

Should history education begin in kindergarten?

Investigating the social representations of prospective and currently employed educators regarding the introduction of children in early childhood to history education

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Abstract

This paper presents research related to the perspectives and social representations of both prospective and currently employed educators regarding the introduction of kindergarten and primary education children to history education. The research was carried out using the Thematic Analysis method, and comprises qualitative data. The results of this research study show that educators are influenced by their social representations regarding the type and form of history education, as well as by their education. Social representations shape their perceptions on the appropriate age for introducing children to history education. This paper presents the theoretical background of the research, its purposes, research strategies, methodology, the results and their analysis, and a final section for discussion and conclusions.

Keywords

early childhood education, history education, social representations, educators

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Theoretical framework

History education for children in early childhood: Is it a controversial subject?

Introducing *history education* to kindergarten and elementary school children¹ can be a controversial issue depending on what we mean by the term “history education”. In a history class that might be perceived as a memorization of dates and facts and a difficult historical discourse with a complex vocabulary, history education is not considered to be appropriate for children in early childhood. In the international literature, perceptions on this subject within the scientific community are linked to at least two significant factors: a) the type of history taught in schools (Cooper, 2002, 2018; O’Harra & O’Harra, 2001; Skjæveland, 2017) and b) perceptions about kindergarten and elementary school children’s skills and ability to understand the historical past (Bruner, 2003).

The Annales School (Burke, 2007; Forster, 1978) and the New History (Munslow, 2014) movement, during the early 20th century, shaped alternative perceptions that marked a shift away from traditional stereotypes regarding the meaning of history and the way in which it should be written and taught. The focus of the study of the historical past shifted from political and military history to the history of people and everyday life, in accordance with the New History perspective. The familiar past, which connects our stories in the present with the stories of the people in the past, came to the forefront of the epistemological debate of historiography and history education (Wineburg, 2010).

Therefore, new topics of interest were added to the existing ones; the history of human cultural activities and everyday life started attracting the attention of researchers as much as national history. Fields such as art history, economic history, history of childhood, history of education, local history, and many others, expanded the horizons of 20th-century historiography. This diversity of thematic approaches in historiography enriched historical narratives with a discourse that addressed topics close to the children’s interests, making it more accessible to early childhood, and expanded the repertoire of educators teaching history from kindergarten to elementary school.

Teaching history through the lens of New History, however, has not universally dominated all educational systems in the Western World. It could be argued that traditional approaches coexist with alternative approaches in the way history is taught, even within the same educational system. Moreover, Rösen (2017, 2012a, 2012b, 2008) identified four forms of historical narrative in history teaching: *traditional*, *exemplary*, *critical*, and *genetic*. The first two consider the historical past as unchangeable and unquestionable, with children having to accept and learn it without doubt. In these forms of historical narrative, the aim is to learn the traditions it brings to the present and to learn from its examples. The other two forms of historical narrative, critical and genetic, accept that the historical past is open to criticism and can be discovered by children and adolescents through scientific approaches to history education.

Furthermore, cognitive psychology has contributed to shaping specific perceptions regarding what a child can learn about the historical past. Piagetian theory (Zaccaria, 1978) was skeptical about children’s ability to perceive concepts such as time and historical time in early childhood, and even in adolescence. Neo-Piagetian cognitive psychologists (Case & Okamoto, 1996) argued that children understand much more than Piaget and his followers, such as Hallam (1969, 1967), believed. According to these newer theories, children’s social environment and their ability to discern significant events in their social and family life and personal history, are factors that facilitate the perception of time and historical time.

Bruner’s theory (2003) that all children can understand all cognitive subjects as long as they are taught in an intellectually appropriate manner, paved the way for introducing young children to historical education. Additionally, Vygotsky’s theory (1993) regarding the contribution of the social and cultural environment to the cognitive development of children and their education (*Sociocultural Theories-SCT*) (Cole, 2003; Lantolf, 2000; Lima, 1995; Wertsch, 1998) enhanced posi-

1 In this article we will use the term “children” instead of “pupils”. This is done for the following reasons: 1) because in some educational systems, including the Greek one, the term “pupils” is used more for elementary school children and less for kindergarten children, 2) this article refers in some cases to “kindergarten children” and in some cases to “elementary school children”, so in order to avoid confusion with the use of the same term “pupils” for different groups of children, it is analyzed each time according to meaning, 3) the term “children in the early years” is, also, used for kindergarten children and children of the first two grades of primary school.

tive perceptions about children's abilities to comprehend the historical past, provided that their everyday sense of time has developed to a satisfactory degree in their thinking.

Sociocultural Theories (SCT) influenced many history scholars, who claimed that children's historical understanding is shaped by their environment (Barton & Levstik, 2009; Barton & McCully, 2005; Cooper 1992, 2002, 2018). These scholars are historians and educators who study the teaching of history in schools, institutional educational policy, as well as the way in which children understand and learn history. This approach connects history and its teaching with cognitive psychology and forms a new field of scientific research regarding the perceptions, representations, and interpretations that students and educators apply when approaching the historical past.

Apart from background knowledge, contemporary studies and research in the field of cognitive psychology also focus on the way in which children learn. Thus, scientific research has turned towards children's *metacognitive knowledge* and *metacognitive skills*. The term metacognitive knowledge (MCK) is associated with people's awareness of themselves, of the cognitive being, of the completion of certain given tasks and their requirements, as well as their strategies and ways to deal with situations created by problem-solving efforts (Prins et al., 2006; Whitebread et al., 2007). Recent research findings show that children, since early childhood, have the ability to develop metacognitive knowledge; they are in other words able to monitor and control the learning process (Larking, 2015; Shamir et al., 2009). Furthermore, children aged 3 to 5 have *metacognitive awareness* regarding the way that their mind or other people's minds work, as well as the requirements of cognitive tasks and the application of strategies, provided that the framework (academic and pedagogical) within which these tasks are developed is appropriately configured for their age and personal characteristics (Marulis et al., 2016). Children's contact with the historical past, through their social and cultural environment and through the execution of assignments, provides many opportunities for self-regulation, socialization and adaptation. In other words, children can develop metacognitive skills through history education. For this reason, it is important for educators to be aware of this theory and its adaptation to the practice of designing and implementing educational programs with a historical orientation.

