

# **How do Catalan Students Narrate the History of Catalonia When They Finish Primary Education?**

## **De quelle manière les étudiants catalans racontent-ils l'histoire de la Catalogne une fois leurs études primaires complétées ?**

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### Article abstract

In this article we analyze how a group of Catalan students (aged 11-13,  $N = 245$ ) narrate the history of Catalonia and we compare their narratives with the official Catalan narrative. From an interpretative approach, we collect data by requiring the students to write down what they remember about the history of Catalonia. The research is conducted by means of narrative analysis and normative content analysis. Our results suggest that most students' narratives are similar to the official narrative in terms of the main characters and events selected and follow the patriotic national narrative by highlighting the relevance of Catalan national symbols. We discuss the implications of this patriotic national narrative in Catalonia and elsewhere, and we propose replacing patriotic national narratives with humanistic world history narratives.

# HOW DO CATALAN STUDENTS NARRATE THE HISTORY OF CATALONIA WHEN THEY FINISH PRIMARY EDUCATION?

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**ABSTRACT.** In this article we analyze how a group of Catalan students (aged 11-13,  $N = 245$ ) narrate the history of Catalonia and we compare their narratives with the official Catalan narrative. From an interpretative approach, we collect data by requiring the students to write down what they remember about the history of Catalonia. The research is conducted by means of narrative analysis and normative content analysis. Our results suggest that most students' narratives are similar to the official narrative in terms of the main characters and events selected and follow the patriotic national narrative by highlighting the relevance of Catalan national symbols. We discuss the implications of this patriotic national narrative in Catalonia and elsewhere, and we propose replacing patriotic national narratives with humanistic world history narratives.

DE QUELLE MANIÈRE LES ÉTUDIANTS CATALANS RACONTENT-ILS L'HISTOIRE DE LA CATALOGNE UNE FOIS LEURS ÉTUDES PRIMAIRES COMPLÉTÉES ?

**RÉSUMÉ.** Dans cet article, nous analysons de quelle manière un groupe d'étudiants catalans âgés de 11 à 13 ans ( $N = 245$ ) raconte l'histoire de la Catalogne et comparons leurs récits avec le récit officiel catalan. Utilisant une approche interprétative, nous recueillons les données d'étudiants à qui nous avons demandé d'écrire ce qu'ils avaient retenu de l'histoire de la Catalogne. Le projet de recherche a été réalisé au moyen d'analyse narrative et d'analyse normative du contenu. Nos résultats démontrent que la plupart des récits effectués par les étudiants correspondent au récit officiel en ce qui a trait aux personnages principaux et événements choisis. De plus, les récits respectent la trame patriotique nationale, mettant en lumière l'importance des symboles nationaux catalans. Nous discutons des implications de ce récit patriotique national, en Catalogne et ailleurs, puis suggérons de remplacer les récits patriotiques nationaux par des récits proposant une vision humaniste de l'histoire mondiale.

This article focuses on the findings in Catalonia of an international research study entitled "Réception et production de récits de l'histoire nationale" (see González & Pagès, 2011).<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of this paper is to analyze how Catalan students narrate the history of Catalonia and to discuss the impli-

cations of their narratives for history education. With this ultimate goal in mind, we contextualize our research in the international literature concerning narratives and history education and we discuss the specific characteristics of the Catalan case. This is followed by an explanation of the methods employed and the findings obtained. Finally, we discuss our results and we present a number of conclusions and recommendations for history education in Catalonia and elsewhere.

#### REVIEW: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES, HISTORY EDUCATION, AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Exploring students' historical narratives is relevant to educational research and, in particular, to history education research for several reasons. According to hermeneutic philosophy, historical narratives have the power to help individuals and communities to understand themselves as well as the world they live in. As "essentially story-telling animals" (MacIntyre, 2010, p. 216), human beings use historical narratives to understand their past and present and to define an eternal truth and an eternal identity for the communities they belong to (Anderson, 1983; Ricoeur, 1984; Rösen, 2004). Furthermore, beyond their association with knowledge and identity, and perhaps because of them, historical narratives have a clear effect on orientating individuals' and communities' actions. Therefore, despite being based on the past, historical narratives can have a potential impact on constructing the future (Ricoeur, 1984; Rösen, 2004; Wertsch, 2000).

