Historical Thinking
Culture and Education

DOI 10.12685/htce.1389

“Can genocide be prevented?”

Swedish lower secondary students determine historical significance

*Ulrik Holmberg**

Karlstad University

Abstract

This article presents the findings of a qualitative study that explored how 53 students (15-year-olds) narratively determine historical significance in written assignments after an inquiry that compared three genocides, namely the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide, and the Rwandan genocide. This study takes up the proposal to distinguish between relevance and significance in establishing historical significance. Significance refers to the knowledge and procedures that are related to the historian´s discipline and important for understanding a historical phenomenon. Relevance refers to historical events and processes that people perceive as relevant to understand the present world. The American Inquiry Design Model (IDM; Swan et al., 2018), which centers on a compelling question, can combine a qualifying dimension of significance with a contemporary dimension of relevance, to qualify students’ historical thinking in combination with a student life-world perspective. The results show that the two dimensions converge and amplify each other and are important to address in history education.

Keywords

inquiry, historical significance, inquiry design model (IDM), history teaching, history education

1. Introduction

History matters. History educators ascribe responsibility to schools for qualifying students’ historical knowledge, through teaching particularly important historical content and developing students’ skills (Ashby et al., 2005; VanSledright, 2011; Seixas, 2015; cf. Young, 2008). However, school is neither the only, nor the the primary, place for learning history. School children do not come to history class as blank slates; they bring with them historical stories that help shape their identities (Barton, 2005; Epstein, 2000; Létourneau & Moisan, 2004). However, the stories that students bring, may not be acknowledged in school history, and what students find meaningful and relevant may not align with what school history considers important for understanding historical events.

* **Contact:** Ulrik Holmberg ✉ ulrik.holmberg@kau.se
Karlstad University, Department of Political, Historical, Religious and Cultural Studies, Karlstad, Sweden

When determining which histories are important to teach and learn, one may emphasize either understanding the present through the past or understanding the past on its own terms. However, such a distinction is called into question by the dual nature of history: it explains both the past and the present from which historical phenomena are interpreted. A singular focus on either dimension risks reducing history to a purely instrumental function (Freedman, 2015; cf. Barton, 2009) or making it susceptible to relativism and conformity to identity narratives (cf. Chapman, 2018). The dual nature of history can be addressed through the concept of historical significance (Nordgren, 2021; cf. Seixas, 1997).

This article presents a qualitative study conducted in three Swedish secondary school classrooms, in which 53 students (15-year-olds) engaged in an inquiry comparing three genocides: the Holocaust, the genocide in Cambodia, and the genocide in Rwanda. The lesson sequence was organized according to the American Inquiry Design Model, a model that combines a rigorous engagement with subject content with an openness to the students' lifeworld perspectives, thus enabling the inquiry to connect meaningfully to the students' everyday lives (Grant et al., 2017; Swan et al., 2018; cf. Holmberg et al., 2022). Thus, the Inquiry Design Model offers a framework for teachers to provide students in a nuanced understanding of the significance of history.

Genocide is a particularly sensitive topic in history education. Few other historical atrocities are as clearly defined and extensively researched. In the Swedish educational context, both Wibaeus (2010) and Ammert (2015) have shown that teachers approach the teaching of genocide with various, more or less normative, motives. These range from upholding the imperative of "never again" and promoting democratic values, to fostering an understanding of psychological mechanisms and encouraging critical thinking. Importantly, Dahl (2021) has demonstrated that students' learning about genocide can be deepened and qualified through history education. Nevertheless, students often grapple with whether the history of genocide should serve as a moral guide for present-day values and actions, or be critically analyzed as part of understanding the past on its own terms.

To help students engage with the historical content both as an object of systematic historical analysis and as a "message" relevant to their lives today, the teachers incorporated Gregory H. Stanton's model, The Eight Stages of Genocide, into the inquiry lesson design. The model conceptualizes genocide as a process, dividing it into eight distinct stages with the aim of identifying potential points for intervention. In this way, it conveys both meaningfulness (it matters) and significance (it is important). It thus seeks to both qualify students' historical understanding and enhance the relevance of the history of genocide to their lives.

In the teaching and learning sequence, the students grappled with the question: "Can genocide be provented?" This article examines students' written accounts, the students argumentation, on this question and search them for ideas of historical significance.

1.1 Purpose

This study aims to explore how students express ideas of historical significance within a teaching and learning sequence focused on comparing genocides. Accordingly, two research questions were posed.

- How can students' historical argumentation be interpreted as an expression of historical significance?
- What challenges and opportunities does teaching structured according to the Inquiry Design Model present for students in constructing narratives, where historical significance is a key component?

1.2 Theoretical background

Historical narratives have been described as a mobilization of ideas about the past to understand the present and create expectations for the future (Rüsen, 2004). A starting point for this process is that whoever seeks to understand and interpret the past is always separated from the phenomenon (the past) he/she seeks to understand. In this way, history is perceived as a contemporary phenomenon that, although the past is the object of study, always takes place in the time of the historian and interpreter (cf. Rothberg, 2009). One consequence of this simultaneity is that history not only explains the past but also reflects the historical culture through which a historical phenomenon is interpreted. What is perceived as historically significant is, therefore, influenced by how we perceive society in the time we live and from which perspec-

tives we view the past. Simultaneously, historical significance is important to reflect over, taking into consideration the historical perspective, the identification of continuity and changes, and source-critical methods. These are ways for approaching the past on its own terms and a way of decentering ourselves—more specifically, our own assumptions about what is significant (cf. Nordgren & Johansson, 2015). From the perspective of historical consciousness, it is hence important to both acknowledge that the past influences our contemporary time and the future, and that there are certain ways to know, experience and interpret the past through history (Rüsen, 2004; cf. Smith, 2024).

1.2.1 Historical significance in history education

Various models have been developed to determine what can be considered historically significant in history education (Counsell, 2004; Phillips, 2002; Seixas, 1994; Seixas, 2013). Researchers have suggested that what can be considered historically significant changes over time but also from one group to another. Also, historical significance is constructed by placing events in a meaningful narrative. From Seixas's point of view (2013), the attribution of historical significance can start from two points. First, events, actors, or processes of change can be considered historically significant if they have resulted in lasting changes. Second, events, actors, or processes of change are significant if they elucidate lasting changes or emerging phenomena in the past or the present. Another way of phrasing it is that phenomena can be considered significant when they reveal something and allow people to understand the past or the present in new ways. While the first criterion surfaces through analyses of consequences, the second criterion, i.e., how something is revealed, is only unraveled through perspective taking. For instance, perspectives that could include a gender-, postcolonial- or global history perspective - always do this with the present in mind. Counsell (2004), in turn, presents five R's for recognizing what is historically significant in that a historical phenomenon is perceived as being remarkable, remembered, resonant, resulting in change, or revealing. These criteria seek to establish a number of things. Whether phenomena or people were noticed during or after their time, if remembrance is important to a group, if experiences, perceptions, or situations can be related to a historical event or person, or if they have led to changes. Finally, whether phenomena reveal and elucidate a new or different aspect of the past. Counsell (2004) believes not that these criteria are universally valid, but that they are an attempt to create criteria useful for assessing the historical significance of very different events, people, or processes. One similarity between Seixas's and Counsell's criteria is that they seek to combine synchronic and diachronic contexts of meaning in which both past and present conditions can determine historical significance.

