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Table of contents

Historical Thinking Culture and Education

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History and its educational relevance for overcoming tensions in current times

Editorial

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Keywords

history education, teaching disciplinary history, historical consciousness, teaching history for current times, history in times of crisis

Research detailing history's workings from non-disciplinary perspectives are gaining momentum. Work in memory studies, historical culture, and non-Western approaches to sense creation offer important insights. For example, in the study of historical consciousness, scholars have examined history's wider cultural, ethical, and temporal implications, seeking to better capture a greater diversity of experiences and epistemologies (Simon, 2004; Karlsson, 2011; Grever & Adriaansen, 2019; Nordgren, 2016; Ruin, 2019; Chinnery, 2019; Zanazanian, 2019, 2025). Such contributions seek novel approaches to understanding how to better operationalize the way we make historical sense of time's flow. Even in the wider field of history education, scholars are searching for ways to broaden our understanding and uses of historical thinking, hoping to disrupt its strict associations with disciplinary history. Scholars seek more existential, cultural, and epistemologically diverse conceptions of how to think historically, to make it more attuned to the realities and needs of the history classroom and beyond (Thorp & Persson, 2020; Alvén, 2024; Parkes, 2024; Wassermann & Angier, 2024; Godsell, 2024; Zanazanian, 2019, 2025). Despite these different interests and important contributions, modernist views of what history is and how it functions still seem to dominate in the field of education. Because of its application of the historical method as a scientific and rational way of constructing knowledge, history from a disciplinary angle is seen as the form of knowledge creation regarding the past that can best explain "how things actually were". In educational contexts, such an understanding of history is often perceived as foundational for allowing people to engage and orient themselves in life, giving them the necessary agency to tackle the many social and political problems that they may face. Adopting the historical method as a form of knowledge creation is seen as specifically permitting learners to act in an informed and self-conscious manner, enabling them to interpret emerging present-day realities as plausibly as possible and to correct misinterpretations of the past that are deceptive and non-conducive to positive change, especially as they arise in the public sphere through (social) media, expositions in museums, or political debates (e.g., Rüsen, 2017; Carretero & Perez-Manjarrez, 2022; Lévesque & Clark, 2018).

With the predominance of the *ideal-type historian* as inspiration for guiding our ideas of what history is and how it should be taught (Zanazanian, 2024), the present issue offers insights into whether such a focus on disciplinary history is still relevant for overcoming tensions in the world. In our contested times, with such life challenges as climate change, increasing frictions

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between contrasting knowledge systems and ideologies, faster technological transformations, and the ever-present need of making better room for marginalized peoples in our imperfect societal structures, the question to ask is whether history, understood primarily as a scientific, modernist, and methodological approach to knowledge creation, is still a relevant model for addressing the contemporary needs of our complex world. When seeking to examine both past and present-day problems in formal and non-formal educational settings, the following questions arise and constitute the basis of the current issue: How can we — as researchers, scholars, educators, teachers, etc. — conceptualize our use of history as a form of sense creation for addressing present-day realities and consequently ensuring positive change through its transmission? Is it possible to adapt history's standard "disciplinary" approach to knowledge creation to better address emerging challenges in the world, at different levels of schooling? If so, how? Should other approaches, such as democratic citizenship, use-of-history competencies, oral histories, testimony, and or understandings of historical culture, form the basis for developing new "standards" of history education? Do untapped opportunities remain that can enable the creation of new meanings for new futures?

This second issue of *Historical Thinking, Culture, and Education* sought both theoretical and empirical approaches to addressing these questions. The call of this issue was open to scholarly work from local, national, and transcultural contexts. It also welcomed interdisciplinary perspectives and differing research methodologies as practiced in various cultural settings. The following research papers and miniatures are the result of our call. As can be seen, they represent an interesting array of approaches to addressing history's educational relevance for overcoming current tensions in the world. Of interest, they include similarities in the types of crises our authors bring to their reflections, the type of texts they offer, i.e., research reports or position pieces, and the types of methodologies, research-wise and or teaching-wise, they use in their work. Key orientations also emerge regarding the authors' views of history and how it should be taught, notably their configurations of time and its workings. Authors also mainly seem to connect history to narrative, either as a form of expression or as an entry point for gaining insights into people's thinking. Ideas on how to make change through the teaching of history moreover come to light.

All contributions to this second issue look at current day crises. The research papers examine what to do with history as it relates to either broader disruptive situations or contexts, such as environmental or related crises due to our engagements in the Anthropocene (McGregor & Karn and Breser & Heuer), historical experiences of violence (Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg), colonialism (Godsell & Maluleka), and difficult histories (Honold & Eiland) or to specific types of disruptive events, such as genocide (Holmberg) and terrorism (Bammens et al.). One of the miniatures focuses on fake news and misinformation (Nally), while the other two provide interesting reflections on our state of being as historical actors (Scriba and Wansink). Which, in light, of these crises, can offer key insights into how to view the history teacher and learner as engaged and ready to commit to making change.

Four out of the seven research papers comprise research reports that share important findings (Holmberg; Bammens et al.; Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg; Honold & Eiland). The remaining three articles are position pieces (McGregor & Karn; Godsell & Maluleka; Breser & Heuer). One miniature provides an overview of a German-speaking monograph on how individuals resonate with history. Another considers how hope can be supported through history education, and the last explains how to counter fake news by promoting historical consciousness. In terms of methodologies used, two out of the seven focus on either a mixed methods approach to sharing data (Bammens et al.) or an examination of surveys and student essays (Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg). Four other ones focus on teaching methods, using an inquiry design model (Holmberg), an analysis of a teaching unit (McGregor & Karn), critical historical inquiry and activity theory (Honold & Eiland), and an analysis of political and history education (Breser & Heuer). The seventh article uses ethnography as inspiration for both a research and teaching methodology (Godsell & Maluleka).

Key ideas emerge from these contributions that demonstrate how the issue's authors view history, its workings, and its relevance for the history classroom. Four of the research papers view history as comprising time's temporal flow, moving from the past to the present into the future, with an interest in wanting students to understand the historical process to better prepare them for changing the future (Holmberg; Bammens et al.; McGregor & Karn; Breser & Heuer). For Holmberg, grasping the historical process means harmonizing notions of historical significance and historical relevance, where understanding the present through the past or understanding the past on its own terms is aligned with developing perspectives onto the future for action.

For Bammens et al., what matters is the notion of historicizing, where gaining facts, contextual knowledge, and information on actions already taken, can help learners understand that historical phenomena are in constant evolution. This comprehension, in turn, can enable them to reflect on how they position themselves, to then come to appreciate that they have agency in how they decide to make sense of phenomena, which can also evolve. For McGregor and Karn, history works to highlight the interconnectedness of emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual learning, and can thus make visible and uphold human responsibilities for caring for our ecosystems and fellow species who share our planet. Bringing eco-emotional literacy together with experiential learning, storying, and inquiry practices can show how past-present-future are connected and can thus counter complacency in our treatment of the environment. For Breser and Heuer, engaging with history, in our times of crises, means "doing" responsibility and recognizing our ability to act. By being self-reflexive about how we think and how we do things, we can consequently open horizons for engaging with the future. In the face of unprecedented changes, emerging from life in the Anthropocene, it is up to us to be responsible and to change if we want to survive. All these articles look at students' engagements with the historical process through the lens of their interactions with events or phenomena that are external to them. Through grasping and engaging with the historical process, the aim is to equip learners to make change, either to their societies or worlds of belonging (Holmberg) or to themselves, where the authors believe through transforming the self, learners can change the outside world for the better in the future (Bammens et al. McGregor & Karn; Breser & Heuer).

Two of the remaining three research papers still connect history to its temporal flow, but either mainly emphasize the connection between past and present (Honold & Eiland) or mainly connect history to the future (Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg). Both these articles, however, focus on potential obstacles or tensions that block student learning through engaging with the historical process. At play here are either teachers' own challenges in reasoning about how to proceed in their teaching, particularly in teaching sensitive topics (Honold & Eiland), or the challenges brought on by prevailing political cultures that impede learners from criticizing authority, which in turn, impacts students' historical consciousness and its role in changing attitudes and mindsets (Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg). Regarding teachers' challenges, what arises is the need of engaging with non-disciplinary input sources of information. When dealing with local, difficult histories, the skills and benefits of disciplinary history are not enough. Emotional knowledge, racial knowledge, political and ideological clarity, and deeper content knowledge beyond official narratives for critiquing and helping develop counter-narratives, are needed. Pedagogical reasoning is situated, and teachers cannot simply rely on disciplinary history for doing history (Honold & Eiland). In turn, concerning the impact of prevailing political cultures, knowledge of the fates of victims of violence and the emotions that this information can generate does not directly lead to the rejection of violence. Focusing on victims' experiences of violence is not enough. Since learning history involves learning through examples, examining the subjectivity of the perpetrators of violence is also necessary to gain a better sense of what it means to separate good from bad. Only concentrating on victims' narratives can lead to political fictions and ideological manipulations (Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg). The seventh research paper does not necessarily connect history to time's flow but does discuss creating new pathways forward by helping the marginalized regain their voice (Godsell & Maluleka). As the authors mention, "voice contains knowledge, agency, vision, and history".

Six out of the seven research papers engage with the ideas they propose through the lens of narrative (Holmberg; McGregor & Karn; Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg; Honold & Eiland; Godsell & Maluleka; Breser & Heuer). Narrative's uses vary. Narratives are at times a source of knowledge and the way this information is presented to us (McGregor & Karn; Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg; Honold & Eil). Here narratives, in the form of stories, are external to us and are brought to learners in the teaching context. Narratives are also seen as the medium through which we can gather information on learners (Holmberg) or the means through which we express history (Godsell & Maluleka; Breser & Heuer). Only one contribution does not make room for the idea of narrative but rather for the knowledge and skills we gain (Bammens et al.).

When it comes to making change through the teaching of history, the contributions to this issue offer several approaches. Change through the teaching of history can happen in many ways; in ways that are different from having learners to think like the *ideal-type historian*. To engage in preventing genocide, for example, learners need to get a sense of their agency through better understanding the historical process. Gaining agency can take place by understanding how history works as well as grasping how learners can get involved to gain new outlooks onto the future. Getting learners to recognize significant events as a process with different steps can enable them to see the relevance of what they are seeking and what steps need to be taken. As such,

history is something learners can intervene in, especially when there is an alignment between using key procedures and concepts for understanding historical phenomena and fully employing them for interpreting the present and creating perspectives for the future (Holmberg). Some authors offer design principles. To reduce learners' fear of the threats of terrorism, history can help make change by offering facts, context, and a sense of control by demonstrating actions that individuals and law enforcement agencies have already taken for combatting terrorism. This input can help learners to better understand and demystify any perceived helplessness in the face of the threat of terrorism and can lend to hence decrease the fear of it (Bammens et al.). To combat anthropocentrism's negative impacts on the environment, change can be made by having learners realize that things can get better. The key is to grasp different ways of thinking about time and one's place within it. Mindsets can evolve by having learners come to recognize that the past is very different from the present and that the future need not consequently be the same as the present. Change and continuities over time, input from experts (including traditional knowledge keepers), and examinations of how different cultures present history, can help foster this process of change (McGregor & Karn). In contexts that seek to decolonize pedagogy, change can be made by using history to give voice to those who have been marginalized and to open new trajectories for questioning and problematizing the official knowledge learners are presented with. To make change, this pedagogy of providing a voice needs to be done regularly, to support and develop students' voice and trust in their own thoughts and knowledge (Godsell & Maluleka). Again, in dealing with the negative effects of the Anthropocene, the idea of having learners gain critical-reflexive distance from their thinking and social conditions to open new possibilities and horizons is also suggested. The idea, for the authors, is to thus learn to engage in practices of historical-political education and doing responsibility (Breser & Heuer).

The two remaining research papers mainly emphasize key obstructions or challenges to history's change-making process. When faced with teaching the history of policing and activism in Detroit, teachers seem to be faced with a tension, where they need to navigate and figure out where they stand regarding how to teach such a sensitive topic (a racialized history), while also having learners come to position themselves and manage their affective responses (Honold & Eiland). Ultimately, teachers need to harmonize their disciplinary goals for teaching history and their sense of responsibility regarding learners' affective well-being. The impact of learners' prevailing political culture is also an obstacle, especially when it limits learners' abilities for freely and independently questioning the powers that be (Schor-Tschudnowskaja & Auersperg). When thinking of how to teach history, deep analysis of the political culture in place in society needs to happen. Learners should ultimately be given opportunities to question the power dynamics involved during times of historical violence.

The second issue's miniatures also provide interesting insights into how we should or can rethink history to better deal with tensions in current times. Scriba offers his imagined persona of Historicus to describe the workings of history, which he does by analyzing personal perceptions and experiences of history. He looks at such key concepts as resonance, understanding, and encounter. Wansink offers his deep reflections on the notion of hope in education. Not only is the concept of hope complex, but it is also in crisis given the many tensions we currently face in the world. Wansink particularly suggests that teachers balance their personal hopes with their professional ethics and the state curricula they are responsible for transmitting. Necessary moral dilemmas and frictions will arise that teachers will need to navigate. Wansink calls for research to better understand these processes. Concerned with fake news and misinformation, Nally offers key insights into how to integrate the concept of historical consciousness, which has been added to the new history curriculum in New South Wales in Australia, into the teaching process so that core historical contents and skills become meaningful for learners outside the history classroom. In our era of post-truth, one key aim, he argues, is for learners to specifically be able to detect forms of misinformation and to analyze them in more nuanced ways.

When looking at the second issue's contributions, it appears that in assessing history's relevance for education in our current times of tension that most of our authors seem to move away from disciplinary history as best as they can, without outright rejecting it. They inadvertently turn to a general understanding of how we navigate time's flow with history, albeit one that mainly connects past-present-future in a linear and segmented manner, for making sense of how we can move beyond disciplinary history. The question that arises is whether what is available when theorizing about what history is and how it functions in the field serves as defaults for visualizing history and its potentials or are there other ways of proceeding. When it comes to history and its teaching, does moving from one paradigm of history and its workings mean moving to another one, which seems to be seemingly gaining ground. What does this say about history and its teaching?

We hope our readers find this issue stimulating and would like to thank the authors for their dedicated engagement with questions about how history can address current tensions. We would also like to thank the reviewers for their valuable feedback and the production assistants, Lorenz Meier, Dominik Rieger (both FHNW School of Education, Switzerland), and Sina Springer (University of Cologne), for their support in the publication process.

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Overcoming anthropocentrism

Experiences for learning history

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Abstract

History educators are well positioned to connect, or reconnect, young people to their environmental relations, if they can expand the purposes and vehicles for history learning. This effort may include historical thinking, while also moving beyond it towards better understanding and upholding our relationships to the planet. We offer history educators a set of considerations as they plan experiences for learning that bring environmental topics into their teaching, bridging between theoretical literature and practical guidance. The four facets of experiences for learning on which we focus are: 1) eco-emotional literacy, 2) nature connectedness through experiential learning, 3) storying, and 4) inquiry practices. All facets are characterized by understanding how the past, present, and future are connected in ways that move towards overcoming anthropocentrism. To illustrate the possible learning outcomes of this approach to history education, we describe a teaching unit entitled "What is the story of this watershed?"

Keywords

history education; social studies education; climate crisis education; experiential learning; watershed unit

1. Introduction

History teaching reform, curriculum change, and professional development continue to place emphasis on creating thinking classrooms, imbued with disciplinary approaches and skill development (Berg & Christou, 2020; Harris & Metzger, 2018; Lévesque & Clark, 2018; Seixas, 2017; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Stipp et al., 2017; VanSledright, 2014; Wineburg, 2001). Centring a Canadian perspective in this work, the hard-won and still-ongoing transition away from passive memorization of authoritative narratives marks a significant improvement in history education. We acknowledge successes in curriculum changes towards students becoming actively engaged in questioning, seeking multiple perspectives, constructing meaning, and communicating their interpretations (Brown, 2024; Clark, 2019, 2024; Lévesque & Clark, 2018). Improving student literacy and capacity in the methodologies used by historians, and others who employ knowledge from the past and stories of the past, is essential to learners' present and future participation in social and political processes. However, history as a discipline — which itself is not singular — is one system among many for organizing stories. And, it is not always the most important system in Canadian classroom settings where outcomes are also tied to social justice, decoloniz-

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ing, citizenship and civic engagement, activism, and futures thinking (Clark, 2011, 2018; Cutrara, 2018, 2020; den Heyer, 2011, 2017; Miles, 2018; Osborne, 1995; Sears, 2011; Stanley, 2000; Taylor, 2018; von Heyking, 2006). If the cognitive/rational domain, and disciplinary approaches such as second-order historical thinking concepts, are the only focus of history education, it will be at great cost. Western-modernist knowledge dominance and its entanglement with Eurocentrism, capitalism, and anthropocentrism functions to exclude ways of knowing, being, and doing that are essential to living well (Bell, 2020; Brant-Birioukov et al., 2023; Donald, 2019; Stein et al., 2017). The urgency of addressing such exclusions is exacerbated by the current conditions of polycrisis (Mark et al., 2023).

As Indigenous scholars in the North American context have long advocated, attending to the interconnectedness of emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual learning creates more holistic and effective learning opportunities (Bell, 2020). Ensuring that learning is embedded within local ecological webs of relations is essential to both human and more-than-human wellbeing (Donald, 2019). Beyond teaching the whole person, history teachers can make visible and uphold human responsibilities for caring for our ecosystems and the other species with whom we share the land and water over time (Kress & Horn-Miller, 2023). Furthermore, outdoor practices including ways of paying attention, ways of reading and understanding the natural world, oral or non-academic ways of passing on situated knowledge from the past and about the past, and ways of making things from the earth are sorely missing from most schooling experiences (Bowers, 2001; Orr, 2004; UNESCO & MECCE, 2024). Apart from communicating a separation from the environment and ignoring our dependence on it, this is resulting in greater alienation of young people from nature and contributing to adverse psychological outcomes for children and youth (Chawla, 2020; Louv, 2008).

It is our contention that, as unfamiliar as it may feel, history educators are well positioned to connect, or reconnect, young people to their environmental relations, if they can expand the purposes and vehicles for history learning in their classrooms. As we have seen with the transition towards historical thinking in the Canadian history education context, to facilitate changes in practice, history teachers will require professional learning and supports, including accessible theoretical frameworks, pedagogical guidance, model lessons, content suggestions, and an ongoing professional learning community (McGregor, 2017; Sears, 2014). Within this suite of necessary supports, here we specifically illustrate what may be involved in curating experiences for learning in a history classroom focused on overcoming anthropocentrism, using a watershed unit as a thinking tool.

The contribution of this article is the identification of facets of experiences intended to overcome anthropocentrism, the theoretical background for those facets, and the practical implementation of teaching that achieves those facets. The four facets are: 1) eco-emotional literacy, 2) nature connectedness through experiential learning, 3) storying, and 4) inquiry practices. While such experiences for learning are still characterized as part of social studies and history education, by pursuing an understanding of how the past, present, and future are connected, they also mark a resistance to complacency in our current times. This resistance is necessary in the face of mental and physical health crises among youth, the urgency of loving the earth and treating the earth as if it is living, and pursuing a more just present and future for communities disproportionately affected by climate catastrophe and other global challenges. This article is intended as a bridge between theoretical literature and practical guidance, for an audience of history teachers, teacher educators, graduate students, and professionals involved in history teaching reform. We offer a set of considerations as they plan for the four facets of experiences for learning that include and move beyond historical thinking. Working with these facets is intended not only to bring environmental topics into history teaching, but also to direct teaching towards understanding and upholding the most important human relationships over time: our relationships to the planet. While we have not tested all of the specific elements of the watershed unit we describe here, it is intended to serve as a tool to think with, as readers look to refresh their approaches. For that reason, we selected a topic that is somewhat generic and transferrable to different places, while offering facets that are relatively new to history education in Canada.

This article is derived from a larger series of research initiatives undertaken by the Social Studies & History Education in the Anthropocene Network (SSHEAN), of which we are both founding members (Brant-Birioukov et al., 2023; Evans et al., 2024; Karn et al., in press; McGregor, 2019, 2023; McGregor et al., in review; McGregor et al., 2024; McGregor, Karn et al., 2022; McGregor et al., 2021, 2022). Beyond what we share in the present article, we are conceptualizing a larger the-

oretical framework for social studies and history education (SSHE) "in the Anthropocene."[1] Our research responds to the unprecedented environmental and equity conditions of our time that demand a refocus of the purpose of SSHE towards overcoming anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism involves the planetary-scale subordination of nonhuman organisms, denying they have value in their own right (Kopnina et al., 2018, p. 115), and designating human needs and wants as superseding those of all other species, and the planet itself. There are particularly problematic forms of anthropocentrism among dominant populations in the Global North. For example, Stein et al. (2017) refer to "fantasies of ontological security," that presume human entitlements to autonomy, immunity, hierarchy, social mobility, property accumulation, law and order, universal knowledge, and human morality—without accountability for the cost of those fantasies to other beings (human, more-than-human, or environmental). Despite these persistent and resistant anthropocentric narratives, Stein et al. (2017) suggest that "it is both possible and necessary to develop critical analyses and pedagogical tools that make visible the multiple forms of violence inherent to the house that modernity built — that is, the true cost of its false promises" (p. 10). Retz (2022) has also argued that history education is an important site for reconsideration of the normative category of human, if human is now acknowledged as a force of nature.

Whether or not the exemplar we share here can facilitate a deep critique of modernity, coloniality, or human/more-than-human dualities, as we imagine it could, will depend largely on a teacher's willingness, preparedness, guidance, and curricular context. However, it is with this ultimate goal in mind that we offer a pedagogical approach that re-enlivens a compelling relationality with place through experience. We recognize the limitations of school systems as they are presently organized to overcome anthropocentrism, given its ubiquity and durability in dominant knowledge systems. Still, our position is that if history classrooms do not become spaces where environmental histories are explored experientially, it is implausible that the subject area will contribute meaningfully to addressing this existential tension.

Section 2 of this article describes the teaching conditions that teachers may face as they embark on this work, and reviews literature relevant to demonstrating the nuances of those conditions as well as some strategies for addressing them. Section 3 presents our theoretical framework, grounded in the literature, which identifies the four facets of experiential learning in history education classrooms oriented towards a changing climate. Section 4 offers the application of the four facets of experiential learning through a practical example — a watershed study taking place over several seasons. Here the theoretical discussion is enlivened through thinking with the lesson example, including mapping the four facets of experience to student learning outcomes. Finally, in Section 5 we outline how this article contributes to the ongoing reform of history education towards matters that are more deeply relational with the more-than-human.

2. Dynamics of teaching for climate crisis in social studies and history education

Teachers may not have engaged in learning environmental histories during their own education, or experienced learning in ways the climate crisis now demands (Hawkey, 2023). More demanding than new content, in taking up climate topics or environmental crises, teachers are confronted with challenges managing the many convergent and divergent demands associated with anxiety, difficult knowledge, and uncertainty (Garrett, 2017, 2019; van Kessel, 2020). In this section we discuss the inevitable dynamics teachers can prepare for, including: developing competencies in handling eco-emotions, such as but not limited to eco-anxiety; students feeling alienated from or scared of their environments; students being overwhelmed by the expectation that they help solve climate issues; or feeling angry and unsupported given the epistemological resilience required to handle how they are impacted by, or implicated in, climate justice transitions.

Climate change pedagogy research suggests that teachers develop competencies in handling eco-emotions so that these emotions do not become a barrier to learning (Atkinson & Ray, 2024; Hiser & Lynch, 2021; Ojala, 2013; Pihkala, 2020a, 2020b). Within history classrooms, ecological

1 We use this term to recognize the current epoch in which humans are the dominant influence on the Earth (Chakrabarty, 2009; Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Davis & Todd, 2017; Lewis & Maslin, 2015; Malhi, 2017), while acknowledging the term's limitations, including recentring the human species (Corfield, 2011) and implying that all humans are equally responsible for ecological damage (Moore, 2016).

emotions may surface at the teacher's or students' instigation, and in planned or unanticipated ways. Planned discussions may arise through interactions with Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers, viewing documentaries, or analyzing historical and contemporary evidence. Students may initiate conversations due to world events (e.g., forest fires, hurricanes, climate protests, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report releases), personal and family experience, empathy and care for others or for justice, or during outdoor field trips. Student reactions to climate change may be overt (e.g., explicit expressions of climate anxiety) or covert (e.g., where the concern is not spoken of, but no less operative in terms of its impact on learning). Bringing an awareness that learning may be "experienced as a burden" (Garrett, 2017, p. 1), includes looking out for student reactions signifying resistance, trauma, the defended subject, and deep precariousness. Existential anxiety, mortality salience, and worldview threat may be triggered if learners acknowledge that "assumptions that dominate in Western societies are perhaps not viable in the long term given the context of climate catastrophe" (van Kessel, 2020, p. 135). Garrett (2019) argues that social studies educators can position themselves to address the devastating reality that the climate situation is much worse than we think by "providing spaces to articulate our reactions to them" (p. 613). According to Pihkala (2020b), teachers should view these situations as opportunities to proactively name, share, and channel emotions constructively to increase student emotional literacy and nurture hope. Van Kessel (2020) counteracts worldview threat with a set of pedagogical strategies: providing conceptual tools, narrating cascading emotions, carefully using humour to diffuse anxiety, employing language and phrasing that does not overgeneralize, and priming for tolerance (pp. 137-138). In the history classroom, examining evidence of how people in the past felt and expressed their emotions towards the environment has the potential to help students become more aware of their own emotions (Eisman & Patterson, 2022). Difficult conversations about present and future environmental conditions belong in school classrooms, as there are few other public spaces for youth to learn more, express their responses, and access supports.

As a result of their home and family circumstances or life experiences, teachers and their students may not have a great deal of prior exposure to nature, comfort with the outdoors, or environmental literacy, even in the spaces that they regularly inhabit (e.g., being able to name bird or tree species that they see regularly, being able to dress appropriately for weather conditions). Those from racialized communities may also experience racism and other barriers to spending time outdoors (Scott & Tenneti, 2021). Teachers may need to offer introductory coaching and modeling in outdoor knowledges, skills, and dispositions for some youth, alongside welcoming students with prior familiarity through camping or farm experience. Intentionally identifying students' varying starting points, addressing equity-related barriers, and accruing background information and content knowledge should be part of planning for climate topics in history.

Climate change lesson designs often strive to conclude on a hopeful note, or at least a busy one, by activating youth environmental or climate action (Evans et al., 2024). Climate action is an important strategy to engage students in making change, while serving to protect against despondency and depression (Schwartz et al., 2022). However, it can also leave learners feeling a great deal of responsibility and pressure (Galway & Field, 2023). Rather than communicating to learners that they carry individual or generational responsibility for "solving" the climate emergency, we suggest that history teachers look for ways to introduce learners to pre-existing groups, organizations, or communities that students can join in taking action or striving for change. This approach may be embedded with civic or citizenship education, and provides opportunities to learn about the history of environmental collective action—even more essential considering that, when historicizing the environmental crisis, students tend to emphasize individual actions and the capacity for technology to solve our problems rather than identifying the importance of engaging in collective action and civic engagement for societal transformation (Gripe & Sandahl, 2024). Furthermore, this demonstrates to young people that adults who arrived on earth before them are at least as concerned as they are and will not leave them to confront this wicked problem alone (McGregor, 2023).

Teachers may also look to the field of climate justice education and critical global citizenship education for guidance on how students may be differently impacted by climate topics and implications (Atkinson & Ray, 2024; Karsgaard & Davidson, 2023; McGregor et al., in review; Walsh et al., 2020). Such approaches call on teachers and learners to examine whether the challenges of addressing climate crisis will result in sustaining the very problematic human ways of knowing, being, and doing that have gotten us into this mess, and result in "multi-layered injustices" (Stein et. al., 2023, p. 990). Furthermore, resisting apathy in the face of catastrophe, climate justice ed-

ucation methods rest on the understanding that "the world is unfinished," (Misiaszek, 2023, p. 1264), the world is open to hope, thick reflexive praxis, collective action, and deep change (see also Cachelin & Nicolosi, 2022; Lin et al., 2023; Misiaszek, 2022). For example, tracing the causes and outcomes of collective political action movements, such as youth climate strikes, is an example of how historical study might contribute to questioning and confronting the unjust status quo (Karsgaard & Davidson, 2023). With the complex and overlapping dynamics of climate anxiety, difficult knowledge, outdoor learning, calls to action, and climate justice in mind, we intend to offer teachers a way forward through experiences for learning that fit with current teaching expectations and simultaneously serve to resist anthropocentrism.

3. Experiences for learning: A theoretical background for the four facets

We advocate for experiential learning that builds on the strengths of both environmental education and SSHE. In this section of the article, we highlight and connect with scholarly literature that upholds the four facets of experiential learning we have identified in this context. The value of learning through and from experience has been well-documented in educational research (Keeton & Tate, 1978; Kolb, 1984; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Moon, 2004; Silberman, 2007), despite persistent tendencies to revert to knowledge transmission approaches in traditional classroom settings. Twenty-first century technology makes it so that factual re-call and re-search (that is, searching for information or evidence that already exists) are widely accessible to students studying history (Wineburg, 2018). The influence of critical theories and critical pedagogies in education call for experiential learning as one tool to ensure education is a site of change — in the pursuit of freedom from oppression — rather than reproduction (Freire, 1970). We acknowledge that our orientation to experiential learning is built upon our learning from Indigenous pedagogues (Bell, 2020; Kulnieks et al., 2010), environmental pedagogues (Derby, 2015; Jickling et al., 2018; Monroe et al., 2019), and history educators (Atherton & Moore, 2016; Karn, 2024b; Marker, 2011; Wakild & Berry, 2018) who advocate for experiential approaches.

Youth need opportunities to enhance their confidence and competencies with various ways of exploring and making meaning, forming and maintaining relationships, solving problems, and discerning among multiple courses of action. SSHE that moves towards overcoming anthropocentrism, then, makes explicit the kind of experiences youth benefit from. In the course of intentionally engaging environmental content (e.g., environmental histories), as advocated for within recent history education scholarship (Adorno, 2022; Hawkey, 2023), SSHE may also facilitate the four facets identified here: 1) eco-emotional literacy, 2) nature connectedness through experiential learning, 3) storying, and 4) inquiry practices.

3.1 Engaging the affective dimensions

Emotions and feelings are part of learning (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007), and SSHE can centre opportunities for students to identify and express their emotions, as well as make affective connections with nature. In recent years there has been significant recognition of the crucial role of attending to emotion in classroom environments to facilitate effective learning, particularly for navigating the challenges presented by climate crisis (Kretz, 2020). Within the context of history education specifically, "engaging emotion is essential to effective history instruction" (Neumann, 2019, p. 276). Humans are multidimensional beings with cognitive, emotional, and spiritual capacities which, when appropriately engaged and activated, can be utilized to enhance learning and growth. This is clearly acknowledged in Indigenous education paradigms related to lands colonially referred to as Canada (e.g., Bell, 2020), but no less relevant outside of them. Contrary to the ontological and epistemological tendency to devalue emotion in Western knowledge systems, emotions operate as sources of information and insight (Kretz, 2020). Students and teachers are always already bringing their emotional experience to the classroom (Kretz, 2020), including in SSHE (Garrett, 2017; Hawkey, 2023; Karn, 2024a; Sheppard & Levy, 2019). As such, all classrooms have an affective valence, with some forms of emotion enhancing learning and other forms working against learning. Consider, for example, the challenge of a distraught or threatened student's ability to absorb and process information effectively (Picard et al., 2004;

van Kessel, 2020). Attending to affective dimensions is essential to teaching well in any situation, but particularly in the face of climate emergency.

To encourage SSHE students to engage their emotions in healthy and productive ways for learning and empowerment, the ability to identify and share ecological emotions in respectful, supportive, non-dismissive, and non-judgmental environments is key (Chawla, 2020). When challenging emotions surface and are shared, they must be taken seriously and students should be encouraged to share those emotions (Ojala, 2013) and expand their emotional vocabulary. SSHE teachers may wish to offer students opportunities to learn to name the wide spectra of climate emotions, to regularly practice an emotional well-being check-in, and provide content warnings when appropriate (Pihkala, 2020b). Teachers may also consider reframing ecoanxiety as eco-empathy, eco-compassion, or eco-caring to emphasize connection, love, and relationships between humans, more-than-humans, and the Earth over time (Hickman, 2020). There are many benefits to pedagogies that openly invite emotions (Boler, 1999), and a reimagined SSHE classroom for the Anthropocene is no exception.

In terms of caring responses to ecoanxiety and the range of other emotions that may arise in SSHE classrooms, it can be helpful to highlight positive changes societies have made in the past and present to protect the natural world (Chawla, 2020; Hawkey, 2023; Pihkala, 2020a). Youth should be enabled to investigate that which is personally relevant to them, and meaningfully engage with others, thereby building social trust (Chawla, 2020). Through supporting SSHE students in collaborating on concrete climate change action, both empowerment and well-being are generated (Ojala, 2013). Working with groups and organizations can help ameliorate the sense of insufficient impact that often accompanies attempting to mitigate climate change harms through small personal changes to one's own, for example, consumption patterns. Taking meaningful action in local community contexts can foster a sense of efficacy and connection (Chawla, 2020; Chawla & Cushing, 2007; Field, 2017; Ojala, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2022; Trott, 2019; Woodbury, 2019). SSHE classrooms are particularly well-positioned to engage in these possibilities, as the subject of social studies includes a focus on civic education and there are rich opportunities in history to study and learn from social movements in the past.

3.2 Nature connectedness and competencies

Research demonstrates the positive health outcomes of living and learning in close proximity to green space and other species (Louv, 2008). The positive outcomes of nature connectedness span the cognitive to the behavioural, the physical to the emotional, the social to the environmental (Louv, 2008). As humans are animals, we need to be part of our ecosystems to be well, and to be preserved those ecosystems require us to be conscious of our interdependence with them. Furthermore, while many privileged populations on Earth currently have a degree, or many degrees, of insulation between their daily activities and the planet, future ecological changes or emergency situations are likely to demand competencies that those populations have not required recently (e.g., living with less electricity, repairing things rather than buying new, growing more food locally). Rather than viewing outdoor and environmental education as taking away instructional time that would otherwise be spent on traditional school subjects, every subject in school requires re-evaluation for its potential to contribute to learning outdoors, learning alongside and about other species, and learning how to care for oneself and others in nature. Despite innumerable objections and barriers that limit teachers' opportunities to take youth outside for learning (Pedretti et al., 2012), SSHE must do its part.

In particular, SSHE can contribute lessons on how humans have related to other species over time, and as economic or environmental conditions have changed. Such lessons can be taught just as powerfully — likely more powerfully — outdoors, in direct experiential relation to those real places and beings under study (Derby, 2015; Jickling et al., 2018; MacDonald, 2022), thereby reflecting in practice the importance of land-based education. As part of these outdoor experiences, students learn about dressing and packing appropriately for the conditions, pivoting activities depending on weather, acquiring skills for safe travel from experienced mentors, and learning respectful stewardship practices.

Indigenous-led land-based learning and mentorship are among the most important strategies for facilitating Indigenous language and cultural revitalization, which are crucial for advancing decolonization (Simpson, 2002; Wildcat et al., 2014), as well as protections for biodiversity and land-, species-, and water-defence (Tran et al., 2020). Land is viewed by many Indigenous peoples as first teacher, the basis of relationships, a place of reflection, and the setting for de-

veloping a holistic perspective (Bell, 2016; 2020; Bowra et al., 2021; Marker, 2018; Styres, 2011; Tuck et al., 2014). These potential learning outcomes, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, relate as much to SSHE as they do to outcomes associated with other subject areas. Land-based learning offers the opportunity to resist and transcend Eurocentric educational structures (Bowra et al., 2021), and experience ways of knowing, being, and doing that honour relationality. One way to begin is by questioning place-naming practices, language(s) used to describe land, and metaphors associated with place, while (re)encountering place informed by Indigenous knowledges (Brant-Birioukov et. al., 2023).

3.3 Storying

SSHE is a site where youth encounter stories. The word "story" is not used here as a synonym for fiction, although that is a form of story that may be present. Story represents the many techniques humans use to organize the meaning they make, and the importance of preserving the diversity of these storying techniques and the dexterity to move among them (Frank, 2010). Humanities-focused climate education "shows promise in engaging students through narrative, storytelling, and local community projects, and building upon climate communications research that similarly emphasizes a storytelling approach" (Siegner & Stapert, 2020, p. 522). In the face of climate crisis, we also require stories that expand conceptions of time and place to include deep history (Miles & Keynes, 2023; Retz, 2022; Riede, 2022), which allows us to consider "the depth of the predicament that confronts humans today" (Chakrabarty, 2018, p. 6).

Beyond making sense of — and responding respectfully to — accounts of the past or from the past, or individual testimonies (Simon, 2004), students in schools encounter the underlying "mythologies" that frame a worldview (Donald, 2019). This is not new, but we emphasize the opportunity to make this the focus of discussion in SSHE. Metacognitive engagement and explicit modeling with students about story listening might include etiquette or cultural norms, situated processes of evaluating truth(s) claims (such as peer review or critical questioning), and considering whether meaning should be determined explicitly or implicitly (and fixed or fluid, etc.) by the story teller, the story listener, or both in relation (Archibald, 2008). In particular, students will need to be attuned to how power operates within relations between differently socially-, politically-, and economically-positioned story tellers and listeners.

Furthermore, we are inspired by Arthur Frank's (2010) assertion that, "[n]ot least among human freedoms is the ability to tell the story differently and to begin to live according to that different story" (p. 10). Frank outlines how stories are relational actors that shape human consciousness, connect people into collectivities, offer diverse purposes through various genres, support dialogical interpretation, and nurture imagination. In North American Indigenous traditions, stories are gifts that enact the web of reciprocity that makes life possible (Archibald, 2008; Marker, 2019). Alongside understanding others, developing narrative competency and dexterity in SSHE supports the capacity for students to harness agency through narrating their own place in the flow of time and change (see also McGregor, Pind et al., 2022). Narrative competencies in more than one system for story listening, reading, telling, and writing are crucial skills for the Anthropocene (Derby, 2015).

3.4 Undertaking inquiry

The historical thinking movement in Canada is influential in reframing SSHE as a place to teach students how to do history (or engage in social study), rather than transmitting a series of dates and names to remember from history (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Seixas, 2009; 2017; Stipp et al., 2017). This curriculum reform is criticized for its potential retrenchment of Eurocentric knowledge systems (Cutrara, 2018, 2020; den Heyer, 2011, 2017), and for continuing to exclude other legitimate systems of making meaning from the past (Marker, 2011, 2019). However, if we understand this movement as tied to engaging students in forms of inquiry and critical thinking, without communicating that there is only one legitimate form (McGregor, 2017; Gibson & Case, 2019; Miles, 2018; Seixas, 2012), there is significant potential inherent in pedagogies that prepare youth to frame their own questions, investigate and apply evidence, wield crucial interpretive concepts, present accounts, or make their own judgments and decisions. Historical thinking can open students to a variety of forms of meaning-making about the past, while encouraging awareness of how considering diverse and multiple perspectives can help illuminate the rich complexities of historical narratives. Further, incorporating environmental perspectives, specifically, can strengthen students' critical thinking and historical understanding (Hawkey, 2023).

Not all approaches to inquiry are equivalent, and there are problems with superficial implementation of critical and historical thinking, let alone assessing for it (Gibson, 2021). Historical thinking is sometimes simply thematic analysis that is still delivered as a closed system to students using content transmission. Inquiry can be offered as re-searching; that is, having students find pre-determined correct answers through a simple information hunt. Rather, the form of inquiry advocated for here with respect to overcoming anthropocentrism is consistent with the definition of critical thinking that supports youth to synthesize or make judgments among multiple plausible choices on the basis of criteria (Bailin et al., 1999). There are a number of frameworks (such as the "Critical Challenges" approach used by The Critical Thinking Consortium, or the Four Dimensions of the C3 Framework for State Social Studies Standards) for lessons and classroom activities that facilitate inquiry based or critical thinking. Climate justice educator Maria Vamvalis (2022) strongly recommends meaningful forms of inquiry as a vehicle for constructive climate change education. One of the most important capacities in undertaking this kind of historical and critical thinking, but which is not frequently featured in the Canadian historical thinking literature, is the ability to frame one's perspective as embedded in a worldview and positionality.

