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## A history course to develop European citizenship

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This paper discusses ‘good’ practices; that is, what I think good practices in higher education teaching should be, and specifically those concerned with history teaching. It will describe how my own teaching experience and reading contributed to planning a new curriculum for elementary teacher training and particularly a social sciences course in this.

In the University of Minho elementary teachers’ training curriculum the course *Themes and Itineraries of Portuguese History (TIPH)* is one of five social sciences courses. The others in the group are: *Social Science: Issues and Methodologies* (1<sup>st</sup> semester), *Education for Social Communication* (2<sup>nd</sup> semester), *Space and Society* (3<sup>rd</sup> semester) and *Workshop on Teaching Social Studies* (4<sup>th</sup> year). The philosophy of the elementary teachers’ training curriculum is not clear-cut because three departments are involved (Sciences of Education, Integrated Science and Mother Language, Artistic Expressions and Physical Education), and they do not share the same philosophy and practices. Even within each department there are differences between areas. According to Ross’s analysis, (2000, pp. 91-94) curricula may be content-driven, objectives-driven and/or process-driven. Our current teacher training programme is more content-driven than the previous<sup>1</sup> curriculum. For instance, although the *arts* used in theory to be integrated (all the courses were called *Movement and Art Education*), in practice they were not. In this new curriculum, they constitute truly separate courses. There are also areas where the didactics are integrated within the traditional disciplines, such as history, but in other areas there exist traditional courses, as for example in Natural Sciences, and courses named *Didactics of Natural Sciences*.

On the other hand the curriculum could be seen as more objectives-driven than its predecessor because of a strong generalised claim about the lack of students’ knowledge of basic subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, and the history and geography of Portugal. Consequently, having in mind their future profession, the instrumental purposes of this curriculum are emphasised. However, since several faculty members stress the importance of the process over the product, it is also process-driven. In some course descriptions the need for reflection is made evident, but instrumental purposes can be discerned which relate the theories students learn to the practice they are beginning to experience.

I have taught courses on the Bachelors’ degree in Elementary Education for several years. For the last five years I have taught at the University of Minho, following a curriculum designed in the late eighties. I taught the first year course *Social Science I – Foundations* (an introductory course of methodology of social science) in a different manner to the way it had previously been taught. I organised the course in four modules; an introduction to social science followed by modules that focused on geography, history and anthropology<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes these three modules were integrated, but at other times were

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<sup>1</sup> The first curriculum was set up in the late 1980’s and replaced in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> There are Psychology courses, and a Sociology of Education course as well as Philosophy of Education, but they are from the department of Sciences of Education.

framed as more traditional disciplines. The second semester-long course *Social Science II – Didactics* deals with appropriate methods of teaching social studies at elementary schools. Despite my intention to relate the two courses, it sometimes seemed that the students had forgotten most of what they had learned in the preceding year. I also noticed during the supervised schools practices that students did not apply the methods they had learned in *Social Science II – Didactics*. This happened even when units had been planned in cooperative sessions in College. Several strategies were tried to overcome this; for example, students were required to investigate a subject in *Social Sciences I - Foundations* and then to develop units about the same subject in *Social Science II – Didactics*, constructing teaching materials for the units they had planned. This worked well: students produced very good materials that they used in their practice. Many used not only the materials they developed but also those of colleagues. The materials were developed individually and cooperative workshops, and were given to the Institute of Child Studies (now with the Social Sciences Resources Centre). Some former students now teaching in schools near the Institute still use the materials.

The final time that I taught *Social Sciences – I Foundations* (in 1998-99) I tried a compromise between depth and a broader coverage of the topics. I presented a list of topics, such as Portuguese discoveries and multiculturalism, Portuguese art and international styles, and Portugal and the European Union, and students chose two to develop in depth. One was to be investigated autonomously, the other in class. For the later, the students chose Portugal and the European Union – a topic I had not previously taught.