The use of historical narratives in history education has usually been associated with romantic-patriotic history education (Carretero, 2007; Rösen, 2004; VanSledright, 2008). Understood as the sort of history education that aims to build the nation-state (Citron, 1987; Osborne, 2006; Seixas, 2009), to contribute to a sense of togetherness (Rösen, 2004), to enhance the love and loyalty to the nation (Carretero, 2007; Falaize, Heimberg, & Loubes, 2013; Loubes, 2010), and to transmit certain cultural-national values (Falaize, 2011; Ross, Mathison, & Vinson, 2014), romantic-patriotic history education uses particular teaching strategies such as the commemoration of public speeches, monuments, and days (Rösen, 2004), and the memorization of certain facts (Funes, 2010). This whole set of purposes and strategies is usually integrated into a nation-state narrative that is recounted in school curricula (especially history curricula) as well as in other media (Seixas, 2009).

The nation-state narrative has been revealed as one of the traditional "grand narratives" (Lyotard, 1984). Grand narratives, so-called "master narratives" (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Wertsch, 1997), or "official narratives" (VanSledright, 2008) provide individuals and communities with some semblance of meaning and purpose that contribute to the maintenance of dominant groups (Lyotard, 1984). Like any other narrative, official narratives are composed of a set of

elements (Elliott, 2005) in which settings, characters, scenes, and plots can be found (Létourneau & Caritey, 2008; McAdams, 2011). In official nation-state narratives, the plot unfolds in the “nation” (VanSledright, 2008), the characters are divided in a binary opposition in which the “we” (represented by the “national heroes”) is opposed to the “others” (represented by the “enemies”) and the main scenes represent the “traumatic events” of this “official national past” (Kaplowitz, 1990). As described by Finn (2006) in his defence of patriotic history in the USA, this official nation-state narrative is “about heroes and villains, freedom and repression, hatred and compassion, democracy and theocracy, civic virtue and vice” (p. 580).

Within education and social science theory and research, romantic-patriotic history education and the transmission of official nation-state narratives are controversial. Whereas certain authors support romantic-patriotic history education and the transmission of official narratives in the construction of national values (Finn, 2006; Ravitch, 2006), others criticize the imposition and legitimization of an official discourse (Ross et al., 2014; Wertsch, 1997, 2000, 2012). Whereas certain scholars have declared the importance of official narratives for their contribution to cohesive and peaceful societies (e.g. de Marrais & LeCompte, 1994; Durkheim, 1956), others have argued that, although official narratives can contribute to peaceful national societies, they also contribute to violent international societies (Buckley-Zistel, 2008) by means of creating a “we” which, rather than being affirmative, is built upon a reactive approach to the “non-we” or “others” (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Buckley-Zistel, 2008; Moreno & Arriba, 1996). Radical scholars have also criticized romantic-patriotic history education and the transmission of official narratives for attempting to impose the dominant culture’s ideology on minorities (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 1989).

Two alternatives have been proposed to overcome the controversy caused by romantic-patriotic history education and the ways in which it uses official nation-state narratives. First, the substitution of the official national narrative with other narratives has been proposed. Rather than narrating the official nation-state narrative, an alternative inclusive national narrative that does not generate a clear “we” and “others” has been proposed (Létourneau, 2006), as well as a local, thematic (VanSledright, 2008), or world-humanistic narrative (Levstik, 2014; VanSledright, 2008). The second alternative is a discipline-based history education that would avoid narratives by providing learners with evidence-based learning (direct access to historical sources, evidence from different approaches, etc. See Seixas, 2004; VanSledright & Afflerbach, 2000). This alternative has, nevertheless, been questioned by those who deny the possibility of avoiding narratives in history education (Barton & McCully, 2006; Létourneau, 2006).

Previous research studies have suggested that narratives are necessary to expand upon students' learning about history (Egan, 1989; Levstik, 1989) because they articulate any historical knowledge into structured narratives (Barton, 2008; Seixas, Peck, & Poyntz, 2011). Within history education research, the ways in which students build historical narratives have been a key research topic. It has been suggested that although textbooks and official curricula tend to follow official narratives (Christou, 2007; Idrissi, 2010; Torsti, 2007), their impact on students' narratives is considerably lower than the impact of teachers' discourse, collective memory, or even the discourse about the present (Létourneau, 2006; Mosborg, 2002; Wineburg, Mosborg, Porat, & Duncan, 2007). Hence, it could be argued that what have been described as vernacular narratives, "what social reality feels" (Bodnar, 1992, p. 15) might have a higher impact on students' narratives than the official narrative, "what it should be like" (p. 15).

