
New Trends in History Textbook Research
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This article summarizes the great lines of developments in History Textbooks Research as they were synthesized following the presentations in the September 2009 conference of the International Society for History Didactics on History Textbook Analysis: Methodological Issues held in cooperation with the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig / Germany. Evolutions on history textbook research are significant and they reveal a school historiography as a challenged area both for history education and social, historical, pedagogical and / or political studies. In the frame of this historiography and of the corresponding research, significant conceptual and methodological generic transformations occur. In the conceptual level, we noticed a significant broadening of the concept of the narrative. It begins as a multimodal narrative; it then evolves into a fragmented and reconstructed narrative; finally it becomes an open narrative. In the methodological level, we observe several shifts: from the textbook as genre to its uses and perceptions by the individuals, from the search of its messages to the negotiation of these messages, from the textbook as text to its political, cultural, social, ideological contexts. Observation of classrooms, research on social representations and / or on memories, interviews and surveys, oral history procedures, comparative methods and qualitative analysis seem to reshape the methodological horizon of history textbook research.

Toward the concept of the narrative in school historiography

The history textbook remains the favorite object of history didactics research and an increasingly challenging issue within other disciplines such as historical, political or pedagogical sciences. Despite the development of new media, history textbook is still the dominant translation of the curriculum in schools, the most widely used resource for teaching and learning history. It is regarded as mirroring dominant contents and practices, perceived as chief national instrument perpetuating cultures and ideologies and believed to reflect the complicated relationship between power and knowledge. The history textbook as social construction, cultural artifact, source of collective memory, piece of master narrative, autobiography of the nation state continues to attract significant epistemic attention and provides important insights into the social, political and cultural context within which it is produced. It is almost a research tradition accumulating data for an important range of issues focused mainly on identity policies through education with a special concern on history textbooks: portrayals of the Self and the Other, definitions of the »true« citizen, ill-pictured or neglected social groups and minorities, bias and prejudices, etc.
However, the history textbook has dramatically changed worldwide. Research in different national contexts shows that history textbooks as well as other subjects' textbooks are increasingly influenced by new technologies, the web revolution and image culture. Iconographic materials interrupt more and more the unity of the written text and create a new multimodal text. They are not any more in the margins of the text, they are parts of this new kind of text. Documents, graphics, learning targets, cards, colors defining specific areas for key notions or ideas have enlarged the concept of the textbook content and finally have reshaped the narrative patterns. The historical narrative does not result only from the authors' narrative but also from the combined documents and exercises for the students. Research has pointed out that documents and authors' narratives are not always consistent; In many cases, the visual text carries different meanings and suggests a different narrative. Moreover, DVDs and CD-ROMs accompany the history textbook and enhance the multimodality of the history lesson. The latest trend is on-line materials available on the Internet and aiming to support individual learning and motivation, creating new teaching-learning methods and strategies. Information technology used not only within formal educational settings but also in informal ones. Independently of the range of uses and the impact of these resources, which remains until now, difficult to assess, research on history textbook faces a new environment.

Furthermore, theoretical inquiries into historical thinking move toward a kind of history text that does not give answers but supports the students' own accounting of the past and fits in with laboratory learning procedures encouraged by most school subjects. Learning history, a core issue in abundant research of History Didactics, has recently expanded to textbook studies. This is set in a context where the school curricula, including those for the subject of history, are structured around abilities and competencies. The textbook must then include activities, laboratories and workshops, all aimed toward historical thinking. Questions are thus supported and answers are not offered but required. The authors' text must not cancel out this procedure. In many cases, history textbooks tend towards a kind of open narrative importantly different from the traditional history textbooks narrative or the historiographical narrative. This new open narrative is structured in a multidimensional way which excludes one univocal story from a certain beginning towards a well known ending. It is, on the contrary, open to many narrative layers, probably including differentiations of messages and pluralities of meaning.

History Textbook Research is considerably affected by these changes. Researchers could not analyze history textbooks without taking into consideration new textual and contextual realities. New realities generate new questions and imply new analytical frameworks and new methodologies. New analytical frameworks and methodologies are combined with conceptual generic transformations for history textbooks and history education in general. These trends can be discerned in many research experiences. Among them, major fields see considerable transformations. Firstly, this is the research on the content of the history textbook.

Influenced by new structural appearances of history textbooks, changing teaching practices and epistemological improvements mainly in linguistics, researchers move from a classical analysis of content which was identified with the written text to the analysis of the multimodal text. Underestimated or marginalized in previous research, parts of the textbook conceptualized previously as paratext or iconography and thus supplementary become more and more the focus of inquiries and comparative research. Consistencies are not incontestable. Comparisons between the proposed activities, the written text, the curriculum and the whole didactic apparatus constitute new objects of research. Thus, the history education metalanguage moves to the center of inquiries.

From the text to the context
The history textbook is in addition a favorite object of controversies and conflicts. Situated within a complex system of epistemological and educational requirements on the one hand and political and social demands on the other, dependent on collective
representations, related on controversial memories and submitted to institutional constraints and different economical market systems, the history textbook often becomes the main battlefield for current history and memory wars. Globalization processes, post-totalitarian and post-colonial contexts intensify awareness of collective identities and reshape the past in different or even competing schemes. History textbooks and history education in general are often the victims of different agencies of memory and/or political and ideological demands and they have to deal with the issue of the past as the propagator of collective identities.

Simultaneously, the history textbook is set in a school-related epistemological context, under institutional constraints. As an educational support medium, it refers implicitly or explicitly to the curricula, to the hidden curriculum as well as to the whole school culture and to what is collectively expected to be taught and learnt in schools. It acts within a subject system as well as in a school system privileging and legitimating a kind of knowledge, intellectual and practical abilities as well as social aims. At the same time, a history textbook relies on the historiographical and epistemological frames of academic history, as well as on the traditions that organize school knowledge and schoolbooks. It has to adapt to curricula, education policy, and to textbook production and approval processes. The ideologi cal character of the system in which a history textbook is situated influences its contents and its layout, offering more or less space for autonomous thinking and debates. Within this scope, scope, didactical and pedagogical premises arising in a general context of changes which aim to enhance their role as tools, conflict with ideological and cultural traditions.

Research on history textbook, especially concerned with the ideological and cultural capital that they carry, have to take into account this complex system when analyzing history textbooks which are finally combinations of history as an academic discipline, history as a school subject, history as a didactic product and history as public property.

These developments affect the methodological and conceptual framework of textbook research. The old methods of written content analysis often quantitative, are not sufficiently relevant for investigating and analyzing the multimodality and multi-functionality of history textbooks. Comparative methods are needed to correlate the social, educational, and personal contexts of learning procedures. Quantitative approaches are employed increasingly seldom especially when the approach of the content is new, being either replaced by or used as supplementary to, qualitative analysis.

A slow change turning the focus of the research from the textbook as a genre to its uses and perceptions is also clearly manifested. Within this framework, the interest of researchers addresses the practices involving the textbook in classrooms and the teachers' and students' reception of the textbooks rather than the messages included in the content or the goals of the producers as related to the state, the authors and the market. Questioning the correlation between the uphill and the downhill approach is a new trend requiring new methods for the collection and the analysis of the data. Observation of classrooms, the inquiry into the representations of teachers or and students, their experiences or even the memories of the individuals call for methodologies often borrowed from the social sciences, offering both individual and comparative perspectives. Individuals are now considered active negotiators of the messages and the meanings carried by the history textbooks. Comparative methods are thus needed to correlate the social, educational and personal contexts of learning procedures. Increasing analytical complexity, crossed methodologies, and comparative methods thus question the traditional methodological framework of textbook research.