

Scientific Literature Review Abstract

Integrating Content and Skills in Teaching History and Philosophy in the Israeli State Education Curriculum

Dr. Yehoshua Mathias

The present scientific literature review, prepared at the request of the **Initiative for Applied Education Research**, a division of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, examines and analyzes the State education's history and philosophy curricula within the general framework of humanities studies. The review's point of departure is that the humanities focus upon understanding human experience through reading texts, understanding and interpreting them.

The first section of the review analyzes the formal history and philosophy curricula. The guiding question of this analysis was whether the curricula encourage cultivation of high-level thinking and meta-cognition. This, based on the assumption that high-level thinking is the key to progress in learning and development of responsibility and of the learners themselves within their own learning process and the areas they are studying.

In primary school, historical subject matter and concepts are learned within "Society, Homeland and Civics," a required, integrated, multi-disciplinary curriculum for second through fourth grades. Their study is designed to cultivate learners' national heritage and identity and to create a shared cultural and moral denominator among the pupils around values of liberal democracy and multi-culturalism. The emphasis in their study is on a spiral-like process – from the individual, family and the local outward to the general, national and state.

History for grades six through twelve: History is systematically studied as a required subject in grades six through nine and in high school. The ideological concept at the basis of the program is that the study of history contributes to the development of learners' cognitive abilities as well as of their national and civic identity. The program for sixth through ninth grades is structured around a diachronic axis from antiquity to contemporary times while the program for high school is seen as the stage for going more into depth and focusing on selected periods of time and topics. Study centers on national history against a background of general history, particularly that of Europe and the West. **Intensive study includes three units of study**, one of which is a seminar in writing a historical paper.

Philosophy is an elective subject in high school studied by a small minority of students. The conceptual basis of this program is anchored in philosophical study at university. Study is divided by fields – epistemology and ethics are the main areas of study. Intensive study includes selected philosophical issues and topics and an independent essay by the student. The philosophical problem and its deliberation, studied with the help of texts from the classical literature form the basis of the program.

Analysis of the history curricula for middle school and especially for high school indicates that there is a large gap between the ideological concept and the curriculum as outlined in the syllabus: the ideological concept presents history as a research field characterized by

multiple perspectives and narratives and complex methodology while the syllabus presents history as a body of factual information without the intellectual and methodological dimensions stressed by the ideological concept. As a consequence, the gap between history as a school subject and history as a field of research is increasing. Examination of sample assignments on source analysis from the matriculation examination and of an authorized textbook reinforces this conclusion. The study of history does not develop historical thinking and meta-cognition which are, according to recent research, the main challenge in teaching this subject. In this context, the review distinguishes between the skills required for a critical reading of history and the skills required for a critical reading of philosophical texts, and points to the synergy that can occur between them.

The second section of the review maps the major directions of educational research in teaching history during the last generation. One of the outstanding features of the research is its eclecticism, reflected in the diverse disciplines and departments to which the investigating researchers belong. The review proposes the following mapping: research on curricula and textbooks divided into three types: **a. critical studies of the formal curricula** and in general, of textbooks. These generally lead to the conclusion that the formal curricula serve a selective tradition and exclude national, social, cultural or gender minority groups; their study benefits the national state ideology and its official historical narrative; **b. research assessing curricular performance** that examines the curriculum's success in meeting their developers' goals; **c. historical and cultural research of curricula** that focuses upon the historical process of developing the curricula and the changes therein. These studies generally stress the cultural, social and cognitive character of the knowledge they include.

Most of the studies incorporate a call for revising and repairing curricula. In this review, we examine the changes proposed, including the change in defining the role of historians in curriculum development committees: so that they serve not as sources of historical knowledge, but rather as critics of the curriculum discussion.

During the last generation two additional research directions have developed: **one – the historical literacy approach**. The premise of this approach is that the methods of thinking and inquiry that characterize the community of historians are what give vitality and relevance to studying the past. Although students are not expected to become historians who produce **new historical knowledge**, they should be brought to the point where they can make intelligent use of second-order concepts such as causality, chronological order, evidence, and historical interpretation – concepts upon which historical thinking is based. Within this framework, another research direction has recently developed which examines the tools, concepts and ways of thinking required for historical analysis of popular feature films that deal with historical events rooted in the collective memory.

The other direction is the cognitive approach that investigates how students and teachers perceive and think history while comparing it to the thinking of historians. Several conclusions arise from this research: first, "thinking the past" in a historical manner requires mastery over second-order historical concepts and of complex cognitive strategies and structures whose sources are in the research culture and community; second, there is a large gap between the thinking of historians and that of students. Several researchers have even developed study units designed to promote student's mastery of these strategies and

concepts. In this context, there are those who examine the types of knowledge and thinking characteristic of good history teachers. From these studies, it can be concluded that good teaching necessitates several conditions: a teacher with a thorough understanding of historical subject matter and of history's special epistemological character, an open school culture that encourages a flexible curriculum and curricular autonomy. At the same time, the importance of individual qualities and attributes such as intellectual and didactic courage, acting ability, etc. cannot be discounted.

Another research area investigated by cognitive psychologists is students' historical memory. One of the interesting findings arising from these studies is that the effect of culturally transmitted content, images and messages, including popular culture, on shaping students' historical memory are greater than the effect of school curricula. Furthermore, students who belong to minority groups that are discriminated against ascribe higher epistemological value to their family and community's historical memories, even if they are vague, than they attach to academic history taught in school.

The last section is a brief review of the possibilities of integrating the study of history and philosophy with other fields. Three approaches to integrated teaching are identified in the research literature: the classical humanism approach that brings different fields together but does not contest the independent existence of separate disciplines; the holistic approach, characterized by progressive education and which holds that since the reality in which learners live is whole and not divided by discipline, teaching should create a similar integration, one that would advance learners' understanding and their capacity to engage within this reality and repair it; and, the post-structuralist and post-modern critical pedagogy approach which disputes the preeminence of the logocentric, academic and analytic orientation of the school curriculum.

An examination of the research literature published in ERIC indicates that most of the inter-disciplinary curricula belong to the first and second types. The main problem with these curricula is the tension between the conflicting logic of the disciplines and as a result, the disconnect between teachers. The solution proposed in the research is to create a dialogic community of teachers who participate in these curricula.