The difference in reception of official and vernacular narratives could be explained if we consider that students are likely to negotiate rather than assimilate the official narrative (Bakhtin, 1982). Previous research has suggested that students undertake this process of negotiation according to their gender and ethnic identities (Carretero & González, 2004; Christou, 2007; Epstein, 2000; Levstik & Barton, 1998; Levstik & Groth, 2005; Porat, 2004; von Borries, 1997). By means of this process, students build narratives in which they highlight certain core events, learned at school or elsewhere (Seixas et al., 2011), and "use imaginations to fill any gaps" (Barton, 2008, p. 240). Students' narratives share, nevertheless, certain key aspects of official narratives. Research conducted worldwide has suggested that students explain historical narratives in terms of the main characters being divided between "friends" and "enemies" (Carretero & Kriger, 2004; Létourneau, 2006; Létourneau & Caritey, 2008), who face a set of traumatic events (Carretero & Kriger, 2004; Létourneau & Caritey, 2008; Levstik & Groth, 2005; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2001). Also, it seems likely that the plots within students' narratives follow a progressive or complex trajectory in accordance with the official narrative in each country (Barton, 2002; Lee, 2004; Levstik & Barton, 1998; von Borries, 1997). To what extent these research results apply to the Catalan case is as yet unknown.

#### **THE RELEVANCE OF THE CASE: BUILDING CATALAN IDENTITY WITHIN THE SPANISH STATE**

In this research study, we assume that it is not only nation-states that have their own official national narratives transmitted through history education. Under the assumption that nations are imagined political communities (Anderson, 1983), we understand that "nations without state" (Guibernau, 2000) also transmit their own official national narratives. For instance, Québécois (Létourneau & Caritey, 2008; McAndrew, 2010) and Northern Irish (Barton, 2002) students explain a certain sort of history that, rather than being associated with the state they belong to (Canada or the United Kingdom), is associated

with the nation – understood as an imagined political community – they identify themselves with. One of the aims of the present research study is to ascertain whether or not this is also the Catalan case.

According to the Spanish Constitution, Catalonia is a historical nationality within Spain. Catalonia is currently subject to academic controversy due to its demands for independence (e.g. Guntermann, 2013; Lang & Ondarza, 2012; Prat i Guilanya, 2012; Strubell Trueta, 2010). The Spanish state is considered to be a multinational state (e.g. Stojanovic, 2011) with at least three different national identities prevailing within it (the Castilian / Spanish identity, the Catalan identity, and the Basque identity) that coexist in multiple combinations (e.g. only the Catalan identity, Catalan and Spanish identity, only the Spanish identity, e.g. see Prat i Guilanya, 2012). The exclusive identification with the Catalan identity has increased substantially in the last ten years (Prat i Guilanya, 2012) and this increase is pointed out as one of the main causes of today's fervent demands for independence (Guibernau, 2014).

The Catalan identity has strong historical roots that have been identified as key components of the Catalan official narrative (Guibernau, 2000; Rodon, 2012). Although mainly based on the Catalan language (Arguelagué, 2006; Rodon, 2012), the main national symbols – the flag (*la Senyera*), the national anthem (*Els Segadors*), and the national day (*La Diada*) – are built upon certain key historical events (Prat, 1991). The creation of the Catalan flag is associated with the foundation myth of Catalonia (Wilfred the Hairy, Count of Barcelona, received the flag as a symbol from Charles the Bald, allowing him to start his own dynasty), an event which was supposed to have taken place in the ninth century. The national anthem is based on the *Guerra dels Segadors* (Revolt of the Reapers) in 1640 “when Catalans united against the harsh treatment they were receiving from Castile” (Guibernau, 2000, p. 1002). They provisionally joined the French kingdom and after the peace between Castile and France, Catalonia was divided in two: the French part and the Spanish part. The national day commemorates “the abolition of Catalan rights and liberties in 1714 when on 11 September (which turned into Catalonia's national day), after a massive Franco-Spanish attack, Barcelona surrendered” (Guibernau, 2000, p. 1002), and the Catalan laws were abolished together with the Catalan language, which was replaced by the Castilian language (Spanish) in all the official documentation. More recent core historical events include the restoration of the Catalan government after 200 years during the Second Republic (1931-1936), the resistance during the Civil War (1936-1939), the Franco dictatorship and the second abolition of the Catalan government (1939-1975), and the development of a new autonomy in contemporary times (1975-2014) (Rodon, 2012). We assume that these historical components of the Catalan identity comprise the official Catalan narrative.