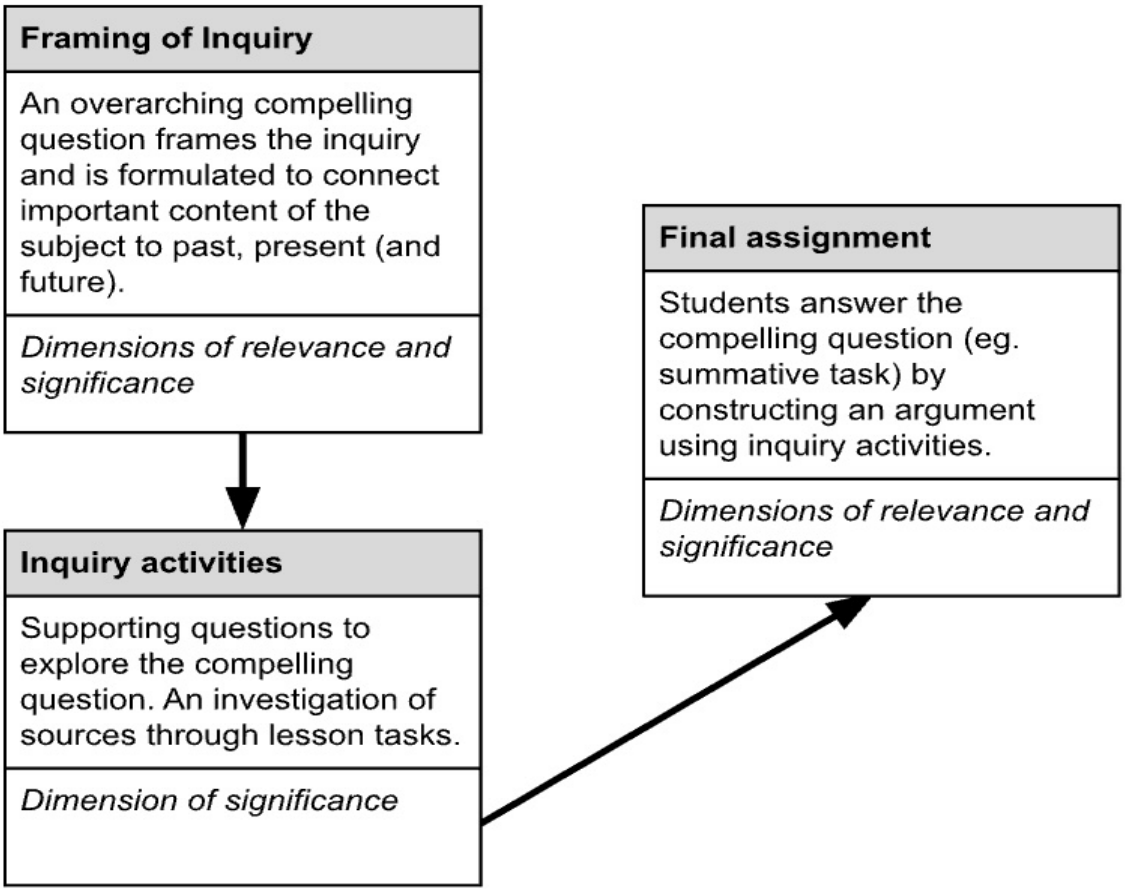
Following various frameworks for determining historical significance (e.g., Seixas, 1994, 2013; Phillips, 2002; Counsell, 2004), Van Straaten et al. (2016) have argued for a distinction between *historical significance* and *historical relevance*. Historical significance refers to when an event, process, or person was important in the past and historical relevance refers to when the past is important in the present. Van Straaten et al. (2016) prefer historical relevance as a concept. This is partly based on the fact that historical significance is constructed in the present. It is also difficult for students to connect the past and the present, and therefore it is important for teachers to guide the process (Van Straaten et al., 2016; cf. 2019). The point, both from a history-theoretical- and a pedagogical perspective, is therefore made to focus specifically on the ability to connect the past, the present and the future. Nordgren (2021) uses the same distinction, but in a slightly different way. Relevance, in a similar way as van Straaten et al., refers to historical events, people, or processes that are considered important for understanding the present and thus also have an orientational function towards the future. Significance, on the other hand, refers to the knowledge and procedures of academic history, which are important in understanding historical phenomena. Significance is hence about how we experience the past through interpretation. There are certain ways to know, experience and interpret the past through history that are important. This usage of historical significance can be compared to Counsell's (2004) argument that historical significance as a concept operates at a different level than other procedural skills, such as analyzing historical explanations or recognizing continuity and change, which can all be useful in determining historical significance. While van Straaten et al. (2016) focus to make the past relevant for the present, and future, Nordgren (2021) suggests that a significant dimension and a relevant dimension influence each other, as ways we engage with the past influences how we understand the present and the other way around. Therefore, it is crucial to examine both the past and the present on its own terms.

This study explores how students accounts in a teaching structured according to the inquiry design model expresses ideas of historical significance. In exploring historical significance the distinction between dimensions of significance and relevance have been adopted from the work of Nordgren (2021).

1.2.2 Research on historical significance in history education

Empirical research on the use of historical significance in education has mainly focused on how students attribute historical significance, based on task-based interviews or think-aloud protocols (Seixas, 1997; Barton, 2005; Kim, 2018; Sjölund Åhsberg, 2024a). Studies show that students have difficulty in determining past events' significance if the criteria for determining significance do not match their own experiences (Barton, 2005; Peck, 2009). At the same time, Sjölund Åhsberg (2024b) has shown that perspectives based, for instance, on LGBTQ+ identities, environment, or class, resonate with their absence and that students often identify historical content as historically significant when it can be linked to official narratives (cf. Barton, 2005; Peck, 2018). Such studies, thus, show not only that students' experiences and their understanding of their contemporaries strongly influence what can be considered significant in the past but also that school history, and how history is taught, affect how students determine historical significance. Research has shown that students do not automatically connect history to the present but need continuous guidance (Van Straaten et al. 2016; 2019). This suggests that the relevance of history teaching should be addressed and be made explicit in the classroom.

Figure 1: Dimensions of significance and relevance in IDM design



Note. This graphic represents an ideal figure of the Inquiry Design Model in connection to dimension of significance and relevance. It suggests that a compelling question, formulated to grasp both a relevant and significant dimension of history, frames and drives the inquiry. This compelling question is investigated and explored through supporting questions where sources are interpreted through tasks, a dimension of significance. Finally, the compelling question will be answered in the summative task, that is an answer in a form of an argument built on evidence, a significant dimension, to a relevant question.

1.2.3 The inquiry design model to promote dimensions of significance and relevance

A teaching model where a relevance dimension is explicit is the Inquiry Design Model (IDM). IDM is a pedagogical model that helps to design inquiries in social studies and history to develop subject-specific knowledge relevant to students (Grant, Swan & Lee, 2017; 2018; cf. Holmberg et al., 2022). An inquiry organized according to Inquiry Design Model is framed by an overarching question, what is known as a compelling question. The function of the compelling question is to be relevant and important to both the subject and the students (Swan et.al., 2018; Holmberg et.al 2022). Since the Inquiry Design Model attempts to unify subject knowledge and relevance for the students, this model is useful to study and demonstrates the dimensions of significance and relevance in the students' narratives (see Figure 1). The specific teaching design is further elaborated in section two (Context), below.

