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Elements of Historical Personal Identity Construction of Finnish-Speaking Students

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Abstract: In this paper, the constructions of historical personal identity of Finnish-speaking students are analysed. The students participated in a larger study of historical narratives and identities, carried out in 2020 in two schools in Finland and in one European School outside Finland. In the mixed-method study, sixty-one students were interviewed and given writing and drawing assignments on historical identity. In this paper, the students' visual representations of their personal historical identity and its relationship with wider official history are analysed. The aim is to increase understanding of how 14–16-year-old students visualise and articulate their historical personal identity constructions and the historical elements they use in negotiating this identity. The findings suggest that the students integrate personal and historical social narratives in diverse ways but that the majority of them find it challenging to connect their personal family history with the wider official history. Only twelve students made the connection. In addition to presenting the results for the whole group of students, the visual representations of two selected students are discussed in more detail so as to highlight the difference in the approaches to historical personal identity construction among the students.

Keywords: young people; identity; history education; Finland; European school; historical identity

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Citation: Taivalantti, T.; Norppa, J.; Löfström, J. Elements of Historical Personal Identity Construction of Finnish-Speaking Students. *Societies* **2024**, *14*, 113. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14070113

Academic Editor: Alistair Ross

Received: 17 May 2024
Revised: 20 June 2024
Accepted: 4 July 2024
Published: 6 July 2024

1. Introduction

> The formation of identity is one of the most important, if not the most important, function of historical thinking in the way of life of any given time [1]. (p. 203)

In this quote, the German philosopher of history Jörn Rüsen draws attention to the fact that the formation of people's identity and historical thinking are interconnected. It can be argued that history and social studies/social sciences in particular are the school subjects that are relevant in the process of young people's identity construction. Yet researchers have paid relatively little attention to the practical applications of identity construction in these subjects.

Issues of identity are a topical question, as witness countless theoretical and empirical studies of identity and identity politics, for example, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and several other countries [2–4]. Many recent and current conflicts around the world can be traced back to issues of identity, like disagreements over national, ethnic and religious identities [5,6]. In some countries there is a strong political agenda to direct young people's identity construction in school history education [7]. Hence, it is relevant for researchers to know more of how young people negotiate their historical personal identity and what elements they use in this process. In other words, how young people orientate or make sense of their own lives within a historical continuum [8]. Instead of concentrating on historical social narratives, the aim in this paper is to highlight young people's personal narratives that have a bearing on their identity.

In spring 2020, a study was carried out that involved sixty-one Finnish-speaking 14–16-year-old students in three schools. One part of this mixed-method study was a

drawing assignment, inspired by Elizabeth Daws Duraisingh [8] and Peter Seixas [9], where the students were asked to 'draw a diagram or picture that illustrates how the past helps explain who you are and the life you are living or hope to live.' Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen [10] have argued that visual presentations allow people to express themselves in a different, sometimes more subtle way than verbal presentations. This is particularly valuable in complex and sensitive topics, such as identity, where it may be difficult for a person to give a verbal account of his/her thoughts and feelings and where ethical considerations by the researcher are more demanding [11]. The potential of visual research methods has not been explored much in research on young people's historical identities, but in this paper, the focus is on analysing young people's visual presentations in the aforementioned drawing assignment.

In the following sections, we will first discuss selected theoretical views on historical identity, narratives, and history education, paying special attention to historical personal narratives and their connection with identity construction process. We will then describe the method of the study and give an overview of the findings before proceeding to discuss in depth the cases of two selected students' visual representations of their personal historical identity. The results of the analysis can not be generalised but must be understood as highlighting the parameters of personal identity construction processes. The aim is to increase our understanding of how 14–16-year-old students visualise and articulate their personal historical identity construction and what elements they use in negotiating this identity.

2. Theoretical Framework: Identity, Historical Social and Personal Narratives

The concept of identity has evolved throughout history, as shown by Floor Van Alphen and Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse [12]. It has been used in different fields such as mathematics, where it indicates sameness, and in humanities and social sciences, where it has come to mean reflection on the self. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper [13] have criticised the concept for its ambiguity as it has been often used without a proper definition. In everyday language and politics of identity, it involves notions of sameness and specific collective identity. In modern human and social sciences, identity is seen as actively constructed by the individual rather than 'received'. Identity is seen as situational, developing in context and being subject to change. Alistair Ross [14] (p. 284) has used the attribute 'kaleidoscopic' to describe young people's identities: each person has a palette of material—the particles seen in the kaleidoscope—that rearrange themselves in a new pattern as the context changes when the instrument moves to a new position.

In addition to history, several other elements are used for personal identity construction processes, like gender, religion, and class. As Chris Lorenz [15] has stated, a personal identity consists of a set of characteristics that the person has developed in interaction with his/her environment and that sets him/her apart from other people. People's understanding of the past shapes their identity, and vice versa [8,16,17]. Historical narratives are a way to project and express historical identity, to process information from the past and make sense of it. To Jürgen Straub identity formation is one of the functions of historical narratives [18], and in the same vein, James Wertsch [19] has seen both historical social narratives and historical personal narratives as resources of identity. Historical personal narratives can be understood as devices for people to express who they are: people construct autobiographical narratives with meaningful historical content in terms of their past, present, and future. Historical personal narratives can also include reasoning as to why some historical events are more significant than others and how they affect one's own life. While recognising that individuals are attached to historical social narratives, like a nation's historical narrative, in their historical personal identity construction, this study focuses on the content of historical personal narratives and how people make sense of their own lives within a historical continuum (cf. [8,20]).

In history education research on identity, the focus has often been on only one identity layer, like nationality, ethnicity or race. Researchers agree that students' identity construc-

tions connect with history education, but research in this field has focused on students' historical social identities and narratives [21–29]. This may exaggerate the centrality of a fixed historical social identity in students' historical identity [12]. Issues of social identity and belonging are relevant when speaking of historical identity, what historical narratives are presented in history education, and how. In history teaching, the focus on conventional story lines may often fail to pay attention to students' personal interests and identity [30].

