

Historical Films in History Classrooms: Documentaries or Fiction Films? Teachers' Views and Practices



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Abstract Visual culture evolves as the dominant platform for our encounter with the past. Moreover, the impact of movies on shaping our historical culture is considered powerful. History Education in theory recognizes the outstanding position of movies as chief carriers of historical messages. But what are the practices employed in history classrooms? What are teachers' conceptions, attitudes and instructional practices towards films? Have they inherited traditional positivist skepticism about movies' historical veracity and accuracy? If they use films in their history classrooms, what kind of movies do they prefer, fiction or nonfiction, and why? These are the leading questions of the research presented in this chapter. We used a mixed methods approach to collect data from a large number of teachers in Greece. Results show that the general disciplinary conceptions and ideas on history as well as on history education have a considerable impact on instructional practices toward movies. Teachers who prefer historical documentaries for objectivity and validity reasons, considering these reasons central for history teaching and learning, use documentaries as an objective medium to support the textbooks 'one truth' content. On the contrary, teachers who criticize the content-based history teaching and the alleged objective representation of the past use historical documentaries as any other historical sources and narratives taking into consideration their subjective nature. In this second case, not only the content of history textbooks is questioned, but also the idea of a sole historical truth and objectivity in historical interpretation. Research data are rich and meaningful, connecting closely teachers' epistemological beliefs with instructional practices of digital media, which movies are included in.

Keywords Cinematic history · Teachers' conceptions · Movies in history education · Historical films and history classrooms · Epistemological beliefs and instructional practices

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Introduction

Movies as a cultural force of representing the past and shaping historical identities require a new space in history and social studies classrooms. This space deals with major shifts, both epistemological and cultural. At the epistemological level, it concerns the turn of history education toward matters of historical interpretation, the social construction of history, and the formation of collective memory (Levstik & Tyson, 2008; Metzger & Harris, 2018; Stearns et al., 2000) following significant changes in historians' conceptions about their discipline (Munslow, 2007; Ankersmit, 2005; Passerini, 2015; Scott & Keates, 2001). At the cultural level, it primarily concerns the growing importance of visual culture as the dominant cultural platform for our encounter with the past (Davis, 2000; Metzger & Paxton, 2016). Our understanding is linked to images fraught with textuality and discourse. Students live in societies saturated by media, in which historical media occupy a central place. The "Disney effect"—the tenacity of Disney's cartoon narrative of Pocahontas upon students' historical representations—summarizes the powerful impact of visual culture on shaping our ideas about the past (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001, pp. 703–704). Visual culture is now considered constitutive of our historical culture, a significant concept (Carretero et al., 2017) for understanding the multiple modalities of our relation with the past, the experience of the past, and the way the past acquires new meanings in the present (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017). In the frame of the plethora of public uses of history, more and more people encounter history through popular genres like cinema, television, and the internet. Korte and Paletschek (2017) use the term "historical edutainment" to describe the phenomenon of the prominence of popular history as a distinct growing sphere of knowledge production about the past.

History education cannot ignore the outstanding position of films as chief carriers of historical messages in our societies. Movies could be powerful tools (Russell, 2012) to bring the past in the classrooms alive through visualization. Films could also be approached as unique documents combining picture, sound, and music (Bernard et al., 1995, p. 25; Poirier, 1993), as "filmic texts" (Briley, 1990; Poirier, 1993) or "moving image documents" (O'Connor, 1987, 1990) serving as sources for learning history, as evidence to be interpreted, or as historical artifacts to be analyzed (Stoddard, 2012, p. 272). Films in history and social studies classrooms are also suggested as visual media that help students develop empathy, especially for marginalized groups, as well as excellent tools for raising controversial topics and introducing multiple perspectives in history classrooms (Kansteiner, 2017, pp. 179–180; Marcus et al., 2010; Stoddard, 2009; Stoddard & Marcus, 2017). Films are finally an ideal tool for developing visual historical literacy (Brinley, 1990; Mavrommati & Repoussi, 2020).

The new space required by films in history and social studies classrooms faces several barriers. Research points out the problem that the use of films without clear instructional purposes, and non-optimal uses (Hobbs, 2009) or even the misuses of films in history and social studies classrooms (Paxton & Marcus, 2018) can be

attributed to many factors: teachers' suspicion toward films' historical veracity and accuracy; the sense of helplessness (Kansteiner, 2017, p. 173); traditionalist attitudes that regard movies only as entertainment (Donnelly, 2014, 2016); practical and technical matters like time or availability and in general the school's conventions or even teachers' competences. Even in cases in which films are used as a thoughtful medium for engaging students in historical thinking procedures, the "filmic language"—the specific cinematic system of transmitting messages and creating feelings—is ignored (Mavrommati & Repoussi, 2020). All the above explanations highlight the gaps in history education regarding the use of films.