1.3 Method and data

The study's empirical data was collected through a case study of three ninth-grade Swedish history classrooms (with 15-year-olds). All three classrooms belonged to the same metropolitan school. The teaching sequence was designed by two teachers as part of a professional development course on inquiry-based teaching (funded by the Swedish Institute for Educational Research). The planned lessons were the students' third encounter with lessons organized according to the Inquiry Design Model. The students should, therefore, be considered relatively accustomed to the teaching model. In total, the study involved three classes comprising 68 students. Ultimately, 53 students (26 boys and 27 girls) were included in the study. Non-responses arose partly because not all students performed the inquiry's final assignment *(n = 8)* and partly because they had not all consented to participate in the study *(n = 7)*.

The study's primary empirical material is comprised of the students' final assignments *(n = 53)*, that were analyzed qualitatively in two steps after getting familiarized with the data (Braun et al. 2018). First, a content analysis (Bryman, 2012) assessed the themes that emerged from teaching and reading the students' texts. The content analysis of references in the student texts have been quantified and presented in result section (see table 1). This categorization focused on occurences of references made by the students to materials used in class. Other empirical materials—such as classroom observations and other written texts from the lessons, were used to contextualize and create an understanding of the lessons. Historical significance was then used as a theoretical analytical tool, and the empirical data was interpreted using the significance and relevance dimensions (cf. Braun & Clarke 2006; Braun et al. 2018). The distinction between significance and relevance was adopted from the work of Nordgren (2021). The significance dimension refers to within-subject knowledge and procedures that are, accordingly, important for understanding a historical phenomenon. The students' engagement in class and their final assignments were important in identifying important dimensions of significance. Knowledge of the teaching structure and its planning was important in determining what categories were important concepts and procedures in class and which, in turn, expressed significance. These categories are further developed below, in the context section. The relevance dimension, on the other hand, refers to how the students use historical events, people, or processes to understand the present. To invoke contemporary phenomena or to include themselves as historical actors in their argumentation was also considered as a relevance dimension.

In a second step, the students' texts were analyzed narratively (Riessman, 2008). This analysis focused on how the students included themselves in their narratives, and particularly how they related the content to their time, i.e., which functions the original categories filled in their texts. This was a way of creating latent meaning in the data (Braun et al. 2018). Without such analysis, interpreting their use of the various categories would have been impossible. For example, paraphrases or simple spelling mistakes can lead to the misinterpretation of arguments and themes. Euphemisms such as "us and them" to refer to classification or "separation" to refer to discirimination was used by students. The narrative analysis, therefore, both supplemented the initial content analysis and was fundamental in interpreting dimensions of significance and relevance recognizing their functions in the texts (cf. Riessman, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

1.4 Ethical considerations

All materials were pseudonymized by assigning the students codes comprising a number, a letter, and two numbers (1X11), conveying information such as gender and school class, as well as distinguishing between individuals during analysis. The same code key was used in the lesson recordings and final assignments. The transcripts and recorded materials are kept at Karlstad University, while the code key is stored elsewhere. This research was ethically reviewed at Karlstad University (Event No: HS 2021/305), and it adheres to the Swedish Research Council's recommendations for good research practice.

2 Context

The teaching approach analyzed in this study dealt with the history of genocide and was organized according to the Inquiry Design Model. The lesson sequence's compelling question was as follows: "Can genocide be prevented?" This question was formulated in an attempt to make the history of genocide compelling and relevant to students so that students learned about themselves from the history of genocide, not just about genocide (cf. Wibaeus, 2010; Ammert, 2015; Dahl, 2021). This question focuses not on the past but on the present and future. Therefore, it seems to examine what can be learned from and about the history of genocide to prevent further genocides, rather than about the history of genocide for its own sake. Thus, a relevance dimension framed the inquiry, rather than a significance dimension.

In total, the inquiry spanned six lessons. The first lesson was staging, in accordance with the Inquiry Design Model framework (Swan et al., 2018). Staging involves an introductory lesson that introduces and arouses interest in the compelling question (in this case, "Can genocide be prevented?"; see Figure 2). In addition to the compelling question and the staging, the inquiry comprised four supporting questions. Such questions can be understood as research questions that frame each lesson. One lesson addressed each of the four supporting questions, with its formative performance tasks and sources (Figure 2). Additionally, during lessons, students wrote summative assignments (i.e., individual responses to the compelling question) after exploring the supporting questions. The summative task was formulated in the same way as the compelling question: "Can genocide be prevented?".

The staging was completed in two parts. First, the students watched the feature film *Hotel Rwanda* and discussed in writing at end of class, that the genocide in Rwanda took place in 1994, despite televised broadcasts and United Nation reports about the events. Second, the students had to think about which genocides they knew from history. The classes were then asked to create a timeline of the history of genocides, based on the students' suggestions. This dual purpose of this staging was (1) to show how the international community was more or less paralyzed and could not prevent the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and (2) to show that genocide seems to be a recurring phenomenon that could happen in the future. The staging, therefore, seemed to call for action and was also (like the compelling question) future-oriented. Accordingly, both the compelling question and the staging engaged with a relevance dimension in determining historical significance—that is, they suggested that studying the history of genocide is important so that we can know how people have acted in the past when genocide might happen again.

The first three lessons (supporting questions 1–3; see Figure 2) were similarly structured but distinct in that each lesson used different historical content. Each lesson's content concerned one of three genocides: the Holocaust, the genocide in Cambodia, and the genocide in Rwanda. These three lessons form the background and context of the student texts analyzed in this study.

Table 1: Lesson sequence scheme

Compelling question: Can genocide be prevented?			
Staging: The movie Hotel Rwanda with a discussion in writing from students at end of class, as well as an introduction to the genocide concept and a brainstorming session on genocides in the past, creating a timeline			
Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3	Supporting question 4
What leads to genocide?	What can be learned by studying genocide?	What can we learn by comparing genocides?	What can we do to prevent genocide?
Formative Performance Task 1	Formative Performance Task 2	Formative Performance Task 3	Formative Performance Task 4
Categorize the events of the Holocaust using Stanton's model of the steps leading to genocide.	Categorize the events of the genocide in Cambodia using Stanton's model. Compare the Holocaust and the genocide in Cambodia using a Venn diagram.	Categorize the events of the genocide in Rwanda using Stanton's model. Compare the three genocides using a Venn diagram.	A discussion exercise addressed the question of what can be done to prevent genocide.
Sources	Sources	Sources	Sources
Living History Forum material on the Holocaust	A: Living History Forum material on the genocide in Cambodia; B: photo of Lesson 1's categorization	A: Individual testimonies on the genocide in Rwanda; B: Living History Forum material on the genocide in Rwanda; C: photo of the categorization from Lessons 1 and 2	Student-generated examples from the Facing History website
Summative Task: Answer the compelling question ("Can genocide be prevented?"), using the four lessons in an argumentative text.			

Note. The sequence of lessons should be read both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the compelling question and the summative task frames is framing the inquiry. Horizontally, the specific lesson sequence consists of four supporting questions with accompanying formative performance tasks and sources.

