

How a History Teacher Helped Students to Think Historically by Challenging and Transforming His Own Conceptions about Teaching

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Abstract:

In this study, we examined how a history teacher transformed his conceptions about teaching history and his role in helping students to think historically through reflection. After having a reflective discussion with the teacher on our previous teaching intervention, we designed together a teaching intervention based on the concepts of cause/consequence and continuity/change. We observed the six-hour intervention and after its completion we had a final interview with the teacher. We found that through the reflective discussion the teacher was able to identify and challenge his theoretical assumptions which lied behind his teaching choices. His close involvement in designing and implementing the teaching intervention along with his reflection gave him the opportunity to put into practice his new enriched ideas and improve somewhat his teaching. Thus, he used various strategies to help students make sense of the concepts studied, such as appropriate assignments, targeted questions, domain specific vocabulary, etc.

Keywords: history teacher's reflection; teacher's conceptions; historical thinking; cause; consequence; continuity; change; secondary education

1. Introduction

Seixas and Morton note that "histories are the stories we tell about the past". Since the past is gone, we have no direct access to it but through fragmentary traces. Historians try to make a coherent story out of these traces dealing with the distance between the present and the past, making choices in order to draw meaning and interpreting the traces. Thus, history is what comes of this process and "historical thinking is the creative process that historians go through to interpret the evidence of the past and generate stories of history" (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 2). To do so, they have to use primary sources, establish historical significance, discern change and continuity, investigate cause and consequence, take historical perspectives and comprehend the ethical dimensions of historical interpretations.

Historical thinking has become the core of history teaching in many curricula and the teacher's part in enhancing it has been an issue of interest. The Greek History Curriculum does little to offer comprehensive guidelines as to how teachers may cultivate students' historical thinking. Our first study on historical thinking (Mamoura & Nako, 2021), though centered on students' skills and perceptions, revealed unexpectedly valuable insight on the teacher's role and beliefs. Intrigued by that, in this study we were interested in exploring possible change of the teacher's perceptions on historical thinking and if so, to what extent it helped students comprehend concepts of history.

2. Theoretical Framework

The current study focuses on teaching two of the aspects of historical thinking introduced by Seixas: i.e. cause and consequence and continuity and change.

Cause and consequence is the concept which turns series of events into history. That is, only by identifying how certain situations came to be and what they brought about can we make sense of history. According to Seixas and Morton (2013), a key factor to that is considering the interplay of causes and consequences. On the one hand, causes can range from "the focused influence of the choices made by historical actors to the broad influence of prevailing social, political, cultural and economic conditions". On the other hand, conditions, opposition and unforeseen reactions may have influenced the historical actors' intentions, leading to unintended consequences (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 104).

Students need to approach the complexity of these concepts in order to fully comprehend them, so they need to understand that causes vary in their influence (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 110).

Seeking the causes and consequences is in a sense a straightforward task for students, since it is clear that they need to construct their own causal explanation (Counsell, 2011). However, students often view causes as facts and causal explanations as things to be discovered instead of constructed. That is why they construe causation in a rather linear way disregarding the fact that multiple causes can have both direct and indirect influences. Furthermore, students tend to explain events mostly by referencing historical actors' wishes and needs and much less by examining the historical context which made those actions and events possible (Halldén, 1998). In addition, students need to see that causes differ in content, time, role and weight so as to be able to classify events according to time, content and role (Stoel, Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2015). Rich domain-specific vocabulary is necessary for students to express these nuances. In order to get acquainted with the complexity of causes, students could work on this historical concept by identifying the different causes of an event, categorizing the causes by chronology, type and significance and debating about which causes were more or less significant (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021).