In this article, we aim to shed light on teachers' conceptions, attitudes, and instructional practices toward historical films by presenting data—both quantitative and qualitative—of research conducted in Greece with 498 participants, primary and secondary school history teachers.

Movies and History: A Passionate Relationship

Cinema loves history. The past is one of the favorite subjects of cinematographic narratives. From the beginning, the cinema industry (Mintz & Roberts, 2001) has realized the importance of historical reconstruction in two forms: documentary and fiction. To this classical distinction, Rosenstone (2006) has added a third form: the experimental historical film. The American film *The Birth of a Nation*, made in 1915 was the significant sign of the cinematographic inclination to write history (Carter, 1983, pp. 9–19). Thenceforth, statistics testify to the continuing power and prestige of the past as source material in the movie business (Niemi, 2006). And as other versions of history, cinematic history, although it seems to reproduce and reflect a certain vision of the past world through the behaviors and the values that the movie selects as framework, reconstitutes the past in its own way, using its modalities and adapting its narrative to the specific cinema genre—fiction or non-fiction—the audience, the epoch, and the producers' ideas among others (Chansel, 2001; Sorlin, 2004). Spectators tend also to receive the cinematographic representation of the past according to their history conceptions and identities. Research reveals the significance of the students' cultural, societal, ethnic, or religious context in the reading of the filmic text (Dimitriadis, 2000; Epstein, 1998) and positionality has emerged as a vital component for understanding "how one engages in thinking about the past" (Peck, 2018, p. 311). Production, representation of the past, and reception by the viewers constitute three major aspects of understanding historical films (O'Connor, 1990, pp. 10–26). In other words, historical films refer to three temporalities: the time of production, the time of representation, and the time of their reception by the public and/or their analysis in history classrooms. Films contain three stories to be explored.

Cinema loves history but the feeling is not mutual. History, especially academic history, was indifferent, skeptical if not hostile to the filmic uses of history. For a long period of time, most historians considered cinema an institution of "systematic

falsification of the historical record” (Kansteiner, 2017, p. 169). But since the late 1960s the ongoing questioning of the calls for objective history, the major shifts in the ways in which attention to the past was directed and applied, and the multiplication of history languages forced historians to reconsider their relationship with cinema (Burrow, 2009, pp. 468–485; Dosse, 1987; Passerini, 2015; Rosenstone, 1995, 2000, 2006). Historians started to study the entertainment industry and to understand the role of films as an instrument in the formation of public opinion and/or propaganda (Grindon, 1996). Other scholars influenced by different epistemologies—film studies, semiology, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, Marxism—approached cinema as a sign system and/or examined ideological influences on the film industry. Cinema as an interpreter of the past followed (Toplin, 1996) and new questions emerged to renew dialogue among scholars concerning the modalities of the representability of history in films (Ernst, 1983, p. 397). Historians, even if they accept films’ prominent tendency toward fictionalization, questioned the most unsettling fact that many films tend to compress the multifaceted past into a closed world by telling a single, linear story with essentially a single interpretation (Rosenstone, 2009, p. 31). But it is not a given in the film. Linear narrative or monolithic truth is a choice of the film maker. Davis (2000) showed the countless possibilities for the film to bring more than one story to the surface at once and for taking multiple perspectives. There is also doubt over whether a film can capture the complexity of history and render anything more than a descriptive narrative of the past, and accusations of the “discursive weakness” of films (Aaltonen and Kortti, 2015; Jarvie, 1978). Critical historians also maintain that historical films emphasize human conflict and tend to highlight individuals rather than movements or the impersonal process and therefore ascertain a thinning of data (Grinton, 1996). These objections strengthen the dialogue between historians skeptical of cinema and historians writing history in moving images. The supporters of the filmic representation of the past (Walkowitz, 1985) argued that any discrepancies between history from textbooks—or books, in general—and history from movies may usually seem to arise from content but, in reality, they come from the nature of the visual medium itself. Advocates of filmic history (Raack, 1983) add that movies contain other kinds of data which cannot be included in written history, such as sounds, landscapes, and strong emotions expressed through the body and face. The fact that a movie cannot include traditional historical data such as written words does not mean that it cannot render the past. It actually does it in a way which is unfamiliar and totally different from that of historiography (Rosenstone, 1995). All these contributions urged for greater openness to cinematographic work, arguing for the medium’s possibilities beyond the conventional suspicions of traditional history and supporting the imaginative ways in which films can explore the past.