The topic was developed through lectures, visual material, and through students' research in practical classes. The most important element was each student individually annotating an article or chapter they had selected from a given list. Only one student chose an article about economic aspects. Most analysed works about Portuguese/European identity or issues related to multiculturalism. Many chose a vignette from a European Commission booklet, *Racista, Eu? (Am I Racist?)*, which they had to complement with other readings. They enjoyed this, and also the opportunity to exchange ideas about their readings. The examination results were good but not significantly different from those of other years.

In the previous years (1997-98) the Institute of Child Studies was in the process of developing a new curriculum, and it had been my responsibility to produce the social science courses. The experiences described above shaped several decisions, but I was also influenced by several readings, in particular *The Social Studies* issue of May/June 1997, and the book *History in Higher Education: New Directions in Teaching and Learning* (ed Booth and Hyland, 1996). I was also influenced by the research and ideas of an outstanding American researcher on teaching and learning history in elementary school, Linda Levstik<sup>3</sup>.

To be promoted to associate professor I had to present a course report that would discuss methodologies and means of evaluation of the subject. It was the right time to more systematically analyse the foundations of the social sciences curriculum, and one of the courses in detail.

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<sup>3</sup> One of her important books that influenced my views was *Doing history: Investigating with children in elementary and middle schools* (Levstik and Barton, 1997; Lawrence Erlbaum).

Some general key ideas underlined my decisions. In higher education the utilitarian dimension, connected to the objective-driven curriculum, is stressed (Pinto, 1994): I could not omit this in a course that trains students for a particular job. But I also agreed with Pinto on the importance of learning to learn, so ‘learning, not teaching, takes primacy, particularly in higher education’ (Brown, 1996, p. 303): this became one of the key ideas of the course.

It is important to remember that our students are whole people, not only prospective teachers. A personal dimension, in terms of ‘general educational experience’ (Brown, 1996, p. 307) was therefore written into the course. Another purpose of higher education referred to by Brown is the ‘preparation for knowledge creation’ (1996, p. 307), and this became another aim of my course. I do not expect elementary teachers to generate historical knowledge, but I hoped they would be able to contribute generating knowledge about how to teach in elementary education, and specifically how to teach history to young children.

The course aimed

- to play a role in the personal education of students as responsible and participant citizens through the learning of the history of Portugal and the history of the European Union;
- to provide training oriented to their future profession;
- to encourage cooperation in the process of teacher education by developing reflective abilities and openness to innovation; and
- to provide a continuing education intertwining both personal and professional growth (Freitas, 2000, p. 20).

There were two further important ideas in the course. Firstly, the principle of isomorphism, which Estrela (1992) considers one of the principles in continuing education, but which I felt should be more evident in initial teacher training. My classes use several methodologies I believe students should use in their teaching in elementary schools. Secondly, the principle that training should be developed at the workplace. I try to discuss with students the methodologies I use in my teaching of *TIPH* and present theories around them. During the fourth year of the course, in the *Workshop on Teaching Social Studies*, the students will plan units, construct materials, and use them in their classes in school. They will reflect on this practice with the Social Science professors who supervise them.

Booth and Hyland (1996) call attention to the importance of teaching history in higher education to promote and enhance the health of the field, and I agree with this. My students will not be historians, nor develop research in the field, but they can contribute to raising the interest of young children in the subject. It would, I argued, be worthwhile including a course on history in *TIPH*, even if only three hours a semester, if it developed the students’ interest in history.