The concepts of continuity and change are crucial in following history's course. They are closely interrelated since you cannot make out change unless it is set against a steady background. Whether we find change, continuity or both depends on where we look at and what questions we ask (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 78). Since both continuity and change can lead to either positive or negative outcome, the concepts of progress and decline are essentially part of them. Drawing from Seixas' concepts of historical thinking (2005, p. 143-144) and Rösen's (2005) genetic type of historical consciousness, we believe that progress and decline co-exist. For instance, change can be simultaneously positive for one group of people and negative for another while people's perspectives on it may change over time.

Counsell (2011) points out that, as opposed to cause and consequence, identifying continuity and change requires a different reasoning process. Students need to problematize the idea of change and continuity and consider their interrelation. Chronology is essential in this task as well as imagination of how people experienced the developments at that time, because "judgments about the degree or nature of 'change' or 'continuity' must be at least partly constructed out of the time orientation in which people lived" (Counsell, 2011, p. 117). Students seem to be struggling with these two concepts; this difficulty most likely stems from their misconception of history as a linear series of events. To them, each event constitutes a change, so they find it difficult to identify continuity. That is why Lee (2005) thinks that "students need to move from a concept of change as an event to the idea of change as a 'process' and change in 'states of affairs'". These difficulties, in turn, trigger others, such as students often equating change with something positive: they do not easily realize that a change can signal the beginning of a period of progress or a period of decline. This misunderstanding can be attributed to their difficulty in distinguishing the various causes and the many levels of consequences that a historical event can have as well as the underlying idea of historical progress which most history textbooks assume (Seixas & Peck, 2004). An exercise in change and continuity, which could be done in a history class, is a/ to compare an event of the present to one in the past or b/ to compare two events in the past, whilst assessing whether the change signals progress or decline.

3. Previous Research in the Field

In broad terms, teachers pursuing the development of students' historical thinking ought to design inquiry-based teaching approaches which include work with sources, authentic historical questions and investigation of the different perspectives and interpretations (Gestdóttir, Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2021, p. 47-48). Explicit instruction of concepts and strategies is considered a useful tool in guiding students to think historically (Stoel, Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2015). Additionally, the questions and feedback that teachers bring into whole-class discussions are considered important in stimulating students' historical thinking (Havekes et al., 2017).

Teaching students to think historically is a challenging endeavor partially owing to the discipline itself. That is because apart from finding strategies fitting to students' learning problems and prior knowledge, teachers need to guide them into a/ searching for multiple possible answers instead of a single right one, b/ establishing criteria to evaluate the quality of arguments and c/ using specialized language (Havekes et al., 2017, p. 72-73). Havekes et al. (2017) conducted a study on the strategies teachers use to guide historical thinking in classroom discussions. A strategy teachers used to help students explore various possible answers is "problematizing" students' remarks, i.e. having them come up with alternative answers or elaborate on the given answers. The authors highlight that problematizing should focus explicitly on both substantive and procedural knowledge for students to construct historical context. The challenge of considering and evaluating arguments was dealt by explicitly explaining the criteria for historical thinking and modelling correct historical thinking. Regarding the use of specialized language, teachers used domain-specific concepts as well as colligatory concepts and relate them to the historical context.

Whereas all seven teachers, who participated in the study, included strategies to facilitate the use of specialized language, few stimulated thinking about the quality of answers and only one of them problematized students' answers on both a substantive and procedural level.

Except for the discipline demands, teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the nature of the subject shape their views on how it should be taught and therefore their own teaching practices. The transformation of content knowledge into pedagogical products and teaching practices is what Shulman (1987) called "content pedagogical knowledge". Building on Shulman's model, Tuithof et al. (2021, p. 3-4) conceptualize PCK as the transformation of content and pedagogical knowledge into a different type of knowledge that is used to develop teaching practices. In addition to knowledge of instructional practices and students' understanding, which were introduced by Shulman as key elements in PCK, Tuithof et al. (2021, p. 5) added three more: knowledge of assessment, knowledge of curriculum and teaching orientation. In their investigation of 16 Dutch teachers' PCK they discovered that a number of teachers were driven by their overarching subject related goals, which suggests that the teaching orientation, i.e. the knowledge and beliefs that guide instructional decisions, may play a central role in PCK.