Thenceforth, many scholars agree (Metzger, 2010; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998; Wineburg et al., 2000, 2007), that filmic representation of the past is a kind of historical narrative which in fact greatly impacts citizens’ thinking about history, even if research on how people read the historical films they watch are rare (Seixas, 1993). The development of public history discourses and practices, the multiplication of the paths and stimuli through which we encounter the past and the revolution in digital technology that has dramatically changed historical communication and practices have contributed to new links between the present and the past. These links concern

not only the content of history and its democratization in order to include those forgotten by mainstream traditional history but also its practices breaking the barriers between professionals and audiences, and between producers and users of history. In all these popular history versions, fact and fiction, representation, performance, experience, instruction, and entertainment are mixed (Korte & Paletschek, 2017, pp. 191–198). Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) correlate the beginning of this turn to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the use of the past as “a source of empowerment and political mobilization”. They date it from the 1970s and 1980s when academic historians “had begun collaborating with new audiences through museums, films, community oral history, programs” (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p. 4).

The Historical Documentary and Its Use in History Classrooms

There is a long-standing debate about the definition of the documentary in general and historical documentary in particular. Not paradoxically, the debate has concerned its relation with fiction and actuality as “documentary is a film genre in which a pledge is made to the viewer that what we will see and hear is about something real and true—and, frequently, important for us to understand” (Aufderheide, 2007, p. 56).

First defined as a non-fiction film, the historical documentary had to prove its reliability in the representation of the past, its re-enactment of the past real world. Not only content but also techniques of representation were determinant for characterizing which film was documentary and which was not. Intrinsic textual features were often determinant for characterizing a film as documentary. Film’s *indexing*, the way a movie is labeled in announcements and press releases, informing viewers to read the text as non-fiction, creating expectations, and prompting specific viewer behavior, is considered to be an identifier of the historical documentary film (Ludvigsson, 2003, pp. 64–65).

Rosenstone (2006) argues that historical documentary is a problematic filmic form that pretends to be a direct reflection of the reality of the world while it constitutes facts “by selecting traces of the past and enfolding them into a narrative” (Rosenstone, 2006, p. 70). In that sense, Rosenstone considers drama film more honest because it is overtly a fictional construction. “With drama, you know—or you should know—that what you see is a construction of the past” (Rosenstone, 2006, pp. 70–71).

As documentary has evolved and since notions about what is fitting for a documentary and what is not changed over time, some films spark debate about the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction films. As a consequence, in direct relation with epistemological debates on history as socially constructed and contextually situated, the traditional distinction between fiction and non-fiction film has been relativized. Nichols (2001) distinguishes two kinds of films, both telling a story but of different

sorts: “documentaries of wish-fulfillment and documentaries of social representation”. In the first category, he includes what we call fiction films as conveying truths if we decide to see them as truths and lies if we decide to reject them. In the second category of documentaries, he includes what we call non-fiction films as giving “a sense of what we understand reality itself to have been, of what it is now or what it may become”. They also convey truths if we consider them as truths (Nichols, 2001, p. 2). Both types of films, he argues, call on us to interpret them as well as to believe them. Scholars from the field of film studies agree that we can see any fiction film in a non-fictional way (Branigan, 1992, pp. 192–193) or any historical documentary in a fictional way according to our beliefs and conceptions about the events narrated in it.

Even though the distinction between fiction and non-fiction cinema concerning reliability was questioned by prominent scholars who argue that both genres reconstruct the past in their ways (Ferro, 1977; Sorlin, 1980), history and social studies classrooms have inherited all historians’ skepticism on the relationship between films and history. Even supporters of the use of films in history classrooms begin their suggestions warning their audience about the dangers of using them as a medium for teaching history. Taking a distance from the filmic medium, highlighting the seductiveness versus trustworthiness of the movies, and emphasizing their critical uses have tended to be the common features of the relevant literature (Kansteiner, 2017, pp. 173–175). Many teachers, overcome their distrust by choosing documentaries as reliable and objective, bypassing the modern approaches that view documentaries as another genre of historical film without special praises of accuracy and trustworthiness (Bernard et al., 1995; Poirier, 1993; Warmington et al., 2011). In addition, students, according to Stoddard’s (2007) findings, are unable to recognize the director’s perspective in documentary films, and consider them accurate and objective, failing to see in them the interpretation process that uses historical evidence in order to fulfill a certain portrayal of past events. But, relevant empirical research on how teachers use historical documentaries in the classroom as well as data on teachers’ perceptions on the uses of historical documentaries and the implications of these perceptions on teaching practices is very rare and not recent (Marcus & Stoddard, 2009). It is also infrequent to correlate teachers’ practices with historical documentaries with their epistemological beliefs about history, even though it is known that teachers’ disciplinary background impacts the uses of teaching methods and resources (Voet & De Wever, 2016).

