

Third Misconceptions Seminar Proceedings (1993)

Paper Title: MISCONCEPTIONS OF REVOLUTION IN HISTORY
TEXTBOOKS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON MEANINGFUL
LEARNING

Author: Baldissera, José Alberto

Abstract:

Keywords: Concept Formation, Educational Methods, Teacher
Education, Concept Fromation, Misconceptions, Concept
Teaching, Concept Mapping, Learning Processes, Teaching for
Conceptual Change

General School Subject: History / Teacher Training Practice

Specific School Subject: History

Students: College

Macintosh File Name: Baldissera - History

Release Date: 12-15-1993 C, 11-4-1994 I

Publisher: Misconceptions Trust

Publisher Location: Ithaca, NY

Volume Name: The Proceedings of the Third International Seminar on
Misconceptions and Educational Strategies in Science and
Mathematics

Publication Year: 1993

Conference Date: August 1-4, 1993

Contact Information (correct as of 12-23-2010):

Web: www.mlrg.org

Email: info@mlrg.org

A Correct Reference Format: Author, Paper Title in The Proceedings of the
Third International Seminar on Misconceptions and Educational
Strategies in Science and Mathematics, Misconceptions Trust: Ithaca,
NY (1993).

Note Bene: This paper is part of a collection that pioneered the electronic
distribution of conference proceedings. Academic livelihood depends
upon each person extending integrity beyond self-interest. If you pass
this paper on to a colleague, please make sure you pass it on intact. A
great deal of effort has been invested in bringing you this proceedings,
on the part of the many authors and conference organizers. The
original publication of this proceedings was supported by a grant from
the National Science Foundation, and the transformation of this
collection into a modern format was supported by the Novak-Golton
Fund, which is administered by the Department of Education at

Cornell University. If you have found this collection to be of value in your work, consider supporting our ability to support you by purchasing a subscription to the collection or joining the Meaningful Learning Research Group.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF REVOLUTION IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON MEANINGFUL LEARNING

José Alberto Baldissera

Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos

São Leopoldo - RS - Brasil

1. Learning, History and Misconceptions

The learning of History goes hand in hand with various problems. Generally, history is presented in text books as in the classroom with an anachronistic conceptual base.

According to Ausubel, when the subsuming concepts are not implicitly comprehended, the new concepts cannot be clearly understood, causing prejudice to meaningful learning. There are more inclusive concepts which should serve as a basis to be worked upon and understood, serving then as a basis for other concepts. Two examples are the concepts of capitalism and socialism, which, due to their complexity, require a wide gamma of subsumerss to be significantly understood.

There are concepts which simply should not be explained with the same meaning in the different historical epochs in which they are found. However, this transformation of concepts is practically never developed in text books and also, in general, is not utilized by professors in the classroom.

The concepts ought to correspond to the facts to be interpreted and should be defined with a maximum of clarity and consistency. Of course, many authors of text books do not clarify, nor adequately define, the concepts which are being applied to a determined context. Furthermore, as

the facts change far more quickly than the concepts, there lacks a synchronicity between the two. As a result, the concepts that arise, are in relation to the realities being studied through anachronistic concepts.

In History, it is common to encounter inappropriate concepts, which, while appropriate for one context are inappropriate for another, yet used none the less to achieve the same ends and meanings. In a similar fashion different terms are used to refer to the same fact or collection of facts. Changes occur in History, yet the terms don't change and this is another problem encountered in History text books, which consistently appears in thesis papers, analysis and articles by historians. The subject matter which the Historian has chosen to analyze and the manner or method which she will utilize is the product of his/her personality, ideology, culture and values.

Without a doubt, problems of consequential importance are those which derive from a manipulation of concepts, which have not been defined nor appropriately contextualized.

Bloch (1976, p. 151) alerts that the necessity of defining a variety of concepts is primordial to understanding. Even so, the meaning of concepts are often amplified, restricted or deformed without advising the reader. That is, this occurs even when historians, researchers and authors of text books perceive and acknowledge the role of concepts, which is rare in itself.

Remembering that historical concepts pertain, in the great majority, to the common (empirical) sense, I underscore what the philosopher Kant affirmed,

...In history, we take, for example, the concept of revolution. If I introduce into this concept the dislocation of properties, I would have a certain historical view of what this means; not introducing this characteristic I would have a different dimension of the historical meaning of a revolution.

