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Teaching history to face the world today

Socially-conscious approaches, activity proposals and historical thinking competencies

PETER LANG

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Teaching history to face the world today

This book develops the challenges that history teaching must face as a curricular subject at the beginning of the 21st century. These challenges are related, both to new epistemological approaches in history education, and also to the development of new activities, active-learning methodologies, and historical thinking competencies.

In terms of new approaches, this book suggests activities regarding invisible topics such as social and economic impacts in history, inequalities, church and science, gender equality, power and violence, prosecuted by justice, peasantry and the urban world, family and daily life, terror or travelers and their cross-currents.

Regarding the activities, the incidence of new technologies in social relations and the effects of globalization is very remarkable for our students. The authors highlight the need for changes in teaching and learning history.

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Chapter 1. Active teaching methods in history education: Inquiry strategies

Abstract: This chapter[1] focuses on the capacity of active learning methods to improve teaching and learning processes in history. In traditional education, the subject of history was originally conceived as a means of legitimating the nation-state and did not have an exclusively instructive purpose. However, historical science does not produce descriptive knowledge to be learned by heart, but rather interpretations which are prone to reinterpretation depending on the sources and the dominant trends. For this reason, an epistemological approach to the subject of history should be based on its critical and analytical function in terms of social reality. The implementation of active learning methods leads students to develop skills of observation, analysis, interpretation, comprehension and expression and helps them to exercise their memories and critical thinking skills. This chapter examines the main active learning methods based on inquiry.

Keywords: Active teaching methods, history teaching, inquiry strategies, educational methods, historical thinking

Introduction

Recent research has shown that Spanish students have a low level of historical literacy due to an old-fashioned epistemological conception of the subject, grounded in a mainly memory-based teaching model in which the methodological principles are deeply rooted in tradition (Miralles & Gómez, 2021). In the light of this situation, the need has arisen to redefine the two fundamental pillars which determine how history is taught in educational contexts: epistemology and methodology. This renewal has been determined by a trend which proposes a skills-based model of education favouring the development of historical thinking skills among students (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Lévesque & Clark, 2018; Thorp & Persson, 2020; Miralles & Gómez, 2021).

In the traditional school context, the subject of history was originally conceived as a means of legitimating the nation-state and did not have an exclusively instructive purpose (Carretero & Kriger, 2004). This approach, based on positivist historiographical perspectives, has sustained and determined the teaching of history for many decades, leading to teaching principles built around specific dates, names and events, totally neglecting contents of a behavioural or procedural nature (Clark, 2011; Gómez et al., 2018b).

However, historical science does not produce descriptive knowledge to be learned by heart, but rather interpretations which are prone to reinterpretation depending on the sources and the dominant trends. For this reason, an epistemological approach to the subject of history should be based on its critical and analytical function in terms of social reality, particularly due to the fact that the job of the historian (the scientific point of reference in this context) is defined by the search for primary sources to bring the discipline closer to scientific knowledge with an empirical foundation.

In this regard, within the context of school tradition, in comparison with subjects such as history, which have been taught and learned based almost exclusively on the teacher's narrative and on reading and repetition on the part of the students, there have been other subjects which have focused more on active experimentation; in other words, subjects in which the contents have been taught inside a laboratory (Gómez & Miralles, 2017). This differentiation, far-removed from the scientific reality and possibilities of history, has meant that the scientific method is related with certain scientific subjects, while social subjects have been excluded from this category. Indeed, it is revealing to observe how rarely teaching actions are included in compulsory education, in historical archives and documentation centres, which are spaces of reference for the historian.

The teaching of social contents should be based on the methodological foundations of the subject, although such a claim does not imply that students should become experts (in this case, historians). Rather, they should learn to employ certain forms of historical thinking which, consequently, will enable them to question the parameters for understanding the world which have been presented to them since their education began (Ibagón et al., 2021).

This approach supposes that students are able to understand what society is, how it works, how it has been shaped over time and how human relationships have been modified and what consequences the actions of individuals and groups have had in both the past and the present (López-Facal, 2013). Knowledge of how narratives of the past are built must be learned from an early age, along with the tools used to interpret historical sources in an appropriate and critical way (Miralles & Gómez, 2021).

