

Exodus, Kiddush Wine, Grandma and the Holocaust: Young Children and History¹

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Abstract

It is commonly assumed that young children have a concrete mode of thinking, and Piaget's developmental theory (Piaget, 1973) firmly supports this approach. It has a notable effect on early education, where logical-mathematical thinking and concrete subject matter stand at the core of the study programs. In the history discipline, the prevailing opinion is that to develop historical thinking, it is necessary to master numerous terms inherent to the historical discourse, which are general, abstract, and particularly more complex than concrete everyday terms. Consequently, children do not learn history in their first five years of elementary school.

The present study challenges the ruling approach. In contrast to maintaining that historical thinking cannot develop without terms inherent to the history discipline, I argue that young children have other concepts that allow them to think historically. Following Foucault (2005), I claim that terms used in historical thinking have no objective existence outside the historical discourse. The terms children use to think about history deserve to be included in the historical discourse and should influence the history teaching of young children.

Key words: historical thinking, historical discourse, perception of the past, development of thinking in children.

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