One of the first studies on young children's historical understanding examined the relationship between narratives and educational approaches to the historical past (Levstik, 1983). One of the conclusions of the study was that the historical past can be approached by children in early childhood without the use of school textbooks, but in a reliable way, with educators utilizing historical sources and properly organizing them. Therefore, as traditional forms of history education become disentangled from strict adherence to the textbook, general perceptions about history teaching become more liberated. Moreover, these perceptions include educational programs aimed towards children in early childhood.

Barton and Levstik (1996) conducted research on the understanding of historical time (one of the fundamental scientific concepts regarding history education and historical epistemology), involving 58 children from kindergarten and every grade of elementary school. They concluded that dates have no meaning for kindergarten children, but they do perceive some elements of historical time, therefore the introduction of this concept to their education makes sense under certain conditions (i.e. in a way that is appropriate for their age). De Groot-Reuvekamp et al. (2014) claimed that it is logical for the educational approach to historical time to start early (even in kindergarten), because it is a concept whose development does not depend on the development of language, but remains an autonomous part of children's thinking. Therefore, the earlier the teaching of this concept begins, the more time and opportunities children get to develop it.

Cooper (1992, 2002, 2018) investigated the approach of the historical past by children in early childhood, using sources coming from their environment (monuments, buildings of historical value etc). Cooper (2002) claimed that language plays an important role in approaching historical time and creates limitations in young children's understanding of this concept, since language is not sufficiently developed in these ages. This, however, does not preclude that young children can approach historical time and the historical past; if done appropriately, this process can aid the development of other skills, such as vocabulary, verbal expression, narrating etc. Therefore, Cooper (2002) argued that we can introduce children to history education through the utilization of historical sources in kindergarten teaching and the use of appropriate chronological vocabulary and expressions. Historical sources are traces of past human activity and, in the case of educational programs with a historical orientation in kindergarten, they are drawn from the environment (examples: photos from the children's personal history, toys from their parents' and grandparents' childhood, objects from museums, from squares and streets with historical names and so on).

There is not much research on educators' perceptions, ideas and representations concerning the teaching of history in early childhood. A handful of researchers have published notable research on this subject in the past 20 years. A recent study (Skjæveland, 2017) showed that educators applying programs of historical orientation employ a series of methods to create an experiential approach of the historical past, such as: personal testimonies from adults; family history; and children's personal history. In 2018, Levstik and Thornton summarized their studies and research on international trends in history education in kindergarten and arrived at the following four directions:

- (1) a field associated with historical content and declarative knowledge, but through first order concepts (historical concepts that carry social experiences in historical speech such as "nation", "society", "family", "childhood" and so on), (2) the field of mental tools used by students to create their own documented representations of the past through second order concepts (concepts that make up historical discourse, such as historical time and space, causality, continuity and change in time [Seixas 2017a, b]), (3) the concept of similarity and difference in time, and (4) inclusive and equitable history education for the common good (Barton & Levstik, 2009)

This brief review of modern international tendencies, directions, and requirements provides evidence that history education can indeed start in kindergarten. This can be achieved through compensatory and differentiated education; in relation to public uses of history (museum and monument visits etc); alternative and creative teaching methods (experiences of children and of those familiar to them, teaching through art, utilizing comics etc); or through the use of historical sources in the educational process. In modern societies, children are aware of the historical past in multiple ways (through stories they hear from their family and social environment, through children's literature, and through public uses of history). In kindergarten and elementary school, however, this connection should be more systematic and developed with proper planning.

These various perspectives highlight both support for the introduction of young children to history education and skepticism towards the idea. This is, therefore, a reason to look at the views of the teachers themselves on an issue that is likely to be of concern to them during their careers in education, and which may be a factor in their professional and scientific development.

Social representations

Social representations are very important in the orientation of teaching. Educators' beliefs and representations affect their way of thinking and the methods in which they approach history teaching. Maggioni et al. (2009) showed that the scientific beliefs of prospective and currently employed educators (students and active educators) influence the way they approach and apply the historical past in teaching, as well as their use of critical thinking in their teaching (such as posing questions, using historical sources, the causality of historical facts and the interpretation of people's actions). Social representations are mental frameworks shaped in the minds of individuals through the influence of social norms, stereotypes, socially acceptable perceptions - essentially through the interaction of individuals with their immediate and broader social environment. Educators working in schools and prospective educators studying to become teachers are individuals who strive to deepen their knowledge of their subject. They possess social representations and furthermore, their thinking is intricate on matters related to their field. They have a repertoire of symbols, metaphors, and examples that may interact with their social representations (Wilson & Wineburg, 1993). Therefore, there is a particular interest in exploring their social representations, as they constitute a specialized audience, and their views may differ from the so-called common sense.

Bronfenbrenner's theory (1992) greatly affected contemporary scholars of education and helped elucidate the complexity of the systems that are responsible for the development of children's personality. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner described systems having the child in their center and developing around it, as the following concentric circles: the *microsystem* (the child itself is in the center of this circle, specific educational programs, peer groups, the neighborhood); the *mesosystem* (family, school, educational policy); the *exosystem* (such as the parents' social and financial status, mass media, the environment surrounding the school); the *macrosystem* (ideology, values and customs, social representations and stereotypes); and the *chronome-*

ter (changes in the environment referring to life in school and every subject separately) (Darling, 2007; Duerden & Witt, 2010; Spencer, 2008). Children's history education is part of their general education, and their historical culture is about broad aspects of their personality. Therefore, it is also shaped by complex environmental and social factors, as stated in Bronfenbrenner's theory. After all, modern scholars have pointed out the importance of children's social and family environment in their history education (Barton & Levstik, 2009; Cooper, 2002 2018).

