

PHD RESEARCH

TESSA LOBBES

History without dust. The many faces of the present in Belgian postwar history education, 1945-1989 - [Original

Title : *Verleden zonder stof. De gedaanten van het heden in het Belgische naoorlogse geschiedenisonderwijs*

KU Leuven, 2012. Supervisors : Kaat Wils & Tom Verschaffel.

At the beginning of the school year, Belgian politicians are often interviewed on the importance of school subjects. History education, they claim, has a democratic mission and especially the more recent past of the Great War, the Holocaust and the European Union should be studied. In short, the study of history should be largely connected to the present. This debate is not new. After all, one of the most vexing questions in postwar history education was precisely the relation between past and present. In this PhD, I examine how and to what extent Belgian history education evolved from an encyclopedic, past-centered patriotic subject to a present-oriented subject with global and democratic ambitions. I translate this question into the study of the evolving 'figures' of the present. After all, the present appeared at diverse levels of history education (from goals, contents to didactical methods) and in diverse ways (such as judging the past from the present).

The changing position of the present is studied in relation with the implications of the growing desire to converge history education and civic education, with the interactions between history education and academic history and with the meaning of the didactical transformation of history education into 'a science of the present'. The

ideas and practices of history inspectors, members of history curriculum commissions and history teachers are central. Next to an analysis of their discourse on the present, curricula, textbooks and exemplary lessons are investigated. In contrast to older historiography, this book shows that the shock of the Second World War stimulated inspectors already in the 1950s to reorient history education from a patriotic past-oriented subject into a more international peace education dealing with twentieth century history. From the 1960s on, next to a growing internationalisation, moralisation and didactisation of the subject matter, the largest number of hours was awarded to the recent past. After all, the present was called to 'save' history education which was judged excessively past-oriented. Moreover, history lessons lost hours to the new present-oriented subject societal education. The omnipresence of the present was rejected and a more balanced attention between older and more recent time periods was implemented. Nevertheless, as a result of this postwar evolution, the present remains a strong feature of present-day history education.