive element that lies beyond these skills that can be cultivated through learning, because it is an essentially human dimension (Maposa; Wassermann, 2009). In our opinion, this is nothing more than a false theoretical dilemma, an enormous effort used to force the separation of schools of philosophy and of power in Europe since the 19th Century, or, in Shakespearian terms, *Much ado about [almost] nothing*. As an ontological dimension, historical consciousness refers to the ways in which individuals immersed in the historical cultures mobilise historical knowledge (Cardoso, O., 2015, 2019; Rüsen, 1994). In other words, as a skill, therefore as something that can be taught and developed, it is about the forms of articulating the past that can be apprehended through – traditional, exemplary, critical, and critical-genetic – schooling (Cerri, 2011).

So, the enigma can be resumed in the following question: is historical consciousness a movement from inside the psyche out or something that can be created from outside in? Without a doubt, historical consciousness has an outside-in formatting, therefore, it is culturally and historically determined; on the other hand, no consciousness can do without a brain which works well and that is organically apt to allow a human being to localize themselves in a temporal, diachronic, and spatial dimension. In short, one approach does not invalidate the other. To lean to one side or another of the issue creates more philosophical aporias than solutions for the practical use of the concept within the educational environment. The notion of historical consciousness is operational, from the heuristic perspective, and comprehensive. Nevertheless, some care must be taken with its uses. Studies of civilisations outside modern and Western understandings of history demonstrate that there are other forms of comprehending humanity through the transformation of time and that should be considered. By not doing this, by naturalising them, we run the risk of taking as certain and

¹⁹ Note that, for Rüsen, “the teaching of History transform historical consciousness in a topic of the teaching of History” (Rüsen, 2007, p. 91).

definitive hegemonic traits of ideas that come from a narrow “occidentocentric” perspective (Castro, 2017; Hartog, 2003; Bentrovato; Nieuwenhuys, 2020; Sahlins, 2012).

In general, although the teacher’s approaches to the past-present are, *lato sensu*, correct, they lack a deeper reflective support. Our concern in this paper is to find out if the teachers are aware that they are working with the historical consciousness of their students, in its different forms, when they mention the past-present formula. If this is not the case, there is the risk that there will be a process of naturalisation and simplification of a central dimension of the human understanding of time. Like in a *habitus*, history and the past-present relationship could become a language framed on a museum wall, losing its intrinsic dynamism of transformation and the possibility of them raising issues. Knowledge itself is reified through a widespread convention when the questioning of the conceptual dimensions stops (Bourdieu, 1989; Lahire, 2003). In this way, knowing that a car has wheels is not a reflected condition. Is it a mental image that corresponds to the car as an empirical referent (I am obviously not talking about a damaged car). The vehicle genre already brings with it some presumptions without which it would be nonsense or something different to a vehicle of this type. Is it possible to think about driving a car with no seats, or without a steering wheel – as long as it is not on one of those TV programmes that make doing everyday things seem absurd? To approach the past-present relation in the classroom requires both going further than just naming it, or presuming its relevance, and being aware of the levels that one wishes to work with so as not to reduce it to triviality, or banality – at the end of the day, every history teacher talks about this, right? Almost all of the teachers that approached this question in the interviews presented weak arguments, even if there were important dialogical and socio-constructivist attempts as shown by teacher (9) above.

Thoughts on the formal-pragmatic-normative framework

When we reach the other stage of questions, the teacher’s lines of reasoning become all the more worrying. Why did they choose what would be taught? The question is straightforward, even if the answer is not. To address this question properly means both justifying themselves about their personal choices (theoretical, practical, emotional); and also, their content choice – which topic/framing/object that they intend to take to the students – in relation to the recommendations and requirements of the PFEQ.

At least half of the teachers resorted to the formal-pragmatic-normative level in their answer to question 2. Broadly speaking, I teach “this” because it is in the PFEQ, plain and simple. For example, (2) “it is to follow the material”; (3) “the book follows the programme, therefore, it is what should be covered, so, I do it like this”, (7) “because it was pretty much imposed on me”; (11) “well, in fact, it is the content that is about the *Iroquoian* and *Algonquian* societies”; “they are in the sequence and in the programme, that’s what needs to be taught”; (13) “they are part of essential knowledge”.