The investigation of the relation between social representations and the perceptions of current and prospective educators certainly needs to be enriched with new research and studies. As made clear from the review presented, however, this issue has been of considerable interest to the researchers who have worked on it. Furthermore, scholars like Moniot highlighted the importance of social representations in history teaching 30 years ago (Moniot, 1993). It has been claimed that historical thinking comprises an amalgamation of social representations, personal knowledge, and attitudes, as well as validated historical knowledge (Lautier & Allieu-Mary, 2008). The theoretical foundation of the studies on the subject of social representations and their connection to historical thought traces its roots to the theories of Vygotsky and Moscovici (Vygotsky, 1993; Moscovici, 2001; 1994; 1988). Social representations are ideas that shape forms of reality which we could associate with the term common sense and could be examined with regard to their dynamic relation to everyday and social life (Moniot, 1993).

History education and educators in Greece: Description of the educational system and references to the curricula

In Greece, institutional history education begins in the third grade of elementary school. History as a cognitive subject is assigned 90 minutes per week, one school lesson corresponding to 45 minutes. It is defined by a nation-wide special curriculum and school textbook, one for each of the six grades of elementary school. The institutional history is taught in the third, fourth, fifth and sixth grades. History is focused on the nation, while there are some references to European and World history. Familiarizing children with the past is developed through many historical periods, ranging from ancient to modern times.

Greek kindergarten curricula define the parameters of history education and suggest that educational programs of a historical orientation should be applied starting in kindergarten. The 2003 curriculum, which is valid to this day, mentions familiarizing children with the past (OGG of H.R. 304/v2/2003, p. 4322) through the concept of time, through distinguishing between present, past, and future, and through concepts of change in time (observation of changes in their lives, in school, local and community history, in everyday habits and in various customs). Furthermore, this curriculum connects familiarization with the past to environmental studies and language itself, and supports interdisciplinary approaches to the educational process.

A new curriculum concerning every level of education was published in 2021 and applied initially only in specific "experimental" schools; its general application across the country is planned for after the 2022-2023 school year. In the kindergarten curriculum there are specific references to history education (OGG of H.R. 5961/v2/2021, pp. 76290-76294). In this curriculum, history education is connected to school performances, feasts and memorial days, to art, to the nation and national symbols (Greece and other people), the world, culture, tradition and the development of critical attitudes. It is also connected to the introduction to the concept of time and chronology, continuity in time, forming questions and collecting data associated with historical events. For the first two grades of elementary school no autonomous history curriculum exists, but in the framework of continuity in education, history-oriented educational programs make up a part of school performances and other special programs, such as those about the environment, culture, visits to museums, landmarks and other cultural institutions.

In spite of the references to introducing children to the historical past starting in kindergarten, which are made in the Greek curricula, scholars and professional historians interested in the teaching of history in the school environment in Greece are focused on secondary education or on the epistemology and theory of history (Avdela, 1998). Furthermore, due to a lack of relevant studies or research, there is a gap in the literature concerning the views of teachers

and trainees on the introduction of history education in kindergarten; we also do not know how they themselves perceive the importance, nature, and form of historical education for children in early childhood. This is a gap worth exploring.

Research questions

This study examines the working hypothesis that educators support introducing children in early childhood to history education, and that they would plan and apply educational programs with a historical orientation. The research questions of this study are the following:

1. What factors shape the views of the participants concerning the introduction of young children to history education, and what is their relation to social representations?
2. How do social representations about introducing history to children in early childhood relate to the nature and form of history taught in schools?
3. Which specific elements of the design and application of educational programs with historical orientation would be the main interest of the educators who participated?

Identity of the research

This research was carried out on university students studying to become educators, and currently employed educators. The students attended a course during the spring semester of the 2021-2022 academic year at the Department of Primary Education of the University of the Aegean, which aims to prepare educators to work in elementary school as teachers. The title of the course is: "Introduction to History Education for children in early childhood (in kindergarten and the first two grades of elementary school)". In the context of this course, students had the chance to become aware of theoretical issues regarding the introduction of children to history education and the concept of historical time, historical culture, cognitive theories on history education, and other relevant issues. They also had the opportunity to interact with a reasonable number of educational programs appropriate for children in early childhood that have been implemented in Greek kindergartens and published in scientific magazines and conference proceedings. It is important to note that this university course was first taught during the academic semester when the present research study was conducted (2021-2022).

Methodology

Thematic Analysis was the methodology used for the collection and processing of the data of this study. This method was chosen because it was deemed appropriate for the task of investigating social representations of the target groups, since it is a qualitative analysis related to Grounded Theory, which examines the influence of social structures on human thinking (Corbin & Holt, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007). According to Braun and Clark (2006), this method focuses on identifying the main topics in a data source, aiming to analyze and comment on what participants in a study mention. The interpretative repertoires that are included in the themes identified in the data analysis represent a pattern that appears when all the data collected is codified and classified at the second and third levels (creation of codes, grouping and searching for patterns, repertoires). The study's main goal is to analyze the participants' answers in order to discover common themes and identify the elements that give meaning to their views and feelings (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible method, because it is compatible with numerous epistemological positions (such as realism, constructivism and phenomenology). The topics that arise from the answers given in the open-ended, semi-structured interviews could come from data (inductive coding), be based on specific characteristics that researchers show interest in (productive method), or even come from a combination of the two aforementioned methods (Issaris & Pourkos, 2015). This study relies mainly on the productive method of data coding, while combining it with the inductive method when called for, depending on the answers given and the way the participants answer (single-word answers, complex, analytical, etc).