There are two kinds of solutions proposed to counter what might be called historical illiteracy: one is to include more history courses in secondary education and higher education; the other is to change the methodologies, involving students in activities that contribute to developing their interest in history. The inclusion of more courses has not in

practice produced better results, for instance, in the development of the historical thinking, and I do not think that this is the solution. However, with the free availability information through computers, it is now possible to gain easy access to historical data. The inclusion of Information Technologies (IT) courses is not enough in itself - I agree with Cowan when he says, 'IT should be incorporated in history courses' (1996, p. 31). I suggested several CD-ROMs and web sites with information suitable for my students, but I also gave them printouts of the PowerPoint presentations I used in the classroom, which included dozens of pictures. My school has satisfactory facilities but there were some problems because not all the computers were able to operate with the necessary software. Also, while most elementary schools have computers they do not always have enough software, so I tried to provide students with visual sources of information.

Owen (1997) presents six challenges based on his study, most of which I aimed to develop in the *TIHP* curriculum, but I noted particularly his conclusion about what content to teach: 'The fifth challenge is selecting and teaching content that is new, challenging, complex, and specific, rather than redundant, simple, and general' (p. 118). It is not possible to find most of what I teach - for example about everyday life - in most of the available Portuguese history books; it is necessary for students to use several sources of information. I suggest sources and students research the subjects on their own, with some synthesis provided by me.

Hawkins (1997) and Owen identify important aspects of teaching in general and teaching history in particular: one of these is to pay attention to most of the students' bad experiences of social studies, and the low importance elementary teachers give them. We need to teach so that our students become interested in the subject, so that they will motivate their future students. Therefore they advocate - even in higher education - the use of IT, games, poetry, real objects, painting and the other visual arts, and music.

Booth and Hyland (1996) work on history methodologies in higher education are useful. Stearns writes about the potential of lectures: I use these in association with technology in the curriculum sections I called *Itineraries*. Following Ramsden's (1996) suggestion about the power of visual sources, I present timelines which contain more visual clues than they do dates, related to each subject through time. I found this the best way to get students to remember and syntheses large amounts of information in a short time.

I also look to the community (Winstanley, 1996), both as a potential resource and as a possible object of study by students. In some small villages teachers are the most educated persons, and I encourage my students to learn how to look for things that need to be studied before they disappear. My history courses always have an ethnographic dimension. Cooperative learning, as advocated by Stearns (1996), is also a strategy I use systematically as a good way of developing the competencies needed for an active and responsible citizenship. The last methodology that I emphasise - but not the least important - is exploring the potential of field trips, as stressed by Hallas (1996). I plan field trips during classes, but I also provide written directions, more or less structured according to the objectives, for independent field trips taken individually or in small group outside class time. These can be used as an introduction to a subject, as a conclusion or often as a way to collect data for an autonomous work. Several authors, including myself, stress the importance of such methods in the teaching of history (see Hawkins). This author also points out an argument that relates directly to my students. They think that they do not have enough historical knowledge, and as it is not easy to

become proficient in such a broad subject, they avoid teaching the subject or they rely heavily on textbooks. It is vital to show them that teachers should be lifelong learners - 'demonstrating to our students how to be expert researchers and information managers' (Hawkins, 1997, p. 112)

The students' evaluation arises from the previous options. Booth (1966) considers sets of dualities:

- examinations versus coursework,
- formative versus summative,
- student-led versus tutor-led,
- collaborative versus competitive,
- explicit versus explicit criteria,
- product versus process,
- content versus competencies,

but affirms that, although he presents them as separate dualities, 'in practice they are closely interconnected and can be used harmoniously together to produce a balanced assessment procedure' (p. 263): a view with which I am in complete agreement. I propose course work according to a format of group work and the organisation of a portfolio, together with a short examination.

I try to give more weight to the process than to the product, to the competencies rather than the content, the implicit criteria rather than the explicit criteria, the formative rather than the summative, the collaborative rather than the competitive, but I know that some students cannot forget the final degree mark, the final classification that will determine the place (a big city or a small town) where they will start to teach, or even the possibility of unemployment if they do not successfully complete their degree. It is necessary to deal carefully with students' attitudes and feelings on these matters.

In 2001 I will be teaching the *TIHP* course for the first time. The implementation of this curriculum will be the subject of another paper.

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