The inquiry's formative performance tasks (see Table 1) are crucial in understanding the content that confronted the students. Through these encounters, the students discerned the content's significance dimension (cf. Nordgren, 2021; Counsell, 2004). One task for the students in each lesson focused on the use of a model. This task involved categorizing historical events as different steps on the way to genocide. The model was Gregory H. Stanton's Eight Stages of Genocide model, which Stanton introduced in 1987 after comparing the Holocaust to the genocides in Armenia and Cambodia and which has since been modified with two additional steps. The model used in class was the original version which comprised eight steps: classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, preparation, extermination, and denial. The performance task was based on given events during a particular genocide process that the students were asked to identify and relate to the model's steps. The teaching material used was created by the Living History Forum (www.levandehistoria.se) but adapted and organized by the teachers according to the Inquiry Design Model. This task can be described as a deductive categorization task, but it aimed to identify historical change. Identifying and recognizing change can, therefore, be understood as a significant dimension of determining historical significance in this specific instruction's design. This function of the exercise is further demonstrated by Supporting Question 1's formulation, what led to genocide, and the explicit expectation that this supporting question would be used in answering the compelling question.

In addition to the task that used Stanton's model to identify the different steps in the genocide process, the students practiced comparing the different genocides. This comparison sought to examine similarities and differences between the Holocaust and the genocide in Cambodia (Lesson 2) and then between all three genocides, including the genocide in Rwanda (Lesson 3). The starting point for the two comparisons was the students' previous work with Stanton's model in each investigation of the three genocides (supporting questions 1–3; see Table 1).

Thus, the lesson sequence progressed from practicing the ability to identify to comparing. While Supporting Question 1 aimed to develop familiarity with Stanton's model and identify the different steps toward genocide (which included a small test on the different steps of the model), supporting questions 2 and 3—"What can be learned by studying genocide?" and "What can be learned by comparing genocide?"—both focused on the ability to recognize differences and similarities between genocides, such as by comparing two genocides in the second supporting question and all three genocides in the third supporting question. An important dimension of significance, alongside the three genocides' roles as content, was the ability to recognize and compare steps. The historical content selected for the exercises emphasized this ability (see Table 1).

3 Results

Establishing historical significance basically involves arguing why something is important to know. This study distinguished between significance and relevance, as we can justify historical significance from different vantage points. Significance concerns the use of subject-specific knowledge and procedures to understand a historical phenomenon, historical event, change process, or person as historically important. Relevance, on the other hand, concerns perceiving a phenomenon as important to our time in order to understand the world around us (cf. Nordgren, 2021, 2019). The analysis of the students' written assignments, the summative task, was analyzed based on these two dimensions of historical significance (significance and relevance) to answer the research question: How can students' historical argumentation be understood as expressing historical significance?

Three of the four lessons in the series were designed to use Stanton's model, asking students to identify different steps toward genocide and then compare similarities and differences between three genocides. Stanton's model was central to the instructional design of this teaching design since students were asked to practice specific skills, such as identifying change and comparing genocides in order to answer supporting questions, which could ultimately provide informed answers to the compelling question. Thus, the two skills practiced using Stanton's model are a specific way of experiencing and interpreting history through which a significance dimension can be identified. Therefore, examining the extent to which the students used Stanton's model and the comparison of the three genocides in their responses' arguments, and these references' function, is of interest. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 focus on the significance dimension, while Section 3.3. focuses on the relevance dimension.

3.1 Identifying steps toward genocide

The results show that 46 of the 53 participating students mentioned or used Stanton's model in their writing assignments' arguments (Table 1). To determine the extent to which they mentioned the model and its components, a content analysis was first conducted, revealing five groups of student texts. Group 1 did not use or mention the model explicitly at all. Group 2 used and mentioned some steps without mentioning the model or its creator. Group 3, on the other hand, used and mentioned the model without mentioning its individual steps. Group 4 mentioned the model and referred to a selection of steps. Finally, Group 5 presented both the model and all of its eight steps.

Table 2: References to Stanton's model in student texts

Group	Students (*n*)	Classification	Symbolization	Discrimination	Dehumanization	Organization	Preparation	Denial
1. Not mentioned	7	NA*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2. Mentioned some steps	12	8	6	6	2	NA	1	2
3. Mentioned the model	9	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
4. Mentioned the model and some steps	16	10	8	6	3	1	1	3
5. Mentioned the model and all steps	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Total	53	27	23	21	14	10	11	14

Note. The table shows whether and how many of the student texts contain one or more of the different steps of the Stanton model. Column 2 shows that seven students never mentioned the model or its different steps, while 46 students mentioned the model or the steps at least once. In Group 3, nine students mentioned the model but not its various components. Also, the model's seventh step, extermination, was not included in this compilation; students used the terms mass murder, genocide, extermination, and killing interchangeably in their texts, and attributing the terms' uses in this context to Stanton's model was difficult. *NA=Not Applicaple.

The content analysis revealed a clear pattern in the references to the model's steps. The initial steps were mentioned most frequently (see Table 2). Selected steps—that is, choosing to men-tion classification, symbolization, and discrimination—expressed historical significance. Historical significance basically entails selecting what is important to know. But the content analysis said little about why this selection took place. In a second step, a narrative analysis was, therefore, carried out. This analysis focused on distinguishing the function of mentioning the model and its different steps in the student texts. Using Stanton's model, the students implicitly discussed two important aspects of significance: first, seeing genocide as an open historical process, rather than a historical event or closed process, and second, the extent to which intervention in this process was possible.

In Group 1 *(n = 7)*, neither Stanton's model nor any of its stages were mentioned. The model seemed to lack explanatory power in these students' texts; thus, a significant dimension was absent. This group's responses were scattered. Three of the seven students did not believe genocide could be prevented. One of these three expressed a rather semantic criticism of the compelling question's formulation: "I have the mindset that if something has been prevented, it has never happened and will never happen. There is not. Then you have not really prevented anything" (2C30). The other two students who did not believe genocide could be prevented believed in a compromise between freedom of expression and genocide prevention (2C20; 2A38). Preventing genocide would require the introduction of a dictatorship and a restricted freedom of expression. Simultaneously, however, genocide has precisely occurred in dictatorships. That genocide only occurred in dictatorships explained why so few people resisted genocide (2B47). While the compelling question was irrelevant for the first student (2C30), the reviewed historical cases seemed irrelevant for the other two students, who could not relate the model to historical development (2C20; 2A38). Yet, some students in Group 1 suggested that intervention was important but did not describe genocide's historical development using Stanton's model:

> "I also think an important thought to always keep in mind is; how could this escalate if I don't tell anyone, and what can I do if something happens? One thing I've learned during this learning process is how important it is to DO something, often if you don't know what to do, it just results in you standing and watching everything that happens." (2C42)

This student's mention of escalation and the need to intervene shows the relevance of the compelling question. However, Stanton's model was not used in the student text to show what the historical processes in the three studied genocides looked like. Group 1 included three of the four students who answered "no" to the compelling question. These three students either felt that the question was not relevant enough or questioned the Stanton model's explanatory power, feeling that its steps could not be used to answer the question. Group 1 found no aspects of the activity to be significant and the written tasks were characterized by an absence of a significance dimension.

