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Teaching geography and history in primary education

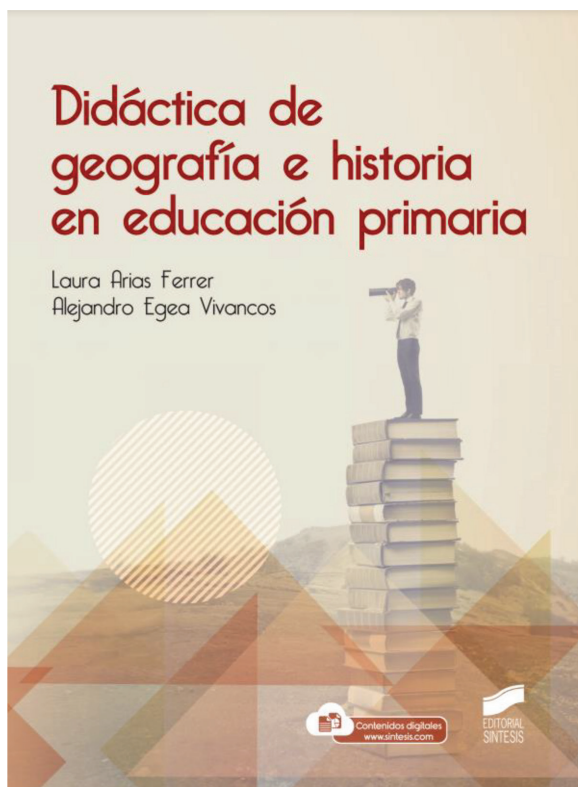
The art of teaching, also known as didactics, aims to facilitate learning and the contribution of knowledge in teacher training and in the field of knowledge of the social sciences, which is what concerns us here. The book truly excels in facilitating this objective by delving into two disciplines of the social sciences, namely geography, which studies the spatial sphere, and history, which absorbs the temporal sphere.

Arias and Egea introduce us to aspects associated with geographic space, space that can be placed and pinpointed, space where natural phenomena and the environment occur and interact, on the one hand, and the many meanings encompassed by the word time, including civil time, chronological time, historical time, social time and the interpretation and social use of history, on the other hand. “The purpose of teaching space and geography centres around knowing, understanding and describing the different spaces, places and processes involved, but also understanding the motives that have led the societies and cultures that inhabit such spaces and places to act the way they did” (2022, p. 14). These objectives comprise a series of key aspects: the influence of social and cultural context, the weight of memory, the empowerment of women and the importance of territorial conflicts. In addition, to really understand these disciplines it is vital to examine current trends in how scientific methods are used to introduce these subjects, strategies for critical analysis, the development of critical thinking, civic awareness and the creation of cit-

izens, considering all of these factors jointly as an essential tool for personal growth and development.

The new chapters of the book open up a range of possibilities when it comes to going beyond traditional descriptive and academic teaching, in the case of geography, and days, weeks, years and dates, in the case of history. These contributions inspire us to constantly reflect on and question why things are as they are, helping to develop the ability to think in historical terms, choosing the most effective method to help students absorb learning based on research and the analysis of problems, projects and cases studies.

Figure 1. Cover book



Source: Editorial Síntesis.

Teaching students about space helps them to understand human beings' relationship with their environment, inevitably going beyond mere spatial references to allow them to comprehend the cultural, social and environmental consequences (Wiegand, 2006, as cited by Arias and Egea, 2022).

Looking at the content of the first few chapters dedicated to geography, we find an important contribution (figure 1) about eight of the most remarkable schools that have focused on spatial analysis and the notion of geographical space since the 1970's, as well as the inclusion of the concept of globalisation, since the 1990's.

Of special relevance is the section on subjective space, which is linked to humanistic geography and related to the cultural and social context as a major influence on the identity of a region's inhabitants and their collective memory and perception, and the values arising from these. "Some places are unique not just because of the human and physical processes affecting them, but also due to how each one of us responds to that place" (Thornton and Brunton, 2009, as cited by Arias and Egea, 2022).

Still on the subject of the objectives of geography, and with regard to aspects involving the cultural landscape, it is important to relate this to the social dimension, the historical dimension and the perceptual dimension in order to incorporate these into the student's environment in the classroom through observation, turning the student into an active agent. Likewise, the corresponding and vital importance must be given to the section on sustainable development, focusing on Unesco's SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) and ESD (Education for Sustainable Development).