Gestdóttir, Van Drie and Van Boxtel's work offers more insight into teachers' teaching practices and beliefs as far as historical thinking and reasoning is concerned. In 2019, they observed lessons from nearly half of all upper secondary history teachers in Iceland to study their daily teaching practices. The observations revealed that teachers a/ demonstrated historical thinking and reasoning by providing students with explanations and historical context regarding the historical phenomena and b/ engaged students in activities which asked for historical thinking and reasoning. However, they did not communicate the learning objectives and they scarcely used explicit teaching of historical thinking and reasoning.

These findings match those of other studies which also show that second-order concepts and thinking strategies often remain implicit in history classrooms despite their positive effect (Stoel, Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2015, p. 56). As a matter of fact, Stoel, Van Drie and Van Boxtel's (2015) quasi experimental pre-test-post-test study suggested that students who were taught causal reasoning explicitly acquired not only first-order knowledge but also knowledge second order concepts and strategies.

In 2021, Gestdóttir, Van Drie and Van Boxtel investigated how eight teachers' beliefs about teaching history may contribute to their tendency towards teaching historical thinking and reasoning. The observations with the observation instrument Teach-HTR, which they developed, along with the interviews with the participants indicate that teachers who held more nuanced beliefs about the nature of history were more inclined towards teaching historical thinking and reasoning. In fact, teachers who believed in the interpretational nature of history and in learning through guided inquiry did more project and source work and let students approach the tasks freely and come up with their own answers. In other words, they orchestrated more student-centered and inquiry-based lessons. To the contrary, teachers who prioritized providing students with cultural knowledge and cultural stock-in-trade were inclined to lecture or combine lectures student tasks, which mainly asked for recall, thus promoted historical thinking and reasoning to a moderate or small extent.

Nevertheless, research suggests that teaching practices are not always in line with teachers' beliefs. This discrepancy is often attributed to teachers' inexperience, curriculum demands (Gestdóttir, Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2021) and limited available resources (Boadu, Donnelly, Sharp, 2020). Due to the aforementioned, Boadu, Donnelly and Sharp (2020, p. 192) believe that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge is an important area to develop, since it could assist them in mediating the curriculum, approaching their teaching and influencing students' understanding.

4. Research Methodology

An essential difference from our previous research (Mamoura & Nako, 2021) with the same history teacher as a research subject and the history class of 22 students is that in this case we met with him two times in his school setting. After we had informed him about the content and goal of this research, an authentic reflective discussion was preceded on the results and conclusions of the first research, and then we all together organized the new teaching intervention. In the previous research, the history teacher had not participated in the preparation of the teaching plan; on the contrary, in this research he had the central role, with us acting mainly as consultants/advisors, asking him much more questions about his thought processes and his teaching choices, than giving him ready knowledge. This is a form of self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1995) that focuses on how teachers can take control of their own learning, by setting their own learning goals, locating appropriate resources, deciding about teaching methods.

One of our main goals was for the teacher to reflect on our previous research results in order to get in touch with his unconscious (tacit) theories about teaching and learning history in secondary education and understand that teaching is an act of partners rather than research subjects or participants (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). As we believe that the meaning is not in the experience or the theory itself but in the understanding of the experience and the attitudes of the participants towards this experience, we were interested in what ways “our” teacher reflected on his previous teaching results and transformed his initial conceptions and subsequently his teaching approach. Our teacher, having already left his defense mechanisms aside since the first research, had noted things that he had second thoughts about and/or satisfied him in the previous five-hour teaching, which he used in his reflective discussion with us. So, reflection on the first didactic “act” gave space to feedback and to the new “act”.