Group 2 comprised 12 texts that did not explicitly refer to Stanton's model but, nevertheless, used its steps. These responses argued that genocide was a preventable process, fairly often by referring to one to three of Stanton's eight steps: classification *(n = 8)*, symbolization *(n = 6)*, and discrimination *(n = 6)*. Describing genocide as a process, rather than an event, was an important message in these texts that the following excerpt demonstrates.

> "Yes, genocide can be prevented by being active and looking for red flags in society. There are quite a few steps that need to take place before the genocide itself begins, that is, before a lot of people start losing their lives. Because it [mass murder] is not the only part of a genocide. It takes a lot of planning and preparation and slowly but surely dehumanizing the vulnerable. It is during this period that we can put up the most resistance." (2C54)

The described "genocidal process" was more universal, rather than specific processes during the Holocaust or the genocide in Cambodia, for example. Thus, avoiding deviations or variations by addressing specific genocides was one aspect of the lack of significance dimension. The three genocides were important as genocides, not as unique histories. All the students in Group 2 agreed that genocide could be prevented with the caveats that such prevention was difficult, only possible in "theory," or merely a hope *(n = 6)*. Although these conclusions were nuanced, few historical references to actual genocides were expressed. Only four of the group's 12 students clearly affirmed that genocide prevention was possible.

Group 3's nine texts mentioned only "Stanton's model" or simply "the model" without referencing its different steps. Like Group 1, a lack of using the model also characterized Group 3. Their texts did not clarify how the model could contribute to an understanding of genocide as a process. For example, one student wrote,

> "I think that genocide is due to such a hatred of any of these ethnic groups and the desire to exterminate them, so I don't think you can always prevent it. But maybe in some cases you can and in any case always reduce the tragedy. If we use Stanton's model to avoid genocide, I think we can get quite far just with the help of the eight steps that exist and humanity." (2A29)

Searching for explanations for genocide—in this case, "hatred"—was characteristic of the Group 3 texts. The quote above is complex, discussing first "hatred" and ultimately humanity. In between, it mentions Stanton's model as a way of "getting pretty far." The search for reasons to why genocide happens could mean that these students perceived genocide as an established process, not an interruptible process (cf. Group 1). This view was most evident in six of Group 3's nine texts. Nevertheless, a clear majority believed genocide could be prevented. Only one student negatively answered the compelling question. Although they found the question relevant, they used no historical references or the model to demonstrate the progression toward mass murder. As in Group 1, Stanton's model appeared to lack explanatory power in Group 3, as its steps were not used to show genocide's nature as a process.

Group 4 was the single largest group. Its students mentioned Stanton's model and selected some of its steps. In their analysis, this selection helped to identify a significant dimension of their argument. All 16 Group 4 students believed genocide was preventable because it is a process in which intervention is possible early on. Fifteen students mentioned either classification *(n = 10)*, symbolization *(n = 8)*, or discrimination *(n = 6)*. Although the students did not all mention these initial steps, euphemisms such as "us and them" and "separation" indicated these steps' application:

> "These steps begin with slowly creating an us and them, and beginning to separate people according to different characteristics, religions, or backgrounds. These first steps are quite difficult to detect, but they are easier to act against. Unlike the last steps that are easy to detect but hard to stop." (2C40)

This text's selection emphasizes the first steps, showing an individual's scope for intervention in the genocide process. This excerpt expresses that this scope is greater during the early steps, which are hard to recognize. The later steps are easy to recognize, but this scope narrows. Focusing on the scope of action in different contexts demonstrates the application of a significant dimension. Revealing this changing scope also touches on an aspect of relevance, referring to the individual's ability to act and, thus, to present-day responsibility.

In the final group, Group 5, nine texts used and mentioned both Stanton's model and all of its steps. This group focused on showing the genocidal process in order to identify a possible scope for action. All the Group 5 texts expressed that genocide could be prevented. One strategy to prevent genocide was to outline the different steps, showing that genocide is a process that could be stopped if detected early. One student wrote, "In my opinion, every step can be prevented, except for mass murder and denial. But the further you go, the harder it becomes to influence as an individual" (2A59). Although most Group 5 texts indicated that the model was created by comparing genocides' similarities and differences in history, the texts sparsely included historical content. For example, the Star of David was invoked as an example of symbolization (1B25; 1B44; 2A08). The historical content, thus, served more to explain the model's steps than to show that historical variations occur or how each step might have manifested in the three studied cases. Group 5 focused on presenting the model and discussing genocide as a process. Individual genocides were not highlighted to show their differences. Rather, the texts focused on similarities that could be summarized using the different steps.

Thus, four of the 53 student texts negatively answered the compelling question, all of which were from groups 1 and 3. These groups presented the genocides as an established process, not a process of change. Understanding historical events as processes is one of three aspects of determining historical significance, according to the instructional design that emerged in this analysis of identifying steps toward genocide. The second aspect that emerged from the analysis was that making the genocidal process visible reveals a possible scope for action. The final and third aspect, which were partially absent, specifically concerned referencing the three genocides to demonstrate variations between the genocidal processes.

3.2 Comparing genocides

The comparison of genocides was central to the lesson design and the second exercise's focus (lessons 2 and 3). Three commonalities between the genocides were identified in all three whole-class discussions: that the vulnerable group's rights were restricted, that the vulnerable group was dehumanized, and that millions of people were killed (Lesson 3A–C). While the first two commonalities resembled Stanton model steps, the latter concerned the number of victims and the focus on millions of deaths. Other similarities mentioned in one or two classes also resembled steps of Stanton's model and concerned propaganda (3A and 3C), denial (3A and 3C), false accusations (3A), and killing opponents of the regime (3B). Not all steps were included in the commonalities, although all eight steps had been identified as such in the previous exercise. The differences concerned the genocides' locations (i.e., Europe, Asia, and Africa) and ideologies, such as communism and Nazism, as well as how symbolization or other specific phenomena manifested, such as the use of gas chambers during the Holocaust (see Table 2). The differences that the students identified together with their teacher through whole-class discussion point to a significant aspect of each genocide as an event: the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide, and the Rwandan genocide are important in their own rights due to the specific contexts in which they took place.

Table 3: Comparison of three genocides, the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide, and the Rwandan genocide

School class	Similarities	Differences
A	Sexual abuse Dictatorships False accusations—reinforcing hatred Dehumanization—pests Perpetrators denied their crime Propaganda to spread their message Rights were taken from the weak Millions of people were murdered	Different locations: Africa, Asia, and Europe Hitler came to power through free elections—proclaimed himself Führer [H] Labor camps [H + C] Concentration camp [H + C] Religion involved [H + C] Political beliefs (Nazism and communism) [H + C] symbolization [H + C] Socioeconomic class — townspeople were exposed [C] Racial ideas — racial biology [H + R] Marked ethnic group in passport [H + R] Power was seized by force [R + C]
B	Civil rights were abolished Millions murdered Opponents of the regime are killed Parable of vermin Dictatorships	Physical characteristics [R] Identity passport [R + H] Death lists [R + H] Gas chamber [H] Jews — not only people but also religion [H] Markings — symbolization [H + C] Labor camps [H + C]
C	Restricted and removed rights Denial after the genocide Dehumanization—pests Millions murdered Everyone uses propaganda	6 million, 1.7 million, and 800,000 murdered Location: Europe, Asia, and Africa Only lasted a short time [R] Boycott of Jewish affairs [H] Ongoing in Europe in several countries since the Germans took over [H] Race and racial biology [H + R] Special pass for those at risk [H + R] Death lists [H + R] Eradicate race [H + R] Symbolization — clothing [H + C] Labor camps [H + C] Endangered belong to a different class, city-dwellers [C]

Note. The three classes compared the genocides using a Venn diagram through a whole-class discussion. The abbreviations H, C, and R represent the Holocaust, the Cambodian genocide, and the Rwandan genocide, respectively. These abbreviations are used to highlight different genocides' specific features and similarities between two — but not all — genocides.