Films’ different perspective taking is what makes them a great tool for history education, and historical documentaries should ideally be used in order to help students understand multiperspectivity. This, according to Hess (2007), would be one method to foster critical historical thinking, namely understanding the past through the use of evidence, and to undermine non-rigorous explanations, such as conspiracy theories. After all, analyzing sources is one of the main core historical thinking concepts (Seixas, 2017), along with establishing historical significance, identifying continuity and change, analyzing causes and consequences of historical events, taking historical perspectives, and discussing the ethical dimensions of

history. Such an aspiration is common in other efforts to use historical documentary in the classroom too (Martin, 2007; Neuhaus, 2016). Buchanan (2015) suggests that the start of developing such historical thinking skills should be made in the preservice history teacher training context, where preservice teachers are trained to critically reflect on historical documentaries and their own ideas on controversial historical topics. Moreover, her research found that a combination of viewing films with classroom discussion, written reflections, and historical analysis can be a powerful teaching strategy. Stoddard (2007) suggests that historical documentaries in the history classroom can develop empathy and create a framework where difficult subjects are discussed. Methods for the implementation of documentaries in the history classroom vary slightly in the relevant literature, including combining the screening of a documentary with interviews with people who have direct experience of the relevant historical facts, analysis of primary sources, and discussion (Martin, 2007). A common aim of all the existing approaches to using documentary is the development of a historical thinking process about events that makes use of evidence and solid arguments to reach a logical conclusion (Hess, 2007; Martin, 2007; Neuhaus, 2016; Mavrommati, 2019). Another way of incorporating historical documentary in the history classroom is by students creating their own documentaries (Fehn & Schul, 2011; Krahenbuhl, 2016).

Empirical Study

Objectives

Our research aims to investigate teachers' conceptions about the use of historical films in the history classroom and their relevant instructional practices in order first to find out what kind of historical films teachers prefer and why, and second to determine possible different approaches to using them as instructional tools in relation to teacher stances toward the nature and characteristics of historical films they prefer.

Methods

We used a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014) to collect data from a large number of participants nationwide. The first stage of the research consisted of an online survey with both closed and open-ended questions, which was initially answered by a total of 498 participants, primary and secondary school history teachers. For the second stage of the research our aim was to collect richer, qualitative data, which was achieved through conducting online interviews with 5 volunteers from the pool of the 498 survey respondents. The survey was comprised of three parts: in the first part, the participants answered demographic questions. They also

answered a question on whether they use historical films in the classroom. Depending on their answer (yes or no), the survey bifurcated into two separate sets of questions, one that included questions on the uses of films in the classroom and the other which focused on reasons why teachers do not use movies in the history classroom and their relevant training needs. Therefore, the initial 498 survey respondents were scaled down to 387 who answered the part of the survey relating to the uses of film in the classroom, while the remaining were directed to a set of questions that focused on the reasons for not using films as instructional tools. Of those 387 respondents, 210 answered open-ended questions relating to the ways teachers introduce films in their history classrooms, their best practices, and the opportunities and difficulties they experience relating to the use of historical films.

The qualitative data from the questionnaire, i.e. the open-ended question responses, were analyzed through a coding procedure, as were the interview responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The codes that emerged from the survey responses were synthesized into categories and themes, and the themes that emerged served as the backbone of our semi-structured interview protocol. The survey responses indicated that Greek teachers prefer to introduce documentary films more than fiction films in their classrooms, and gave an initial picture regarding their specific uses.