4.1. Research Questions

In this research we decided to focus primarily on the history teacher and study how he helped students to perceive some aspects of historical thinking as defined previously. Particularly, taking into account the results of our previous research (Mamoura & Nako, 2021) and aligned with the theoretical framework of the aforementioned concepts (cause-consequence, change-continuity, progress-decline), we investigated whether the same teacher differentiated his teaching strategies, after a reflective discussion (i.e. whether any of his previous conceptions changed), and how he helped students to perceive these aspects of historical thinking. Another innovation of this research is that the two researchers designed the two three-hour lessons along with the teacher, after the reflective discussion. On that account, our research questions were formulated as follows:

1. Which of the teacher's strategies seemed to help students perceive cause and consequence, as reflected in their oral and written responses?
2. Which of the teacher's strategies seemed to help students perceive continuity and change and identify progress and decline, as reflected in their oral and written responses?
3. Which factors seemed to help the teacher transform his initial conceptions about teaching students to think historically?

4.2. Participants and Context of the Study

In this research we used the same participants (purposeful sampling) as we wanted to see the development of the history teacher's role and the students' progress through the selection of rich information. According to Patton (2002, p. 46), information rich cases can reveal “a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research”. Thus, our sample was the class of 22 students (from middle and higher social and economic environments), aged 13-14, of a public experimental Junior High school of a metropolitan area in Athens. The highly-qualified history teacher (PhD holder in History, 16-year teaching experience, mentor teacher for postgraduate students in the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) although familiar with effective history teaching practices (e.g. cooperative learning, using historical sources), he lacked pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). As a consequence, he seemed to encounter difficulties in how to co-construct historical knowledge with his students, so he did not seem to guide his students into an inquiry orientation (Mamoura & Nako, 2021, p. 84). Intrigued by these findings, we had a reflective discussion with the teacher after the completion of that research. We listened to the recorded teachings, studied students' written essays and engaged in a free dialogue about not only the intervention but history teaching in general. The teacher seemed to realize that some of his teaching strategies and decisions (such as checking students' content knowledge only by asking questions and grading students' answers, explaining and giving away the answer before giving students enough time to think and puzzle over the questions) had actually declined students to think historically. As a result of our reflective discussion, we designed the teachings in co-operation with the teacher, had discussions between lessons and a final interview at the end of the teaching intervention.

The first section of the teaching intervention was based on the concept of “cause and consequence” and Wineburg's reading strategies. The students were asked to study the sources provided in order to answer the following historical question: “Why did the October Revolution break out and what were the consequences?”. Therefore, we picked sources which focus on the causes and consequences of the bourgeois revolution of February 1917 and that of the October Revolution of 1917 in a way that highlights the relationship between them. Particularly, the worksheet included two separate groups of sources –one for each revolution– but all sources were on the consequences of the those revolutions, so that the students could deduce that the outcome of an important event can serve as the cause for another. Hence, students, divided in 7 groups, were expected to identify how the outcome of the first revolution served as the cause for the second and study their direct and indirect consequences, assessing the importance for the historical subjects of that time.

Except for the questions referring to all 13 historical sources (sourcing, close reading, corroboration questions), students had to fill in a table sorting the causes (long-term / short-term) and the consequences (direct / indirect) as their final assignment.

The second section was based on the concept of “continuity and change” and Wineburg's reading strategies. The historical question posed was “What changed and what remained the same after World War I?” and students were asked to study aspects of the war which indicated continuity and change. Specifically, divided in the same 7 groups, they had to examine various areas which either underwent changes or remained as they were (social, economic and political), identify the national and social groups affected by the changes and evaluate their quality. Thus, a plethora of written and visual sources –10 sources included in the worksheets and 4 excerpts and maps from the textbook– were chosen for students to think about or imagine changes (e.g. map and excerpt from the textbook: What impact do you think these changes had on Greece and Turkey; did they affect their relationship?, Otto Dix's painting titled “War Cripples”: What difficulties do you imagine that soldiers, who returned wounded from the war, had experienced and how may these have affected them?) and consider continuity (e.g. photo of women working in an arms factory: What do you assume about this era by looking at the picture?). Finally, students were assigned as homework to fill in a table writing down about each group of sources whether they describe a change or continuity, whom it affected and for whom it was positive or negative.

