

HistEdu Working Group

This project is an initiative of a sub-group of the EUSTORY Network called the 'HistEdu Working Group'.

Contested History - Concept Note

Contested History

Varying perceptions of history and the construction of competing narratives to support such perceptions can lead to division and dispute. Our shared macro-heritage, our history, is complex and it is this complexity that can serve as a starting point for discussion, conversation and negotiation regarding relevance, meaning, representation and sometimes truth, in situations where contested histories divide society.

Conflicting historical narratives are often based on facts relevant to both perspectives, sometimes multiple, however it is the interpretation of these facts as they relate to the historical event or legacy that are generally disputed. Indeed these interpretations are often so interwoven that they seem impossible to reconcile. It is also the case that some competing historical narratives directly contradict each other or run in parallel. While this may seem less challenging, the very polarisation that defines such a contestation can, overtime, establish equally significant barriers to reconciliation and a pathway forward.

'Traditional' or 'old school' approaches to historical research have focused on developing simplistic narratives, however, contemporary historians, special interest groups and working groups that seek to engage society in through dialogue of varying forms, recognise that in order to do so what they present must hold true to the realities of real life. That reality is that history is as complex as the lives that citizens live. Considering this, it is important that, where contestation exists, that a cancellation of a perspective is not the intended outcome, rather an acknowledgement that through a process of meaningful engagement (discussion, reflection, debate and learning etc) the complexity of our shared history can be appreciated, even if uncomfortable.

People shape historical events, either through their actions or as proponents of the resultant narratives that shape perception. As such, it is community that sits at the heart of both creation and perception and it follows from this that formal and community based education activities have a key role to play in historical representation. Schools and non-formal education opportunities bring together stakeholders from all sections of society and so it could be argued that schools and non-formal provisions sit at the nexus of societal activity, indeed the formal recognition of education as UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal No.4 provides a strong basis upon which to build any activity that seeks to engage citizens in exploring contested histories.

The provision of education, regardless of mode (formal and/or non-formal), represents a microcosm of society directly or indirectly including: ministries, industry, academia, community actors, teachers, school management, students and their parents - all stakeholders in such eco-systems. It makes sense, therefore, to consider education settings as suitable locations to attempt to explore how contested histories can be explored and how that exploration can impact the communities that surround, shape and respond to life in their time.

Methodology

Selection of Participants & Overarching Research Question

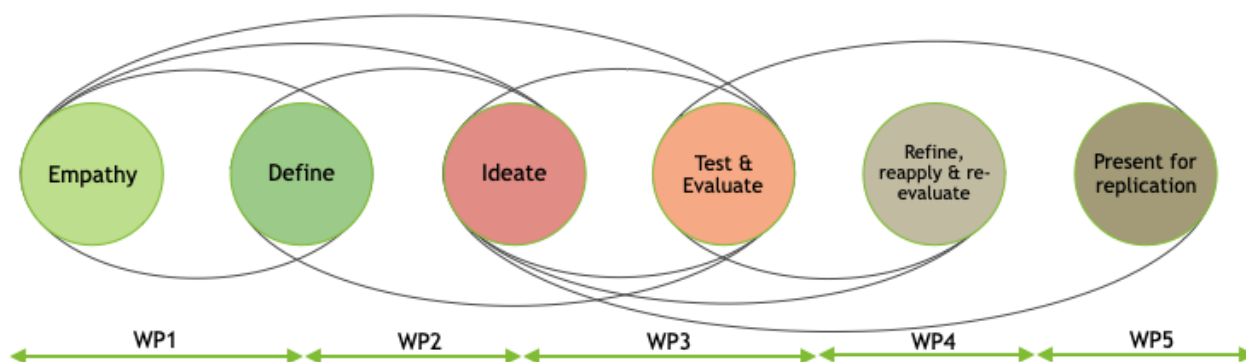
Multiple stakeholders inhabit the school ecosystem. The working group team determined that teachers sit at the centre of all of the aforementioned actors. This category was further broken down into teachers who are in-service and teachers who are pre-service (student teachers). Given the well documented challenges regarding access to schools and recruitment of busy time-pressured teachers the working group team determined that working with teacher training colleges and student history teachers would provide the best opportunity to iteratively develop a pedagogical intervention that might support a response to the following research question:

- How can contested histories be positioned in 21st century European second level classrooms?

Overarching HistEdu Project Methodology

The overarching research methodology for the HistEdu project is an exploratory sequential, design research methodology. Employing a constructionist, design thinking, paradigm the project will take the following steps in three distinct work packages aligned with the design thinking approach (Figure 1):

- WP 1: Develop a clear understating of what contested history means in various contexts (complete)
- WP 1: Develop a working definition of content histories (complete)
- WP 2: Engage with experts and practitioners currently active in this field
- WP 3: Ideate & test a pedagogical informed and methodologically robust educational intervention
- WP 3: Evaluate the effectiveness of the design intervention in-situ
- WP 4: Refine and reapply



- WP 5: Present the resultant generic model for others to adapt and/or adopt.

Figure 1: WP Activities and Design Thinking Alignment

Engagement with Experts & Practitioners Currently Active in this Field

Given the emergent nature of this area of research, activity with the classroom and inline with curricula rather than ancillary to curricula, the project team will seek out and engage with experts and practitioners currently active in this field, through focus groups and workshops, to determine the state-of-the-art in such practice. It should be noted that there are a number of ‘live’ initiatives and programmes that are currently working in the area of contested histories (<https://contestedhistories.org>; <https://www.ibanet.org/contested-histories>) however, the project team did not find any that are explicitly aligned to examinable requirements of curriculum teaching.

Development of Educational Intervention

Once the state-of-the-art has been determined and a report has been generated this will form the foundation upon which participating student history teachers, in multiple jurisdictions, will be asked to explore how contested histories be positioned in 21st century European second level classrooms. The methodology that will be employed by participants will be an Action Research methodology now a well established methodology embedded in teacher education programme around the world. Alternatives to this should be considered where the context demands. Ideally, student teachers would evaluate their respective curricula and identify an opportunity to situate contested history in their classroom while at the same time providing student with the opportunity to achieve the Learning Outcomes (Learning Intentions) associated with the chosen topic and in line with any examination requirements.

Next steps include feedback on this concept note, recruitment of willing teacher education providers and engagement with experts/professionals

(Participating teacher training providers should agree a common approach, or as close as possible, so that the findings of the student teachers can feed into the target HistEdu project.)