As there are no pure facts within the subject of history, a discourse of the past is built on the interpretation that historians make of the evidence they mainly gather from archives (Carretero & Montanero, 2008). Thus, it is essential that students learn to question such evidence. As far as education is concerned, the teaching of history should be based on a scientific method applied in the classroom via the re-ordering of data, the analysis of variables and the search for analogies. This scenario is considered both viable and necessary for students to develop critical thinking skills.

Ultimately, with a traditional, linear and memory-based teaching model in formal educational contexts, the need to intervene, not only in the aforementioned stages of education, but also in initial teacher training, is considered essential for the consolidation of a body of teachers who put active teaching strategies into practice in their classes (Lévesque & Zanazanian, 2015). Only in this way will it be possible to ensure that future teachers can guarantee an equilibrium between knowledge, abilities and skills (Sánchez-Fuster, 2017).

Within the epistemic framework of the teaching of historical contents, the authors have identified the existence of two levels of concepts which help to establish a dividing line concerning how to approach the teaching of this subject. On the one hand, there are first-order concepts, which seek to answer questions such as *What? Who? When?* and *Where?*

In other words, answers to questions linked to an acritical, linear and repetitive form of teaching in which specific dates and historical events provide structure to the knowledge. On the other hand, there is a second level of contents known as second-order concepts, which are related with developing different strategies, capacities and skills in the classroom, making it possible to obtain a more complex understanding of the past (Wineburg, 2001; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Lee, 2005; Seixas & Morton, 2013; VanSledright, 2014). The second-order concepts are related with how to do things and, by extension, with an active methodology, drawing students closer to the techniques employed by historians, such as searching for, selecting, analysing and handling historical sources, thus fostering historical perspective and empathy with other subjects of the past.

Consequently, the second pillar of the teaching of historical contents is constituted by methodological principles, i.e., the guidelines referring to how the teaching and learning processes should be carried out (Gómez et al., 2018a; Miralles et al., 2019). Therefore, when speaking of a methodological renewal in the classroom, it is relevant to recall the consolidation of skills-based education in Spain, following its implementation in 2006, via the Ley Orgánica de Educación (Organic Education Law, LOE), ratified in 2013 via the Ley Orgánica de Mejora de la Calidad de la Educación (Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational

Quality, LOMCE) and, finally, the Ley Orgánica por la que se modifica la LOE (Organic Law modifying the LOE, LOMLOE), which was passed in 2020. This legal context demonstrates the need to redefine the educational model of social knowledge, recommending the introduction of teaching methods which enable the progressive acquisition of contents. This is in line with the guidelines of education curriculums which defend the use of active learning methods for the acquisition of skills (Gómez et al., 2021).

In this context, however, it is necessary to be aware that, according to research, teachers, when beginning their professional activity, tend to resort to their prior experiences as a model (Parra & Fuertes, 2019). In other words, they resort to their memories of how their own teachers taught them (Estepa, 2017). Thus, there is a risk that they will perpetuate the (generally passive) methods they experienced during their own education (Sánchez-Fuster, 2017). The challenge, therefore, is to turn towards a model of teaching which fosters critical thinking among students via active methodologies, thus making it possible to leave behind teaching methods based on memorisation (Moreno et al., 2021; Martínez-Hita et al., 2022).

In recent decades, history teaching has been considered to have the basic function of forming critical and autonomous citizens (Carretero & Voss, 2004). Taking this premise into consideration, students are encouraged to understand processes of change in historical time, relating them with the present, i.e., encouraging them to learn to think historically (Carretero & Montanero, 2008). In this way, in the teaching process around which the subject of history takes shape, the aim is to stress the cognitive and disciplinary aspects of the teaching of history via the implementation of historical research methods (Lee, 2005; VanSledright, 2011; Seixas & Morton, 2013; VanSledright, 2014; Domínguez, 2015).

Thus, regardless of the educational context, the teacher finds him/herself in the unavoidable situation of having to generate a balance between concepts, procedures and attitudes. The main aim of teaching methods for the social sciences must be to encourage students to discover and understand the world around them, in the light of the complexity of their own social reality. The teaching methodology, therefore, must make reference to the issues put into play in order to develop learning in teaching processes, based on strategies, techniques and resources (Gómez et al., 2018b).