Sample and research process

The research sample consists of 26 participants, 19 of whom were university students and 7 were currently employed educators. Participants were randomly selected from two major metropolitan areas of Greece, namely Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as the island of Rhodes (urban and island areas); all those who systematically attended the course participated in the survey. Regarding their educational background, we can mention that active educators were graduates of a four-year BA program at the Department of Sciences of Preschool Education and Educational Design and the Department of Primary Education in Greek Universities, while prospective educators had completed high school and were attending the Department of Primary Education of the University of the Aegean. All participants were female. The total number of participants (currently employed and prospective educators) was deemed sufficient to conduct qualitative research using Thematic Analysis, because content analysis research can focus on a small sample, small-sized groups, or even on specific points of a text (Cohen et al., 2007). Despite the volume of the content resulting from the interviews, adequate time was dedicated to studying and analyzing them, to conducting the data collection carefully, and to analyzing them in a systematic way.

The data collection was carried out using an interview form which was uploaded to an internet cloud service (Google Forms). The interview plan can be found in the Appendix of this text. The purpose was for currently employed educators and students to have access to this plan regardless of location and to allow them to choose how much time to allocate to answering. They could concentrate on the plan in a quiet place of their own choosing and take as much time as they wished to answer the plan questions in writing, without external influences. It is estimated that the response time for participants to answer the plan questions is from twenty minutes to an hour approximately.

Reliability and validity

The validity of this research was based on Maxwell's (1992) model regarding the criteria for assessing the validity of qualitative research (Mills et al., 2017). These criteria are as follows: 1) Descriptive validity, 2) Interpretive validity, 3) Theoretical validity, 4) Generalizability (Internal and External), 5) Evaluative validity. As this model was adopted to ensure the reliability and validity of the research, this paper provides a holistic and multifaceted approach to the theoretical framework, without expressing the subjective opinion of the author. For this reason, extensive reference is made in the theoretical part of this article to the different perspectives on this subject found in the international literature. Furthermore, the identity and methodology of this research is accurately described, and the author emphasizes the perspectives of all those who participated in the research. Data collection and analysis was conducted by carefully studying the research results using the rigorous methodological approach of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006), which aims to codify the content of participants' answers, and express this coding through specific classification of the responses into themes and super-themes. Themes were not predefined prior to data collection, but formulated based on the initial coding of the response content. Namely, the final framing of the analysis and discussion of the results was only done once the responses had been studied at three levels: 1) coding of the verbal elements of the responses from which meaning can be derived (creating codes); 2) classification of the codes into broader categories (themes); and 3) classification of the themes into broader categories (super-themes). The data analysis that follows, as well as the discussion and results sections, will explain the degree to which the present study responds to the working hypothesis and research questions. Also, issues concerning the generalizability of the research results will be discussed. In qualitative research, the results are not generalizable, because their sample is small. In the present research study there is an internal generalizability of its results, which forms a framework (general internal scheme) that organizes the social representations of

the participants. This framework comprises the basic answers to the research questions. At all stages of the research study the author of this article remained emotionally detached and did not express personal opinions on the subject. The researcher and the author of this article are the same person because it was not possible to find a collaborator or external evaluator of the research and a critical reader of this article.

Data analysis

The opinions of the participants were organized into 241 codes (one code is the smallest unit that can still contain meaning and express social representations, views and interpretations), which were further classified into seven themes and three superthemes. The themes and superthemes of this study can be found in Table 1:

Table 1: Superthemes and Themes

Superthemes	Themes
The child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and abilities • Challenges • The child's place in the educational process • Learning benefits
The educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The educator's "profile" • Challenges • Their training regarding history education
The educational process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics (what must be done) • The process of introduction to history education • The educational methodology

The final classification of research data shows that prospective and currently employed educators who took part in this research view the introduction of children to history education as a process that is characterized by a three-sided relationship between the educator, the child, and institutional education (kindergarten and elementary school) (Figure 1). No currently employed or prospective educator made any reference to the children's close environment (family, kinder-

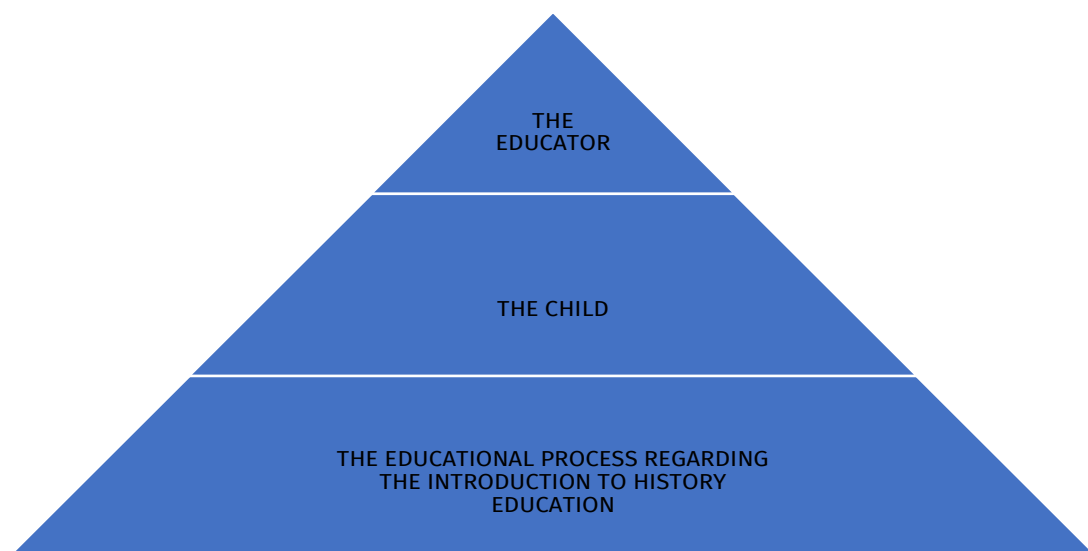


Figure 1: Representation of the "educator-child-educational process" relationship

garten/school environment, friends) regarding the creation of representations about the past and the historical past, nor did they mention educational policy on children's introduction to history education (curriculum, instructions for educators, the influence of local authorities and the school and kindergarten management).