4.3. Data of the Study and Data Analysis

The data used in this study came from a variety of sources: a) our reflective discussion with the teacher after the first teaching intervention (see previous research) and while preparing the lesson plans for the second intervention, b) the worksheets and historical essays completed by the students, c) the direct classroom observation of the six-hour teaching intervention, which was audiotaped, and d) the teacher's interview after the completion of those teachings.

Our personal contact with the teacher and our observations of the particular teaching intervention helped us to understand and capture the context within which the teacher and his students interacted. This understanding is essential to a more holistic perspective (Patton, 2002, p. 262) of the phenomenon under study. We also took field notes in order to record the participants' verbal and nonverbal behavior and the context in which these behaviors took place (Maharaj, 2016). Through field notes we also reflected on our own thoughts, feelings, questions and so on (Flick, 2014), as we had the opportunity to recall those at a later date (Kawulich, 2002).

In our research, we used the qualitative methodology of interviewing. We used semi-structured interview questions in order to elicit teacher's conceptions. The interview was inductively analyzed in order to understand how certain conceptions were manifested within the teacher (Patton, 1990). Through the analysis of whole data, major themes and categories were emerged. These categories resulted from the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the reflective discussion we used previous research conclusions as a critical incident. The term critical incident usually refers to everyday events that can shape the thinking and action of the teacher during reflection. The crucial aspect of these incidents arises from their very interpretation and analysis, as they can indicate situations that teachers interpret as empowering or challenging aspects of their practice (Sisson, 2016). This critical incident helped the teacher to reach an initial self-awareness of how he reasons and of what his underlying assumptions and conceptions were (i.e. we asked him “What were the most important factors that pushed you in this didactic choice?”).

4.4. Confirmability and Trustworthiness of the Research

Confirmability was gained by quoting many of the teacher's reflective comments; we demonstrated that the data represent the participants' responses and not our biases, viewpoints or expectations (Polit & Beck, 2012). Firstly, we studied the research data independently and afterwards we had numerous research meetings, searching for misunderstandings or inconsistencies. Another important tool used to gain trustworthiness was member checking, an opportunity for “our” participant to approve particular themes of our interpretation of the data provided (Merriam, 1998) in order to find out whether the data analysis is congruent with his views (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Our teacher was given the transcripts of his interview and our interpretations and was asked to verify their accuracy (Carlson, 2010, p. 1105). Finally, we used triangulation of sources, in order to cross-check the consistency between many and different data sources (Patton, 2002).

5. Results

It was evident throughout the research that the teacher reflected on his first instruction and worked on ways to improve it. Following broadly the guidelines of our approach of teaching historical thinking, he chose historical sources, which highlighted the historical concepts studied, and designed oral activities and written assignments which required students to think historically. The most notable elements of his instruction have to do with the way he conducted it.

The teacher did not just give explicit instructions on historical thinking strategies and demonstrate them himself by interrogating and corroborating the sources and providing historical context in order to explain the phenomena under study, as he did in the first study. He also engaged students more in the historical thinking process. As a matter of fact, he asked more open-ended and inquiry-oriented questions and encouraged discussions among students instead of implying the answer or even providing it himself. Similarly, he did not omit the whole-class discussion at the end of the teaching but he actually had students go over the sources and give their answers to the historical question of each lesson encouraging them to voice their interpretations. Additionally, he no longer felt the need to assess students' content knowledge by asking content questions at the start of each teaching, as he brought out students' prior knowledge during the lessons by asking them to make historical hypotheses. Having an active role in designing this teaching intervention, he gained confidence as he felt more inspired and "*not just the implementer*" which helped him shed his authoritative figure and become more of a partner to his students.

