Learning to Understand Historical Context:
Role-Playing Game "The Nuremberg Prosecutors"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of historical thinking in students using active methodologies is an unavoidable opportunity to approach key events in the history of humanity, such as the Nuremberg trials. This chapter presents a proposal for gamification in the classroom through role-playing using a card game designed ad hoc in order to develop historical empathy in students. The objectives of this proposal are to determine the responsibilities of individuals and organisations for the execution of the German extermination programme, decide the seriousness of the facts proven through documentation and sources provided, value respect for life and tolerance as the foundations of democracy and human rights, investigate and become aware of the crimes committed by those involved, and value respect for life and tolerance as the foundations of democracy and human rights. This activity introduces students to a controversial topic such as the Nuremberg trials through activities such as the creation of a preliminary commission, the performance of the trial, and a debate.

HISTORICAL THINKING AND HISTORICAL EMPATHY IN THE CLASSROOM

Encouraging students' historical empathy has been a point of convergence for recent research into the development of historical thinking in the classroom (Brooks, 2008; Seixas and Morton, 2012; VanSledright, 2014; Wineburg, 2001). The work by Foster and Yeager (1998) stands out in theoretical reflection on historical empathy. These authors define historical empathy as the "ability to infer from given knowledge an explanation of certain actions" (p. 2) since "historical empathy combines the adductive and logical thinking associated with the use of evidence" with "the inferential and appropriately creative skills that seek to bridge the gap between what is known and what may be inferred from history" (p. 3). Other authors, such as Riley (1998), argue that empathy is nothing more than "a reconstruction of others' beliefs, values, and goals, any or all of which are not necessarily those of the historical investigator" (p. 33). Finally, Foster (1999) had already highlighted years earlier that the concept of empathy can be addressed by pointing out what it is not. For example, empathy does not require a student to identify with a historical figure since any attempt to do so "ignores the perspective of hindsight and is alien to the principle that historians are contemporary interpreters of past events" (p. 19). Empathy requires "cautious inquiry and close examination of available evidence" (p. 19). It concerns understanding the context and managing to reconstruct the perspective an individual or a group based their decision on at a precise historical moment (Paricio, 2019). Rather than a sentimental issue, it is a question of understanding the historical context to appreciate the actions of those who came before us and not to judge historical facts based on presentism.

Concerning empirical research, authors such as Ashby and Lee (1987) found in their early curricular experiences with historical empathy that students tended from the outset to assume people in the past held the same beliefs, ideas, and values they had in their own time. Other studies documented how students justified past actions that now are found unacceptable by claiming the perpetrators were, in some way, inferior (Lee et al., 1997; Lee and Ashby, 2001). Other research on historical empathy in the classroom has studied it using primary sources, for example (Carril-Merino et al., 2020; Dickinson and Lee, 1978; Shemilt 1987). This is particularly interesting due to the use of resources that are contemporary to the historical moment to understand.

In Spain, several research projects have conducted historical empathy exercises in the classroom using both a cognitive and an affective dimension (Domínguez, 1986, 2015; González et al., 2008; Guillén, 2016; Sáiz, 2013). Multiple educational proposals have also recently been documented to study historical empathy with preservice teachers (Carril-Merino et al., 2018, 2020, 2020b; San Pedro-Veledo and López-Manrique, 2017), thus indicating that this is an emerging line of educational innovation in Spain that will become consolidated.

WORKING ON THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: AWAKENING HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN STUDENTS

One of the major problems that has arisen since starting to develop historical empathy in the classroom is, undoubtedly, the confusion between empathy and sympathy (Paricio, 2019). The first documented experiences in which, for example, students were asked to write a letter as if they were World War I combatants, showed that the line between imagination and a true exercise of empathy is too thin (Coltham

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