What interested us most in the interview part of the research was the theme “objectivity and validity” which featured as the most common reason why teachers consider historical documentaries an effective instructional tool for history in the survey responses. This understanding of documentary films as the objective is found in relevant research too (Marcus & Stoddard, 2007; Stoddard, 2009; Wagner, 2018). Therefore, in the interview stage of our research we asked teachers specifically to elaborate on their ideas on the nature of historical documentaries and the ways they use them in the classroom. The questions were open ended, and the core lynchpin of the interview protocol was made up of the following questions:

1. What do you think about the relation of historical documentaries to historical truth and objectivity?
2. What are the reasons/ considerations for using historical documentary films in the classroom?
3. How do you use them in the classroom? Can you give us an example of a best practice for using historical documentary films in the classroom?
4. What are the reasons for not choosing to use a historical documentary in the classroom?

The link to the SurveyMonkey survey was sent to all primary and secondary schools in Greece, and was distributed to the history teachers of each school by the school’s director. Anonymity was accomplished throughout all stages of the research, as the online survey did not request any identification information, such as name or school district. The interviewees were protected through the use of pseudonyms.

The interviews lasted from 45 min to 1 h with each participant, and were transcribed. For each participant, a transcript of the interview, of roughly 2000–3000 words, was analyzed thematically.

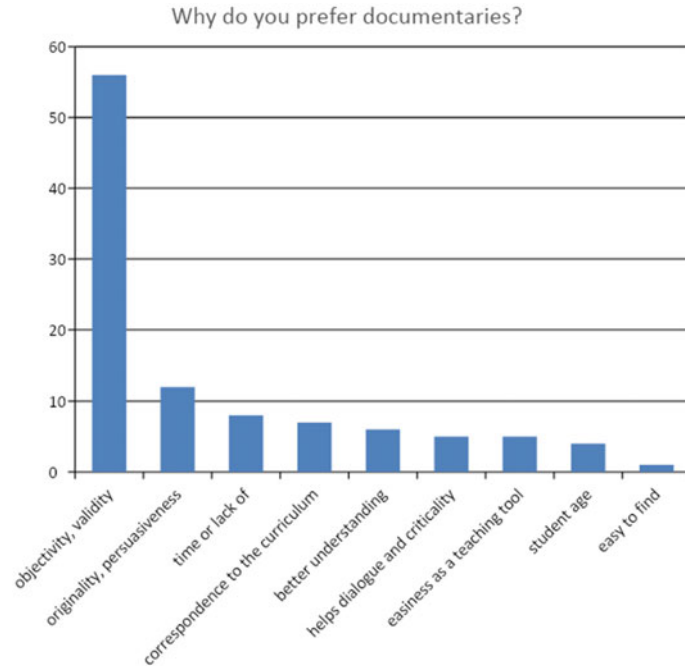
Results

Teachers' Film Preferences

Although our questionnaire aimed at finding out about teachers' use of historical movies in the classroom, both fiction and documentaries, even from the first survey responses it was evident that Greek teachers prefer to use mainly historical documentaries as history teaching tools, as opposed to historical fiction films. After the first questions of the survey, which asked for the respondents' demographic data, teachers were asked to respond to a question asking whether they use historical films (both documentaries and fiction) for instructional purposes. Out of 494 respondents, 387 (73.84%) answered that they use historical films, and 107 (21.66%) responded that they do not.

Consequently, we asked teachers to specify the kind of historical films they use, namely documentary, historical fiction, both, or none. The number of teachers that use solely documentaries is nearly 10 times the number of teachers that use only historical fiction films (34.57% as opposed to 3.70% respectively). However, more than half of the teachers said they use both documentary films and historical fiction movies (60.49%), while only a very limited number of teachers answered they do not prefer either of the two for teaching purposes (1.23%). Next, we asked teachers to describe the reasons why they prefer documentaries over fiction movies by responding to an open-ended question. The reasons for this preference are depicted in the graph below, with the most common answer being that they use documentaries because they consider them objective and valid (Graph 1).

Teachers reported a number of reasons for using documentaries. Data from the answers to this open-ended question revealed that the majority of respondents prefer documentaries over fiction historical movies due to their perceived objectivity and validity (54%). A second reason for using history documentaries is their originality and persuasiveness (11%), while the third most common reason (7%) for using them is their short duration combined with the short teaching periods (45 min, twice a week) and their immediate correspondence to the Greek history curriculum (7%). Teachers also reported that screening history documentaries advances students' understanding (6%), that it helps dialogue and the development of critical thinking (5%), that it is an easy-to-use teaching tool due to its format (5%), and that it is best used with older rather than younger students (4%). It is interesting to note, regarding this last category relating to the use of history documentaries depending on student age, that for primary teachers it is considered best to use it with students in the final year of primary education (12 years old), but for teachers of secondary education students in the first years of secondary education (13–14 years old) are considered too young to understand historical documentaries, so they tend to use it with older students (15 + years old). Last, only a very small percentage answered that they use historical documentaries because they are easy to find (1%).