With this in mind, Veyne (in Silva, 1976, p. 134) affirms:

...It should be understood in which manner one should look at a History book: it is necessary to see the terrain of a combat between a truth always changeable and concepts always anachronistic; concepts and categories must be constantly

remodeled, not, that is, have one prefixed format but modeled in accordance with the reality that is the object in each society.

This is also applicable to history text books because these same limitations are reproduced in them. Therefore, there is always the need for concepts and categories to be consistent with the facts to be interpreted and that the concepts be fully and clearly defined.

Due to the relativity of our knowledge, History, a "science" in constant transformation, is obliged to review its concepts and structure them in accordance with the current necessities.

The student of History ought to learn the *conceptual instruments of History*. When these concepts are ambiguous, he ought to perceive the ambiguity. It is necessary, therefore, to allow the students of History to analyze the historical concepts, not simply comprehend the meanings that the historian gives them.

This is fundamental for a meaningful learning to occur, either through reception or discovery, according to David Ausubel's theory of learning.

Various authors emphasize this mixture of impurities which appears in History books and, beyond that, in History text books. He refers to a mixture of veritable narrative and of concepts which are not thought through to their finality, nor upheld with firmness. In this manner, they mix, and not infrequently, anachronistic notions and conventional categories.

2. Principles

In the following section I go over four possible principles, formulated in a conditional form, until their validation is corroborated by students and research by groups of post-graduate professors. These studies will or will not confirm what they assert.

2.1. The Meaningful learning (and consequently effective teaching in higher education) of the *concept of Revolution* develops in relation to: a) Not merely this concept taken in isolation but in relation to other concepts in which it plays a role. b) (develops in relation to) the subsumers implied in the concept's definition, during the historical process through which the concept of revolution acquires consistency and applicability, with the intention of interpreting history.

According to Pasquino (in Bobbio et al., 1986, p. 1123-1134):

It is exactly during the French Revolution that we bear witness to a decisive modification of the concept of Revolution; changes, indeed, already implicit in the formulating theories of the luminaries of the time, that had nurtured many of the leaders of this Revolution: From the mere restoration of a law disturbed by the authorities, there passes a faith in the possibility of the creation of a *new order*; from the search for liberty in the old institutions there arises the creation of new instruments of liberty; In conclusion, this is the reason that it raises itself against tradition to legislate a constitution that assures itself not only *liberty* but brings as well *happiness to the people*. A rupture with the past could not be more complete. Even the disillusioned thinkers with the recent revolutionary occurrences and with the anti-libertarian consequences agree with this diagnosis. One can only speak of Revolution when the change evidences a new beginning, when it makes use of violence to constitute a form of Government absolutely new, with the objective of turning into reality the formation of new political law, and when the liberation of oppression aims at the unbinding of liberty (Arendt, 1963, 28).

It would be Marx, at last, who gives a complete form and end even more grandiose to Revolution. It would arise not only as an essential instrument for the conquest of Liberty, identified as the end of the exploitation of man by man, and as a result, the possibility of overcoming poverty, but also as a means to achieve equality, put in social justice fully, man fully developing all of his qualities. It is not so much man the unsatisfied consumer that is the artifice of Revolution, but man, alienated and frustrated producer that in Revolution victoriously strive to develop to the full his potential. It is Marx, who, after all perfectly fuses the two elements underscored by the luminaries - liberty and happiness and presents a perspective of

simultaneous execution through the liberty of the productive man. therefore, as long as the Revolution operates as a panacea of the evils of any society it will function as a powerful symbol and as a stimulus for victory over oppression and over the dearth of resources.

2. 2 The structure of a conceptual group, that is, of a collection of concepts semantically related, obeying the rules of modern Structural Semantics, probably leads us to admit it as a concept- generator of social change (or socio-political-economical change). This conceptual group includes, among many (revolt, rebellion, reform, coup d'état, counter-rebellion etc.), the concept of Revolution.

According to Pasquino (in Bobbio et al 1986, p. 1121), we ought to distinguish the concepts of Revolution, rebellion, coup d'état, and violence in order to better comprehend the concept of Revolution.