Figure 1 contains a pyramidal representation of the "educator-child-educational process" relationship, as it emerged from the opinions expressed by the participants in this research. The educational process is placed at the base of the pyramid, since it included the largest number of codes and references (182 codes) among the participants' answers. The smallest concentration of codes (23) was found in supertheme 2 ("*The educator*") and for this reason it was placed at the top of the pyramid. Several references correspond to supertheme 1 ("*The child*") (36 codes), but significantly fewer than supertheme 3 ("*The educational process*"). Therefore, it was placed in the middle.

Supertheme 1: "The child"

In this section we will gather the views of the current and prospective teachers who participated in the study about supertheme "The child". In the present study, the teachers' responses have been grouped into four categories (themes): "*Skills and abilities*", "*Challenges*", "*The child's place in the educational process*", and "*Learning benefits*". Coding the study of the responses in line with the previous themes, it can be noted that participants mentioned both difficulties and benefits arising from the child's participation in the process of introduction to history education. The difficulties brought up by the participants include: children's difficulties in understanding concepts such as historical time and causality up to and including the first two grades of elementary school; difficulties understanding the complexity of historical narrative, historical language, political and military history, as well as historical trauma. These views associated the introduction to history education with a traditional teaching method. According to the interviews, the main elements of this method are historical events and historical narratives with a focus on national, political and military history.

Participants' verbal expressions that carried more optimistic views and representations, mentioned that children can indeed understand elements of the historical past in early childhood. These elements can be found in the children's immediate environment and can be adjusted to suit the educational process and the children's age. Specific elements that were mentioned included local history, family history, personal history, and the comparison of elements between the past and the present.

The educational benefits that children gain from history education in kindergarten was classified. The answers given by the participants further strengthen that it is beneficial for children of an early age to be introduced to history education. Specifically, they believe that children who are introduced to history education during the first stages of their school life gain critical thinking skills, are introduced to historical thinking, begin to form a historical consciousness, can comprehend some historical concepts, and enrich their knowledge. They also believe that the introduction to history education contributes to the development of broad cognitive and linguistic skills. Furthermore, they believe that it helps children develop empathy, especially when history education is used together with anti-racist education and the creation of an anti-racist consciousness. Therefore, children develop a sense of acceptance towards diversity, of peace, equality and freedom, of mutual respect and acceptance of "others" history.

Supertheme 2: "The educator"

All participants in this study mention the role of educators in the introduction of children to history. Therefore, a separate supertheme called "The educator" was created. Classifying all the answers that were relevant to this supertheme resulted in the following three themes: "*The educator's profile*", "*Challenges*", "*Their training in history education*".

To summarize the classification for this particular supertheme we can note that the participants in this study consider the role of the educator significant. Specifically, educators are seen as a fundamental element in designing and implementing educational programs with a historical orientation. Educators who took part in this research believe that the role of a kindergarten or elementary school teacher, who implements such programs, is to be a leader, someone who helps, supports, and encourages. The educator must be an intuitive, active, objective, and open-minded (free of prejudice) coordinator of the educational process. All the above means that they recognize the role of the educator in introducing children of an early age to history

education, its value and importance. In one of the questionnaires, the educator is actually referred to as a “role model” for children. Regarding their views on the profile of the educator, they fall within a spectrum that ranges from instructional to open-minded. In other words, everyone supports a democratic profile of the educator, who is very close to children and encourages, advises, and helps them, does research into what and how to teach and is innovative so as to solve problems.

Regarding the difficulties the educator faces with regard to introducing children to history education, those mentioned are limited class time, lack of time for self-education, difficulty managing controversial and traumatic issues, lack of historical knowledge, lack of knowledge regarding the methodology used in applied programs of historical orientation and the difficulty of planning an educational program according to the principles of history education. They also mention a lack of relevant educational material and the gap that exists in the Greek educational system when it comes to aiding the educator in their search for relevant material (lack of funds, lack of guidance and seminars regarding special educational issues like history education). Another reference is made to historical discourse, since it presents certain difficulties (terminology difficult to understand, complex narration) and the difficulty in simplifying it, so as to make it more understandable to children. They also mention the difficulty in implementing specialized methodological approaches such as differentiated teaching, especially in the cases of classes which include students who can easily comprehend the subject of history, while others cannot perform so well. Moreover, they mention the difficulty the educators face in putting into practice everything they have planned.

Based on all the above, we can point out that educators who took part in this study believe that as early as kindergarten, Greek teachers are willing to help their students in all aspects of school life, including history education. They also believe in the value of the educator’s work and that teachers can research, innovate and take initiatives to implement educational programs of historical orientation. However, they face many challenges posed by the educational system, which does not provide them with the appropriate means to advance into new or alternative teaching methods. What’s more, they point out “gaps” in the system, which they associate with lack of special seminars, lack of funds and educational material, and lack of updated knowledge on the principles of history teaching.

Supertheme 3: “The educational process”

Participants in this research study claim that the educational process holds fundamental meaning when it comes to introducing young children to history education. Since this subject was mentioned by all participants, a supertheme dedicated to the educational process was created, and divided into three themes: “*Ethics (what should be done)*”, “*The process of introduction to history education*”, “*The educational methodology*”.

All participants argue that the educational process has great significance in changing beliefs about this issue. It seems that they are influenced towards assuming a skeptical point of view by their experience of the Greek educational system, which does not encourage the planning and implementation of educational programs with historical orientation in kindergarten and elementary school. This, however, does not mean that they are dogmatic with regard to such programs or that they refuse to implement them; neither does it mean that they do not recognize their usefulness and importance within the educational process.