From our point of view, the study of this official national narrative in Catalan history education is relevant to history education in Catalonia and elsewhere

for several reasons. First, as mentioned, history is currently used to justify relevant political positions and social movements (Guibernau, 2014; Prat i Guilanya, 2012). Consequently, identifying to what extent the official Catalan narrative is assimilated / negotiated by students can give us some clues in identifying whether history education is contributing to the enhancement of critical or uncritical social thinking with regard to analyzing modern events. Second, history education and language education have been at the core of the political debate within Spain and Catalonia (López Facal, 2003; Oller i Freixa, 2013; Pagès, 2010; Santisteban, 2013), and it is claimed that each historical nationality has established their own master narrative (Carretero, 2007). We propose the study of students' narratives as a method to identify whether or not the official Catalan narrative has had an impact on young people's discourse. We believe that this approach might contribute to analyzing (continuing with the Québécois and Northern Irish studies) the incidence of official narratives in the nation-building of nations without state. Third, we have highlighted elsewhere the complexity of the evolution of the Catalan syllabus (Oller i Freixa, 2013; Pagès & González-Monfort, 2011; Santisteban, 2013). In the present syllabus, identity-building is still one of the aims of primary education (Oller i Freixa, 2013). However, the syllabus highlights the main aim of primary history as being to increase the knowledge about the time (structure, measure, social and historical time) during which people lived and about "the ways in which people lived in the past, relevant events and characters in the locale, and Catalan and Spanish history, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> century"<sup>2</sup> (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2007). Beyond this, there is no further explicit mention of any sorts of events, monuments, or commemorations. Therefore, in contrast to other curricula (Christou, 2007; Idrissi, 2010; Torsti, 2007), the history syllabus in Catalonia seems not to be based on the official narrative. Being aware of existing research that restricts the impact of syllabuses and textbooks on students' discourse (e.g. Porat, 2004), we wonder how the Catalan syllabus is received by learners.

Fourth, Spain has a strong tradition of researching identity issues within official curricula and textbooks (Sáiz Serrano & López Facal, 2012); however, in contrast with other areas, there is a limited amount of research on students' reception of national historical narratives (Sáiz Serrano & López Facal, 2012). The research conducted in Spain to investigate students' narratives or students' identity issues has been mainly focused on secondary or post-mandatory education (Carretero & González, 2004; Navarro Sada et al., 2008; Prats Cuevas, Trepal i Carbonell, Peña Calvo, Valls Montés, & Urgell Plaza, 2002; Prego Gonzalez & Armas Castro, 2014; Schmidt, 2005) and, despite the existence of some investigations conducted in full or partly in Catalonia regarding identity (Navarro Sada et al., 2008; Prats Cuevas et al., 2002), we are not aware of any research focused on the reception of official Catalan narratives among students.

Taking these research gaps into account and with the ultimate purpose of gaining an insight into Catalan students' historical narratives, the objectives of this research study are:

- To analyze the historical narratives regarding Catalonia among Catalan students who have recently completed their primary education;
- To compare students' narratives with the official Catalan narrative.

## **METHOD**

To explore students' narratives and their connection with the official narrative, we conducted mixed methods research with a predominantly qualitative approach. Following hermeneutic assumptions, we understand reality as a social construct (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and language and communication as the mechanisms human beings use to construct their meanings (Gadamer, 1975). In accordance with the hermeneutic approach, the research is mainly qualitative. Data is, nevertheless, summarized using basic quantitative techniques in order to obtain an extensive picture of the analysis conducted.

### *The participants*

As mentioned previously, our research was focused on analyzing students' narratives upon the completion of their primary education. Consequently, we decided to select students who were at the beginning of the first year of compulsory secondary education (first year of *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* and aged 11-12) because we wanted to ensure that they had finished the entire primary education cycle but had not yet been taught history in secondary education. In Catalonia, first year secondary school students are essentially taught geography in the first half of the academic year and history in the second half. Consequently, we collected data during the first half of the year (October 2011-February 2012).

Two hundred and forty-five students from four different schools were selected via volunteer sampling. Four Catalan social studies teachers agreed to participate in the research study and their students were asked to be participants. Despite being aware that this sample was not a simple random sample and, consequently, could not be considered a representative sample of Catalonia, we consider it appropriate due to the availability of resources and the well-known difficulties in gaining access to students (Morrison, 2006). Relevant characteristics concerning the schools researched are presented in Table 1, while relevant characteristics concerning the students are presented in Table 2.