Although historical personal identity construction has not been studied much in the context of history education research, historical personal narratives are not new in the field of historical research. For example, autobiographies are historical narratives in the context of individual life histories [18] (p. 44). They allow the person to be a protagonist in a narrative and reflect history through one's own life experience [12] (p. 97). Research suggests that developing the ability to create autobiographical and transgenerational narratives is central in young people's emotional and psychological development [31,32]. This also connects with moral development as there is a moral component in the ability to construct historical narratives and orientate in time [33,34].

Regarding young people's historical identities in Finland, the Youth and History survey, carried out in 1995, showed the importance of the national narrative of Finnish history in the responses of young people [35]. The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), carried out in 2016, gave a similar result. It also showed that Finnish students' knowledge and skills in civic matters are very good but their self-efficacy in civic participation and their self-reported interest in politics is low [36]. Several studies suggest that the historical identity of Finnish youth is strongly connected with the social historical narrative, especially the events connected with WWII as a collective experience of the nation [37–41].

In a recent study, it was found that Finnish young people recognise a need for diverse historical social narratives, not only national but also sub-national narratives and narratives that include elements of several national narratives. In a multicultural family context, the parents' country of origin and activity are related to the level of the students' exposure to Finnish history culture: some students identify themselves with the Finnish national narrative, others with supra-national narratives [42,43]. These findings have inspired the study that this paper is based upon and where students' historical personal identity construction processes are explored. It is assumed here that historical personal narratives reflect the students' needs and interests and are used in their personal identity construction. Making this process visible may help develop new approaches in history education, as will be discussed in the end of the paper.

3. Research Questions and Methodology

Personal identity and personal identity construction processes are challenging to research as they are largely unconscious and unreflected. Processes that involve emotions and are difficult to verbalise may, however, be approached through visual means [10,44,45]. Differences between producing analytic verbal accounts and visual representations like drawings should not be exaggerated, but it seems reasonable to think the latter has a lot of potential to express the social–emotional elements of personal identity, for example. As Dawn Mannay has contended with reference to her observations, 'the creation of visual artefacts also works to make the familiar strange for research participants, who gain new perspectives on their own understandings of their subjective worlds' [11] (p. 28). As researchers of visual methods have highlighted, visual images can be analysed from the point of view of their production, content, and perception [46]. People's different drawing skills may, however, result in research material that is qualitatively diverse, and the abundance of visual elements may be difficult to code and categorise in the analysis but the potential of visual research methods is great. Thus, the research forming the base of this paper was designed to give visual methods a central place.

In this paper, 14–16-year-old Finnish-speaking students' historical identity construction processes are explored, with an extra focus on two selected cases. The research questions are as follows:

R1: How do the students visualise and articulate constructions of their historical personal identity narratives?

R2: How do they connect their own life stories to the wider official history?

R3: What historical elements do they use in negotiating their historical personal narratives?

Here, wider official history is understood as the history taught in school but it is also the history culture around us. History teaching at school is not the only factor that provides young people with elements for historical identity construction. Other forms of history culture—popular culture like Hollywood films, history magazines, computer games, etc.—also influence young people's relationship with history [47–50].

3.1. Participants and Context of the Study

The qualitative mixed-method study that this paper is based on was carried out in February–May 2020 in three schools. Information about the participating students and schools is in Table 1. As a strategic choice in order to increase diversity in the research material, the schools were selected so that they are located in different kinds of socio-cultural milieu: one school in a small Finnish town, one school in a medium-sized Finnish town, and one school with Finnish-speaking students in a major international metropolis outside of Finland. The schools in Finland are municipal comprehensive schools, the most common school form in Finland. The school outside Finland is part of the network of European Schools[1]. The students in the European School who participated in the study live outside of Finland but have connections to the Finnish culture as at least one of their parents is Finnish. One class from each school was selected by a teacher to participate in the study. In the schools in Finland, they were Grade 9 classes, and in the European School, a Secondary 5th Grade class.

Table 1. Information on the schools and students that participated in the study.

	School 1	School 2	School 3
Number of students	22 (10 boys, 12 girls)	19 (12 boys, 7 girls)	20 (11 boys, 11 girls)
Age	15–16	15–16	14–17
Geographical location	Pirkanmaa region, in Finland	Central Finland region, in Finland	European country outside Finland
Description of the location	Town with less than 25,000 inhabitants	Town with over 100,000 inhabitants	City with c. 1 million inhabitants
School type	Finnish comprehensive school	Finnish comprehensive school	European School
Class	9th Grade	9th Grade	Secondary 5th in the Finnish language section
Context the study was conducted in	Social studies lessons	Social studies lessons	Finnish and Science lessons
Curriculum/Syllabus used in the school	Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014	Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014	Schola Europaea, History Syllabus—S4–S5

The research was conducted in Finnish during social studies lessons in the two schools in Finland and during Finnish lessons or science lessons in the European School where the students study history in their second language. In the Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, currently in force in comprehensive schools in Finland, one of the aims in history education is to support the pupils in building a personal cultural identity [51] (p. 446).

The current history syllabus in the European School participating in the study also aims to develop the students' individual identity, more specifically, their awareness of their historical identity through the study of the historical experiences of different cultures [52]. The content of identity is not more closely described or defined in the syllabus.

The everyday environments of the students in this study are diverse and the students are exposed to diverse history cultures. It is assumed here that in the middle-sized Finnish town, the students' direct personal international contacts are more limited and the influence of the Finnish history culture is strong, but due to globalisation, migration and the use of the Internet, international influences are also present. The students' direct personal international contacts are likely to be more extensive in the international school in a European metropolis, with students from all around the world and Finnish-speaking students in the minority.

3.2. Data Collection

The data expressing the students' historical identity construction were collected through a questionnaire, two writing assignments, a drawing assignment, and semi-structured interviews. The writing and drawing assignments were piloted. The questionnaire and the writing and drawing assignments are found in Table 2.

Table 2. Questionnaire and writing and drawing assignments used in the study.