Revolution is an attempt, accompanied by the use of violence, to overthrow the existent political authorities and substitute them with the object of effecting profound changes in the political relations, in the judicial and constitutional laws and in the social-economic sphere. Revolution is distinguished from *rebellion* or *revolt* because the first is delimited in general by a circumscribed geographical area and usually is devoid of ideological motivations, and does not in general propose the total subversion of a constituted order but the return of the principles that regulate the relations between political authorities and the citizens and procures the immediate satisfaction of political and economical vindication, retribution. Rebellion can, in turn, be pacified either by the substitution of some political personalities or by economic concessions. Revolution is distinguished from a coup d'état because the latter is mounted solely in the attempt to substitute the existing political authorities within the institutions, without or almost without any change to the political or socio- economical mechanisms. Beyond this, while rebellion or revolt are essentially popular movements, a coup d'état is typically designed and effected by a few individual pertaining to an elite, being, as a result essentially of a chimeric character. The taking of power by revolutionaries can occur through a coup d'état (as we can consider the taking of power by the Bolsheviki, in 25.10.1917) but a revolution is only complete with the introduction of profound changes in the political and social and economical systems.

2.3 At the post graduate level, the interdisciplinary focus becomes indispensable for the deepening of concepts of these conceptual groups. Ausubel's theory, Structural and Procedural semantics and cognitive Psychology have their contributions to make to the development of the teaching of History, especially at higher levels.

2.4 Formulating a theoretical reference to guide a methodology of teaching and evaluation in History, after the development of interdisciplinary studies, should be one of the objectives of a History course and of the teaching of History at the doctorate level.

Without the existence of this referential, we are left with, on the one hand, the specialized dictionaries (as with Bobbio) and, on the other hand, the traditional teaching methods. Among those, the professor makes an effort so that meaningful learning can occur on the part of the students, aided by (especially in middle and high-school teaching) text books rarely interested in the development of basic concepts for the comprehension of the historic process, as the concept of Revolution.

As for the origin of the term Revolution, we encounter in Pasquino (Bobbio et al. 1986, p. 1123) the following explanation.

The word Revolution was created during the Renaissance in reference to the slow, regular and circular movement of the stars, and used to indicate that political changes cannot part from the universal implicit laws. In the eighth century, the word became used, in particular, as a political term, to indicate the return to an antecedent state of things, to a pre-established order that was disrupted. The English Revolution of 1688/1689 represents, in turn, the end of a long period, also marked by a civil war and the restoration of the monarchy. Beyond this, it is important to note that the American Revolution and even the French, in the beginning, were not conceived by their authors as something original, but as a return to a just and ordered state of things that had been disrupted by excesses, abuses and the lack of governing by the political authorities, and that these things should be restored either speaking of the elimination of the excess of the Colonial English, or speaking of the moderation of the extravagances of the despotic exercises of power by the Bourbon Monarchy. The American Revolution permits us to identify some of the characteristics of which today we usually define as *wars of national liberation*. In fact, the American

Revolution is the first example of a war of anti-colonial liberation directed by a community looking to avoid a long and bloody war which, however, did not provoke fundamental changes in the socio-economic sphere not over looking that many American citizens continued to be loyal subjects of the king of England having to pay for that preference with the confiscation of goods and the abandonment of the country. The lack of fundamental political changes, which culminated in the creation of an American federation once the socio-economic relations permaneced substantially and the American political elites that emerged pertained to the superior extract of the colonial society, the American Revolution, with a basis in our definition, can be better analyzed as a sub-species of a war for national liberty.

3. The concept of Revolution -- a collection of facts from students / teachers of Middle and High-school and Universities

With the objective of establishing a diagnosis of how their students define the concept of Revolution -- professors in an advanced university level History course, after four years of studies, provided for us in writing, this concept.

This is the result from some of these students:

Student 1

The concept of Revolution is very complex and there is much divergence about what is the most correct opinion.

Personally , I confess that I need to further study the subject. But, initially, from what I have seen up to the present, I tend to see the concept of Revolution as a totally separating rupture with the existing system driving the government of a determined country and then following with the introduction of a new system (with other ideas, ideologies and concepts) with new leaders dedicated to this new system.

