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## In search of the meaning-making student: Notes on the lack of third-order concepts in the Finnish history curriculum

### **Abstract**

In this article, the current Finnish history curricula for basic education and upper secondary school are analysed from the perspective of what space they give to the students' personal meaning-making activity in teaching and learning of history. This is a pertinent question, considering that history is often mentioned as a subject where students process the issues of identity, worldview and values. The research question is: Where and how is the students' processing of their personal relationship with history addressed in the curriculum? The material consists of the history section in the national core curricula for basic education (2014) and upper secondary school (2019) and in the criteria for final assessment in basic education (2020). The method is qualitative theory-driven content analysis. The result is that the students' personal meaning-making activity is referred to in the general task and the learning objectives of history teaching and learning and in the assessment criteria of history learning but not in the content of history teaching. As the student as a meaning-making agent does not appear where the content of teaching is outlined in concrete terms, there may be only little inspiration for the history teachers to discuss history's personal meaning in the classroom. This can explain why Finnish students have had difficulty to understand, for example, why questions of historical wrongs can be experienced as transgenerationally relevant and alive.

Keywords: history teaching and learning, curriculum, meaning-making, third-order concepts

## Att söka efter den meningsskapande studenten: Iakttagelser om bristen av third-order begrepp i de finländska läroplanerna för historia

### **Sammanfattning**

I denna artikel analyseras vilket utrymme ges åt studenters personliga meningsgivande aktivitet i historieundervisning i de finländska läroplanerna för historia som nu är i kraft. Temat är relevant med tanke på att historia ofta nämns som ett skolämne där studenter processerar frågorna kring identitet, livssyn och värden. Forskningsfrågan är var och hur studenternas processerande av sitt personliga förhållande med historia hänvisas till

i läroplanerna. Materialet utgörs av kapitlen på historia i läroplansgrunderna för den grundläggande utbildningen (2014) och för gymnasiet (2019) och bedömningskriterierna för slutbedömningen i den grundläggande utbildningen (2020). Metod är kvalitativ teoristyrd innehållsanalys. Resultatet är att studenters personliga meningsgivande aktivitet bara hänvisas till i beskrivningen av historieundervisningens allmänna uppdrag och inlärningsmål och i bedömningskriterierna men inte i beskrivningen av historieundervisningens innehåll. Studenten som en meningsgivande aktör syns inte där undervisningens innehåll mest konkret utstakas; det betyder att där finns lite inspiration för historielärare att diskutera historiens personliga mening i klassrummet. Detta kan förklara varför finländska studenter har haft svårigheter att begripa, till exempel, varför frågor om historiska orättvisor kan upplevas som transgenerationellt relevanta och levande.

Nyckelord: historieundervisning, läroplaner, meningsskapande, third-order begrepp

## Framing of the research question

There are multiple aims for history teaching: it is expected to provide the students with substantial knowledge of history and the skills of historical explanation and reasoning, but also to support their growth to democratic citizenship. The latter entails, importantly, understanding the major dynamics of societal development and politics; analysing the public use of history; becoming conscious of the formation of historical identities; improving in social perspective-taking and developing in moral thinking. As Barton and Levstik (2010) have eloquently phrased, these aims are about “teaching history for the common good”. The citizenship education element in history teaching and learning is centrally about how history is invested with meaning at the societal and the personal level. This is in itself an important distinction and a complex issue. If, for example, the student learns in the history classroom that the people in some countries were exploited by colonialists and they suffer from its consequences and the student becomes committed to reparative policies that address this troublesome legacy; is it a societal or a personal orientation?<sup>1</sup> The same question arises in Stéphane Lévesque’s (2005) notion of historical significance that he argues should be central in history teaching and learning. The element of “historically significant” content that Lévesque calls memory significance is likely to connect with personal interest rather than the societal relevance of the content, but it is an empirical question which of these is considered primary in a specific case. These questions are relevant also in relation to the tradition of history teaching serving as an instrument of the nation-building process: the major objective was to socialise students in the myth-like narratives of the nation’s history (for the Finnish case, see Ahonen, 2017). But does it entail a deeper personal conviction and attachment or is it rather a matter of civic duty and customary rituals?