TABLE 1. *Relevant demographic, economic, and social statistics from the schools and the school towns investigated (sourced from Institut d'estadística de Catalunya, n.d.)*

School code	A	B	C	D	–
School status	Public	Public	Public	Public	–
Province (region within Catalonia)	Barcelona	Barcelona	Barcelona	Tarragona	Catalonia
Inhabitants (2012)	6,426	23,363	1,621,000	7,372	7,570,908
Household income per capita (€) (2010)	17,800	17,100	19,300	15,600	16,900
Inhabitants born in 2012 (%)					
Catalonia	70.6	76.1	59.0	57.0	63.2
Spain (excluding Catalonia)	24.2	17.2	19.4	20.5	19.1
Abroad	5.2	6.7	21.7	22.5	17.7
Votes for Catalan nationalist parties in the Catalan parliamentary elections 2012 (%)	38.9	54.0	47.6	52.3	49.2

TABLE 2. *Relevant characteristics of the students investigated*

Characteristic	School code				Total	
	A	B	C	D	Count	%
Gender						
Male	22	48	30	20	120	49.6
Female	30	45	23	24	122	50.4
Age (mean)	12.0	11.7	11.6	11.9	11.8	
Place of birth						
Catalonia	26	82	29	32	169	80.1
Spain (excluding Catalonia)	0	1	1	0	2	0.9
Abroad	2	5	20	13	40	19.0
First language						
Catalan	9	36	15	22	82	33.9
Spanish	41	48	20	6	115	47.5
Both	2	5	4	2	13	5.4
Other	0	3	14	15	32	13.2
Total	52	94	54	45	245	100.0

**Data collection**

To collect data from students, and as part of wider research<sup>3</sup> programs, we decided to ask students to write down what they knew about the history of Catalonia. Specifically, students were required to answer the question: “What do you know about the history of Catalonia?” This procedure had been successfully employed and justified previously by other researchers (Létourneau & Caritey, 2008; Porat, 2004) to investigate students’ narratives, and we decided to follow their example. It must be emphasized that students did not know in advance that they would have to answer this question and answers were collected after 45 minutes by their own teachers.

**Data analysis**

**TABLE 3. Codes by dimensions and sub-dimensions**

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Normative content analysis (a priori codes)	Narrative content analysis (emerged codes)	Total
Settings	Period	Prehistory, ancient history, medieval history, modern history, contemporary history	0	29
	Place	0	Catalonia, Spain, Europe, local, France... (n = 24)	
Characters	Individuals	0	Franco, Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy), catholic kings, James I, Philip V... (n = 19)	47
	Groups and Quasi-characters <sup>a</sup>	0	The Catalans, the French, the Spanish, the Castilians, the English... (n = 28)	
Scenes (events)	—	0	Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy), La Guerra dels Segadors (Revolt of the Reapers), Muslim Conquest, La Guerra de Successió (War of the Spanish Succession), Spanish Civil War... (n = 19)	19
—	Progress	Progress, Decline	0	2
Codes (total)		7	90	97

**NOTE.** <sup>a</sup>Quasi-characters can be defined as any entity (e.g. states, institutions, concepts) that behaves as if it were a character. For instance, see *Henríquez (2009)*.

Data was analyzed by means of normative content analysis and narrative content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). The units of analysis were created through the process known as “unitizing” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), namely, by creating units of analysis and ascribing codes to data (Cohen, Manion, & Morriison, 2011). The codification was undertaken by using the open source software

TAMS Analyzer. In the normative content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002), general codes were created in accordance with traditional historical periods ( $n = 5$ ) (see Table 3, i.e. prehistory, ancient history, medieval history, modern history, and contemporary history). Students' narratives were codified first using these codes.

In the narrative content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002), codes emerged from data ( $n = 90$ ) by following the procedure described by Miles & Huberman (1994): data codification, creation of a code scheme, description of codes, data recodification, and creation of a codes matrix. In this final matrix we incorporated the narratives' components described by McAdams (2011) (settings, characters, scenes, and plots) as dimensions in which we classified the whole set of codes.

In the quantitative analysis, we identified the presence / absence of each code in students' texts by means of descriptive statistics (percentage). Although this process of quantification has been criticized because of its significant losses of variance (Sandelowski, 2009), we considered it appropriate to summarize the data analyzed by means of the normative and narrative content analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *The setting: When do the narratives take place?*

Students' narratives are essentially set in the medieval history period (72.5%) (see Table 4). Traditional Catalan history identifies medieval history as being the foundation of Catalonia and the period of maximum expansion. Approximately 37% of the students set the history of Catalonia in the modern history period in which the traumatic events of *La Guerra dels Segadors* (Revolt of the Reapers) and the *La Guerra de Successió* (War of the Spanish Succession) took place. Whereas the medieval history period can be considered the period of maximum expansion, it is usually described as a period of crisis for Catalonia. The presence of contemporary history (18.1%), ancient history (8.2%), and prehistory (6.5%) in students' texts is considerably lower.