Questionnaire to Gain Background Information
1. Name
2. Gender
3. Age
4. School
5. What are your parents' occupations?
6. Have you always lived in Finland?
7. If you have lived somewhere else, where and for how long?
8. What language or languages do you speak at home with your parents and siblings?
9. What language or languages do you speak with your friends?
10. Do you have a passport?
11. Which country/countries do you have a passport for?
12. Define your own nationality as you experience it.
13. Do you feel that nationality is an important thing for you? Why?
14. Do you feel yourself. . . (select 1–6 valuable options for you)
Finnish, Nordic, As a resident of home community, European, Foreigner, As a resident of your village or neighbourhood, World citizen, Multicultural, As a resident of your province, Expatriate Finn, Migrant, Immigrant, None of the above
Writing assignment 1
Write your own biography. For example, you can answer these questions: Who are you? What things are important to you? Where do you feel you belong?
Writing assignment 2
Earlier in the questionnaire you defined your nationality and in another task you selected the groups you felt you belonged to. Now please write the history of the most important group or nationality as you see it. Be prepared to tell us more about what you wrote.
Drawing assignment
Draw a diagram or picture that illustrates how the past helps explain who you are and the life you are living or hope to live.

The questionnaire was used for collecting background information from the students. Following the method of asking students about their nationality and identity used by Peck [53] and Van Alphen and Van Nieuwenhuyse [12], it was assumed that the students can have multiple nationalities and identities that they are asked to define by themselves. As the pilot study showed, the question 'which group do you belong' was too broad. The categories were then altered so that the available options were sub-national, national, supra-national, or none of these (Table 2). Biographical assignments were used that give space for each student's voice and allow him/her to distinguish between multiple layers of identity and explore them in depth by addressing them in the assignment explicitly (see [12]). The aim in the writing assignments was to encourage the students to reflect on their identity and the layers of identification freely. The first writing assignment focused on who the student is, the second on what historical social narratives and what group(s) the student feels belonging to.

The drawing assignment, an adaptation from Elizabeth Daws Duraisingh [8] and Peter Seixas [9], gave the students an opportunity to express themselves through means of visualisation rather than verbal explanation. We asked the students to 'draw a diagram or picture that illustrates how the past helps explain who you are and the life you are living or hope to live'. The aim was to invite the student to reflect on his/her relationship with the past and how the past might affect his/her present and future.

Based on the writing and drawing assignments, fourteen students were selected for semi-structured individual interviews that took place online, due to COVID-19 restrictions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were 30–90 min long and aimed to give the students an opportunity to analyse the texts and the drawing they had produced earlier. The interview strategy was to start with a commonplace topic, like the COVID-19 situation and the lockdown measures, and move on to questions of history education, the students' recent studies in history, learning history outside the school, and the student's historical personal identity (cf. [14]). Next, the student's written assignments and drawing and how history teaching could help students construct their identity were discussed. In consideration of the complex relationship between history and identity, the interviews were kept close to the students' lifeworld, like family, school and hobbies.

3.3. Data Analysis and Findings in Overview

In this paper, we focus on the analysis of the students' drawings; the interviews and the texts produced by the students were used as support in the analysis. We coded the data twice using two different approaches to create categories. In the first round, inductive content analysis was used where a data-driven approach enabled the analysis of the material without preconceived categories. In the second round, the approach was abductive content analysis. The background theory guiding the content analysis was the guidelines for interpreting visual representations, developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen [10].

In the first round of analysis, we went through the students' drawings to analyse how the students connect their own life story to the wider official history. The focus of analysis was the textual elements. The drawings were arranged according to whether they include historical elements and, second, whether these elements relate to personal life, the wider official history, or both. This way, four different categories were formed in the material of fifty-three drawings.

The first category included drawings showing the connections between the students' personal life/family history (birth, start of school, etc.) with the official history. There were thirteen drawings in this category. The second category included drawings that present only the student's personal history. In this category, there were twenty-six drawings. Thus, it appears that it was easier for young people to draw their personal history without connection to the wider official history. The third category included one drawing that presents the official history without any connections to the students' own lives or family history.

The fourth category was the drawings that did not have any historical elements; this included thirteen drawings. These drawings presented pictures of the students' hobbies or

objects of interest or meaningful things like the students' families. In this category, there are drawings that depict history in an abstract way or describe the stress caused by school, and also drawings that suggest that the students have been struggling with the assignment and have found it difficult. Some of the students may have felt themselves unable to visualise their thoughts, and two students answered the assignment in writing. We labelled this category of drawings 'Other'.

The spread between the four categories resembles the result Dawes Duraisingh obtained in a similar kind of study in the United States where almost half of the drawings showed the students' immediate personal experiences, and one quarter referred to the historical past that features in the history textbooks. The researcher suggested the result is explained by the vagueness of the assignment itself [8] (p. 179). It is possible, however, that the students also do not easily connect the historical past with their own lives if 'History' to them is primarily the school subject and the textbooks where political, economic and social processes are discussed on a macro-level [54].

The second round of analysis in our research concentrated on the composition of the drawings in order to see how the students visualise their historical personal identity narratives. The guidelines developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen [10] for interpreting visual representations was used as the analytic tool. The drawings can be representative of different types of visual structures: one is a narrative-type presentation, the other a mind-map-type presentation. Following Kress and Leeuwen [10], these are named a narrative and a conceptual representation, respectively. Narrative visual structures have a vector that describes a dynamic process, like a temporal relationship. They present actions, events, processes of change and spatial arrangements [10] (pp. 55–63) [55]. To understand how the students construct their personal historical narratives, their use of vectors and other components in the presentations were analysed. In the mind-map-type presentations, the elements appear as generalised and 'timeless essences' [10] (p. 76). The focus of analysis here is how these features appear in the students' drawings and are used in organising and presenting the students' thoughts about the historical elements that have had an impact on their life.