5.1. Which of the teacher's strategies seemed to help students perceive cause and consequence, as reflected in their oral and written responses?

According to the teacher, generally students had no difficulty perceiving causes and consequences but were not familiar with their complexity or their interrelation. So, he came up with the idea of presenting the historical sources in a way so that students had to figure out themselves which were the causes of the October Revolution and thus come to the conclusion that one event's consequences can work as the causes of another (see 4.3 Participants and Context of the Study). In addition, the assignment asked students to distinguish the short-term from the long-term causes and the direct from the indirect consequences and subsequently think about whether they were intended or unintended (see Seixas & Morton, 2013). Indeed, the assignment helped students to identify the different types of causes and consequences, although they did not easily tell apart the long-term from the short-term causes. Their main difficulty, though, lays on being able to see the greater picture, as students were not aware of the fact that the outcome of the Revolution of February 1917 sparked the October Revolution of the same year until the teacher wrote down the causes of the two revolutions on the whiteboard and pointed out their relationship.

However, we observed that students presented events in a linear way using time expressions such as "and then /after that" instead of explaining the interrelation among the events discussed. As students referenced only the sequence of events, it seems that either they were only able to distinguish the timeline or they were interested in just that. Either way, the teacher wanted to get students to think about causal and consequence relations, so he started thinking out loud and pointed out the specific vocabulary which described cause and consequence in a source scaffolding them to do the same to the rest. In detail, the teacher along with the students they reasoned and searched the sources for words or expressions which expressed short-term causes (source B: "...the direct and pressing problems that soldiers were now facing") and long-term causes (source C: "The constant dissatisfaction led people to flee from villages to big cities...") as well as the outcome of certain events (source A: "These events forced tsar Nikolas to give up the throne...") and underlined them. Later, he asked students to incorporate the specific or similar vocabulary in their oral and written responses and students replied in less superficial ways.

Additionally, students focused on actions and tried to comprehend them but they generally ignored the social environment within which they operated, thus attributed to actors more power than they actually had. In order to bring the underlying conditions to students' attention, the teacher asked questions which highlighted the interplay between actors and conditions. For example, he asked "Was Lenin the main reason that made the Revolution possible?" (sources B1, B2) or "Why was it easy for the Bolsheviks to seize power in November of 1917?" (source C) so as to show that Lenin and the Bolsheviks gained popularity and support because they promised to solve poor people's life-long problems. These intriguing and purposeful questions, which emphasized the social and political context, sparked students' interest and enhanced close reading, so they gave more complete and contextualized answers.

5.2. Which of the teacher's strategies seemed to help students perceive continuity and change and identify progress and decline, as reflected in their oral and written responses?

Students did very well in identifying both long-term and short-term changes especially the most dramatic ones; all were able to identify the changes in visual sources, such as maps and images. In addition to those, it was observed that some of them focused particularly on changes or turning points which are dominant in the Greek collective memory. For example, they paid more attention to the Treaty of Neuilly, which concerned the settlement of borders and populations between Bulgaria and its neighboring countries, and the Treaty of Sevres, which defined the division of the territories of the Ottoman Empire and essentially meant its dissolution; therefore changes which had an immediate effect on Greece.

Continuities were trickier to grasp, as the following example illustrates. The teacher chose a historical source on women's preoccupations during the WWI aiming to get students to see not only change but also the continuity in change: according to the source women were allowed to work in factories for as long as men were fighting in the war. Students considered the new role of women in the workforce during WWI as opposed to that prior to the war and quickly pointed out that at that time they were allowed to do "men's jobs" because men took part in the war. However, they did not take note of the fact that it only applied for as long as the men were absent, hence it was not a permanent change. One student even took it a step further claiming that "it was the start of the feminist movement and women's life as we know it". In response, the teacher asked them questions about the depth and the pace of the change and prompted them to attend to that particular extract of the source carefully. Therefore, students were able to acknowledge that the degree of freedom, which was given to women of that time, not only was limited but was even revoked soon after the war, thus the change was too brief and limited to be considered a turning point for feminism. Prompted by the teacher's questions, they also reasoned about the pace of the change and came to the conclusion that it occurred too fast for people to get used to the idea and all that goes with it: "had it happened more gradually or consciously, it may not have been revoked".