Graph 1 Reasons for using documentaries

Documentaries as Objective Representations of the Past

For more than half of the teachers that answered our survey (54%), historical documentaries provide students with an objective, reliable account of past events. For these teachers, the value of historical documentaries as objective constructs of past reality is unquestionable. This objectivity is a product of historical research, which, according to the teachers, is the methodology followed by documentary makers. Namely, they see documentaries as historical work that uses historical research methods as well as historical terminology. For these history teachers, historical documentaries are social scientific works whose content can be taken at face value. For example, teachers claimed that they use documentaries because:

“...they come closer to the truth or show it...”

“...they present facts as they happened without the director’s opinion interposed...”, or,

“...they give students documented knowledge...”.

But how do teacher views on historical documentaries’ objectivity and reliability affect their classroom practice? In order to answer this question, we compared the answers teachers gave to two questions: the answers of those who answered that they prefer documentaries due to their objectivity were crosschecked with the answers of the same respondents to the next question in the questionnaire, which asked them

to describe their best practices and provide examples of their teaching strategies when historical documentaries are included in teaching. Two trends were identified in these answers. According to the first trend, no further research or analysis is necessary in the history classroom when documentaries are used, and documentaries can replace teaching. This way, documentaries can accompany the schoolbook as confirmations of the schoolbook's content, which often (at least in the Greek education context) provides students with the one sole truth about their historical past (Repoussi, 2011). The second trend identified in the survey responses included discussion of the contents of the documentaries in comparison to those of the school book, analyzing the documentary as any other historical source rather than just using it as a way to visualize the past and confirm the school book's narrative.

Documentary Films as Support of the Official School History

Teachers who answered that they consider documentaries to be a valid resource for teaching due to their objectivity and historical truth often included a variety of constructive teaching methods to frame their teaching. For example, a large number of teachers answered that they use film creation, dialogue, and role-playing as activities and methods to help students understand the contents of the movies after screening them. A number of teachers use more traditional tools like worksheets which are completed after the screening in order to evaluate student learning. It is interesting to learn that many history teachers who answered that they consider history documentaries an objective medium stated that they use them in order to support the content of the schoolbook. This is an important finding as it shows one specific way documentaries are used for history education, which involves not questioning the content of the schoolbook in their teaching and only using the historical documentary as a way to support the official historical knowledge offered by the National Curriculum. Some of the teachers' answers capture this very clearly. For example, a teacher who answered that she uses history documentaries because they present real historical facts gave us the following description of her best practice when using documentaries:

"we examine the historical fact with the students, I inform them about the movie, a few words about the director, we then watch the movie, we discuss, and we connect [the discussion outcome] with the historical facts they have been taught by the book".

Another teacher that chooses documentaries over fiction because they are more accurate stated that they use them.

"in a supportive manner during teaching, as synopsis of the chapter and as an additional source".

Documentary Films as Sources for Analysis and Interpretation

Some of the teachers who consider historical documentaries objective accounts of the past, however, use them in the classroom not as visual reinforcements of the school

book's contents and narrative, but as a source to be analyzed and interpreted. Activities for this category of teachers included a comparison to the school book's contents and discussion of the different views provided in the documentary. For example, a teacher who believes that documentaries have a more dispassionate approach to the historical past described her best practice when using them as follows:

"watching the movie, classroom discussion, comparison to the schoolbook, in some cases a worksheet, relation with fieldtrips".

While another stated that she uses historical documentaries in the following manner:

"initial reference to the textbook, screening, disrupting many times and exploratory questions in all-important points so that initial knowledge is consolidated and possible questions from the movie are clarified and then discussion and conclusions".

In these two examples we see a trend emerging, that of collaborative construction of the movie's meaning and historical past as an outcome of comparison to the schoolbook's "official" historical knowledge.

Documentaries as Subjective Representations of the Past

The data from the interviews gave us a more analytical view on the use of documentaries as sources for analysis. All five teachers who responded to our call for an extensive interview believed that history documentaries are not an objective means of representation of history and treated them as an opportunity to question the official presentation of school history. This also had an impact on the way they teach using history documentaries.