During the second round of analysis we found three different categories: narrative representations; conceptual representations; and the group 'others' (see Table 3). The first category, narrative representations, included twenty-two drawings. In a typical drawing, time was represented by a vector that usually starts from the left and progresses to the right. The events on the timeline were added as images or text elements. There were also other solutions: three students bent their vector to a snake form, and one student drew a top-down vector. The starting point of the vectors was, in the majority of these drawings, (n = 14) the moment the student was born, and typically, the vectors' end point was vague. In Figure 1, there are two examples of this kind of student narrative structure.

Table 3. Summary of results by the categories of the first and second round of analysis.

	Narrative Structure	Conceptual Structure	Others	Total
Personal history and wider official history	8	5		13
Only personal history	13	13		26
Only official wider history	1			1
Others (Picture of meaningful matter, for example family or hobby)			13	13
Total	22	18	13	53

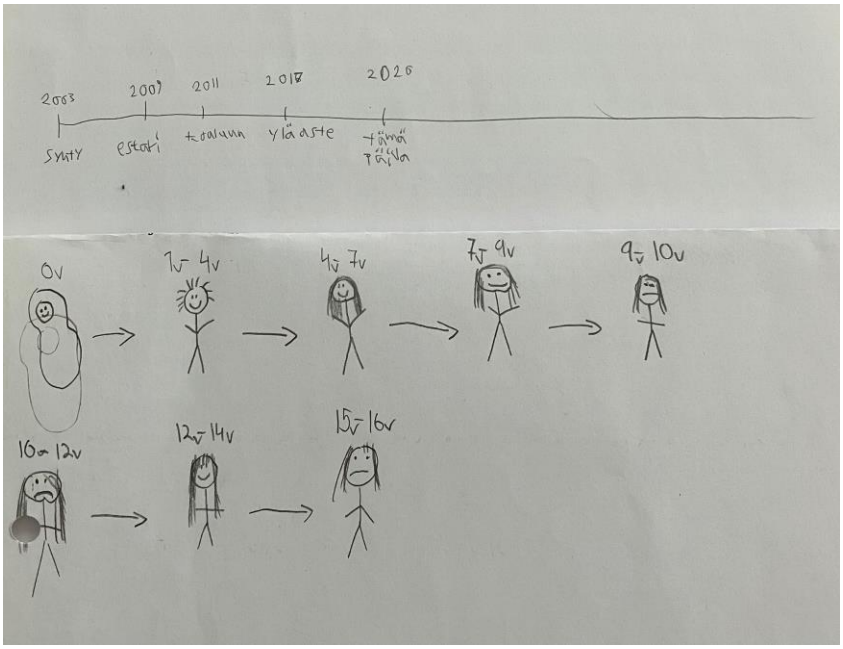

Figure 1. Two examples of narrative structure in the students' drawings.

In the first, rather minimalist, example, the textual elements tell when the student was born, started pre-school, school, and secondary school; the last recorded event is today (tämä päivä). In the second example, the student has drawn herself at different ages; the number above the human figure is the age in years. Also, the mood of the person at different ages is visible in the drawing.

The second category of representations that was formed in the analysis, conceptual representations, included eighteen drawings. In these mind-map-type presentations the students drew themselves or wrote the pronoun I (minä) in the centre of the picture. They added around the centre text or pictures that are connected with the centre with lines. In the text and pictures, things that are meaningful to the student, like family, friends, and hobbies, are described. Figure 2 is a conceptual representation that is very typical in this research. The student wrote the word I (Minä) in the middle of the picture and the following text elements around it: the future, friends, hobbies, school, and the family. Two lines go from the future (tulevaisuus) to the job (työpaikka) and money (raha). In the same way, three lines were drawn from the text element hobbies (harrastukset) to the words playing (pelaaminen), going to the gym (lihaskunto), and running (juokseminen).

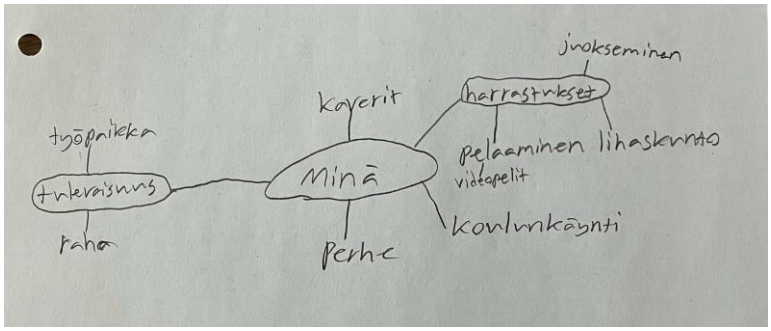

Figure 2. Example of conceptual structure in the students' drawings.

The third category of representations in our analyses includes thirteen drawings that were seen as having neither a narrative nor a conceptual structure. Again, this category

was labelled 'Other'. It is worth noting that in the first and second round of analysis, the drawings placed in the category 'Other' were the same.

Table 3 gives an overview of the distribution of categories in our analysis. As stated above, the distribution here resembles the results of the study by Dawes Duraisingh [8], in how personal and official history feature in the students' presentations. Regarding the structure of representation, a narrative and a conceptual (mind-map) structure appear to have been an almost equally appealing choice to the students. It is noteworthy that one-fourth of the students produced representations that were too loosely connected to the assignment or empty of content to be included in the 'main' categories. As mentioned in commenting on Dawes Duraisingh's research, students may find it difficult to process questions about the personal meaning of history because such questions may often remain unaddressed in the history classroom. But the assignment may also sometimes be unclear to the students, resulting in a large number of non-answers.

Considering the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon discussed in this paper, it may be fruitful to add the element of qualitative analysis to the quantitative analysis. In the next sections of the paper, two cases are discussed that show in more detail how the students visualised and articulated constructions of their historical personal identity narratives and how they connected their own life stories to the wider official history. The two examples were chosen because they are seen to include a broader, richer combination of both personal history and official history, and they also have different visual structures: one is a narrative-type presentation, the other a conceptual mind-map-type presentation. Moreover, the interviews of the two students who made the drawings provided particularly valuable additional perspective on their content.