The teacher also assisted students in making judgments about the changes under study because they often seemed to equate change with progress. For instance, two students were of the opinion that the formation of Yugoslavia after WWI was a positive change ("since it became independent") although the source explicitly stated that in fact it was the unwanted unification of three nations. It is possible that this incomplete interpretation is related to students' implicit belief that the concept of independence has an inherently positive meaning. That concept is likely to derive from their idea of the Greek Revolution in 1821, when Greeks fought for their independence from the Ottoman Empire. It must be noted that the Revolution of 1821 constitutes one of the most significant events in modern Greek history and as such has been established as a national holiday and a school celebration. Thus, we believe that students formed their opinion about the creation of Yugoslavia based on their own contemporary perceptions on the value of national independence. Though the determination of progress or decline is indeed inherently dependent on perspective, it is essential to examine the perspectives of the people of the past in order to draw safe conclusions in the present. So, the teacher called students to recall previous events and concurrent circumstances and ponder historical actors' feelings as described in the historical source. Thanks to these specific instructions, students were able to appreciate historical actors' perspectives, make contextualized judgments about the quality of change ("unwelcome change") and describe the impact it had on different people.

By the end of the lessons, the majority of students saw the connection between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II, as a result of significant changes. The students reasoned and observed that the dissatisfaction with the demands of the countries caused "feelings of hatred", which led to World War II and thus negatively affected "all of humanity since there are still ruined lives from World War II". This means that they correctly placed the events in their historical context (contextualization) and used their previous knowledge, proving that they handled successfully both the concept of cause and effect and that of continuity and change.

5.3. Which factors seemed to help the teacher challenge and transform his initial conceptions about teaching students to think historically?

The transformation of the teacher's initial conceptions first became clear in our reflective discussions and could be later detected in his teaching practices. It seems that our reflective discussions and the teacher's engagement in the preparation and implementation of the teaching interventions were the main factors which helped him consider and alter some of his practices.

Through our discussions, the teacher seemed to realize that some of his teaching strategies and decisions had disinclined students to think historically and puzzled over them. The most important moment of his reflection was when he made the following statement: "I realize that in my first teaching implementation I did not help my students develop mentally because of many 'closed-ended' questions I addressed to them. I did not make it easy for them to 'interrogate' the sources, as I focused more on the learning objectives I would like to produce through teaching and less on the very process of understanding the past and the historical subjects".

The teacher seemed to change progressively the traditional authoritative approach image; he respected more students' opinion, so he managed to establish a pleasant interpersonal environment. In his interview after the completion of two teachings, he stated that he became more aware of his transition from the concept of teaching to the concept of learning, which is a key feature of constructivist teaching (see Wu, 2021). Another factor that seemed to transform his initial conceptions about historical thinking was the climate of dialogue between us in our first reflective discussion.

He stated that this interpersonal dialogue helped him to liberate himself in terms of his teaching choices; thus, during his new teaching implementations dialogue was dominant within a community of learners. The classroom was seen as a community of discourse engaged in activity and conversation (Fosnot, 1996). The groups of students were responsible for defending and communicating the result of their work to the classroom community. The teacher stated that “this is very difficult and requires a lot of effort, but only then you can better understand students' misconceptions but also what and how they can think”.

