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Methods to ensure the effectiveness of educator historians and the specifics of their applications

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Abstract

Along with a radical change in the content of history education, importance has also been given to the modernization of the methodological system of teaching history, the organization of the teaching process, the supervision of results, as well as the development of new criteria and methods for verification and assessment. It is not yet clear which methods are the most suitable for studying in case of history and other social sciences. Based on the current situation and with an appreciation for recent developments in the process of teaching history and the issues that have arisen as a result, we have noted the following existing contradictions – the contrast between the aspirations of learners who wish to gain knowledge of history and the didactic capabilities of the existing traditional methodological system, as well as the necessity for the history teacher to innovatively present the material and the limits of the traditional methodological system in her current arsenal. The teacher is free to choose the methods used, but that choice has certain limitations. A range of factors have been described in the pedagogical literature that influences the choice of teaching methods. Considering the methods that influence the choice of teaching methods, the educator historian must look at the available facts and outline the related predictable and unpredictable developments and consequences. Each chosen method is part of the initial procedure of the educator historian's thinking. In the education process, the consistent use of one method or the other assumes that the facts have been examined fully in parallel with their historic period and specific developments. Thus, the creation of a flexible system of interactive methods and their broad application, including modern technological approaches and possibilities, is extremely important and necessary. It is obvious that one of the most important issues that have emerged before the educator historian is the targeted construction of the teaching process and the selection of teaching methods for that process which must be supported by research evidence, because the educator historian who does not use interactive methods is similar to a traveler without a map. In the article, we analyze interactive teaching methods that can be used by the educator historian during the education process in the stages of promotion, understanding and reflection.

Keywords: History, teaching, method, historian, technology, education, interactive lesson.

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1. Article

In the past decade, the reforms conducted in the school system of the Republic of Armenia created the necessity to also radically review the aims and objectives of the teaching of history in schools. Along with a radical change in the content of history instruction, the modernization of the methodological system of teaching history, the organization of the learning process, monitoring outcomes, as well as new standards and methods for assessment and evaluation have also been considered very important.

The school level does not yet have a sufficiently developed modern system for the efficient teaching of history. Therefore, a clear set of pedagogical research methods, best suited for use when examining history and other social sciences, does not exist. Due to this situation, having an appreciation for recent developments in the process of teaching history and the objectives that have arisen as a result, we noted the existence of contradictions:

- Between the effort made by learners to acquire knowledge of history and the didactic capacity of the existing traditional methodological system,
- Between the necessity for delivering the material innovatively and the capacity of the traditional methodological approach available in the teacher's arsenal.

The teacher is free to choose the method of instruction, but that choice does not allow for full freedom. The pedagogical literature has highlighted a number of factors that influence the selection of the method of instruction:

- The aims and objectives of the instruction, content, volume of the material being taught and its level of difficulty, the knowledge level of the learners, their positive or negative attitude, the specific age-related characteristics and work capacity of the learners, the time allocated for learning the material, the conditions in which the instruction is being organized, the methods that had been used earlier, the lesson types and styles, subject-subject and subject-object relationships, the composition of the class, the competency of the teacher.

Taking into account the factors mentioned above influencing the selection of the teaching method, the history teacher must examine the available facts and outline their foreseeable and unforeseeable developments and consequences. The selection of each method is part of the benchmark procedure of the history teacher's professional thinking. This or that method selected sequentially or systematically for the teaching process assumes a complete examination of the facts, parallel to their historical timeline and various developments. Thus, it is extremely important and necessary to have a broad application of the interactive methods and the creation of a flexible methodological system, which includes modern techniques and approaches. It is clear that one of the more urgent issues faced by history teachers is planning the learning process, and selecting teaching methods that must be backed by research-based evidence, because history teachers who do not use effective and interactive methods are like travelers without maps (Stepanischev, 2013). Below, we analyze the interactive teaching methods that the history teacher can apply during the stages of the promotion, valuation and reflection (PVR) stages:

PVR is recognized as a system of modern teaching methods that takes a stage-based approach to the teaching process – the promotion stage, valuation stage and reflection stage. Let us look at the specific characteristics of each stage from the point of view of its effectiveness in acquiring knowledge of history.

1.2. The core objectives of the promotion stage in the process of teaching history are

- The determination of the level of knowledge and information about the new material among the learners;
- Their active participation in the discussion of the material;
- The promotion of the practical efforts of the learners to identify and acquire knowledge, the encouragement of a demand for acquiring knowledge.

At this stage of the teaching process, the most suitable methods to use are “brainstorming” and “prism”. For example, by using the “brainstorming” method during the promotion stage, the history teacher first clarifies the topic for the lesson, its aim and objectives, and then develops the standards for “best option” and outlines the process for the lesson, after which a historical problem is presented to the class for discussion, with the expectation that the learners will propose various options for resolving this problem, thus stimulating their creative, cognitive and mental activity. All the members of the classroom actively participate in the discussion, both as those who propose ideas, as well as those who critique them. The use of this method leads to a practical and individual-centered approach by the teacher. The “brainstorming” method, in turn, has a number of stages of application:

- Developing a database of ideas,
- Analyzing the ideas developed,
- Processing the outcomes achieved.

