

SEM@s



Sharing European Memories
at school

Final workshop

Conclusions

*Donostia - San Sebastian,
16th November 2012*



Today's seminar was the end point of a long process based on "Sharing European Memories".

As you know this project was organized around the theme of 'historical memory', which is a topic of great interest to people in Europe, but also in the Basque Country. We have seen evidence of this, this year, 2012, with the 75th anniversary of Guernica bombing and the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Navarre, which have been the subject of several studies, with different purposes and from different points of view. These discussions are closely linked to Social Sciences, as this area is a great source for the construction of the identity of the student.

Historical memory itself is the desire of society to socialize a concrete image of the past, emphasizing some aspects and updating them consciously. This is transmitted to future generations as a characteristic of the identity of that society. However, shared memories are often contradictory and even conflicting. Even, as mentioned at the beginning of the session, the role of historical memory in education is subject to doubt.

- 1) There are those who are not sure if these contents are suitable for teaching
- 2) and it is not clear exactly what to teach or how.

The aim of this session was to answer these questions.

Is it appropriate to include historical memory in the social sciences curriculum?

For our part we believe that, as Jacques Delors said and is supported in the Basque Curriculum, the **socialization** function of education is to transmit the culture of a society. We must bear in mind that in the Information Society, the socialization of new generations has expanded reaching globalization, while communication between students and their families and communities has broken down. Socialization is widening between citizens of other nations while communication between generations is breaking down.

Thus, historical memory can make an interesting contribution to the recovery of communication, since, as we have stated:

- oral history may be well suited to understand the past and interpret the present.
- the analysis of how a community builds the story of the past, can **help us to know and understand that society**, given that memory is closely linked to tradition, identity, heritage, values, power, etc.

Jonathan Even-Zohar, from EUROCLIO, has told that studying the different perspectives of an event, students get to understand how history is constructed, so that the study of historical memory is an appropriate methodology to get to know a community, people or group. In a historical inquiry we will work with newspapers, statistics, biographies, heritage sites, but it's always valuable to try to find sources that help us look into the minds of people from this period – memories from the past.

Oral history gives the voice to those who 'did' history and they make themselves understood to the new generations. By analyzing the social changes that occurred in **Donostia – San Sebastian** at the time of the great changes of the twentieth century, students have had the opportunity to learn more about their cities and citizens, as these changes have been very important in building the local identity of these peoples.

Industrialization also greatly influenced society in Slovenia, as our colleagues from **Kranj** have reported. Students searched for differences between memory and historical records of the industrialization of Kranj in the period between the two world wars individually.

We reach the same conclusion in the case of **Poznan** in Poland, since they have worked on the Bank of Memory of Poznan. The students were requested to collect recorded conversations conducted with witnesses of past events, which are important for the understanding of everyday life in the past century.

In these cases it is clear that analyzing the relationship between memory and history, has been an appropriate way to understand the complexity of the historical process. Even though, high school students tend to objectify and simplify history too much, at least by using information from different sources they have realized the complexity of the issue.

Another important objective is to **develop social competence**, which has been strengthened with the participation of out of the school community.

On the one hand, there have been visits to the 'realms of memory' and on the other, they have worked with protagonists from outside the school environment. For example,

- Santo Tomas Lyceum has made an attempt to bring the physical spaces closer to the students by doing a cycling tour of significant places of the industrial age.
- In Slovenia the school cooperated with the local branch of the Ljubljana Historical Archives.
- the Poles held a series of 'meetings with History' in places called as "The Temples of Memory": museums, libraries and archives
- Forma Giovani school students interviewed witnesses from the Second World War.
- And in the United Kingdom the importance of the Normandy landings and the D day in British national identity was discussed.

Another conclusion of this seminar is the importance of historical memory as a **tool for peace education**. That is, by learning from past mistakes we can develop the social skills of students, as they colleagues from Norway have done in the study of local historical memories of the II World War in Kristiansand. They visited the exhibition at Stiftelsen Arkivet in which prison torture chambers and cells from 1942-45 have been reconstructed and had meetings with the living witnesses, that had been informative and eye-opening for the students.

How to work on historical memory

The Basque Curriculum proposes a move from the logic of '*savoir*' (knowledge) to the logic to '*savoir faire*' (know how), making education a knowledge to be used in practical situations and contexts. But until recently, as Jonhatan Even-Zohar has said, the focus

in Social Sciences has been the teaching process, i.e. the knowledge that the teacher imparts to the student. However, an education based on competences demands that teaching be more focused on the learning process of the students themselves.

Today, we have concluded that, by working on historical memory **through oral history**, students learn working procedures as well as concepts while developing their historical thinking.

Thinking historically, is to learn to develop historical knowledge and as we have seen in the case of Donostia-San Sebastian, such projects require students to interrelate different variables such as the economy, demography, social systems etc. It involves understanding historical time, reasoning with causality and interpreting and critically evaluating information sources. We have already seen that, when working with a variety of sources and protagonists, students are more aware of the multiple causes of events, are able to distinguish fact from opinion and have a clearer concept of historical time.

This methodology also helps the students to work on historical empathy outside the current 'presentism' and through testimony of close witnesses, to understand that generation more deeply.

As we have seen in the Santo Tomas Lyceum experience, **the project methodology** is well suited for this type of work, and at the same time they become familiar with the techniques of historical research.

As regards creative thinking, the students were able to express the results in **different types of work**:

- Students of Santo Tomas Lyceum organized an exhibition for the School open day.
- The Norwegians produced digital stories presenting what they had learnt about the memories of the Second World War.
- The Italians participated in a Living Diorama, during which the students could compare the different points of view.
- In Slovenia:, the participants made posters and a short documentary on the discussed topic.
- Poland: the material was collected using a standardized questionnaire, conducting a series of interviews, making copies of photos and documents or preparing photo documentation of different objects and places.

These creative works were the most valued by students, along with the visits to the 'realms of memory'. As we have said many times, if we want to motivate the students we have to design activities that generate interest, which in this case we believe we achieved.

Regarding the option **to share the work**, as the testimonies of experiences have highlighted, each town has a very different cultural and educational tradition, and coordinating conferences has led to difficulties. These communications also generate high expectations among the students so we believe it is an issue to be addressed carefully.

In any case, even if we can say that in these conversations the students failed to get to know well the reality of the other groups, they did develop their communicative

competence, and it can help them to realize the complexity of society and the importance of placing every event and every society in its particular context.

To sum up today's conclusions, we can say that it has become clear that working on historical memory through oral history:

- extensively develops social skills and citizenship
- helps students learn to think historically
- works on rebuilding empathy and communication between generations and
- helps to build the personal and collective identity of the students.