### *Where do the narratives take place?*

Ninety-one point five per cent of the students set their narratives of the history of Catalonia in the context of Catalonia as a whole, 24.4% set it in their local villages, 17.7% set it in Spain, and none of the students set their story in Europe or the rest of the world.

The dominance of Catalonia as the spatial context can be explained in terms of the question students were required to answer: "What do you know about the history of Catalonia?" However, even considering the impact of the question, we could have expected that students would contextualize their narratives regarding the history of Catalonia in the history of wider regions such as Spain, the Mediterranean region, Europe or the world. Our data suggest that this contextualization rarely took place; students narrated a story with few connections to elsewhere.

**TABLE 4. Percentage of students' texts coded**

Element	% of students
The setting: The historical period	
Medieval history	72.5
Modern history	36.9
Contemporary history	18.1
Ancient history	8.2
Prehistory	6.5
The setting: The place	
Catalonia	91.5
Local (other than Barcelona, within Catalonia)	24.4
Spain	17.7
Barcelona	11.6
Aragon (region within Spain, border with Catalonia. Part of the Crown of Aragon)	11.6
Valencia (region within Spain, border with Catalonia. Part of the Crown of Aragon)	1.8
Mediterranean region	1.2
Europe	0.0
The characters	
Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy)	58.1
Catalonia / the Catalan people	41.9
France / the French people	18.8
Francisco Franco	11.1
Sant Jordi (Saint George)	10.3
Spain / the Spanish people	10.3
Castile / the Castilian people	7.7
Jaume I (James I of Aragon)	3.4
Isabel I and Ferran II (Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon)	2.6
Felip V (Philip V of Spain)	2.6
The scenes: The main events	
Guifré el Pilós (beginning of Barcelona's dynasty) (826-987)	58.2
La Guerra dels Segadors (Revolt of the Reapers) (1640-1659)	32.2
The Muslim Conquest (711-1150)	17.1
La Guerra de Successió (War of the Spanish Succession) (1701-1715)	13.0
The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)	13.0
The foundation of the Crown of Aragon (1150)	8.9
The Roman Conquests (3 BC-AD 3)	7.8
The conquest of the Mediterranean (1136-1349)	2.7
Democracy (1982-2014)	2.1
The Second Republic (1931-1936)	1.4
The plot	
Decline	12.1
Progress	7.2

### *Which characters?*

The main characters of students' narratives are *Guifré el Pilós* (Wilfred the Hairy) (58.1%) and Catalonia or the Catalan people which / who acts / act as a quasi-character (41.9%). *Guifré el Pilós*, as mentioned, was the first Count of Barcelona who was allowed to start his own dynasty but he is mainly mentioned in terms of the legend that involves the creation of the Catalan flag. In students' narratives, Catalonia (or the Catalan people) acts / act as if it / they was / were a single character who behaves like a person. For example, one student explained: "I know that the Catalan people fought against the Castilian people and some knights killed the Catalan count" (ID140), whilst another mentioned, "some time later... Catalonia didn't speak Catalan, but Castilian" (ID73). Beyond these two main characters, the most mentioned characters are the French people (also a quasi-character) (18.8%), Francisco Franco (11.1%), *Sant Jordi* (Saint George) (10.3%), Spain and the Spanish people (10.3%) and Castile and the Castilian people (7.7%).

The characters in students' narratives could be understood as the "we" and the "others". Whereas the "we" would include the hero, *Guifré el Pilós* (Wilfred the Hairy), the Catalan people, and also the legendary *Sant Jordi* (Saint George), the "others" include Francisco Franco, the Spanish people, and the French people. Both groups seem to include a mix of quasi, legendary, and, to a lesser extent, political characters.

### *Which scenes?*

In students' narratives, the main events are the myth of *Guifré el Pilós* and the foundation of Catalonia (58.2%), followed by *La Guerra dels Segadors* (Revolt of the Reapers) (33.2%), the Muslim Conquests (17.1%), *La Guerra de Successió* (War of the Spanish Succession) (13.0%), and the Spanish Civil War (13.0%). Beyond the foundation of Catalonia, the rest of the events are related to wars and conquests; they are all events that could probably be described as traumatic.

It must be highlighted that among the four most quoted events, three of them are related to important Catalan symbols. The foundation scene describes the creation of the flag, the anthem is based on *La Guerra dels Segadors* (Revolt of the Reapers), and the Catalan national day commemorates *La Guerra de Successió* (War of the Spanish Succession). Indeed, 54.5% of the students explicitly mention at least one of these symbols: 36.4% mention the flag, 16.4% mention the anthem, and 9.2% mention the national day. Students' narratives commonly mention these core events by following different strategies. Whereas some students mention just one of the events (46.7%), other students mix two or more events in one single event or mention different events and fill the gap in between (8.7%).