During the exercise, new categories were also created to interpret the past, such as the genocides' occurring in different places (Europe, Asia, and Africa). This difference was greatly important from the perspective of historical relevance. The argument that genocide could take place anywhere on Earth was favored by the selection of the three genocides on three different continents. Thus, the comparison of the three genocides did not just concern Stanton's model, even though this identification exercise was the basis for the students' comparisons. From two of the whole-class discussions, another category emerged (see Table 3), dictatorship.

When comparing the three genocides, dictatorship was crystallized as a new category in two of the three classes (3A and 3B; see Table 3). The students used dictatorship in their responses' arguments, together with the category of democracy. Nineteen responses used one of these categories (dictatorship: 18; democracy: 10), and nine of these 19 responses used both categories. The students who invoked the categories of democracy and dictatorship were in groups 1 – 4. The group that most frequently used Stanton's model and its steps did not use these two categories.

A commonality among the three genocides, as already mentioned, was their occurring in dictatorships.

> "We have studied three genocides and in all these countries there was a dictatorship, in China there is a genocide happening right now and there too there is dictatorship. So what can be concluded from this? Well, that for a genocide to happen, it almost has to be a dictatorship, otherwise it will be very difficult to get a completely democratic country like Sweden to start a genocide. So in order to prevent genocide, we must learn to prevent dictatorships." (FLM1B15; cf. FLM1A64; FLM1B24; FLM1B31)

As a category, dictatorship functioned to explain genocide; thus, dictatorship was a necessary condition for genocide to occur and it nearly seemed to determine that genocide would occur (although the student included the caveat "almost"). A dictatorship causes a limited scope for maneuvering and fear of resistance, thus masking the steps toward genocide.

> "Once a country has become a dictatorship, it is also very difficult to resist. You can risk your own life and the lives of others if you stand up and speak out. If you take the Holocaust as an example, everyone who helped Jews or was some kind of danger to the Nazi Party's hold on power was killed. With that, a fear of speaking their opinions also spread. Those who said what they thought were silenced." (FLM1B68; cf. 1A11)

In the same spirit of fighting dictatorship to prevent genocide, several students emphasized the importance of preserving democracy. For these students, democracy primarily meant freedom of speech and expression. The lack of freedom of expression was, therefore, seen as a reason for genocide's emergence.

> "Above all, it is very important that we retain the democracy and freedom of speech we have today, for example in Sweden. Because without freedom of speech, it is easier to come to power through violence, horrors and dictatorships. Since we no longer have a voice and can influence society and in addition, the information from other countries is hidden so that they do not interfere. For example, all three of the genocides we worked on share that they were all a dictatorship and that led to them being able to spread their ideology or message freely in the country and no one could resist because you had no right to say what you thought. Unfortunately, there are several countries in the world that are not a democracy and do not have these rights that we in Sweden have. In those countries it is easier for such genocide to happen again." (FLM1A64; cf. FLM1A10; FLM1B24; FLM1C04)

Citing the preservation of democracy to prevent genocide was a way for these students to answer the compelling question. The notion that focusing on genocide as a process, using Stanton's model, made the possibility of intervening in the early steps toward genocide apparent is a reasonable interpretation, as is the notion that invoking democracy was more about preserving democratic values than specifically preventing genocide. Dictatorships, on the other hand, threatened these democratic values. However, the students' desire to provide a historical explanation for why genocide occurs, rather than identifying a pattern, is also a reasonable interpretation. Either way, the categories of democracy and dictatorship can be understood here as frozen historical concepts (Somers & Gibson, 1993; cf. Scott, 1991)—concepts used without historicization and with reference to a specific regime and context—or the categories may have been used even though they were not understood in relation to the exact steps toward genocide (i.e., the categories of democracy and dictatorship partially obscured the understanding of genocide as specific historical processes). Hence, using both democracy and dictatorship as concepts could have led to simplistic conclusions. Dictatorship, for example, was used to argue that genocide was not preventable and that genocide prevention would conflict with freedom of expression (four of the 53 total student texts suggested that genocide was not preventable).

> "It's the same song over and over again, unfortunately. If you are to avoid genocide, you have to have a dictatorship-like government and really question people's ambitions within the government, but is it really right to control the population to reduce the risk of genocide? In my opinion, no. What is the point of living if you are told every single step to take—it is not human." (2A38; cf. 2C20)

Regardless of whether the students saw democratic freedom of expression as guaranteeing that genocide would not occur or whether a restriction to such freedom and, thus, democracy were necessary to prevent genocide, the topic democracy structured the students' narratives (cf. metanarrative). The arguments made was either that democratic rights were crucial for the possibility to prevent genocide, or that the prevention of genocide could only be done by the

restriction of democratic rights. Thus, the categories of democracy and dictatorship can be understood both as requiring democratic rights to intervene early in a genocidal process and suggesting that genocide is a process that only begins in dictatorships. Ultimately, the compelling question and the relevance dimension gave direction to both of these arguments. The challenge in the classroom seemed to involve substantiating and unpacking the steps toward genocide without stopping at the conclusion that they take place in dictatorships.

3.3 Relevance to the present

When the compelling question was posed in the first lesson, during its staging, the students were given the opportunity to answer with a simple yes or no. They did so by placing a sticky note onto the whiteboard as they left the classroom at the end of the lesson. Of the 61 students present, 44 answered yes, while 17 answered no. These numbers later changed; at the end of the inquiry, 49 of the 53 participating students answered yes. Thus, the proportion of students who believed genocide could be prevented rose from 72% to almost 91%. Since the students' initial responses to the compelling question were anonymous, we must be cautious in drawing conclusions about this change. Nevertheless the compelling question about genocide seemed important and relevant to students.

The reference to contemporary phenomena was strongly linked to what students had identified via the categorization exercise and the categories of dictatorship and democracy. For example, four students mentioned China (1C32; 1B15; 1A03; 2C54) or North Korea (1A16) to show that genocide was happening currently.