4. Experiences for learning in practice: What is the story of this watershed?

To illustrate the possibilities of the four facets of experiences for learning in SSHE, we suggest a unit titled "What is the story of this watershed?," guided by this same inquiry question. Ideally, it would involve multiple lessons throughout the school year, during different seasons, and each lesson could range from one class period to an entire day. This unit has not been empirically tested, which is a future direction for our research. It serves here as a tool to think with as history educators reconsider the place of experiential pedagogies, nature connectedness, and climate responsiveness in their classes. For that reason, it is intentionally general, adaptable to various grade levels or even post-secondary, and transferrable from place to place. We are inspired by other watershed lessons, including a class inquiry into the source and destination of a creek, involving a student expedition to follow the creek, as well as creek map-making, and wildlife study (Sobel, 2008). We have also come across resources that would support learning about the Don River watershed, one of the most urbanized rivers in Canada that was declared "dead" and has been returned to life, or further from home, the Beltie Burn in Scotland, a recently restored river system.[2]

4.1 Setting up the unit activities

For this unit, teachers identify a local watershed that is easily accessible, and can serve as the iterative focus for learners. Site selection would consider watershed significance for local Indigenous communities, involve learning Indigenous language names of rivers, lakes, and wetlands, and inquire into cultural stories or oral histories of the watershed and surrounding ecosystems that would be appropriate to share with their students. To provide an example from our teaching and learning context in the area of Kingston, Ontario, Canada, we would spend time at the Cataraqui River watershed, located within a conservation authority that continues to expand its protected areas, especially to preserve habitat for species at risk like Snapping Turtles and Bald Eagles.

To set up the historical context surrounding the watershed, teachers identify several local experts on the watershed (such as civic planning, conservation, wildlife management, Indigenous knowledges, community recreation). Each expert may present to the students on the history of the watershed and human relationships with the water and its ecosystem over time. Archival

2 For more on these watersheds, visit this Don River interactive news story: https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/features/2024/daylighting-rivers/; and watch this video on the Beltie Burn restoration: https://youtu.be/tWCQVU4_UvQ?si=3cXWj7QZRHuORt1y. Additional resources to support learning about watersheds may include this PBS Watershed immersive 360° video series: https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/pivotal/t/watershed-stories-of-people-connected-by-water/; and the Anthropocene Curriculum's "The Watershed in Your Head" mapping: https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/contribution/the-watershed-in-your-head/.

materials, including historical maps, at the municipality, library, or other repository may serve to represent watershed changes over time. The purpose of this segment of the unit is to understand the life of the proximate water: where it comes from and flows to, how the size or direction and trajectory may have changed over time, pollution issues and clean-up efforts, species management, and human interactions. Students become aware of the environmental histories of the water under study, from various perspectives and orientations.

4.2 Experiential activities

Spending time within the watershed ecosystem on more than one occasion is essential. Field trips to the water are opportunities for teachers and students to practice preparedness for outdoor learning, including advance safety and accessibility considerations. During visits students can take walks, find a sit spot to reflect or engage in art practices, participate in species identification or phenology through recording their observations, and learn in unexpected ways from other people and beings. Students may engage in developing knowledge and skills related to water safety, water cycles, water testing, water as a means of transportation, flooding, pollution, treatment, erosion, and deposition. Students may consider the lifeways of different groups and other species who have been in relationship with the water ecosystem, including Indigenous peoples (e.g., How has the water been used as a means of transportation? What tools and knowledges have been used to test water over time?). Students may learn that traditional cultural practices and skills could still be of value, either in the same way that they were undertaken in the past, or with adaptations. This inquiry can continue back in the classroom through seeking additional resources or creating their own resources and materials to share with others.

While spending time outdoors, interacting with the water, students have the opportunity to attend to the mind, heart, spirit, and body. As students engage with their surroundings, they are encouraged to attune to their senses and different modalities for learning and being. For example:

- Sound and smell: What do we hear? What do we smell?
- Sight: What do we see in different seasons? What do we notice about outdoor light (brightness/shade)?
- Feelings/emotions: What do we feel when we are near the water? Do our feelings change outdoors?
- Physical bodies: What do we like/dislike to touch? How does the temperature affect us? How does the air feel?

Students may be invited to record their responses to these questions (writing, drawing, photographing), as they arise organically. Teachers and learners can benefit from a sensory processing pause to connect with water, reflect on how it makes humans feel, and consider how it shifts learning.

As we suggest multiple visits to the water's edge, teachers may iteratively prompt students to consider how the watershed ecosystem may have changed since the last time they visited (e.g., What are the biggest changes, and what are some other minor changes noticed during the visit? How did these changes impact the ways in which the group interacted with the water?). In this way the watershed ecosystem becomes a co-teacher, along with the learning community. While identifying the knowledge, skills, and competencies students have developed through the watershed unit, students can consider how these outcomes can help create better interactions with water moving forward (e.g., What might be the future story of the water? How can we participate in the next chapter of this water's story?).

4.3 Culminating project

The conclusion of the unit may feature and mobilize the outcomes of the inquiry that students undertake (in other words, the outputs from their experiences), or initiate a new action-focused project. Building on our caution above — about avoiding communicating to students that climate change or pollution is exclusively their problem to solve, but also giving them meaningful experiences of taking action in the world — working alongside community members may enrich

this culminating task. This might involve supporting or collaborating with a community-based organization, municipality, or water expert that students interacted with during their learning. Or the audience for a knowledge mobilization project could be the larger school community around that class. Example projects could include:

- Collaboratively designing and displaying a timeline and mural answering the unit's guiding question, what is the story of this watershed?
- Creating individual stories or artworks representing students' time spent with the watershed, and exhibiting them at their school during a special water consciousness-raising event.
- Signage, non-polluting art, or an installation made with natural materials could be left by the watershed for public viewing.
- A public social media campaign could inform local citizens about the watershed, such as through a "Did you know...?" series of posts about the history of the watershed, or by featuring questions about how water should be cared for and protected in the future.

All of these projects would build and consolidate students' narrative, communication, and project-management skills, as well as encourage them to gain experience with change-making and collective action.

4.4 Learning outcomes

Participation in this unit is intended to encourage students to value time spent outdoors through their interactions with nature during different seasons and in various weather conditions. We view this experiential practice as essential to overcoming anthropocentrism because humans who are not comfortable being outside will by extension likely have greater difficulty noticing, and acting in accordance with, their interdependencies with other species.

The learning outcomes we have in mind depend on recurring visits with the same local ecosystem, specifically intended to decentre current human use of local places and imagine other past and future ways of living well in them. By spending time in the same place, students have time to observe and reflect, and could, therefore, experience a deeper sense of connection to the watershed ecosystems and other species that were, and are, present there. Such a gradual, slow learning process is intended to nurture students' sensory awareness and affective responses to learning and interacting with nature. And, by learning more about a local place, students may be able to continue their relationship with that watershed and its more-than-human constituents beyond the timeframe of the unit.

Student learning in this unit involves being in relation with others, including human others (e.g., classmates, teachers, experts, knowledge holders) and other species within the watershed ecosystem. Consistent with SSHE learning outcomes in most jurisdictions, students may develop and apply skills related to listening to and sharing with others through discussions, modeling, and presentations. They may learn to honour a diversity of voices — human and more-than-human — and to find their own voice. There are also opportunities to practice with observation, trial and error, persistence, critical thinking, and reflection while working individually or collaborating in small and large groups. The variety of activities within this unit invite students to build from collective prior knowledge and experience as they consider the past, present, and future of the watershed.

To overcome anthropocentrism, students need exposure to narratives that resist human-centered notions of progress, and chronologies that are constricted to human development. In this unit, as students learn about past lifeways connected to a watershed, they may develop understandings of interactions between humans, more-than-humans, and the water ecosystems indicating that life was very different in the past and could be different again. By visiting the watershed during different seasons, students may also notice changes within a shorter span of time. Observing continuities and changes are likely to take place alongside listening to the stories of experts and knowledge holders, and exploring the different ways that human cultures explain connections between the past, present, and future — whether viewed as a linear unfolding, a continuum, a cyclical phenomenon, or other relationships. Understanding various ways of thinking about time, and one's place within the unfolding of time, is an important purpose for SSHE, as such learning can assist students in telling and enacting their own stories about the water ecosystem. Table 1, below, further elaborates the learning outcomes we associate with the watershed unit, according to each of the four facets of the experiences for learning we have described.

Table 1: Summary of unit learning outcomes and connections to experiences for learning

Learning outcomes	Connections to four facets of learning experiences
Valuing time spent outdoors, interacting with nature during different seasons and weather conditions.	Engaging the affective dimensions Nature-connectedness and competencies
Understanding past lifeways connected to a watershed, and interactions between humans, more-than-humans, and the water ecosystem at particular times, as well as changes and continuities over time.	Storying Undertaking inquiry
Developing processes of observation, trial and error, persistence, and reflection, individually as well as in small and large groups.	Nature-connectedness and competencies Undertaking inquiry
Working together with classmates to develop skills related to situated lifeways and sharing their learning with others through discussions, modeling, and presentations.	Storying Undertaking inquiry
Attuning to their senses and different modalities for learning and being.	Engaging the affective dimensions
Listening to the stories of experts and knowledge holders, and telling their own stories about the water ecosystem.	Storying

5. Hopes for the future of SSHE

We have outlined how nature-centred experiences for learning can contribute to a SSHE that is more holistic and better oriented to the relationships, dispositions, and informed perspectives that will be needed to live well in the context of climate crisis. These experiences must be shaped by a teacher's explicit and ongoing recognition of the challenging dynamics of teaching with difficult knowledge, and through their commitments to engaging the four facets: 1) eco-emotional literacy, 2) nature connectedness through experiential learning, 3) storying, and 4) inquiry practices. The watershed unit outlined here exemplifies how these objectives can be pursued through SSHE programming, in ways that may build from experiences already taking place and without requiring exceptionally different conditions for teaching than are experienced in many schools now. While it is too ambitious to suggest that history lessons such as this, in typical school settings, will overcome anthropocentrism in a broader sense at the societal or global level, we use the verb form of overcoming to signify our purpose in taking whatever action is within our professional and practical means, given current structures. This approach to overcoming anthropocentrism in the SSHE classroom is warranted in response to climate crisis, and especially in light of the dominance of historical thinking concepts in curriculum to the exclusion of other ways of knowing the past. We wish to emphasize the value of thinking about change over time as inherent to the human experience of the environment rather than exceptional to it.

One of the best potential sources of primary evidence and ideas for lesson topics that SSHE teachers have at their disposal is scholarly work in the field of environmental history, which has grown and diversified over the past several decades to engage interdisciplinary methods and sources (e.g., Isenberg, 2014; McNeill, 2010; Piper, 2013) and centre other species to work against human exceptionalism (e.g., Bonnell & Kheraj, 2022; Ritvo, 2004). Unfortunately, to date, from our experience much of this excellent research has not made it into K-12 classrooms in Canada for engagement by young learners. Teaching that centres environmental experiences for learning, no matter the topic, certainly demands more than an everyday slideshow or source analy-

sis activity. Especially as field trip policies are becoming more risk-averse and administratively burdensome, it is difficult to get out of the classroom. It takes time to build relationships with community organizations and co-plan lessons with visiting experts. Allocating time to this kind of interconnected, emergent, and sometimes unpredictable learning, instead of to more typical curricular topics and approaches in history, demands a flexibility and willingness to change on the part of teachers and department heads. When experiential learning takes time away from covering required curriculum topics, teachers may need to make a case for these choices to their administrators, students, and potentially to parents. And yet it is crucial at this juncture to make such brave decisions, and to engage in letting go of some of what we held on tightly to from the past; letting curricular content decay in favour of that which we need to grow, as is expected in any natural system. Teacher self-care, professional communities of practice, and ongoing collaboration with community partners are all important in this ecosystem, to nurture wellbeing even amidst unending pressures and expectations. Doing so may produce a SSHE that is framed by the crucial environmental relationships with which humans are interdependent — in the past, present, and future.

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Practicing connections

"Doing" responsibility in historical-political educational processes

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Abstract

In light of multiple crises in the Anthropocene, the required major transformation in various societal and political realms is fraught with challenges and obstacles. In particular, the areas of education and training play a pivotal role in being able to respond "responsibly" to these ambiguities. Using two examples, one from the practice of political action, one from the practice of historical theory, the text problematizes the difficulties, but also the possibilities of "doing" responsibility through the lens of critical historical-political education.

Keywords

Anthropocene, crisis, doing responsibility, connections, historical-political education

1. Responsibility and its ambivalences

Life in the Anthropocene appears to be life in a constant crisis. Extinctions, wars, migration movements, social inequalities, pandemics, inflation, and climate change deeply shake habits, securities, and expectations, revealing contradictions of the "imperial way of life" (Brand & Wissen, 2017).[1] The fundamental promise of the Western welfare state to enable a secure life in an orderly society seems to be unattainable without fundamental individual, societal, and political changes (e.g. Neckel, 2023, p. 7). The planet and its inhabitants are in a crisis – a crisis with an indefinite time horizon. Thus, it is ultimately the practices of orientation in time and space, historical thinking, historical knowledge (e.g. Simon, Tamm & Domańska, 2021) and history learning as "practiced future care" (Schulz-Hageleit, 2004, p. 239) that face fundamental challenges when the future becomes a threat (e.g. Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 23). Particularly, human-induced climate change along with its current impacts and dystopian future forecasts as a change that do not develop from previous states but bring about something unprecedented (e.g. Simon, 2019, p. 7) stands as a sign of the planetary challenges in the Anthropocene. It is the climate issue "where opinions differ" (Nassehi, 2019, p. 54). In this crisis, the questions of what we should want, must do, and can do, as well as the associated search for guiding answers and alternative actions become problems for which there seem to be no simple solutions. In this unsettling space of

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in-betweenness, the practice of historical-political education and its accompanying visions for future improvement reach their limits (e.g., Nordgren, 2021). The individual's orientation in time and space through the understanding and creation of meaning within the tension between societal participation and individual life practices becomes a persistently ambivalent challenge.[2] It unfolds differently than planned, encompassing moments of disengagement and non-participation as much as instances of involvement in negotiation processes of the political and political agency. Paralysing fear, insecurity, disorientation and the feeling of unavailability are so far inadequate recipies for a productive handling of the crisis.

Despite all ambivalences and polarizations, it can be observed that current crisis diagnoses are always linked to the concept of responsibility (e.g. Jonas, 2020, p. 38). The responsible "we" appears as a powerful actor in our current times of crisis (e.g. Eis & Moulin-Doos, 2013/2014, pp. 405 and 423). As early as 2017, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the Club of Rome (a global think tank that studies and advocates for sustainable solutions to global challenges) pointed out "what we need to change if we want to survive" and notably who is responsible for it: "It's up to us" (Weizsäcker et al., 2017). In this context, it is particularly the fields of education and training that play a central role in creating this addressed responsible "we" (e.g. Deutsche Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie, 2020). In these calls to action, education, responsibility, crisis, and future are powerfully related as interdependencies (e.g. Kuhlmann, 2021, p. 30), seeming to mutually condition each other, as responsible actions in the present and for the future are modeled as an effect of successful educational processes. Responsibility then no longer appears as a basic ethical concept, but becomes a "discursive operator" (Vogelmann, 2014, p. 21) of temporal practice, an instrument of the political, a way out of the crisis, and simultaneously an individual task of the historically and politically educated subject. This understanding of responsibility entails challenges and demands on the addressees of these calls to action, with such a call presupposing the autonomous and capable subject of action, which, however, only emerges as such during this call, without considering its prerequisites, (im)possibilities, and powerful entanglements (e.g. Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2018, p. 286). Failing at this challenge, withdrawing, and refusing the demands of taking on responsibility quickly becomes a moral failure in the crisis. The "I would prefer not to" (Melville, 2004), as famously articulated by Melville's Bartleby, becomes a marker of irresponsibility.

In the following, we will attempt to explore the practices of "doing" responsibility (e.g. Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2018) for the discourses of history and political didactics from an interdisciplinary perspective.[3] We consciously undertake this effort against the recurring demands on historical and political didactic practice (e.g. Pandel, 2022, pp. 13-18) to continuously refer to "native" discipline-specific terms and canonical works. Such a practice could indeed be described as "irresponsible" in the mode of scientific reflexivity. Under these conditions, the academics are indirectly encouraged to adhere to a closed rule system, to operate within a predetermined discourse framework, to submit to the prolonged current disciplinary practice, and not to dare to look into an open future, in order to venture into professionally "unknown" possibilities. To live up to our own aspirations, we will use two examples—(1) one from the context of political action and (2) one from the practice of grounding historical theory—to explore the connections between responsibility and the future. In both cases, pasts and futures are envisioned that seek to be different by negating the status quo. This conceptual shift is achieved precisely by problematizing the conditions of possibility for historical meaning-making itself, while pointing to the potential for transformation through critique and emphasizing the experience of being present in transitional spaces.

This will also allow us to problematize the normative "overload" (Bachelard, 1980, p. 153) of the pathos of responsibility and its governing effects from a perspective of subjectivation and time theory (e.g. Vogelmann, 2013, p. 20). Our critique is intended as a contribution to a reflection

2 The concept of "Bildung" cannot be adequately translated into English with the term "education." Bildung „has no obvious English-language substitute" (Friesen, 2021, p. 343). Nevertheless, for the sake of readability, we have chosen to use "education" in this text. However, it should be noted before reading that the term "education" here encompasses the concept of "historical-political Bildung," which involves more than just historical learning, possessing historical knowledge, or having the competencies for historical thinking. Rather, it is about the process of individuals becoming present in time and space—what educational philosopher Gert Biesta (e.g., Biesta, 2019) refers to as "trying to be at home in the world"—through modes of historical thinking and political action. This dimension is largely neglected in the English-language discourse (e.g. Thorp & Persson, 2020).

3 In this attempt to theoretically explore historical-political educational processes, we primarily draw on German-language texts because we see an opportunity to make the largely untranslated ideas of German-language history and politics education didactics accessible to an international debate (e.g. McGregor, Pind & Karn, 2021).

on the Anthropocene that does not merely focus on its negative, e.g. ecological, consequences but also encompasses its own symbolic orders, including those of historical-political education (e.g. Heuer, 2022) and responsibility, implicitly oriented towards the narrative of progress and its inherent drive for optimization (e.g. Wulf, 2022, p. 34). Against this backdrop, we will then discuss (4) how historical-political educational processes, within their shared interrelatedness and interconnectedness, can be understood as a relational event of responsible actions, being responsible, and feeling responsible for the future, as the Other that approaches us. At its core, our aim is to reveal possibilities of speaking about responsibility in the context of historical-political education in the Anthropocene in a different way, "without already being able to sufficiently achieve it" (Rüsen, 1989, p. 88).

2. "Knowledge is responsibility. Your actions are your duty!"[4]

It is Monday, October 16, 2023 at 9.30 a.m. The third week of lectures in the winter semester begins at the University of Graz with an oversized banner and eight blindfolds for the eight stone representatives of "progressive scientific spirit, revolutionary research, and global thinking" (Leljak & Wentner, 2019, p. 12) standing on the roof of the university, in the face of man-made climate change in the Anthropocene: "We are all the last generation before the tipping points" is written in black and white at a height of almost twenty meters. After using public spaces and their infrastructure as locations for various protest actions in the face of global warming over the past two years, these actions have now also reached the public education centers of colleges and universities. From the main building of Austria's second-largest university, the megaphone resounds: "We as a society must break out of this paralysis in order to finally take action" (Letzte Generation Österreich, 2023). Only a few people stop to listen to the words. Most of the passing students and staff pull out their smartphones, take a quick photo, and hurry on. Compared with the other protest actions by the climate activists of the "Last Generation," the banner drop from the roof of Graz University was only marginally provocative. Only a few of the grandparents and parents waiting for their grandchildren and children to graduate in front of the main building reacted angrily, while most others were indifferent or even in sympathy. The actions of the "Last Generation" usually polarize more than almost any other. While the protest actions are largely "unconditionally" supported (e.g. Rucht, 2023, p. 18) by some public intellectuals and climate scientists, there are defensive reactions from established parties and parliamentarians, as well as sometimes extremely violent counter-reactions. These range from physical violence against the "climate stickers" to media-staged public incomprehension and rejection of national symbols, luxury shops, and public buildings "stained" with orange paint, to the Germany-wide raid on activists in spring 2023, or the labeling of the "Last Generation" as the "Climate RAF" by the German CSU state group leader Alexander Dobrindt. The civil disobedience of the "Last Generation" and their offensively articulated call to take responsibility in the face of man-made climate change is facing widespread rejection from large sections of the population (e.g. Rucht, 2023, p. 19), even though the majority of both the Austrian and German population generally attaches social importance to climate protection. Many observers interpret this polarization as a generational conflict, of young versus old, "Generation Z" versus the "boomers", speaking of a glaring "responsibility gap", proposing a "climate generation contract" (Interview with the sustainability researcher Sebastian Helgenberger, 2022) and calling for solidarity and togetherness, not least between the generations in the current crisis. The fact that this interpretation is a media-effective instrument of simplification, with which the sheer incomprehensibility of the threat is shifted to a "clearer terrain" (Minkmar, 2023) the well-known and recurring conflict between the generations and their different areas of experience and horizons of expectation, becomes just as obvious as the fact that the traditional use of the basic historical concept of "generation" (e.g. Jureit, 2017) and its symbolic function of simultaneity conceals the generational heterogeneity of the activists, their non-simultaneities. The "Last Generation" sees itself as the first generation in the space between "no more" and "not yet," in the gap of the crisis (e.g. Breser et al., 2022, p. 39): "We are the first generation to feel the consequences of the climate crisis – and at the same time the last generation that can still do something. We are the last generation of people who

4 The "Last Generation Austria" protest continued on November 9, 2023 at the University of Vienna with the banner drop "Knowledge is responsibility": in addition to the banner displayed from the roof of the university, there was another one on the entrance steps, this time with the slogan "Your action is duty!" Cf. online https://us13.campaign-archive.com/?u=b0301f11ba8a0837a2985ff50&id=ed53cf5b54 [retrieved on November 21, 2023].

can still stop the collapse of our livelihoods" (Letzte Generation Österreich, 2023). And this generation includes people, old and young, boomers, parts of generations Z, Y, and X. And so they are not a generation because they were born at the same time, share experiences of time and expectations of the future, form the foundation of a togetherness through "being born together with others" (Wimmer, 2019, p. 286), but because they share the same evaluations and judgments of their experiences of time and derive the same motivations for action from them (e.g. Wimmer, 2019, p. 289): "Through their actions, people want to contribute as subjects to the flow of time [...], to realize in it ideas of what should be, but is not yet or no longer" (Rüsen, 1990, p. 159).

The actors of the "Last Generation" are in the interstice of the political, in time and in the space of the present, interconnected precisely because they form historical and political meaning (e.g. Vajen et al., 2022) through their experiences of time that can be understood by others: "They motivate themselves in their activities through notions of belonging that extend beyond the boundaries of their own lifetime" (Rüsen, 2020, p. 95). Their "knowledge", which leads to responsibility and legitimizes it, also exists in narrative form, it is a story of somebody and for somebody. Their interconnectedness, their shared responsibility, ultimately result from a common practice of historical-political education, facing the challenge and demand "to enable the future of descendants through present actions" (King, 2015, p. 33). And ultimately, it is also attributable to the inherent ambivalence of this "generative challenge" (King, 2015, p. 33) that this "Last Generation" polarizes when it undertakes to "courageously resist" (Latour, 2019, p. 24). Because taking care of the present practice for a future, assuming responsibility, from which one will be excluded due to their own life expectancy, is disturbing, unsettling, fearful, and is inherently always in crisis, precisely because the "past self" (King, 2015, p. 47), such as one's own "imperial way of life" (Brand & Wissen, 2017), is called into question. Thus, the ambivalences of educational processes and the normative demands associated with them (enlightenment, responsibility, sustainable lifestyle, etc.) of the "homo responsibilis" (Grunwald, 2021) have been pointed out time and again by psychoanalytic research (e.g. King, 2022). If the "where from" disappears, the "where to" is unreachable, and the "now" becomes a problem due to its own impermanence. The "Last Generation" is in crisis because it disrupts continuities and becomes a place in search of practices of responsibility in the crises of the Anthropocene: "However, this reality is not beyond our time, but in time as its rupture, which is manifest with each new beginning" (Wimmer, 2019, p. 303).

For our search for practices of doing responsibility as effects of historical-political education processes, the following appears to be interesting: Even though the history of the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change, along with their dystopian future forecasts, cannot be seriously doubted by anyone based on empirically plausible sources, responsible action in the political practice of the "Last Generation" and the responsibility of its actors are denied by large parts of the population, just as they in turn attribute irresponsible actions to established parties. Even though the "heroic concept" (Henkel, 2021, p. 9) of responsibility seems to be crucial for the practices of generative belonging of collectives, it is far from fixed itself. Rather, the crucial aspect is how this responsibility is enacted in concrete actions and for whom, and how these others react to this action: "Responsibility is not simply there but is produced through the involved actors in concrete practices" (Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2017, p. 287).

3. Can tomorrow be different? Responsibility and the future

As much as the concept of responsibility is a central term in various everyday, political, and scientific discourses, it is difficult to provide a catch-all definition (e.g. Heidbrink, 2017). Responsibility appears in different contexts as a term, expression of feeling, task, and ability at the same time. However, the questions of what it means from the perspective of historical-political education when one is asked to act responsibly, to take on responsibility, or when one is attributed responsibility, are difficult to answer. Rather, the term often appears in the context of history and political didactics as a "morally charged placeholder" (Sombetzki, 2014, p. 198) for a whole array of different phenomena (e.g. Kühberger, 2007; van Norden, 2021), causing the empirical reality of its implementation and its empirical observation and theoretical reflection to appear challenging. It is ambiguities that characterize the use of the category of responsibility between everyday linguistic harmlessness, theoretical indeterminacy, and empirical unavailability (e.g. Meyer-Drawe, 1992, p. 14): "The sympathetic sound of the word stands in contrast to its often not unobjectionable implications" (Meyer-Drawe, 1992, p. 14). However, these implications become

clear when one confronts the ambivalences of the "Last Generation's" Doing Responsibility, which aims to make decisions in the political sphere, with those "scripting games" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 169) of theory in which justifications of historical-political responsibility are theoretically designed (e.g. Kuhlmann, 2021). In this way, responsibility can be understood empirically as something active in "active practices" (Vogelmann, 2014, p. 20) and thus becomes accessible to analytical observation: "In this perspective, responsibility therefore does not appear as an overarching, universal, and therefore timeless concept, but is constantly produced anew and differently as a concrete, historically and culturally situated, practice-specific phenomenon." (Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2017, p. 288). What these two different practices have in common is that in both cases of doing responsibility, times are related and futures are designed. Responsibility can therefore also be analyzed as a powerful practice of time. This can be exemplified by the historical-theoretical modeling of historical responsibility that Jörn Rüsen put up for discussion in a volume published in 2003 entitled "Can yesterday get better?" Under the title "Taking responsibility for history. Critical reflection on the ethical dimension of history" (Rüsen, 2003), Rüsen attempts to describe historical responsibility "as a different kind of truth," "which is produced by the discursive procedures with which historical knowledge fulfills its cultural functions in social life" (Rüsen, 2003, pp. 49-50). To this end, he distinguishes three temporal dimensions of historical responsibility, of which "responsibility for the future" is of particular interest for our argumentation, precisely because he places his remarks in the context of "threatening environmental problems" and the associated challenge of generativity: "Today, there is a growing realization of the responsibility of present-day actors for the future living conditions of their descendants" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 57). Historical thinking in particular has the task of "deciphering opportunities for action" and "opening up future perspectives" that arise from the "past sediments in the living conditions of the present" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 58). Against this backdrop, Rüsen develops his concept of "irresponsible" historical thinking, which is characterized by a vision of the future that appears as a "circumstantial extrapolation of conditions that are predetermined in the past or arise in present contexts of action" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 59). In such cases, an "effective[...] ethical[...] obligation from the historically founded perspective of the future would be excluded" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 58). Rüsen sees the "irresponsibility" in the idea of dominating history constructed from this closed future. In such a temporal relation, the future then becomes the necessary consequence of a certain historical development, the past thus becomes the condition of the closed future itself: "This conviction can increase the self-esteem of the actors to the point of fantasies of omnipotence: they can imagine that they control the course of history based on their knowledge of a comprehensive law of historical development" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 59). Ultimately, such a constructed future would have subjectivizing consequences for the narrators themselves. In such a time regime, they would be deprived of the freedom to "negate or transcend the limitations that the past has built into the open possibilities of future life" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 60). And it is precisely this keeping open of the future that, for Rüsen, becomes the condition of historical responsibility, of responsible historical thinking (e.g. Rüsen, 2003, p. 73). Rüsen thus joins a modern discourse context that was first opened up in 1975 in terms of history didactics. In the important book of critical-emancipatory historical didactics, History and the Future, Klaus Bergmann and Hans-Jürgen Pandel, following Ernst Bloch's Ontology of Not-Yet-Being, outline the image of a "real future", an image that precisely opens up a future of "the not-yet, the objectively not-yet-there" (Bloch, 1960, p. 87) in contrast to a future that "is knowable and is known" (Bergmann & Pandel, 1975, p. 108). Historical thinking, (narrated) history, with its inherent emancipatory momentum, then becomes the motor for designing an open future that can be expected on the basis of the shared space of experience. In their understanding, historical responsibility for the future then manifests itself in keeping the future itself open, the "critical rejection of pre-determined development[s]" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 59) as Jörn Rüsen called it in 2003.

Just as with the example of the "Last Generation" banner drop, this example of theoretical practice also makes it clear how much the concept of responsibility itself is temporally and culturally situated and how its successful attribution is an effect of powerful processes of addressing. It is true that this theoretical modeling of science could be used to qualify the historical thinking of the "Last Generation" as "irresponsible," precisely because they legitimize their doing responsibility with a history that is ultimately not a history, but rather the "extrapolation of given conditions" (Rüsen, 2003, p. 73) and is thus oriented towards the political "overcoming of problems and crisis possibilities" (Bergmann & Pandel, 1975, p. 39). At the same time, it could be argued that this plausible justification of theoretical practice cannot be used to derive appropriate decisions for the future in the political space of the present. The gap between theoretical responsibility and responsible political action can therefore hardly be bridged, precisely

because both practices of doing responsibility follow different logics (e.g. Kuhlmann, 2021, p. 135). Inasmuch as this theoretical modeling of historical responsibility is a child of modernity, in which open futures could be expected based on past experiences, the doing responsibility of historical-theoretical and historical-didactic practice can also be questioned and problematized in the mode of scientific reflexivity (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993, p. 372), precisely because it is difficult to hold on to the image of an open and "real" future, towards which we are moving by constantly designing this future through historical thinking, when the future itself becomes a threat: "What to do when the opening up of ever new options and the self-evidence of individual and collective spaces of possibility without stop rules and saturation limits is lost?" (Lessenich, 2022, pp. 90-91). So what would practices of doing responsibility look like as effects of historical-political education if the future is no longer something that is in front of us as a regulative idea, but rather something that is currently approaching us as a threat (e.g. Chakrabarty, 2022; Hübner et al., 2023)? What could it mean in the time horizon of the Anthropocene to act responsibly, to be responsible and to feel responsible (e.g. Rushing, 2015)? When we have to look forward and no longer just backward (e.g. Rüsen, 1983, p. 65) in order to cope, to worry, and to imagine: How can tomorrow be different for the future inhabitants of planet Earth?

4. Responsibility and historical-political education in the crises of the anthropocene

> There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus. It depicts an angel who looks as if he is about to move away from something he is staring at (Benjamin, 2010, p. 19).

Being in a planetary crisis in the face of man-made climate change and its consequences poses numerous challenges to the process of searching for a way out, for possibilities of criticizing current symbolic orders, for emancipation from structuring structures of the political, and for those of future historical-political orientation, while at the same time generating numerous impositions on individuals and societies. These are challenges and impositions on the constructions of self and world relations, questions about the form and possibilities of a "world-centred education" (Biesta, 2022) and the associated "responsibility for the world." The experience of contingency, of a break in time, which precedes the attribution of a crisis, the darkening of the available horizon of expectations, presupposes a presently experienced otherness (e.g. Blom, 2023).

The experience of crisis as the ongoing disruption of the expected therefore requires orientation in time and space in order to experience oneself as a subject capable of acting on an individual level and to be addressed as such by others. As critical moments, the manifold crises of the Anthropocene then represent places of searching and orientation between the before and after, given the diversity of possible futures. Crises are thus always also places of historical-political education. Because in this contingency of the in-between space, "which has made us what we are", we can also find the possibilities of "no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do or think" (Foucault, 1990, p. 49). For despite all uncertainty, human beings remain what constitutes their humanity, namely "capable of acting" and an "actor par excellence" (Fleury, 2023, p. 9). As spaces of possibility for historical-political education, crises thus point to the contingency of the socio-cultural and political framework, shake plausibility and traditions, demand thinking in alternatives, and challenge positionings, becoming present in the present: "The crisis repeatedly makes it clear how fragile the unquestionable entity that we call society is" (Mergel, 2012, p. 14). And it should be added that in the age of the Anthropocene, this no longer applies only to society, but also to world and self-relations, the planet Earth, and its inhabitants as a whole. The crises of the Anthropocene thus compel us to become restless, to adopt a critical-reflexive distance from ourselves and conditions and to get moving in order to constantly reprocess the unsettling experiences of temporal and spatial change in the practice of life for ourselves and others. Historical-political education understood in this way does not appear as a harmonious unfolding of unconscious resources, as a kind of crisis management formula, but rather the educational process manifests itself as an ambivalent struggle with oneself and one's own entanglements in time and space (e.g. McLean, 2024). In the crises of the Anthropocene, historical-political education becomes a tightrope walk at the boundaries of the present (e.g. Lessenich, 2019,

pp. 108–109), specifically where the future reveals itself to us (e.g. Deile, 2022). At this boundary, in the crisis, otherness becomes possible. For ultimately – and there is no doubt about this – one is the actor capable of acting, the one who can act, is and feels responsible, and tells a story about it. Crises can therefore also be understood as places of historical-political educational processes, in which one has to critically analyze one's own conditions and in which different subjectivation practices and educational processes can be initiated. These are times of crisis in which the symbolic and political orders can be experienced as constructed orders for someone that could also be organized differently. And so the crises of the Anthropocene also open up new time horizons, new pasts, presents, and futures (e.g. Nordmann, 2020, p. 99; Landwehr, 2020, p. 146). The practices of historical thinking, political action, and historical narration are changing.

And so Benjamin's "angel of history" could be read differently. The storm would then no longer carry him "inexorably into the future", but would come at us from afar, with open wings. The future would then no longer be open and far out, not unattainable and guiding as a regulative idea. Rather, it would be the future, the Other that comes to us from elsewhere: "As a result, this appeal, this promise of the future, will necessarily open up the production of a new context, wherever it may happen [arrive]. The future is not present, but there is an opening onto it; and because there is a future [il y a de l'avenir], a context is always open. What we call opening of the context is another name for what is still to come" (Derrida, 2002, p. 20). And to be able to expect this other in the future, to take care of it in the now of the future, to take responsibility, and to give it answers to its questions, would then perhaps be the task of doing responsibility in the context of historical-political education with the aim of "response-ability" for the planet in the Anthropocene: "Response-ability is about both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying – and remembering who lives and who dies and how in the string figures of natural cultural history" (Haraway, 2016, p. 2).

In order to learn to see these other practices of historical-political education and doing responsibility, we need to meet in other places. "In order to change", wrote Richard Rorty, "it is important to be brought to a place from which something new becomes visible" (Rorty, 2003, p. 52). Places that are not primarily used for argumentation and reasoning, that "do not breathe the spirit of science" (Rüsen, 1989, p. 91), but places where something is marked and shown – namely differences, paths, and possibilities. They can be used to train the eye for alternatives, including the concept of doing responsibility. In these aesthetic manifestations, the complex interplay of social orders and social actors, their integration in the field of planetary forces, dominant discourses, and entanglements in one's own and other people's history(ies) is thematized. This also refers to subjective as well as societally shared imaginary concepts (e.g. Jehle, 2024). They are about affiliations and demarcations, about recognizing and criticizing symbolic and social orders. And precisely by demonstrating the exclusionary effects of hegemonic discourses, powerful dispositives and dominant symbolic orders, they point to the criticism of our own orders, our own standpoint, by confronting us with other perspectives: "At the same time, they force us to expose ourselves to severe self-doubt" (Rorty, 2003, p. 60), writes Rorty. And by showing us possibilities and creating interrelationships, the objects of aesthetic practice are able to challenge us to become present, to position ourselves narratively in times and spaces. They stimulate, affect, and address. They lose their pure object status by doing something to us. At best, they challenge us to act, be, and feel responsibly.

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How moving are the victims' stories?

An attempt to question the role of victims in historical education using the example of student essays from Russia

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Abstract

This article is about how dealing with historical experiences of violence and their victims shapes politically relevant attitudes towards violence and how this can be anchored in history didactics. We are interested in the situation in which events that occurred far in the past do not leave pupils indifferent, but rather affect them. Using a nationwide history competition among Russian students, we examine several dozen student works to understand how students engage with narratives about victims and what reactions these narratives evoke. Our findings show that while students show great sympathy for the suffering of victims, this sympathy does not necessarily translate into an attitude that can prevent future violence and promote attitudes critical of power. We argue that historical consciousness arising from the emotional confrontation with historical experiences of suffering is strongly dependent on the prevailing political culture.

Keywords

historical consciousness, emotional engagement, pedagogy of emotional upheaval, Betroffenheitspädagogik, history didactics and political culture

1. Introduction

Modern history didactics revolves around imparting historical knowledge - knowledge of concrete facts from the past. However, something else is meant by historical consciousness, which serves as a bridge in historical didactics: The knowledge of historical events is linked to the need for orientation of adolescents, which is a need to imagine how to act meaningfully and sensiblely in the future. The systematic distinction between historical knowledge and historical consciousness is of central importance for the following explanations. Historical consciousness emphazises the importance of historical didactics: The past is converted into meaningful attitudes, decisions and actions in the future (Seixas, 1998). We want to take a closer look at how past events can have a meaningful function in the present.

The fates of victims of past experiences of violence play a significant role in this context: In this case a meaningful orientation gained from the past means above all a specific attitude towards violence, namely the hope that one will not be exposed to it oneself in the future. In the

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following, we would like to focus on certain aspects of the significance of historical events of violence for history that imparts knowledge and gives meaning. Specifically, we are interested in the connection between awareness of or even in-depth engagement of past experiences of violence (e.g. within one's own family) as well as attitudes towards violence that affect future thinking and action. More specifically, we ask about the importance of the emotional impact (we follow the German term "Betroffenheit" here) of the victims of violence and their suffering for attitudes towards violence, which should provide meaningful orientation for the future. To put it bluntly, the question is: To what extent can we expect clear future attitudes (e.g. rejection of violence) from knowledge about victims and their experiences of violence as well as being affected by them? Or is it perhaps the other way around, according to our thesis, namely that such knowledge of the fates of victims of violence and their suffering, as well as the emotional consternation triggered by this, can certainly give rise to different attitudes and profiles of historical consciousness (including those that do not necessarily have a preventive effect against violence). In our contribution, we will not only discuss these questions but also try to make explicit some of the conditions that influence the kind of historical consciousness that develops through consternation and "Betroffenheit" with the victims.

We will proceed as follows: After a brief critical view on the term historical consciousness and the current state of pedagogy of emotional upheaval (Betroffenheitspädagogik), its premises and expectations, we will turn to a specific empirical case: a nationwide history competition among schoolchildren in Russia. In the next step, we will summarize the evaluation of several dozen works submitted by pupils in this competition, paying particular attention to the way in which pupils deal with historical victimhood narratives. In the last step, we will discuss the specifics of the attitudes that are indirectly reflected in the student works submitted to the history competition and relate them to political culture in Russia. To begin with, we can say at this point that all of the students' historical research papers that we analyzed showed visible concern for the suffering of the victims, without revealing any politically relevant attitudes that we could consider conducive to preventing the violence that happened to the victims of the historical narratives in question in the past. We will attempt to provide some explanations for this finding.

2. History and emotional concern: a critical examination of the "pedagogy of emotional upheaval"

To clarify the terminology of the concepts mentioned here, it is essential to point out that we are using for "concern" or "upheaval" the German term "Betroffenheit", which is not the same as the term empathy. While empathy is about an actual capacity for empathy, "Betroffenheit" initially only describes the fact that something is perceived as relevant and disturbing at the same time and has a cognitive and an affective component. We believe it is essential not to underestimate the role of the cognitive component in "Betroffenheit". Below we briefly discuss the aims and problems of what is known as affectedness or upheaval pedagogy, which is often understood as predominantly "emotional".

The concept of historical consciousness must also be linked to a scientific concept at the outset. Our understanding of it is based on the view of Jörn Rüsen. According to him, historical consciousness is a necessary prerequisite for orientation in actual life situations since it aids us in comprehending the past to grasp present actuality. Rüsen characterizes historical consciousness as a key orientation element that provides a temporal frame and matrix to daily life. For Rüsen, as well as for the project described here, narratives play a special role in the constitution of historical consciousness and the associated formation of moral values (Rüsen, 2004). Jason Endacott's understanding of historical empathy should also serve as a theoretical guide for this text. Like Rüsen, Endacott and Brooks also emphasizes the importance of historical consciousness for current life situations. According to them, "historical empathy is the process of students' cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions" (Endacott & Brooks, 2013, p. 41). The pedagogy of emotional upheaval discussed here aims to strengthen both competences.