There are limitations to the interpretation of drawings in that a visual representation can be interpreted in a myriad of ways [55]. Emese Hall [56] has problematised the use of children's drawings in research, saying that analysis and interpretation should be carefully considered and the children ideally should be invited to engage in dialogue about their work so that they are respected as expert informers. With these considerations in mind, in this research, drawings were interpreted against the relief of the material collected in the interview and the writing task (see Table 2). Further, in the interviews, the students were asked to discuss their drawings to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

The number of students in our study does not allow for statistical generalisation. If the study was to be replicated with a larger and more diverse group of students, quantitative research methods could be used to obtain a more detailed picture of the variation in how students connect personal and official history. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could have considerable potential to identify patterns in a larger data set and provide the basis for statistically generalisable conclusions.

4. Sofia's Narrative Representation

Sofia is a 16-year-old Grade 9 student who lives in Finland in a medium-sized town outside of the metropolitan region. She goes to a Finnish-speaking comprehensive school. (Finland has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, so some schools are Swedish-speaking). Sofia has always lived in Finland. Her parents work in the cultural sector. She speaks Finnish with her parents. When asked to define her nationality, she wrote that she feels Finnish and European, and she continued: 'I never felt my Finnishness as important as people near me. Europeanness has always been an important part of my identity, though I have always lived in Finland. But I have always travelled a lot in Europe…'. Art and equality are important to her. She has artistic hobbies and art gives her an opportunity to escape busy, demanding aspects of life. She feels connected with the region and also the LGBTQIA+ community and a choir community that give her a sense of safety in life.

Sofia's drawing (Figure 3) has several pictures and thought bubbles that are cartoon-like elements. In the middle there is a picture of herself, and behind her head is a cloud with the word worries (huolia). Above is a timeline with vectors, and at the bottom there is a family tree in the left corner and a thought bubble in the right corner. The timeline has

two branches. One starts from the First and Second World War, followed by the Cold War and the Middle East crises; it ends with a bomb and the text war (sota). The other branch starts from industrialisation (teollistuminen), followed by a picture of a car, a factory and a plane, and it continues with the vector to the word climate change (ilmastonmuutos). From the end points of both branches there are vectors to the cloud of worries. So as to underline the worries, there are also two other lines leading to the words worry about the future (huoli tulevasta!). The timelines represent the official history and show how historical development has brought about challenges in the world where she lives. It can be suggested the official history influences Sofia's thinking because the vectors point to the thought bubble that reflects worries.

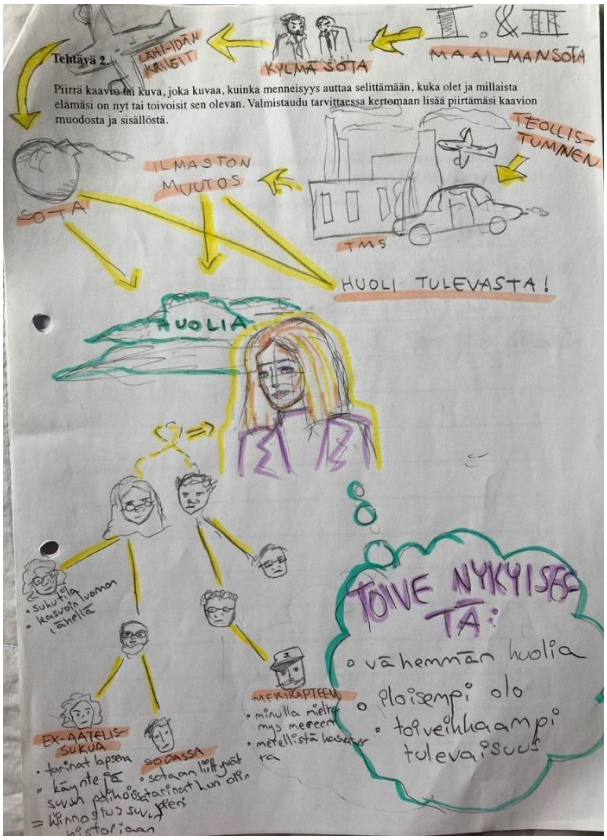

Figure 3. Sofia's drawing.

The family tree in the left corner presents Sofia's personal family history. It has three generations and it shows that one branch of the tree has been connected to a noble family. Sofia's family has visited places that are linked with family history, and she reflects that these visits and stories have inspired her interest in history. In the family tree, there are two great-grandfathers. One of them was in war (sodassa), and Sofia added a note that she heard stories about war when she was small (sotaan liittyvät tarinat kun olin pieni). Another great-grandfather was a sea captain (merikapteeni), and Sofia commented that she had a maritime upbringing (merellinen kasvatus) and is fond of the sea (mieltymys mereen). She recognises that earlier generations have influenced her present-day self and inspired her interest in history. In the drawing, she links the family tree to herself, and the vector pointing to her starts from a heart between her parents.

Sofia presents her thoughts about the future in the thought bubble in the lower right corner of the drawing. It can be interpreted as a way of expressing one's inner thoughts [10]. The headline in the thought bubble is wish in the present (toive nykyisestä) under which are three wishes: less worries (vähemmän huolia), more joyful feeling (iloisempi olo), and a more hopeful future (toiveikkaampi tulevaisuus). (See Table 4).

Table 4. Translations for Figure 3.