Compared to the first teaching intervention, the following statement indicates a more conscious attitude on his part towards his understanding of the nature of historical knowledge: “While organizing my teaching implementation, I wanted to avoid a sense of historical causes' interconnection in a mechanistic sequence and to emphasize, through the selection of sources, the various relationships between causes and effects. In this way, I think that I helped my students to recognize the complexity of historical events just like they recognize the complexity of their present. My core question both before and during my teaching implementations was why it is important for students to know this? Why is it important for students to interpret historical events?”. We could argue that the teacher's transformation is reflected clearly just by his transition from his prior certainties to an attitude including constant questioning.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Our previous research concluded with an important question about the challenges of teaching historical thinking and the ways the history teachers can be empowered to do so. The results of the present research give some insight into that. The reflective discussions we had with the teacher allowed him to immerse in interpretative reflection (Van Manen, 1977); he became more able to identify and challenge the theoretical assumptions which lied behind his teaching choices. His close involvement in designing and implementing the teaching intervention gave him the opportunity to put into practice his new enriched ideas about history teaching and improve his teaching.

Specifically, this teaching intervention seemed to contain enough elements to be classified in the constructivist epistemological example. The teacher allowed and encouraged students to raise their own questions over historical sources, to generate their own hypotheses about causes and consequences and check their viability with their classmates (Fosnot, 1996). He seemed to support knowledge building by prompting students to come up with more coherent answers through scrutinous examination of the interrelation among historical facts. Additionally, in order to help them think of change as a process and evaluate its outcome, the teacher encouraged students to think about and describe changes as well as pose questions about them, both of which are considered indicators of sophisticated historical thinking (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Also, unlike our previous research, he was not afraid to facilitate group dialogue and whole-class discussions to explore the historical concepts, a strategy that seemed to “emphasize the role of the negotiated and shared meanings” (Maclellan & Soden, 2004) and lead to the creation of a shared understanding of the historical period. Last but not least, through his teaching practices the teacher seemed to have gained a satisfactory understanding of the conceptual foundations of the history subject which, as Wineburg and Wilson claim (1991), prevented him from simplifying it.

To sum up, the most important strategy that our research revealed is the problematization of historical knowledge. Instead of simply asking students to seek for answers in the historical sources available, the teacher raised thought-provoking questions (e.g. “Was it normal for women to be working in factories during WWI?”, “Why would the national unification be a negative thing?”) and urged them to get into a discussion about it. In other words, the teacher acted in a more metacognitive level, in which the emphasis was on the construction of historical arguments (see Havekes et al., 2017) using second-order historical concepts, which seemed to enhance historical thinking for most students. This problematization was reflected in the teacher's speech not only during the implementations but the reflective discussions and interview as well. Progressively he stopped being preoccupied with following the lesson plan so as to achieve content related goals and was mostly concerned about how his students responded and what he wanted them to comprehend. He reflected on his strategies and how they seemed to help students reason historically (“How did my questions help students? Did I give them enough time and space for historical reasoning to take place?”). So, slowly but surely there was a shift from lack of confidence in the correctness of his teaching choices to confidence to act through reflection and alternative ways. Thanks to this shift, the teacher participated fully in the teaching process, reflecting not only on “what do I do” and “how do I do it” but also on “who am I” and “what do I want my students to achieve”; so, it helped him to seek for a more personal interpretative framework for history teaching.

Thus, our research, along with similar others in the field, reflects the necessity to study and develop further the idea of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, which is built through reflective dialogues with researchers and teacher involvement in the design and implementation of teaching interventions. The above elements facilitate teacher's

challenging and transforming possible previous and ineffective ideas and practices. In the light of this, we firmly believe that we move from teacher training models, which enhance absolute confidence in authority and result in teacher deskilling, to a model of teacher education which acknowledges that “knowledge, beliefs and intuitions are inextricably intertwined in the mind of a teacher” (Verloop et al., 2001, p. 446) and as such they should all be taken into consideration.

7. Limitations of the Research

The main limitation of the current research is the restricted time and number of participants. Had the research lasted longer and all history teachers of this school been engaged, the results would have been richer and probably more interesting. Nevertheless, although our qualitative research does not claim representativity, it does provide an in-depth focus and understanding of this complex and interesting issue.

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