In the second part of the book, we ask ourselves about the nature of time and examine a range of answers to this paradox (Figure 2), dealing with the different possible definitions of time based on different disciplines, analysing chronological time and historical time in terms of subject content, chronological thinking, historical understanding and the analysis and interpretation of history. Thus, the knowledge absorbed by children outside of the school setting is part of the quantification of stimuli of a historical nature, to a great extent, being narratives that need to

Figure 2. Main geographical schools and their influence on the teaching of geography

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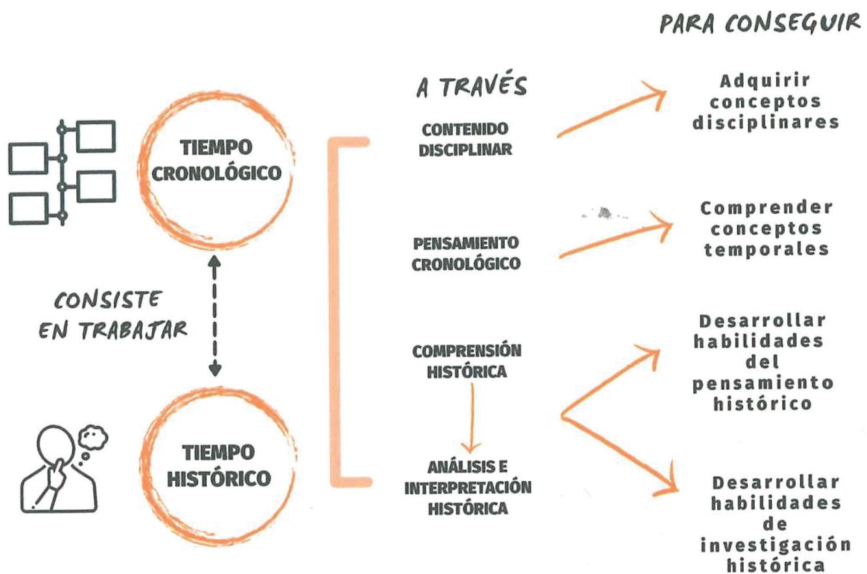
Source: Arias and Egea (2022), based on García Ballesteros (1998), Pillet (2004), Santos (1999), Souto (1998).

be detected by teachers (Epstein, 1997; Pozo, 1985; Prats, 2016; Wineburg et al, 2001, as cited by Arias and Egea, 2022). The book tackles the difference between the past, history and memory with a scientific approach, creating narratives using evidence, historical sources, interpretations that confirm the historical method, even using revisions.

The text does not forget about “Teaching how to think historically” (Holt, 1990), (Pierre Vilar, 2004) or the need to transfer these ideas into the educational field (Lévesque, 2008; Prats, 2001; Seixas and Peck, 2004; as cited by Arias and Egea, 2022), and the differentiation between “content of the first order, substantive and conceptual, and of the second order, organisational meta-concepts (2022, 115). In fact, it provides a study

Figure 3. What does it mean to teach and learn history in Primary education?

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Source: Arias i Egea (2022, p. 108).

based on the theses of different authors on “the different abilities associated with historical thinking” (Egea and Arias, 2018), (2022, p. 116)

What does it mean to teach and learn history in Primary education? A historian’s method is considered to be absolutely crucial: “A school’s mission is not to create historians, but rather future citizens who will develop the skills to discern between information and disinformation” (2022, 125-126). This task brings with it difficulties and challenges (Figure 3), which go beyond the concept of time and the limitations posited by Jean Piaget, focusing on a paradigm shift in terms of the abstract ideas about children’s learning that began to appear in the 1990’s, selecting suitable content and using historical and temporal analysis to plan from an early age and using resources that encourage and promote the ability to present arguments, developing thought by creating links between different situations in order to observe one’s environment, analysing objects, cultural heritage, photographs (Cooper, 2002, as cited by Arias and Egea, 2022), adding primary sources, works of art and anything else that might favour the creation of multiple individual and collective perspectives, establishing dialogue and creating hypotheses.

The last part of the book provides us with a veritable doctor’s prescription of resources and active ingredients to help us understand historical research methods and how and why interpretations of the past are created, as well as how to achieve historical perspective by placing and locating the knowledge provided by different texts. All of this is vital “to make the student think chronologically and historically, allowing the student to get inside the historian’s method, thereby developing the sought-after ability to both acquire knowledge and present arguments” (2022, p. 146).

Besides the above list of resources, the book also includes recommendations to bear in mind when teaching geography or history. Let’s not forget, however, that, according to Dewey, “Education should begin with the student’s curiosity” (Oguz-Unver i Arabacioglu, 2014, as cited by Arias and Egea, 2022). This is why we agree that it is necessary to carry out a diagnosis that includes an analysis of students’ existing

Figure 4. Difficulties learning history



Source: Arias i Egea (2022, p. 144).

knowledge in order to be able to ask the most appropriate questions, helping them to resolve enigmas, present arguments and provide arguments to back up and explain monosyllabic responses, always bearing in mind that the social sciences are not exact sciences, but rather are probabilistic and require debate, meaning that sometimes there can be more than one right answer. It's a question of "doing", "listening" and "thinking" (2022, p. 181).

This personal, direct, expert and occasionally ironic way of presenting such high knowledge about the teaching of geography and history is the real lesson to be learned and the reason why we have a warm understanding with the authors, Laura Arias and Alejandro Egea, of Universidad de Murcia, a university with which we have close ties.

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