

CONTEXTS

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Abstracts



Editorial: Textbooks and Beyond: Educational Media in Context(s)

Simone Lässig

This article provides an introduction to the aims, methods, and interdisciplinary approach of this new journal, elucidating the traditions of international textbook research and the function of educational media as illuminating sources for various academic disciplines. Textbooks and curricula in particular, which are not only state-approved but also of a highly condensed and selective nature, are obliged to reduce the complexities of the past, present, and future onto a limited number of pages. Particularly in the humanities, which often deal with concepts of identity and portrayals that may be more open to interpretation, textbooks can become the subjects of controversial debate, especially in relation to societal shifts such as globalization and immigration. In this regard, this journal intends to illuminate the situations in which educational media evolve, including their social, cultural, political, and educational contexts. The emergence of new, particularly digital, educational media marks new modes of knowledge production. *Contexts* invites analyses that reach beyond the printed page and even beyond the institution of the school itself.

Issue no. 1: Teaching and Learning in a Globalizing World

Editor: Hanna Schissler

Introduction: Teaching and Learning in a Globalizing World

Hanna Schissler

The globalizing world with its entanglements and multiple interactions, shifting notions of place and time, unifying as well as fragmenting tendencies, new forms of boundary drawing, and old and new lines of conflict, influences our lives and public awareness in the "information age." As far as education is concerned, this situation demands a critical stock taking and new reference frames for understanding this globalizing world, which on the one hand provides great new opportunities and on the other hand generates enormous risks. It requires teachers to provide guidance, and teaching materials to provide young people with orientation. Rapidly shifting contexts demand new abilities to act and to maneuver. Collectives and individuals are equally impacted by the rapid and uneven processes that are customarily summarized as "globalization." To understand what is happening in this complex world is crucial. From the perspective of old or insufficient reference frames, the world will seem erratic, unpredictable, and arbitrary. Schools as the transmitters of knowledge and as socializing agencies play a crucial role in preparing young people for this world of multiple modernities and rapid development. It is their responsibility to provide orientation and guidance. How well they do this depends on any number of factors, and not least on the quality of educational materials. Such materials, however, are frequently more than simply educational media. They are sources via which the societies in which they are produced and put to use may be understood.

Can National History Be De-Provincialized? U.S. History Textbook Controversies in the 1940s and 1990s

Thomas Bender

This article examines two incidents of textbook controversy in the United States in the course of the last half century. First, it addresses history's historical relationship to the modern nation-state and nationalism. How does that relationship, and the particular way it is understood, limit the boundaries of history, particularly the contest over whether American history ought to be taught as self-contained and exceptionalist or taught within a larger global context? Second, it addresses the presence of what could be called a historical essentialism or even historical fundamentalism in textbook controversies. The article concludes with an examination of the increasingly political character of the textbook approval and adoption process, as well as the role of publishers and professional historians in the process.

Visualizing the Former Cold War “Other”: Images of Eastern Europe in World Regional Geography Textbooks in the United States

Dmitrii Sidorov

This article discusses contemporary western representations of the former Cold War geopolitical “other,” Eastern Europe, conveyed by illustrations in contemporary American world regional geography textbooks. I would like to explore if there are certain geopolitical biases in the pictures’ general messages, such as tendencies to highlight the transitional, problematic, and marginal at the expense of showing the essential and centripetal characteristics and landscapes. Images for Eastern Europe tend to marginalize it for the rest of Europe by minimizing visual references to its physical landscape and its role in European history; overemphasizing local problems connotes the need for the supranational assistance of the expanding European Union. Overall, this article attempts to reveal various Cold War legacies and “marginalizing” tendencies in visual representations of Eastern Europe, thus contributing to the visual and popular cultural turns in geography and geopolitical studies.

The Perpetuation of War in U.S. History Textbooks

Seth. B. Scott

American history textbooks, for the better part of the twentieth century, have focused on war as the primary actor. This article investigates the pervasiveness of war in textbooks and considers the effect of such on students and their role as future policymakers. In the past decade, history textbooks have undergone a total transition toward an emphasis on social history. An examination of what this entails, and what impacts this may have on schoolchildren and society as a whole, lends insight into the effects the study of history can have. Finally, I argue that a historian must not only choose events that illustrate the past, but also determine how those choices may affect the future.

In a World of Migration: Rethinking Literacy, Language, and Learning Texts

Elizabeth P. Quintero

This article has evolved from teaching future teachers about literacy and language in multilingual contexts. The examples are taken from contexts in the United States with learners from around the world. Professionals in the classrooms, in the teacher development programs, and in schools and colleges of education have been doing responsible research for many years, and have learned much regarding the learning of multilingual people who represent a multitude of histories. In this article the focus is on rethinking literacy, languages (home languages and target languages of host countries), the connections between personal and communal history and learning texts, and how all of the above relate to the curriculum in various learning arena.

The Riddle of a Common History: The United States in Mexican Textbook Controversies

Mauricio Tenorio Trillo

By identifying two general issues in recent history textbook controversies worldwide (oblivion/justice and inclusion), this article examines understandings of the United States in Mexico’s history textbooks (especially those of 1992) as a means to test the limits of historical imagining between U.S. and Mexican historiographies. Drawing lessons from recent European and Indian historiographical debates, the article argues that many of the historical clashes between the nationalist historiographies of Mexico and the United States could be taught as series of unsolved enigmas, ironies, contradictions, in the midst of a central enigma: the persistence of two nationalist historiographies incapable of contemplating their common ground. The article maintains that *lo mexicano* has been a constant part of the past and present of the US, and *lo gringo* an intrinsic component of Mexico’s history. The differences in their historical tracks have been made into monumental ontological oppositions, which are in fact two tracks—often overlapping—of the same and shared conflictual and complex experience.