At this point, we will examine in more detail the viewpoints, the social representations, and the interpretations of the participants, regarding the educational process (supertheme 3). As shown in Table 1, the answers can be classified into three thematic units:

- “Ethics”, meaning what is considered ethical, what is appropriate to do. This concept has a double meaning for the participants. On one hand, they believe that there is an ethical aspect to history education, and in turn to the introduction of children of an early age to it (what are the limits separating the historical past as expressed in historiography, and how it can be taught in kindergarten and the first two grades of elementary school). On the other hand, they wish to see history education added to the educational system, so as to create the ideal conditions for the introduction of children to it. This aspect could be called the desired outcome, what they wish to see happen.
- “The process of introduction to history education”. In this thematic unit, it becomes clear that the educators who took part in this research perceive the introduction to history education as a complex pedagogical process that needs to be developed in stages over

the course of several years, before using a school textbook. They see it as a preparatory process for school history, which is systematically taught in Greek schools starting in third grade.

- “The educational methodology”, in which they reported a variety of methodological approaches considered appropriate for the introduction of children to history education.

In the thematic unit of “Ethics”, one finding that can be considered important are the opinions of the participants regarding the age limits of the introduction to history education and the criteria that inform their views. Since this finding goes to the heart of the present study, it will be analyzed at this point, separately from other findings. Furthermore, while the methodology of this research does not include quantitative characteristics, some which are considered essential will be mentioned at this point, in order to help readers better comprehend the analysis that follows, without affecting the systematic analysis and presentation of the research data.

Discussion

The background of social representations

In their majority, the educators who took part in this research were positive towards the introduction of children to history education in kindergarten. A negative attitude towards this was found in the answers of only four participants, a small number when compared to the total number of participants (26).

Specifically, one of the students mentions: “...They (the children) could do so (be introduced to history education) from a young age, and with short and specific references, but I would say that mostly, the preferred age would be 11 or 12 years old, when they start to develop a more critical stance towards the world and begin to become more aware of the world around them and what they read”. In other parts of this interview, references to stereotypical beliefs about history are made such as “history repeats itself”, “people learn from the past”, “there is a way to associate history with books, traditions and the arts”. In this interview, it becomes quite clear that there is a connection between views on the age limits of introduction to history education, and social stereotypes about the characteristics of teaching at school, which correspond to a paradigmatic form of historical consciousness.

In another interview, a currently employed kindergarten teacher mentions that among the goals of history education is that “they (the children) should live in the present while having the knowledge and information of the past, so they can move on (in life)”. In another part of her answer, she mentions: “I guess that my answer is in contrast with the goal of the course (she means the academic course, within whose framework this study took place), but that is what we are here for, to learn. Personally, I think that the third grade of elementary school is appropriate for children to start learning about historical facts, or maybe even the fourth”. It is yet another interview that confirms the association of a form of historical consciousness with paradigmatic and traditional beliefs and social stereotypes regarding history education. There are similar findings that emerge from the other two interviews that identify with this point of view.

As mentioned in the “sample and research process” section of this paper, seven currently employed educators took part in this research. Therefore, it is important to examine their views on this issue compared to the group of students who took part in the same research. No currently employed educator confirms the opinion of the four students who were negative towards introducing children to history education in kindergarten or the two first grades of elementary school. The currently employed educators confirm the opinion of the majority of the students, who are in favor of introducing young children to history education. Furthermore, one kindergarten teacher mentions that: “Of course (she means that children can of course, even in kindergarten, be introduced to history education), in kindergarten we already work with educational programs, for example “museum cases” which are of historical orientation (“museum cases” are specially created educational material from museums, that can be transported in the form of a “suitcase” to the school grounds and is frequently borrowed by some kindergartens). In another part of the interview, she mentions: “The experiences they gain (from history education) have long-term benefits for children”; in another part she points out that “(if introduced to history education at a young age) they will know how the history they study is created”. This percep-

tion is associated with social representations of history as “living” or “alive” and the educational process as an investigative, experiential, cooperative and team process through which the young child comes into contact with the methodology of becoming familiar with the historical past, in a way appropriate for their age. This refers to the association between history education and the genetic form of historical narrative as per Rösen’s classification (2012b; 2017), which has been explained in the theoretical part of this paper. This view argues that the introduction of young children to history education is part of the knowledge to be received by children. The rest of the educators (22 prospective and currently employed) who were positive towards the introduction of children attending kindergarten or the first two grades of elementary school to history education, associate this view with children’s development of critical thinking and ability, as well as the development of historical thinking and consciousness.

Another point worth studying comparatively, was the association of opinions that were negative towards the introduction of young children to history education, with question C3: “What are your thoughts regarding the connection between the curricula about the historical past and history, and daily life in kindergarten and the first two grades of elementary school? Do you believe that the curriculum is compatible with the educational programs of historical orientation that are being applied in kindergarten?” (see Appendix). This question refers to the connection between everyday life in the kindergarten and history education of a formal or informal type (meaning either that references to official curricula in history education are used to support educational programs implemented in kindergarten or that references to the historical past are made through school life activities, such as national holidays and anniversaries, local festivals etc). The four students who were negative towards the early introduction of children to history education, answered this question by saying that: “Indeed, everything is possible, as long as we know the way”, “I am not sure it would be feasible for them to be just of historical orientation”, “Indeed, it is feasible if the educator can combine them and properly manage it (this issue)”, “Children must be slowly introduced to educational programs”. All four of these answers reveal a lack of awareness regarding the kindergarten curriculum, which is not entirely unexpected coming from prospective educators who have no teaching experience and have not been specifically informed about this curriculum. However, it should be pointed out that this study took place within the framework of a specific course, which did include relevant information; therefore, the remaining 22 students did not share the same opinion about this topic. It is evident that this was information that the four students in the specific interviews had missed. Based on the previous observations then, it becomes obvious that in this study, the views of educators on the appropriate age of introduction to history education are associated with their personal social representations about the aims of history education, their beliefs about the kind and shape of historical narrative that must or should be cultivated in schools, as well as the awareness they possess regarding the historical orientation of educational programs in kindergarten and elementary school.