The relation between the formal curricula, in this case the provincial one, and what is experienced in the school’s daily life is very dynamic, the curricula are often reconstructed (or should be) according to the regional or sociocultural contexts. A good research indicator would be to

ascertain to what extent teachers are involved in the design of their respective courses. There were teachers – (8) and (12) – that endeavoured to talk about the content in a more logical or operational way.

(12) We start by covering territory, next economy, then, there is a logical order in the way we see “aspects²⁰” as well, because before we speak about economics, we have to talk about territory as it is our territory’s resources that allow.... Interviewer: ... [an understanding of] how the economy works? (12) Exactly. So that it makes more sense.

Moreover, teacher (8) explains “we changed our annual planning, and we work with aspects. With society, territory, economics, politics etc. Then we would cover politics”. The next step could be to say that this change would bring with it new problems for the students to solve, or something along those lines. Within the relations established in the two frameworks, what teacher (4) said is worth mentioning. First, he breaks the logic that all the other teachers had resorted to and affirms that the content that he is working with: “is not in the programme, I know...” His justification is clearly based on the social-political relevance of studying his object, as: “(...) it really is an important period of change, of turning points (...) And also an impressive moment of our history. It is the first time the army goes to the streets; it is the first time for a lot of things (...) it is a key moment”.

To summarise, the teachers discourse swings between two stances: a) the simplified application of one dimension of historical thinking, in particular that of historical consciousness; b) the alignment to formal-pragmatic-normative justifications. Whilst the first can serve as a clue to rethink teacher training, that is, to what extent the current curricula in the universities of Quebec meet the main issues put forward by the fields of education and history; the second could indicate a certain apathy on the part of the teachers about the knowledge and topics organised in the PFEQ.

What are the reasons behind this possible apathy? Hypothetically, it seems to us, that in both cases, there is a need for teacher training that encourages the teachers to think of their lessons as scientific-type paths and to direct the student’s gaze towards a more critical vision of society using this same method – that of raising problems, questions about the content and establishing a method of analysing the sources in the classroom. A justification of this apathy can be gathered from the UQÁM’s²¹ teacher training syllabus. Is only one class in the academic career of a bachelor’s degree in education sufficient so that students (future teachers) can develop, a slightest bit consistent, theoretical base to face the challenges of school practices? In our opinion, far from it.

Between curriculum requirements and teaching practices

The third and final question refers to at least two interpretive levels: 3) *What questions did you ask yourself when you were planning this activity? About what topic, and why?* On the one hand, the questions encouraged the teachers to think about the problems, hypothesis, and conjunctures that came before organising the practical activity. On the other, the questions meant that the teacher

²⁰ In this case, they are referring to a word used locally, that denotes the various elements that will be studied, such as: culture, politics, economy, society, and territory.

²¹ One of the biggest universities in the province of Quebec, in the city of Montreal.

had to connect the problematization with the topic/object of study to be covered in the classroom. A possible answer that would deal with the question should move within the problematization-object-praxeology triad.

The teachers' answers provide important insights about the curriculum and about teacher training for primary education, as at least 70% of the answers only deal with the praxeological level. That is, the teachers are much more inclined to think about the practice as a central element, whilst the prior theoretical reflections about the content to be covered in the classroom are minimised or simply abandoned.

For example, teacher (1) comments "(...) I did not want the children to just get a grasp of the subject, that they learnt it by memory (...) I wanted it also to be useful later on and enjoyable". According to teacher (2), "when I have something specific to present, I ask myself: ok, will they be capable of understanding it? What examples could I give to illustrate it well, to guarantee an understanding (...) Make a good connection using comparison". Again, teacher (3) admits "truly, I didn't ask myself many questions. (...) Could I present a visual support or something like that?" Or still, teacher (4) shares, "I really thought about the essential knowledge, in the content, in my pedagogical intention (...) About knowledge, content, concepts and also about class management". Furthermore, questions like the following appear: "in what way they [the students] will be able to have a debate. In what way will they be able to get to the debate, ready, to debate without stress, without embarrassment" (9); "what would attract them a little, give them a taste? Sometimes, a film or a documentary could be interesting, could be different" (12); "I put myself in the shoes of the child, what parts could they find more difficult? After that, I seek both a playful and logical sequence" (13).