> "There is actually a genocide taking place today in China. But no one talks about it, this is the dangerous thing and what makes there is room and opportunity for a genocide to take place. We often choose to close our eyes and ignore the horrible. But in order for that not to happen, we have to talk about it." (1C32)

"We must talk about it" meant revealing that steps toward genocide were currently taking place. Highlighting this contemporary example was a way to show continuity of these crimes against humanity and, thus, the text visibly applied the concept of historical relevance. So, to invoke China was not a question of naming more examples of genocide but, rather, the urgency to act and "talk about it." Sweden was also mentioned in relation to the democracy and dictatorship categories (see the quote by 1B15 above) to answer the compelling question. Nine of the 13 students who referred to Sweden did so to show that the country was a democracy with freedom of speech laws preventing genocide. Arguably, these students' understanding of genocide history was framed by the nation (cf. Kim, 2023). Another student mentioned Sweden and saw genocide education as successful in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, using the pandemic and demonstrations against related restrictions to illustrate the importance of freedom of speech:

> "A recent example is the demonstrations against the corona restrictions. The demonstrations were against the restricted freedom of assembly introduced by the government with exceptions. Many people were upset with the protesters (including myself), but after reading about one of the protesters' motives, I realized that the demonstration might be one of the prices you have to pay. Some of the protesters said they were afraid because of the revocation of rights, which made me think. They may have feared that violated rights are often one of the early steps in both genocide (discrimination) and in forming a dictatorship in the face of genocide (for example, Hitler applied emergency laws when he transitioned to autocratic power). Sure, it can be considered excessive (it was a pandemic, after all), but as the saying goes, the wrong use does not take away the right one. Maybe we have to live with people being a little too cautious rather than the opposite." (1A10; cf. 1B25; 1A03)

The quote above shows that Stanton's model left an impression when the student used the model to discuss the outcomes of restricted rights. Genocide was explicitly unpacked as discrimination. The model also became useful and relevant in elucidating a contemporary phenomenon, especially as a critical instrument where coronavirus restrictions were criticized for limiting people's right to be heard. Another student, referring to Sweden, said that xenophobia in Sweden should be seen as a warning signal:

> "A group in a minority has a very easy time being exposed in a society. If you make an analogy with Sweden, there is unfortunately a lot of immigrant hatred. Many blame crime and misery on our new additions to society, instead of also seeing the good they contribute. We already have an anti-immigrant party in our parliament, and many people, for example, find it difficult to get a job, simply because of their name as a distinguishing mark. These are warning bells, and even [though it may feel] like Sweden is far from a genocide." (1B44)

Importantly, the compelling question focused on, and was formulated based on relevance rather than significance. However, the notions of significance and relevance could also overlap in the students' answers, which became clear when one student commented that caution should be exercised when using Stanton's model since it may not always correspond to reality:

> "That is also my strongest concern with Stanton's model. Stanton's eight-step model is fantastic when it comes to identifying and judging genocide and for more easily identifying early signs such as symbolization. Identification may be, if not, the most important thing we can do to prevent genocide. . . . On the other hand, the risk of a clear model — however well developed it may be — is that we look past events that do not fit into it." (1A10; cf. 2A21)

To this student identify different steps may have shown the variation between the genocides and the difficulty in recognizing a genocidal pattern since the genocides looked so different in varying contexts. Concern was expressed for the present and the future, as well as the possibility of identifying the steps toward genocide in a new context. The student expressed a more dynamic view of history that involves being mindful of historical explanation, rather than focusing on inevitability. In this way, history appears meaningful and serves as a warning bell in the present and for the future.

4 Discussion

The IDM framework's compelling question, which is assumed to have the potential to combine qualified history lessons with openness to students' lifeworld, was formulated as follows in the teaching design of this study: Can genocide be prevented? Students' active in-classroom inquiry into a relevant historical phenomenon — in this case, genocide — offers several opportunities, as well as challenges, to determine historical significance narratively.

This study explored how students narratively determine historical significance in student texts, and asked how student assignments could be understood to narratively determine historical significance. The study distinguished between two dimensions of historical significance: significance and relevance. In this context, significance concerns the procedures and concepts used in the classroom to understand a historical phenomenon, while relevance concerns the importance of history in interpreting the present and creating perspectives for the future. The study shows that these two dimensions were expressed in the participating students' texts through the lesson design and that they depended on the compelling question's formulation. This study's compelling question — "Can genocide be prevented?" — seemed to play a crucial role in conveying relevance to students. The students expressed an understanding of historical processes and their own roles as part of history while also understanding that history is not inevitable. The relevance component of their historical interpretation, through which the students' texts called for action to intervene in the genocide process, touched on a dimension of significance, namely viewing historical phenomena such as genocides as processes, rather than events, or as a more given process (e.g., an unavoidable narrative).

An assessment of significance concerns the concepts and procedures used in the lessons to understand and interpret their historical content. The lesson design allowed the students to use Stanton's model of the steps toward genocide to interpret the historical content. The model helped students categorize different historical events, making genocide visible as a process of historical change. Moreover, the model afforded the students a specific gaze upon the events during the examined genocides that helped the students see a specific genocidal pattern and identify the process of approaching genocide. Understanding history as a process was, thus, an important outcome of the lesson sequence.

Understanding genocide as a process of change also enabled the students to consider an individual's scope for action. Students could choose either to describe the entire process leading up to a genocide in order to discuss when the scope for action was greatest (Group 5) or to select a few steps and then describe the part of the process where the scope for action was greatest (groups 2 and 4). Thus, Stanton's model had the necessary explanatory power to show genocide's nature as a process and assess the scope for action. In 37 of the 53 student texts (groups 2, 4, and 5), an assessment of significance was, accordingly, recognizable. The compelling question of whether genocide can be prevented seemed to play a major role here. All of these 37 students also answered the compelling question affirmatively. Stanton's model provided explanatory power for the 37 students' views. Thus, engagements with significance and relevance converged.

However, the lessons' design also presented two challenges concerning which content was regarded as important. These were simplistic conclusions and a lack of evidence for the various steps toward genocide. The simplistic conclusions involved using the democracy and dictatorship categories to answer the compelling question. In the student texts, defending democracy or preventing a dictatorship was a way to prevent genocide—either by defending freedom of speech or opposing the rise of dictators. These categories partly replaced the different steps toward genocide; thus, genocide as a process was partly obscured because the historical processes of the different genocides that were examined were left unspoken. These categories can, therefore, be seen as "frozen historical concept"" (Somers & Gibson, 1993; cf. Scott, 1991) that need to be questioned, unpacked, and historicized. The second challenge was tracing the steps to genocide. It concerned the extent to which the students referred to specific events in order to show similarities and differences between the three genocides studied. The students made relatively few references to specific events during the genocides; rather, they referred to the different steps toward genocide. Events were omitted particularly when discussing the differences between the genocides. Hence, the recognition of these steps could be difficult. Just as democracy and dictatorship can be seen as frozen historical concepts, Stanton's different steps also risk being "frozen" if they are not supported by historical examples. If history is not understood as something to intervene in by making the historical process visible, as per the compelling question and lesson outline, events' significance in creating the structures that shape our world today can be lost. This possibility also highlights the tension between interpretations of significance and relevance, as well as the importance of distinguishing between the two, in lesson planning and research.

The present study is a limited case study on students argumentation to why the historical study of genocides is important in the present and for the future. The study focuses on how expressions of historical significance based on the two dimensions of significance and relevance have manifested themselves in students' texts in a specific teaching situation. The specific classroom situation is therefore crucial for the results. Generalizations should therefore be made with caution. For example, no statistical calculations were carried out.

Nevertheless, the study's results show the importance of addressing the dimensions of relevance and significance in planning and implementing history lessons. The results also show that these two dimensions converge and amplify each other, which means that they must be handled and addressed in instruction, and their categories must be unfrozen. In effect, the Inquiry Design Model functions as a planning tool to address both of these two dimensions, But, further research on instruction that aims to qualify student's historical argumentation on relevant, compelling and urgent issues in history is needed.