In Finnish	In English
Timeline on top	
I and II Maailmansota	World war I and II
Kylmä sota	Cold war
Lähi-idän kriisit	Middle East crises
Sota	War
Ilmastonmuutos	Climate change
Teollistuminen	Industrialisation
Tms.	etc.
Huolia	Worries
Huoli tulevasta!	Worry about the future!
The family tree in the lower left corner	
• sukutila • kasvoin luonnon lähellä	• family estate • I grew up close to nature
EX-AATELISSUKUA • tarinat lapsena • käyntejä suvun paikoissa =>kiinnostus suvun historian	EX-NOBLE FAMILY • I heard stories as a child • visits to family places =>interest in family history
SODASSA • sotaan liittyvät tarinat kun olin pieni	IN WAR • war-related stories when I was little
MERIKAPTEENI • minulla mieltymys mereen • merellistä kasvatusta	A SEA CAPTAIN • liking for the sea • maritime upbringing
The thought bubble in the lower right corner	
TOIVE NYKYISESTÄ • vähemmän huolia • iloisempi olo • toiveikkaampi tulevaisuus	WISH IN THE PRESENT • less worries • more joyful feeling • a more hopeful future

Sofia's drawing shows a narrative visual structure. Her drawing includes multiple sections, but they form a dynamic unified whole. Sofia uses vectors to show how different things affect her and her thinking (cf. [10] (pp. 55–63) [55]). In the upper part of the picture, she refers to the wider official history as two timelines where the vectors express temporal relations and cause–effect relations, making visible how history and the present world connect. Her drawing gives the impression that she is aware of and concerned about the state of the world. She presents the official history's timeline separately from the family tree although the events and the people in these two parts coincide in time. The family history seems to have a positive and empowering effect on her life today, some graphic elements seem to express particular emotional warmth, and she identifies some elements that she thinks have influenced her identity, whereas the official history is a cause of anxiety and affects how she views the world today.

5. Laura's Conceptual Representation

Laura is 15 years, lives in a big European city and goes to the European School. She has lived in several European countries. She was born in Finland but moved abroad when she was four years old. She speaks Finnish with her parents. When asked to define her nationality she wrote that she feels Finnish, but not strongly: 'I feel like I'm Finnish, because we go [to Finland] every summer and winter. We've moved a lot during my life, but Finland is only thing that has remained constant. I always cheer for Finland in competitions, especially in ice hockey (but Belgium in football). However, I don't feel that

I'm particularly strongly Finnish because when you're there, you don't really know the places and you don't have friends there'.

Laura's drawing has two sections (Figure 4). There is a mind-map in the middle and a box with the word future (tulevaisuus) in the bottom right corner. Her mind-map is a star-formed diagram. In the middle is a box where I (minä) is placed, and around are seventeen lines that lead to circles and squares with contents that are important to Laura. According to Kress and Leeuwen [10] this kind of mind-map is a conceptual structure or, more precisely, a centralised analytical structure. There are no vectors or dynamic time. Without timelines it is possible to connect elements more freely: a mind-map allows for organising one's thoughts on a given topic according to one's individual logic. The events of official history are on the same level as elements of personal history. In the mind-map, Laura mentioned personal historical events and also official historical events, and she has also added explanations for her choices. If the event is personal, Laura has written explanations to the line which leads to the box in the middle (Minä). In the case of official historical events, she has written explanations next to the box where the event is presented. The place of the explanations shows that some of the events depicted in the drawing have had a more direct effect on Laura than others. For example, on the right side of the drawing is a box with the text Finland (Suomi), and in the line is the text home, family (koti, suku). In contrast, there is nothing on the line from the circle with the text No slavery (ei orjuutta), but instead the explanation (tasa-arvoa) is next to the circle.

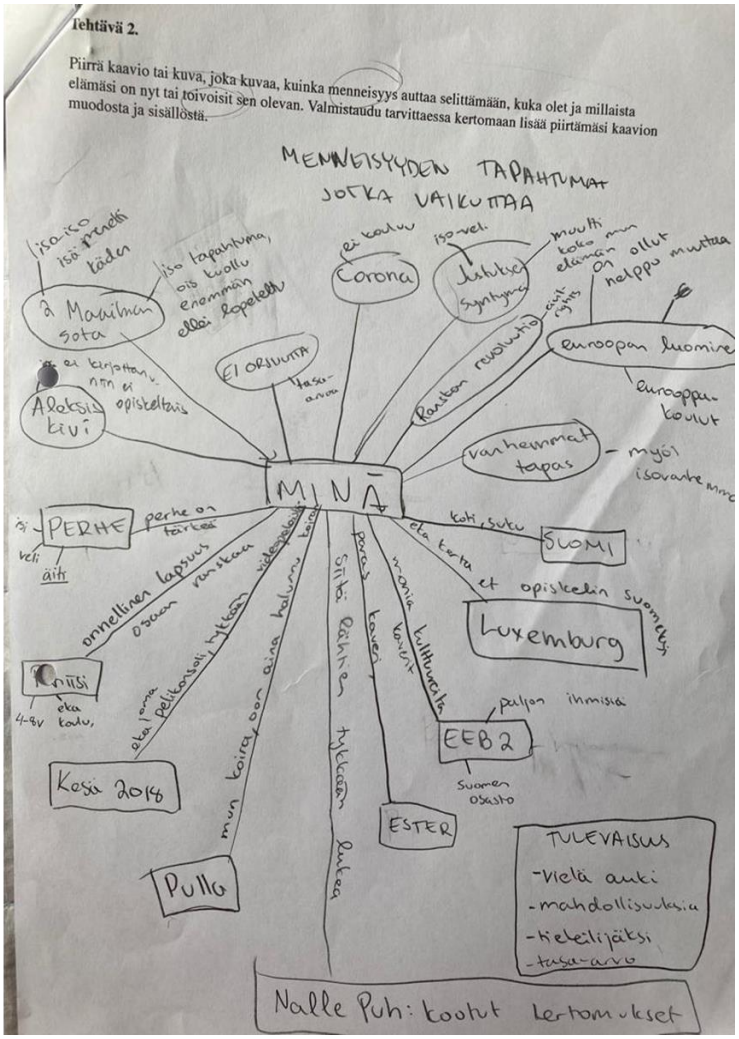

Figure 4. Laura's drawing.