### ***What is the plot?***

Only 20% of the students narrate a story with a clear plot. Among them, the number of students who describe a plot of decline is higher (12.1%) than the number of students who describe a plot of progress (7.2%). The students who describe a plot of decline explain this decline in terms of the crisis (economic decline), “there was no crisis, nowadays there are plenty” (ID236) or in terms of losing Catalan power to the Castilians, “Catalonia fought against Spain for its independence, but it lost” (ID195). In contrast, the students who describe a plot of progress explain progress in terms of technology or welfare, “I think they had a really boring life, without television, computers, games... in contrast, now we have everything” (ID238), or the survival and recovery of the Catalan language, “we moved from having to speak Spanish at school to having television shows in Catalan!” (ID219). Some students’ narratives could be identified as having a proper epilogue or expectation. As one student mentioned, “and something really important that will happen soon is the independence of Catalonia that would bring a new difficult episode to this autonomous community” (ID237).

## **DISCUSSION**

Students investigated narrate a patriotic Catalan history. As associated with patriotic history narratives (Funes, 2010; Rösen, 2004), students’ narratives highlight the commemoration of certain Catalan symbols associated with what could be described as the official Catalan narrative. Although in contrast to other official curricula (Christou, 2007; Idrissi, 2010; Torsti, 2007), the Catalan syllabus does not mention specific symbols, events, or characters and highlights the contemporary period (Oller i Freixa, 2013), students from four different contexts narrate a history based on the commemoration of the flag, the anthem and the national day and mainly provide the context of medieval and modern history. This would reinforce previous research that has highlighted the lower impact of the syllabus in students’ narratives (Létourneau, 2006). In contrast, it seems likely that if the students investigated learn their narratives in school contexts, this learning is mediated by a vernacular narrative (Bodnar, 1992) or collective memory (Létourneau, 2006; Wineburg et al., 2007) through teachers’ discourse (Létourneau, 2006) or even the discourse about the present (Mosborg, 2002).

Our results also suggest that although Catalan students seem to select the characters of their narratives in order to narrate a dual (we / the others) history, these results are comparable with previous research that has identified this tendency among Québécois and Argentinean students (Carretero & Kriger, 2004; Létourneau, 2006; Létourneau & Caritey, 2008). However, in contrast to these previous research studies, the Catalan students investigated further emphasize the mysticism and legendary nature of their characters. Since the

students investigated had recently finished primary school, and previous studies have focused on older students, it could be suggested that their age has an impact on the sort of characters students select.

On the other hand, women, ethnic minorities, and other social, religious, and cultural groups are absent in students' narratives. In contrast with what has been stated previously (e.g. Lévesque, 2005; Levstik & Barton, 1998; Levstik & Groth, 2005; von Borries, 1997), there is nothing in our research that suggests students narrate the history of Catalonia according to their gender or ethnic group. However, since this was not the main aim of this investigation, our results regarding this issue are only exploratory and we understand that further research needs to be conducted.

The analysis also suggests the relevance of traumatic events in students' narratives. Although, considering the main trends of the official Catalan narrative (Guibernau, 2000; Rodon, 2012), it would seem likely that students' narratives would incorporate traumatic but also "successful" events (conquests, Second Republic, democracy) similar to students elsewhere (Carretero & Kriger, 2004; Létourneau & Caritey, 2008; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2001), Catalan students tend to prioritize traumatic events over other sorts of events such as successful episodes. Considering that the only exception to this trend is the event about *Guifré el Pilós* and the foundation of Catalonia (associated with the myth of the creation of the Catalan flag), it seems likely to us that perhaps the reason for the relevance of these traumatic events in students' narratives is not their traumatic nature but their connection with Catalan symbols (the flag, the anthem, and the national day). Indeed, we wonder, following Barton (2008), whether these students select the core events related to these national symbols and only fill the gaps between these events to explain the full history of Catalonia.

