

The Uses and Functions of Textbooks in Secondary History Classes

First I would like to thank THEN/HiER and the team at the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness for welcoming me! I would particularly like to thank Penney Clark, Associate Professor at UBC, who was gracious enough to work with me during my short stay there.

A short, but productive stay. It all began with a reading list suggested by Dr. Clark on the functions of textbooks and research on these historical artifacts. While my dissertation is principally on how teachers use textbooks, I expanded my conceptual framework with specific interesting and relevant concepts through these readings



Textbooks are everyday tools for teachers who use them for important purposes but in diverse ways; however they can also be considered cultural, social, and historical objects. As well as being historical artifacts, textbooks also reflect the sociocultural context of the period in which they were produced and used. For this reason, research focused primarily on content is especially meaningful since textbooks are the carriers of values and norms that change over time.

Discussions with Dr. Clark were therefore centred around these issues of research on textbooks. We particularly explored the different philosophical and epistemological currents that might support such research. Whether the goal was to count the number of times aboriginal people were represented, or how social justice is defended, or how the agency of social groups is presented, the analysis of textbook content is necessary because it revolves around social, cultural, religious, nationalist, and sexual questions and issues, to name but a few.

We also discussed different contexts of production and use that can exist between provinces and countries. We therefore approached various issues encountered in history teaching according to place and time, standards of evaluation, and teaching practices.

In our discussions of teaching practices, I presented results of a survey I conducted with Québec secondary history teachers on uses and functions of textbooks and other teaching resources. These results clearly demonstrate an extensive use of textbooks – teachers often, and sometimes very often, use textbooks, but in very selective ways. In other words, teachers use textbooks but choose sections that most interest them and sometimes complement this with related documents on the same topic. This process holds a central place in classroom teaching which is supported and illustrated by the sections of textbooks or related documents that are chosen. The problem arises then that students rely

on these documents in spite of curricular objectives that encourage active learning, working with diverse and sometimes contradictory sources, and using the historical method or their reflexive and critical capabilities. These results still need to be confirmed through classroom observations that I will conduct in order to complete my doctoral dissertation.

This visit therefore was extremely helpful and certainly enlarged my research perspective. It was very beneficial to have contact with others in another university context that allowed me to view things through a different lens.

In closing, this was a very positive and enriching experience which allowed us to exchange, improve, and extend our academic expertise on various topics.

Thanks again to Penney Clark and THEN/HiER.

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