On the left side of the picture Laura has written Aleksis Kivi, the name of the Finnish author who was one of the first to write plays and novels in Finnish and whose novel, Seven Brothers (Seitsemän veljestä), published in 1870, has had a central role in the Finnish cultural history. Laura explained that if Kivi had not written in Finnish, she would not be studying in Finnish (jos ei kirjoittanu niin ei opiskeltais). In the next circle, she mentioned the Second World War (2 Maailman sota) and added two texts next to it: a big event where more people would have died if it had not been stopped (iso tapahtuma ois kuollu enemmän ellei lopetettu), and great-grandfather lost an arm (iso-isoisä menetti käden). She mentioned the French revolution (Ranskan revoluutio) and no slavery (Ei orjuutta), for they represent civil rights and equality to her. The creation of Europe (Euroopan luominen) was meaningful for her as it makes it easy to move from one country to another (on ollut helppo muuttaa). In this context, she mentioned European schools (Eurooppa koulut). Elsewhere in her drawing, there was also a separate square for EEB2, the abbreviation for her own European school, and she explained it is relevant to her because there are, for example, many cultures (monia kulttuureita), friends (kaverit) and a Finnish section (Suomen osasto). (See Table 5).

Table 5. Translations for Figure 4.

In Finnish	In English
Translations sequentially in a clockwise	
MENNEISYYDEN TAPAHTUMAT JOTKA VAIKUTTAA	PAST EVENTS WHICH INFLUENCE
Aleksis Kivi • jos ei kirjoittanu niin ei opiskeltais	Aleksis Kivi • if he had not written in Finnish, we would not be studying in Finnish
2. Maailman sota • iso-isoisä menetti käden • iso tapahtuma ois kuollu enemmän ellei lopetettu	World War II • great-grandfather lost an arm • A big event where more people would have died if it had not been stopped
EI ORJUUTA • tasa-arvoa	NO SLAVERY • equality
Corona • ei koulua	Corona • no school
Justuksen syntymä • iso-veli • muutti koko mun elämän	Birth of Justus • the big brother • changed my whole life
Ranskan revolution • civil rights	The French Revolution • civil rights
Euroopan luominen • on ollut helppo muuttaa • € • Eurooppa koulut	The creation of Europe • it has been easy to move • € • European School
vanhemmat tapas • myös isovanhemmat	parents met • grandparents too
SUOMI • koti • suku	FINLAND • home • family
Luxemburg • eka kerta et opiskelin suomeksi	Luxembourg • the first time I studied in Finnish
EEB2 • monia kulttuureita • kaverit • paljon ihmisiä • Suomen osasto	EEB2 • many cultures • friends • a lot of people • Finnish section

Table 5. *Cont.*

In Finnish	In English
ESTER • paras kaveri	ESTER • the best friend
Nalle Puh kootut kertomukset • siitä lähtien tykkäsin lukea	The Complete Tales of Winnie-The-Pooh • since then I liked to read
Pulla • mun koira olen aina halunnut koiran	Pulla • my dog; I have always wanted a dog
Kesä 2018 • eka oma pelikonsoli, tykkään pelata	Summer 2018 • my first own game console; I like gaming
Pariisi • onnellinen lapsuus • osaan ranskaa • 4–8 v • eka koulu	Paris • happy childhood • I know French • I was 4–8 years old • the first school
PERHE • perhe on tärkeä • isä,veli,äiti	FAMILY • the family is important • father, brother, mother
The box in lower left corner	
TULEVAISUUS • vielä auki • mahdollisuuksia • tieteilijäksi • tasa-arvo	FUTURE • still open • opportunities • a scientist • equality

The box with the headline the future (tulevaisuus), in the bottom right corner in the drawing, does not have a contact line to Laura herself. Her future is as if in an other dimension, and she has written in the box that the future is still open (vielä auki) and there are opportunities (mahdollisuuksia).

6. What Identity-Forming History Comes Up in the Drawings

War has had a prominent place in the historical narratives that Finnish people construct: WWII is a central theme in Finnish history culture and historical social narratives [37–41]. The war had a deep impact on many families because of the human casualties and the loss of territories to the Soviet Union. This is also the case in the drawings discussed here. Sofia mentioned WWI and WWII, the Cold War and the crises in the Middle East, and she saw that they are connected. To her, the wider official history is war and conflicts. In her family tree, she mentioned WWII and linked it to her family history. Laura also mentioned WWII and her great-grandfather who lost his arm in the war. In the interview, she mentioned that she put her great-grandfather in the drawing because she thinks he is one of the reasons why she is interested in history, especially WWII. She also discussed her other grandfather who likes history and has a room full of history books: visiting him, 'we watch some documentary about WW II and he always explains it to us terribly eagerly'. There is a concrete transgenerational element in how the two students give WWII meaning as part of their historical personal identity. In both cases, the significance of the war is visible in their drawings as part of official history and family history: the events of the war figure as a crossing between the two, a hub of identity-supporting narratives.

Regarding (trans)national identity, Laura mentioned in her drawing the Finnish author Aleksis Kivi, thus drawing attention to the importance of Finnish language to her. A recent study of Finnish students in an international school milieu has also shown Finnish-speaking students value the Finnish language and do not take it for granted [43]. But in the drawing is also the creation of Europe, and it is connected to the symbol of the euro and the text 'It has been easy to move', referring to the common currency and European Union citizens' free movement. It appears that these aspects of the European integration are significant and presumably positive to Laura as her family has lived in several EU countries and she is

familiar with how they affect people's daily lives. Also, one of her parents is employed by the EU and she studies in the European School. The European community-building project and the Finnish nation-building project (Aleksis Kivi) are present in Laura's drawing. Openness to both transnational and (Finnish-)national perspectives is visible in how she connected 'Many cultures' to her positive experiences of EEB2 but also added the link 'Finnish section' to EEB2. In Laura's drawing, elements of positive transnational and national identity formation co-exist and seem to affect her as an asset. In Sofia's drawing, there is awareness of global issues, like climate change, but these issues seem to be a cause of concern. In her drawing, the family tree appears to provide support and comfort, whereas the global context appears as a source of anxiety.

Related to aspects of civic identity, there is also a further difference in what Sofia and Laura have raised in their drawings: Sofia identified acute global problems but did not give expression to positive resources that could help address them; she only hoped there would be fewer worries and more joy in her future. Laura wrote in her drawing no slavery and French revolution, and added to them equality and civil rights. Human rights and the development of democracy were also important themes for the group of Finnish-speaking international students in a recent study [43]. Van Nieuwenhuysen and Wils [57] (p. 57) have argued that Flemish students identify with historical events that have contributed to the development of democracy and human rights. In Laura's case, such events and historical processes also appear, suggesting they are significant to her historical and, it can be proposed, civic identity: history that has made her what she is consists of human efforts to expand democracy and human rights and fight oppression and injustice.