The interviews with the participants also reveal information about their views on the appropriate age of introduction to history education, that concern ethics; in other words, what they believe should be done regarding young or older children’s history education. These elements refer to the skills of children which the participants in this research believe should be developed, and to the content of history education. We could classify this data into two categories which agree with the previous analysis of educators’ views regarding the appropriate age for history education. These are the following: A) Educators who believe that history education can start in kindergarten. This category comprises the majority of participants (22). B) Educators who believe that history education should start in the third grade of elementary school. This comprises four participants, a minority in this sample.

Introduction to history education and the nature of history and learning

According to the views of participants in this research, as studied and presented in the previous section, opinions on the appropriate age for the introduction to history education correlates with social representations about the nature of school history and the relative learning outcomes. Participants who argued in favor of introducing young children to history education also indicated that this educational process may help children: develop critical and historical thinking and consciousness; be more accepting of “others” and “diversity”; strengthen their sense of mutual respect; broaden their horizons comprehend historical concepts; enrich their existing knowledge, create new knowledge, and develop the skills to explore it; develop linguistic skills; develop empathy and historical empathy; develop their personality and gain moral and mental

development. According to this perspective, the content of history education is, or should be oriented towards the development of historical thinking, consciousness, literacy, and historical empathy; it also emphasizes the pedagogy of peace, that is the development of concepts such as freedom, equality, and peace, as well as a turn towards the history of “others” and anti-racist education. Additionally, these participants mention that history education should be oriented towards creating the active and democratic citizens of the future, the development of a set of principles and values for children, and towards their socialization. Furthermore, they mention the need for history education to be oriented towards the development of a cultural identity and to be conducted in an age-appropriate way.

According to the participants who argued in favor of the introduction of historical education in the third grade of primary school, history education must or should focus on historical facts, search for causes behind them, develop a national consciousness, and help people “learn” from the historical past. These participants identified history education with historical facts and ignored the multiple functions history education has in our days such as the development of historical thinking, consciousness, culture and empathy, its effect on creating an identity for individuals, its relationship with modern civilization etc. The results of this research showed that the participants in favor of the introduction of young children to history education perceive history education and young children’s introduction to it as a complicated process which is associated with different aspects of children’s personalities, such as the development of skills, the creation of an identity, being acceptive of “others” and of “diversity” etc. On the other hand, participants that were negatively inclined towards the introduction of young children to history education identify history education with its content, which they believe should be shaped according to national history and focus only on historical facts.

Design and applications of educational programs

Based on the above, it stands to reason that the 22 participants in favor of the introduction of young children to history education account for the most of the elements (182 codes) distributed in the thematic sections that correspond to the application and methodology of the educational process (Table 1, “The educational process”). Regarding the educational process of introducing young children to history education, the opinions given confirm the previous data and help showcase its multimodality. The process is, for instance, associated with acquainting young children with their family history, local history and anniversaries, visits to cultural and educational institutions, and with public uses of history. It is also mentioned that provisions need to be made for adequate class time so that appropriate activities can progress, and meta-cognitive functions can be targeted, and for the appropriate awareness of educators. Another view expressed is that the introduction of young children to history education prepares them for the subject of history, which they will be taught at a later stage, namely the other grades of elementary school as well as secondary education.

Regarding the thematic unit of methodological approaches to the educational process, a variety of methods is mentioned which greatly reinforces the view that it is possible to introduce young children to history education, as long as it is done appropriately. It is also a complicated process from which everybody has something to gain (including the educational system, the educators and the children). Furthermore, the frequent mention of the educator’s methodological approaches is further emphasized by the variety of suggestions, which indicates that the participants believe in the value of a proper educational process. Also, the appropriate methodological approaches, with their variety and complexity, are frequently mentioned, even repeated within the same interview; this indicates that the participants believe that a superficial approach to the historical past based on a one-sided narrative, is not sufficient when it comes to the modern school. It seems that most of the participants in this research share a common view on the value and importance of history education for young children. Furthermore, they believe that there are multiple benefits from introducing young children to history education, provided this can be achieved through the combination of multiple and varied educational actions and activities.

Participants mention the following methodological approaches: utilizing historical sources in the educational process; planning and applying projects; cooperative teaching and working in groups; using computers and interactive white boards; creating timelines and decoding data found in them; the reverse approach to time (from the past to the present); utilizing appropriate books; using audiovisual media, movies and documentary films; using images and photos. Furthermore, they mentioned the methods applied in the educational process should, in their views, include classroom visits by persons such as: “experts”; familiar people (such as chil-

dren's relatives, their grandparents); people belonging to local authorities (clergymen, people working for the local government); as well as artists etc. Other appropriate educational methods mentioned by participants include visits to historical and archaeological sites, institutions and museums, as well as cultural and educational institutions. Methodological approaches were also mentioned that facilitate the educational process, enhance inquiry-based learning and help with issues that have to do with comprehension; these approaches include: tracing children's existing knowledge and representations, dealing with cognitive conflicts, using concept mapping, brainstorming, creating workshops, developing discourse, fostering a democratic classroom environment, creating motives and finally, reflection. Participants also mentioned the interdisciplinary character of educational programs with a historical orientation, and their practical implementation in kindergarten, the involvement of institutions with scientific prestige in the educational process, such as universities, and abolishing the practice of learning the history textbooks by heart from history education. Regarding the interdisciplinary character of history education, they mentioned that the introduction to history education can be done through the following fields: Psychology, Sociology, Geography, Literature, Economy, Music (songs with historical content), Theater (dramatization, puppet shows, theater games), Arts, Environmental Education, Museum Education.