In contrast with students elsewhere, Catalan students seem to narrate a declining history. Whereas American students (Levstik & Barton, 1998) and English students (Lee, 2004) narrate a progressive history, and German students (von Borries, 1997) and Northern Irish students (Barton, 2002) narrate an ambivalent history, Catalan students narrate an ambivalent history that, in the Catalan case, ends with a traumatic event or dramatic climax. We would suggest that in contrast to the official narrative (Rodon, 2012), students investigated do not perceive political autonomy as a climax, or at least as an interesting and outstanding climax, for their stories. The defeat against the Spanish army, the suffering caused by the economic crisis, and the prohibition of the Catalan language are highlighted as appropriate climaxes in students' narratives. This difference can probably be explained in terms of the difference between official and vernacular narratives (Bodnar, 1992). Whereas the official narrative might identify "political autonomy" as the goal of the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) of Catalonia, the students investigated seem to be dissatisfied with this goal or to perceive it as unaccomplished. Whether the present

reinforcement of the demands for independence might change the ending in students' narratives and perhaps also in the official narratives is something we are presently investigating.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The patriotic approach of students' narratives and the similarities between the official narrative and students' narratives are, in our point of view, problematic. First, we wonder whether primary history education and primary education as a whole do actually contribute to uncritically reinforcing certain national cultural values (Ross et al., 2014) and the official discourse or the grand narrative (Wertsch, 1997) by highlighting certain celebrations and symbols. The alternative regarding the relevance of history education is not optimistic either: primary education and especially primary history education would not have a sufficient effect on countersocialising the official discourse or the vernacular narratives. Second, our analysis has suggested a distinction between the Catalan "we" and the "others." This distinction could be assumed as the difference between the heroes and the enemies. To what extent this is indeed the case and the Catalan "we" is built upon a reactive approach to the "others," perhaps "Spanish / Castilian others," is a question we do not have sufficient information to answer. However, if this was the case, it could be suggested that this opposition is relevant in terms of students' configuration of their identity / identities. Given the relation between Catalan identity and the political future of Catalonia and Spain (Guibernau, 2014), it would seem better to reflect carefully on what these narratives actually are – these narratives that are to some extent reinforced or countered by schooling and history education. Third, students' narratives reveal a predominance of legendary and quasi-characters and an omission of female and minority group characters. Beyond the assumption that this could imply the imposition of a dominant culture's ideology (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 1989), we should be concerned, as a democratic society, about the potential relationship between those who are perceived as active in history and those who are perceived as active in present society (Sant & Pagès, 2012; Smith Crocco, 2008). In other words, if students do not identify themselves with the active characters in their narratives (because these characters are legendary, are turned into a uniform mass, or do not represent gender, social class, cultural, ethnic, or religious diversity, etc.) they could assume that they are not or cannot be active citizens in their society (Pagès & Sant, 2012; Sant & Pagès, 2012; Smith Crocco, 2008).

To tackle this situation which we identify as problematic, we argue, similarly to Létourneau (2006), that there is an essential need to deconstruct students' narratives in primary and in secondary education. We suspect that if this deconstruction process is not conducted, students will be able to incorporate new facts, scenes and characters in their narratives, but will maintain the same uncritical discourse. This deconstruction is essential but nevertheless insufficient



for contributing to students' critical learning (Létourneau, 2006; Levstik, 1989). According to the hermeneutic approach and supported by previous research (Egan, 1989; Létourneau, 2006; Levstik, 1989; Barton, McCully, & Conway, 2003), we argue that students behave as "storytelling beings" and learn history narratively, that is, as if it were a story. Perhaps it is fitting for society at large to write a new story to explain history; perhaps in the meantime, we, as teachers / educators, should contribute to student teachers' reflections about the story they will narrate.

Similarly to Létourneau (2006) in the Québécois case, we propose that, in the Catalan case, the Catalan history narrated in schools be changed to the Catalan history (or stories) explained by certain historians that describes Catalonia as a borderland in which all Catalan citizens are in some way "we" and in some way the "others" (Vicens Vives, 1975). Our previous research study (Sant, Santisteban, & Pagès, 2013) has suggested that this version of Catalan history is less problematic in terms of building an inclusive "we" not built upon any "others."

In the Catalan case, but also elsewhere, we propose national history be contextualized in a world history with humanistic and civic purposes (Levstik, 2014; VanSledright, 2008). The humanistic narrative could also have characters, scenes, a plot, etc. The heroes could be equitably selected (among gender, ethnic, class, and religious groups) from those who fight for human rights, and should there be a need for enemies, they could be selected from those who infringe upon human lives and rights. The main plot could be an ongoing story towards the achievement of a peaceful, just, and fully democratic world in which students are identified as the future – and perhaps the present – characters that need to decide what exactly a "peaceful, just, and fully democratic world" is, how to accomplish this world, and when the story is complete.

## NOTES

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2. Original in Catalan. Translated by the authors.
3. This study was part of the international investigation entitled, "Réception et production de récits de l'histoire nationale" mentioned in the introduction.

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