Danish University Colleges

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THE INHERENT DYNAMICS OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES ON THE CONTROVERSIAL

- To teach controversial issues in history – Holocaust as a case

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OVERALL PURPOSE

This PhD thesis explore what characterizes history teaching in controversial issues through an observational study of three history teachers practice. The study focus on how historical narratives unfold in the classroom based on the teacher’s didactic choices and considerations:

- What role do controversial issues play in history teaching?
- How do didactic reflections and choices come to light in teacher and students narratives of the controversial?

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The approach to controversial issues in education is based on a more existential understanding of the controversial launched by Bertucio and Hartstellung and Hardin (2016)

- the controversial is based on the choices and deselections we make as “aspects of being” (Bertucio, 2016) based on our existential living conditions and values both as individuals and society.
- As an interpretative tool to elucidate contradictions in history in order to understand “aspect of being” in the past and present.

HYPOTHESIS

The teacher’s didactical choices when adjusting, selecting and deselecting important points and themes of teaching, are of great importance and has a crucial impact on the narratives created and in the interpretation that takes place on the basis of the content represented.

Three levels of simplifications:

- History scientific knowledge is educationalized
- Controversial acts in the learning materials are normalized, simplified or factualized
- History is interpreted as an absolute narrative in classroom

PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

To analyse the connection between the teachers choice of learning materials, the teaching settings and the creation of narratives within the classroom, when teaching Holocaust:

- how the learning materials present and characterize controversial issues within the past
- The teachers’ use of the learning materials
- The narratives created in classroom about the controversial

EMPIRICAL SETTINGS

The empirical data is based on an ethnographic approach in a classroom study in an upper class in Danish primary school. It consists of a small study of Holocaust teaching aimed at preparing students for a study trip to Poland including a visit to Auschwitz

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The learning materials (LM)

- An analysis of 8 different LM shows to some extent that controversial acts are normalized, simplified or factualized
- However, with some differences - from emphasis on the ethics and nuances of narrative history to an explanatory review of the Holocaust
- The moral of “learn from history” was evident in older LM but absent in newer LM
- The moral cause of the sentence above didn’t get an ethical impact in classroom discussions
- Factualization of the controversial occurred
- The bad nazis and the innocent civilians became a strong narrative amongst student
- “Why don’t they just bomb, the evil ones?”

STUDENTS RESPONSES

"It’s insane... he [Himmler] encourages the murder of women and children!"

"But I don’t understand… Why genocide?"

"We all have a responsibility not to forget”. (If we forget history will repeat itself)"