To cite this article

Holmberg, U. (2025). "Can genocide be prevented?": Swedish lower secondary students determine historical significance. *Historical Thinking, Culture, and Education, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.12685/htce.1389

Peer review

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymized during review.

Declaration of conflicting interests

I am not aware of any personal or institutional conflicts or potential conflicts of interest in relation to the submitted manuscript.

Research ethics statement

All material was pseudonymized. The pseudonymization was done by assigning codes to the informants. The transcripts and recorded material are kept at Karlstad University with the code key elsewhere. The research has been ethically reviewed at Karlstad University (Dnr: HS 2021/305) and corresponds to the Swedish Research Council's recommendations for good research practice.

ORCID iD

Ulrik Holmberg https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0801-4568

References

Ammert, N. (2015). On genocide and the Holocaust in Swedish history teaching. *Historical Encounters*, 2(1), 58-69.

Ashby, R., Lee, P., & Shemilt, D. (2005). Putting principles into practice: Teaching and planning. In M. S. Donovan & J. D. Bransford (Eds.), *How pupils learn: History in the classroom* (pp. 79–178). National AcademiesPress. https://doi.org/10.17226/11100

Barton, K. C. (2005). "Best not to forget them": Secondary students' judgments of historical significance in Northern Ireland. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 33(1), 9–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2005.10473270

Barton, K. C. (2009). The denial of desire. In L. Symcox & A. Wilschut (Eds.), *National history standards: The problem of the canon and the future of teaching history* (pp. 265-282). Information Age.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Terry, G., & Hayfield. N. (2018) Thematic Analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health and Social Sciences* (pp. 843–860). Singapore: Springer.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Chapman, A. (2018). Introduction: Historical knowing and the "knowledge turn." In A. Chapman (Ed.), *Knowing history in schools: Powerful knowledge and the powers of knowledge.* UCL Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv14t477t.13

Counsell, C. (2004). Looking through a Josephine Butler shaped window: Focusing pupils' thinking on historical significance. *Teaching History*, 114, 30–37.

Dahl, S. (2021). *Lärdomar av folkmord - Undervisning och lärande som historisk tolkning och orientering* [PhD thesis, University of Stockholm]. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1598972

Epstein, T. (2000). Adolescents' perspectives on racial diversity in U.S. history: Case studies from an urban classroom. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 185–214. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312037001185

Freedman, E. B. (2015). What happened needs to be told: Fostering critical historical reasoning in the classroom. *Cognition and Instruction*, 33(4), 357–398. https://doi.org/10.1080/07370008.2015.1101465

Grant, S. G., Swan, K., & Lee, J. (2017). *Inquiry-based practice in social studies education: Understanding the inquiry design model*. Routledge.

Holmberg, U., Johansson, P., Britton, T. H., Johansson, M., & Nordgren, K. (2022). Frågedriven undervisning för att organisera normativa kunskapspraktiker i SO-ämnena. *Nordidactica*, 12(4), 124-153.
Kim, G. (2023). "Because the United States is a great melting pot": How students make sense of topics in world history. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 51(3), 372–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2022.2162466
Kim, G. (2018). Holding the severed finger: Korean students' understanding of historical significance. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(4), 508–534. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2018.1461934
Létourneau, J., & Moisan, S. (2004). Young people's assimilation of a collective historical memory: A case study of Quebeckers of French-Canadian heritage. In P. Seixas (Ed.), *Theorizing historical consciousness* (pp. 109–128). University of Toronto Press.
Lévesque, S. (2005). Teaching second-order concepts in Canadian history: The importance of historical significance. *Canadian Social Studies*, 39(2).
Nordgren, K., & Johansson, M. (2014). Intercultural historical learning: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 47(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2014.956795
Nordgren, K. (2019). Boundaries of historical consciousness: A Western cultural achievement or an anthropological universal? *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 51(6), 779–797. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1652938
Nordgren, K. (2021). Powerful knowledge for what?: History education and 45-degree discourse. In A. Chapman (Ed.), *Knowing history in schools: Powerful knowledge and the powers of knowledge* (pp. 177–201). UCL Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv14t477t.13
Peck, C. L. (2009). *Multi-ethnic high school students' understandings of historical significance: Implications for Canadian history education* [PhD thesis, University of British Columbia]. https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0055123
Peck, C. L. (2018). National, ethnic, and Indigenous identities and perspectives in history education. In S. A. Metzger & L. McArthur Harris (Eds.), *The Wiley International handbook of history teaching and learning* (pp. 311–334). Wiley Blackwell.
Phillips, R. (2002). Historical significance – the forgotten "key element"? *Teaching History*, 106, 14–19.
Riessman, CK. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.
Rothberg, M. (2009). *Multidirectional memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization*. Stanford University Press.
Rüsen, J. (2004). *Berättande och förnuft: Historieteoretiska texter*. Daidalos.
Scott, J. W. (1991). The evidence of experience. *Critical Inquiry*, 17(4), 773-797. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343743
Seixas, P. (1994). Students' understanding of historical significance. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 22, 281–304.
Seixas, P. (1997). Mapping the terrain of historical significance. *Social Education*, 61, 22–27.
Seixas, P. & Morton, T. (2013). *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Nelson Education.
Seixas, P. (2015). A model of historical thinking. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49(6), 593–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1101363
Sjölund Åhsberg, C. (2024a). "We say that we are a tolerant country": National narratives and middle-school students' perspectives on historical significance. *Nordidactica*, 2024(1), 1-24.
Sjölund Åhsberg, C. (2024b). Students' views of historical significance – a narrative literature review. *History Education Research Journal*, 21(1), 2. https://doi.org/10.14324/HERJ.21.1.02.
Smith, J. (2024) History in the curriculum. In E. Rata (Ed.), *Research Handbook on Curriculum and Education* (pp. 353–366). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802208542
Somers, M. R. & Gibson, G. D. (1993/1996). Reclaiming the epistemological "other": Narrative and social constitution of identity. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Social theory and the politics of identity* (pp. 37–99). Blackwell. https://www.academia.edu/809214/
Swan, K., Lee, J., & Grant, S. G. (2018). *Inquiry design model: Building inquiries in social studies.* Routledge.
VanSledright, B. (2011). *The challenge of rethinking history education: on practices, theories, and policy.* New York ; Routledge.
Van Straaten, D., Wilschut, A., & Oostdam, R. (2016). Making history relevant to students by connecting past, present and future: a framework for research. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 48(4), 479–502. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1089938

Van Straaten, D., Wilschut, A., Oostdam, R., & Fukkink, R. (2019) Fostering Students' Appraisals of the Relevance of History by Comparing Analogous Cases of an Enduring Human Issue: A Quasi-Experimental Study. *Cognition and Instruction*, 37(4),512-533, https://doi.org/10.1080/07370008.2019.1614590

Wibaeus, Y. (2010). *Att undervisa om det ofattbara. En ämnesdidaktisk studie om kunskapsområdet Förintelsen i skolans historieundervisning* [PhD thesis, University of Stockholm]. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A352713

Young, M. (2008). *Bringing knowledge back in: From social constructivism to social realism in the sociology of education*. Routledge.