All the answers above, *mutatis mutandis*, approach the level of pedagogical intervention with significant concern and sensibility, including aspects like avoiding memorisation as an end to itself; presenting knowledge that interest the students; using explanatory elements that are close to the pupils' knowledge; comparison; illustration and even, making activities more playful and enjoyable. There were those that recognised the importance of constructing activities in which the students were protagonists, drawing attention to active learning methodologies:

(7) How could we make the information that they learnt more concrete? (...) And that is why I thought I could use comparison so that they [the students] could see the similarities and the differences (...) Yes, because in social universe, it is easy to give the lesson for them, to work on the subject and them to continue not being active; so, I look for ways to do it differently.

Conversely, fortunately a minority, we found totally laconic answers: "in fact, I did not think about this. This activity was created previously by two colleagues that teach the same year as me" (6).

Of the thirteen teachers interviewed, only four understood the question as a conversation between theory (historical and conceptual knowledge that underlie the activity) and practice (how to involve the students in an educational intervention). Even so, the answers varied significantly in depth and quality of analysis. There were those that were not concerned with the conceptual and procedural principles and even the practices emphasising a purely factual dimension of

political history, “the first thing to look at was the progression of the politicians [understand it in a chronological framework]. (...) In order to find the maximum names of politicians for my class, but, really, seeking those who were a focus of progression” (8)²².

Three teachers gave broader answers, and we will examine them more slowly. It is the case of teacher (5):

As we are going to start a new section about the *Algonquians* and as a new song will be covered, one of the questions that I ask myself is about the lyrics of the songs (...) to be certain that the vocabulary [of the songs] will correspond to the vocabulary that the students are familiar with or will recognise. What words I will have to explain (...) So, I must prepare for that, for the vocabulary and the possible questions of the students. Also, I have to prepare my clothing because I am changing to another Native American, so I have to change some of my accessories so that the students can see the difference between the character of Angeni, that they know as an *Iroquoian* woman that taught before, to a new *Algonquian* character that will teach them now.

Firstly, a topic that is found in the PFEQ is defined – the *Algonquians*. Secondly, the sources are defined – traditional songs whose lyrics will be used in the classroom. Here, there is an underlying concern with the student’s relationship with interpretation through the learning of specific vocabulary from popular indigenous songs. What follows then are the dynamics to be established in the classroom so that the students become engaged with the selected topic. Teacher (5) uses a clear classroom methodology, combined with key heuristic elements debated within the framework of historical thinking, especially, the centrality of the use of sources in learning history (Carrasco; Molina; Puche, 2014; Carretero; Lopez, 2009; Éthier; Lefrançois; Audigier, 2018; Moerbeck, 2023; Moerbeck; Magalhães Dos Santos, 2023; Vansledright, 2010; Wineburg, 2001). After all, like the Greek researcher Irene Nakou rightly points out, “the sources [are] the basis of on which the historical questions and inferences are produced” (Nakou, 2003, p. 61–2). The concern of teacher (5) with the level of vocabulary should be emphasised, because it underlines the importance of the knowledge of lexical structure in the interpretation of the students belonging to the present world that separates them significantly from the past and from different ethnic groups. In other words, they are students that are studying old indigenous songs that were transmitted by specific oral traditions. The understanding of the teacher of this distance (student-source) is crucial, because it evidences their intention, in this case implicit, to avoid the dangers of presentism (Hartog, 2003; Hobsbawm, 2013). The approach of teacher (5) would be complete if they had made explicit some specific questioning in relation to the sources, directing the gaze of the students to a precise investigation. In any case, given the inspired structuring of the activity, one can imagine that this could have merely been omitted, as is often the case in oral remarks.