In this context, the implementation of active learning methods implies that students will develop observational, analytical and interpretative skills, the capacity for comprehension and expression, the exercise of memory and a critical sense. All of these are essential for the personal and professional development of any individual in present and future societies. For this reason,

from a methodological point of view, teaching how to historicise should seek to encourage students to reject the memorisation of dates, events and concepts and move towards the elaboration of hypotheses, looking for evidence, the contrasting of sources and the critical analysis thereof. As Schorske (2001) pointed out, thinking historically consists of employing the material of the past in order to guide us in the present. Therefore, the ultimate aim of school history education should be to provide students with the necessary tools for critical reflection which will help them to understand and gradually change their society (Santisteban, 2019).

Active learning methods, such as classroom research, problem-based learning, problem solving, simulation, debate, case studies, etc., make it possible to establish a close relationship between historical knowledge, the acquisition of competences and critical thinking. The teacher acts as a manager of learning situations with a variety of teaching strategies at his/her disposal, making it possible to recreate the most appropriate teaching environment. Thus, in order to improve the teaching of history, it is necessary for teachers to stimulate the development of historical thinking by applying alternative methodologies which are far-removed from epistemological conceptions which view history as a set of closed knowledge (Miralles et al. 2017). For this reason, the learning of history should be focused on strategies which enable students to develop more complex cognitive skills regarding the comprehension and explanation of historical phenomena (VanSledright, 2011), such as inquiry-based learning.

As pointed out by Van Boxtel et al. (2021), this active learning method, on which this chapter will focus, has acquired different names: "inquiry-based learning" (Pellegrino & Kilday, 2013; Voet & De Wever, 2017, 2018), "problem-based historical inquiry" (Brush & Saye, 2014), "document-based lessons" (Reisman, 2012) and "doing history" (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Levstik & Barton, 2015). However, independently of the name it is given, this type of learning consists of the student being able to interpret the past by responding to questions about history posed by the teacher (Van Boxtel et al., 2021). In order to achieve this, the student should read, analyse and synthesise multiple sources, among which can be found historical documents, objects and secondary sources.

In the context of education based on the implementation of active learning methods, the inquiry method presents a student-centred approach, as he/she participates in the process by reasoning and building his/her own narrative of the past or by evaluating a given narrative. In this regard, historical inquiry is clearly in opposition to passive perspectives in which students are only required to assimilate a prepared historical narrative which cannot be questioned at all. However, this is a complex process, with some authors insisting on the need

to introduce a solid foundation to the construction of historical knowledge in the classroom (Maggioni et al., 2009; Stoel et al., 2017). In any case, learning by inquiry does not mean that students have to build history, but that they should be willing to draw their own conclusions regarding specific historical phenomena, always with the help of a teacher (Van Boxtel et al., 2021).

One possibility within the context of history education is that students cooperate with each other about an open history question which, via the use of multiple sources of information, brings forth different perspectives on the issue at hand (Voet, 2017). Such a situation will enable students to build a reasoned response based on the different interpretations put at their disposal, thus reinforcing the use of second-order elements (Van Boxtel et al., 2021). In this way, students develop the ability to draw justifiable conclusions regarding complex processes of a historical nature, applying historical thinking skills such as continuity and change and causes and consequences (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2017).

However, this methodological shift also implies inquiring about the pedagogical benefits of this practice. According to specialists, historical inquiry enables students to develop a deeper understanding of the construction of historical knowledge, particularly as far as the historical thinking skills are concerned (Stoel et al., 2017). Normally, methodologies of an expository nature present historical contents as absolute truth which cannot be questioned by students. According to researchers, the use of historical inquiry in the classroom makes it possible for students to discover the existence of more than one plausible answer to validate their statements with arguments via the use of evidence (Nokes et al., 2007; Reisman, 2012). This type of practice is particularly relevant for students today. Indeed, the development of skills relating to the critical analysis of sources (not only in relation to history) can be considered essential in today's society due to the infoxication of the media with which we are confronted on a daily basis, particularly in terms of the prevalence of fake news on social networks and the broadcasting of discourse lacking in rigour on the part of the mass media as a whole (Castellví et al., 2021, González-Valencia et al., 2022).