This rupture of a system in order to introduce a new one, either can be achieved by an armed revolt (as was the case of Cuba), as it can also be

achieved through a pacific manner (as with the case of Ghandi in India, even though I don't know if you can say that there occurred a revolution of the whole sense that I am referring to above).

Using this perspective for the concept of Revolution, what happened in 1964, with the ousting of João Goulart and the installation of the military regime was not a Revolution. That is because there wasn't a rupture with the existing system guiding our country.

Student 2

One can consider a Revolution when the movement taken causes profound transformations in the political, social, economic and mental structures of a country. In contrast, when there occurs movements like in the case of the Revolution of 1930, which didn't change at all the social, political, and economic structures, where the reforms were only realized in some sectors, like working laws: this occurrence cannot be considered a Revolution.

Student 3

It is common to apply the term "Revolution" to any movement or "coup", that is activated various times in order to maintain a system (continuation) or to promote apparent alterations , giving the impression that profound changes are occurring.

I believe that revolution means, or implies, complex changes in the structure of the organ or system that the revolution aims at changing.

That would be, a change in the attitudes and posture in light of the proposed alterations, in the evolution itself or in the act in question.

Student 4

The term "Revolution" is used when we identify a historical fact that has structurally modified a group or society. We can say that, if a social group changed itself in terms of its internal organization, social relations and in the manner of producing objects and elements necessary for survival, then that group has undergone a revolutionary change.

The term is often utilized inappropriately. In the case of the military coup d'état of 64, for example, there was not a revolution because there was no profound social transformation.

With the passing of history, man recognized facts and lived through them, learning to establish specific criteria in order to conceptualize a revolution, in the historical sense. However, many historians establish certain limits and make a profound analysis of the facts before defining them as being Revolutionary in character.

I think that a revolution cannot pass in an artificial manner, but instead, must derive from the interior of the social body and not as a coup.

Student 5

We say "Revolution" of a movement that will totally alter a structure, that is, an economy, a society....a people.

We can use as a basis the "French Revolution", where changes occurred.

These alterations, normally, affect all of the classes and a revolutionary movement occurs when there exist a confrontation of ideas.

Student 6

Revolution is an extensive change that occurs in a country and that radically alters its political, economic and social aspect. To exemplify this we can use the French Revolution (1789) which brought an end to an absolutist old regime and allowed a new group- the bourgeoisie - to assume power. Or we can take the Russian Revolution (1917) when the Czarist Empire was overthrown by the proletariat and their leaders took power.

Student 7

We would apply the term Revolution as being a total change in the existing structure of a country or region. Revolution, nevertheless, would be a social, economic, political, and cultural change in relation to a preceding

structure. That is, not a change occurring only at the moment, but with real and continual changes.

If we look at revolution in this way, I believe that in most cases in which the term Revolution is applied, it does not correspond to its real meaning. It is common to use the term Revolution to describe a political coup, which most of the time does not really alter the administrative system, but rather, only changes the names of the people who occupy the positions, legitimizing this alteration by alterations and amendments to the constitution.

In the case of the so-called Revolution of 64, what occurred in fact was a military coup d'état. I don't consider this occurrence a Revolution, but as a seizure with the objective of placing, "in fact" and "in right", the military in power, since it had already been exercising its power "under the table."

Student 8

Social, political and economic Revolution implies, as put by the concept in physics, a movement capable of inverting or radically transforming the structure of a determined society or civilization.

This historical fact, needs, so as to be understood as a Revolution, to mark a profound alteration.

If it is to be characterized as being a decisive division in time or space it would have to change concepts, values and ideologies. It would have to lead to a change in the quality of life. It would have to be different from what already exists and assume a new perspective for the historical future.

For these reasons, the military coup of 64 cannot be seen as a Revolution, because it did not produce a single significant alteration in the existing social order.

Student 9

It is everything included in a "movement" that ruptures the social, cultural, political and economic institutions of a period or of a historical period of a society.

A Revolution does not happen from one moment to the next, or from night to day, it is a "process" sometimes slow and sometimes more rapid, it proceeds molding, acquiring volume until a moment when it explodes, rupturing with the old structures.