The teachers that participated in the interview phase of our research stated that they mainly choose documentaries instead of fiction when they use movies in the history classroom. The main reason for this are time limitations, as documentaries are usually shorter than fiction films and can be edited as an instructional tool more easily in order to fit in a lesson design and the history curriculum standards. Those teachers considered historical documentaries an instructional tool that can be used separately from the school book and can provide the basis for a discussion on the selected historical topic. None of them claimed that the reason they use it is because it shows the truth about the past or because it is an objective account of history. We considered this an excellent opportunity to dig a little deeper on the views and ideas of teachers who did not consider documentary films a mirror of reality. For the five teachers in the interview group, historical documentaries are a source that allows for historical interpretation, development of arguments, and analysis of evidence. For example, one of them stated:

"On the Web, there are many kinds of documentary films. They are all subjective, in history. I may disagree, believe something else, objectivity in my teaching is related to me not taking advantage of my educational authority to impose my ideas, but I will say 'kids, watch out, there is a sequence of events here, come to your own conclusions'".

For all teachers in the interview group, connection to the curriculum was not the main reason for using documentaries but they all exhibited skills of moving away from the textbook and the aims of the curriculum and considered the history lesson as a medium for either civic, moral or arts education. For example, a teacher suggested ways to connect the past with the present, in the context of the current refugee crisis also affecting Greece, with the purpose to develop civic engagement:

"I may ask students to comment how people in Constantinople were dressed, how monks and nuns were dressed, and ask them what do Muslims wear today? What did people in Byzantine times wear? I bring the discussion to the present day, of course. [...] everything happens in order to make this connection with the present, to take history out of the book and place it in front of the students linked to the present day, [and explain] that this can affect the present practically but can also define the future, so you can learn how to act meaningfully".

Moreover, all of them stated that they analyze historical documentaries just like any other primary or secondary source, taking into consideration their subjective nature:

"... by explaining that each one of us carries their own experiences, their ideas, their influences, the left-wing or the right-wing journalist... Just like in all our lives there is subjectivity, there is subjectivity in movies, even in documentaries, even if they are masterpieces, they still have their weaknesses".

"I deal with the movie just like any other source, primary or secondary, namely each time we read a source and ask questions concerning the author, the purpose for its creation, who it is addressed to, the purpose of its message, so we follow the exact same process with the movie".

For this group of teachers who see history documentaries as yet another source to analyze, teaching history in a more creative way, independent from the National Curriculum, and in an interdisciplinary manner, is a norm rather than the exception. For example, when she was asked how she designs a lesson that utilizes documentaries in the classroom, a teacher who considers documentaries as subjective artifacts responded the following, clearly moving away from the foci of the National Curriculum and the school book:

Well, so far we have achieved a degree of pedagogical freedom in a way that we can handle the curriculum and daily schedule with some flexibility. [...] I mean, it is commonly accepted that many things that are included in the books or the teaching objectives of the curriculum are not "necessary". [...] I am interested in economic, social, and political history. Namely, not just the facts. Facts only make up the context, i.e. know where we are, and after that we seek causes, connection of events, sequence, how we go from one period to the next, and we set a number of questions, i.e. why did this happen? What would happen if? We also ask hypothetical questions. So when you structure the lesson this way you also make a choice of the course content, i.e. we choose the important parts of the book, so it's easy for me to handle the curriculum.

For these teachers, the fact that documentaries are only one source among many others they analyze in their classes goes so far as to see the textbook too as a very basic source of historical knowledge and understanding, as far as rejecting it:

"[...] what students don't know is that the textbook presents reality in a certain way. If we go to movies or documentaries they will see that for the same thing, different people present historical truth in a different manner, or, anyway, that they have different opinions.

So, there's a confusion there. Because we see it [a fact] in one way in the schoolbook, while in the documentary in another. [...] So this is one of their basic questions and they end up rejecting the schoolbook [because] it doesn't mention everything, "you are not telling us everything, miss..." And you surely can't answer all their questions so you end up [saying] "see, kids, in order to really learn history you will start from the schoolbook and you will make an effort for the rest of your life to learn from every source, e.g. from a museum visit, newspapers, various books you should start buying from a young age. History is not the schoolbook, it's a million other things".