2.1 The pedagogy of emotional upheaval

The term pedagogy of emotional upheaval or „Betroffenheitspädagogik“ refers to a non-specific pedagogical method that aims to lead people to deeper reflection and consequently intensive learning experiences through emotional affect. Affect should be used to raise awareness of certain social challenges. For example, in civic education, history education and memorial education, affect is used as an educational tool, although Münch (2019) explicitly points out that education on memorials should not work with it and rejects the idea of deliberately provoking strong emotional and cognitive involvement. Brauer and Lücke (2013) nevertheless mention visits to historically meaningful places, historical documentation and comparable material to illustrate that emotions are a central aspect of historical culture. According to Brauer and Lücke (2013), this is common sense in history didactics. With reference to Bodo von Borries, they describe that there is a reluctance to teach history in Germany in terms of emotion-led history teaching and point to the manipulation potential of this approach, which was used in a targeted manner in the Wilhelmine Empire and under National Socialism, as an explanation for this reluctance. Furthermore, according to Brauer and Lücke, there is a fear of the incalculable effect of emotional historical learning processes, and therefore cognitive learning principles are preferred.

The focus in teaching lies on the cognitive communication and processing of historical facts and the emotions they evoke (Brauer & Lücke, 2013). However, Münch (2019) demonstrates that emotionalizing approaches are indeed employed and, based on interviews, suggests that teaching staff explicitly describe visits to memorial sites explicitly as an emotional event. Overwhelming and emotionally charged experiences are therefore part of the practice of teaching history and are also expected by pupils when visiting memorial sites, for example, after appropriate preparation. According to Münch, this can lead to disappointment, alienation and even avoidance if the memorial pedagogy offered does not consciously support this approach. In qualitative interviews conducted by Münch with teaching staff, it quickly becomes clear that emotion plays an important role in conveying historical facts. The classification of emotion as a teaching tool varies from person to person. One teacher describes emotion and, in particular, dismay as the aim of the memorial site visit, in which he addresses staging problems such as fair weather, which is detrimental to the desired mood. Münch describes the approach of emotion as an indicator of knowledge as possibly hindering the independent classification and reflection of the content conveyed. Psychological findings on emotion indicate that strong emotion stands in the way of cognitive processes, meaning that too much emotion can actually interfere with the processing of information.

As in the theoretical approach, there is also disagreement in the practical implementation with regard to the use of emotion in teaching history. In the interview, one teacher explicitly points to emotional overwhelming as a danger of some teaching strategies and describes a problem that illustrates the need to interweave history teaching and psychology: the need to deal responsibly with the emotions evoked in pupils. Münch points to uncertainties in dealing with emotion, the appropriateness of emotionalization and the actual objective of confronting historical content and the consternation it evokes. In the practice of teaching history, emotion is used to deepen the learning effect, but at the same time the classification of the emotion evoked in this way is a challenge and its actual effect is diffuse. The integration of digital media into different teaching concepts also reveals that history is often communicated through the use of emotions. For example, the diary of Anne Frank is offered as a video series on YouTube. According to the director of the Anne Frank House in an interview in 2020, the material, which includes additional information such as an explanation of “discrimination”, is intended to invite people to “enter into a direct relationship with the girl Anne”.

The videos are offered with accompanying teaching material and were published on YouTube with the idea that a particularly large number of young people can be reached there. The Anne Frank House website states that the video diary is intended to inform young people about Anne Frank’s story and its historical context in a way that is appealing and accessible to them. Possibilities such as this show that emotion is part of teaching for many teachers, that history didactics uses it and all the more that it is necessary to systematically deal with emotional history teaching, define goals, examine methods and uncover gaps. Hasberg points out the great variance in the use of emotional content in the teaching of history, ranging from the complete refusal of emotional touch to complete identification with the victims. Hasberg (2013) points out that emotion and empathy are equated, whereby the distance between the historical actor and the recognizer is not taken into account. According to Hasberg, there is a lack of empirically reliable basic research on the role of emotionality in historical learning (Hasberg, 2013).

First of all, it should be noted that there are good arguments for wanting to use emotionality for educational purposes: Proponents hope that it will promote empathy, strengthen moral awareness and foster social connectedness and a collective narrative of right and wrong in terms of an orientation framework. In the following, we will take a critical look from a psychological and sociological perspective at the challenges that can arise from the required concern.

2.2 Some challenges of the pedagogy of emotional upheaval from a psychological perspective

As early as 1966, Brehm was able to show that overly strong emotional appeals can lead to resistance and rejection. People who perceive their room for maneuver as being restricted or at least threatened show aversive reactions. Numerous studies such as those by Pennebaker and Sanders (1976) support this finding and illustrate how important it is not to exert emotional pressure while teaching.

Apart from direct rejection there is also a more subtle level on which one can respond to emotionally charged content.

The term "slacktivism" refers to a form of activism where people show support through simple, low-effort actions such as sharing information on social media. Often, the focus is less on the actual social or political message and more on self-presentation and displaying a socially desirable stance. However, this can also have positive effects: important topics reach a broader audience, minimal engagement can lead to deeper involvement, and self-presentation may influence actual behavior to avoid cognitive dissonance. Nevertheless, there is a risk that symbolic actions create a sense of moral superiority or fulfillment, leading individuals to believe their involvement is complete without taking further action. If a person performs a good deed or feels morally superior, for example through the feeling of socially desirable involvement, this can lead to another curious effect:

"Moral licensing" describes the fact that a person, after performing an action that they consider moral or ethical, tends to behave immorally afterwards. The background to this appears to be the idea of "moral credit". Since symbols or symbolic actions also have an effect on self-image (Gollwitzer et al, 2002), it is conceivable that the concern that is apparently demanded by some teachers during school trips has a comparable effect. Monin and Miller (2001) were able to show that people are more inclined to behave in a discriminatory manner after a moral act, as they already see themselves as moral people and therefore find a deviation forgivable. Recent findings by Blanken et al (2021) support this finding.

Wen and Hu (2023) were able to add an interesting perspective on the display of moral actions on social media channels. In their study, they were able to show that the public sharing of moral actions leads to a decrease in moral self-esteem and the performers are more likely to carry out further moral actions instead of relying on their "moral credit". The display of political convictions or moral ideas in order to gain recognition without actual actions following is referred to as "virtue signaling" (Barclay, 2013). This behavior seems to be particularly prevalent in social media, where certain symbolically transmitted attitudes are used to signal affiliation with specific groups and ideologies (Jordan & Rand, 2020). Van der Linden points to the effect of virtue signaling on political discourse, as it is used by public figures to appeal to specific (voter) groups (Van der Linden, 2018). Tosi and Warmke describe this practice as not just annoying but morally bad. It is superficial and serves to distract from problems and one's own inaction (Tosi & Warmke, 2020). In relation to the use of consternation as an educational tool, this means that measures such as whipped-up memorial site visits could promote the mere appearance of moral integrity rather than actual ethical behavior. The demand for emotional reactions and the forced display of consternation may be an obstacle to finding solutions to the issues raised, as the emotionalized pupils then believe they are already on the side of moral integrity and no longer see any need for action.

In daily life and popular approaches emotion is often seen as a suitable vehicle for information. With reference to psychological findings, however, this reveals potential problems. The overly targeted appeal to emotion or empathy can lead to something called "empathy fatigue" or "compassion fatigue". This is when people are repeatedly exposed to stressful information and as a result are emotionally exhausted and less receptive to the seriousness of the problems mentioned (Moeller, 2002). Empathy fatigue is common in professions that require constant emotional engagement, such as healthcare (Chen et al., 2022). However, it is also relevant for the general public when people are exposed to a constant stream of emotionally charged media or news. This can result in the issues presented being perceived as less urgent or serious, not be-

cause they are less critical, but because the audience's emotional response is dulled (Moeller, 2002). This finding is relevant in the field of teaching historical knowledge in that the phenomenon can undermine educational goals related to empathy and moral engagement. If students are repeatedly confronted with upsetting or emotionally intense content, the initial impact of this material may diminish. This could result in them no longer being able to properly appreciate the gravity of the topics covered, whether they are historical events, social justice or moral education. From a cognitive psychology and neuropsychological perspective, there are also criticisms of overloading lessons with emotions. Excessive emotional arousal can significantly impair cognitive processes, as has been empirically demonstrated for decades. Figueira et al. (2017) were able to show that emotional distractions have an unfavorable effect on certain cognitive processes, such as memory tasks. They point out that emotional states can control actions and decisions in our everyday lives through their influence on cognitive processes.

A further challenge that can arise from the use of emotional pedagogy is that the degree of complexity of the events described may not be portrayed due to the depictions aimed at emotions. The simplification of complex social problems could lead to an uncritical adoption of stereotypes. This happens because oversimplification leads to overgeneralizations that ignore individual differences and perpetuate rigid, biased views of social groups. (Annenkova & Domysheva (2020). Simplified and generalized beliefs about social groups tend to persist because they provide an easy way to process information, but they overlook individual differences and therefore contribute to social prejudice and discrimination (Zhang et al, 2023). Social categorization is a necessary cognitive process that requires active engagement with one's own perceptual habits. It would make sense to provide students with historical information that is as complex as possible and described from many perspectives in order to support them in actively and critically engaging with the content. To counteract these stereotypes, critical thinking skills are crucial by fostering the ability to analyze and question these oversimplified narratives (Annenkova & Domysheva, 2020). From a didactic perspective, the oversimplification of complex historical events can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes and perpetuate one-dimensional views of certain groups.

In order to illustrate how pedagogy that focuses on consternation is applied and what further discussion points arise from this for history didactics, we will now present a specific empirical case. It not only reveals the psychological challenges of didactics aimed at emotion but also raises specific politically relevant questions.

3. Russia-wide history competition for students in the final years of secondary school (1999 – 2021)

We consider the history competition "People and History, 20th Century Russia", which was initiated and carried out by the Russian well known human rights organization Memorial from 1999 to 2021 (The competion's site is https://www.memo.ru/en-us/projects/men-in-history.). However, the original name in Russian ("Chelovek v istorii") is in the singular, literally translated as "person in history", which, as will be shown later, is highly relevant; in English translations, however, the plural form has prevailed. This competition of high-school students (in Russia 9., 10. and 11. classes) from all the regions of Russia continued until Memorial was finally banned and dissolved by the Russian state in 2021, shortly before the war against Ukraine began, in the course of a long-standing campaign of persecution; many Memorial employees had to leave Russia as a result of this persecution. For many observers, the destruction of one of the world's best-known NGOs in Russia was part of the immediate preparations for the large-scale attack on Ukraine. However, it should be noted that since 2017 at the latest, and to some extent already since 2014, Memorial and specifically the relevant historical student competition have been subject to various disinformation campaigns initiated by the Russian state. According to the findings of the FIDH 2021 rapporteurs, this involves several forms of persecution:

> […] education officials harassed and intimidated students who participated in International Memorial's Russia-wide annual historical school essay competition. In 2017, school officials across Russia pressured competition laureates so that they would not travel to Moscow for the awards ceremony. The list of the laureates was not public at the time, making Memorial suspect unauthorized access to its email account. In 2019, competition laureates and/or their teachers were interrogated by school principals, local officials, and/or FSB operatives who demanded that they stop participating in Memorial's programs. The same year, a letter was circulated among the participating schools calling on history teachers not to take part in the competition, or otherwise engage with International Memorial. […] In 2016, an independent ethics board associated with Russia's Union of Journalists concluded that the Ren-TV reports covering International Memorial's school competition did not comply with media ethics standards, and were 'pure propaganda purposely discrediting Memorial' (FIDH Report, 2021).

A decisive factor in the work of Memorial, which was founded during the perestroika years, was the conviction that commemorating the victims of various Soviet repressions was the highest social duty. When Memorial was founded, Soviet citizens knew little about the history of their own country, not even the approximate number of victims of state terror - let alone all their names and exact details of their fate in the Gulag (at least the date and place of death) - were often unknown even to their relatives. With the aim of commemorating the victims, Memorial decided to carry out comprehensive and meticulous historical research. The overriding goal of erecting a memorial or becoming a place of remembrance (hence the name of this NGO) initially prompted Memorial to bring all the victims who deserved to be remembered out of oblivion. And so the organization pursued the ambitious goal of knowing every victim by name, of being able to assign every date and every fact biographically, of reconstructing the history of the gulag and its victims in as much detail as possible - by name. Over the years, a spontaneous movement of committed activists has developed into a solid and unique expert institution, which has gladly made its knowledge available to anyone interested (Schor-Tschudnowskaja, 2014).

Several thousand young people took part in the history competition, which was launched in 1999, in the years up to 2021. The competition archive comprises around 38 thousand written works, which were written according to certain predefined criteria that met the high standards of both history education and history sciences. The pupils were invited to take a closer look at regional and/or family history, reconstruct biographies, investigate unknown historical events and facts and, above all, recreate the historical experience of specific people. As this was a competition in which winners were nominated each year, we deliberately did not only include prize-winning works in our study. The competition jury was made up of well-known Russian journalists, writers and academics. The best and prize-winning essays by the students were published in several anthologies of the competition.

According the competition site the intended outcome was to "encourage students to engage in research of the Russian history of the last century, to stir up an interest in the fate and fortunes of ordinary people, their everyday life – what makes up the 'great history' of the country" (People and History, 20th Century Russia).

In addition to this main goal of the competition, Memorial has also repeatedly formulated other goals: Arsenij Roginskij, long-time chairman of Memorial, emphasized the importance of finding oneself in history and only then feeling connected to one's own family, one's own city, one's own country, in other words, to build connections between the past and the children's lives today. A temporal, historical connection, being embedded in a long chain of events, links between present and past are also addressed by some of the jury members. For example, the writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya (2008), alluding to Shakespeare, emphasized that the students' essays can resist the familiar state in which "the time is out of joint" and reconnect or reconcile the times. But other goals were also addressed, such as the moral duty of adolescents or the fact that the students give contemporary witnesses the beneficial opportunity to finally speak out about what happened to many families during the long period of Soviet history (according to Irina Scherbakowa, chairwoman of the competition's organizing committee). Last but not least, one of the aims of the competition has always been to promote historical research into the Soviet past and to create archives. After 20 years, the historical knowledge gained through student essays has indeed formed a solid historical foundation. This is where the mission of the Memorial meets that of the history competition: it is to preserve the memory of a difficult past that is exposed to silence and silencing.

Before we take a look at the student essays themselves, the following heuristic difficulty should be noted at this point: The student essays are now being viewed retrospectively from the year 2024, after Russia launched a major attack on Ukraine in February 2022, many (estimated at up to one million people) have left Russia, the repressiveness of Vladimir Putin's regime has

been drastically tightened and the number of political prisoners or banned NGOs and media has risen dramatically. In the course of this tightening, not only has Memorial and its projects disappeared, but such history competitions have become completely impossible. It can be argued that this outcome of developments in post-Soviet Russia was rather difficult to predict for many people there, as well as for Memorial staff. In 2009, the organizers of the competition published an anniversary booklet to mark its 10th anniversary, in which they very optimistically expressed their conviction that "today's young people no longer have any forbidden topics, are free, are not afraid of anything or anyone" and that the development of such civic awareness is one of Memorial's most important goals (Chelovek v istorii, 2009).

Fifteen years later, most of the rather small number of sociological studies on young people in Russia indicate that they represent the social group that is largely politically passive and conformist and largely loyal to the current regime in Russia, which has become highly authoritarian, according to Russia's leading sociologist Lev Gudkov, for example. When asked about conformism, Gudkov made it clear that this can be observed above all in those population groups "from whom I had actually expected a different reaction [than indifference, author's note]: among younger, better-off, educated people. They quickly buckled and began to show the greatest indifference and tolerance towards the war (Medvedev, 2022). However, it is difficult to research the current mood in Russia under increasingly repressive conditions, which is why there is a lively debate among Russian sociologists (quite a few of whom had to leave Russia) about how to interpret the attitude of the population, especially young people (Schor-Tschudnowskaja, 2024). We will return to this debate briefly later.

At this point, we would like to note that our privileged perspective from the year 2024 certainly leads to certain distortions and biases when interpreting the data from the decades before: It is the knowledge of the shocking outcome of the school competition, which lasted over 20 years, and also the disappointment about unfulfilled lines and hopes that were associated with it, and therefore probably also our own emotional dismay, which could have distorting effects when reading and analysing school essays, which we would like to point out here. But we would like to use this very perspective to better understand the role of young people's historical consciousness and its political relevance in retrospect. In order to better assess our findings, we have placed them in a wider context and related them to other studies and data on political culture in Russia.

3.1 The voices of victims from the past and the voices of pupils in the present

In the course of the dismantling of Memorial, its entire archive had to be evacuated from the organization's premises and taken to safety. This also affected the approximately 38,000 works submitted as part of the school competition, several thousand of which were not digitized and were stored in paper form in various boxes. As part of a research project initiated in 2022, we were able to provide some support for this digitalization, which gave us access to a total of around 250 student essays. However, the aforementioned research project is dedicated to the dynamics of students' historical awareness in the period between 1999 and 2021. We will not look at this question in detail here. For this article, we present a small excerpt from the findings (more or less systematically distributed over the 20 years with regard to only 89 essays), namely those central patterns of interpretation that we were able to identify as more or less unchanged in the students' representations over the 20 years of the analysis period. The evaluation of the essays, which has not yet been completed, is carried out by means of content analysis (inductive categories) and the analysis of political-cultural patterns of interpretation; only the results of the analysis of patterns of interpretation are used for the following explanations.

The social patterns of interpretation (see Meuser & Sackmann, 1992; Oevermann, 1973) are an essential part of social self-awareness and are therefore particularly suitable for research into political culture and historical consciousness. They have a dual function: they are (1) meaningful components of the lifeworld that enable orientation and guide action, but at the same time (2) they are also the results of internal social negotiation processes. They have both cognitive and affective components. Specifically, it is about a systematic representation of which topics are brought up and what the categories are that subjects use to describe and interpret something. Lexical units, key words, frequency of terms and key metaphors, for example, define the subjective horizon of interpretation, which is always also a reflection of the social horizon of interpretation. Since we are primarily interested in the consternation in connection with historical experiences of misfortune and the consternation is more than just affects, but always also interpretations, we want to focus especially on those feelings that are consciously or uncon-

sciously expressed in the works, as well as a few patterns of interpretations that we classify as politically relevant and that can be inferred from the students' formulations.

The papers evaluated were on average between 10 and 20 pages long, the proportion of male and female pupils was roughly the same, all pupils from the last three school years, but from very different regions of Russia. Many of the papers included photographic material. They were all dedicated primarily, but not exclusively, to the fates of relatives in their own families, but acquaintances, neighbors or people discovered by chance could also be the subject of historical research. The majority of the student essays were based on eyewitness accounts and oral and written memories of relevant adults, but documents from family and local government archives were also included in the research. The fates of the people to whom the students turned their attention were largely determined by significant political events of the XXth century, such as the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917 and its consequences, forced collectivization, exile and forced resettlement of various social and ethnic groups, state terror under Josef Stalin (especially in the 1930s and 1940s), the occupation of parts of the Soviet Union and the Leningrad Blockade during the Second World War, the reconstruction of the country after the war and, last but not least, hunger and hardship in the years before, during and after the war.

What emotional relationship to the researched historical events do the pupils express? The reactions expressed were dominated by respect, pride and amazement. Pupils repeatedly wrote that they were moved by pride because the people whose lives they were researching were able to survive so many trials and proved to be resilient. The fact that victims of violence survived these experiences and were perhaps not even broken inside gave the students a great deal of respect for them. They also expressed their admiration for the "human greatness" of their relatives, as they tried to preserve their human dignity even in very dangerous situations or under the wildest, even inhuman circumstances. Let us illustrate this with a few examples (without mentioning the names and places of residence of the students). For example, one pupil stated in his work that it was only through his historical research on six generations of his family that he understood that if there had been "no revolution (October Revolution 1917 - author's note) and its consequences as they were", his ancestors could have "achieved much more".

He claims to be proud of his ancestors, knowing how much potential they had and what was prevented in their lives by political circumstances. Another work, written jointly by two pupils from the 10th grade, ended with the following confession: "On these pages, we wanted to give the floor to those people who were never asked by anyone how they lived, and whose unrecognizable heroism and resilience were neither appreciated by those in power nor sometimes even by their own children" (Chelovek v istorii, 2009). This basic motif, according to which a victim's biography per se resembles a heroic deed and deserves pride and admiration, runs through the vast majority of student essays.

One girl who dedicated her research to the forced relocation of several generations of her family wrote: "This almost century-long forced relocation of my mother's side of the family has made us resilient, has not hardened our hearts and has not triggered anger towards our homeland" (Chelovek v istorii, 2009). This basic motif also runs through most of the works: Hard fates and experiences of violence do not mean that people love their country any less; on the contrary, (surviving) experiences of violence and patriotism are mutually dependent. This motif can be found again in the wording of some of the history teachers who supervised the pupils' research on site: "The mission of this competition is to encourage young people to study the history of their homeland, to awaken love for this country and respect for the history of the fatherland, no matter how tragic this history may be," said one history teacher on the 10th anniversary of the competition (Chelovek v istorii, 2009).

The astonishment expressed several times indicates that the adolescents obviously could not imagine what it meant to be at the mercy of the whims or arbitrariness of a totalitarian state. It is noteworthy that many witnesses also reported their experiences of violence as completely senseless. This senselessness of violence continued in the pupils' view of the past: Most of the experiences of violence reported to them are described by the pupils as incomprehensible or senseless: Why and for what purpose this happened is beyond comprehension in several generations. This is obviously related to the fact that the victims' experiences are systematically described as life tragedies, historical tragedies or tragic pages of history. And because they are tragedies, the students almost completely avoid asking in their texts who or what their relatives were victims of, i.e. which specific actors or decision-makers were responsible for the harsh fates, which specific political decisions caused the suffering of people in previous generations. The state terror under Stalin is referred to as "tragedy", "blows of fate" or "trials of fate", the war as "sorrow", political reprisals as "difficulties", camp and prison experiences as "tragic pages of

history". Various metaphors, literary and even poetic devices, especially comparisons with natural events, can be found in almost every work; state terror and political injustice are depicted as a kind of force of nature. Students therefore very often describe events in an impersonal way, such as "he was arrested", "he was taken away at night", "everything was taken away from him", "the family was sent into exile" etc. Persons as well as authorities, political institutions and rulers who arrested, interrogated, shot, expropriated, harassed or committed other injustices very rarely appear in the pupils' work; if at all, then they are mentioned in an allusive (e.g. "Soviet power") or even euphemistic way. One of the pupils compared the entire history of the 20th century to a "tornado of fire" that swept through his district. Another pupil also wrote in an impersonal manner: "Perhaps it will never be known again how many people have their graves in the nameless cemeteries of Vorkuta" (Vorkuta was the infamous camp region in the north of the Soviet Union - author's note) (Chelovek v istorii, 2009). Whether this is an allusion to the systematic concealment of Soviet state reprisals in contemporary Russia as well as the lack of efforts by the Russian authorities to ensure that all victims are identified by name and commemorated remains an open question.

In this context, we noticed a work entitled "So that this does not happen again" by its author, in which she describes persecutions and murders of clergy and the destruction of churches and church inventory in the 1930s using the example of a local story from the Russian north. During her research, the student succeeds in gaining access to the files from the state archives, she studies and quotes interrogation protocols of the NKVD in her work, and obviously she also gains insight into which specific persons and local authorities were involved in the various reprisals and state crimes described in the work. However, this student also only mentions the names of the victims and otherwise chooses exclusively impersonal formulations; she only gets specific about the date on which the main character of her research is executed. She concludes her work by quoting an inscription on a local memorial plaque: "Dedicated to those who experienced sorrow and humiliation, buried in unknown graves, remaining in our thoughts, so that this may not happen again" - "as a sign of mourning for guiltlessly condemned victims of the gulag" she adds to this inscription (Chelovek v istorii, 2009). In view of the gentle, impersonal treatment of perpetrators, this faint hope does not look very promising.

Let us briefly note what this first insight into the students' work has revealed: Moved by pride, admiration and deep respect for the biographies researched, the students tend very strongly to see much that is heroic as well as tragic in these biographies. Heroism and tragedy are the two leading patterns of interpretation with which the attempt is made to restore the subjectivity of the victims and which shape the students' historical consciousness. What is completely absent from the small sample of analyzed essays is, on the one hand, the subjectivity of the perpetrators and, on the other, the possibility of self-critical reflection.

3.2 Russia's political culture: precarious historical sense-making?

Here we want to avoid entering the debate as to whether historical consciousness is a part of political culture or, conversely, whether political consciousness is one of the dimensions of historical consciousness (Pandel, 1987). We argue that historical consciousness is closely intertwined with political culture, so that it is not possible to consider historical didactics, for example, or historical narrative or the representation of victims of past experiences of violence outside of the political-cultural context. Patterns of interpretation, which go hand in hand with contemporary thinking and are indispensable when considering historical narratives, are also closely linked to the structure of power relations and the degree of autonomy of subjective action. By and large, we follow the observation of the two well-known German cultural psychologists Carlos Kölbl and Jürgen Straub (2001):

Historical consciousness and historical self-awareness emerge and form empirically, more precisely: In the course of adolescents' participation in the socio-cultural practice of temporalizing, dynamizing and "historicizing" the world and the self. In this respect, individuals and groups are exposed to varying degrees of socio-cultural incentives and incentives that promote or inhibit historical meaning.

We also follow the thesis of the American psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen, according to which historical representations only appear to be about the past, but instead primarily depict the range of interpretative patterns and values (Gergen says "the sense of what is right") taken from contemporary socio-cultural (we add: political-cultural) life. (Gergen, 1998). In the following, we want to critically scrutinize the "sense of what is right" depicted in the student essays, without losing sight of the fact that requirements or expectations of historical narratives and historical didactics are formulated from the perspective of political culture.

Let us first return to Memorial, which was not only the umbrella organization for the school competition, but also the leading high-profile research institution dealing with Soviet history for decades. Originating as a civic movement dedicated to remembering victims (!), it later repeatedly addressed the question of the relationship between victims and perpetrators in social remembrance. Memorial staff repeatedly pointed out that victims and perpetrators were "mixed up" in Soviet history (i.e. perpetrators often later became victims themselves). From this, Memorial derived an explanation for the lack of social remembrance work: The conditions, especially during the Great Terror under Stalin, when people denounced each other and took part in the official smear campaigns - directed against whomever ("spies", "counter-revolutionaries", "cosmopolitans", etc.) - traumatized the population to such an extent that neither horror at what had happened nor sympathy for the victims could be felt. Furthermore, a clear distinction between "us" (good) and "them" (bad) was not possible in relation to the Gulag, which is why ultimately there was no coming to terms with this history.

It is precisely this conflation of victims and perpetrators that is responsible for the fact that the Gulag is usually referred to as a tragedy. For many years and in many portrayals, Memorial, for example, was also seen as a historically enlightened organization that interprets the tragedies of the past primarily as a violation of human rights. Indeed, tragedy is by definition a genre in which no clear separation between bad and good is possible, as higher powers are at work, so to speak. Under such circumstances, the question of the possibility of coming to terms with such a story is cast in a completely different light: How are people supposed to come to terms with crimes that have happened by virtue of their reason if they can be traced back to the actions of higher powers? How are they supposed to address the question of guilt with rational legal and political instruments if there are no true culprits among the people? The chairman of Memorial Roginskij, who died in 2017, explained the situation as follows:

> The blurred line between ‚victims' and ‚perpetrators', which is characteristic of many episodes of Soviet terror, now has fatal consequences. People could not find a point of reference for themselves and could not establish a moral frame of reference with which they could judge the past (Roginskij, 2011, p. 60).

We are not convinced by the psychological mechanism that Roginskij holds responsible for the lack of interest in injustice and crimes during the Soviet era, but we agree with Roginskij that it is hardly possible to make a clear distinction between victim and perpetrator groups. All the more reason why we want to know why the victim narrative is so strongly emphasized in the students' work. Who is the "person in history" (the literal translation of the title of the student competition)? In this context, rare sociological studies that deal with historical consciousness in modern Russian culture are very valuable. According to them, it exhibits a strongly sacralized, metaphysical perception of history: According to them, as also assumed by Memorial, history is not the result of human action, but the work of higher powers; and "a repetition of the tragedies of the past" is thus predetermined (Gorin, 2009). In a history imagined in this way, there can therefore only be heroes and victims and no perpetrators or losers; the "man in history" is therefore above all a heroic victim - and the political decision-makers as well as the imaginative figure of the "state", which is identified with "Russia itself" and also takes on mystical traits, hardly appear in the story, are concealed and thus relieved of political responsibility. But isn't the perpetrator also a "person in history"?

Some Russian historians, such as Tatyana Voronina (who has since left Russia), also speak of the official pattern of interpretation of history (using the history of the Second World War as an example), which is to be perceived as "flawless in its heroism and greatness" (Voronina, 2011). This socio-cultural pattern of interpretation (repeated for years by propaganda in the media and in school textbooks) is confirmed not only by sociological data, but also by current Russian legislative practice. For example, the FIDH reporters quoted above speak of the obsession of Russia's ruling elite with control over historical memory, they

> seek to create a heroic national narrative and legislate away any doubt about the state's historical righteousness as well as ‚high moral service to the State'; Russian Federation ‚honors the memory of defenders of the Homeland' and ‚protects historical truth' (Article 67.1 § 3); warns that ‚diminishing the significance of the people's heroism in defending the Homeland is not permitted' (Article 67.1 § 3) (FIDH, 2021).

Indeed, the general mood among the population of post-Soviet Russia is characterized by a remarkable indifference to the issue of "state terror" or "state crimes" Neither the now known figures - which are still inaccurate, but at least testify to the extent of Soviet (and now post-So-

viet!) repression - nor the many film adaptations of the works of well-known writers and Gulag inmates such as Varlam Shalamov or Alexander Solzhenitsyn, nor documentary films about the Gulag on television or the Internet, nor the performances of relevant plays in theaters have led to a change in the mood regarding the millions of victims of state arbitrariness in the Soviet Union. This social background played an important role in Memorial's position with regard to the question of perpetrators, and accordingly the latter receded into the background. Memorial had its activists work primarily on collective compassion for the victims and their memory and understood its educational (!) work as efforts directed against social (political, historical and moral) indifference, indeed as political resistance! Since collective compassion for the victims was seen as much more important than the question of who all were (co-)perpetrators, the "Soviet state" was declared guilty of terror and repression across the board and the citizens of this state were generally regarded as victims (and heroes) of the totalitarian regime.

One of the paradoxes of post-Soviet history is that the central importance that the memory of the victims had for Memorial contributed to the very widespread political exoneration of the figure of the "state" in Russia. Looking back from the year 2024, it can be said with a heavy heart that Memorial's historical work has always been situated on the painful border between accepting the leitmotifs of Russian political culture and attempts to modify them. The more attempts were made to rationalize the patterns of interpretation of tragedy and victimhood, the more undesirable Memorial itself became. The lack of an openly declared break by the country's official leadership with the repressive methods of state policy and the perpetuation of the repressive political culture were therefore the most difficult obstacles to Memorial's work, obstacles that ultimately caused it to fail.

Looking back from the year 2024, the social dynamics in attitudes towards repression and state terror in the Soviet Union can also be recognized. The dominant feelings towards the Soviet history of terror are still indifference and disinterest. As much as this history could have had a traumatic effect, it does not seem plausible that this indifference is due to the conflation of perpetrators and victims. For even if this conflation is a historical fact, it should still trigger reactions of horror or at least curiosity in the face of the sheer possibility of unimaginable mass atrocities. It is not only the figure of Stalin and the crimes of the state leadership that deserve to be shocked, but the everyday social situation of a totalitarian regime itself. Alexander Daniel, former board member of Memorial, rightly remarked in 2009: "True patriotism is the feeling of responsibility for the present and the future of one's own country, and it begins with pain and deep sorrow for its past." (Daniel, 2009). Only in the next step could a critical and political reflection begin, as well as a distancing from the arbitrariness of state power towards its own population.

Here we want to raise the critical question of whether admiration for victims and pride in their survivors is in line with a true critical engagement with the narratives of victims or rather contributes to the obscuring of historical circumstances and actors? Could it not be that this kind of consternation about the fates of victims evades critical and multifaceted engagement with history and instead only supports political manipulation with it, possibly completely unintentionally?

According to the results of a Russia-wide survey conducted in 2017 (VZIOM, 2017), just under half of respondents condemned the Stalinist purges, while 43% considered them "justified" (for whatever reason). And even among the descendants of those who were imprisoned or murdered at the time, this figure is surprisingly high: 33% stated that the purges at the time were a "necessary measure" to "ensure order in the country". This means that one in three people considered the fate of the victims in their own family to be politically justified, even necessary.

Overall, approval of Stalin has continued to rise steadily in recent years. In March 2019, it reached its (temporary?) peak: every second respondent stated that they had positive feelings towards Stalin (approx. 51%, with respect for him mentioned above all, followed by sympathy and enthusiasm) (Pipija, 2019). (By comparison, in 2008, 31% reported a positive attitude towards Stalin). When asked "What role did Stalin play in the life of our country?" in March 2019, 70% of respondents stated that he played a positive (18%) or somewhat positive (52%) role. Just under 20% rated Stalin's role negatively (37% in 2008). The Russian journalist Anna Narinskaya (who has since had to leave Russia) summarized this finding very emotionally but also pointedly: "Not only are we [the Russian population] not so far gone that we consider the reprisals [state terror] to be something evil, we are not even so far gone that we agree that they existed at all!" (Medvedev, 2018).

In the few years following the dismantling of Memorial and the discontinuation of the history competition, the glorification of the state and the manipulative significance of the heroic victim narrative continued to rise sharply in Russia. Meanwhile, for over two years now, Russian intel-

lectuals and public figures (most of them at a safe distance because they had to leave Russia) have been bitterly debating public opinion in Russia in connection with the current war against Ukraine. It was not only shocking for people in Ukraine that people in Russia neither wanted to nor could prevent or stop this war. For many cultural workers and intellectuals from Russia itself, the passive or passively supportive behavior of the absolute majority with regard to the attack on the neighboring country, which has since resulted in several hundred thousand dead and wounded as well as millions of refugees, also proved to be an incomprehensible and painful realization. However, it can now at least be argued that the lack of resistance among the Russian population to the large-scale attack on Ukraine, which destabilized the entire European and transatlantic security order, was only made possible by specific victim narratives, to put it bluntly, by a specific manipulatively generated consternation and empathy with supposed victims.

Together with Katharina Hametner and Markus Wrbouschek, Anna Schor-Tschudnowskaja (Hametner et al, under review) describes in a recent study that, on closer inspection, the reactions to the war against Ukraine or, as it is often called in Russia, against the "Russophobic West", can certainly be described as dismay or "Betroffenheit": The majority of people surveyed so far appear to be emotionally moved by the war and convinced that something at least necessary and possibly even good, heroic, is happening! The paradoxical thesis is that the war against Ukraine is not legitimized out of strong aggression, but precisely out of compassion and empathic concern.[1] This concern results from a victim consciousness and the (propagandistically supported) idea of one's own suffering and moral rightness. The authors therefore suggest distinguishing between two types of "Betroffenheit": a critical and a resigned one. The first type of consternation or "Betroffenheit" implies a moral questioning of oneself and doubts about the correctness of one's own position, while the second implies a moral revaluation of oneself and one's own community. Critical consternation is therefore not only self-critical, but also oriented towards (power-critical) change, while resignation is conformist and conservative in nature. Only critical consternation takes into account not only experiences of suffering and powerlessness in the sense of a historical perspective, but also the experiences of perpetrators, especially when we are talking about permanently existing unfree social orders with decades of perpetrator history, in which experiences of violence and perpetrators have hardly been dealt with. Resigned consternation, on the other hand, tends to heroise the victims and ignore the question of perpetrators and responsibility.

The well-known American historian Timothy Snyder pointed out in a debate on the role of Holocaust museums that the moral lesson of the Holocaust is not that one could become a victim of the purges oneself. The most important lesson from such historical events is that such purges happen right next door to others and are easily overlooked, perhaps even with one's own active or passive support. It is therefore not so much the emotional identification with the victims that is decisive for critical historical consciousness, but at least no less important is the emotional reference to the perpetrators and perhaps even the imaginary identification with them.

"There is little reason" - according to Snyder (2015) - "to think that we are ethically superior to the Europeans of the 1930s and 1940s, or for that matter less vulnerable to the kind of ideas that Hitler so successfully promulgated and realized". In this sense, critical concern is much more than empathy or an emotional reaction to the perception of other people's suffering or misfortune; rather, it means a (power-) critical vigilance towards the reassuring normality of everyday life, which can always conceal violence, and thus a cautionary moral questioning of oneself as well as of the social groups with which one identifies.

4. Conclusions for history didactics

When it comes to developing a new orientation of history education, our thesis is that a fundamental assessment of the political culture within which this education will take place is necessary. The guiding questions here could be, how rational and critical of power do we want to be? How much subject autonomy do we strive for? How much reflection is part of autonomous subjectivity?

We do not want to fundamentally deny the value of the "Betroffenheitspädagogik". Rather, our aim is to show that the historical didactic value of students being affected by the victims' experiences of violence and empathizing with them in history lessons can only be assessed in a political-cultural context. In a situation in which any doubt about the correctness of those in power and the political community identified with them is sanctioned, the consternation conveyed in

history lessons due to historical experiences of violence can lead to an additional anchoring of the impunity of the perpetrators. Our aim was to show that, under certain circumstances, victim narratives encourage one-sided historical thinking that rejects the rationalization of past events and critical reflection. Moreover, this one-sidedness of historical thinking obviously promotes a certain susceptibility to political fictions and ideological manipulation.

At the beginning of our paper, we stated that historical didactics is geared towards meaningful insights, a meaning that can guide current and, above all, future decisions and actions. We would now like to conclude by pointing out that any kind of one-sidedness in thinking diminishes subjective autonomy. Hannah Arendt once expressed it very aptly: "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist." (Arendt, 1973, p. 474). We hope that it was clear from our argument that, under certain circumstances, being affected by historical experiences of violence is very well able to prevent the distinction between fact and fiction. If we are concerned with a way of history consciousness that includes personal responsibility for history that is only emerging today and tomorrow, it is essential not only to re-establish the subjectivity of the victims, but no less the subjectivity of the perpetrators who committed the injustice, i.e. their responsibility. For Arendt, who was also much concerned with the meaning-giving function of history, it was this distinction that is particularly relevant. According to Arendt, we learn from history through examples, which, divided into good and bad, help us to develop a meaningful orientation for our own actions (Beiner, 2012). From a historical didactic point of view, people should reflect on deeds in history, those that can be a good example in the future and those that are unsuitable for this.

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Student voice in history teacher education

A means to build pedagogies around marginalized historical narratives

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Abstract

This is a theoretical-conceptual paper that draws on autoethnography to explore using pedagogies in history teacher education that bring student voices and student knowledge production to the centre of the teaching and learning process. These proposed pedagogies are used to create a foundation that centers marginalized knowledges, histories, and historical narratives. This is proposed as a decolonial pedagogy, or a pedagogy built on decolonial impulses, and is invoked as such. Beyond giving weight and value to student voices, an intention of this pedagogy is to create an awareness of silences and absences of marginalized voices in the South African school history curriculum. These pedagogies also intend to create an awareness of whose knowledges, realities, and beings are included in the knowledges brought into the teacher education classroom. Through an auto-ethnographic approach, this paper explores these pedagogies as used in a history methodology course in a Bachelor of Education program in a university in South Africa, to propose the pedagogies that are explored. As the paper is theoretical-conceptual, the data draws from the autoethnographic aspect is used to explore the potential of the pedagogies rather than proving their impacts. We argue that this kind of exploration is useful in mapping out the different approaches to counter coloniality in the classroom, and that this is supported by other history education research. Our argument is underpinned by a decolonial theoretical framework that understands the education system, especially tertiary institutions, as existing in continuing coloniality.

Keywords

history education, teacher education, student voice, decolonial pedagogy, marginalised histories

Introduction

South Africa is in a moment of flux in terms of the country's history education in schools, with the potential of a new history curriculum for primary and High School on the horizon (DBE, 2018). This potential new curriculum comes after ten years of work by a Ministerial task team (appointed by the Minister of Basic Education in 2015) whose investigation found that there was indeed a continued Eurocentrism in South Africa's curriculum (Ndlovu et al., 2018). At this juncture of a potential new curriculum, it is necessary to think carefully about the current state of history in

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our schools, and crucially, to think about history teacher education in our tertiary institutions. However, our history classrooms are impacted by much more than the current of future curriculum: history teachers teach in the context of the classrooms that they find themselves in. These history classrooms, we explore below, impose severe constraints on many history teachers.

