

## *The Role of Identities in History Teaching: a Controversy and a Challenge*

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While narratives are supposed to establish identities aiding people to make sense of the world and the past (Rüsen, 2005, p. 11), history educators tend to focus on the constraints narratives create for students' historical thinking (Wertsch, 2002, Lee, 2009) and argue instead in favor of a disciplinary approach in history teaching. History educators especially comment on the "particularistic" ways (Lorenz, 2012) in which the national narratives, taught at school and transmitted by the students' communities, are constructed, thus speaking of the "failure of the traditional national narratives as a basis of teaching history", (Carretero, 2012, p. 141).

On the other hand, there is evidence from research that 'identities', or the narrative frameworks supporting them, cannot be easily excluded either from students' thinking, or from history teaching at school: Barton and McCully (2005 and 2009) found that Irish students become more dependent on communities narratives as they grow up and despite their schooling, while other historians and history educators call for relevance in history classes (Husbands, 2001, Barton 2009, Stearns, 2010). The latter ones emphasize the need students have to make connections between past and present: students' own experience, community or "background" narratives would give them a framework to make comparisons between past and present and function as a scaffolding to develop more complex historical thinking (Mosborg, 2002).

History educators in the 1990s period and onwards, making use of previous research in students' historical thinking, and recognizing the proliferation of ethnic, social and other identities that took place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century accompanied by relevant past accounts, advocate for a school history that would be primarily relevant to students' identities: thus they recommend contemporary history covering themes that students may relate to (Barton 2009, von Borries 2009), controversial issues also, in a way that students understand the present and "how we got to where we are now", (Stradling, 2001, p. 99). They seem to agree that national history is not restricting for students as long as the global and multicultural dimensions of it are addressed in the classroom (Rietbergen, 2010, Grever, 2012). Finally, students ought to participate in exploratory class processes, to be able to realize the constructed character of equally the past accounts (Lee & Howson, 2009) and the identities that the latter accounts support (Seixas, 2000, Lorenz, 2010).