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BOOK REVIEW

***INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING RIVAL HISTORIES:
PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSES TO CONTESTED NARRATIVES
AND THE HISTORY WARS***

**EDITED BY HENRIK ÅSTRÖM ELMERSJÖ, ANNA CLARK,
AND MONIKA VINTEREK**

LONDON: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2017. XXI + 292 PAGES

\$119.99 (HARDCOVER), \$89.00 (E-BOOK)

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This edited volume, *International Perspectives on Teaching Rival Histories: Pedagogical Responses to Contested Narratives and the History Wars*, presents a survey of various approaches used to teach competing histories. All the chapters address the same question—“How do, or should, teachers pedagogically engage with rival histories?” (p. 2)—and explore the epistemological implications of teaching more than one narrative in the history classroom. Editors Henrik Åström Elmersjö, Anna Clark, and Monika Vinterek frame these issues theoretically in their introduction, and Peter Seixas’ epilogue offers a concluding discussion of the range of studies presented. The ten remaining chapters, which are divided into the three thematic sections detailed below, examine practices in geographically disparate countries.

The volume offers a unified theoretical approach to the topic of teaching history, as all the chapters draw on Seixas’ three-pronged typology that distinguishes between a “best story” approach, a “disciplinary” approach, and a “post-modern” approach. The editors connect these pedagogical approaches to epistemological tendencies among historians, emphasizing similarities among a reconstructionist, constructionist, and deconstructionist stance. In the best-story/reconstructionist approach, history is viewed and taught as knowable and able to be conveyed accurately by a narrative. This traditional approach to history aims to transmit a (dominant) collective identity. With the disciplinary/constructionist stance, students learn to think like historians, which involves “doing” history by evaluating different sources and narratives. According to the editors, the post-modern/deconstructionist approach contains two strands—the moderate stance and the radical stance. The moderate stance, what we might call historiographical, seeks to understand how history is written, by whom, and to what (political) end.

Rather than focusing on narratives, this approach considers the power dynamics inherent in writing and teaching about history. The radical stance goes farther, in that it considers history completely unknowable and maintains that the chasm between narrative and the past as it actually happened is unbridgeable.

The book is separated into three sections, in addition to the theoretical framing provided by the editors' introduction and Seixas' conclusion. The chapters in the first part, "Historical Cultures and National Histories," explore how historical cultures can clash and how different actors have tried to bridge gaps within and across national boundaries. The approaches in this section, which vary from a case study to the more broadly theoretical, offer suggestions for how these divisions may be approached in the future. The second section, "Official Histories in Multicultural Societies," focuses on specific cases from a range of countries. These chapters evaluate tensions between or within official narratives. As the editors rightly point out, these varied case studies of pedagogical practice demonstrate similar findings, most notably that teachers' unexamined emotional investment in particular narratives has a powerful impact on their classroom practice. These chapters thus convey the conviction that teachers in multicultural societies must be made aware of their own bias if they are to teach effectively for conflict resolution. The third section, "Critical Thinking and Multiperspectivity," analyzes specific initiatives that promote more critical approaches to history teaching. These analyses combine the book's overarching theoretical focus with practical examples and critical assessments.

International Perspectives on Teaching Rival Histories will be of interest to scholars and practitioners in the field of education in emergencies, particularly regarding how societies in conflict can navigate competing historical narratives (see Paulson 2015). The theoretical coherence of the book, drawing consistently on Seixas' typology of history teaching, provides a useful framework for scholars, policy-makers, curriculum developers, and educators. The geographical and chronological diversity of the case studies present a wealth of contexts from which to draw models for practice. The editors and most of the authors employ a normative approach to the subject, thus offering guidance for practitioners of education in divided societies. There does appear to be some variation in how the authors interpret Seixas' categories and which models they advocate, leaving room for readers to consider the merits of different epistemological approaches. This volume presents a remarkable degree of coherence and readability, as the authors and editors have provided ample background for readers with various specializations to understand the context and issues in a wide range of situations.

This diversity of studies supports the editors' stated aim: to offer not one universal way of teaching rival histories but to develop a repertoire of approaches to meet the needs of various societies.

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Paulson, Julia. 2015. "Whether and How?" History Education about Recent and Ongoing Conflict: A Review of Research." *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 1 (1): 115-41. <https://doi.org/10.17609/N84H20>.