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Learning by Researching Historical Documents and Relics

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Abstract

One of the most active methods for getting to know the historical past of mankind is represented by the study based on the research of historical documents in original or copy, as copied or projected reproductions. Researching historical documents provides the possibility to get to know the historical past by the pupils' direct activity of research, systematization, perception of some causes of historical events.

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Keywords:

1. Introduction

The intelligent use of documents or relics of the past, in the process of understanding history, has a huge pedagogical value. Related to the learning theory through discovery, historical documents are seen here, not only and not first of all as simple illustrations of some more or less abstract exposures, but as true sources of new knowledge, as a starting point for a constant activity of searching and learning the historical truth through self power. From this point of view, they perform an important heuristic function for revealing the truth.

The direct contact with documents or historical relics, their careful investigation, helps pupils to reconstitute or recreate facts and important moments from the historical past, to observe in detail and analyze, to confront and express assumptions, to issue critical assessments and to infer some types of truth, to deeply understand the

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historical fact and to bear in mind the most important data, to form an objective attitude and a modality of thinking historically.

The thorough study of some matters while researching such testimonies gives a more active feature to learning history. The desire to learn is different now: pupils take part with interest and curiosity in studying documents and new knowledge appears as a result of a personal effort of search and discovery of the historical truth, and it is no longer only a simple registration of some data communicated by the teacher.

2. The use of the investigation in learning and assessment

The issue of research as searching the ways to solve some aspects through personal effort is related to several categories of methods, out of which we mention learning through discovery. M. Ionescu (2003) considers that learning through discovery is related to the pupil's position in the state of subject of the scientific knowledge. Pupils are in the situation of discovering the truth, reflecting the way of elaborating the knowledge through their own activity. The previously named author presents the stages which should be covered by an investigative approach and also the advantages of such an approach.

The mentioned stages are:

- confronting the problem situation;
- achieving the act of discovery (searching data, structuring and interpreting data, using the operations of thinking and highlighting novelties);
- formulating conclusions and generalizing them;
- applying the newly discovered data in new situations.

In terms of advantages, they are: the intensity of the intellectual activity, the durability of acquirements, the assimilation of methods, the learning progression, the transmission of information flows from the teacher to the pupil.

The assessment guide for history (Doicescu, 2001: 69) includes the investigation among the complementary methods of assessment and considers that school curricula, by reference objectives, "develop the pupil's ability to investigate / research historical facts." The authors of the guide consider that the existence of this reference objective is beneficial, as the pupil will be helped:

- to exercise techniques of intellectual work and the method of learning by discovery;
- to interpret historical sources and to corroborate them;
- to cultivate their interest in researching;
- to learn the stages of projecting a historical investigation (Neacșu, Stoica, 1996: 66, 67):
 - specifying / identifying the variables / terms of reference;
 - controlling the variables - the theoretical knowledge the research underlies;
 - analyzing and interpreting the data provided by the historical source;
 - formulating hypotheses and conclusions and their argumentation;
 - pointing out the source of possible errors (example: the failure of communication, research, on the account of the lack of the edited or unedited material).
- to be provided the material resources which are difficult to access (ie. historical sources of a large extension, maps, archaeological sources, information about the author within the narrative sources);
- to carry out the activity during a class or during a succession of classes.

The aforementioned paper also presents the assessment objectives, conceived on three levels of performance, as well as some recommendations about projecting and implementing an investigation:

Assessment objectives

Level 1:

- rendering some data, facts, processes, explaining the causality for previously acquired knowledge;
- using properly the specialized language and the techniques of intellectual work;
- projecting graphically the previous knowledge (models, drawings, results of historical modeling, synoptic tables).

Level 2:

- choosing, ordering and processing independently the previous knowledge according to the historical logic

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