Some authors have shown how, in carrying out inquiry-based studies, students have developed a greater awareness of different historical perspectives when working with historical sources (Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012) or employing the methods of the historian (López et al., 2021; Hughes, 2022). Furthermore, certain authors have stated that inquiry methods should be complemented with debates which include abstract historical concepts (Van Drie & Van de Ven, 2017) and the production of written work.

Ultimately, we consider that the use of inquiry strategies in educational contexts implies a pedagogical break from practices which have been dominant for generations in Spain. However, future teachers will only abandon their prior conceptions, built through their own experiences as students, if a change is brought about in their education, particularly at university, thus contributing to the generation of epistemological transformations. In this way, teachers will obtain real and effective training (be it initial or ongoing) so as not to be obliged to resort to past educational experiences when designing their own classroom teaching activities.

Some inquiry strategies

Why inquiry methods and not research methods or strategies? Sebastiá (2012) answers this question by stating that research implies a systematic activity aimed at discovering and developing a body of organised knowledge. Secondary education students, who are not specialists in any field of science, lack the necessary skills to increase the knowledge in a specific subject. Therefore, the correct term to use would be inquiry, as this points towards the formation of significant knowledge for students.

Having clarified this point, the different inquiry-based learning strategies detailed below have several points in common (Galindo, 2016; Quinquer, 2004). First of all, it could be said that all of them are aimed at the acquisition of knowledge, skills (regarding communication and creation) and values (commitment and responsibility). Secondly, they promote more active participation among students via a working procedure based on the teacher posing a significant challenge which students must aim to resolve by working in small groups to search for, contrast and apply information. Thirdly, the challenge should be connected as closely as possible with the students' context and reality so as to increase their levels of motivation and involvement. The fourth characteristic to be highlighted is that, in this way, critical, autonomous and creative thinking can be fostered among students and processes of metacognition can be encouraged. Finally, all of this implies that the teacher's role varies substantially, changing from being the centre of attention of the process to being a guide, facilitator or coach of the students' work. Below, some inquiry strategies will be outlined.

Problem-based learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a relatively recent approach which originated in the field of medicine in Canada in the 1970s, recently becoming more widespread

in the field of the humanities. In general, it is accepted that teachers incorporate this methodology at times into their classes. However, it is preferable for PBL to have a certain level of continuity throughout the school year.

In PBL, the teacher presents a situation or problem which requires the intervention of the student in order to seek possible solutions, thus obtaining the desired learning outcomes. Restrepo (2005) states that one problem of this approach could be the fact that students may be confronted with a variety of issues, ranging from understanding a complex phenomenon to resolving a mystery, clarifying a situation or relating variables of a conflictive situation. In any case, the situation should always stimulate learning as questions with no answers arise which become learning objectives, which, in turn, motivate students to be informed and to consult the relevant bibliography in order to provide answers to the questions and solve the problems (Gil, 2018).

Among the many advantages of employing this method can be highlighted the fact that it encourages the development of competences, fosters critical thinking and produces significant learning via interaction, cooperation and autonomy, leading students to relate ideas and build their own knowledge based on their own prior knowledge, research and activity (Del Valle & Villa, 2008). To these benefits must be added the fact that problem-based learning, related with historical thinking, implies presenting the true work of the historian to students, i.e., building problems and seeking answers when contextualising and interpreting primary sources (Aceituno, 2017). Along these lines, the experiment presented by Poch & Yousuf (2017) was aimed at students experiencing the subject of history as a historian would, using primary sources to tackle challenging questions concerning historical interpretation via the use of well-defined historical thinking skills. It is encouraging to note that, in this way, students increase the skills relating to what Poch & Yousuf call the "5Cs" of historical thinking: change over time, causality, context, complexity, and contingency. Indeed, given the nature of social studies, which often imply contradictory interpretations, students are stimulated to resolve these types of situations, offering positive results (Maxwell, 2020).

Project-based learning

In accordance with Quinquer's (1997, 2004) thesis, project-based learning implies direct contact with the object of study. Students are provided with a topic to work on or an idea to develop which they can choose themselves. The tasks necessary for achieving the objective are planned, the idea (final product) is executed or implemented via a project, a proposal, an exhibition or an object and is presented

to the class, the school or in another context, with the final result being evaluated. In this way, both skills and knowledge are developed and applied. Project-based learning has a long history, although in its present conception it is important to note the leading role played by students, the possibilities for interpersonal communication, the analysis and resolution of problems and the globalisation of contents.

