

The relationship between the teaching of history and critical thinking

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Abstract

The recent years have seen a growing and rather consistent debate concerning the reevaluation of the written history of Albania and that of the World. This debate concerns history books used in school curriculums. Therefore, this article attempts to give an analytical review as regards to the way history books in schools analyze the history of Albania and the history of World. Below we approach the way the historic thought has evolved in school books from the politicized and schematic historical facts to a reasoning based in facts and arguments. Furthermore we will have a look on the critical thinking of our students. The main questions here are: Have the school history books motivated students to think critically, and if so to what extent have they succeeded? Have they succeeded in preparing future intellectuals released from prejudices?

Keywords: relationship, history, critical thinking, Albania.

Introduction

One of the main priorities of the education process in the Republic of Albania is to approach its methods and concepts with those of developed countries in order to give school a European dimension where long term skills can serve the objective of integration into a knowledge society.

Thus, the methods, techniques, and applicative practical works have been the object of researchers of the educative field. Therefore, the current article that takes into consideration the integration processes, and the transformation of education from a reproductive perspective to the creation of knowledge and riconceptualization of history from that of wars, and conflicts to a new one of civilizations, and peaceful living has a coherent object of analysis.

As mentioned above, our curriculums, texts, and trainings of teachers have put a big emphasis on the reproductive learning and the assessment of students, but a smaller one on the student learning process mechanisms, and an even smaller one on the education of student skills regarding the use of textbooks, and other materials, written, visual etc. At this point, it is obvious that the free expression of students' proper points of view and the interpretation of historical events, and phenomenon hasn't been the focus of teaching.

The main purpose of education is to create people who are able to deliver new things, not to simply repeat what older generations, and / or people have created, or discovered. The second purpose of education is to form critical minds that verify things prior to accept them, and most importantly do not accept everything (Musai, 2015).

This statement of Piaget is the main responsibility of our schools in now days. The development of students' critical thinking at all school levels is the 'backbone' of

of the whole system: the programs, textbooks, and methodology, otherwise the concept of curriculums.

This objective requests come from the current biases of development, the strategic orientation the Albanians have already set for themselves: the integration in the family of the developed nations.

The subject of history places a specific emphasis on cognitive abilities, and reasoning thus enabling students to better understand the world around them, in this specific case the concepts and topics in this subject like, problem resolution, reasoning, action planning, and the selection and creation of new ideas. The cognitive skills development is based on the theory of cognitivism which considers students as active and creative actors, while the learning process as a search for knowledge that is specific and necessary as well. There are several kinds of school thinking appropriate for teaching, based on: interpretation, categorization, classification, synthesis, problem resolution, comparison, and analysis.

Let us give an example below of the National Liberation War of the Albanian people during WWII, the topics, and the teaching perspective. Albania during WWII National Liberation War is studied in the 12th class during the high school as part of the history of Albania as a special line of it. It has an important place in the history of Albania, and is composed of five topics from 1939 - 1944.

This historic period is explained chronologically in two parts. The first one explains the Italian invasion during 1939 - 1943. The main events are:

- The first moments of the Italian occupation;
- The setting of the occupation administration ;
- The resistance against occupation 1939 – 1941;
- The creation of the Albanian communist party and its political platform;
- The conference of Peza and the National Liberation Front;
- The National Front (political party) and its platform 1942;
- The relations between these two political groups during 1942 - 1943. The contradictions and the different points of view regarding the continuation of war.

The convention of Mukje;

The second one explains the German occupation 1943 - 1944.

- The organization of structures of state during the German occupation;
- The creation of the Legitimacy movement (political party) on November, 21st 1943 and its political platform;
- The resistance against occupation;
- The military operations during winter 1943 and spring;
- The political situation in Albania during 1944;
- The end of the war and the contribution of Albanians in its development;
- Kosovo and Cameria during the WWII.

Supplementary pieces of reading are given for each of these topics to further fill students' knowledge with appropriate information. It is important to describe the teaching process and the methodology used to transmit it as clearly as possible. The education structure in schools and student centered teaching with its focus on critical thinking diversifies and makes classes more attractive. This methodology emphasizes 'the learning through remembering'.