It has been argued that moral questions, like equality and human rights, are an important part of history teaching [33]. An earlier study of Finnish students has suggested that when history teaching has not trained students to discuss moral questions in the classroom, students enjoy such discussions and can reflect on the moral meaning of history (Löfström 2014) [34]. In studies of Finnish students' civic knowledge and attitudes, it has come out that when Finnish students' knowledge and skills in civic matters are internationally very good, their self-efficacy in civic participation and their self-declared interest in politics is very low [36]. That there are no positive historical cases of civic activity, civic movements or agents of civic activism in Sofia's drawing is congruous with the marginal place of participatory citizenship in Finnish young people's civic attitudes in earlier research. Laura's drawing expresses some degree of 'civic consciousness' in referring to how people have changed the world in the past (cf. [20]); yet no agents are mentioned, only macro-level events and developments.

It is noteworthy that in these visual representations of historical personal identity construction there are few references to individuals or collectives of people. This may reflect adherence to conventions of history teaching rather than the students' personal view of what is relevant in history, as suggested in a study of discussions in the history classroom in Spanish schools [30]. So as to better understand the students' answers in our study, the students were asked in the interviews if history education should help young people construct their identity and if the things taught in the history classroom have meaning to them, and if not, what would be meaningful to them. In the interview, Sofia reflected on the dilemma of history teaching making an impact on students' identity: it is good to know where one is coming from but not let it define oneself. When asked what elements of history teaching could be meaningful to her she said:

> 'Probably the stories of individual people. In a way, often when we talk about some historical event we talk about countries. In wars there are countries, and maybe some captain will stand out, but nothing else. In a way it would be nice to hear the stories of ordinary civilians, how they have acted in those situations and how they have managed.'

Laura's answers expressed a similar view. She stated that perhaps history teaching could help students' personal identity construction but in reality it rarely does:

> 'Right now, in history lessons we go through that they lost this and they won that. It is cool but I could take a break now. It's not terribly interesting. But if you could focus on one person it could have a bigger impact. Especially at young age, hearing about all the important and inspiring people in history could give more self-confidence and self-esteem.'

Laura also mentioned that the history lessons have not dealt with individual people but her science teacher is enthusiastic about Marie Curie, and she had also read the books about Malala Yousafzai and Anne Frank in other subjects' lessons. She reflected that this approach might work in history lessons, too. In a recent small-scale survey among Finnish Grade 8 students, it was found that learning about important people and events in the history classroom is indeed considered both generally important and personally interesting to the students [58]. Views on who is actually 'important' may vary, however, and in our study, it is noteworthy that while Laura was thinking of 'great' personalities, Sofia was more interested in 'ordinary people'. Both approaches can give valuable support to the students' identity construction processes.

7. Conclusions: History, Personal Identity Construction, and Stories of Individual People

In this paper, we discussed the visual representations and the connections between the official history and personal history in the drawings of a group of students. Further, we have focused more closely on two students to show the diverse connections in their personal historical identity constructs as expressed in their drawings and the interviews. One of the students, Sofia, used a traditional narrative structure: her visual representation showed causes and consequences, their temporal relationships, and the two tracks of history that are official and personal (family-related) history. The other student, Laura, used a conceptual structure: narrativity is more implicit, events and processes form a network rather than a storyline or a trajectory, and all the events are at the same level, whether part of the official or family history. In the students' drawings, the wider official history was connected to the students' personal situation either through their family history, like war, or values and concerns that are important to them, like human rights, climate issues, or the students' first language, as in Laura's case. Both Sofia's and Laura's visual representations allow for expressing such connections, but Sofia also expressed—perhaps due to the more diverse graphic elements in her drawing—some visibly emotional and evaluative dimensions in her historical personal identity construction. In that sense, Sofia's drawing shows the potential of visual representations to convey affective–emotional content.

The results of this study suggest that the majority of students find it challenging to connect their personal history with the wider official history. Twelve students were able to make the connection. Does it mean they also find history as a school subject meaningful to themselves? Not necessarily: as the selected quotes from the interviews show, the students did not find that history teaching always meets their interest. Consequently the role of history teaching in supporting the students' identity building process may remain marginal. There is a wide variety of sources of inspiration to identity building outside the history classroom, but as far as history teaching is expected to provide material and support, it seems more attention could be given to 'living people', individuals and groups as historical agents. The drawing assignment in this research project put the students' own and their family's life into focus, but we suspect that in the history classroom, it is uncommon to ask students to make representations of how their own and their family's lives intersect with the wider historical developments in society. Such intersections may be conjectural and difficult for the students to outline, but tentative construction of them could also serve as an exercise where students give history personal meaning that too often may be lacking in the classroom.

If students are not actively encouraged to construct connections between 'small' and 'big' history, and if history teaching focuses only on macro-level political and social history, students may come to believe that the history of everyday life and, more particularly, their family history does not qualify as legitimate history. The visual representations of the

two students that we have discussed here suggest that students have the capacity to cross between official history and family history or everyday history, but it needs to be clearly communicated to them that history teachers are genuinely also interested in the personal meanings that students give to the past.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, T.T., J.N. and J.L.; methodology, T.T., J.N. and J.L.; formal analysis, T.T.; investigation, T.T.; data curation, T.T.; writing—original draft preparation, T.T.; writing—review and editing, T.T., J.L. and J.N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Open access funding provided by University of Helsinki.

Institutional Review Board Statement: We have paid particular attention to the fact that all participating students did so voluntarily and were given full explanations in advance of all relevant aspects of the study, taking full account of their role in the classroom. We have also sought approval from their parents/guardians. We are fully committed to taking care of the data protection and privacy of these young people.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Note

[1] https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/mission (accessed on 19 June 2024).

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