In the case of teacher (10):

Deep down, I thought about what would be relevant in order to deal with the subject. I really wanted to find out what would show me that they [the students] had understood. So, this is what the changes are all about. I, in fact, did do some research of photographs, [to see]

²² Here we can see a clear concern for facts – to learn the names of politicians.

if there were any. I searched for photographs from before and after (...) so, the time of the Native Americans, Iroquoians, and the coming of the French.

Although it is less complex than the previous answer, we must consider: a) the choice of the background, but conceptual, knowledge, like the changes that happen over the course of history; b) research that involves primary sources of an iconographic nature, like the photographs; c) an explicit thematic framing, such as the relation between the Indigenous peoples and the French in the colonisation process of the Amerindian land. Although to a limited extent, the teacher made more evident their interest in taking on the notion of social change as a guide for their approach.

Lastly, teacher (11) explains:

I would like to do an activity that will require less management of material. I came across an idea of a game that a teacher was going to do in social universe, and I said to myself: “why don’t I ask them to create a game for the workshops?” And that is when I had the idea and I did this activity so that the students could enjoy revising, but also could also see what they learn and why I ask them to indicate the differences between the two societies (...) I chose to do this because it would motivate them and at the same time allow them to develop certain skills that we sometimes leave behind in their exercise books. I said to myself, if I just asked them about the clothing, they would say: “what are the Algonquians wearing?” “What do the Iroquoians wear?” They wouldn’t ask me about the differences and the similarities.

Through the use of the differences between the societies and an impulse to build workshops, it is clear that the teacher is more concerned with the questions of their students and less in introducing the subject through questions to be answered. Firstly, mentioning the formulation of questions by her students provides evidence that it is an activity prepared by a teacher that intends to dialogue with her students, evidently, this is very positive. In a way, here, what was seen in general previously is confirmed: there was significant effort in the educational intervention process (in the planning of pedagogical practices), but not in regard to the object to be studied – unless the more elementary, albeit structural, issues of the PFEQ, like learning through way of comparison – tracing differences and similarities in time and space.

Epilogue

Throughout this article, we have seen that the topics chosen by the teachers varied a lot, even if there were underlying spatial or political emphasis in the framing of the objects. Comparison was the most used heuristic to address the objects, the approach tended to support itself on the topic-chronological milestone binomial, but with time gaps motivated by comparison. The factual element is also very present, with a strong stress on the important figures and names in politics of each period. In the field of historical thinking, some secondary concepts became clear, like cause and consequence, or even, changes, what might make us think, equally, in continuities. Reflection about the concepts of temporality or, still, empathy is very weak, almost inexistent in the teacher’s answers. Whilst the notion of consciousness appears sometimes, but always disconnected from its predicative – historical (consciousness). Despite this, the past-present relations are there.

What is the reason behind the teachers' lack of conceptual articulation? Maybe an investigation of teaching training programmes within humanities in the universities in Quebec would bring a more conclusive light on this question. A solution could be found in Catherine Duquette's proposal, as the author suggests thinking about concepts like historical consciousness, historical understanding, and historical thinking within a procedural framework for primary school teachers (Duquette, 2015). There is a strong relationship between the development of reflexive historical consciousness and the skill of thinking historically, but this is not possible without entering into dialogue with a long historiographic tradition (Moerbeck, 2021).

Perhaps this is the challenge at hand: to think sensitively for each age group about how to introduce children to the inquisitive and investigative universe of historical thinking. Little by little, a conclusion is reached, that developing a critical conscience about the world, through a clearer perception of the importance of the historical perspective could stop students getting to secondary school like "babies in the forest", in particular concerning raising basic questions about the sources they examine (Wineburg, 2019, p. 2). Although regarding pedagogical practices, the Quebecois primary school teachers seem well prepared and well aware of the importance of using student-centred practices in the classroom, they continue wanting when the discussion is about the theoretical-conceptual sphere.

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