Chapter 15

Researches, Projects, and Experiences in Didactics of History and Heritage From the DiPaSt Center of the University of Bologna, Italy

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the article is to present the most representative research led by the International Center for Didactics of History and Heritage of the University of Bologna with the participation of schools and teachers of all levels, and institutions and local authorities in the field didactic of history and heritage teaching. Specifically, it will analyse: the project called Roots to fly, where the scholars who have carried out research inherent to the heritage can expose their results and make proposals for the protection and enhancement to the leaders of the institutions appointed to these tasks; the European project STEP, which has developed a preschool and primary interdisciplinary curriculum to create relationship between children school experience and informal education; and, finally, research projects oriented to the perception of teachers in training and in service on the theme of heritage education for active citizenship.

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INTRODUCTION

A lack of memory prevents us from referring to our experiences, making weighted choices and to foresee at least in part the consequences of them; while limiting and jeopardizing each individual’s right of freedom and autonomy by making them subordinate to the will of others.

Nowadays we risk forgetting how to face a future of undefined contours and without knowing sufficiently even the origins and roots of the most pressing and decisive current matters: those issues regarding living together both at a local level and at an international one; issues about equal opportunities, social components and cultural minorities; legal matters; those concerning the limits and imbalances of economic development and motivations, genesis and adaptability of the normative and constitutional basis which have been put into force at both national and international levels. From these reflections, we may deduce that among those components which make up the overall formation, it is the historical (Seixas & Peck, 2004; Lévesque, 2008; Prats Cuevas & Santacana Mestre, 2011; Miralles Martínez, Gómez Carrasco, & Rodríguez Pérez, 2017) and heritage ones that have a leading role (Estepa Giménez, 2013; Estepa, Ferreras, & Morón, 2013; Fontal, 2013). This is because it induces not just a greater understanding of the origins and the presuppositions of actual realities but also a profound critical capacity and understanding of those evolution processes at work. It also considers the consequential possibilities of a better planning of one’s own individual and collective future, connecting it to the past and the present in a historical curve, where each important choice is destined to reverberate on the quality of life of future generations and become irreversible. Even if sometimes repressed, it is a need that has been manifested in every human generation, and nowadays it is amplified by an unprecedented acceleration in changes in the scales of values, behaviour and environmental issues. Taking into consideration these continuous transformations, it is essential to carry out research on didactic strategies more suitable in rendering the teaching of history efficiently at all school levels leading to comparisons at both national and international levels, which allow the identification of fundamental and irrevocable paradigms (Borghi, 2016b).

Personal and collective stories, in which each one of us is the subject and direct participant, do not begin with our existence but much earlier. Inside and all around us, innumerable hereditary elements and memories reach us, survive and are transformed from many past generations up to the present. When recognized and considered in all their different shades, these inheritances, as well as helping us to form our personal identities can become opportunities to combine and construct a sense of collective, fixed, and shared belonging, thereby creating the basis of vital dynamics which are open to new contributions. All this can be achieved following the correct paths of education towards heritage and active citizenship. The education to active citizenship through the knowledge of heritage (where the past meets the present) can be the starting point for a renewal of the teaching of history (Dondarini, 2007).

Ultimately, thanks to heritage education, from school to lifelong learning, awareness and the need to protect (take care of at all levels) heritage with shared responsibility activities are developed. So, heritage is the essential answer to the contemporary challenges of democratic citizenship, environmental protection, social inclusion, sustainable development and, in general, well-being.
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