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# Editorial: Linking past, present and future: the development of historical thinking and historical competencies across different levels of education

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

[Linking past, present and future: the development of historical thinking and historical competencies across different levels of education](#)

Teaching history involves more than memorizing dates, facts and names. It involves the articulation of historical competencies that pave the way for both students and teachers to effectively examine, understand, and interpret past and present events, as well as those that may occur in the future. The development of historical thinking can engage students in their learning processes as they foster the development of cognitive processes in interactive and more autonomous tasks. Within this collaborative framework, the analysis of historical pictures, traits, interviews, sign-ups, wills, agreements, laws, inter alia, under a critical, and analytical view provide a wider outlook of the content under study and zoom out of the theoretical lessons more focused on rote learning and repetition rather than on cognitive and critical reasoning.

This Research Topic presents the results of several studies whose main aim has been to analyze the promotion of historical competences and historical thinking at different educational levels, in particular in secondary and higher education. To this end, the studies that have finally been accepted in this Research Topic have focused on some relevant initiatives and effective resources in an attempt to examine the implementation of historical competences in real educational contexts. In this sense, the scholars involved in this Research Topic have delved into the reasons that encourage the development of historical thinking with the aim of correctly understanding past and present situations and actions, interpreting historical sources or training in the skills and abilities usually adopted by historians.

In particular, [López-García](#) examines the effectiveness of a teaching methodology based on the principle of historical thinking among Spanish adolescents. For this purpose, the general impressions of history teaching and the use of digital resources expressed by two groups of high school students were compared. The results of the research show a considerably better perception in the responses collected in the experimental group, compared to those obtained in the control group.

In another study included in this Research Topic, [Simón-García](#) reviewed how the Modern Age is taught in Spain through the analysis of educational textbooks. For this purpose, more than seven hundred activities were collected from Spanish secondary school textbooks focusing on the historical contents of this period. The results obtained show that the textbooks were effective in their design of activities and promoted an adequate cognitive level, although they were still full of facts and concrete data mainly related to political and cultural history. Among the irregularities found, the author points out that these resources did not delve into complex reasoning that would allow students to draw meaningful conclusions about these past events and their possible effects on the present. In the same vein, it was observed that the textbooks incorporate a discourse that does not facilitate discussion and reflection on Spanish historiographical stereotypes, nor on the social problems of the Early Modern period.

In a similar study, [Hildebrandt-Wypych](#) proceeded to examine contrasting narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Polish history textbooks. The author closely examined Israeli and Arab-Palestinian narratives through a discourse analysis method, emphasizing how the conflict was treated in these resources through the incorporation or elimination of pro-Israeli and/or pro-Palestinian ideas in their narratives. The results of the study indicate that, although the reductive “aggressor-victim” format does not predominate, the depiction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in most of the textbooks reviewed is unbalanced, presenting unequal relations between Jews/Zionists and Arabs/Palestinians.

Another study by [Hernández-Cardona et al.](#) analyses the development of a didactic digital audiovisual narrative based on historical reenactment and service learning activities, specifically related to hospitals during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). With the help of emerging digital technologies, the generation of images of the past facilitates the participation of secondary and higher education students in innovative proposals based on historical reenactment, which can help the design of educational history products, the development of historical thinking and the integration of motivating resources in both formal and non-formal learning spaces.

These studies foster reading comprehension, analysis, complex reasoning, and interpretation of past events. These skills are effective because they enable teachers, students, historians and researchers to understand the causes and effects of historical events and their impact on the present day. Asking questions about the past that guide students’ learning processes and help them gather evidence to support or challenge their initial ways of thinking is

important for examining the account of past events or time periods within a given context. In this sense, identifying gaps in historical narratives, and other challenges during coverage of past events can encourage students to make meaningful interpretations about history, develop problem-solving skills, search for new clues and pose alternative questions to refocus their initial hypotheses about past situations and characters.

Much remains to be done and research on the application of historical competences at different educational levels is still scarce. It is therefore essential to continue research into the identification and development of these competences by applying active methodologies and making use of innovative resources in an attempt to increase students’ complex reasoning and historical thinking in the context of the knowledge society.

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