

**Sant, E.; Santisteban, A.; Pages, J. & Boixader, A. (2015, September) "Who Are The Catalans? The Discursive Construction Of The Catalan Identity Through The Historical Events Narrated By Secondary Students". Paper accepted at the ECER 2015, Budapest, Hungary**

### **Who Are The Catalans? The Discursive Construction Of The Catalan Identity Through The Historical Events Narrated By Secondary Students**

This proposal is based on empirical work undertaken in Catalonia (Spain) in 2014. The aim was to analyse the Catalan 'we' constructed by Catalan students through their interpretation of historical events and to examine the extent to which this 'we' is open to non-dominant groups.

The concepts of nation and national identity are contested. Nations are usually described as 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) in which national history plays the role of collective memory (Werst, 2008). From this understanding, national history is "not a sacred history but an invented tradition" (Meyers, 2004:141) to define an eternal identity for the nation (Ricoeur, 1984). The notions of national 'sameness' (De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak, 1999), 'togetherness' (Rüsen, 2004) and 'destiny' (Christou, 2007) seem to indicate that national identities are built upon the unity of a common past, present and future.

The role of history education in promoting this national unity has been highly debated. Following Bourdieu (1994), history education inculcates the 'fundamental presuppositions of the self-image' (1994:4) which constitutes the base of the national we. The love and loyalty to the nation is exalted (Carretero, 2007; Falaize, Heimberg & Loubes, 2013) at the same time that the national identity is stimulated. However, the educational construction of this 'national we' usually implies processes of exclusion and domination. National history education might be intrinsically exclusive. The process of creating a unified 'we' is usually based on establishing the borders between the 'we' and 'the others' (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Moreno & Arriba, 1996; Buckley-Zistel, 2008). Therefore, creating a 'national we' seems to necessarily imply creating an international or intranational 'others'. Similarly, national history education has been criticized either for being an imposition of the dominant cultural values to the non-dominant groups (Giroux, 1997; Ross, Mathison & Vinson, 2014) or for leaving those who are not aware of the national narrative socially excluded (Meyers, 2004).

We understand that 'nations without state' (Guibernau, 2000) such as Northern Ireland, Quebec, Scotland, the Basque Country, etc. also might try to generate some sort of togetherness and sameness through history education. Furthermore, recent events such as the Scottish Referendum on September 2014 and the Informal Vote on November 2014 in Catalonia can question whether Europe is living another nation-building era (Keating, 1997; Kymlicka, 2011). However, the present Europe is not the same than the 19th Century Europe when most European national identities were 'imagined'. Considering that certain processes such as globalization, decolonization and Europeanization have generated much more complex societies, we wonder whether the creation, and also the consolidation, of a national 'we' might be more inclusive or exclusive than it was before.

Catalonia can be considered a key example of a nation without state (Guibernau, 2000). Within Catalonia, multiple combinations of national identities coexist (e.g. Catalan identity alone, Catalan and Spanish identity, Spanish identity alone, other countries' identities). One of the main symbols of the Catalan identity is the national day (Prat, 1991; Guibernau, 2000). The national day commemorates the defeat of Barcelona after a massive Franco-Spanish attack in 1714. 2014 saw the 300th Jubilee of this historical event, during which Catalan public and private institutions promoted a number of educational resources to teach children and young people about the national history. In the same

year, the economic crisis coexisted with the informal vote on independence of Catalonia. Within this context, we decided to investigate how the Catalan identity is discursively constructed through historical events. In particular the following questions are asked:

- How do Catalan students in 2014 construct the national 'we' through the historical event of 1714?
- What groups might feel included and excluded from the national 'we' constructed?

## Method

Data was collected via questionnaires and interviews. Six different schools in Catalonia recognized for their expertise and commitment to citizenship and social sciences education were selected. In each school, social science teachers were requested to survey students aged 13-15. The mean age of the Students (n=339) was 14.2 years and the ratio of boys to girls was 1.04/1.

In March 2014, we started the data collection via questionnaires. Similarly to previous research (Porat, 2004; Létourneau & Carety, 2008), students were requested to explain 'what happened on the 11th of September of 1714 in the way you have learnt, remember or understand it'. Also, as a part of a wider programme of research, students were required to discuss their perceptions about their own identities.

Fourteen students were selected via dimensional sampling. We could perhaps have interviewed a larger number of students, but we preferred to work with a smaller group of students that allow us to gain an in depth understanding of their accounts about 1714 and perhaps follow them at some point later in life. When selecting the students to be interviewed the dimensions of gender, age, school, language/s spoken at home and group in which the students identified themselves were considered, with an aim to create a broad sample. The 14 students were interviewed individually between April and May 2014. The interviews took place in the school context and the average length was 35 minutes. Following the procedures developed by previous researchers (Porat, 2004, Barton & McMully, 2005), students were required to participate in a picture-sorting task, to read aloud their own texts and to further explain their narrative about the 11th of September 1714 and to connect the different pictures with the different historical characters of 1714.

Data was analysed using discourse-historical approach. This approach of critical discourse analyses has previously been used to analyse the discursive construction of national sameness and otherness outside (see De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak, 1999; Wodak, 2001) and within school context (Christou, 2007). The aim was to analyse the relationship between the discursive construction of national sameness and the discursive construction of difference.

## Expected Outcomes

Our results suggest that students narrate the historical event of 1714 according to their 'national' identities. For those students who identify themselves exclusively as Catalans, the national history provides them with an explanation of who the Catalans are. Most of the other students (those who identified themselves as Catalan and Spanish, only Spanish or as none of them) were not aware of the events of 1714. Although the historical event appears in the curriculum and the relevance of the 300th Jubilee in the Media was considerable during 2014, these students seem to be excluded from this story.

This is not surprising when looking at the way in which the 'Catalan we' is built upon this historical event. Students describe the 'Catalan we' as 'normal people' who 'don't have power', who belong to

the 'middle class', who work 'but are not exploited' and who feel victims of political power. From their point of view, the Catalans are historically victims of an 'oppressor', which is associated with Castile or Spain. The Conquest of Barcelona is used by these students to explain the 'dictatorial character' of Spain. The Catalans are also described as a homogeneous group in terms of social class and ethnicity. Although considering themselves victims, the students do not seem to empathize with other groups of 'victims'. For instance, they do emphasize that 'poor people' or 'exploited workers' do not belong to the Catalan group because they are not hard workers, they have had bad luck or just because their oppressors are different than the ones the Catalan people have. Similarly, for the students who identify exclusively with Catalonia, those who are not born in Catalonia or whose religion or ethnic group is not the dominant have difficulties being completely 'integrated' since they have not been victims of the same oppressor.

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