Historical Memory, International Conflict, and Japanese Textbook Controversies in Three Epochs

Yoshiko Nozaki and Mark Selden

Japan's right-wing nationalists have launched three major attacks on school textbooks over the second half of the twentieth century. Centered on the treatment of colonialism and war, the attacks surfaced in 1955, the late 1970s, and the mid-1990s. This article examines three moments in light of Japanese domestic as well as regional and global political contexts to gain insight into the persistent problem of the Pacific War in historical memory and its refraction in textbook treatments. There are striking similarities as well as critical differences in the ways the attacks on textbooks recurred and in the conditions of political instability.

Contending "Historical" Identities in India

Deepa Nair

The controversy over rewriting history textbooks in India in 2000 not only revealed the divergent renditions of collective memory but also evoked decades of contention over self-representation and cultural identity. This article explores these "multiple" renderings of a "singular" past and contends the formation of "historical identities" by arguing that divergent use of reason and interpretation leads to a layered and fluid Indian identity leaving it open for contestation. By situating the case of the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb within the milieu from which textbook controversies emanate, the article suggests an alternative dimension for looking at the controversy—instead of the usual binary concept of "secular" versus "communal" history. At the root of the controversy is not merely politicization but also divergent perspectives of looking at the past and the resultant rethinking and reworking of dominant notions of it.

History and Interethnic Conflicts in Putin's Russia

Dmitry Shlapentokh

Events of the distant past can become the subjects of animated online debates, revealing high levels of ethnic tension between ethnic Russians and minorities. This has been the case with disputes about a recent Russian movie on Genghis Khan, for instance, which is nearing completion in Yakutia. The Internet debate forum has revealed several models of the relationship between ethnic Russians and minorities. First, there is the Eurasian model, which implies a "symbiosis" between these two groups with ethnic Russians playing the lead roles. Second, there is the Asiatic version of Eurasianism, where the Asian minorities play the roles of leaders. Third, there is the concept of Russia for Russians.

Weapons of Mass Instruction: Schoolbooks and Democratization in Multiethnic Central Europe

Charles Ingraio

History schoolbooks are part of a much broader legitimation process through which every society's ruling elite secures the uncritical acceptance of the existing political, social and economic system, together with the cultural attributes that reflect its hegemony. In central Europe, the need to justify the creation of nation-states at the beginning and end of the twentieth century has generated proprietary accounts that have pitted the region's national groups against one another. Post-communist democratization has intensified these divisions as political leaders feel obliged to employ hoary myths—and avoid inconvenient facts—about their country's history in order to survive the electoral process. In this way they succumb to the "Frankenstein Syndrome" by which the history taught in the schools destroys those who dare to challenge the artificial constructs of the past. The article surveys history teaching throughout central Europe, with special emphasis on the Yugoslav successor states.

Migration in German Textbooks: Is Multiperspectivity an Adequate Response?

Barbara Christophe

This article raises the question of how German textbooks should deal with issues of migration as one of the main challenges in a globalizing age. In order to prepare the ground for a well-founded answer it follows a twofold agenda. In a first step, previous attempts at analyzing textbook representations of migration are critically scrutinized and read against the background of current

debates on methodological approaches to textbook research. In a second step, anthropological research on the structure of public German discourses on migration is cited as a key to developing a truly multiperspectival mode of representing migration. Ultimately, the article demonstrates that education alone cannot be given the responsibility of clarifying questions that politics have failed to articulate and that pupils must be taught to participate competently in the discourse on migration policy. They should be familiarized with the various positions advocated in the political sphere, and simultaneously equipped with the necessary tools for critical reflection.

Navigating a Globalizing World: Thoughts on Textbooks, Teaching, and Learning

Hanna Schissler

History textbooks are sources of collective memory and can thus be read as “autobiographies” of nation-states. As teaching materials, history textbooks used to be anchored in national traditions, ultimately legitimizing the rationale of nation-states. In questioning the sole validity of national history, social movements since the 1960s and the process of globalization became the seedbeds for the deconstruction of master narratives. Because of their instrumental character as teaching tools, textbooks in general allow researchers to decipher the normative structures of societies. The information revolution since the 1970s has dethroned textbooks as the sole means of instruction in classrooms, and led to the development of different approaches for the analysis of textbooks. Today’s globalizing world demands new reference frames for teaching and learning. In the second part of this article, eight clusters that are pertinent for orientation in the perplexing realities of the present are drafted: challenges resulting from the revolution in information technologies; the changing world of work; contradictory tendencies in globalizing processes; the impact of a new turbo-capitalism with its de-legitimizing impact on political systems; unequal developments leading to an ever increasing inequality on a global as well as on local levels; the increase of worldwide migration and its impact on classrooms; contested memories in societies that reposition themselves in a world that has grown together and re-fragmented at new seams; and finally, the crisis in orientation and values and the personal costs resulting from the perplexities and insecurities of the world.