For the objective of organizing the history teaching process effectively, we also consider the use of the “Prism” method in the promotion stage of the lesson to be suitable. This method facilitates the free and uninhibited thinking of the learners. The main objective of the “Prism” method is to register and identify the subconscious ties in the learners’ minds regarding the historical phenomenon, fact, concept, event or idea being studied. The “Prism” is an active method that is like a drawing board thanks to which the learners’ thought process becomes clear and descriptive. The application of this method leads to a successful start of the teaching process.

1.3. The main objectives of the valuation stage in the process of teaching history are

- The formation and development of the cognitive interest of the learners
- Effective comprehension of the information
- Identifying the ability to self-regulate and self-monitor
- Establishing connections between previous and new knowledge, the formation of the skill to compare, contrast, and correlate them, and the formation of a new level of knowledge as a result.

At this stage of the teaching process, it is more suitable to use methods such as the “T-shaped Table,” the “M-shaped Table” and the “Mosaic” methods. For example, the use of tables in historical chronological order helps the history teacher work more efficiently, because when discussing the accumulating information, the need arises to categorize and place it, in order to use it more effectively later. The use of the table in historical chronological order is an effective method for the comparison and systematization of historical concepts, events, facts and phenomena. It is particularly useful when three or more concepts, events, facts and phenomena are being compared. The table is formed from the concepts, events, facts and phenomena being compared by providing a row to each, and a column to each of the characteristics of comparison between them. The number of columns is based on the depth and volume of their comparison (Gumilyov, 2015).

- The T-shaped Table is used to compare two sides of the same concept or issue. It is the easiest of the outline classifiers both from an organizational point of view as well as structure, and can be used both for individual as well as group work. It is worth noting that this table, which resembles the letter T, consists of two parts which contain the opposing sides of the same concept or issue, or its positive and negative sides. A table of this kind is very suitable to note the two different answers (yes/no, for/against) or feedback expressing the comparison/contrast on each side (Gyozalyan, Arushanyan, & Gasparyan, 2015).
- The M-shaped table is a slightly more flexible form of the T-shaped table. It is effective to express three different viewpoints on an issue at various stages of the class, and to organize a discussion based on them. It consists of three parts, each of which notes the positive, negative and neutral viewpoints on a particular issue, and contains the necessary facts or data to justify the position (Gyozalyan, Arushanyan, & Gasparyan, 2015).

Another interactive method that can help the history teacher function efficiently is the “**mosaic**,” which allows students to examine a segment of the material in-depth, studying it from a particular viewpoint, considering a specific issue in the available material, and then instructing classmates on this topic. This method has certain stages of implementation, the consistent use of which allows the history teacher to achieve a certain expected outcome. The stages of the **Mosaic Method** are as follows:

- Examining the material and collecting the relevant information,
- Forming the expert group and its targeted work,
- Forming the study group and the implementation of instructional work,
- Concluding the ongoing work,
- Summarizing.

During the teaching process, the stage of examining the material and collecting the relevant information consists of first dividing the learners into support groups. Each group member becomes an expert in a sub-section of the material being studied and his or her function is to gather comprehensive information on that topic. This division facilitates the integration of students who have learning difficulties or other limitations. It is not necessary for team members to collaborate with each other; they can also complete the assignments independent of each other (Burgetti, Merenyi, Szabo & Takacs, 2006). During the teaching process, the stage of forming the expert group and its targeted work consists of the expert team members comparing and complementing each other’s shortcomings. The stage of forming the study group and the implementation of instructional work consists of each expert teaching the other members of the support group the sub-section that he or she has learned. The stage of concluding the ongoing work consists of an assessment of the learners which consists of all the core questions related to the topic. The summarizing stage consists of a summary of the results based on individual and group scores.

1.4. The core objectives of the reflection stage in the process of teaching history are

- The development of the ability to independently and adequately articulate the knowledge of history, concepts and facts, as well as clearly reproduce the definitions and rules.
- The fusion of previous knowledge acquired and new knowledge, and its inclusion in the core knowledge system.

At this stage of the teaching process, it is more suitable to use methods such as the “case” and “cube.” The advantages of the “case” method are that the learners are given the opportunity to experience a historic situation, and the chance to play out a historic event, as a result of which they reflect and recognize its significance and importance, forming set positions and convictions on the given issue. The use of the “cube” method in the stage of reflection is more effective when certain controversial issues come up during the teaching process, the discussion of which assumes the organization of a debate as a result of which the learners can not just express a certain position, but also justify it, defend it and present their own viewpoints and ideas.

Thus, we can conclude that the application of the methods that were presented and analyzed does not just provide the opportunity to make the learner more active, by turning him or her into a fully involved subject in the teaching process, but it also allows the development of historic thinking, cognitive and logical abilities and skills that promote an understanding of how people and society change in space and over time. For this to happen, the mindset of the learners must be

- Free of chains, because there are no theories, versions, viewpoints or historic incidents that cannot be argued.
- Multi-faceted, because the history of the past is told in different voices, and there is never a single one that can suppress all the others. It is necessary to want to and be able to listen to all the voices.
- Alternative, because history always ponders the question, “What would have happened if...”

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