This paper explores this web of interconnections (higher and basic education, teacher education and classroom reality, history curriculum and history pedagogy) enacted in South Africa history education classrooms. We explore our own response to the interconnections through pedagogies we employ in our history teacher education courses. We locate these pedagogies as decolonial, and locate them as pedagogies that foreground student voices and critical historical thought. In foregrounding student voice and critical thought, we intend, and actively work towards, locating students as knowledge producers, bringing their own (often marginalized) histories and voices to bear on the school history curriculum (in South Africa, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement curriculum (2011)). Through doing this work we intend to make space for marginalised histories in both the teacher education and school history classroom. We understand that any curriculum will have gaps, and there are always important histories that exist outside of formalised curricula. What we propose is an intervention in historical thinking and historical consciousness (Seixas, 2006), to allow students as knowledge producers to be able to understand processes of marginalization, and trust themselves enough to respond as history teachers.

History teacher education in South Africa is a contested space, intersecting issues of coloniality in South African universities (Heleta, 2018; Maluleka & Ledwaba, 2023) and issues around history education (also often involving coloniality). Teacher education in South Africa also requires thought around issues of overcoming the effects of colonialism and apartheid on history education, in both schools and teacher education (Ndlovu et al., 2018). While the post-apartheid school history curriculum has had three different instantiations, there are still remnants of coloniality in the current curriculum (Shabangu, 2024; Maluleka, 2023). Coloniality also manifests in some indigenous histories, and presents, being marginalized (Ndlovu et al., 2018). There are different potential responses to this, which could, for example, involve a focus on indigenous knowledge systems to push back against the marginalisation caused by coloniality (Maluleka and Mathebula, 2022; Shabangu, 2024). In this paper we explore an intervention through the pedagogical and assessment design of history methodology courses. We particularly focus on a simple pedagogy, which, we argue, explores how we get students to value their own voices and histories, and thus think about marginalized histories, through a decolonial approach (Szabó-Zsoldos, 2023).

The challenge we are thinking through in this paper is an intersecting one of realistically workable history pedagogy, the relationship between student voice and history education, marginalized histories, and the way the space of the history classroom is experienced. One of the challenges for the teaching of pre-service history teachers in South Africa is needing to prepare them for the vastly different contexts they could teach in, depending on where they find a job after their degree. The South African primary education system, over 350 years through colonialism and apartheid, continues to breed inequality, and these unequal opportunities for learners provide dramatically different contexts for our pre-service teachers to teach in (Spaull & Jansen, 2019). The state system in and of itself varies, with some excellent schools known as former Model C schools in suburban (previously white) areas. However, schools in townships and rural areas, catering almost exclusively to African students, provide a challenging context to teach in, often without basic resources like textbooks or chairs, let alone resources like internet connection and screens in the classroom.[1] Township schools are often overcrowded with up to 60 or 100 kids in a class, making learner-centred or creative pedagogies much harder to implement while maintaining control over the class (Stott & Guthrie, 2024). These conditions mean that in South Africa, where inequality has increased since the formal ending of colonialism and apartheid, race and class still play a large role in the quality of education a child receives (Soudien, 2024). The question that these conditions raises for teacher education is how to prepare future teachers for these very different contexts in which they may teach? This question has a particular configuration in history education, where the current curriculum is very content heavy, and where skills are paid lip service but not well integrated into the curriculum (Godsell, 2019). This follows history education research where, over the last several decades, the emphasis has moved onto historical thinking and historical consciousness, rather than memorization of historical fact (Seixas, 2017; Wineburg, 2001, 2018).

1 This is even though there have been digitsation drives in township schools: structural inequality has rendered these largely ineffective.

The material conditions render this kind of critical history teaching in South Africa difficult. These conditions have obvious repercussions for history teacher education: do we follow the international literature, or prepare our students for material realities? Is there a way to do both? In the education major and the subject methodologies offered at the Bachelor of Education at the institution in which we teach, students are taught constructivist, learner centered, inclusive and (sometimes) decolonised pedagogy. However, under the circumstances described above it is often impossible to apply in these methods, resulting in the reinforcing of colonial pedagogies of regurgitation and memory (Zavala, 2016). In this paper, we explore the decolonial possibilities of a low resource strategy, foregrounding student voice. As this is a theoretical/conceptual paper, it is intended to pose ideas which could be further tested in empirical research, although we draw from data from real courses we teach.

In a 2024 newspaper article entitled "Why professors of education should not be teaching future teachers" Jonathan Jansen, himself an esteemed professor of education in South Africa, bemoaned how out of touch education professors are with the South African classroom, citing his own recent experience in returning to it (Jansen, 2024, p. 202). He explained his surprise at the need for repetition of the basics in the classroom, leaving less time for learner centered strategies which allow the construction of learning, or knowledge. His intervention raises a crucial, and contested, question: what is the purpose of learning in school, and how is this measured? These questions are difficult to answer when basic literacy is not in place, which is the case in many South African schools (Spaull, 2013). What are the implications of this for history education specifically, when the discipline has worked so hard to move away from memory and repetition based teaching (Seixas, 2017; Wineburg, 2018)? This also raises the ever-troubling question of the purpose of history education in schools, globally and in South Africa. There are many answers to this, ranging from citizenship to identity formation to critical thinking development (Kallaway, 1995; Ndlovu et al., 2018). We propose, in this paper, that part of the purpose of history education in South Africa is a decolonial function, decentring Euro-Western knowledge and gaze. We suggest we can move towards this impulse through the recentering of marginalised histories and the centering of student, and learner, voice.

To think about how the decolonial function might be achieved we need to think about how pre-service and then in-service history teachers encounter themselves, their voices and their knowledges, their agency, in the contested and contesting spaces of history classrooms in teacher education? Thinking about how they encounter themselves is counterposed with continued challenges with the South African History Curriculum (CAPS), which, although it contains much more African content than previous instantiations of the curriculum, still often presents a colonized lens visible both in the content and the language of the curriculum (Maluleka and Ramoupi, 2022).

To combat the rote learning that is the legacy of colonial and Bantu Education (Kros, 2010) – the education system mandated for African learners during colonialization and apartheid, which quelled all critical thought (Soudien, 2024); we want our students to be able to approach the curriculum with a critical lens – but this requires students and teachers to overcome the very difficult dynamics these students face in the classroom.

In this paper, we examine student voices as tools that can be developed through a low resource decolonial pedagogy in tertiary education, that can, perhaps, in turn be used to create spaces for marginalized histories, and used in school history classrooms. We make the above argument in three sections: first we discuss decolonial pedagogy, secondly, we discuss student voice, and thirdly we discuss how this can link to marginalized histories.

In the question of developing student voice as a pedagogical tool we address several interlinked fields of literature on history education, decolonial pedagogy, and student voice. To ground this we locate our study in history education in Africa, which continues to struggle with the presence of coloniality (Boadu & Oppong, 2024). This presence of coloniality impacts everything from curriculum to pedagogy to assessment to classroom realities (Maluleka & Ndumeya, 2024). Much of the work on decolonising history education, in South Africa and internationally, has been limited to curriculum, with pedagogical and assessment work as an outlier (Godsell, 2019; Johnson, 2002; Karn et al., 2024; Maluleka, 2021; Szabó-Zsoldos, 2023). Thus, in the theoretical framework below we draw on a combination of decolonial pedagogies, drawn from an international literature, and a theorization of student voice (another subject with little literature in history education specifically).

This article is also located in higher education and in history teacher education, which are thought together deeply with the implications for the school history classroom. In this, we are working with coloniality in a double sense: in the higher education teacher education space, and in the school classroom. History teacher education is an extremely broad academic field, but again, focusing on decoloniality (in pedagogy and in terms of marginalized voices) and student voice speaks into a clear research gap (Dollie et al., 2020).

Theoretical framework: voice as decolonial pedagogy

Decolonisation and decoloniality: working definitions

In order to lay out our theoretical framework for this paper it is important to pause on the often contested concepts of decolonisation and decoloniality. Decolonisation and decoloniality are two dialectically interrelated yet distinct concepts that have gained significant traction in various discourses. Decolonisation and decoloniality are concepts borne in contexts that continue to encounter, live, and breathe legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid. In the global South, these concepts were coined and developed by ordinary individuals, intellectuals, thinkers, and scholars such as Aimé Cesairé, Amilcar Cabral, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Wangari Maathai, Mariama Bâ, Thomas Sankara, Bantu Biko, and Frantz Fanon to name but a few.

While both concepts seek to challenge, dismantle, and transcend the continuation of systems of oppression rooted in colonial histories. These concepts differ in their scope, focus, and application. For instance, decolonisation is more concerned with undoing colonialism, imperialism and apartheid, all as historical phenomenon and as ongoing systems of domination (Ndlovu et al., 2018). Central to decolonisation is the dismantling of, and transcending colonial structures of power and governance (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This often entails the taking apart of colonial structures of administration and domination, and the restoration of stolen land and (natural) resources to their rightful owners – the indigenous people (Grosfoguel, 2013). This is an ongoing process that continues even after formal colonisation, imperialism and aparthied have ended, especially since colonised people of the world continue to grapple with the enduring effects of those periods and a pervasive coloniality. Because of this, decoloniasation is concerned with the rehumanisation of the dehumanised at the level of material conditions (restoration of their stolen land, political and economic independence etc).

On the other hand, decoloniality is a concept that was also developed in contexts that encountered and continue to encounter colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid in many forms. Decoloniality can be considered as an extension of decolonisation in that, it delves deeper into the epistemic, ontological, and psychological dimensions of colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). This deeper engagement makes decoloniality a framework that seeks to challenge and transcend the Eurocentric ways of knowing, becoming and being that have been imposed on the colonised by the colonisers (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). As a framework, it also critiques and challenges ways in which colonial powers not only dominated territories and populations but also imposed their knowledge systems, values, and ways of being, becoming and knowing as universal and superior (Santos, 2014; Fataar, 2018).

Because of this aspect of challenge, decoloniality is also concerned with the rehumanisation of the dehumanised at the level of epistemology, ontology, and psychology (cognitive).

Despite this distinct difference, both decolonisation and decoloniality have similarities. The first thing that makes them similar is the fact that they both work towards the same goal – which is the liberation of the colonised. Secondly, they are similar in that, both concepts challenge the dominance of Euro-Western powers and seek to empower marginalized people of the world, especially from the global South.

Decolonial pedagogies: grounding concepts

We want to locate this research in decolonial pedagogies, which is itself an expansive and varied field. We remain committed to decolonial work because of the overwhelming presence of coloniality in education in South Africa, taking on board the critique and danger of one of us being a white person doing decolonial work (Tuck & Yang, 2012) and trying to use it, not as a move towards innocence, but as a commitment to keep on doing the work that needs to be done, while

working against one's own[2] whiteness. There are three key theoretical positions that shape our decolonial pedagogical jumping off point. The first one is from Zembylas (2018) about decolonial pedagogy as process - this speaks to the pedagogical development of a course as part of a process rather than a one off interaction that achieves things on its own (Zembylas, 2018). This process is one in which we, as lecturers, are one player, and the other players are the students, as well as the curriculum itself, and assessment strategies. The combination of players and pedagogy as process speaks to relationality, and for us this relationality is a big part of the decolonial voicing pedagogy: how the students experience themselves in our classes, and to what extent their voices are heard, valued, and developed. We must also say that there is no one pedagogy that suits every class, and so the design is always an impulse, to be worked with in different ways through the different constellations of classes. A second decolonial strategy comes from Shahjahan et al, who completed an international literature review on decolonising curriculum and pedagogy in 2022. These authors came up with three principles: recognizing constraints, disrupting, and making space for new initiatives (Shahjahan et al., 2022). These strategies are not in themselves tied to decoloniality, but it is studied in the framework as such, so the constraints are those imposed by coloniality, the disruptions are towards coloniality, and the new movements are decolonial. We like this approach because it is oriented in the realities of the work done in institutions that are themselves colonial in their construction but acknowledge that there is space for disruption in these spaces, and that there is the space and agency to do new things. Then we turn to Zavala (2016) who talks about decoloniality in education being about counter/storytelling, healing, and reclaiming. We like this approach particularly for history, when we are dealing with a history that had been erased and devalued by colonialization and continues to erased by coloniality. Therefore, teaching history in South Africa is also talking about the relationship that Africa has to history as a discipline (Boadu & Oppong, 2024). Counter/storytelling is a process of naming and remembering against colonialism:

> Given the fact of coloniality in everyday life, naming entails a deliberate attempt to develop a language of critique that enables colonized peoples to understand their present situation as encircled by colonialism and its structural arrangements and cultural logic (Zavala, 2016, p. 3).

Remembering within/against coloniality serves to excavate the subsumed indigenous knowledges that are devalued by coloniality. This can be done in the tertiary education history classroom and in the school history classroom, through students and learners being able to relate their own histories and experiences to the curriculum. Reclaiming, interpreted into this history education trajectory, is part of re-visioning histories that include our students and their families, the lands and spaces that they come from. Healing, according to Zavala, involves both social/communal healing and spiritual/psychological healing: for indigenous people. The voice pedagogy described below is an individual and collective exercise that, while not framed around the spiritual, makes explicit space for it. One way that we approach these strategies is to highlight student voice as part of our pedagogy, curriculum and assessment, and to build a relationality in the courses.

Theorizing voice as part of pedagogy

Voice itself can be a slippery and somewhat dangerous concept. The danger is in a romanticization of voice that allows us to think about it as some kind of clear expression of otherwise silenced people. McLeod (2011) warns us:

> Yet the appeal of voice as a political project, as a metaphor for identity and agency and as a strategy for promoting empowerment, inclusion and equity, remains powerful. Arguably a certain romance attaches to calls to rescue and release the voices of the silenced and marginalized, allowing under-represented, excluded and neglected groups to have their say, for their perspectives to be heard and the value of their standpoints recognized (McLeod, 2011, p. 180).

2 I, Sarah Godsell, am speaking personally here, as a white woman engaging in decolonial work in academia.

Part of the pedagogy developed around voice that is explored in this paper is, indeed, trying to centre and excavate marginalised knowledges, narratives, and histories, through the students' own knowledges and voices. However, we push back against the appropriation and the romanticisation of voice through allowing the process to be internal (silent) and not necessitating the voices become part of the class discussion to prove an 'equity' or an 'inclusion'.

Our use of voice does the kind of overlapping identified in the strategies laid out below:

> We can identify at least four common and overlapping uses of voice in educational discourse: voice-as-strategy (to achieve empowerment, transformation, equality); voice as-participation (in learning, in democratic processes); voice-as-right (to be heard, to have a say); and voice-as-difference (to promote inclusion, respect diversity, indicate equity) (McLeod, 2011, p. 182).

We use voice-as strategy to both value and develop student knowledges as well as develop a sense of understanding for marginalised histories. Through the strategies to value and grow student voice we want students to develop a sense of themselves as knowledge producers, not only as interacting with the knowledges that are otherwise brought into the course. Dialogue, and dialogic teaching, are important in this (Freire & Shor, 1987). However, we also consider that sometimes that dialogue is internal and reflective. This is a form of critical dialogic pedagogy (Ferreira & Godsell, forthcoming).

McLeod warns of the danger of "speaking for" or of "giving voice" and asks us to pay attention to the power dynamics in the spaces in which voice is invoked as something potentially emancipatory. In our own classrooms, these power dynamics involve us as teachers, as persons with the power to assess, to pass or fail. This is why we have chosen these specific dynamics around the voicing strategies, that, ironically, voice is primarily written. In this strategy it is also left open and so is the student's choice where and how to share the products of this internal dialogue. It is also the repetition and accumulation of voice that we are speaking to, that adds to the knowledge produced on the course. It is not, however, part of the formal course assessment, so is slightly outside of the potentially problematic power dynamics. There is also something important in that the students can exercise agency in what and how they write: we do not check the work so they could, in fact, be writing anything. While this may be criticised, we feel that this is important in pushing back against the power dynamics. "what counts as voice and which or whose voices are recognized?" (McLeod, 2011, p. 184)

There is also a danger of voice being essentialised or essentialising, the voice of a "people", as agency itself, or always offering some kind of essentialised link to self. This is not what we are trying to do as the use of voice in our classes is to build up a sense of trust in students' own knowledges, their own histories, their own responses and thoughts, rather than translate these knowledges into knowledges that represent "a people".

> As reviving voice as an equity and inclusion strategy is not sufficient unless it is accompanied by a more dynamic and situated account of voice-as-strategy and voice-as-communication. This requires reframing the problem of student voice as a matter of listening, recognition and engaged dialogue (McLeod, 2011, p. 187).

Thus, our strategy towards and theorisation around voice centres on student knowledge including students' personal histories. We consider how these histories interact with the school history curriculum and how we approach teaching history in the methodology course. Voice is thus a way to develop and value student knowledge, to allow students to listen to themselves, and then engage in a dialogue (in thought, writing or vocally) with academic texts, peers, and the CAPS school history curriculum. This use of voice is intended as a non-invasive, non-performative way of using voice in the classroom.

Student discussion and voicing is part of any learner centered pedagogy, or dialogic pedagogy, and is not in and of itself decolonial. We connect to the decolonial here through thinking about knowledge production, and who the knowledge producers are in the education space. This is working towards epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). We want to take student knowledge production seriously, to note that they are producing historical knowledge, rather than just reproducing around other knowledge forms. This consideration of knowledge production links to Nomalanga Mkhize's observation that Black people in South African history have been mainly the sources, rather than the producers of knowledge (Mkhize, 2018).

We link the voice in our approach to history methodology to cultivate in our students an avenue towards their own lives, which can link to marginalized histories through excavating their own voices and histories, linked to the knowledge that they bring into the classroom, and the

knowledge that they embody. The concept of critical dialogic pedagogy is a pedagogy that asks for critical engagement with the world and with ourselves, but in a way that is arrived at relationally, through dialogue between students and lecturer, between students and texts, between students and histories, between students and students, and importantly between students and their own minds. This multiple engagement and dialogism provides for a humanising pedagogy (argued by Zembylas to be a decolonial approach) in which students' learning is framed in deep listening, deep engagement, and the engagement is framed in the decolonial strategies listed above (Zavala, 2016; Zembylas, 2018).

Methodology

This paper is primarily a conceptual/theoretical paper. It draws from the design and implementation of the ideas discussed in two courses in a Bachelor of Education course in a Historically White University (HWU) in Johannesburg, South Africa. The research received ethical clearance through ethics protocol number H22/09/06. An autoethnographic approach was used to look primarily at course design, where design was used to heighten student voice as part of the course pedagogy and assessment, as well as an interaction with the curriculum. Autoethnography is a recognised but contested research methodology, relying on the first person narrative(s) of the experience of the author(s), using different data-gathering techniques (Chang, 2016). It is contested as it can cause self-referential bias. We have worked against this by working together, and across courses. What autoethnography does offer, that we found to be of value in this paper, is a high level of reflexivity, using reflections on the authors' own experiences to reflect further on the potential research problem. This reflexivity has been cited as useful in transformative education (Belbase et al., 2008). Autoethnography has also been accused of being used to get around ethics requirements: this is not the case in this paper, as ethics clearance was given (Edwards, 2021). In this paper we value reflexivity and the examination of our own experiences, as we wanted to explore the pedagogical choices we had made. We wanted to explore these choices in the context of the specific problems of coloniality (of history education in our institution and the primary history education in South Africa), and the varied contexts for which we are preparing students to teach in, considering the limitations these contexts present.

Autoethnography as lecturers represents a specific exercise, with dilemmas attached: we cannot escape the power dynamics in our classrooms as we collect data. We recognize our students as co-participants and researchers with us, and yet, on this paper, our names are reflected. The power dynamics are acknowledged and paid attention to in specific ways: ethical clearance is granted through rigorous university procedures; all research participants are anonymous (even though no student data was used in this paper); students are invited to participate in the broader research as writers and knowledge producers (this will be reflected further in different and specific papers produced that reflect the students' specific interests, but a past example of this can be seen in (Dollie et al., 2020)). Students have many demands on their time, and their participation in the research is constrained by these demands. We are careful, as we precede in this paper, to pose our arguments based on our own experience in the classroom (thus drawing on our teaching journal data), and not to claim beyond hypothesis what students experience. We are influenced by our own positionality, and locus of enunciation. Beyond this, however, we find the hours we have spent in the classroom with students to be useful and important, giving us specific insights. Thus, we find autoethnography a suitable methodology to explain what we tried to do, and why. We find this speaks into a useful gap in history education literature on history teacher education and decoloniality, linking into the research problem.

The primary data we draw on are our experiences in teaching these classes, as recorded in a teaching journal, although we also consider course design and pedagogical rationale, to elucidate possibilities around student voice and marginalized histories. The data we thus draw on is a teaching journal, recorded by ourselves over the year of 2024, and our course outlines. We used a decolonial paradigm to inform our data analysis (Craig, 2022). This data was analysed thematically (Alhojailan & Ibrahim, 2012). Among the emerging themes were the themes where we locate our research problem: student voice (and the development of this), marginalized histories (and how to locate and access them) and teaching methods that can be applied across low resource classrooms. In the approach to this paper, as a position paper, we write critically reflecting on our own experiences using these pedagogies in the classroom, thinking simultaneously about the course application and the theoretical aspects of the research problem. This critical

reflection on our own experiences makes this research primarily concept-theoretical in nature.

It is necessary here to give some explanation of the courses we draw on and who our students in these courses are: The methodology courses focus on how to teach history in the last three years of high school, and the content ranges from the nuts and bolts of the curriculum, the lesson planning, and the theoretical issues of emotion or neutrality in the classroom. The course sizes of the methodology courses were 17 and 73 respectively in 2024. Most of our students are African, with a few (one in the 73-person class, 3 in the 17-person class) white students, as well as 7 students identifying as Indian or so called coloured[3]. The majority of our students are in university through the government's National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which funds tertiary education for students from households earning below a certain threshold, or through bursaries specifically for education students, like the Funza Lushaka bursary which is also a government initiative. While the majority are NSFAS students, the students do come from a wide variety of economic backgrounds. What is important for this paper is to note that the majority of our students are negatively impacted by the continuing tendrils of coloniality in the institution, where they continued to be marginalized, even in the majority, through language, culture, and curriculum. This continued impact of coloniality means that decolonial work is actively undoing the dehumanizing that the coloniality in tertiary institution does. Thus, students' voices matter in a way that disrupts coloniality – they matter in a space in which they are not supposed to.

Applying the theory in the courses

Freewriting as voice pedagogy

In our courses, we use a range of different strategies to achieve dialogue. The one we will primarily discuss here is foundational to the courses, for several reasons. It is both an individual act and a process. It is very easy to do. It does not require any technology or reasons beyond paper and a pen. The time for the exercise can be very limited: it can be structured to only take up two minutes of class time, or it can be extended. It is also flexible: it is an individual exercise, but it can easily be adapted into a group, or pair, or class discussion. This strategy is free writing – it is a type of stream of consciousness writing that is supposed to allow students to excavate their own thoughts without any academic or other pressures (Elbow, 2000). There are only two rules to free writing: one is do not stop writing for the allotted time (the times range from 1 to 10 minutes, but we typically use 2-minute exercises), and the second rule is that you do not cross anything out. The prompts can be anything: from asking for a reaction to a poem, or a prescribed paper to taking a couple of minutes in the middle of a debate to capture students' feelings, or a response to a historical narrative. Sometimes the prompts can have a socio-emotional value: how are the students doing? This personal kind of prompt gives them a moment to reflect on themselves and their emotions. A personal check in like this can be useful in high stress moments of the year close to exams, for example. In a more academic approach we also prompt their responses to specific problems, narratives or silences in history and history education, or texts we have read in class. We also prompt them to think about their own histories in relation to what we are doing in class.

These exercises are useful individually, to allow students a moment to process and think about complex questions before voicing an answer. We also use them over time for students to compile a kind of diary on the questions that we ask and think about in class. This is a departure from a lecture style that engages students in questioning but does not create any lasting record of their thoughts and responses to what the class provokes. The intended outcome with this as a repeated and protracted exercise, is that students come to an understanding that their thoughts, their internal voice, have intrinsic value, beyond being expressed in class and beyond being marshalled into a response for an assignment. This valuing of voice and story that are outside of what "knowledge" is valued in tertiary, or primary, history education is a step towards understanding and valuing marginalized historical narratives. Although this strategy is tied into our assessment strategy, which we discuss later in this paper, these writing exercises themselves are not assessed, and never have to be submitted. The fact that the pieces of writing are never

3 The so called coloured identity is very contested and was formalised as a category through apartheid legislation. There are lots of historical roots in this identity, included Cape Malay slave descendants, and descendants of groups identified as Khoi, or San.

submitted allows a, perhaps dangerous, freedom to the exercises, but pushes against the weight that assessments carry in higher education (Godsell et al., 2024).

One strategy we utilize with freewriting is to get students to track how their thoughts, their voice, and how those change over time, through engagement with external information. With this strategy we are asking them to do the metacognitive work on how their thinking develops. This kind of reflection is a valuable part of academic growth, but beyond that we want the idea that their inner voice is valuable to root, and to relate to their history teaching. With a sense of different voices being valuable, we try to develop a sense of different historical perspectives, and as their own voices are often overlooked in their studies, to get a sense of how power dynamics can cause voices, groups, histories, to be overlooked.

Sometimes the development in thought is overtly addressed: the French Revolution is taught in our Grade 10 (two years before the end of high school) and so it is covered in the curriculum we teach at University. We teach the French Revolution in conjunction with the Haitian revolution, and we discuss how the two revolutions have been treated differently in historiography and why. In free writes, we ask students to think about their definitions of freedom in the very beginning, and in the very end of the course, and discuss how their views have changed across the course, also in conjunction with how the revolutions have been historicised.

Sometimes we also bring it closer to home: we think about the 'Xhosa Cattle Killing' – a movement in which 140 000 cattle were killed and 40 000 people starved to death (Davies, 2007) - in the way the prophetess who was the heart of the movement was historicised and we think about this in relation to gender and historiography (Offenburger, 2009). However, students are also encouraged to interact with the histories in their own lives and their homes . We bring this range of historical thought into contact with discussions about evidence and historiography, about historical reliability and veracity. It remains important to develop the ideas of the histories in the students' lives, in their voices (that are multiple and layered and histories) as important, and in that way help the curriculum expand beyond textbook narratives. Students are encouraged to think about the way that the curriculum does or does not reflect their own knowledges. In the same breath, we continue to draw on the importance of a global and interconnected history: that too, is connected to the process of the students recording their own voices.

History as disrupted and disruptable

One of the key themes in our courses is history as constructed, as disrupted and disruptable, which makes the possibilities for marginalized narratives to be woven into the histories more relevant (Trouillot, 1997). It is important here to pause and take a moment to engage with some of the work talking about how ideas of history, and ideas of time, have been contested. Tisani (2018) argues these ideas in an African context, talking about how cyclical ideas of time could impact history, how linear history would interact with a history in which ancestors play a role. She in turn argues the difficulties with the types of knowledge made and ratified by settler historians. She contests the colonial, pre-colonial, post-colonial periodization that binds Africa in a framework that consistently centers colonialism (Tisani, 2018). Cutrara (2018) has talked about a "settler grammar" imposed on history by frameworks of historical thinking, that curtails thinking of history in other knowledge frameworks, especially indigenous ones. While student voice in and of itself does not provide an alternative to this, the prompts given for the writing exercises play a role in pushing student thinking about what knowledge norms we have accepted as part of historical knowledge and history teaching. Thorp and Persson (2020) contend for an openness to different indigenous approaches to history itself. We discuss conceptions of history in class, mainly to underscore the point that there are different conceptions of history, that it exists in different forms, and it is not an untouchable, immovable thing removed from the students. Students' ideas of their own voice and agency in history, become important for their ideas of voice and agency in their understanding of what history "is" and for history teaching. Thus, the idea of history as disrupted and disruptable becomes central to opening space for marginalized voices.

Student voice and marginalized histories: a relationship

This position paper is part of a larger research project, where decolonial strategies in history teaching are researched, but this paper explores, from a theoretical position, a potential relationship between student voices and marginalised histories. This relationship comes back to the

student who said to us that they want to "see and feel themselves" in the history curriculum. This desire is something that really resonated with us, and that we have touched on in our work exploring decolonial history pedagogy (Godsell, 2019; Maluleka & Godsell, 2024). In this section, we make the argument that small exercises which value and validate student voice, and beyond that student prior knowledge, experience, and histories, will pave the way for an understanding of where and how marginalized histories fit in the school history classroom and in the Curriculum and Assessment Statement (CAPS) school history curriculum. This expansion through student voice is possible especially because of the focus on colonization and apartheid in the curriculum, presenting an official narrative, in which it is possible to locate marginalized histories, like histories of women or queer histories, but also the small and divergent narratives that make up the tapestry of history (Maluleka & Godsell, 2024).

The CAPS history curriculum that is currently taught in South African schools contains important South African history, although admittedly less African history. However, Maluleka and others argue that this is still largely presented through a Eurocentric lens – (Maluleka, 2021) even when the historiography is being explicitly engaged, as it is when the grade 10 learners explore portrayals of the leader of the amaZulu, King Shaka. The history presented shows the horrors of colonialism and apartheid, but from a point of view that is both ANC centric (the ANC was one of the political parties that contributed to bringing South Africa to democracy and has ruled since 1994, however there were other important struggle ideologies, parties, and people, particularly women and queer people, that are not recognised in the CAPS curriculum) and presents the struggle as complete, even though for many South Africa remains a place of extreme oppression. Thus, what does it mean for students to see and feel themselves in the curriculum? The pedagogy we are suggesting develops and values student voice in preservice teachers. This pedagogy is a move to students acknowledging their own place in histories and developing an awareness of which histories are reflected in the curriculum and which are marginalized. Developing this awareness is with a view to opening for them to "see and feel" themselves in the curriculum. While this step is valuable, there is more potential here: with explicit guidance in class, valuing their own voices can be a step to understand how histories are marginalized, and thus to valuing marginalized histories more broadly. This process of recognizing marginalised histories cannot happen in a vacuum, and the courses provide explicit work around this in the FET method course. These questions are also raised around the curriculum.

There have been heated debates about what proportion of local history in relation to international history, and then more specifically what local and what international history, goes into the South African CAPS curriculum (Maluleka, 2021). There is also a new curriculum under development that would include different types of knowledge, as well as more afrocentric knowledge (Ndlovu et al., 2018). However, the current world events that we do have in the curriculum are often Euro-centric (the Holocaust is presented twice for example, albeit in different contexts, and the Rwandan genocide is not in the curriculum). In class, we explicitly discuss marginalized histories and where to find them. And the idea that each centered history contains marginalized ones with different perspectives. An example of this idea is, for example, the way our curriculum covers the "American dream" and the "roaring twenties" in a section on capitalism in the USA but does not differentiate that experiences would have been different for women, or black people, or indigenous people, or anyone who was not a white man. The concept we use is to develop an awareness of students' own voices, as well as the histories in them, to bring that to an analysis of the histories contained in the curriculum, (and the historiography of this). In this developing, we want their voices to interact with the histories, told and untold, aware of their own voice and the position of power on it, and bring this understanding to the histories in and out of the curriculum.

Students locating their voices within historical knowledge

To conceptualise this issue of student voices and the marginalised histories, we have needed to engage with the question: how do students navigate their own voice, histories, and knowledges within historical knowledge? We want to go back to the Xhosa cattle killing example; here the students hailing from the Eastern Cape province of South Africa often have stories in their families of the event, the event that devasted the independence of amaXhosa (broadly speaking since there are different groupings of people within what is considered as amaXhosa) and brought them into the wage labour regime of British imperialism. Family, or clan, stories vary in how and who they blame, and the student's obvious inclination is to blame the British governor at the time, the infamous governor Gray, from tricking uNongqawuse, or her colluding with them.

However, coming from different interpretations and historical perspectives presents different stories (Ashforth, 1991; Davies, 2007; J. Lewis, 1991; Offenburger, 2009; Peires, 1987).

This is important because it brings historiography into contact with voice, so the approach is not a simple one of accepting any histories emerging in/ through student voices, as true by default. The approach is about acknowledging and valuing, but also about developing, voices in relation to history, and historical knowledge. Part of this approach is humanising pedagogy, against the dehumanisation of coloniality, part of it is reflexive pedagogy (Ashwin et al., 2015; Zembylas, 2018). Part of it is about allowing for healing in an academic space that consistently dehumanizing students and reduces them to their marks, student numbers, and fees. An allowance for healing is also in a context where many students are struggling with significant mental health issues due to a combination of academic and other, often socio-economic, factors.[4] Part of the project is also about realizing the significance of their own knowledge in relation to the histories studied, and in this bringing about a heightened awareness of what is left out of the CAPS curriculum.

It is not, however, just about histories close to them. In a lecture on marginalized histories and where to find them, we watch a video by indigenous artist Gregg Deal[5], who talks about the stories that are valued in society and those that are not, and what that does to the people involved, in every way. In engaging with this source, we recognise that Indigenous peoples in the America feature almost nowhere in our history curriculum, even though there is a substantial portion of USA history in the curriculum (especially Civil Rights and Black Power movements, which are likened to South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle.). We then talk about the popular franchise restaurants, Spur and Mochachos, who utilize a "native American" theme in their décor – and how racist this is. We talk about, and students write about, why these histories are not in our consciousness as a country when the Black Power movement, for example, is. We argue that recognizing and valuing their own voices will help them recognise and value other marginalized voices, even where that marginalization has become completely normalized. This process of recognition comes with the critical dialogic approach that asks these questions of the curriculum: whose knowledge? whose choice? whose representation?

Assessments in the courses: assessing for voice

This approach of valuing voice is also in the assessment strategy of the courses where we are working with pedagogies of voice: we have shifted, in our methodology courses, from a written exam to a type of oral exam – in the methodology course, we ask our students to record a 20 – 30 minutes podcast. This assessment is authentic in that it produces something that has value outside of the assessment, it allows for a wide range of expression, and the students have a large range of choice in what they are asked to do (Maniram & Maistry, 2018). For the assessment, students are required to choose a partner from the class and record a podcast on "teaching history" drawing on what they found most useful from the course, as well as their lived experiences and their experiences in their teaching practical. There are specific criteria that the students must include, but there is a broad range for them to choose from, and the students have the space to bring their own perspectives and voices to the fore. Students are encouraged to go back to their free writes to track what has been important and impactful for them, and to track their development along the course. When we begin the freewriting exercises in the beginning of the year we tell the students that these writings are their notes for the final exam – and there is an element of agency to that, as we never check what they are writing. However, students' informal feedback has been that these writing exercises have been helpful in engaging themselves, in a sphere outside assessment (in the moment of writing). The podcast is recorded as a 20 - 30-minute conversation in which the student pairs discuss what they think is important in history teaching, and why. The student pair also touches on what has been impactful, or problematic, in the course. We have argued elsewhere why this assessment is in itself decolonial, contesting coloniality of knowledge, of being and of power, but here we want to pause on the voice in the podcast (Godsell, forthcoming). In contrast to the free writes, voice is a physical element of this assessment. The students are put in the position of the expert, rather than needing to aggregate arguments of different theorists, for example, and they get to make the calls on their own experience of the course, and their own relating of the course material to their experience of teaching history. For this podcast the students are also expected to draw on their teaching ex-

4 This comes up regularly in class discussions across different courses.

5 Gregg Deal: Indigenous in Plain Sight, 2018 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3FL9uhTH_s

perience practicals, applying what they had done in their classrooms to the course and seeing what aligns and what does not. In this, the conclusion of the course offers a culmination of the valuing of voice during the course: this does not link it to marginalized histories, but offers students a space where their thoughts, in their voiced form, are valorised in the formal language of academia: examinations and marks. While this assessment structure is important in the working with voice throughout the course, the real value and linking between marginalized histories and the inclusion and valorisation of student voices happens in the writing exercises. It is important that these writing exercises do not require any resources other than two or three minutes of class time, a paper, and a pen. These exercises do not require the class to move around, they do not require anything that might disrupt an already restive or overly large class. This means the exercises can be repeated by the student teachers in any teaching setting, no matter how low resource the school that the students are in. This is necessary because modeling is powerful, and when writing and critical thinking are hard to implement in difficult school classrooms in South Africa, these exercises can offer something valuable. These exercises are small actions, that can yield important results, and can work in the small spaces of the decolonial cracks (Walsh, 2020).

Teaching in South Africa: voices in the decolonial cracks

With this reflection on low resource pedagogies, we want to come back to where we started: the context of teaching in South Africa. For while we have positioned student voice as a means to highlighting marginalized histories, we want to acknowledge the difficulties of bringing student voice and marginalized histories into the classroom, and the conditions under which most history teachers teach in South Africa (Boadu & Oppong, 2024). We have seen teachers successfully manage this feat – through pan Africanism, through feminism, through song – but it takes an extraordinary commitment.[6] Another reason we focus on student voice is to build up student belief in themselves, in their ability to do this work in trying circumstances (McLeod, 2011). Here though, we want to invoke another decolonial concept: Walsh's concept of decolonial cracks (Walsh, 2020). She argues that against the wall of coloniality, we need to find the small, even tiny, spaces of the decolonial cracks, in which to do decolonial work. And as the cracks are worked in, so they widen, and network. What we have tried to outline above is a small strategy that can be used in history teacher education, and that can also be imaginably carried into school history education as it is low resource, that can work in and open decolonial cracks.

Our argument in this paper has been that in the small act of valuing and developing student voice, we are creating space, for students to understand marginalization, of themselves in the current moment and also historically, and create the hope that they can find their own decolonial cracks to work in, in school classrooms, to both foreground marginalized histories, and foreground learner voice (with the work this does in and of itself). Although history teaching in many schools is arduous, we argue that the presented strategy is low in resource use: it is quick, it does not require movement across the classroom, it only requires a writing instrument and paper. In being low resource, this pedagogy also speaks to a history education pedagogy in teacher education that takes into consideration the classrooms that our students go into, and models in a practical way.

If school history learners also have their voices developed and valued, their own thoughts and insights marked as important enough to note down, this could (although much further research would be needed here) help them to see themselves in both histories and historiographies.

Limitations

This paper has several limitations: our approach was primarily conceptual-theoretical, to grapple with the questions and our experiences, and so we limited the data used to our own reflection journals. These limitations means that, in a piece about student voice, we did not include student reflections on the process. We are drawing on classroom observations, but the students may have had different take-aways from the process. This paper has these limitations partly because of the stage of the research we are in and partly because we wanted to give this theoretical aspect of the work its own space. Research focused on student experiences will be a follow up part of this project. For future research, it would also be important to actually observe students

6 This is evidenced in 2022 podcasts recordings I did with Kearebetsoe Thamae and Moosa Khumalo, who spoke about their pedagogies and how these bring in marginalized histories into the classroom.

from these classes when these students are teaching in schools, either as part of their practical teaching experience or when they are in service teachers. This paper is part of the larger research project, of which this paper serves as a theoretical exploration and foundation.

Conclusion: marginalised histories and voice

> Centimetre by centimetre my body begins to feel decolonised, brain cell by brain cell I begin to appreciate just how deeply I have been colonised (Abrahams in D. Lewis & Baderoon, 2021, p. 277).

The above quote highlights the body, but we would like to bring it to bear on the voice as well – that the voice contains knowledge, agency, vision and history. By advocating a pedagogy that actively values voice, this paper has argued that this is a decolonial stance. This decolonial stance, we have shown, is also useful for practical application in schools that often defer to rote learning because of low resource access and physical constraints of the classroom. By promoting a decolonial pedagogy that values voice, we are also modelling a pedagogy for our teachers that they can take into any classroom they go on to teach in. This pedagogy (when paired with other careful aspects of curriculum and assessment design) can facilitate critical reflection on historical knowledge and narrative, seeing themselves as knowledge creators and valuing their own knowledge and lives as part of history(ies).

Our students' voices, in institutions imbued with coloniality, are devalued and derided, through our choice of curricula, pedagogy, and assessment (Heleta, 2018). Often assessments ask students to silence their own knowledge, while asking them about the knowledge of others contained in the course (Crossouard & Oprandi, 2022). In the process of acknowledging and valuing our students voices, knowledges and histories, we highlight the process of valuing what has been marginalized and open up a knowledge trajectory that is critical of what knowledge is presented in curricula and textbooks. This process has two potential benefits in this history classroom: firstly, valuing what is marginalized can open for a pedagogy that values historical perspectives that have been overlooked and excluded, an important decolonial impulse. Secondly, the process has the potential for these teachers to go out into classrooms and value their learners' voices, networking the work in the decolonial cracks, spreading value beyond history as a subject.