Discussion

Social studies teachers' beliefs have been found to profoundly shape their classroom practices, especially in the field of history education (Peck & Herriot, 2015). Our findings from the survey correspond with existing literature (Marcus & Stoddard, 2007, 2009; Wagner, 2018) on the use of historical documentary films in the classroom, according to which teachers have a clear preference for documentaries mainly because they consider them objective accounts of the past. The teachers that tend to regard historical documentaries as pieces of work that realize forms of academic historical inquiry and research trust them as reliable and objective. More specifically, they use historical documentaries, which they consider products of historical research, as visual aids that corroborate the textbooks' dominant historical narrative which is based on a single historical truth. They use documentaries as tools that validate the official, sole historical narrative and treat them as an authority, and their history lessons utilize traditional methods of instruction. This is one way in which teachers use historical documentaries, as identified by Stoddard (2010) who, observing two teachers for a long period of time, found that they use documentaries with historical themes either to support the historical narrative offered by the schoolbook and make sure students have a solid factual basis or as a way to engage students with difficult historical topics and start a relevant classroom discussion. We could assume that, for those teachers, both the documentary and the history textbook emerge from historical research that supposedly seeks the historical truth. As happens with other media, disciplines, and teaching strategies (Voet & De Wever, 2016; Yilmaz, 2010), teachers' beliefs about the nature of historical documentaries are reflected in their instructional decisions.

As evidenced also from our interview data, whether teachers conceive visual history as the objective representation of the past or as a reconstruction determined by many parameters shapes their teaching preferences. The teachers that participated in our survey and interviews agreed that historical documentaries are just another source to be analyzed. They challenged the idea that documentaries reveal the sole historical truth and are objective creations. For these teachers, the historical past is not absolute but it is open to interpretation and negotiation both inside and outside the classroom. We therefore see a different stance toward visual representations of history, following which the role of the teacher emerges as one that fosters criticality and analytical thinking rather than one that validates the official narrative

commonly provided through the schoolbook. In this case, not only is the content of the schoolbook questioned, but also the idea of a sole historical truth and objectivity in historical interpretation, and the teacher emerges as a facilitator in the process of historical understanding development in the history classroom through the classroom dialogic interrogation of sources and the deconstruction of given historical “truths”. These teachers seem to treat the process of development of historical knowledge as a combination of interpretation, arguments, and analysis of evidence. Seeing themselves as mediators who enable the process of historical knowledge construction, in accordance with recent relevant studies (Boadu, 2020), the teachers who were interviewed in our study seem to hold a constructionist, interpretative approach to history as a discipline which forms their practice as history teachers and use of visual media in the classroom. For these teachers, teaching and learning history is a process rather than an objective; their attitude toward the visual historical accounts, especially historical documentaries, forms their teaching strategies which treat history not as fixed but as open to interpretation and reconstruction.

This research on teachers’ beliefs and their implications for their teaching practices is of great importance since there is a bidirectional relationship between the two and teachers’ experience as well as training can alter beliefs and practices (Buehl & Beck, 2015). To this end, Fallace (2007) recommends that history teachers should be trained with more focus on historiography and historical research methods, and philosophy of history in order to understand how to use inquiry in the history classroom. We suggest that teacher training on history teaching should also include training on visual material and its relationship with historical construction and the historical discipline. A further step forward in the current research would be to investigate how specific media that shape historical consciousness such as films, computer games, or other forms of popular culture with historical content are used in the classroom, in relation to teachers’ epistemological beliefs, and how students learn history and develop historical thinking skills depending on teachers’ views about the nature of history and subsequent usage of various media.

Our research does have its limitations. The small sample of teachers who responded to our call for an in-depth interview is the first limitation. Moreover, the findings of these interviews suggest that participants teachers hold an open-to-interpretation stance toward history as a discipline, a stance which is not frequent among Greek history teachers. However, exactly this focus on the attitudes and beliefs of teachers who actually use alternative media in the history classroom, such as movies, provides an idea about infrequent but important trends in the use of these resources.

Our research indicated that historical documentaries are a preferred filmic teaching resource for Greek history teachers, in accordance with relevant trends found in other parts of the world, and the reason behind this use is their perceived objectivity and truthfulness. It also revealed that their attitudes toward historical movies shape their classroom practice and instructional choices. We find the present research in accordance with literature that supports that teachers’ beliefs have an effect on their classroom practices. Especially regarding popular uses of history, such as in film, teachers’ conceptions form their instructional strategies, resource choices, and practices.

An hypothesis resulting from our research is that there is a clear connection between teachers' epistemological ideas about history as a discipline and if, what type, why, and how they use historical films in history classrooms. Supporters of positivist history avoid historical fiction as subjective and prefer documentaries as objective and reliable. Further research could focus on the relationship between teachers' conceptions about history and their teaching practices, including the use of visual media such as historical films. Maggioni et al. (2009) scheme about teachers' epistemological conceptions on history as a discipline provides a basis to correlate these conceptions with teaching practices.

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