Conclusions

The educators who took part in this research study pointed out specific benefits that they believe children will gain by being introduced to history education in kindergarten and elementary school. These benefits were: development of critical and historical thinking; forming historical consciousness; comprehending certain historical concepts that can be characterized as difficult or complicated, such as the concept of historical time; enhancing their background knowledge; developing broad linguistic skills; fostering and developing empathy and historical empathy; being acceptive towards the differentiation of "others"; coming in contact with and getting to know about "others" history, and combining history education with anti-racist education. Furthermore, participants who were positive towards introducing young children to history education also mentioned the development of children's personality and creating a framework of values such as peace, equality, freedom and mutual respect. They also claimed that the introduction to history education increases children's moral and mental capacity and broadens their horizons.

This study showed that participants' education and experience affect their social representations. Specifically, it is ascertained that 22 participants in this research suggest that the introduction in history education is possible and beneficial to the children. The number of negative opinions is small (only four participants). Furthermore, the research showed that active educators who were aware of history education for young children and knew the curricula, shared the belief that it was possible and beneficial for children aged four to eight. All the above leads us to conclude that teachers' education and familiarity with the subject is positively associated with their views on introducing young children to history education. Despite the fact that the Greek kindergarten curriculum includes references to the historical education of young children (OGG of H. R./5961/v2/2021, pp. 76290–76294), and despite the existence of a relevant academic course (in the context of which the present research was conducted), there are some skeptical opinions on the issue. These views are in line with traditional approaches to history teaching, and with the focus on historical facts and dates.

The findings included in the Data Analysis section of this article make it clear that participants believe that the introduction of young children to history education is associated with 3 factors: the child, the educator, and the educational process. This derives from the study of all the interviews, and from their comparative examination. It is evident then that all the educators who took part in this research believe that young children's introduction to history education is a systematic educational and pedagogical process. However, the participants limited the various factors of this systematic approach to institutional history education to only three: the educator, the child and the educational process. Neither the children's environment (family, social) nor the educational policy regarding history education were mentioned - the latter being shaped by the central government through curricula or by more localized factors such as the educational administration of a region or prefecture, the management of a school, the local authorities and unofficial forms of education (cultural institutions, clubs, museums, etc).

This research, despite its important findings, has some limitations. It is a small-sample research, utilizing the research methodology of qualitative analysis (thematic analysis), without quantitative characteristics. Therefore, its results and conclusions cannot be generalized. For this to happen, the research should be conducted on a large sample, with its data capture and analysis adapted to quantitative analysis methods. All these changes practically mean a new research design and implementation with different characteristics. This specific methodological approach was chosen in order to study the social representations, interpretative repertoires and forms of historical consciousness of educators who participated in this research, and to make a connection with their mindset. We hope that future research will be able to study expanded samples, to allow for both qualitative and quantitative characteristics to be extracted.

To Cite This Article

Fardi, K. (2024). Should history education begin in kindergarten? Investigating the social representations of prospective and currently employed educators regarding the introduction of children in early childhood to history education. *Historical Thinking, Culture, and Education*. (1)1. <https://doi.org/10.12685/htce.1286>

Peer Review

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymized during review.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Mr Savvas-Alexandros-Pavlidis for the detailed supervision of the English language.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Appendix

Interview questionnaire

Introduction:

This questionnaire comes in the form of an “interview on paper” regarding the appropriate age for introducing children to history education. The main purpose of this questionnaire is to examine for the first time the perspectives and social representations of students attending an academic course on history education and young children. The perspectives put forward in the framework of this research study must be independent and personal. Please present your views in a brief paragraph, as if providing a spoken answer. The questionnaire will be answered anonymously.

Questions:

- A1. Please present yourself briefly. What is your formal education?
- A2. What is your connection with education? Do you have any experience, personal or professional, regarding preschool and elementary school education? (Is there a child in your family who is attending kindergarten or elementary school and shares their experiences with you? Have you ever been in the kindergarten or elementary school environment (for work experience during your studies, to attend school performances or any other reason)?

- B1. What do you think is the importance of history education today for children of all grades?
- B2. Which educational benefits do you believe modern history education is associated with?
- B3. What should the main goals of modern history education be and what purposes should it serve?

- C1. What is the age you consider appropriate for children to come in contact with the historical past and why?
- C2. What are your thoughts on the importance of introducing children attending kindergarten or the first two classes of elementary school to the historical past?
- C3. What are your thoughts regarding the connection between the curricula about the historical past and history, and daily life in kindergarten and the first two grades of elementary school? Do you believe that the curriculum is compatible with the educational programs of historical orientation that are being applied in kindergarten?
- C4. If you have experience implementing educational programs with historical orientation in kindergarten or the first two grades of elementary school, which issues concerning such programs do you consider significant?
- C5. Which methods would you use to apply educational programs of historical orientation in kindergarten or the first two grades of elementary school?
- C6. If you were to design and apply an educational program of historical orientation, how would you organize the educational process?
- C7. What do you think would be the role of the teacher in an educational program of historical orientation in kindergarten or the first two grades of elementary school, and how would the children participate?
- C8. Can educational programs of historical orientation be connected to other cognitive fields in the kindergarten or elementary school curriculum?
- C9. Would you involve other individuals or institutions in the design, organization and implementation of educational programs of historical orientation? If so, who would they be, for what reason and how?
- C10. What kind of knowledge, information, topics, concepts and processes do you think that kindergarten children are capable of understanding regarding the historical past?
- C11. What elements of the historical past do you believe kindergarten children or those in the first grades of elementary school are unable to understand?

- C12. What difficulties do you believe you would face in the design and application of educational programs of historical orientation in kindergarten or the first grades of elementary school?
- C13. What benefits do you believe children gain from attending educational programs of historical orientation in kindergarten or the first two grades of elementary school? (short term: while attending these programs; long-term: when approaching historical knowledge through the school textbook later in elementary school)