A crucial premise of the paper has been based on ideas of working where we are: how can we prepare history teachers for real-world classrooms in a decolonial way? We have had informal feedback from students who went into the classrooms saying that there was no space for decoloniality in the South African history classroom: there are not enough resources, the curriculum is too overloaded, the ideological spaces are not there, there is not enough time. We are unable to address all of these issues, but we took this feedback into our course design and worked with decolonial principles around humanization and marginalisation (Bam et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2018). We then worked with a simple pedagogy - supported by curriculum and assessment design choices, to regularly support and develop student voice and trust in their own thoughts and knowledge. This research is part of a larger project investigating the decolonisation of history teacher, and future research will include classroom studies to more accurately gauge the impact of these processes. For the purposes of this article, we wanted to investigate the potential of our pedagogies from a conceptual-theoretical perspective.

We look forward to future research that further tests the flight lines between history-teacher education classrooms, and history school classroom.

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Teaching local difficult history through primary sources

Exploring tensions in teachers' pedagogical reasoning

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Abstract

Teaching about local, difficult pasts can center students, their communities, and civic action. However, doing so poses personal and professional challenges. Drawing from Critical Historical Inquiry and Activity Theory, this study explored how six experienced secondary social studies teachers reasoned about selecting primary sources to teach the history of policing and activism in Detroit. As teachers developed their text-sets, they navigated a variety of tensions related to their instructional goals, beliefs, and knowledge of students' identities and communities. We focus on two common areas of tension: how to teach the racialized history of Detroit policing while positioning students as sense-makers and while attending to students' affective well-being. Findings highlight the complex, situated nature of pedagogical reasoning and the promises and challenges of a critical historical inquiry approach to local, difficult history. Findings also underscore the value of teachers' multidimensional expertise in designing difficult history curricula.

Keywords

difficult history, local history, pedagogical reasoning, critical historical inquiry, activity systems

1 Introduction

Teaching local, difficult history offers opportunities to center students, their communities, and civic action. However, it also presents significant challenges for educators. Many teachers may avoid these topics due to concerns about controversy, sensitivity (Metzger & Suh, 2008; Swalwell et al., 2015; Zembylas, 2017), or fears of legal and professional repercussions (Goldberg, 2020). Others may struggle to attend to students' emotional needs (Zembylas, 2007) or racial identities (Chandler, 2015). These challenges highlight tensions within and between the various activity systems teachers navigate (Suh et al., 2024). For example, a teacher may face tensions in reconciling state-mandated curricular requirements with the socio-emotional needs of their students or the political orientations of their communities.

Given the complex interplay of professional responsibilities, personal beliefs, community values, student needs, and instructional goals, it is unsurprising we see difficult history taught

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in diverse ways. A civic education approach may emphasize connections between historical injustices and contemporary opportunities for civic engagement. Other approaches may encourage students to critically analyze why certain topics are labeled "difficult" and what this reveals about historical culture and the broader uses of history. However, such approaches remain underrepresented in U.S. curricula (Baildon & Afandi, 2018).

Teachers may opt for an inquiry-based approach when teaching difficult histories, guiding students to develop evidence-based claims through analysis of historical sources. This method prioritizes historical reasoning skills such as sourcing and corroborating evidence. While inquiry approaches equip students with valuable epistemic tools, they may fall short in addressing the political and personal dimensions of complex historical narratives (Blevins et al., 2020; Santiago, 2019).

One proposal to address the potential shortcomings of a disciplinary inquiry approach is to engage students through critical historical inquiry. Critical historical inquiry explicitly highlights marginalized historical perspectives (Blevins et al., 2020) and historical counternarratives (Cavallaro et al., 2019; Santiago, 2019) and promotes the development of critical literacy and thinking skills (Crowley & King, 2018; Santiago & Dozono, 2022). To effectively plan critical historical inquiry about local, difficult histories, teachers must draw on and apply a wide range of knowledge about history, social justice, local communities, students, and themselves (Blevins et al., 2020). As such, critical historical inquiry likely involves complex pedagogical reasoning, or the transformation of embodied professional knowledge into instructional practices (Lampert, 1985; Loughran, 2019; Shulman, 1987).

Our study investigated the pedagogical reasoning of six experienced, Detroit-area social studies teachers as they engaged in one core practice of inquiry planning: selecting sources (Fogo, 2014). In the study, teachers reviewed, commented on, reasoned about, and selected a set of sources related to the history of policing in Detroit (1957-1973). We then analyzed teachers' reasoning through two theoretical frameworks: critical historical inquiry and activity theory, highlighting the relationships between actors (e.g., a teacher), tools (e.g., primary sources), and objectives (e.g., creating a meaningful source set) (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

Five of the six teachers shared strong beliefs in positioning students as sense-makers and avoiding psychological harm. These beliefs often came into tension with other aspects of their activity systems, including student and community needs and values, their instructional objectives, and the sources themselves. These tensions echo findings from prior research, such as the need to design instruction or professional development that is responsive to teachers' identities (Suh et al., 2024), students' emotions (Suh, 2024; Zembylas, 2007), and students' racial identities and experiences (Chandler, 2015). We also found that teachers' pedagogical reasoning was animated by how they navigated these tensions, which often led to decisions that reflect critical historical inquiry practices, such as prompting students to inquire into connections between past and present. Sometimes, however, navigating these tensions led to avoidance or a desire to more tightly manage students' engagement with or interpretation of sources. Our findings reaffirm the complex activity systems that influence pedagogical reasoning and highlight the importance of navigating tensions in constructing local, critical history inquiry. We then discuss the relevance of our findings for researchers and practitioners doing work around critical historical inquiry and difficult history more broadly.

2 Background

2.1 Traditional and critical historical inquiry

In contrast to lecture-style teaching, a disciplinary inquiry approach asks students to analyze evidence and form conclusions in response to a question or hypothesis. In history classes, this is often done in abbreviated ways and under the guidance of a teacher who may furnish students with a central question and relevant source materials (van Boxtel et al., 2021). Historical inquiry can help students grasp the constructed nature of historical knowledge and develop their own nuanced understandings of the past (van Boxtel & van Drie, 2017). Inquiry teaching also supports students' historical literacy and analytical skills, such as sourcing, corroborating, contextualizing, and synthesizing evidence (Monte-Sano et al., 2014; Reisman, 2012).

When planning inquiry, teachers transform their historical pedagogical content knowledge (Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013) into pedagogical reasoning (Loughran, 2019; Shulman, 1987) to make crucial instructional design choices, such as how to develop a central or compelling question, how (and how much) information to introduce to students, how to compile a source set that represents multiple perspectives and relates to the central question, and how to make sources accessible to specific groups of students (Fogo, 2014; Monte-Sano et al., 2020). Reasoning through designing and facilitating inquiry-based instruction can be demanding for teachers. Teachers must consider how to respond to their students' thinking and support historical literacy, analysis, and argumentation (Fogo, 2014; Monte-Sano et al., 2020; National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). Teachers must also consider how to balance their roles of instructor, listener, and facilitator. Some teachers may be reluctant to engage in this kind of instruction because they see it as conflicting with classroom management needs and content coverage goals (Barton & Levstik, 2003). Inquiry-based approaches can also be difficult for novice teachers who lack disciplinary knowledge (Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013). Even teachers with strong disciplinary knowledge may fall back on a more didactic style of instruction for various reasons (Vansledright, 1996), highlighting a potential lack of support for implementing inquiry learning (Martell, 2020).

Practitioners of critical historical inquiry teach students to use the disciplinary tools of history to investigate questions about dominant and counter-narratives and issues related to power, justice, and oppression (e.g., Blevins et al., 2020; Crowley & King, 2018; Santiago & Dozono, 2022). Reich et al. (2023) offer an inductive conception of critical historical inquiry as having three broad goals: 1) support students' critical historical consciousness, 2) equip students to identify and address pressing social problems, and 3) build bridges between coursework and students' experiences and identities. According to Santiago and Dozono (2022), critical historical inquiry can empower students to respond to social justice issues while also fostering civic participation and independent thinking.

In addition to the demands of traditional inquiry, critical historical inquiry asks teachers to attend to students' affective relationships with the subject and to facilitate learning experiences with clear relevance for students (Reich et al., 2023). Critical historical inquiry therefore expands the breadth of background knowledge that teachers need to support their students' learning and wellbeing. For example, teachers may need to develop acute emotional knowledge (Zembylas, 2007) and racial knowledge (Chandler, 2015) of their students, greater political and ideological clarity (Blevins et al. 2020), and deeper content knowledge beyond canonical narratives to include critiques and historical counternarratives (King & Brown, 2014; Santiago, 2019; Suh et al., 2021). Selecting accessible sources representing a range of perspectives is one key component to designing effective critical historical inquiry (Blevins et al., 2020).

2.2 Difficult history

Most research on teaching and learning difficult history builds on Britzman's (1998) concept of difficult knowledge, which examines how educators and curricula present traumatic events and how students respond to them (Pitt & Britzman, 2003). Scholars have proposed various definitions and frameworks for understanding difficult history (Epstein & Peck, 2018; Gross & Terra, 2018; Jones, 2023; Stoddard, 2022). Broadly, the term has been used to emphasize the emotional, cultural, and political complexities of teaching sensitive topics, distinguishing these approaches from more traditional methods of historical inquiry (Epstein & Peck, 2018). Gross and Terra (2018) provide five criteria for difficult history:

> (1) difficult histories are central to a nation's history... (2) tend to refute broadly accepted versions of the past or stated national values... (3) may connect with questions or problems facing us in the present... (4) often involve violence, usually collective or state-sanctioned... [which] cannot be easily dismissed as aberrations or exceptions... [and] (5) create disequilibria that challenge existing historical understandings (pp. 4-5).

They add that historical events are not "difficult" in the same way for everyone; individuals encounter histories differently based on their personal and social identities, experiences, and their positioning within political and cultural contexts across space and time. Recognizing the situated and power laden nature of difficult histories, Jones and Edmondson (2024) (and Jones, 2023, 2024) warn against reductive, binary uses of the term.

Compared to the cognitive perspectives that have dominated the study of traditional historical inquiry (e.g., Lee, 2005; Wineburg, 1991), scholarship in difficult history has adopted a broader lens, examining the political and social factors that frame teacher decision-making and students'

responses to historical content and pedagogy (Epstein & Peck, 2018; Harris et al., 2022; Stoddard, 2022). Researchers have explored these dynamics through a variety of often overlapping frameworks, including psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Garrett, 2011), emotion (Miles, 2019; Sheppard & Levy, 2019; Zembylas, 2014), historical inquiry (Suh et al., 2021), cultural historical activity theory (Suh et al., 2024), and critical sociocultural approaches that emphasize the role of culture and power in shaping instruction (Epstein & Peck, 2018).

Theoretical works in this field often grapple with epistemological questions, such as what counts as a difficult history, how do people acquire difficult knowledge, and what is the relationship between identity and knowledge of difficult history? (e.g., Garrett & Schmidt, 2012; Harris et al., 2022; Jones, 2024; Potter, 2011; Zembylas, 2014). Empirical work has largely focused on instructional materials (Fogo & Breakstone, 2018; Gaudelli et al., 2012), students' and teachers' knowledge and thinking about difficult history (e.g., Barton & McCully, 2005; Demoiny & Tirado, 2023; Garrett, 2011; Goldberg, 2013, 2017; Miles, 2019; Zembylas, 2017), or case studies of students learning about difficult history (e.g. Sheppard, 2010). For instance, Goldberg's (2013) study found that students' national, racial, or ethnic identity can shape their affective responses and engagement with difficult historical inquiry. Miles' (2019) case study of secondary students showed that students' affective responses to historical sources can influence how likely they are to accept or reject difficult historical knowledge.

Scholarship on difficult history pedagogy have identified a complex array of forces relevant to instructional decision-making. Demoiny and Tirado (2023) found that preservice teachers' racial identities and content knowledge significantly impacted their instructional decision-making at a difficult historical site. Studies have also found that educators may resist teaching difficult histories due to a perceived lack of community or administrative support (Stoddard, 2022) or concerns about emotional trauma (Zembylas, 2017). Though, a strong moral commitment to addressing these histories may counteract these challenges (Goldberg, 2017). Furthermore, contemporary political discourse and events, which permeate nearly all difficult history topics, often impact how such history is taught and learned (Harris et al., 2022; Jonker, 2012). Recognizing the complexity of these forces, Suh et al. (2024) highlight the importance of identity and activity systems — such as those in schools and professional development workshops — in understanding how teachers make instructional decisions around teaching difficult history.

3 Conceptual framework

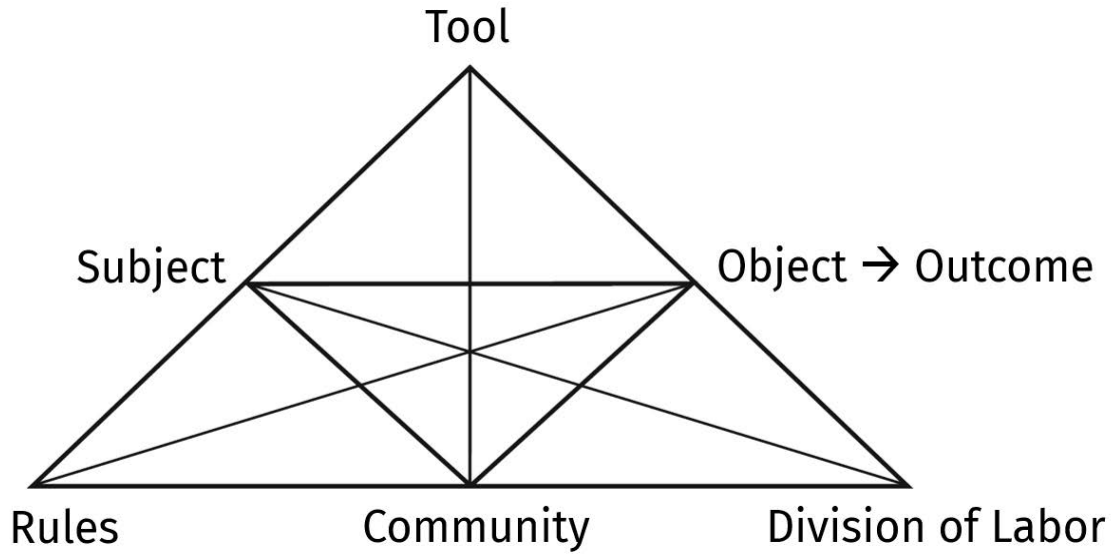
Our goal was to build on this prior work, particularly those recent studies which pay empirical attention to teachers' decision making and pedagogical reasoning around teaching difficult history through an inquiry-based approach (e.g. Demoiny & Tirado, 2023; Suh, 2024; Suh et al., 2021, 2024). Of this recent work, Suh (2024) and Suh et al. (2021, 2024) stand out for their exploration of experienced secondary history teachers' sense-making and lesson planning around difficult history topics. This contrasts with much of the work we found with participants composed of preservice teachers or a single teacher.

The challenges and tensions presented in the literature bring into view the inherent complexity in teaching and learning about the difficult past. Some scholars have attended directly to these challenges and tensions from an instructional perspective. For example, Kubota (2014), in the context of a second language classroom, identified contradictions between theory and practice for critical pedagogues who teach about controversial issues. In Chile, Magendzo and Toledo (2009) explored the experiences of history teachers who taught or avoided teaching about the difficult recent past. Their research identified moral dilemmas that arise when students "are actors in the history that is dealt with in the curriculum" (p. 454). For us, this literature emphasized that teaching about the difficult past through critical historical inquiry is messy, deeply situated in particular sociohistorical contexts, and fraught with nuanced tensions.

We sought a conceptual framework that would help us understand how experienced teachers navigate the complex decision-making process when teaching difficult historical topics through text-based inquiry. We specifically examined how teachers' choices are influenced by their interactions with students, sociocultural contexts, and historical artifacts.

Conceptually similar to Suh et al. (2024), we drew on activity theory to understand and represent aspects of difficult history instruction as socially and historically situated activities, wherein factors beyond an individual teacher's mental processes play important roles in shaping decision-making.

Figure 1: Engerström's (1987, p. 78) model of an activity system



We drew on Engeström's (1987) model of an activity system (Figure 1) to describe experienced teachers' pedagogical reasoning as an object-oriented interaction involving attention to *tools, norms/rules, the division of labor*, and *outcomes*. This perspective helped us position teachers as the subjects within dynamic, real-world environments and to consider the roles and interactions among aspects of those environments and how they contribute to shaping outcomes.

In our case, the focal activity was pedagogical reasoning about how to teach difficult history through a text-based approach. The *subjects* of our focal activity were defined as experienced secondary history and social studies teachers who had an interest in teaching the difficult history of policing in Detroit. The *object* of the activity was to curate a set of primary sources that could be used for inquiry. The *outcome* of our activity referred to a teacher's primary source set and its noteworthy characteristics. Our goal was to gain insight into the interactions within the activity system surrounding teachers' reasoning. This theoretical stance guided our data collection, analysis, and our presentation of descriptive findings.

4 Methods

We used an online survey, a Content Representation (CoRe) activity (Loughran et al., 2004), and two semi-structured interviews to investigate the following research question: *How can activity systems analysis help identify and describe teachers' pedagogical reasoning when selecting sources to teach a local, difficult history topic?*

In our analysis, we looked across the data sources to identify relevant aspects of teachers' activity systems, eventually focusing on how teachers navigated tensions in their pedagogical reasoning.

4.1 History of policing in detroit and study context

We designed this study in coordination with the release of a University of Michigan-led public history exhibit titled, *Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era*. Through its vast collection of primary sources, *Detroit Under Fire* tells the interwoven stories of policing victims, activists, police officers, and politicians. The following is a description of the project from its website:

> Detroit Under Fire is a multimedia digital exhibit that documents patterns and incidents of police brutality and misconduct, as well as 188 fatal shootings and other killings by law enforcement, in the city of Detroit during the era of the modern civil rights movement, from 1957 to 1973. The exhibit further chronicles the anti-police brutality struggle waged by civil rights and black power groups, and by many ordinary people, who demanded racial and social justice and sought accountability for systemic police violence (Lassiter & the Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, 2021).

The project creators intended to include instructional resources to support local social studies teachers in using the exhibit with students. As former teachers, we also saw the potential value of this exhibit as a resource for teachers to engage their students in local, critical historical inquiry.

We conceptualized the history of policing in Detroit as difficult for several reasons. For one, the systematic police brutality, corruption, and cover-up belie the dominant mythology that unjust policing is the result of a few "bad apples" (Bains, 2018, p. 30). Though major reforms have improved policing in Detroit and across the country, many police departments continue to engage in and cover up illegal police conduct. Repeated instances of police brutality and injustices against Black people casts doubts on the dominant Civil Rights Movement narrative that racialized policing has been resolved. We also hypothesized that the politically and racially fraught nature of this history (amplified by being local history) might require teachers to make tough decisions when designing instruction with these materials. We also hypothesized that widespread protests and increased media and political attention toward racialized police violence at the time of our study may add to the difficult nature of teaching this topic.

4.2 Participants

Six teachers from the Detroit area participated in our study. We felt that Detroit was an appropriate site for our study for several reasons. Detroit has a long history of racialized policing and continues to be a crucible of Black activism in response to police violence. Additionally, thanks to *Detroit Under Fire*, teachers in the area now had unprecedented access to hundreds of primary source documents and historical accounts about local policing and activism.

We reached out to potential participants via listservs of regional social studies professional organizations. We used purposive sampling (Palys, 2008) to recruit teachers who self-identified as interested in teaching about the local histories of policing and activism. Below are brief descriptions of our six teacher-participants.

Table 1: Participant description and teaching contexts

Teacher description	Teaching context
Florence is a Black lifelong Detroit resident and activist with over twenty years of teaching experience.	Majority Black, urban school
Jessica is a Black Detroit resident with over five years of teaching experience.	Majority Black, urban school
Maryah described herself as Middle Eastern and has spent most of her life in Detroit. She has over 5 years of teaching experience.	Majority Black, urban school
Nicole is a White Detroit resident of over 15 years, with over 15 years of teaching experience.	Majority Black, suburban school
Robert is a White, lifelong Detroit resident who has been teaching for over ten years.	Majority Black, suburban school
Zach is a White teacher who grew up and lives in the Detroit suburbs and has over five years of teaching experience.	Plurality White, suburban school with few Black students

Our goal was to recruit a diverse sample of teachers in terms of race, ethnicity, teaching experience, and relationship to Detroit. We also considered their students' race, ethnicity, and proximity to Detroit. Three of our teachers identified as White, two as Black, and one as Middle Eastern. All but one taught in a majority Black school district.

4.3 Data collection

We collected data from teachers through four activities:

4.3.1 Survey

Each participant received an electronic, 18-question survey (Appendix A) that elicited short and extended responses about the participant's identity, knowledge of student demographics, teaching approaches, and ideas about teaching topics related to policing, activism, and Detroit history.

4.3.2 Document-based interview

We selected 17 documents (Appendix B) from the hundreds of documents available on Detroit Under Fire. Before selecting the 17 documents, we familiarized ourselves with relevant historical literature and consulted with a professional historian who worked with this content. Our goal was to present teachers with a range of sources to capture the era's significant developments and a range of perspectives, including:

- policing policies and violence enacted by police
- structure, aims, and activities of national and local civil rights organizations
- diverse civilian experiences and opinions on policing or activism
- other issues related to structural oppression, such as housing discrimination

Teachers spent one to two weeks reviewing and writing comments on the sources. We then conducted a 60-90-minute, semi-structured interview with each teacher to discuss their interpretations, reactions to, and decision-making process. According to Yamagata-Lynch, (2010), interviews can be a useful way to learn about participants' activity systems and observe their use of tools in relation to goals.

We spent the majority of the interviews discussing the five documents that teachers had indicated they would be most likely to teach with. We also asked clarifying questions about participants' survey responses. The survey and the interviews provided key information about teachers' activity systems, including their personal and professional beliefs, the norms of the profession, their school and community contexts, their instructional design approaches, and their interpretation and use of sources – among many other factors. The conversations were conducted and recorded via a video conferencing program and were then transcribed.

4.3.3 Content representation questionnaire

Several months after conducting the interviews, we sent participants an electronic Content Representation (CoRe) questionnaire (Appendix C). Our CoRe questionnaire was closely modeled on the one developed by Loughran et al. (2004) who designed the activity to see how science teachers transform disciplinary knowledge into pedagogy. CoRe also provided triangulating data to compare to participants' interview and survey responses. The instrument has since been applied in other disciplines, including a study of history teachers' PCK (Tuithof et al., 2021).

Our adaptation and use of the CoRe questionnaire departed from Loughran et. al.'s (2004) in two substantial ways. First, we altered Loughran's fifth prompt: "Knowledge about students' thinking which influences your teaching of this idea" (p. 380) to read instead "What knowledge about students (e.g., their thinking, experiences, or emotions) may influence your teaching of this idea?" We noticed in our first interview that teachers talked about their students more holistically than just their "thinking" processes. We thought this wording change was needed to reflect that. Second, we assigned our participants to complete the CoRe questionnaire independently rather than collaboratively. This enabled us to better observe how each teacher drew from their wide range of experiences, knowledge, and teaching contexts.

Although teachers completed the questionnaire independently, the content topics, or "big ideas," that were part of the questionnaire were drawn from common ideas expressed by the participants in the first interview or survey. For instance, Big Idea A: "Black Americans have and continue to be disproportionately targeted by policing policies and practices," was a content topic addressed by all teachers at some point in the study. Teachers were given three weeks to complete the CoRe questionnaire. All but one (Jessica) completed this stage.

4.3.4 Follow-up Interview

Following completion of the CoRe questionnaire, we conducted a 60–75-minute, semi-structured interview to ask each teacher clarifying questions about their responses to the first interview and the CoRe activity. We also member-checked some of our initial interpretations of teachers' reasoning. These interviews were also recorded and transcribed. All but one (Jessica) completed this stage.

4.4 Analysis

We began analysis using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where we identified and then open coded (Maxwell, 2013) moments of teachers' decision-making and pedagogical reasoning. These moments included when teachers reasoned about what sources to teach with, how to frame a topic, and what instructional approaches might be best suited for supporting students' thinking at different points in a lesson. In a second round of analysis, we coded factors related to teachers' decision-making. These factors included what teachers knew or felt about the topic, their school, their students, their students' parents, or the community more broadly. We also coded the knowledge tools teachers drew from in their reasoning (e.g., disciplinary knowledge, local knowledge, student knowledge, emotional knowledge). Last, we coded aspects of teachers' instructional contexts that they surfaced in the interviews, survey, or CoRe questionnaire.

In the second stage of analysis, we drew on activity systems theory to organize the data according to activity role. First, we created separate activity figures for each teacher. This entailed multiple rounds of each of us separately organizing data. Then, in conversation, we identified and resolve differences to build consensus figures for each teacher participant. During this process, we also noted tensions between the various parts of teachers' activity systems and the ways those contradictions were resolved or engaged with in some way. As an example, consider this quote from hypothetical teacher Ms. B. "I chose Source X because, even though it's very similar to Source Y, I know my students will be excited to talk about Source X because they will relate with the author." In this example, we would have identified a contradiction between Ms. B wanting to choose sources in line with a disciplinary perspective that values consideration of multiple perspectives (expressed by, "even though it's very similar to Source Y") and Ms. B wanting to choose sources that her students will relate to in ways that encourage their engagement (expressed by, "my students will be excited to talk about Source X because they will relate with the author."). Then we would have noted that Ms. B resolved this tension by prioritizing one over the other.

Last, we looked across participants to identify similarities and differences around the tensions which animated their pedagogical reasoning. We found that tensions both emerged from and animated teachers' pedagogical reasoning, and they are the focus of our findings below.

5 Findings

We found that teachers' reasoning about how to use primary sources to teach difficult history was structured by the negotiation of tensions among aspects of their instructional contexts. Analysis of teachers' thinking as shared during interviews and in their engagement with the CoRe performance task led to the identification of rules/norms (which we translate to beliefs), community members, tools, division of labor, and outcomes of teachers' pedagogical reasoning about how to construct primary source sets for teaching about difficult history. A composite representation of those components is included below in Table 2.

Table 2: Activity features of teacher-participants' pedagogical reasoning

Subject *predetermined*	Experienced, Detroit-area secondary history/social studies teacher
Object *predetermined*	To curate a set of primary sources to teach about the local history of police violence and community activism
Beliefs *Beliefs about teachers' responsibilities when teaching about local difficult histories*	Support students' disciplinary thinking, reading, and writing skills; facilitate students' historical content understanding; avoid causing students psychological harm or provoking emotions that might interfere with learning; avoid indoctrination of students; facilitate discussions related to power, identity, and social justice; design learning opportunities responsive to students and their communities; support students' historical empathy; activate students' civic mindedness
Community	Students; students' parents; members of the larger community; other teachers; school and district administration
Tools	Primary sources from the digital history exhibit *Detroit Under Fire*; teachers' pedagogical content knowledge
Division of labor	Interpreting the meaning of a source; considering the source in relation to instructional goals and norms; predicting how students might interact with a source; considering how to facilitate engagement with a source
Outcomes	Development of a curated source set

In addition to identifying the parts of the activity, we identified two tensions which animated teachers' reasoning, albeit in different ways:

- Tensions around teachers' belief/goal in supporting students as sense-makers
- Tensions around teachers' belief/goal in attending to students' affective well-being

Teachers' pedagogical reasoning emerged through their navigation of these different tensions.

5.1 Tensions around positioning students as sense-makers

We found that teachers held asset-orientations toward students, including the belief or goal that teachers should position students as sense-makers who construct knowledge through supportive opportunities to interpret sources and communicate evidence-based understandings. In trying to fulfill this goal, five of the six teachers surfaced tensions that animated their reasoning and reflected the unique features of their instructional contexts.

For Zach, a tension between his students' general sociohistorical position and his belief in positioning students as sense-makers led to the development of a primary source set which paired quantitative representations of data sources, such as graphs or tables, with testimonial, text-based sources. Zach expressed his alignment with a disciplinary perspective on historical inquiry, wanting students to construct their own historical understandings through careful interpretation and corroboration of primary sources. He told us, for example, that he chose primary sources that would enable him to support students, "in looking for the truth, as opposed to trying to sup-

port some preconceived notion or narrative" (DBI).[1] He also described the use of source-based instruction as a way of "murking everything up" and "introducing… gray area" (DBI) as opposed to lecture-based instruction and multiple-choice style assessments that imply right and wrong answers. When discussing how he might use his source set to support students' learning, Zach said that he would ask students to evaluate the reliability of Source 2 (Appendix B) to reinforce the disciplinary skill of document sourcing and to position his students as sense-makers (DBI).

However, Zach's source set also reflected the relationship between his students' community (a high socioeconomic status suburb of Detroit) and contemporary issues related to policing, race, and activism. Zach worried students may not pick up on subtle expressions of anti-Blackness embedded in the language of first-hand accounts and instead use the accounts as reason to reject historical facts about racism. According to Zach, sources that introduced "gray area" into source analysis might also create opportunities for some students to question the entire historical reality of racialized policing. He wanted to avoid positioning his students to make unjustifiable claims. Weighing this with his disciplinary goals, Zach wrote in his CoRe activity:

> In teaching a topic as thorny as policing, it's important to use authoritative sources as well as anecdotes. Data on arrests should be coupled with testimonies to provide unassailable evidence of unequal policing. This is important so that privileged students do not dismiss evidence of unequal policing as 'biased' or untrue.

Zach's assembly of his set of primary sources was animated in part by a tension between his students' sociohistorical positioning and his belief in positioning students as sense-makers by providing opportunities for students to interpret the meaning of sources. This tension contributed to the construction of a set of primary sources that paired testimony with quantitative representations.

Tensions between teachers' multiple beliefs also contributed to their development of primary source sets. Like Zach, Nicole also wanted to shift the intellectual burden in the classroom by asking students to interpret the meaning of primary sources. For Zach and Nicole, this belief came into tension with their belief in supporting students' understanding of the often subtle ways that anti-Black racism was expressed. This tension emerged in Zach and Nicole's reasoning as they explained why they included a specific source in their source set: Source 11 (Appendix B)—a letter from a White Detroiter opposing a citizen review board. They each wanted their students to understand that many White people supported racialized policing without using explicitly racist language. Zach and Nicole navigated the tension between this belief and their belief in supporting students to draw their own conclusions in different ways.

For Zach, the relationship between his students and the historical topic left him unsure how he might address the intra-belief tension. He told us, "what I would want to give my students is just that kind of really mild-mannered racism that comes out of a lot of White people in this time period and even today, right?" Zach worried, however, that if, hypothetically, the language of the Source 11 was more "agreeable," "some students might identify with that source… Their parents might identify with the views of someone in that source." He went further, telling us, "I'm not sure how I encourage my students to get to that conclusion without just hoping that some of them do… because it's tricky to kind of make people read between the lines" (DBI).

Nicole, like Zach, thought some of her students may sympathize with the implicitly racist arguments made by the author of Source 11 and come to the conclusion that the source did not express a racist sentiment. Nicole resolved this tension differently than Zach, suggesting she would support her students to use a close reading strategy that would illuminate the "racialized undertones of the letter." Nicole explained that she might stop and ask, "When Mr. so and so is writing the letter, [he] is talking about 'young punks.' What color are those young punks? Who do you picture? Why? Do you think he was picturing people of the same color?" (DBI). Nicole offered a way out of the tension through the use of a close reading disciplinary approach.

For Maryah, another teacher, a different intra-norm tension played a large role in structuring her reasoning about how to teach difficult history through primary sources. Similar to Zach and Nicole, Maryah also expressed a belief in supporting students as sense-makers through source interpretation and text-based discussions. However, Maryah also expressed a belief in the need to remain politically neutral and avoid the indoctrination of her students. While Maryah had substantial background knowledge relevant to the history of structural racism and policing, she struggled through how she might introduce and use sources to support students without cross-

1 DBI = Document-based interview; CoRe = content representation activity; FUI = follow-up interview

ing an ethical line. For example, Maryah wondered, "How do I present [these sources] in a way where I'm not attempting to lead my students toward a prepackaged conclusion?" She went on,

> I want them to take a look at history as objectively as possible, and then draw their own conclusions. And I realize it's borderline impossible. But this is teaching all about police brutality as it is associated with race, so it's so tough to try not to push an ideology (DBI).

Though she understood the relationship between policing and structural racism in the US ("it is ingrained in the system"), she did not feel comfortable "formally" introducing the concept of "structural racism" in class (DBI). Rather, she hoped that having students "objectively" analyze the sources would lead them to see structural racism in the history of policing (DBI, CoRe). She preferred to introduce these primary sources as part of, from her perspective, a less controversial topic. For Maryah, the tension between these two beliefs resulted in a general hesitancy around centering difficult contemporary topics in the classroom.

Another teacher, Jessica, also expressed an intra-norm tension related to positioning students as sense-makers. Like the rest of the teachers, Jessica expressed a belief in supporting students to make up their own minds in debates about difficult topics. However, in contrast to Maryah, Jessica believed it was important to let her students know where she stood on the topic of racialized policing. In explaining her selection of Source 14 (Appendix B)—a photograph of a police tank—Jessica said, "What I actually try to do is present opposing opinions to have them think. But they know that I have a problem with the militarization of police. I think that's important that I say that" (DBI). Within Jessica's reasoning, a different tension emerged compared to what we saw with Maryah. For Jessica, there was an intra-norm tension between her commitment to sharing her beliefs about contemporary political topics with her belief in preserving students' agency to interpret sources and grapple with differing perspectives.

5.2 Tensions around attending to students' affective well-being

As a personal belief or professional norm, five of the six teachers discussed wanting to avoid causing students psychological harm or provoking emotions that might interfere with learning. Teachers' reasoning about source selection was animated by the tension between this belief and their objective to create meaningful source-based instruction. The school and community contexts played a major role in this tension as teachers considered the positions and values of community members and students' experiences with police and feelings about police. Considering these factors, teachers reasoned about what sources might trigger anger, trauma, resentment, resistance, and hopelessness as well as what sources or approaches might engender awareness or civic action. Navigating these tensions led teachers to different outcomes. Four of the five teachers of majority Black students discussed strategies they felt would mitigate or redirect their students' anticipated negative emotional reactions, such as managing how their students interacted with a difficult source, reframing sources to humanize police officers, and choosing sources to highlight local activism. Zach, the only teacher who did not teach mostly Black students, chose sources he felt might provoke an emotional response in order to raise greater awareness among his students. At the same time, he relied on the framing of structural racism to combat anticipated emotional resistance to certain sources.

Jessica and Robert grappled with the tension that certain sources, though critical for understanding the history of Detroit's racialized policing, would likely provoke extreme feelings of sadness or anger toward police. Both Robert and Jessica drew on their understanding of their students' orientations toward police and the reality of policing in their communities when navigating this tension. If Robert picked a source that he thought might "rile students up" or provoke further "anti-police mentality" (CoRe), he considered ways of framing and introducing that source to "control those emotions" (DBI). For instance, Robert chose Source 3 (Appendix B), but explained, "I wouldn't want my kids to read that. I would want to read that for them… There's so much negativity in their lives. My students deal with death on a darn near monthly basis" (DBI). In our follow up interview, he clarified that by reading the source aloud, he could give students a chance to "feel that emotion… and then bring you back to some normalcy right afterwards." But if students were left to engage with the document on their own, he worried that they might be too "angry" to meaningfully engage with it. Ultimately, Robert navigated this tension not by avoiding the document but by choosing a strategy to contain its emotional effect.

Recognizing that many of her students have felt "dehumanized in their interactions with police" (DBI), Jessica chose an oral history interview of a Black former police officer and po-

lice chief (Source 1, Appendix B). She thought it was important to include a source featuring a Black officer, because "sometimes students forget that officers, or people in law enforcement, are people too and [those people] have had experiences similar to their own. It's like a binary sometimes, like us and them" (DBI). Through teaching with this source, she thought that some students might not only "shift their opinions" of law enforcement, but might be better able to process their trauma related to policing (DBI).

Relatedly, four of the teachers of majority Black students navigated tensions around sources they thought might arouse feelings of "hopelessness" (DBI, CoRe, FUI). Maryah selected a report by the NAACP on police brutality (Source 1, Appendix B) because she thought it was historically significant but worried that it "would reinforce the idea that things haven't changed and, maybe, perhaps never will change. That sense of hopelessness. That's what I think just from hearing [students]" (DBI). When we asked Jessica how she intended to use a first-hand account of police violence (Source 3, Appendix B), she replied,

> Sometimes I get torn about sharing things like that because—I don't feel hopeless, but in some ways, you do. It's like, okay, give them this information, and then what are they to do with it? So, I haven't figured that out yet, to be honest (DBI).

Later, Jessica explained, "You have to tackle the hard stuff, even if it's difficult, even if they probably can't handle it… the world doesn't really care, so they have to know it anyway" (DBI). For Jessica, the object of having her students confront the historical and present reality of policing in Detroit outweighed the risk of violating a norm about engendering a sense of hopelessness among her students.

Nicole, Maryah, Jessica, and Robert attempted to mitigate the risk of "hopelessness" by including sources that highlighted Black reformers and activists. Justifying her selection of the interview of a former Black police chief (Source 2, Appendix B), Maryah explained,

> I think seeing figures of similar ethnicity in these positions where they are making an impact and influence and seeing that—you know, not only did they come from your city, they had a perhaps similar upbringing and similar experiences. I think that can be very helpful to my students—very much so, motivational, inspirational. At least that's my hope (DBI).

Nicole, Jessica, and Maryah also talked about teaching with a student-created flier for a school "strike" (Source 17, Appendix B) (DBI). The flier included a list of students' demands, such as the removal of police officers from the school. Jessica said about this document, "I like the idea of students protesting because I just think they need to get involved" (DBI). For Nicole, Jessica, Robert, and Maryah, the selection of activist or reform focused sources helped to bring a positive framing toward the inquiry, but it did not resolve all tensions associated with the risks of provoking anger or hopelessness.

Zach, who teaches in a wealthy, plurality White suburb, navigated different tensions between beliefs, community, and instructional objectives. Sources that other teachers worried would provoke anger or resentment, Zach found useful for generating awareness in his students. His students, he told us, "are not really familiar with instances of police brutality… I find myself needing more sources so that they can be aware of police brutality and what it looks like" (DBI). In justifying his selection of Source 2 (Appendix B), he explained, "I kind of like it for the shock value to some extent…I think this [source] is kind of a reminder of the starkness of the issues that Detroit was facing and this time, right? Just how different it is than in the community that they live in" (DBI).

If anything, Zach assumed that, given the community of his students, there might be resistance to learning about this history. In particular, he discussed students with police family members who "can't imagine police officers doing these terrible things" (FUI). For these students, vivid and personal instances of violent policing might lead to further resistance. To get through to these students, Zach explained that, "You have to be able to talk about this [history] as a structural problem built into policing, but that doesn't mean that your dad or your uncle wasn't someone doing this right" (FUI). In this sense, his instructional objective of teaching the racist structures of policing in Detroit's history resolved some of the tension of potentially vilifying individual police members — especially for those students and families with close personal ties to police.

5.3 Florence: An unconflicted activist

Of our six teachers, Florence was the only one who did not seem to surface tensions when selecting or reasoning about sources. A lifelong Detroiter, teacher, and activist, Florence saw the sources as a way to share her own experiences with students and to introduce them to local civil rights groups, issues, and Black media. As with other teachers, Florence frequently connected her source selections to a deep understanding of her students, but she also tied the sources to a need for activism in her community. At one point in the conversation, she explained,

> You need to know the history. How did we get here? From where did we come?... They need to know so that they understand where and why their position here in the city of Detroit is so important. I hate to hear kids say, "When I get grown, I'm leaving Detroit." I hate to hear that because there's so much good here. And I'd like to train soldiers to do what's necessary to stay here and make this a better place (DBI).

She also connected the sources to specific organizations she wanted her students to consider joining or to Black media she wanted them to be familiar with. For instance, when we asked why she had selected the NAACP's report on policing (Source 1, Appendix B), she told us, "It would be an introduction to the NAACP... I would like for them [students] to become members [of the NAACP]... They have a good youth component. [M]y whole purpose is to get them involved" (DBI).

Florence was the exception among participants. Her decisiveness in choosing sources could be attributed to several factors, such as her knowledge of and personal connection to local history, her understanding of students, or her ideological clarity about the purpose of teaching this difficult history.

6 Discussion

In order to select a source set to teach a local difficult history, the experienced teacher-participants engaged in complex, situated pedagogical reasoning which often involved identifying and navigating tensions between their beliefs, community, and instructional objectives. The outcomes of teachers' decision-making highlight the promises and challenges of a critical historical inquiry approach to local, difficult history topics. Above all, the findings underscore the importance of teachers' multidimensional expertise in designing difficult history curricula.