In order to be able to carry out project-based learning in a satisfactory way, students must take the initiative and understand the task proposed, planning it, searching for information in different sources and working in teams to bring the project to fruition.

Experiences of the use of this approach in the teaching of history are not homogenous. On the one hand, some researchers have reported positive results in terms of student learning, not only regarding the enrichment and broadening of their knowledge, but also in that a greater level of motivation was achieved (Ihan, 2014). In addition, historical thinking skills were acquired, as the students were able to understand that history is more than the mere presentation of facts (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009). On the other hand, Ciftci's (2015) experiment did not find significant differences among students employing project-based learning and those using a traditional approach.

However, according to the review of the literature carried out by Kokotsaki et al. (2016), a series of recommendations can be offered for the application of project-based learning to have the desired effect. Among these can be found support for both students and teachers, the importance of group work, a balance between direct teaching on the part of the teacher and autonomous experimentation by students guided by the teacher and the importance of self-evaluation, co-evaluation and continuous and reflective evaluation.

The case study

This strategy consists of the presentation of a specific real-life situation which must be analysed in order to offer a proposal for intervention, fostering reflection, analysis and discussion. It promotes guided discovery learning as students are encouraged to ask questions and formulate their own responses, as well as to infer principles from practical examples or experiences.

The case study method can be used for different purposes within the field of education, as it promotes the use of skills such as observation, analysis, synthesis and the reinforcement of concepts (Parra, 2003).

Prats & Santacana (2011) present the elements of a case study as follows:

- It makes it possible to go from macro to micro or vice versa, as it enables the construction of general reflections from particular aspects or taking general knowledge from particular aspects to the analysis.
- It works with tangible questions which are full of meaning due to their real existence and specificity, allowing students to have a high degree of conceptual or emotional meaning.
- It is holographic in nature as it makes it possible to see the dimension and depth of a specific reality. Out of one question, others arise with their own structural background.

The application of this approach in university experiments related with the field of education has provided positive results in teacher training for early years and secondary education (Gil & Ibáñez, 2013), primary education (Gómez-Carrasco & Rodríguez-Pérez, 2014) and in the fields of pedagogy and social education (Aramendi et al., 2014).

Challenge-based learning

Challenge-based learning (CBL) is an educational approach which actively involves students in a problematic real-life situation which is both significant and related with their own context, thus implying the definition of a challenge and the implementation of a solution (Tecnológico de Monterrey, 2016).

Rather than presenting students with a problem to be solved, CBL offers general concepts from which they obtain the challenges to be tackled. Furthermore, this approach fosters the use of web and mobile technologies such as collaboration tools and wikis. This model is frequently interdisciplinary in approach and promotes projects which involve the wider community (Apple, 2011). This combination enables students to choose their challenges and link them with community interaction, increasing their investment in a productive result.

Students' work with any of these tools can be presented for evaluation by the teacher in order to ensure that they are working. Once students are satisfied because they have obtained what they need from their research, they seek a solution and draw up a plan of action, collecting material as they progress. The images, audio and video recorded in the previous phases of the project provide the raw material for the final step: the publication of a video online with observations and reflections on the successes and failures of the project.

Experiments in initial teacher training (Abril-López et al., 2021) demonstrate the potential of this strategy for developing reflection and problem-solving skills among students.

Service-learning

Service learning is a method which brings together learning and social commitment. Through this strategy, students identify a situation in their local environment which they commit themselves to improve. They then carry out a project which puts into practice their knowledge, abilities, attitudes and values. It is an educational approach through which children can learn while acting upon real needs with the aim of improving a situation. One essential element of service learning is the balance which must be present between service and learning. This approach must be embedded within the curriculum and the action to improve the community must be true field work leading to learning processes (Mortari & Ubbiali, 2021).