In Brazil in 64 there was no real rupture, the power just switched hands.

Student 10

A revolution, according to the exact meaning of the word, only occurs when there is a radical change in the basic structures of the society in question, as with, for example, the French Revolution in 1789.

It is common to confuse a Revolution with a Revolt, as occurred in Northeastern colonial Brazil.

The coup of 1964, in Brazil, in which the military took power, cannot be accepted as a Revolution. There were governmental changes but the basis of society remained almost totally untouched except for a few touch ups and adjustments necessary for the historical moment.

Student 11

We understand by Revolution a movement of all of society, without exception. All must have in mind the same propositions, and not just a group representing a certain class which proposes to disseminate certain ideologies, such that, these same ideologies are directly and exclusively linked to the interests of this class or group.

Revolution for me is a radical change, of a complete system, of all the structures that are mounted within a country. When a faction takes the reigns of power, what you see is the reprisal of the same action from before.

The misunderstanding, of these factions withholding the power is linked to different interests and from that arises what we call Revolution.

The situation of the population continues to be the same, yet the interests involved will not be those of the same dominating class.

Student 12

It represents a total rupture and a brusque and violent transformation of society. From this rupture emerges a society based on a structure that is different from the preceding one and therefore, does not give the impression of continuity and linking with the preceding. This transformation, from my point of view, always comes about in a violent form since the old dominating classes will not give up their power without a strong resistance, and as the new emerging classes arrive upon a level of consciousness and unconformity that cannot lay dormant the result is a shock between the different classes.

The new classes that assume power so that they can legitimize themselves should mark in a clear form their identity and this identity cannot maintaining links with the old dominant class.

4. Conceptions about revolution applied to the Revolution of 1964

These twelve student -teachers , collectively, presented their views on revolution in general and on the 1964 Revolution in Brazil:

"It was not a revolution, but a coup d'état and what is more there was no rupture or emergence of a new society. The dominant national and international elites felt their privileges threatened when they perceived within society a movement that called for social reforms."

"The coup of 64 permitted these elites to consolidate and order themselves and eliminate their opposition and enemies and to achieve this they utilized all of the available means (coercion, torture, exile, assassination, prison, etc.)"

In the conceptualization that the student-teachers gave of Revolution there is a clearly similar idealization. According to what we saw in the "Principles" defined by Gianfranco Pasquino, the ingredient "violence" does not arise. Furthermore, there does not necessarily exist the preeminence of a substitution of political authorities, as indicated by Pasquino so that these changes occur in all of the sectors of society.

This is how misconceptions arise, they are the result of these definitions of the concept of Revolution, characterized not by a total inaccuracy of the concept, but nevertheless by a certain imprecision, once some of the elements are not present, as violence for instance.

It is necessary to remember that there also seems to be a desire to restrict Revolution to processes which provoke, at the same time, socio-economic changes. However, it is wise to remember what Pasquino says, "a definition of Revolution as an attempt to introduce political and socio-economic changes does not allow us to overlook revolutionary phenomena that is not victorious."

In Brazilian history there is a lot of argument between historians about the problem of the episodes of the proclamation of the Republic (1889), of the so-called Revolution of 1930 and of what happened in 1964. Some History text books, treat the occurrence of 1964 (the removing of President João Goulart) as a "Revolution" while for others a "Movement" and for still others, a "Coup."

Conclusion

The problem of conceptualization, specifically in the field of Social Sciences (History) arises from concepts formed imprecisely, undefinedly, idealizedly, and ideologically, which, as a result, can generate ambiguities and distortions when such concepts are applied to analyze history.

There is also the remaining aspect that many times the concept being seen in a restricted manner, when applied is applied in a generic form, or vice versa, which also generates a misfocus of its applicability.

A proposal to clarify this problem involving concepts comes from the use of Conceptual Maps as an instructional resource. A resource that can be used to organize, define, provide a hierarchy and a relationship of concepts as emphasized by Novak. I believe that in this manner we can, in an effective manner, solve the problem of misconceptions.

The application of conceptual maps can aid both the student to learn how to learn and aid the teacher so that his teaching method is more effective. We are testimony to the aid offered by conceptual maps and the clarity they provide with problems related to conceptual subjects.