6.1 Situating pedagogical reasoning in activity systems

Through our work with six experienced, Detroit-area teachers, we found that pedagogical reasoning around teaching source-based, local difficult history was an incredibly complex process, involving considerations of a host of factors, including curricular constraints, parent resistance, community values, local and national political events, student engagement, and student emotions.

Using an activity system approach, we were able to make sense of this complex process by focusing on how the teachers navigated, and often resolved tensions between different aspects of the activity system. We found that five of the six teachers grappled with tensions between the object of teaching the racialized history of Detroit policing and their beliefs in positioning students as sense-makers and avoiding psychological harm. The teacher's knowledge of the community – including students, families, and policing – often shaped or amplified those tensions.

Echoing previous research on teacher learning in difficult history (Suh et al., 2024), we found that pedagogical reasoning around local, difficult history may be best explained as situated within specific activity systems. This stands in contrast to pedagogical reasoning around "traditional" inquiry topics, where issues of identity, emotion, and community knowledge and experiences may be less salient.

6.2 The role of navigating tensions in pedagogical reasoning

Surfacing and negotiating tensions was an important feature of how five of our participants engaged in pedagogical reasoning. Reasoning through these tensions often led teachers to instructional design decisions intended to maintain the object of their activity without negating their beliefs or understanding of community needs and values. Zach, for instance, thought that

a structural framing of the history of policing as an institution would help to mitigate the resistance or resentment of students who have police family members. Jessica, on the other hand, chose a source she thought would humanize police officers in an attempt to problematize her students' existing antagonism toward the police in their community.

Not all teachers' pedagogical reasoning was animated by tensions and not all tensions led to outcomes that maintained teachers' beliefs or instructional objectives. Florence's instructional objective of civic awareness and civic action did not seem to be in tension with her beliefs about teaching or her knowledge of the community. For other teachers, certain tensions were not resolved or may have increased their resistance to the topic. At one point in the first interview, Maryah told us that, "I'm not African American, so I think it's tough for me to bring up those topics, just because of who I am and the fact that maybe I don't feel like it's my place..." (DBI). Other times, navigating tensions led teachers to decisions that seemed to belie their stated beliefs in positioning students as sense-makers, such as providing a pre-formed interpretation of a source.

Nevertheless, navigating tensions seemed to be an important and often productive part of teachers' pedagogical reasoning, particularly when it came to aligning the object of designing a source set with their beliefs and their communities.

6.3 Critical historical inquiry and local difficult history

Teacher participants' pedagogical reasoning underscored the challenges of "traditional" inquiry approaches to politically and emotionally fraught histories (Blevins et al., 2020; Santiago, 2019). Participants' pedagogical reasoning about source selection often led them to outcomes that reflected dimensions of critical historical inquiry, such as beliefs in raising critical awareness (Zach, Jessica, Florence, Nicole), sparking civic engagement (Florence, Nicole, Jessica), and directly connecting historical content to students' lived experiences and identities (all teachers) (Reich et al., 2023).

It is important to note that our teacher participants were not specifically trained in critical historical inquiry. Like other inductive research on critical historical inquiry teachers (e.g., Blevins et al., 2020), our teachers came to these practices through their ideological commitments, knowledge of students, and wealth of experience. Though our sample was small and non-representative, the results of this study suggest that critical historical inquiry approaches may be a natural fit for experienced, justice-oriented teachers when approaching local, difficult history topics.

That being said, inquiry (including critical historical inquiry) may not always be the preferred approach to teaching local, difficult histories and it certainly was not always the approach taken by our participants. At times, the participants resisted certain topics and framings or chose to tightly manage students' interpretations of or interactions with a particular source. Nevertheless, inquiry-based instruction was by far the most common framework for selecting and justifying sources.

7 Conclusion

Inquiry-based history instruction can empower students as sense-makers and help them to develop critical thinking skills; however, some teachers may lack the pedagogical knowledge or support to engage students in effective historical inquiries (Martell, 2020; Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013). Teachers are likely to face additional tensions when designing critical historical inquiry, which often centers around sensitive issues and difficult histories.

In this study, we looked at how a group of experienced secondary social studies teachers reasoned about selecting primary sources, a core practice of inquiry teaching. We found that teachers' reasoning was animated by tensions around how to teach about policing while positioning students as sense-makers and managing students' affective responses.

Variations in teachers' reasoning reflected differing realities and understandings about their and their students' racial and geographic identities and experiences with policing. It also reflected their varying narratives of local and national history, knowledge and stances on historical inquiry, and ideological clarity. Commitments to humanizing figures or engaging students in "objective" inquiry may cause tensions when trying to teach an accessible narrative about systemic racism — especially when those historical figures and sources are complex. Balancing the need to make students aware of the reality of policing without feeding student antagonism

or hopelessness will also likely continue to be a source of tension for many teachers in urban or majority-Black areas.

Overall, findings appear to complicate "traditional" notions of inquiry-based history instruction for such histories and highlight the situated nature of pedagogical reasoning. For many of our teacher-participants and their students, the history of policing in Detroit is not at all removed from the current realities where they live. The clear connections between present and past make this history meaningful but also visceral and political. For these reasons, teachers felt an additional responsibility of managing historical narratives, source interpretations, and emotional responses that often ran counter to their regular disciplinary stances. For these teachers, surfacing and grappling with these tensions was a key part of how they reasoned about inquiry.

As our teacher participants shared their thinking about how to choose and use sources to teach about a difficult past, we heard echoes of various teaching approaches: disciplinary, use-of-history, civic education, and critical and racial literacy frameworks that often reflected critical historical inquiry (Blevins et al., 2020; Santiago, 2019). When it comes to making history classrooms meaningful for students in a politically and emotionally fraught context, teachers may need to recognize and respond to the balance between their disciplinary goals and their responsibilities around students' affective well-being.

7.1 Limitations

One limitation of our project is that our teachers were not designing curriculum for an immediate or actual teaching context. Rather, in order to elicit teachers' pedagogical reasoning, we designed a simulation to approximate the process teachers might go through when selecting inquiry sources. Inevitably, the simulation in some ways departed from how teachers might make decisions about what to teach or how to teach their students. In future projects, we hope to further explore teachers' reasoning and teaching about difficult local history in more realistic conditions and with a research design that enables us to also ask and answer questions about resulting student experiences and learning.

7.2 Implications

Further research is needed on teacher pedagogical reasoning in difficult history. Given the socially complex and inherently political nature of local, difficult history, researchers may find the frameworks of activity theory and critical historical inquiry useful to unearth and explain tensions and practices. Additionally, as Suh et al. (2024) found, teacher learning and decision-making may shift as teachers "boundary cross" from one activity system to another. More research is needed to understand how "boundary crossing" shapes teachers' pedagogical reasoning.

Regarding those who are responsible for the design and facilitation of professional learning experiences for in-service teachers, our study emphasized the need to recognize the dynamic local conditions, including historical culture, that contextualize teachers' professional lives. This implication aligns with existing research on supporting teacher learning and the importance of grounding teacher learning experiences in relevant contexts (Monte-Sano et al., 2023). To do so, teacher educators and those who offer professional development for history teachers should foster authentic relationships and collaborate with teachers as expert partners in designing teacher learning curricula and resources.

For teacher educators, our findings offered a potential heuristic to support preservice teachers' critical pedagogical reasoning. Tensions could be used like classroom case studies, as instructional tools to prompt novice or future teachers' reasoning in response to hypothetical but realistic dilemmas. For example, teacher educators could ask novice teachers to identify and track tensions that emerge as they design a lesson plan and then use those tensions to support class discussion among a group of novice teachers. Or, teacher educators could draw on existing tensions identified in qualitative case studies of expert teachers' thinking and practice and ask novice teachers to reflect on and respond to them.

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Specific contribution of the authors

The authors contributed equally.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Please consider this question with your students in mind. What do you think are the most important aspects of Detroit history for your students to learn? Please explain each answer you give.
2. Do you identify with a certain race or ethnicity? If so, what?
3. Do you identify with a certain socioeconomic class? If so, what?
4. How would you describe your relationship to Detroit?
5. How would you describe the neighborhood where you live, now?
6. Where do you teach (district and school)?
7. Please briefly describe the student body at your school.
8. What subject(s) and grade level(s) do you teach?
9. What subject(s) and grade level(s) have you taught in the past?
10. How many years have you been a teacher?
11. Why do you think studying history is important for your students?
12. Describe a typical history lesson in your class.
13. Briefly explain your interest in teaching the history of activism and policing in Detroit.
14. Are there any personal experiences that have influenced why or how you teach history or social studies? If so, please explain.
15. Does the topic of policing or police violence ever come up in your teaching? If yes, please briefly describe an example.
16. Does the topic of community activism ever come up in your teaching? If yes, please briefly describe an example.
17. Explain why you think your students would or would not be interested in studying the history of community activism and police violence?
18. Do you have any concerns about teaching these topics? Please explain.

Appendix B

Primary Source List

Source 1: Police Brutality Complaints Reported to the Detroit Branch of the NAACP
Source 2: Former DPD Chief, Isaiah McKinnon Recounts Attack by Police as Teen
Source 3: Retired Officer, Joynal Muthleb Testimony to the US Commission on Civil Rights (1960)
Source 4: Black Detroiter, Iris Cox Writes to the Detroit News (1961) about News Coverage
Source 5: NAACP Housing Discrimination Picketing Campaign (1963)
Source 6: Protest of the Police Killing of Cynthia Scott
Sources 7 & 8: Black Activists Respond to Scott Killing
Source 9: Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME) Flyer
Source 10: 1965 Cartoon About Police Violence
Source 11: David Lobsinger Letter to Mayor Cavanagh on Subject of Policing and Opposing the Idea of a Civilian Review Board
Source 12: Number of Black and White Officers by Precinct (1958-1963)
Source 13: Detroit Police Recruitment Brochure (1966)
Source 14: Detroit Police Department Tank in DPD Brochure (1965)
Source 15: Detroit Police Commandos Beat Two Demonstrators (1965)
Source 16: Police Commissioner Ray Girardin Speech to DPD Officers on Warrantless Arrests (1965)
Source 17: Central High Strike Flyer

Appendix C

Content Representation Questionnaire

Participants answered each of the following questions for each of the eight "big ideas" below.

Questions

1. What do you intend students to learn about this idea?
2. Why is it important for students to know this?
3. What else do you know about this idea (that you do not intend students to know yet)?
4.What difficulties/limitations are connected with teaching this idea?
5. What knowledge about students (e.g., their thinking, experiences, or emotions) may influence your teaching of this idea?
6. What other factors may influence your teaching of this idea?
7. What teaching procedures or practices would you use (and reasons for using these to engage with this idea)?
8. How will you ascertain students' understanding or confusion around this idea (including likely range of responses)?

Big Ideas

a. Black Americans have and continue to be disproportionately targeted by policing policies and practices.
b. Individuals and activist organizations use different methods for bringing about change.
c. Positive social change is often the result of sustained activism.
d. White citizens' and organizations' support for (or silence about) the status quo can prevent or slow change from occurring.
e. Within any group, the individuals who belong to the group represent a wide range of experiences and opinions.
f. Institutions, such as police and governments, go to great lengths to maintain their positions of power.
g. Studying the past can help us understand and/or take action in the present.
h. If you have a big idea that's not listed, please type it here:

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"Can genocide be prevented?"

Swedish lower secondary students determine historical significance

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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.

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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.

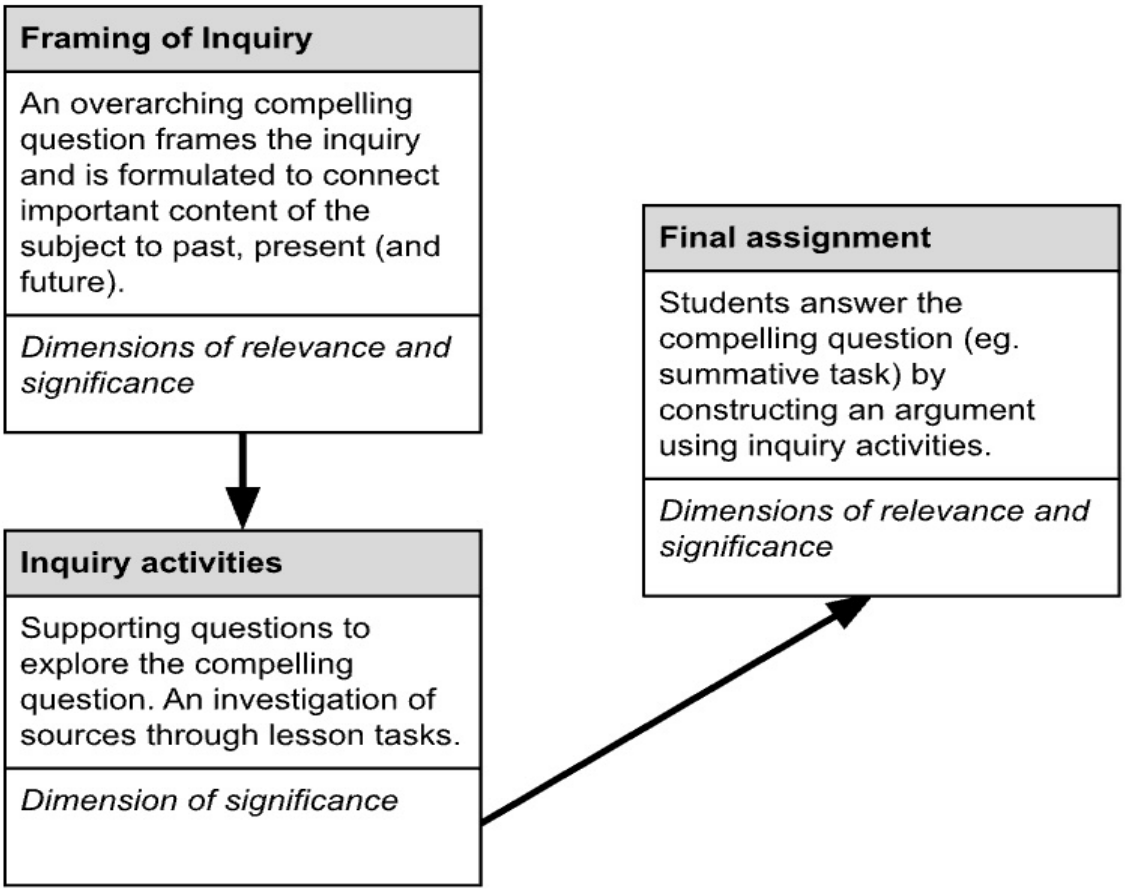
Following various frameworks for determining historical significance (e.g., Seixas, 1994, 2013; Phillips, 2002; Counsell, 2004), Van Straaten et al. (2016) have argued for a distinction between *historical significance* and *historical relevance*. Historical significance refers to when an event, process, 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.

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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.

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Teaching about terrorism

Evaluating a historicizing pedagogy in times of crisis and disruption

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Abstract

This evaluation study investigated the impact of a historicizing workshop on terrorism in Dutch secondary education on students' self-reported fear levels, statistical and historical knowledge concerning terrorism, and perceived control. Our pedagogy emphasized terrorism's historical roots and provided facts about the threat of terrorism and knowledge to help students gain a sense of control over it. We used a pretest-posttest design and mixed-method approach. 390 students completed a survey before and after the workshop and 20 students were interviewed. The quantitative results show that students gained statistical and historical knowledge concerning terrorism and experienced a significant increase in perceived control over the threat of terrorism. Moreover, they showed a significant reduction in fear levels. The qualitative results tentatively suggest that increasing knowledge on terrorism (factual, historical, and knowledge on preventing attacks and managing their impact) can help reduce fear. This paper provides implications for teaching terrorism in secondary education.

Keywords

historicizing pedagogy, terrorism, evaluation study, fear of terrorism, history education

1. Introduction

The core goal of terrorists is to target public perception by exacerbating fear among citizens through the use or threat of violence (Braithwaite, 2013). While terrorists aim at society at large, research has shown that minors are disproportionately impacted by terrorist attacks compared to adults (Pfefferbaum et al., 2003), due to their limited ability to cognitively understand the rationale behind terrorism (Van Overmeire et al., 2020). The impact caused by attacks is not limited to minors who are directly exposed to terrorist violence, but also felt by those learning about the attack from a distance, i.e., through media coverage or discussion with peers (Van Overmeire et al., 2020). These indirectly exposed minors tend to overestimate the risk terrorist violence poses, which might increase fear (Van Overmeire et al., 2020). This can partly be explained by the terrifying images and intense projections of threat, uncertainty, and danger that minors are ex-

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posed to on (social) media following an attack (Comer & Kendall, 2007). To date, little is known about the level of fear of terrorism amongst minors who are indirectly exposed to it (Van Overmeire et al., 2020). Just like their peers who are directly affected by terrorism, they need coping mechanisms to deal with fear, violence, and feelings of injustice, and to strengthen their sense of control over seemingly uncontrollable events.

In contrast to sensationalist media stories, schools can offer a safe space in which students can systematically learn about the history and impact of terrorism. Although few studies have examined the impact of educational interventions on terror-induced fear and perceived threat, the results are promising (Fischer et al., 2011; Krause et al., 2022; Theriault et al., 2017). The key lies in the knowledge-based approach of these interventions: learning about terrorism and terrorists' motives makes the phenomenon less frightening and helps students better assess the threat it poses. However, these studies only address one type of knowledge, focusing on the rationale behind terrorism, and are limited to students in higher education and the US context. Various studies suggest that other types of knowledge, such as facts and figures about the actual threat of terrorism, a historical framework, and knowledge to help students gain a sense of control over the threat of terrorism could be effective in reducing terror-induced fear (e.g., Greenaway et al., 2014).

In this paper, therefore, we explore to what extent providing information about the actual threat of terrorism, placing the phenomenon in a historical context, and helping students gain a sense of control over the threat of terrorism can help reduce students' fear of terrorism. We suggest that providing a historicizing pedagogy through which students can orient themselves in time and place can help them to build resilience against the uncertainty of terrorist attacks, making history education directly relevant for the students' personal lives (Van Straaten et al., 2016; Wansink et al., 2021). In line with this, we investigated the effects of "What is terrorism?": a workshop in Dutch secondary education conducted by TerInfo.[1] TerInfo is a multidisciplinary pedagogical project within Utrecht University, The Netherlands, that helps teachers discuss terrorism and other disruptive events in a historicized way by providing educational support (i.e., materials, workshops) and conducting research. We used a pretest-posttest design and mixed-method approach to investigate the impact of the workshop on the students' fear levels, perceived control, and (historical and statistical) knowledge. 390 students, aged 12-19 years old, across different levels of Dutch secondary education school classes participated in this study by filling in a survey before and after the workshop, and 20 students engaged in a supplementary interview.

By analyzing the impact of the workshop, we want to explore the relevance of our historicizing pedagogy on terrorism and what types of knowledge can help students to better understand terrorism as a phenomenon and reduce the fear it causes. Our aim is to make history education relevant for overcoming and understanding tensions in our current times and promote student well-being. Moreover, our insights can provide history teachers and curriculum designers with design criteria to teach about terrorism and other disruptive events in an informed way.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Fear of terrorism and perceived risk among minors

Fear of terrorism can be defined as "an individual's anxiety about terrorist attacks" (Van der Does et al., 2021, p. 1279). Terror-induced fear can be especially high among minors, due to their feelings of helplessness, uncertainty, and limited ability to cognitively understand the context behind terrorists' actions (e.g., Van Overmeire et al., 2020). While research has examined the impact on minors who experienced terrorist violence firsthand such as high rates of post-traumatic stress disorders (Gurwitch et al., 2002) and depression (Kar, 2019), less is known about the impact on minors who experienced the attacks indirectly, i.e., through (social) media coverage or discussions with peers (Van Overmeire et al., 2020). The few studies that have been conducted on the effect of indirect exposure to terrorism on minors show that terrorism has a destabilizing effect on these minors too, causing psychological distress (Comer & Kendall, 2007), increased fear of terrorism, and increased perceived risk (Nellis & Savage, 2012).

1 https://terinfo.nl

Related to terror-induced fear is the concept of perceived risk of terrorism. Perceived risk can be defined as the perceived likelihood of future terrorist attacks and is positively predicted by fear of terrorism (Kule et al., 2021). Building on previous research, we discern two forms of threat perception: societal (estimated likelihood of attacks in one's country in the next years) and personal threat perception (estimated likelihood of oneself or a family member becoming a victim of an attack) (e.g., Comer et al., 2008).

2.2 Types of knowledge to decrease terror-induced fear

Minors that are indirectly exposed to terrorism require tools to make sense of and decrease their fear of the terrifying events happening worldwide. Based on the work of Krause and colleagues (2022), we believe that education on terrorism has the potential to decouple the factual knowledge regarding terrorism from the negative emotions students attach to them. The classroom environment allows students to systematically learn about terrorist attacks without the sensational and emotional baggage of media environments (Halperin et al., 2013).

Despite the potential relevance of the educational setting to decrease fear of terrorism, there is a lack of studies on the impact of educational interventions with this aim. The few studies that have been conducted show that improving knowledge is crucial in reducing terror-induced fear in minors (Fischer et al., 2011; Krause et al., 2022; Theriault et al., 2017). These studies are aimed at teaching students about the rationale behind terrorism in the context of American higher education. We build on these studies by incorporating other types of knowledge into the intervention and extending it to another context. Based on various studies, we have incorporated three types of knowledge that might help reduce students' fear of terrorism (e.g., Greenaway et al., 2014). In the following sections, we further introduce these: 1) facts and figures about the actual threat of terrorism, 2) providing a historical framework, and 3) knowledge to help students gain a sense of control over the threat of terrorism.

2.2.1 Facts and figures about the actual threat of terrorism

Statistically, the probability of becoming a victim of terrorism is extremely low worldwide, especially in Western Europe. For example, in the Netherlands only six people have died from terrorist violence since 2000, though each incident caused a tremendous shock in society. Despite the very small chance of becoming a victim of terrorism, research shows that people tend to overestimate the threat of terrorism (Kearns et al., 2021). For example, a study by Huddy and colleagues (2002) found that after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, people estimated the likelihood that a terrorist attack would occur in America in the near future much higher than they did before. In the Dutch context, recent research conducted by TerInfo among children aged 10-12 showed that although the number of attacks in the Western world decreased in 2022 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022), 87% of students thought the number of attacks was increasing and 34% considered terrorism a serious threat (Vleeskens et al., 2023). These analyses reveal the discrepancies between the overestimation of the probability of a terrorist attack or being victimized by terrorist violence and the small likelihood of actually encountering an attack (Skøt et al., 2021).

Media exposure tends to influence the discrepancy between reality and people's perceptions of terrorism (Pfefferbaum et al., 2001), leading to excessive safety concerns, a lower sense of control, and a sense of helplessness, due to the uncertainty and unpredictability of an attack (Huddy et al., 2002; Rubaltelli et al., 2018). By helping minors to interpret facts and figures about the actual threat of terrorism, educators could provide them with a rational grip on an emotional matter (Sjøen, 2023).

2.2.2 Placing terrorism in a historical framework

When a violent event occurs, such as a terrorist attack, a sense of shock and urgency prevails in society. Minors often encounter these events unfiltered through graphic images on social media (Comer & Kendall, 2007). Because of their young age and limited historical awareness, minors will likely not have adequate background knowledge to consume and contextualize news related to terrorism, and they will be less able to develop a grasp on this news or situate themselves in response to that news on their own (Wansink et al., 2021). Hence, they need a framework to help interpret what is happening around them, history can provide such a framework (Mosborg, 2002).

Central to our pedagogy is the historicization of present-day disruptive moments: temporarily zooming out of the contemporary event and zooming in on the past. This pedagogy connects the past, present, and future in a way in which history helps to assess, explain, and predict present-day disruptive events (Rüsen, 1989; Van Straaten et al., 2016). Furthermore, sensitive and controversial topics (e.g., terrorism) can evoke such high emotions and strong opinions that it can be difficult to have a conversation about them in class (Goldberg & Savenije, 2018). Historicization can be used to defuse such heated debates by placing the phenomena into a larger historical context or by comparing analogous cases over time (Van Straaten et al., 2019). By relating the "hot" present issue to the past, it cools down for students, making them less anxious and more able to discuss the topic at hand, as it no longer poses a direct threat to them.

The Waves Theory, developed by historian and political scientist David Rapoport, is an example of a historical framework which is well suited to historicize terrorism (De Graaf, 2021; Rapoport, 2002).[2] By placing the course of (modern) terrorism on a timeline and visualizing it as four different waves, propelled by distinct events, ideologies, motives, and situations, Rapoport's theory teaches three important lessons. First, it explains that terrorism is not a new phenomenon but has a longer history, which we can learn from when dealing with current attacks or waves of terrorism. Historicizing terrorism enables minors to place terrorist events in a larger perspective and helps them assess their own position toward these violent trends (Wansink et al., 2021). Students can learn that people before them dealt with the same phenomena as an enduring human issue and found ways to deal with them (Van Straaten et al., 2016). Second, terrorism is not a unilateral concept; attacks have been committed from various motives and rationales. For example, the theory shows that terrorism is not inherently religious or jihadist (Rapoport, 2002). Third, terrorist violence waxes and wanes, as is exemplified by the wave metaphor. Until now, every terrorist trend has come to an end, so the theory can help us predict that the wave we encounter now, and future waves, will also come to an end (Wansink & De Graaf, 2019). Comprehending this can provide comfort and improve well-being.

These lessons are well suited for an educational setting, because they help teachers and minors alike to situate contemporary events in a broader framework which might help them to make sense of terrorist attacks and their threat and defuse the conversation about them in class (Wansink & De Graaf, 2019). By historicizing terrorism in educational programs, teachers can both challenge the terrorists' aim of sowing fear and panic amongst the population and provide their students with clues and cues to "deal" with terrorism as an analyzable and even manageable problem in time and space.

2.2.3 Helping students gain a sense of control over the threat of terrorism

Terrorist attacks might seem uncontrollable events and are in fact very hard to prevent. However, individuals and society as a whole can play a role in managing the effects of terrorism, and police and security forces have successfully prevented attacks in the past. We pose that perceiving terrorism as an uncontrollable phenomenon could lead to fear of terrorism. Conversely, research has shown that a high level of perceived control helps people cope with threatening situations because it restores their sense of psychological security and stability (Greenaway et al., 2014). Perceived control is defined as "a person's perceived degree of control over a stressful encounter" (Zeidner, 2005) and can offer a psychological means of protection in situations of perceived threat and danger (Greenaway et al., 2014). In the context of terrorism, perceived control can be seen as a coping resource to help people manage stressors more effectively related to the exposure to terrorist attacks (Zeidner, 2005).

In order to increase minors' sense of control over terrorism, we suggest it might help to provide knowledge on two aspects of perceived control. The first aspect is knowledge on what we can do ourselves to help minimize the effects of terrorist attacks (Wansink & De Graaf, 2019). The second aspect is on the level of police and security forces. By increasing students' knowledge on how the police and security forces counter terrorism and by demonstrating that they have prevented many attacks in the past, students learn that the police and security forces attempt to control terrorism.

2 This theory has been met with some criticism (e.g., Parker & Sitter, 2016) but can still be used as an empirical grid for studying terrorism over time.

2.3 Current study

Terrorist attacks disproportionally affect minors, resulting in heightened fear of terrorism, an overestimation of its threat, and difficulties in putting attacks into perspective. To deal with this, minors require tools to make them more resilient in order to increase their well-being. Schools prove to be a suitable context to provide these. In our historicizing workshop, we focused on three types of knowledge (i.e., statistical knowledge, historical knowledge, and knowledge to help students gain a sense of control over the threat of terrorism) that might help to decrease students' fear levels regarding terrorism. This study evaluates the impact of this workshop. Therefore, our research questions are the following:

1. Did students' self-reported fear levels, statistical knowledge, historical knowledge of terrorism, and perceived control change after they participated in a historicizing workshop about terrorism?
2. What (type of) qualitative indications did students provide for changing their self-reported fear levels, statistical knowledge, historical knowledge, and perceived control?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique between May and November 2022. Overall, 601 students from 28 classrooms and 10 different schools participated. Students, parents of students under the age of 16, and schoolboards were informed about the purpose of the study and were asked for consent.

Because of missing data from two classrooms, we analyzed the data from 26 classrooms. In addition, 167 students completed only the pre-test, 24 students completed only the post-test, and 20 students provided incomplete data (i.e., filled in less than 80% of the survey). The final sample consisted of 390 students. Students' ages ranged between 12 and 19 years old (M = 14.58, SD = 1.48). Students reported their gender as female (58%), male (35%), non-binary (2%), or "preferred not to respond" (4%). The cultural background of students varied, including students who identified with single nationalities (N = 310), such as Dutch (76%) or Turkish (1%), and double nationalities (N = 51), such as Dutch and Indonesian (4%). The majority of students did not identify with any religion (57%), others identified with Christianity (31%), Islam (3%), Judaism (0.2%), and Buddhism (0.2%). The students came from different educational levels: preparatory secondary vocational education (vmbo, N = 59), higher general secondary education (havo, N = 66), pre-university education (vwo, N = 137), mixed classrooms of vmbo and havo (N = 38), and mixed classrooms of havo and vwo (N = 90). In addition to our quantitative approach, we interviewed 20 students (13 female, seven male) on a voluntary basis from seven different schools, ranging in age between 12 and 19 years old (M = 15.55, SD = 1.90).

3.2 Design and procedure

This study used a one-group pretest-posttest design with a mixed-method approach. Students completed a survey before and after the workshop "What is terrorism?". See Table 1 for a description of the lesson plan of this 50-minute workshop. All educational materials related to the workshop can be found in the Supplemental Materials (Bammens et al., 2025). The workshop's learning objectives are that students learn 1) what terrorism is, 2) to put terrorism in a historical perspective, 3) to better assess the threat of terrorism, and 4) that everyone in society can play a role in countering terrorism. Additionally, 20 students were interviewed after the workshop, selected on a voluntary basis. The closed questions on the survey were quantitatively analyzed to examine research question 1, the open questions on the survey and interview were qualitatively analyzed to answer research question 2.

Table 1: Short description of the lesson plan of the workshop "What is terrorism?"

Time-frame in minutes	Topic	Activity	Corresponding variable	Example
0-5	Introduction and prior knowledge	Answer question 'what do you think of when you hear the word terrorism', which translates into a word cloud		
5-20	What is terrorism?	Definition of terrorism is provided, comprehension is checked by a short quiz, multiperspectivity is explained		Perspectives of freedomfighter versus terrorist
20-35	Question 1: How old is terrorism?	Answer question with historical information, watch a video about the Waves Theory, discuss main take-aways	Historical knowledge	
35-40	Question 2: Is the number of terrorist attacks increasing or decreasing worldwide?	Answer question with statistical information, look at and reflect on figures	Statistical knowledge	One of the figures shows that the number of attacks worldwide has dropped significantly since 2014
40-45	Question 3: How many people have died as a result of a terrorist attack in the Netherlands since 2000?	Answer question with statistical information, teacher explains how terrorism is countered in the Netherlands and that this policy is effective	Statistical knowledge & perceived control	
45-50	Conclusion	Summarize lessons learned, discuss what students themselves can do against terrorism	Perceived control	E.g., by not sharing images of attacks, not letting oneself be unnecessarily frightened, and looking for commonalities rather than differences

3.3 Measurements

3.3.1 Survey

All multiple-choice items on the survey used a five-point Likert scale, for example from 1 (Not afraid or totally disagree) to 5 (Very afraid or totally agree). The survey also included open-ended questions, since open questions are recommended in more exploratory and complex studies to increase the ecological validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To test and improve the validity of the survey items, we piloted the survey in two classes of a Dutch secondary school. Additionally, two students per class participated in cognitive interviews where we inquired if the survey items were clear (Willis & Artino, 2013). We also tested the content validity of the survey by asking experts (on pedagogy and quantitative methods in empirical studies) to review the survey (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2020). As a result, we modified the formulations in the introduction and revised some of the items when it became apparent that students did not comprehend their intended meaning.

In Table S1 (available online as Supplemental Material) we provided a description of all the items and details on the measurement and data analysis (Bammens et al., 2025). To measure students' fear levels, we used six multiple choice items adapted from existing surveys by Comer and colleagues (2008) and Al-Badayneh and colleagues (2011). For example, we asked students "How afraid of terrorism are you?". For statistical knowledge on the number of victims in the Netherlands and terrorist attacks worldwide, we used two single items (e.g., "According to you, how many people have died as a result of a terrorist attack in the Netherlands since 2000?"). We measured historical knowledge on terrorism operationalized as the Waves Theory (Rapoport, 2002) and religious association, and used two single multiple-choice items (e.g., "Terrorism is more prevalent in some periods than others"). For perceived control on the individual and societal level we used two single multiple-choice items (e.g., "Police and security forces can prevent terrorism from taking place in the Netherlands") adapted from Greenaway and colleagues (2014).

In the post-test we asked students five evaluative questions to assess the quality of the workshop (e.g., "What was good about the workshop?") and to reflect on its learning goals. The question "In what ways did you think differently about terrorism after the workshop? If you don't know, fill in 'don't know'" was used in our qualitative analysis to answer research question 2.

3.3.2 Interview

Following the topics from the survey, we asked students in the semi-structured interviews after the post-test to explain some of their answers, if their answers had changed after the workshop and, if that was the case, why they had. The complete interview protocol and topic list is available online in the Supplemental Materials (Bammens et al., 2025). We asked students for example: "Do you fear terrorism? Did your answer change because of the workshop?". These data were also used to answer research question 2. Additionally, we used the interview transcripts to gain more in-depth understanding to the closed items in the survey on statistical and historical knowledge.

3.4 Data-analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative data-analysis

As one item on statistical knowledge was an open-ended question, we recoded students' answers into a numerical format. For example, "approximately 500" was recoded as "500", and "between 10,000 and 15,000" became "12,500". We coded the following answers as missing values: "I don't know" (N = 61), "not a lot/a couple" and "many/a lot/numerous/quite many" (N = 18).

For the final data analysis, we first assessed the data distribution for normality and potential outliers. To answer the first research question, we used Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, because assumptions of normality were not met. Statistical significance was defined at $p < .05$. We calculated Cohen's d effect sizes by transforming the Wilcoxon test z score using the online effect size calculator Psychometrica (Lenhard & Lenhard, 2016). We used IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28) for all our quantitative analyses.

3.4.2 Exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis on fear levels

We investigated the factorial structure of the six fear items with an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Principal component analysis was employed as the extraction method. Eigenvalues greater than 1 were used to determine the number of factors to retain. The analysis revealed that two factor-solutions explained 60% of the variance. According to our interpretation of this result, and considering previous research differentiating between personal and societal threat (e.g., Comer et al., 2008), factor 1 encompassed items (1, 4, 5, 6) associated with personal-related fear of terrorism. Factor 2 consisted of items (2 and 3) associated with societal-related fear of terrorism (national and regional level, Al-Badayneh et al., 2011). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.71, indicating that the sample was adequate, and Bartlett's test of sphericity gave a p-value of < .001.

In addition, a reliability analysis using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was performed to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the two fear level factors on personal and societal fear. The analysis showed a sufficient Cronbach's Alpha (α = .82) on a combination of items (1, 4, 5, 6) that measured personal-related fear. However, the items 2 and 3 measuring societal threat showed an insufficient Cronbach's Alpha (α = .34) and therefore we excluded this factor from our analysis.

3.4.3 Qualitative data-analysis

We conducted a qualitative content analysis using open and axial coding (Boeije, 2010) to identify patterns in the data from the explanatory open-ended questions of the pre- and post-survey on fear and perceived control. First, we openly and axially coded a section of the pre-test data. The axial codes were organized into a coding scheme. Next, the post-test data were openly coded to list if it suited the coding scheme of the pre-test. Some sub-codes were added, and some code-names were broadened or changed. For example, after the workshop, students were able to name more examples of actions they could undertake themselves against terrorism. The code "yes, awareness and knowledge" was expanded to include the sub-codes "talking about it", "no/less attention to it" and "less division". Once all data were collected, the coding scheme and data were transferred to the coding software NVivo (version 1.6.1), where the axial coding of all data was completed.

The transcripts of the interviews and answers to the evaluative question were coded manually, without coding software. A Word document was made with the variables, and excerpts of the transcript were copied and pasted in this document to the variable it corresponded to.

All coding was done by the first author. Codes or segments of text that were in doubt by the coder were discussed with at least one co-author. A feedback loop was used throughout the coding process, in which the codes and categorization were continuously reviewed. To increase the reliability of the study, an audit trail was conducted with an external auditor who revised and assessed the entire qualitative data collection and analyses (Akkerman et al., 2008). More information about the qualitative data collection, analyses, and the report of the auditor can be found in the audit trail report available online as Supplemental Material (Bammens et al., 2025).

4 Results

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of dependent variables and results of Wilcoxon test

Dependent variables	Pre-test			Post-test			Wilcoxon test	
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*z***	*d****
Statistical knowledge								
Number of victims in the Netherlands	307	504423.4	5811046.1	379	934.0	15615.3	-14.80*	0.87
Attacks worldwide	332	3.7	0.9	376	2.4	1.2	-12.06*	0.68
Historical knowledge								
Waves Theory	349	3.8	1.1	383	4.1	1.2	-4.35*	0.23
Religious association	341	2.5	1.3	380	2.1	1.2	-4.21*	0.22
Perceived control								
Individual perceived control	321	2.2	1.2	366	3.0	1.2	-8.23*	0.46
Perceived control of the police and security forces	367	3.5	1.0	379	3.9	1.0	-6.12*	0.32
Fear								
Personal-related fear levels	390	2.3	1.0	390	1.9	0.8	-10.28*	0.54

Note. *$p < .001$; **z score of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test; *** Cohen's d effect size.

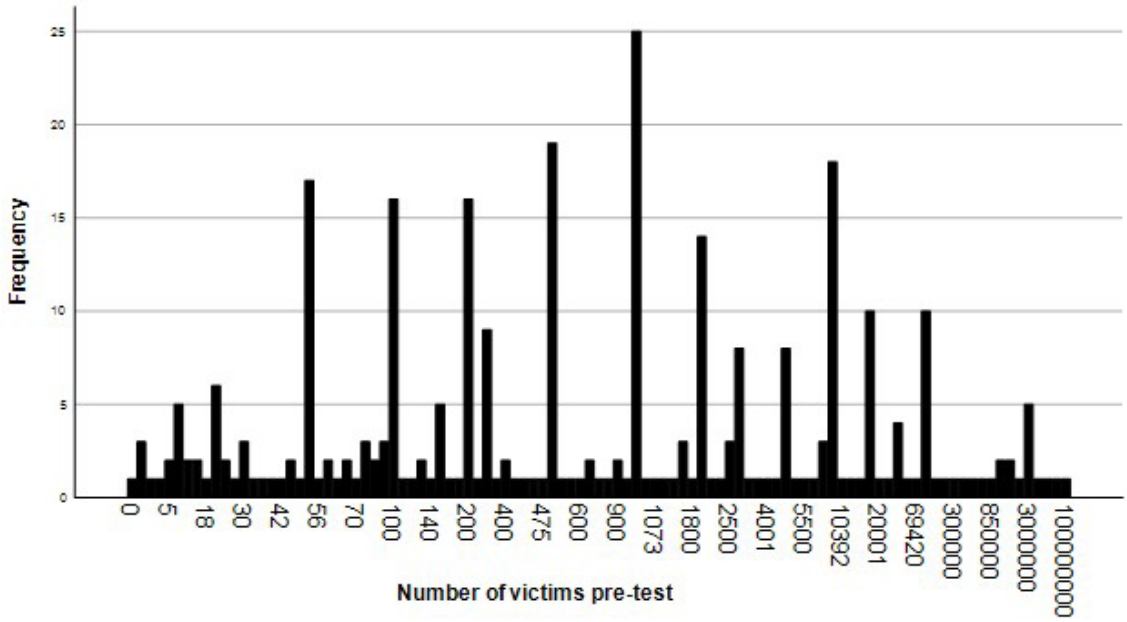
To determine whether students' self-reported responses changed, and if so, in what way, we conducted seven separate Wilcoxon signed-rank tests on each dependent variable. We found a significant difference between pre- and post-test in each variable. Specifically, results show that participants had a significant increase in statistical knowledge, historical knowledge, and perceived control, and a significant reduction in fear levels. In Table 2, we display the descriptive statistics for every dependent variable based on the two time points (pre- and post-test).