Three of the key characteristics of service learning, are as follows. First of all, the true success of education consists of shaping good citizens who are capable of improving not only their personal curriculum, but also society. Secondly, children and young people are not the citizens of the future, they are already citizens who are able now to bring about changes in their environment. For example, they can contribute towards building a better world by fixing up the park near their school, providing company for their grandparents and telling stories to younger children. Thirdly, doing a service for the community helps others. It is one of the most effective learning methods as meaning is given to what they study when they apply their knowledge and skills to a project for a good cause.

Experiments with extremely positive results, such as those focused on the university education of future historians (Straus & Eckenrode, 2014), emphasise the fact that service learning opens up the way for the teaching of academic and professional skills, presenting civic commitment and interest in the community as key elements.

Simulations and strategies for empathy

According to Quinquer's (2004) definition, "we call empathic and simulation strategies to a wide range of activities (social simulation or dramatisation, empathy, role-plays, etc.), which make it possible to reproduce or represent a real or hypothetical situation in a simplified way, lie under the category

of simulations and strategies for empathy". Dramatisations and simulation strategies should form part of the teaching and learning context and of teaching plans. Simulation play at school can reproduce current economic, social, environmental, geographic and political situations. Students' decision-making plays a key role and their participation and motivation are encouraged due to the recreational element offered by these types of strategies (Galindo, 2016). Activities employing empathy help students to understand the intentions and motivations of historical agents, to clarify their conceptions and to understand relativism (Quinquer, 2004).

In relation to historical thinking, simulation exercises based on real-life situations have been used to evaluate the historical empathy of students in countries such as the United States (Pellegrino et al. 2012; Stover, 2007). However, the same good results have not been reproduced everywhere (Rantala, 2011; Rantala et al., 2015).

Educational field trips

According to Galindo (2016), field trips are one of the most complete strategies for teaching history and other social sciences. Direct contact with the reality of the surrounding environment helps students to contextualise, exemplify and apply different contents of the curriculum. As far as concepts are concerned, field trips make it possible to approach events, places, characters and phenomena. Regarding procedure, they favour the development of skills relating to direct observation, orientation, location and data collection. As for attitudes, they encourage students to respect, appreciate and preserve the environment. All of the above facilitates an integral and meaningful approach to historical contents, the socialisation of students and an increase in motivation.

As Cooper (2018) and Vilarrasa (2003) have pointed out, educational field trips are a good strategy for working with primary sources via visits to heritage assets within the students' immediate surroundings. However, trainee teachers recall that such trips in their own education were carried out as a complementary activity to a mainly traditional model of education and they perceive them as activities to be carried out as an added extra to other resources. It can, therefore, be supposed that this is how they would employ such activities in their professional careers (Felices-De la Fuente et al., 2020). This is in spite of the high value attributed to field trips as a strategy linked to the study of history and heritage in countries such as Spain and the United Kingdom (Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to present a justification of a teaching model based on scientific (critical, tentative and constructed) thinking as a valid response to the current knowledge-based society. For its application to the teaching of history, it is necessary, first of all, to reflect both epistemologically and methodologically. Changing epistemological conceptions is essential in order to bring about a transformation in teaching methods. It should be understood that history is not merely descriptive knowledge of the past, which is to be memorised, but that it requires the interpretation of sources of the past, the understanding of public history and argumentation. To approach history in this way, it is necessary for a methodological transformation to take place, in which students are able to interpret and build their own knowledge.

It must be stressed that the idea is not to create historians, but to teach by doing history, taking part in the very characteristics and nature of this type of knowledge in order to generate the skills, values, attitudes and knowledge required to make citizens competent both professionally and in relation to life in today's democratic society.

The active learning methods in use at the present time (project-based learning, problem-based learning, inquiry strategies, etc.) fit in perfectly with the current education system for the two reasons which we have sought to identify in this chapter: Because they fit in with the type of knowledge required by today's society and because, from an epistemological point of view of the knowledge which makes up the education curriculum in the social sciences, they are supported by the very formulation and nature of this knowledge. Thus, it is possible to make a selection of (first and second-order) concepts without worrying about whether the subject matter is being taught.

Knowledge must not be dogmatic, infallible or definitive. It is this spirit which should be transmitted to students when teaching any kind of historical knowledge, as it is this attitude which will bring about a better understanding of the fast-paced changes regarding knowledge taking place at the present time as a result of today's information and knowledge-based society.

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