To conclude this paper, I would like to add something on the subject of the concept of Revolution, which Pasquino affirmed (in Bobbio et al., 1986, p. 1130).

According to him, the idea of Revolution is undergoing crisis today:

In a synthesis, today we think in crisis of the hope of changes that are palingenetical, total and totally positive, not just between studious conservatives, but also among those with a progressive orientation. This is the result essentially, on the one hand, of the comparison of the superior results in terms of democratic politics, social equality and economic development, achieved in the countries which did not experiment with revolutionary changes, with the results achieved by the countries which suffered mainly during the 20th century; on the other hand, the consciousness acquired by the modern systems, given their complexity and the functioning of their mechanisms, could on experiment a Revolution after a large global separation which would become even more difficult to introduce vast amelioration in different sectors of the population.

Another thing that calls attention is the fact that they are in potential motion, these days, gradual and consistent changes. This fact suggests that according to some perspectives, reforms appear to be victorious comparatively or taken by themselves.

The excesses and failures of many revolutions augment the consciousness that, in some cases, they are a violence to history, perhaps, unavoidable, but, at the same time, a violence. They may continue to be necessary in diverse cases of insupportable oppression, in which the liberation of progressive forces has to undergo a clear rupture with the schemes of the past. In all, the great act of political creativity is called Revolution, yet it does not only become more rare, but it also is subject to a more rigid control by the revolutionaries themselves, more aware as to the consequences and results of Revolution which at the height are visible: the success of complete change from the previous political, social and economic relations. (idem).

Bibliography

ALLARD, Michel, LEFEBRE, André (org.) **A História e o seu ensino**. Tradução por Gustavo de Fraga. Coimbra: Almedina, 1976.

ARENDT, H. **On Revolution**. The Viking Press, New York, 1963.

AUSUBEL, David P. **Educational Psychology: a cognitive view**. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

BLOCH, Marc. **Introdução à História**. 3 ed. Lisboa: Europa. América, 1976.

BOBBIO, Norberto et al.. **Dicionário de política**. Tadução de João Ferreira, Carmen C. Varriale e outros. Brasília:Universidade de Brasília. 1986.

BRAUDEL, FERNAND. **Gramática das civilizações**. Tradução por Antônio de Pádua Danese. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1989.

CARRAHER, David Willian. **Senso crítico: do dia-a-dia às ciências humanas**. São Paulo: Pioneira, 1983.

CHAFFER, John, TAYLOR, Lawrence. **A História e o professor de História**. Lisboa: Horizonte, 1984.

COMMAGER, Henry Steele. **Iniciação ao estudo da História**. Tradução de Waltensi Dutra. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores, 1967.

FREITAG, Bárbara, COSTA, Wanderley da, MOTTA, Valéria Rodrigues. **O livro didático em questão**. São Paulo; Cortez, 1989.

KANT, Emmanuel. **Critique de la raison pure**. Tremesayques et Pacaud. P.W.F. 1967

MEDONÇA, Nadir Domingues. **O uso dos conceitos: uma tentativa de interdisciplinaridade**. 2. ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1985.

MOREIRA, Marco A. (org.) **Ensino na Universidade. Sugestões para o professor**. Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade/ PADES / UFRGS / PROGRAD. 1985

MOREIRA, Marco A., BUCHWEITZ, Bernardo. **Mapas conceituais: instrumentos didáticos de avaliação e de análise de currículo**. São Paulo: Moraes, 1987.

MOREIRA, Marco A., MASINI, Elcie F. Salzano. **Aprendizagem significativa: a teoria de David Ausubel.** São Paulo: Moraes, 1982.

NOVAK, Joseph D. and GOWIN, Bob. **Learning how to learn.** New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

REINHARD, Marcel. **O ensino da História e seus problemas.** Tradução de Maria Angelina de Meneses Rodo. Coimbra : Atlântida Ed. s/d.

SILVA, Maria Beatriz N. **Teoria da História.** São Paulo: Cultrix, 1976.

VEYNE, Paul. **Como se escreve a História.** Lisboa: Edição 70, 1971.

VILAR, Pierre. **Iniciação ao vocabulário de análise histórica.** Lisboa: João de Sá da Costa, 1985.