4.1 The impact on students' statistical knowledge

4.1.1 Number of victims in the Netherlands

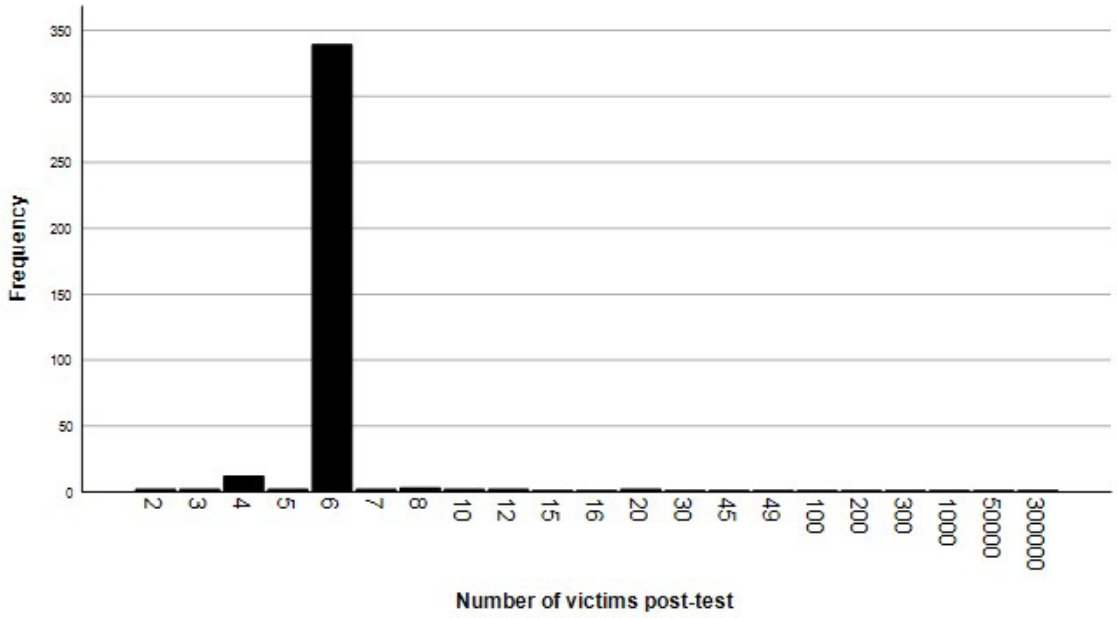
To assess whether students' estimation of the number of victims from terrorist attacks would decrease after the workshop, we conducted a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The outcome indicated that post-test scores (M = 934.0; SD = 15615.3) were significantly lower than pre-test scores (M = 504423.4; SD = 5811046.1), z = -14.80, p < .001, d = 0.87. For the number of victims on the pre-test the median was 700 and the mode was 1000, compared to a median of 6 and a mode of 6 on the post-test. To better interpret these findings, we visualized the distribution of the pre- and post-test answers in Figures 1 and 2. Student answers "I don't know" (N = 61) and unquantifiable answers such as "a lot" (N = 18) were excluded from Figure 1.

Figure 1: Bar chart with frequency distribution of number of victims in the Netherlands on the pre-test (N = 307)



This result shows that students overestimated the number of deaths due to terrorism in the Netherlands before the workshop and had a more realistic idea after the actual number was mentioned in the workshop. In the interviews, students provided three main reasons for why they overestimated the threat of terrorism in the Netherlands before the workshop. Firstly, students did so because they associated terrorism with large-scale attacks that kill hundreds of people. As described by a student: "When you think of a terrorist attack, you really immediately think of 9/11 size and not really of those [smaller] kinds of sizes." Secondly, students overestimated the threat because of the image the media and specifically "the internet" create of the threat of terrorism. For example, a student stated: "Terrorism is actually often quite a big topic in the media. Especially when it is close to the Netherlands or in the Netherlands. And you never remember the exact figures." Thirdly, some students had a very broad definition of terrorism before the workshop, including other forms of crime, leading them to overestimate the number of victims.

Figure 2: Bar chart with frequency distribution of number of victims in the Netherlands on the post-test (*N* = 379)



4.1.2 Attacks worldwide

To evaluate students' knowledge on the frequency of attacks occurring worldwide, we conducted a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The outcome indicated that post-test scores (M = 2.4; SD = 1.2) were significantly lower than pre-test scores (M = 3.7; SD = 0.9), z = -12.06, p < .001, d = 0.68. Overall, the students on average believed that terrorist attacks were increasing worldwide before the workshop. After participating in the workshop and gaining more knowledge on this topic, the majority of the students changed their opinions as on average they disagreed with this statement in the post-test.

During the interviews, the students explained why they initially thought the amount of terrorist attacks increased in three ways. First, some students pointed to the news in their explanations. As one student told us: "Of course, the most extraordinary makes the news, but [that's] just not very representative. As a result, I can imagine people (...) getting a false picture that there are a lot more attacks in a certain area." Second, some students thought that they believed terrorist violence increased because they encounter more images of it on social media and through messages than before, skewing their perception. Third, some students believed that terrorist violence increased worldwide because of various unsettling world events, such as climate protests, COVID-19 protests, US abortion law and high gas prices.

4.2 The impact on students' historical knowledge

4.2.1 The Waves Theory approach

To assess students' understanding of Rapoport's (2002) Waves Theory, we conducted a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The results indicated that post-test scores (M = 4.1; SD = 1.2) were significantly higher than pre-test scores (M = 3.8; SD = 1.1), z = -4.35, p < .001, d = 0.23. Overall, these findings indicate that many students already believed that terrorism is more prevalent in some periods than others. Following the workshop, students demonstrated to have a slightly better understanding of the Waves Theory of terrorism.

During the interviews the students said that they were not familiar with the theory before the workshop, but found it very interesting. Students mentioned two things the history of terrorism teaches them. First, the theory helps to recognize patterns in the course of terrorist violence in the past. As a student mentioned: "You can just see how it went in the past, so then you can also see a bit of how it goes in the future, like with that wave motion. If you see that every time

it [terrorist wave] stops, then you can also assume it will stop again now." Second, students believed that we could learn from the historical trends of terrorist violence. A student explained: "The point of history is always to look at how they used to do it [fight terrorism] and how we should do it now. For example, [what we] could do differently now or do the same way as when things were going very well." As another student summed it up: "I think when you learn things about history, you learn things for the future."

4.2.2 Religious association

To assess the association between religion and terrorism we ran a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The outcome indicated that post-test scores (M = 2.1; SD = 1.2) were significantly lower than pre-test scores (M = 2.5; SD = 1.3), z = -4.21, p < .001, d = 0.22. Prior to the workshop, students on average did not believe that terrorism is always committed by people from a religious intention. After the workshop in which students learned about the prejudiced and incorrect association between terrorism and religion, students on average disagreed even more on this statement in the post-test.

During the interviews we found indications why some students changed their beliefs. Several students claimed that the most important lesson they learned from the workshop is that there have been different forms of terrorism over time, and that terrorism is not inherently religious or Islamic. As one student described: "When you learn about the history of terrorism, you learn that there is not a particular group that commits terrorism and not a particular kind of terrorism." To explain why students believed terrorists only had a religious motive before the workshop, students pointed to news coverage of attacks by religious terrorists (e.g., ISIS) and mentioned the emphasis media place on the ethnicity and/or religion of terrorists.

4.3 The impact on students' perceived control

4.3.1 Perceived control on the level of the individual

Students' individual perceived control significantly increased between pre- and post-test. The outcome of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that post-test scores (M = 3.0; SD = 1.2) were significantly higher than pre-test scores (M = 2.2; SD = 1.2), z = -8,23, p < .001, d = 0.46. Prior to the workshop, there was a certain level of disagreement among students on their ability to do something against terrorism and its impact. However, after the workshop students perceived more control over the threat of terrorism. To examine why students did or did not believe that they could play a role in countering terrorism and managing its impact before and after the workshop, we turn to the qualitative data from the explanatory open-ended questions of the survey.

4.3.1.1 Before the workshop: Reasons why students did (not) believe they could prevent terrorism and manage its impact themselves.

In the survey conducted before the workshop, students presented two types of reasons for why they believed they cannot prevent terrorism and manage its impact. Firstly, they believed they could not or did not want to take a role in countering terrorism (N = 185). Secondly, some students believed they cannot counteract terrorism because it is very or too difficult to stop terrorism from happening (N = 19), and specifically believed that terrorism as a phenomenon is far too big to prevent (N = 11).

The few students that believed they could do something about terrorism before the workshop mentioned raising awareness and knowledge (N = 13), talking to potential terrorists (N = 6), not participating in extremism or terrorism themselves (N = 6), and informing the police about suspicious events (N = 4). Ten students proposed helping people, like donating to victims, or as one student mentioned: "You can take good care of the people around you and make them feel that you are there for them. If everyone would do that, there would be fewer attacks, I think."

4.3.1.2 After the workshop: Reasons why students did (not) believe they could prevent terrorism and manage its impact themselves.

After the workshop, far more students indicated in the survey that they felt they were able to help prevent terrorism and manage its impact themselves. The students who still thought they could not help to counteract terrorism mainly used the same reasons as in the pre-test, but the number of students was lower. Only 98 students in the post-test believed they could not or did not want to have a role in countering terrorism, and ten students claimed it is too hard to counteract terrorism.

The students who did believe they can do something about terrorism after the workshop mainly highlighted the tips stressed in the workshop: do not give the terrorists the attention they seek (*N* = 71), do not be "unnecessarily" afraid of terrorism (*N* = 51), talk and learn about it (N = 14), and ensure less division (*N* = 7). The latter point is illustrated in the following quote: "Being kind to each other and accepting each other's opinions." Moreover, some students proposed informing the police about suspicious events (*N* = 7) and not participating in extremism or terrorism themselves (*N* = 11).

4.3.2 Perceived control on the level of the police and security forces

To evaluate whether students perceived that police and security forces are able to prevent terrorism from happening in the Netherlands we performed a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The outcome indicated that post-test scores (*M* = 3.9; *SD* = 1.0) were significantly higher than pre-test scores (*M* = 3.5; *SD* = 1.0), $z = -6.12$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.32$. This means that although students before the workshop on average believed that police and security forces are able to counter terrorism in the Netherlands, this belief increased significantly after the workshop.

4.3.2.1 Before the workshop: Reasons why students did (not) believe that the Dutch police and security forces could prevent terrorism.

According to the qualitative answers on the survey before the workshop, most students believed that terrorism cannot always be prevented (*N* = 111). They provided three reasons: 1) they thought the actions of the police and security forces can never make terrorism disappear completely (*N* = 66), 2) they assumed the police and security forces are limited in what they can and cannot do (*N* = 33), and 3) students believed that the ability of the police and security forces to prevent terrorism depends on the size of the attack and the number of terrorists (*N* = 12). Other students did not believe in the abilities of the police and security forces to prevent terrorism at all before the workshop (*N* = 44). This was mainly due to their belief that terrorism is too unpredictable to be prevented (*N* = 20).

The students who did believe the police and security forces are capable of stopping terrorism before the workshop primarily listed activities these forces (could) undertake (*N* = 105), such as monitoring potential suspects. Other students who indicated that the Dutch police and security forces are able to counter terrorism in the pre-test argued that this is their job and responsibility (*N* = 23), they have the power and influence to do it (*N* = 16), and they are trained to do so and therefore have the required knowledge and means for it (*N* = 13).

4.3.2.2 After the workshop: Reasons why students did (not) believe that the Dutch police and security forces could prevent terrorism.

After the workshop, still many students argued in the survey that terrorism can never be counteracted completely (*N* = 63). This was mainly explained by their belief that it is difficult for the police to be informed of every terrorist attack and arrive in time at the scene to prevent it from happening (*N* = 28). Only 15 students believed that police and security forces are totally unable to prevent terrorism after the workshop, mainly because of the unpredictability of terrorism.

In the post-test more students indicated that they believed the police and security services are capable of countering terrorism than in the pre-test. Firstly, 130 students listed actions such as monitoring suspicious activities (*N* = 54), preventive measures (*N* = 27), and infiltrating or going undercover (*N* = 16). Secondly, some students in the post-test still claimed that police and security forces have the power and influence to counter terrorism (*N* = 15), preventing terrorism is their job and responsibility (*N* = 14), and they are trained to do so and therefore have the required knowledge and means for it (*N* = 14).

Compared to the pre-test, a new explanation in the latter category was mentioned in the post-test: 15 students argued that police and security forces have proven their ability to counter terrorism in the past. In the interviews the accomplishments of Dutch counter-terrorism efforts stood out to some of the students as well: "It did surprise me that it [preventing attacks] apparently succeeds more often than it fails. I thought it would be the other way around."

4.4 The impact on personal-related fear levels

To investigate if students' fear of terrorism decreased after the workshop, we performed a Wilcoxon signed-rank test. We found that fear levels during the post-test (M = 1.9, SD = 0.8) were significantly lower than the pre-test scores (M = 2.3, SD = 1.0), z = -10.28, p < .001, d = 0.54. Fear levels significantly decreased after the workshop, although students on average reported they were not very afraid at the beginning of the workshop (M = 2.3). To better understand these quantitative results, we will use the qualitative data from the open-ended explanatory and evaluative question of the survey and the interviews.

4.4.1 Before the workshop: Reasons why students were (not) afraid.

In the survey before the workshop, students provided five reasons for why they were afraid of terrorism. The reason most frequently mentioned was that students found terrorism a scary and violent phenomenon (N = 23). Students were also afraid because they thought terrorism is unpredictable and cannot be counteracted (N = 14). Other students wrote that terrorist attacks are a realistic threat (N = 16) or could victimize themselves or people they know (N = 10). For example, a student wrote: "There are also many civilian casualties in attacks, so someone I know could someday be a victim of that as well." Lastly, students claimed that they were afraid of terrorism because of images in the news (N = 8).

We found five reasons why students were not afraid of terrorism. A group of students explained this by the assumption that terrorists would not target the places they live or attend regularly (N = 79). Others believed that terrorism does not take place very often (N = 38) or is far removed from their experience (N = 70), explaining their lack of fear thereof. As one student claimed: "It has never really felt close to me, it's kind of otherworldly." Some students mentioned not being afraid of terrorism because they were not concerned about terrorism or felt safe (N = 54). Finally, some students said that being afraid of terrorism is useless (N = 19). As one student wrote: "When I'm afraid I'm in my own prison."

4.4.2 After the workshop: Reasons why students were (not) afraid.

In the survey after the workshop, some students indicated that they were still (slightly) afraid of terrorism, and they primarily attributed this to the fact that terrorism is a small but realistic threat (N = 20), and it is still a scary phenomenon (N = 14). As one student put it: "It [being victimized by terrorism] is not very likely, but it could still happen to you."

Far more students indicated in the post-test that they were not or no longer afraid because – as TerInfo's workshop emphasizes – the threat of terrorism is not as great as they imagined it to be. Most students explained that they were not afraid of terrorism after the workshop because the probability of an attack and becoming victimized by it are small (N = 105), terrorism does not occur in their surroundings (N = 99), and the number of attacks is declining (N = 15).

Furthermore, we found in the interviews and evaluative question that according to the students the workshop in general, or certain aspects of it, helped diminish their fear levels. First, and in line with the findings from the survey, the students often mentioned statistics on the actual threat of terrorism that were taught in the workshop. Students claimed that these numbers reassured them, because they made them realize that the threat of terrorism is smaller than they imagined it to be. Especially the actual number of terrorist attacks made students less afraid. As one student said:

> You know, you hear all kinds of things on the news, for example, and then you think, yes, that all sounds very intense. But when you then learn on the other hand that there have only been six deaths in total [in the Netherlands since 2000], (...) that does make you less worried. That makes the shock fade away, actually.

Another student told us that the numbers showed her that: "Despite some of the things that happen, the Netherlands is actually quite a safe country." The fact that the number of terrorist attacks is decreasing was also mentioned as a reason for students being less afraid of terrorism.

As one student described: “I didn’t know [before the workshop] that it [the number of attacks] goes down a lot, which was actually quite nice. (…) When you see figures like this, you might find it much less scary.”

Second, students mentioned how the history of terrorism and the Waves Theory approach helped them put terrorism into perspective, which made them less afraid: “Of course it [learning about the history of terrorism] is important. Because if you learn a little bit about how and what works, it makes you feel more secure.” Third, some students mentioned they were less afraid of terrorism after the workshop because they learned that the police and security forces have already successfully prevented several attacks in the Netherlands.

5 Discussion

5.1 Discussion of results

In this paper, we examined to what extent our historicizing pedagogy could help reduce students’ fear of terrorism, providing three different types of knowledge (factual information about the threat of terrorism, historical knowledge concerning terrorism, and knowledge to help students gain a sense of control over the threat of terrorism). We explored this by investigating the effects of TerInfo’s workshop “What is terrorism?” on Dutch secondary education students. Although our statistical analysis was exploratory in nature, the quantitative findings nonetheless showed considerable effect sizes. After the workshop, students demonstrated increased knowledge of the actual threat and history of terrorism, perceived greater control over terrorism, and reported reduced fear levels. The qualitative findings suggest that the students’ decreased fear of terrorism after the workshop stemmed from learning that the threat of terrorism was less severe than imagined (statistical information), being better equipped to put terrorism into a historical framework (historical knowledge), and recognizing police and security forces’ past successes in preventing attacks (perceived control). This aligns with prior studies that show that students who received education on terrorism reported decreased fear levels and threat perception (Fischer et al., 2011; Krause et al., 2022). These results are hopeful, and we can cautiously conclude that the workshop is beneficial to decrease fear of terrorism among secondary education students and that history teachers could benefit from our design principles.

Several findings stand out when comparing the insights of this study with prior research. First, although students were significantly less afraid after the workshop, they were less afraid of terrorism before the workshop than might be expected from previous research (Comer et al., 2008). This could be due to the study’s timing: it was conducted in a relatively calm period with no terrorist attacks in the Netherlands or surrounding countries. The students in our sample primarily experienced terrorism indirectly and attributed their absence of fear to their belief that terrorist attacks happen far away from their daily lives and not in their immediate vicinity. This aligns with research indicating that people in close proximity to terrorist attacks generally perceive a heightened threat and an increased sense of vulnerability compared to those experiencing it indirectly (Avdan & Webb, 2019).

Second, despite a global decrease in attacks (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022), students highly overestimated the threat of terrorism before the workshop, as seen in Figure 1. The highly differentiated results on the pre-test showed a median estimate of 700 and a mode of 1000 victims of terrorist attacks in the Netherlands. Students attributed their overestimation to associating terrorism with largescale, highly publicized attacks with numerous victims. This aligns with studies that state that media exposure primarily effects heightened risk perceptions and excessive caution for safety (Nellis & Savage, 2012; Rubaltelli et al., 2018). Moreover, contrary to what might be expected from previous research (Comer et al., 2008), the students’ clear overestimation of terrorism seemed to be unrelated to more fear as students in the pre-test on average were relatively unafraid of terrorism. The historicizing workshop provided students with factual information on terrorism victims in the Netherlands and the frequency of attacks worldwide. We found the largest effect sizes for the two statistical knowledge items, indicating that students gained a better understanding of the small chance of being involved in an attack. For example, after the workshop 89% of the students now correctly reported the number of six victims of terrorist attacks in the Netherlands (Figure 2).

Third, before the workshop, students on average already had a general idea that terrorism is not inherently religious, and that terrorist violence waxes and wanes. The Waves Theory aligned with their intuitions, but students still seemed to lack a coherent framework to make sense of terrorism. It appears that the lessons from the Waves Theory helped students contextualize terrorist attacks historically. Some students noted that the Waves Theory helped them to recognize patterns in the course of past terrorist violence and relate to these patterns from their own perspectives. In short, our approach suggests that by historicizing terrorism, students improved their ability to connect the past, present, and future, recognizing terrorism as an evolving historical phenomenon. Moreover, we have some indications that this approach helped students reflect on their own temporal positioning and realize they have agency in the continuous process of meaning making (Rüsen, 1989; Van Straaten et al., 2016; Wansink & De Graaf, 2019). We also acknowledge that such goals are very difficult to achieve in one workshop. Still, we think our findings are relevant for history education, as our historicizing pedagogy helps students to better understand current events, and provide students with a framework to gain better grip in a world that is constantly changing.

Fourth, we found that students perceived more control over the threat of terrorism after attending the workshop, both at the level of the individual and of the police and security forces. These findings might suggest that demonstrating the roles individuals and police and security forces can play – and have played – in combatting terrorism can enhance students' sense of control. Previous studies showed that a high level of perceived control restores a sense of security and stability, which in turn helps people to manage threatening situations such as terrorist attacks (Greenaway et al., 2014). As a result, we hope that the knowledge they received in the workshop and their increased sense of control will help students cope with potential future attacks.

Lastly, previous research has shown that improving knowledge, specifically teaching students about the rationale behind terrorism, can help reduce terrorism-induced fear and increase their well-being (Fischer et al., 2011, Krause et al., 2022). Our quantitative results show that the workshop significantly improved students' historical and statistical knowledge, with the largest effect sizes observed for the latter. Our qualitative results provide indications to assume that three other types of knowledge (i.e., statistical knowledge, historical knowledge, and knowledge to help students gain a sense of control over the threat of terrorism) can have a beneficial effect on reducing fear. When a disruptive event such as a terrorist attack occurs, and minors are overwhelmed by gruesome images and news items on social media, our historicizing approach with these three types of knowledge can provide an interpretative framework for students to situate themselves better in time and space, and to restore coherence and meaning to disruptive, sometimes seemingly inexplicable events (Wansink et al., 2021). A knowledge-driven historicizing approach can help students to interpret the present and make students more resilient against unfiltered social media feeds.

5.2 Limitations & future research

First, we chose to apply the workshop and test its effects in multiple schools and classrooms, preferring a natural setting over a (semi-)controlled environment. We think the ecological validity of this study benefited from this approach. However, a limitation is a relatively high attrition rate of students who did not fill in the post-survey due to practical circumstances in the school settings (e.g., absentees or being inadvertently overlooked by staff members).

Second, we used a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data to grasp and interpret the effects of the workshop on students' understanding and fear of terrorism. This approach yielded several relevant insights, but our evaluative approach entails that the results should be interpreted with these limitations in mind. To draw stronger conclusions about causal and moderation effects, a different research design is needed. A multilevel approach to control for the clustering of data would improve the research design and the generalizability of our conclusions. In addition, adding a delayed treatment control group would also reduce potential bias and further increase the validity and generalizability of our results, and also ensure that the students in the control group experience the benefits we found in our explorative approach.

Third, we measured some variables with a single-item scale that were not yet operationalized in previous research, such as historical knowledge on terrorism. We tailored several existing scales and constructs to comprehensible items for our target group and context following a pilot and expert advice. However, optimizing the survey constructs (e.g., multi-item scale) in future research would increase the reliability of the measurement across contexts and, furthermore, contribute to understanding the causal relationship between the three types of knowledge we

studied and a possible decrease in fear of terrorism. For example, the students participating in this study differentiated between personal-related and societal-related fear (Al-Badayneh et al., 2011; Comer et al., 2008), but we were only able to measure personal-related fear in a reliable way. For history education research it is important to demystify the black box on how students orient themselves in time and place, what this means in terms of resilience, and how to best research this.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the present study is carried out within the Dutch context, where terrorist violence occurs on a small scale, especially in the timeframe of the study. This makes our findings context specific. Our workshop could be helpful to students in the Dutch context to decrease fear, but possibly less so in countries in which the terrorist threat is higher. Previous research shows that children living in these areas develop a different perception of threat (Sharlin et al., 2006). Even within the Dutch context, whether the workshop is effective may depend on the composition of the study population. For example, characteristics such as trauma and religious background may affect how minors respond to the workshop (e.g., Andersen & Mayerl, 2018). Since our research sample was not very diverse in terms of religious and ethnic backgrounds, future research should try to collect more diverse student samples to identify whether these three types of knowledge would work in different contexts and with specific groups that could be marginalized by teaching terrorism (e.g., Muslim or traumatized students) or if other elements would be more effective.

5.3 Implications

Terrorism is a challenging, yet necessary topic of discussion among secondary education students. The results regarding our historicizing approach are promising and provide important insights on how to structure and facilitate conversations about disruptive events, such as terrorist attacks in history education. We hope that other researchers and teachers use our design principles to develop other workshops about sensitive topics and investigate these. It would be interesting to find out if students benefit from placing topics such as riots and political upheaval in larger historical frameworks (e.g., Van Straaten et al., 2019). Finally, we propose that a historicizing pedagogy can both challenge terrorists' aim of sowing fear and panic amongst the population and provide students with clues and cues to "deal" with terrorism as a rational, and even manageable, problem in time and space.

Supplemental materials

The following Supplemental Materials referenced in the article are online available at https://doi.org/10.34894/SAY8JD (Bammens et al., 2025).

- Table S1
- Interview protocol and topic list
- Audit trail report
- Workshop materials translated in English

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How can history teachers respond to post-truth?

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Abstract

History teachers currently grapple with the impact of misinformation and political polarisation on their discipline. The concerns about these two factors have become more prominent as forms of inequality have widened significantly in the wake of responses to COVID-19. These shifts have taken place at around the same time as an authoritarian-leaning trend has begun to develop, which is underpinned by the assumption that historical and moral decline might be arrested by a sudden and radical shift in policy and leadership (Bufachi, 2020; Consentino, 2020; Daniel, 2024). These macro-factors have been broadly categorised as post-truth conditions, since they contribute to increased centralisation of authority over political and cultural knowledge, thereby causing a fragmented identity to develop in the rest of the societies where these developments eventuate. To address these circumstances, the core question addressed in this Miniature is: How can teachers integrate historical consciousness as part of teaching and learning, to respond to post-truth? The first section will contextualise post-truth conditions, while the second will sketch the curriculum context, and a third will suggest how historical consciousness might be applied using a literacy focus, as part of mapping elements to a teaching context in New South Wales, Australia.

Keywords

historical consciousness, post-truth, curriculum, pedagogy, history education

A recent (post-truth) history of co-opting terms

Post-truth has been linked with factors that facilitate the spread of misinformation, destabilise socio-political cohesion (McIntyre, 2017; Forroughi et al., 2019), exacerbate forms of inequality (Lewandowsky et al., 2017), and forms of epistemological crisis (Barzilai & Chinn, 2020). In an American context, the playwright Steve Tesich penned a polemic op-ed which took aim at the sanitised reporting and misleading government messaging about the nature of the Gulf War. He critiqued the lack of footage that implicated American troops in violence, and labelled it as a reaction to what he called “Vietnam Syndrome” (Tesich, 1992, p. 13) where public assumptions about America’s superpower status was unassailable, except in cases where a conflict was likely to continually be extended. Additionally, in public messaging, foes were characterised as enemies of democracy and freedom, so to characterise the USA as a defender of these ideas. He argued that on the basis of a deliberate mismatch between events, reporting and public knowledge, such claims about America’s role in the world could no longer be made with much veracity. This focus on deception and misinformation was taken up – independently – by the Australian

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philosopher Jeff Malpas (1992) at roughly the same time. He focussed instead on ideological and political impacts of post-modernity, in terms of mechanics involved in post-modern treatments of historical reality, particularly in the cases of Holocaust denial, (then) rewritings of histories by former Soviet states to reflect a localised perspective, and potential re-emergences of Nazism.

In the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns, definitions of post-truth have shifted to focus on forms of disruption to socio-political cohesion. Examples have included the absence of shared and individual responsibility in addressing existential threats (Coper, 2022; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; McIntyre, 2018), a zeitgeist of crisis (Barzilai & Chinn, 2020), and the notion that a sudden pivot in leadership, policies, and style of government in a democracy will expedite threats (Foroughi et al., 2019). Post-truth has also been used to refer to the enactment of political power and control, overriding any motive of common good or "truth" (Fuller, 2018, p. 3). This political emphasis is characterised by a slide away from democratic dialogue (Hannon, 2023), to ratcheting aggressive rhetoric of authoritarian-posturing, populist strongmen-style leaders (Consentino, 2020; Forroughi et al., 2019; Harsin, 2020; Kalaycı, 2022; McIntyre, 2018; Pomerantzev, 2019).

Post-truth figures in terms how members of a community are encouraged (while others are discouraged) in socio-political engagement, particularly in cases where there is a clear political hierarchy. In literature pertaining to post-truth one of the more cited examples was in relation to a quote attributed to Karl Rove – a senior advisor in the Bush Administration – in 2004, and has been re-cited several times ever since (e.g. Weinger, 2011; Schonfeld, 2017; Palma, 2021). In response to a belligerent media interview about the onset of the War in Iraq, he purportedly responded off camera with:

> People like you are still living in what we call the reality-based community. You believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality. That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you are studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors, and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do (Pomerantzev, 2016, citing Suskind, 2004).

Following this logic, there is little acknowledgement that needs to be given by politicians, for those who appear as supporters for figureheads who have spearheaded different campaigns. Just as socio-economic inequalities separate rich from poor, an aspect of post-truth involves the segregation of individuals who are empowered by political structures being segregated from those who they disempower (cf. Fuller, 2018).

In the Australian context (which will be explored in more detail with the next section), recent public uses of post-truth have linked the concept with misinformation, and the production of political narratives designed to dissuade critical engagement by citizens. Such characteristics were evident when the voting population of this country were given a proposal (Referendum) that there be a panel of Indigenous advisors, to represent different localities and groups about Government measures. The proposal was designed to address a key omission in the Australian Constitution: The lack of recognition for Indigenous peoples. It was during the ensuing campaign that then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Linda Burney, used the two terms interchangeably with regard to how so-called evidence cited by the No campaign was frequently manufactured, during the 2023 Voice to Parliament Referendum in Australia (Butler, 2023; Cf. Beck, 2023; Graham, 2024). In the case of indecision, prospective voters were told by the Opposition Leader, Peter Dutton: "If you don't know, vote no" (Biddle et al., 2023, p. 38). Where there was any doubt about the claims or evidence to support them, it follows that critique or questioning was discouraged, rather than building a better understanding about the circumstances surrounding the Referendum. The proportion of votes for against-in favour was 60.1 percent and 39.9 percent, respectively.

What is the curriculum context?

The current curriculum documents in an Australian context are drawn from a national statement, the Alice Springs (Mpartwe) Declaration, which articulates a vision for an education that is predicated on values of equity and equality of opportunity for everyone who completes formal and informal schooling (2019). Educational frameworks drawn from this document attempt to enable students to be active and engaged contributors to their communities. In New South Wales, the writing context for this article, each syllabus features a section that outlines the rationale of the subject, followed by a short statement about how learning is relevant to post-school contexts. For History that is taught to 12-16 year old students, it appears as follows:

> The History 7–10 Syllabus provides students with the opportunity to study Aboriginal Cultures and Histories by investigating the oldest living, continuous cultures in the world. It also provides broader insights into the historical experiences of different cultural groups within our global society to develop an understanding of the shared history that has shaped Australia. Through the study of history students learn civics and citizenship, which form the basis for Australia's free, democratic and egalitarian society (NESA, 2024).

As part of this rationale, historical consciousness is defined as "…enabling students to locate themselves in the continuum of human experiences." The above extract shows that this focus on a continuum involves integrating "Aboriginal Cultures and Histories", and other enduring cultures, which are cultivated by way of historical thinking skills, that are linked with the political literacy of civics and citizenship. In scholarship terms, these observations align with Rüsen's emphasis on "testing [the] validity of case studies" by applying "general rules from specific examples" (2005, p. 31). This frame is sketched in terms of history being used as a vehicle for promoting ideas and behaviours associated with active citizenship in Australia more broadly (Sharp & Parkes, 2023). This purpose aligns closely with Nathalie Popa's (2023) and Peter Seixas' (2016) definitions of how historical consciousness can be operationalised in school curriculum, by reconstructing the past based on fragmentary or retrospective constructions. That being said, these alignments suggest that there is a dependence on teacher expertise to bridge the gap between theory and practice. As there is no reference to the scholarship explicitly in the curriculum documents (except for a reference list that exists separately) teacher knowledge of historical consciousness will likely need to be addressed in future professional development, due to this concept being a new inclusion in the curriculum documents.

An additional element of the curriculum is the expectation that knowledge and skills linked with history will be acquired via moving from simple to complex content, following Jerome Bruner's spiral curriculum model (1960). As such, there is the implicit assumption that teachers will design their sequences of learning for each unit of work, around key ideas that drive and shape history, allowing students to apply their analytical skills to increasingly complex sources, scenarios and debates. The language of these documents are aligned with The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration (2019), so the documents from New South Wales will – like other jurisdictions – enable members of Australian communities to build social cohesion, by way of shared understandings to be "active and informed members of their communities" (AERO, 2024, p. 8), as well as having a curriculum that mandates a set of shared understandings about how modern Australia came to exist.

The curriculum structure indicates that although there is an expectation to develop historical consciousness locally, the relationships with the past which emerge are framed within a values-based national identity, of a "free, democratic and egalitarian society" (NESA, 2024). Active and informed participation lies at the heart of this. There are several exclusions around what active and informed participation looks like, particularly with the selective inclusion of such forms of Indigenous Knowledge as Deep Time (Westaway et al., 2024). Such shifts are significant, because it echoes concerns that have been expressed by Peter Brett (2022) amongst others, that the assumption that the curriculum will provide models of participation, when the content being delivered does not live up to this aspiration (cf. Heggart et al., 2018 for reflections on a previous Australian curriculum program, Discovering Democracy). The importance of these considerations is demonstrated in Kenneth Nordgren (2019) pointing out that it is an opportunity for broadening the scope of history beyond human perspectives. In this lens, operationalising historical consciousness in classrooms needs to involve teachers asking questions about what shapes "historical narratives, as well as [demonstrating] an openness to letting the present and the future impose new requirements on the past" (Nordgren, 2019, p. 794). The expectation therefore, is that teachers cultivate personalised and communal relationships with the past which ready students to see the value in skills to investigate other perspectives; it is not to create the next generation of historians.

Framed within a more global context, Andreas Körber contends that the integration of historical consciousness affords the opportunity for comparative approaches to history education, between "non-Western" and "Western" but not in terms of "non-modern … incomplete, inferior or else" (Körber, 2016, p. 447). For Peter Seixas' Canadian perspective, it was a crucial part of practicing history democratically, as it involves "individuals comprehending the historicity of their own circumstances, the mutability of their identities and the contingency of their traditions" (Seixas, 2016, p. 3). Such observations are essential for linking conceptions of historical consciousness in Australian curriculum documents (such as those listed in the previous sec-

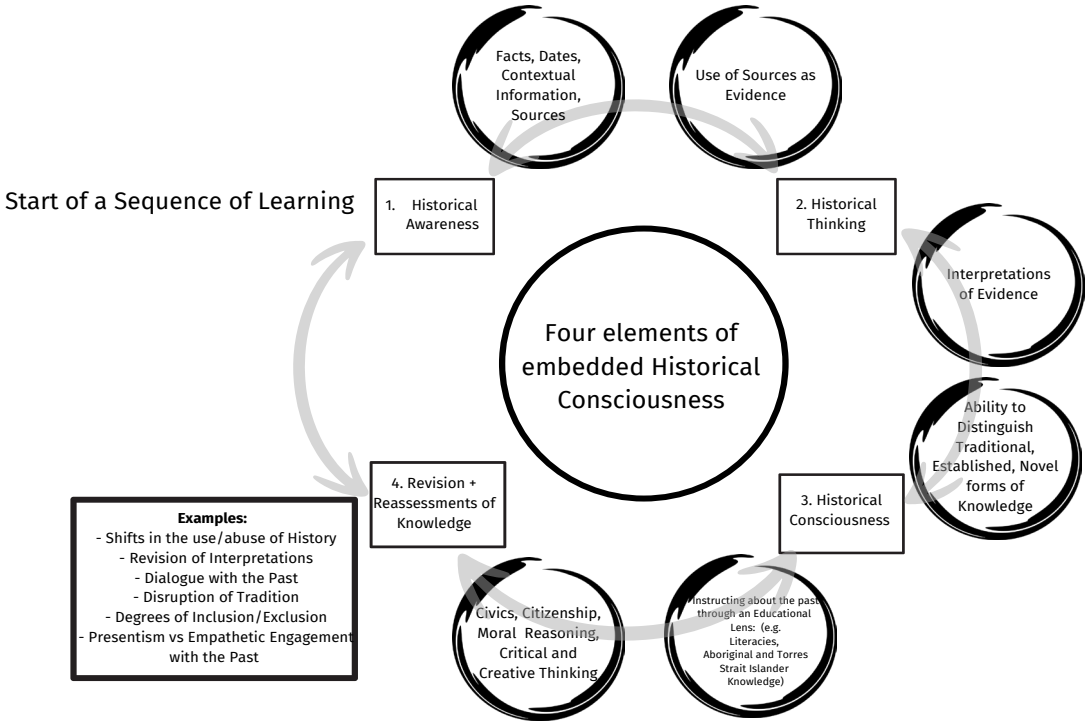
tion) with other cultures. Heather Sharp and Robert Parkes have noted for instance that in the current national curriculum, outside of the mainstream of "White Australia", other groups are largely relegated to the "periphery of Australian culture and identity — engaging in civic life and being featured in Australian history only when they are exotic ..." (Sharp & Parkes, 2023, p. 193).

How does this theory translate into practice?

This section provides ideas for teaching and learning in a localised level, starting with mapping criteria and intended outcomes of learning sequences, that can be used to evaluate student learning (following Drake & Reid, 2018). Since the scope of the curriculum is to engage with historical consciousness in a manner that addresses localised circumstances, such engagement with the past could be crafted to work against post-truth conditions that were identified in the first section. Figure 1 shows what such considerations might look like as part of a teaching and learning cycle that gradually develops complexity of ideas. Table 1 on the other hand, shows how practices might work in a commonly studied case study in Australia (World War II and the Battle of Singapore).

Figure 1 shows how historical consciousness might be integrated as part of a teaching and learning cycle that develops in its complexity. In their delivery, modes of teaching usually focus on delivering foundational content and skills first, to cultivate historical awareness, while more sophisticated analytical skills linked with historical thinking gradually becomes more autonomous with guided, then independent opportunities to practice (in line with the increasing complexity between the two outlined in: Ankersmit, 2001; Ahonen, 2005). Relationships with the past cultivated through historical consciousness are more intrinsic and relate to how individuals, groups, and communities connect to the past. Cultivating such connections requires substantial amounts of engagement with the subject before teachers' and students' grasp of it can begin to be understood and assessed in a schooling context. The steps between each of these aspects of understanding the past represent the details that would be used to introduce additional layers of complexity. The last segment about revision is where change is recognised as required to address controversial elements of history that are no longer valid in the face of source material, changing ways of interpreting the past, or the use of technology which disrupts traditional assumptions. The diagram is therefore organised by forms of relationships with the past, rather than a hierarchy.

Figure 1: Historical consciousness configured as part of a teaching and learning cycle.



The purpose of Table 1 is to deconstruct elements of historical consciousness so teaching and learning strategies can be aligned with this central concept. The structure is adapted from the epistemic framework developed by Sarit Barzilai and Clark Chinn (2018), to create a more specific alignment with the goal of integrating historical consciousness in a manner that respects the curriculum requirements and historical inquiry methods. This paper was part of a more extended body of research where they elaborate on methods of diagnosing post-truth conditions (Barzilai and Chinn, 2020), and what roles educators have in addressing these. A key element of their findings was the significance of epistemic alignment, to provide clarity of the ideas, concepts, knowledge and skills and ensure learnings remain both transferrable between contexts yet in keeping with term educational goals.

The examples that have been selected focus on commemoration about World War II, to develop historical consciousness by engaging with experiences of Australian soldiers in Darwin (northern Australia) and Singapore. These points have been tailored to topic areas in the History curriculum that are widely taught. This conflict relates to both a compulsory junior curriculum for 15-16 year olds as mandated content, are situated in a senior curriculum for Modern History, and relate to the largest global conflict that has directly effected Australia. As historical consciousness is by definition non-linear (Popa, 2021) the delivery is intended to be flexible and Table 1 is structured to allow purposeful teaching that cultivates specific elements of historical consciousness. These guidelines allow for teachers' delivery to accommodate a key difficulty that is linked to operationalising historical consciousness: its variation is due to localised relationships with the past (see for instance, Seixas, 2016; Körber, 2016; Clark and Peck, 2018), and there is contention about whether it is a European concept that has been mapped onto different contexts, or a species-wide trait (Seixas, 2016; Nordgren, 2019).

Currently, a key challenges is to integrate literacy instruction into history education contexts, while keeping the focus on discipline-specific knowledge and skills. Currently this priority is outlined in the Rationale section of the syllabus. Table 1 is the integration of a literacy-focus following recommendations from a recent literature review (Wilson et al., 2023). Two elements in particular feature as part of the Table to guide its effectiveness:

- Deconstruction – critical analysis of historical sources to ascertain context, audience, message; purpose of source creation and perspective represented; techniques used to communicate the message, purpose and perspective of a historical source.
- Reconstruction – interpretation, reasoning and explanation of historical evidence; analysis and synthesis of evidence and historical argument; analysis and reasoning leading to a judgement expressed as an assessment of value or an evaluation based on criteria (Wilson et al., 2023, p. 3).

