

Per Eliasson, KG Hammarlund, Erik Lund & Carsten Tage Nielson
(eds.), *Historie didaktik i Norden: del 1, historiemetvetanda -
historiebruk* (Malmö & Halmstad: Malmö högskola and Högskolan i
Halmstad, 2012) | 1

The challenge is tackled in two volumes; “historiemetvetanda - historiebruk” [history usage] reviewed here; and “historisk kunskap” [historical knowledge], in a separate volume, not covered here.

The authors constitute a group who have a background in history teaching and research in history teaching. They cover all three levels of schooling, from compulsory school through upper-secondary and university level.

The book contains a collection of articles on didactics in history. It divides in two parts: on the one hand, historical consciousness; on the other, the application of history, as the book’s title unveils. In sum, there are 20 authors with 16 contributions, six on historical consciousness and the rest on the application of history. The book can be regarded as dealing with latest developments in the field. The articles make up a comprehensive and well-written book in four different languages, thus demanding quite an effort from the reader. The same reader can however engage in stimulating and rather diverse debates taking place in different countries, but as a whole the book leaves also an integrated, coherent picture of the subject. A call is made for a debate on concepts, synthesis and new knowledge. How does this debate relate to the situation best known to the reviewer, i.e. the Icelandic situation?

The discussions of the Nordic historians on history didactics is truly interesting for those who have been active in history teaching for a long time, both from the perspective of the history teacher in upper secondary schools and as a lecturer in teacher training programs for future history teachers at compulsory schools. The debate needs attention and participation from history teachers at all levels of schooling – at least here in Iceland.

What should be the didactics of history as a subject in schools and universities? The book reveals different traditions in the Nordic countries, combined with the German and the Anglo-Saxon traditions, as to answering the question on what history is all about. Should history teaching further the historical consciousness of students, so that they can be able to recognise the link and continuity between past and present, preferably in the light about expectations of the future? Or should history teaching have the objective of training students in thinking as historians, to use concepts like cause and change, which can be applied to different cases for diverse eras? Should history teaching shed light on the basic values of modern multicultural societies and give the students leeway to discuss how these values

appear at our times? These are all important questions, also if not especially as Iceland is concerned, and the book reflects upon these questions and the central terms of continuity and change in the magnetic field between the Anglo-Saxon and Continental traditions in history education practice - *historical thinking* and *Geschichtsbewusstsein*. The most pressing questions regard the role of schools in fast-developing multicultural societies, in which the schools are steered into being nationalist flavoured and history into a canonised subject.

A common take on these issues is to regard history as a past that is used by someone for some present purpose. Therefore it is believed that the historical consciousness must be at the forefront, but not the university subject of history. And also we must know how people, teachers and students, use historical consciousness in everyday life. On such matters, the book generally calls for the development of pedagogical and theoretical understandings of the social formation and utilisation of historical consciousness at large.

Two definitions of history are presented in the book: (1) A professional one, referring to schools and the classroom; (2) and a broader one referring to history as a central process in people's lives, not just for understanding our own past and present, but our expectations about the future as well. All the contributions on the use of history are based on the latter definition of history.

Perhaps the core subject matter of the book is the political use of history. Mythical historical visions that used to pervade nations are taken as an example for instrumental uses of history. Another example concerning such an instrumental writing of history comes to mind in connection with the 2013 manifesto of the rightwing parties in Iceland, i.e. the so-called "registration of the history of Iceland". Apart from such naive or blatantly instrumental uses of history, moral uses of history for the purpose of educating the youth to democracy and the rule of law are also discussed in the book, along with results of research on how this kind of moral uses can be approached in class. The book thus invites us in Iceland to consider the question of whether the State of Iceland has nothing to say regarding the policies and practices of its past - for example those applying to refugees from European dictatorships in the late 1930's.

The authors discuss how situations outside schools have an impact on the planning of history

teaching, but primarily they focus upon how the official curriculum shapes this teaching. There is a wide spectrum of experiences that are tackled in the volume. For one, the Norwegian official stance is to teach training students to be critical thinkers, whilst also providing cautious instructions on the actual contents of the history to be taught in the classrooms. In relatively young states, after all, history is typically used for the sake of acquiring legitimacy and nation-building. A national mythologising history teaching is well-known to us Icelanders, indeed *qua* massive political project. A renationalisation of history teaching in the Nordic country of Denmark, instead, presents us with the case of more classes being taught for the sake of creating a stronger national identity, involving also a legitimising rhetoric of conservative ideas as well as broader normative implications.

Annette Warring writes in the introduction that “The teaching of history is a battlefield”. If so, the job recommended in the book is to move the attention of the stakeholders from the ideological battles going on in the history books, videos and worksheets, towards the pedagogical battles waged in the classrooms and society at large.

The full text of the book is available for free in pdf format on the following website:

<http://hh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:515559/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

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