



30 AUG – 01 SEPT, DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

## USING TEXTBOOK RESOURCES TO CONSTRUCTING IDEAS IN HISTORY: A STUDY WITH PORTUGUESE STUDENTS ABOUT IDEAS ON SLAVERY AND THE SLAVERY TRAFFIC FROM AFRICA TO BRAZIL

Ana Squinelo, Isabel Barca & Glória Solé

(CIEd, UMinho)



Universidade do Minho  
Instituto de Educação  
Centro de Investigação em Educação



## INTRODUCTION

This exploratory study is part of a post doctoral Project on history textbooks, historiographic narratives, and historical learning.

In Portugal, this Project focused on how Portuguese students construct a concept with influence of their textbooks – slavery and traffic from Africa to Brazil. This issue is common to both countries (Portugal and Brazil) although still rather silenced in Portuguese history.

Understanding perspectives on ‘others’ as agents, for empathy and cultural plurality is one of the goals of this study.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What ideas do students construct about the concept of slavery based on textbooks?
- How do students interpret the textbook sources (about slavery)?
- What consequences of slavery trade and slavery do students envisage for Brazil and Portugal ?

**The sample-** 16 students (6 girls and 10 boys, 13-14 year olders) attending 8th grade) in a Portuguese urban school.

**Instrument-** individual questionnaire (paper and pencil task).

**Data analysis-** Inductive analysis (inspired by Grounded Theory, Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The students were asked about the meaning of slavery and its possible consequences for Brazil and Portugal in the light of evidence on the slave trade and slave labour during the sixteenth century, exhibited by their textbooks. Examples:

4.1- What do you understand about the topic of slavery from the history lesson?

4.2. – Observe your textbook historical sources: what does each source portray?

4.3 - What would be different and what would remain in the history of Brazil and Portugal If the Portuguese had not initiated the slave trade from Africa to Brazil?



Source A



Source D

### **A escravatura no Brasil (Slavery in Brazil)**

Uma das coisas que se veem hoje no mundo, e nós pelo costume de cada dia não admiramos, é a transplantação imensa de gente e nações negras que de África continuamente estão passando para esta América (Brasil) (...).

Padre António Vieira,  
*Sermões*, (Séc. XVII).

### **Source B**

### **Escravos – uma mercadoria como outra qualquer [Slaves – a merchandise as any other]**

(...) (depois de desembarcados) o dito nosso feitor com os ditos tesoureiros e escrivães irão avaliar os ditos escravos, cada peça por si, em sua justa valia; segundo melhor entenderem; escreverão os preços que lhe forem postos em escritos de pergaminho que se lançarão nos pescoços dos ditos escravos (...).  
*Regulamento da Casa da Guiné, 1509* (adaptado).

### **Source C**

## DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. What do you understand about the topic of slavery from the history lessons?

WORK PERSPECTIVE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS (QUESTION 4.1)	NUMBER OF STUDENTS (QUESTION 4.2)
Forced labour	8	5
Agricultural	1	4
Heavy work	1	-
Work for Free	1	1
All activities	5	10

## DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. What do you understand about the topic of slavery from the history lessons?

HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS (QUESTION 4.1)	NUMBER OF STUDENTS (QUESTION 4.2)
Lack of freedom	8	10
Bad treatment	2	6
Colour discrimination	1	6



## DATA ANALYSIS

### Examples of students' answers:

#### Antonio, 13 anos

4.1

“Slavery is something bad differentiating the human beings: it means lack of freedom and inhumanity.”

4.2.

Source A portrays “black people working for white people. It portrays slavery”.

Source B shows that “they worked for free”.

Source C shows that “the slaves were seen like a thing and were sold such as food in the current markets”.

Source D portrays the bourgeois luxury at the time. [We see] exotic animals inside the house, the slave serving their lords as it was due.

## DATA ANALYSES

### Examples of students' answers:

#### Ana, 14 anos

4.1

“Slavery is a word given to a part of history where some human beings were slaves of others.”

4.2.

Source A portrays “slaves working”.

Source B shows that “the slaves were transported on slavery ships, many of them died before reaching the place where they would be sold”.

Source C shows that “the slaves were chosen by the person who would go to buy them and that person would negotiate the price”.

Source D shows that the rich people bought slaves and these had to do what their owners wanted.”

## DATA ANALYSIS

4.3. What would be different and what would remain in the history of Brazil and Portugal If the Portuguese had not initiated the slave trade from Africa to Brazil?

### **Examples of students' answers:**

"There would not have been so many slaves in Brazil."

"If the Portuguese had not started the slave trade from Africa to Brazil people of Portugal would have gone to Brazil and Brazil would continue to be a colony of Portugal."

"The Brazilians and the Portuguese would be much whiter."

"The Brazilians would have been made slaves, there would not have existed Brazilians of African origin".

"Maybe later in history the same thing would happen, but thankfully it happened as now we can know that slavery is inhumane."

## PROVISIONAL REFLECTIONS ON RESULTS

- Students use some previous knowledge when answering to 4.1.
- Those initial expressions of ideas on slavery (4.1) appear to be enlarged and refined when looking at textbook sources (from generic or tautological ideas to more detailed ones (slavery traffic, domestic work...)).
- A few students express in a more detailed fashion their ideas on slaves as human beings (“they were chased, separated from their families and sold”).
- However, source interpretation appears too simplistic in many cases (descriptive or just focused in a single idea).

## PROVISIONAL REFLECTIONS ON RESULTS

- Concerning past and present relationships students gave counterfactual pictures which pose some perplexities in terms of historical plausibility (question 4.3). The conceptual categorisation of those answers will be carried on with add of follow-up interviews if possible.
- Enlarging the students' perspectives about 'dark sides' of history (such as the slave trade) might be a way to develop themselves as human beings.



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# THANK YOU!

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