The connection between historical consciousness and a literacy focus in New South Wales, Australia, can be clarified by elaborating on the research of Nathalie Popa. Her research is working on how to operationalise historical consciousness, by cultivating a combination of "disciplinary and everyday habits of mind" and "... a sense of historical being (to make sense of their own place in, or a sense of belonging to, a constructed historical continuum)" (Popa, 2023, p. 143). These considerations are aligned with the rationale of the New South Wales syllabus from the first section of this article; Table 1 incorporates historical experiences from groups who were not given much public voice during World War II (in this case, Ada Joyce Bridges representing nurses, and Frederick Prentice for Indigenous soldiers). The table does not need to be followed in order, and is designed to give examples for how classroom practices in a high school context might be implemented to cultivate historical consciousness.

Table 1: Planning considerations for integrating aspects of historical consciousness.

Aspects of applying historical consciousness	**Learning intention**	**Sample planning considerations (phrased as inquiry questions)**	**Task ideas**
1. Establishing general rules from specific examples in history, before testing their validity by applying them to other case studies (Rüsen, 2005, p. 31)	Filter ideas about what is important to enquiring into an area of history	• Locate a source/site. • Provide a semi-contextualised version to students. • What is its significance to a community? • Who is it significant for?	• Create a Digital Collage (such as using Lucidspark) of images; • The class then annotates them for the (1) location, (2) how visible the memorial is, (3) what lies around it, (4) who/what is being commemorated • Provide the class with a list of sources/sites; They develop a short presentation that poses questions about why the site should be kept. • Scenario: The local council is discussing the removal or replacement of the memorial. What are some steps that could be taken to find out what significance it has to the local community?
2. Generalised and Abstract Knowledge, is distinguished from – and mapped across – to localised examples (Popa references these elements, 2023)	Determine the focus of time / place / individual / group that will be enquired about Make connections between a school's local area and a larger-scale event	• What was taking place in the school's local area at the time of the conflict being studied? • What factors bridge the contexts between objects from the past and people in the present?	• Use a Bloom's Cube to map how a local site is investigated, such as cenotaphs, Veterans Associations/Returned Servicemen Leagues (RSLs), cemeteries. The six components should include tasks that shift from identify to create/evaluate and can be completed in any order the student chooses. • For a group PBL, (such as investigating a veteran), tasks might borrow from Museum Design Principles: (1) Smithsonian Institute's Types of Visitors can be used to allocate students to functions within a group: – Ideas: Visitors seeking conceptual and abstract thinking – People: Visitors seeking emotional connections – Objects: Visitors seeking visual language and aesthetics – Physical: Visitors seeking multi-sensory experiences (2) Steps involved in Museums Victoria's One Object, Big Story initiative (including exemplars): https://museumsvictoria.com.au/learning/small-object-big-story/

3. Narrative (Popa, 2023) and accounts that are either fragmentary or retrospective constructions of the past (Seixas, 2016, p. 432)	Justify: (1) type of sources that are being consulted, (2) explanation or analysis that is being taken to inform an effective, informed judgement	• How is the past being framed? • What are the uses and functions of history being learned about? • Which mode is being used to articulate the engagement with history (e.g. story, non-linear)	Guide activities that address this aspect of historical consciousness by indicating two features: – Thematic designs for museum exhibits include: curiosity, challenge, narratives and participation (following Skydsgaard et al., 2016). – Exhibits that preserve the memory of individuals in history consider: Analysis of Artefacts, Biographies, Types of Presentation, Representing Perspectives of Individual, Family, Community, State/Nation Use a structure of providing a: • narrative (such as introducing a class by telling a story through a visualising activity); • challenge (posing ambiguities, questions, or aspects that need more information); • participation (answering questions/completing a series of tasks based on core themes/ideas of commemoration, such as investigating individuals' participation in armed conflict); • curiosity (posing inquiry, next steps that feed into the design of the following class). • Students are provided with a Document Based Study, or a sample of sources from a Museum exhibit (such as the Commemoration of Bukhit Chandu in Singapore being linked with the impact of the Opium Trade on the Malay and Chinese populations).
4. Points of Similarity, Contestability and Difference that are present between historical interpretations (Chapman, 2011; Seixas, 2016, p. 435; Popa, 2023)	Establish the criteria for the what/how of ambiguities in the enquiry.	• What else needs to be explored? • What ambiguities have arisen from interpreting the past?	Construct a class debate that tests the degree of agreement/disagreement with assumptions about memorials, such as: • *Dedications, plaques and headstones never change.* • *Memorials represent veterans in their best light, that glosses over any flaws.* • *Messages to society from memorials show how people should aspire to be.* Case Studies could include commemorations of: Individuals: • *Ada Joyce Bridges (at Scone, Kranji, Radji Beach, in the AGNSW's collections – she is commemorated in substantially different ways at each)* • *Petty Officer Hajime Toyoshima (at Cowra's Garden of Friendship, in Darwin's Aviation Museum, in the AWM online archives)* • *Indigenous Australian WWI Veteran Frederick Prentice, who was only given proper dedications at Adelaide Cemetery in 2021 (Lacey, 2021).* Events: • *Signing of Singaporean Surrender to the Japanese* • *Signing of Japanese Surrender to the Allies* *These are shown in a variety of ways, such as at the Old Ford Factory in Singapore, and re-enactments through Wax Exhibits in Fort Siloso's Surrender Chambers.* Collectives: • *Singaporean Memorial to Civilians/Missing*

5. Clarify conceptual definitions that guide practices, and reflect on the validity to to varieties of perspectives and sources (Seixas, 2016, p. 434; Popa, 2023).	Such practices can be extended across different scales. Preventing any of micro/meso/macro and localised/regional/national/international factors taking priority over one another.	• What conclusions can be arrived at about the inquiry topic? • What versions of history are being told? Which are being excluded? • Is the scope of inquiry too small/large, specific/generalised? • What are sources for future inquiries?	• What is the history of the school in relation to the conflict? If the school was not founded, what links does the town/suburb/city/region have with the conflict? • Compare Darwin Aviation Museum's preservation of the Japanese Zero with the Peace Garden at Cowra. • Provide annotations of Brazier and Inglis' Sacred Places (2008, p. 1); Their verdicts on the purposes-influences of commemoration might be compared with David Stephens' (2008) review of the book. • Provide annotations of Clark's (2017, p. 1-3) Unfinished business: Rewriting the Past. The key questions should enable students to link details in the article about structures dedicated to memorials and commemoration, with their own experience of the events and people they are representing

Conclusions and future research

Conditions linked with post-truth have made aligning theory with practice more significant, as it clarifies the intentions, processes, and applications students will translate their learning to. With the inclusion of historical consciousness in the new curriculum, this adjustment is an opportunity to be innovative in how teaching and learning of this concept is framed in local contexts. When deconstructed into its various elements, historical consciousness can act as a core that guides students' relationship with historical concepts and content, thereby increasing the likelihood that students will be able to view the skills as meaningful in contexts outside the classroom. For teachers it offers considerations about what conceptual ingredients need to be incorporated as part of best practice. Future research might elaborate on these alignments, such as investigating how this organisation of history curriculum impacts students' academic achievement, as well as fostering their relationship with history (such as Popa, 2022; Zarmati and Nally, 2023). These applications of analytical skills will be crucial in building capacities to detect forms of misinformation, by understanding the provenance of source materials to inform more nuanced analyses.

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Review

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Historicus* in Resonance, Understanding, Encounter

Experiencing history beyond competence grids

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Abstract

In this miniature the author of the book “Historicus* - Wie wir Geschichte erleben” (2023) presents his key ideas to an English-speaking audience. He analyses individual “historical acts”, describing them under the perspective of “Resonance”, “Understanding”, and “Encounter” and uses various language games to do this (e.g. Hartmut Rosa, Charles Taylor, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Avishai Margalit or Emanuel Levinas). At the end he transforms his theoretical results into the profile of a persona called Historicus*.

Keywords

hermeneutics, ethics of history, experiencing history, resonance, historical acts

Introduction

Resonance, Understanding, Encounter: These are the keywords I use in my book “Historicus* - Wie wir Geschichte erleben” (Scriba, 2023) to describe how people experience history beyond official competence grids, published by school authorities.

I’m launching this idea against the background of the fact that teaching history often does not achieve these goals and that people tend to fall back to lower levels of historical reasoning. According to earlier observations by Bodo von Borries (1995), I hypothesize: There are emotional needs, expectations of meaningfulness, and worldviews that in engaging with history play a very different role than those addressed in school curricula and competence grids. So the concept of this book is:

What is “Historicus*”? I propose a notion for talking about dealing with history that is closer to the needs of people than German discourses on this topic seem to normally offer. What will “Historicus*” give to us? If we want to teach history closer to the audience and if we want to understand better how the audience effectively uses history for their purposes, we need a different approach than the competency grids given, e.g., in school curricula; for this the book offers a proposal. So teachers may easier assign their students’ mental prerequisites before planning their interventions.

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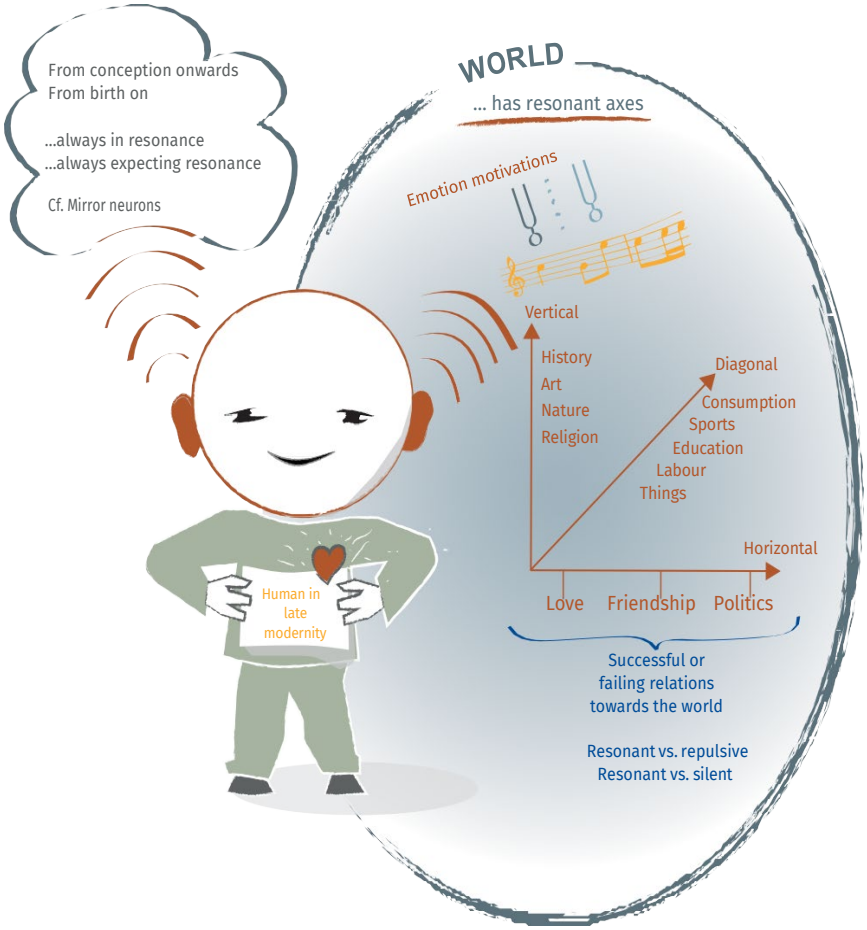
Why “Historicus*” is important? For making these discourses more operable I create a persona, “Historicus*”, in order to check if one can really describe what persons do when they deal with history. Reflecting the meanings of the three key words, I create a theory of historical acts: So, we may describe what people really do when they feel affected by the past and when they deal with history, i.e. when they do historical acts.

Resonance

In the first main section, I develop the concept of resonance. Following the sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2016), who describes human world relations in the metaphor of musical resonance, I also illuminate history as an experience of resonance; here history appears as one of the human relations towards the world, i.e. where people resonate with the world motivated by their needs for meaning and for interpretation.

Figure 1: Human in resonance – following the ideas of Hartmut Rosa (Scriba, 2023, p. 38)



On this basis, I locate the modern European self in various time regimes, as described by François Hartog (2015). Even being conscious of various time regimes, historical resonance experiences are primarily non-cognitive experiences, but bodily experiences in the sense of corporeality, as conceived by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). As a result of the chapter on resonance, Historicus* appears as a persona, who

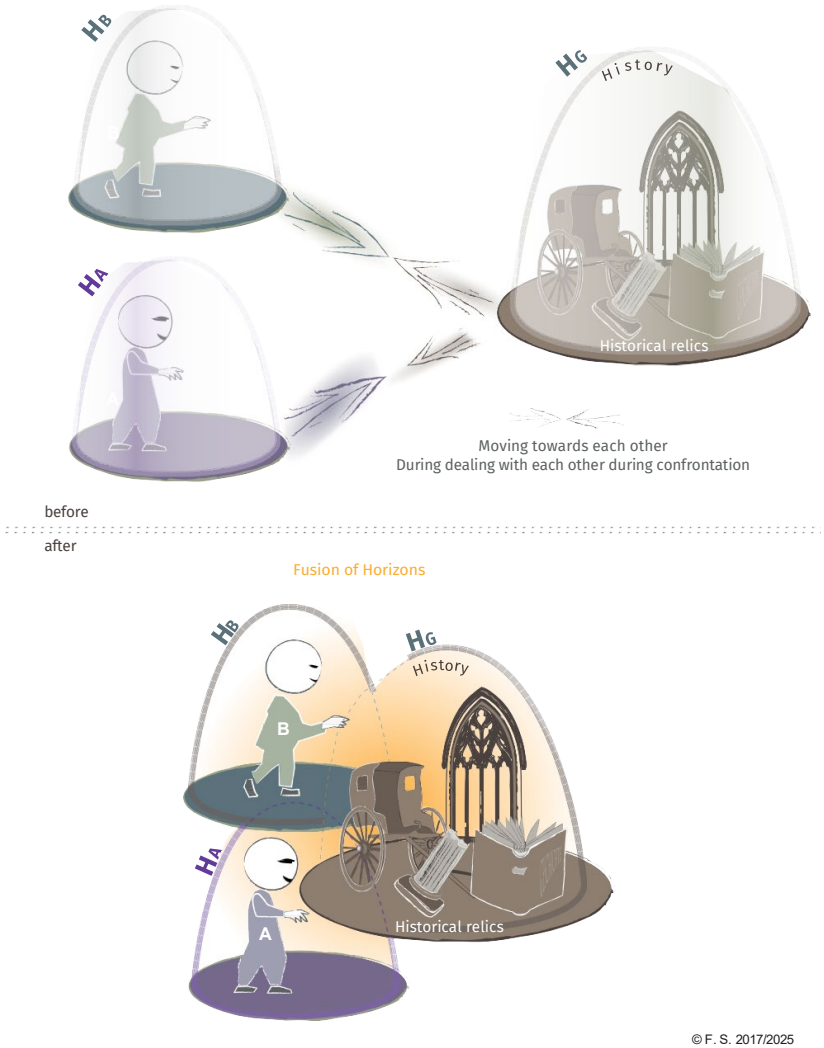
1. perceives itself, especially since the processes of Enlightenment and Modernization in Latin Europe over the last 300 years, as a point-shaped self - buffered for instance against cosmic influences: This self experiences itself with its psychic interiority (“Innerlichkeit”), while searching for meaning (“Sinn”) in a fragilized world, and thereby constructs a secular experiential sphere of history (“historischen Erfahrungsraum”) by communicating with other subjects (cf. Taylor, 1996),

2. lives in a coexistence of different regimes of historicity, whereby the hegemonic notion of timelines as a narrative guiding pattern since 19th century historicism is increasingly relativized, especially in late modernity, by presentism in dealing with historical heritage, (cf. Hartog, 2015) and
3. seeks not only cognitive, but also aesthetic and narrative resonance in its corporeality (cf. Merleau-Ponty; De Certeau, 1991), which is intended to lead to physical and psychological homing (Beheimatung) by means of the construction of meaning through the experience of time (cf. Scharnowski, 2019). Dealing with history seems to promise such resonance. Historicus* seeks resonance in historical acts. They experience history in resonance.

Understanding

In the second main section, I conceive of history as *understanding*: I attempt to re-read the hermeneutics conceptualized by the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and to assess its scope for historical didactic purposes. So, I go contrary to a long tradition of marginalizing hermeneutic approaches in history didactics. While distancing myself from Heidegger's ontological presuppositions, which Gadamer certainly refers to in his main work *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode*, 1961), I see Gadamer's language games as metaphors, which allow to describe ways to perceive and to experience history. I share Gadamer's hypothesis that we are "surrounded by history", i.e. that we cannot escape our historicity. This applies anyway - whether we are aware of our historicity or not. I use Gadamer's concepts of *hermeneutic circle, of history of impact* ("Wirkungsgeschichte") and his metaphor of *fusion of horizons* ("Horizontverschmelzung").

Figure 2: Fusion of horizons (Scriba 2023, p. 297)



Even if we experience history holistically - for example through images, staged spaces or triggered emotions - our understanding ultimately pushes us towards verbalization, towards narration. Therefore, historical understanding occurs in *logopetal historical acts.* In principle, this also applies when we recognize the limits of verbal narrativity and occasionally ask about the special functioning of deixis, the power of images (cf. Boehm, 2007).

Here, I have explicated the medium of understanding, thereby amplifying Gadamer's thinking. So Historicus* has gained in character. They encounter the history surrounding them and presenting itself with tact and taste. In doing so, they go through dynamic processes of understanding that gradually promote better understanding, in which they gradually revise their prejudices.

Encounter

In the third main section, I look at history as an *encounter* with "the Other". This may mean both "the other" in the generic masculine as another person and "the other" in the neuter, i.e. something that appears to be completely different or alien. With this terminology, I am following philosophical statements based in Jewish traditions of thinking where specific experiences of exile, diaspora, and alienation are reflected. And I'm embedding this in Reinhart Koselleck's concept of the *experiential space of history* ("Erfahrungsraum Geschichte").

I then describe the encounter in this experiential space using the language games by philosophers of Jewish thought, Martin Buber (1878-1965) and Emanuel Levinas (1906-1995). Buber conceptualizes encounter as a mutual transformation in the so-called *between* ("Zwischen"). Levinas, on the other hand, conceptualizes encounter as being obligated by the other, specifically by the face of the other, which morally "subpoenas" one. Here, I ultimately metaphorize history or "the history that presents itself to us" as the Other (Scriba, 2023, p. 381); this analogy presents itself concretely as follows:

> Like the summons by the face of the Other, I cannot in principle escape being enveloped by history, the potential presence of the Other. Although I can try to look away or to eliminate the traces of the past from my field of vision, from my own horizon, by building walls, such an endeavor is a reaction to the presence of the past, i.e. paradoxically it remains present. In this respect, history always summons and demands behavior from me. [...] Dealing with the Holocaust requires catch-up solidarity - in the form of mourning, remembrance, vigilance against the risk of repetition, confession in the face of racist incidents. An exemplary family history, such as presented in the exhibition under the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, is the face of the Other, which brings me as a visitor to further acts of history: Questions about why, feelings of grief and anger, questions about alternative courses of events (How could something like this have been prevented back then?) and conclusions for my own thoughts and actions (What can I contribute to 'Never again Auschwitz!'?) (Scriba, 2023, p. 381).

The philosophy of dialogue, which was developed primarily by Martin Buber (1878-1965), necessarily ethicises memory and remembrance out of its own nature and is thus in tension with the norms of Cartesian scientificity. Those who carry out historical acts are thus inevitably exposed to a competition of different claims, a *competition of norms*: different stakeholders wrestle over how Historicus* deals with presented history. In public discourse, Historicus* does not act alone, but always in interaction with others. Therefore: When Historicus* carries out historical acts and examines them, methodically a stakeholder analysis must always take place. This means that in order to understand historical acts, it is always necessary to ask which claims determine these historical acts from the outset. If you acknowledge the inherent tension of different claims in historical acts, this also opens up a mindset for remembering historical issues from the perspectives of different people who are more or less affected - without having to exclude certain perspectives as a supposedly fundamental attack on my own loyalties (cf. Michel Rothberg's term "multidirectional memory") (Scriba, 2023, p. 389).

I then deal with the *ethics of memory* and this in applying also the concept of *temporal plurality*. In doing so, I link reflections by the philosopher Avisai Margalit (*1939) on "*emic*" and "*etic*" memory and on "*chrono-ferences*" by the modern historian Achim Landwehr (*1968). Both are based on the premise addressed by Yosef H. Yerushalmi (1932 to 2009), that remembering is an ethical imperative.

For conclusion: The imperative to remember may be motivated ethically or morally, but not necessarily scientifically – especially watching the Western concept of "looking for truth by taking distance".

This directs the questions to Historicus*: Is it good to remember? Does remembrance or memory have an ethical or moral value (cf. Scriba, 2023, p. 392)? Margalit derives this imperative from the necessity of survival; he also identifies a tension between smaller, natural communities such as families, known as "thick communities" having their often non-reflected ethic claims, and larger communities linked by more abstract ideas, such as societies and nations, known as "thin communities" declaring explicitly moral claims.

For the question of ethical and moral claims in historical narratives, this means that even and especially in balanced narratives, moral and ethical impulses become effective in their tension between scientific detachment, adherence to general moral principles directed at all of humanity and nature, and the ethical principle of loyalty to a "thick community". Historicus* thus performs their historical acts in the triangle of tension between morality, ethics and scientific distance. This also applies to their balanced narratives. Topics such as the Holocaust, modern slavery, especially in America, or genocidal colonial crimes show how quickly the prioritization of one source in such historical acts triggers sensitivities motivated by other sources (Scriba, 2023, p. 402). So overall: Historicus* is exposed to an inherently ambiguous and consequently dynamic memory imperative, which also varies in intensity. In Western cultures, the scientific norms of a still largely historicist regime of time are still effective as well as the privileging waking consciousness (cf. Scriba, 2023, p. 428).

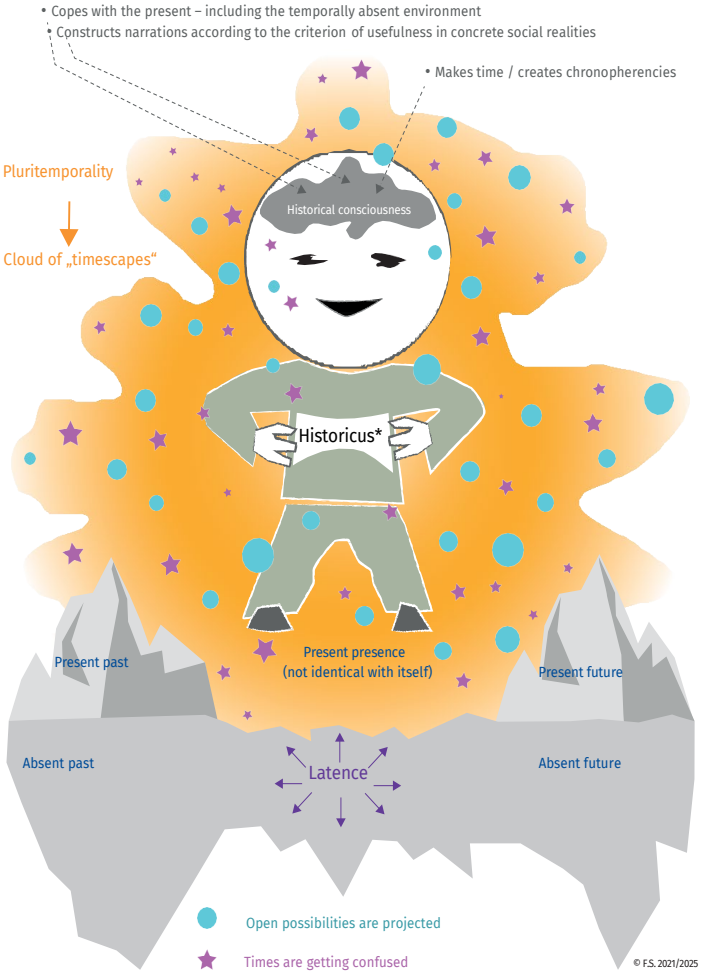
People's relations towards the world such as memory, remembrance, but also forgetting, inevitably contain a temporal dimension. For whenever I remember something, whenever a group remembers something or transforms it into cultural memory, something that has passed is prepared for the present, something that has passed gains presence. It is therefore plausible, that the German historical theorist Jörn Rüsen (*1938) qualifies historical relations towards the world in his writings on historical theory as: "the formation of meaning through the experience of time" ("Sinnbildung über Zeiterfahrung") (Rüsen, 1990, p. 11, pp. 157–158). If someone experiences a relationship to history as resonant in Rosa's sense, then, principally shapes meaning via experiencing time even if perhaps not always cognitively elaborated, but in any case, sensually and bodily in Merleau-Ponty's sense. In the Latin-European cultural context, it has become plausible to metaphorize this experience of time on a timeline.

If we historicize the timeline as a legacy of pre-Christian biblical provenance, the scope for thought opens up to look at other forms of time perception and conceptions of time. The early modern historian Achim Landwehr (*1968) calls the different relationships to time "chronoferences" (Landwehr, 2020, passim, pp. 22–24, pp. 245–248). By this he means that humans have the ability to establish relationships to absent times (Landwehr, 2020, p. 249). In fact, humans live in *pluritemporality*, of which they become aware in different ways and which they bring to discourses in different ways (Landwehr, 2020, pp. 43–46, cf. example Carlsbad USA ibid. pp. 267–294). Landwehr outlines some methods of how people "make time" (Landwehr, 2020, pp. 50–63, pp. 161–175, see Scriba, 2023, p. 435).

The idea of pluritemporality provokes: Especially historicist traditions, which move more or less unreflectively in the idea of the timeline in the sense of a developmental novel. However, if one reflects on the possible temporal relationships in everyday life, then the coexistence of different patterns becomes clear. Pluritemporality is therefore part of everyday life. People's relationship to this pluritemporality is summarized by Landwehr in the concept of "chronoferences". He defines:

> Chronoference is meant to express that people and collectives are able to refer to non-present times, that is, to imagine pasts and futures of different kinds in order to make them present-absent times. […] They are therefore characterized by the simultaneous status of absence and presence … (Landwehr, 2020, p. 245) (cf. Scriba, 2023, p. 437).

Figure 3: Historicus* in time-scape, pluritemporality following Achim Landwehr (Scriba, 2023, p. 438)



Consequently, the science of history must define itself as a discipline for temporal relation (Landwehr, 2020, p. 258). For the persona "Historicus*", this means that they turn out to be an expert in pluritemporality (see Figure 3): Effectively, Historicus* has a field of vision, that is also a space for the projection of open possibilities of uncertain realizability: they may look at alternative possibilities, at the selection of events or their interpretation (Landwehr, 2020, pp. 65–66). (cf. Scriba, 2023, pp. 444–445).

Historicus* thus always "cares" for a group in their historical acts when they work on their chronoferences in historical acts and live their contemporaneity with its pluritemporality in a resonant and reasoning way. In doing so, they are moved by tensions generated between the three poles of "humanistic moral principles", "proximity ethics", and "scientific distancing norms". In doing so, they encounter the Other as a past that presents itself, inviting them into a space of possibility and enabling transformation. They experience history in resonant contemporaneity, driven by tensions that can be described in terms of moral philosophy (Cf. Scriba, 2023, pp. 445–446).

Persona Historicus* speaking

Because the dramaturgy of this essay focuses on describing personal perceptions and personal experiences of history, I will now summarize the results in the words spoken by the persona Historicus*. In doing so, I am following the *six logical levels* developed by the psychologist Robert Dilts (Dilts, 1993) to describe personalities. These levels are not entirely uncontroversial in detail, but are sufficient for my purpose in order not to forget an essential aspect of human existence and thus also historical experience.

Figure 4: Persona Historicus* (Scriba, 2023, p. 451)

Level 1: Environment - being at home in the Latin-European-historicist time regime

> "History surrounds me - and I can't take off my Latin European glasses." (Scriba, 2023, pp. 451–452)

Level 2: Behavior - understanding as resonance and narrative reasoning

> "The past evokes something resonating in me. I want to understand it and to construct fact-oriented narratives to do so." (Scriba, 2023, p. 457)

Level 3: Skills and knowledge - enabling narrative timescapeness (Zeitschaft)

> "I can cogently narrate my relationship to the past - and become wiser in the process. I perform acts of history." (Scriba, 2023, p. 464)

Level 4: Values and beliefs - the possibility of fact-oriented sense-making in timescape

> "I can form meaning in the tension between several non-metaphysical sources of morality and thus reflect on timescape - in a fact-oriented way and based on methodology, developed since the 18th century." (cf. Scriba, 2023, p. 469)

Level 5: Identity and belonging - reflective and dynamic homing of the modern self

> "I can also make myself at home in the volatile late modern age. I can flexibly integrate different relationships to the past and different perspectives of memory into my modern, buffered self without it splintering in to fragments." (Scriba, 2023, p. 474)

Level 6: Spirituality - reflected contemporaneity as a spiritual resource

> "My relationship to the past can help me to know, that I can feel carried in my life." (Scriba, 2023, p. 480)

As the model of the six levels of personality shows, different levels interact in all subjects, from seemingly unchangeable circumstances to action and knowledge to spirituality. Dilts' levels support each other. Historicus*, our persona, experiences timescape - feeling strong, medium or no resonance at all - and situates themself in relation to it: considering the circumstances, in historical acts of dealing, ability-related, value-oriented, identity- and affiliation-related and also spiritual quality. In such a timescape they experience

- how they have become the person which they see themself and their world as at the moment,
- what distance they have from previous worlds here and elsewhere - describing and judging,
- how "hot", "cold" or "tempered" knowledge of the past affects them,
- how strongly or how little historical acts influence their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

It remains, close to Levinas: there is social evidence that humans and animals do not want to suffer without reason. That is why Charlie Brown (cf. Rüsen, 2003, p. 21) is probably right after all: he still hopes that yesterday would be better. (cf. Scriba, 2023, p. 488). Also, professional historians and history teachers should be aware of their (hidden) hopes.

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Is there a place for hope in history education?

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Abstract

To hope is an integral part of being a human (Webb, 2012). Several educators have suggested that hope should play a crucial role in education to empower young people to shape their own futures and build resilience (hooks, 2003; Freire, 1994; Jacops, 2005; Vlieghe, 2019; de Winter, 2024). I propose that history can and should offer inspiring examples to provide hope for the future, but teaching "hopeful histories" presents both historiographical and ideological challenges. With this miniature I want to start a broader discussion by exploring the question: Is there a place for hope in history education?

Keywords

hope, pedagogies of hope, history education, difficult knowledge, normative balancing

What is hope?

Hope is a complex concept that can be defined in various ways and has different meanings in different cultural contexts. It has been seen as: an emotion, a cognitive process, a state of being, an attitude, a disposition, and more (Webb, 2013). Much research is based on what is called the so-called standard theory, which says that hope involves a desire for an outcome accompanied by the belief that the outcome is possible but not certain in the future (Downie, 1963). Hope as such can serve as a coping mechanism when our well-being is threatened. In history a distressing misuse of this is the slogan "Arbeit macht frei" [work makes free], which encouraged concentration camp prisoners to work harder by giving them false hope of freedom. In this case, hope was cynically exploited by the Nazis.

The crisis of hope

An iconic poster of Barack Obama shows his portrait with the word "hope" underneath. This image encapsulates the powerful message of the then-young senator, urging people not to see the future as something beyond their control, but as something that they can transform for the better through collective effort (Obama, 2014). However, according to Jacop Huber (2024), the concept of (political) hope is in crisis twenty years later. Politically, there is little reason for hope, with wars in the Ukraine, Congo, Sudan and Gaza, the rise of the far-right, and a climate crisis that is being addressed far too slowly.

I think that in history education we are merely confronted with dilemmas concerning political hope. Political hope can be characterized by a particular desire for a specific ideological or

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political outcome. Jacop Huber (2024) argues that there are forms of (political) hope, whose realization does not depend solely on our own efforts (consider, for example, our hope regarding the outcome of an election in another country). Yet, political hope involves us at least paradigmatically as actors, although the goal is not entirely in our hands, it does require our contribution. Unlike many everyday goals we pursue, political goals are often distant and ambitious; their realization may exceed our lifetime (think of the hope to realize equity in a diverse society). Therefore, political hope requires us to situate ourselves in relation to historical time and the situational context we are in. Moreover, the realization of political hope typically requires collective efforts, which can be initiated by political and social movements.

Although social movements are formed around a specific ideological goal and the hope of achieving it in the future, currently many activists are critical of the concept of hope. This is evident, for example, in the credo of climate activist Greta Thunberg (2019): "I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day." Critics argue that hope leads to passivity and perpetuates inequality, while panic would be a more appropriate response given the state of the world. This more negative view of hope dates to Aristotle, who feared that hope would make us naive to reality. Therefore, when (climate) activists use the term "hope," they often refer to "active hope," which serves as a motivation to continue taking action for the well-being of the planet (e.g., Extinction Rebellion, n.d.)

Pedagogies of hope

In teaching and education, the concept hope has been especially embraced in critical pedagogy, with thinkers like bell hooks (2003) and Paulo Freire (1994) considering hope essential for bringing about social change. However, there are different pedagogies of hope, and they can serve to reproduce social relations as well to transform them (Webb, 2012). In the Netherlands, pedagogue Micha de Winter views hope as the engine for personal development and, therefore, essential for the upbringing of young people (de Winter, 2024). Micha de Winter advocates for a future and social justice-oriented pedagogy that offers young people perspective and assumes growth. He is not alone in this; various studies show that young people with a hopeful outlook on the future are more proactive, happier, and have more confidence in politics than those who are convinced of social decline (e.g., Borman, 2015). According to Micha de Winter, it is therefore necessary for young people to see opportunities for action, for democratic participation to be promoted, and for educators, including teachers, to model hope and optimism.

Hope and history education

When it comes to hope and history education, surprisingly little research is available. However, certain tensions are clear. First, there is a temporal tension. The object of hope (that which you hope for) lies in the future, while the object of history education lies in the past. These two come together in the subject (students or teachers) who are in the present, thereby connecting the past and the future. But while hope and history concern different time frames, they are also connected.

On an individual level, our sense of hope is closely linked to our (personal) past. How we remember and interpret our past influences what we consider possible in the future (Larsen, 2015). We listen to our own story: How hopeful is that? From this psychological perspective, it seems desirable to tell mostly hopeful histories at the collective level in education. However, from a historiographical perspective teaching such "feel good" histories is problematic. The pursuit of hopeful stories can obscure the complexity and often dark aspects of history (Tyson, 2015). It also makes history susceptible to political misuse.

The tension between hope and history

A classic debate in historical theory revolves around the distinction between the practical past and the historical past, a concept introduced by Michael Oakeshott (1983). He defined the "historical past" as the past as constructed by professional historians, who, since the early nineteenth century, have claimed to study the past selflessly, "for the sake of the past," without any practical purpose (Oakeshott, 1983, p. 27). In contrast, the "practical past" is how most people who are not professional historians perceive the past. It is meaningful to those who approach it with the question, "What is to be done?" (Lorenz, 2014, p. 32). According to Chris Lorenz (2014),

Oakeshott's intention in making this distinction was to separate the "world of facts" from the "world of values". Although this strict positivist fact/value difference is epistemologically problematic and can no longer be upheld (e.g. Putnam, 2004), it provides an interesting framework for reflecting on whether hope has a place in history education. When viewed through this strict dichotomy, hope, being oriented toward the future, seems to have no role in the historical past and is instead linked to the practical past.

Historian Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) argues that a historian who remains faithful to "hope" is ultimately separated from "truth". According to Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, p. 1), the historian's task is to be realistic, to see what really existed and exists, without yielding to "the ahistorical, the mythical". If a historian must be hopeful, only evidence that confirms your ideological premise remains. Ta-Nehisi Coates, an African-American historian, criticizes the idea (and hope) that the American political tradition follows a historical course that automatically leads to social justice and progress. Historical thinking shows that changes in a society over time require interpretation and explanation, precisely because these changes do not occur in a linear fashion and can also deteriorate.

Historian Peter Wirzbicki (2015) offers another perspective on hope, arguing that despite its many hardships, the past also reveals hopeful developments. Examples include the abolition of slavery, the achievement of women's suffrage, the formation of trade unions, and the defeat of fascism. From this position, the past can be made "practical" by providing students with hopeful narratives that may empower them to shape their own futures. Peter Wirzbicki expresses concern that progressive historians may focus too heavily on a history dominated by oppression, which risks eliminating the possibility of critically examining and reforming the world, as if oppression and capitalism are the only possible outcomes.

The paradox of difficult knowledge and hope

Researcher Lisa Farley (2009) views hope in history education differently, focusing on the role of "difficult knowledge". Difficult knowledge refers not only to the traumatic content of certain types of historical knowledge but also to the internal conflicts (fears and desires) that these representations evoke in students (Britzman, 1998, p. 118). According to Lisa Farley, a paradox occurs in history education. While we try to offer students safety and a hopeful future, a focus on ethical failures in the past can lead to a loss of hope and increasing skepticism among students.

Difficult knowledge raises many questions for students. According to Lisa Farley, teachers can never fully explain why the world fails as history does not offer simple tangible lessons that allow us to prevent future mistakes. This paradox of "difficult knowledge" raises questions about the limits of reason in thinking about the meaning of history and our attempts to make sense of it. This does not mean that teachers should avoid difficult knowledge; according to Lisa Farley, students should learn to tolerate disillusionment and uncertainty, and for her that gives hope. If we only emphasize the promise of reason and progress through education, we forget the underlying conflicts, fears, and uncertainties that questions about difficult historical knowledge bring to the surface.

Discussion

I feel conflicted about the role of hope in history education. On one hand, the belief that education can contribute to a peaceful and social justice-oriented society is a major source of motivation for me as a teacher and researcher. I share Misha de Winter's view that we need to offer young people a hopeful perspective and the sense that they can make a positive impact. I personally have democratic hope, which envisions a society where people are equal in principle, have equal rights, are provided with opportunities to develop themselves, and can freely make their voices heard (de Winter, 2024). However, I also think it's crucial to seriously consider the epistemological and ideological objections to promoting hope in history education.

First, I think that teaching obliges us to treat the past in a practical manner as we teach history to prepare students for the future and to give them agency (Low, 2023). This means that teachers should not treat history as something isolated from the present or as a fixed interpretation. However, we need to recognize that we as teachers and researchers have methodological, moral and epistemological responsibilities. Being aware that your position in time and place, along with your hopes, will inevitably influence how you perceive and present history is

one such responsibility. Additionally, people around the world have different ideological forms of political hope, which can lead to conflict, friction, and the misuse of history. As ascribed to Napoleon Bonaparte: "A leader is a dealer in hope," and we know that leaders around the world often exploit history. A good starting point for education would be to actively explore with students the various forms of hope and their historical contexts over time (Wansink et al., 2018).

What hope can the past give?

The discussion leads to the recurring normative question: What hope to teach? According to Peter Wirzbicki history cannot in itself point to a path to a just future. However, history can provide the building blocks for an ethical vision, but the task of constructing values lies with us and with every contemporary society in a continuous movement (Akkerman et al., 2021). Hope is eventually an existential, ethical and sometimes religious choice. However, we can decide whether we focus on human suffering or human resistance; the horrors of war or the hope for peace; humanity's capacity for evil or solidarity (Hartman, 2015). According to Lea Dasberg (1980), as educators, we must balance presenting injustice and suffering with offering hope and possibilities for improvement. The past offers us all these possibilities, but we decide how to organize, interpret, and teach them. In that choice, we exercise our situated moral freedom and responsibility. History can serve as a source of inspiration and deep reflection, as there is a wealth of knowledge and philosophical and religious traditions across the world that can guide us in how to strive for a better world (e.g., de Graaf, 2024).

Conclusion

Hopeful historical narratives can make us feel good, but they do not necessarily lead to real change or deep historical understanding. At the same time, offering hope for a better and just world is an important pedagogical and psychological goal, it is like oxygen helping students to face the uncertain future with courage and agency. bell hooks (2003, p. xiv) writes: "Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness"; "We live by hope"; Living in hope says to us: "There is a way out, even from the most dangerous and desperate situation." As teachers we must normatively balance between our personal hopes, professional ethics and state curricula. This balancing act can lead to friction and moral dilemmas within ourselves (Wansink et al., 2021). We need researchers who will conduct empirical studies on how history teachers navigate these conflicting goals in relation to hope. Finally, I will not only hold onto hope but will actively strive for a peaceful and more socially just world. I will navigate the balance between my aspirations and doubts, yet remain steadfast, refusing to give up as so many have before me, and they continue to inspire me.

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