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Representation and interpretation: Textbooks, teachers, and historical culture

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Abstract

This article presents a study of how contemporary Swedish lower secondary school textbooks present the emergence of the Cold War and how 10 active lower secondary school history teachers interpreted a quotation that was ambiguous in relation to the general narrative in the studied Swedish textbooks, seeking to analyse textbooks both from the perspectives of content and reception. Applying a theoretical framework of uses of history, the study finds that the narratives presented in the studied textbooks are what could be called traditional in the sense that they do not acknowledge perspective and representation in history. While the interviewed teachers generally acknowledged that textbook narratives are representations of history and contingent on perspective, few teachers extended this to include how their own views affect their interpretations, suggesting an intermediary appreciation of the contextual contingency of historical narratives.

Keywords: textbooks; narrative; history didactics; interpretation; reception; uses of history.