The following topics are an indispensable part of teaching:

- Boosting the debate;
- Visiting museums;
- Visiting historical places;
- Power - point presentations that through images and images and movie sequences transmit events / moments of war, resistance of the Albanians, and historical people of the time;
- Interviews realized by students with veterans of the WWII based on the information obtained by the school textbooks;
- Gathering materials from historical books, journals, newspapers of the time, or internet sources;
- Dramatizations.

The above mentioned activities enrich the content of the subject' s message which in turn can be transmitted through generations, and remain in the memory as one of the most important event s in the history of Albanians. One of the innovations related to the way of approaching the history of Albanians and that of the World in teaching has to do with the way these topics are written and read through the use of the twelve critical thinking skills. To better understand this approach students are given short paragraphs that have to do to with different skills related to the relevant topics.

Let's see another example: when topics such as 'the American revolution' are explained students are given such an assignment: write a paragraph to briefly explain the causes and consequences of this revolution.

In another topic, for example, Albanian beyliks, students are asked to write a comparative paragraph in order to focus on their common and different features. In other cases, argumentative paragraphs are asked as an assignment, or students are asked to classify, and categorize the facts. These examples are worth mentioning to better understand the way teachers can use the twelve skills when giving writing assignments, as well as the questions as a valuable way to boost the critical thinking. The final purpose is to create students that can fulfill the framework of a historical event using most of the above mentioned skills, and if possible all of them.

The history textbooks of the recent years offer different types of questions that enable the use of critical thinking, instead of the reproductive one when discussing facts. Even though, this important element helps for a better process still there is place for improvement and enrichment of these questions. Obviously, communication is a very important factor during history teaching. There are two kinds of communication in classes: participating and presenting.

The participating / debating communication or the verbal speech is the exchange of messages. The presenting communication is the communication of two, or more people usually, with just one direction. There is more negotiation of the meaning than in the participating communication where co-speakers stand in front of each - other. The art of asking questions are the center point of a successful teaching. every formulation that stimulates critical thinking will be considered, regardless the fact that it may be written, oral, or expressed with gestures and requires an answer. If it involves the student in the learning process it will be considered successful. the question has its phases. There is *an initiative* (the teacher asks a question), *an answer*

(the student gives an answer), *and a reaction* (a praise is given).

In 1997 a new project 'The development of critical thinking through reading and writing' began its application in Albania as well as in other central and eastern European countries. The project evoked the great enthusiasm of teachers and pedagogues as a fruitful investment for the Albanian education.

Since the very beginning it was a success that during the years became even more stable in the entire Albanian curriculums and especially in the history curriculum. Critical thinking is becoming a leading philosophy in our education system.

Technology and the education through media are also important during the teaching of history. Some of these priorities are:

- it ensures better ways to get the needed information;
- it allows for more flexibility during learning;
- it ensures simple ways to boost and develop the way of thinking;
- it creates a personal space regarding the online learning;
- it helps to move forward;
- it influences the creation of visual situation.

These elements of technology and media are valuable especially for projects and practical activities, but they can also be used when explaining new topics. Once more we emphasize that critical thinking in history teaching enables a better explanation and serves as a basis for the cases and examples offered during explanation.

Conclusions

Critical thinking does not happen in vain, but in an already prepared environment where the information is taken by students. Questions, arguments, and causes, and consequences are offered on this basis. This becomes clear if we remind the systematic assessment, or the formulation of opinions based on these rational criterions. However, one should be prepared as the critical thinking often is a difficult process, and even not a pleasurable one like the painful truths that we can meet during history teaching. Critical thinking and the school thinking skills are a mental/cognitive process in order to organize, and understand complicated processes. We can boost thinking skills in the history classes when we think about controversial historical events. This can boost our very personal thoughts. As stated above, cognition, language, and the subject have a symbiotic relationship. They reinforce each - other, and depend on each - other. The use of the discussed skills and critical thinking makes teaching more effective and stimulates students' involvement because their opinions are encouraged and respected from teachers and other students as well.

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