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this perceptive question.

Despite these demarcation difficulties it is relevant to ask if, and how much, the history curriculum invites the student to a meaning-making activity at the personal level that is about processing one's own identity, worldview and values. Nathalie Popa (2022) has reviewed the research on meaning-making in history teaching and learning and has identified three themes that are important to take into account in making history relevant to the student. They can be seen as an operationalisation of what the cultivation of the student's historical consciousness entails: negotiating the presence of the past; making inquiries on historical material with the help of the disciplinary and everyday habits of mind; and building a sense of historical being (Popa, 2022). History teaching and learning also have other dimensions, like learning competencies of historical reasoning. However, giving the student's personal meaning-making processes a prominent place is important because it is about making the study of history more relevant to the student in the first place. As Popa has concluded: "a meaning-centered approach could promote a conscious engagement with what is being learned [and] would enable students to see the value of what is being learned to make sense of their world, and thus how and why it may be worthwhile to learn it" (Popa, 2022, p. 199). It follows from this that if history teaching fails to connect with the student's personal meaning-making processes, and if the history curriculum fails to give space to these processes, opportunities for the student to mature as a self-reflective, historically conscious subject are diminished. Thus it is relevant to analyse the history curriculum and ask whether there is room for such opportunities in the curriculum, where it is found in the curriculum, and how the curriculum might be improved in this respect.

In this article, the current Finnish history curricula for basic education and upper secondary schools are analysed from the perspective of what room is given to the student's personal meaning-making activity as part of teaching and learning of history. The research question is: *Where is the student's processing of his/her personal relationship with history addressed in the general task, the objectives, the contents and the criteria for assessment for history teaching and learning?* Also, explanations for the findings are discussed tentatively and at the theoretical level as there is currently little empirical evidence to support the explanations.

In the next section, I discuss the findings of earlier studies that address the question of what history means to the student. The category of third-order concepts is introduced as the theoretical concept in interpreting the meaning-making dimension of teaching and learning history.

## What do the students expect from teaching and learning of history?

In the last 20 years, the skills of historical reasoning have been emphasised as the aim in teaching and learning of history in the curriculum in Finland. One justification is that teaching and learning about the principles of constructing and

evaluating historical knowledge could support the students' general civic skills of critical thinking, for example regarding how historical claims are being used in society. But even though epistemological elements in the study of history are emphasised in the formal curriculum, the implemented curriculum in the classroom may often remain focused on the factual accounts of the past (Rantala et al., 2020; Rantala & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020). The concept of powerful knowledge that has inspired many recent analyses of teaching and learning can be seen as compatible with the notion that it is important to teach students to use disciplinary conceptual tools (Puustinen & Khawaja, 2021). In the context of teaching and learning history it entails focusing on the skills of historical reasoning or, as often conceptualised, historical literacy. But it has also been pointed out that even though studying disciplinary skills may open important insights and develop important abilities, it may reduce teaching and learning history to activities and exercises that have no relation "to something living and meaningful" for the students (Nordgren, 2017). That is to say, there is a danger that the study of history will be found irrelevant by the students.

What do the students themselves expect of the school subject history, and what importance do they give to perspectives related to the social and cultural meaning of history? There are some empirical studies whose results are worthwhile to consider. Two surveys on the Finnish students' relationship with history were carried out within a few years interval, in 1995 and 2003. In the surveys 15-year-old students were asked what "history" is to them. The most strongly supported alternatives in the questionnaire were that *history is instructive examples of what is right and wrong* and that *history gives background to present-day life and problems*. On the Likert scale 1–5, these alternatives got the average point 3.50 and 3.62 respectively in the 1995 survey, and 3.36 and 3.65 in the 2003 survey (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; Hakkari, 2005). The alternative that *history gives an opportunity to learn from the failures and successes of others* received less support but the average point was 3.17 in the 1995 survey and 3.18 in the 2003 survey, which can be interpreted as a slightly positive response. The alternative that *history is a tool for managing one's own life* got only a lukewarm response; the average point was 2.96 in the 1995 survey and 2.94 in the 2003 survey (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; Hakkari, 2005.)

In these survey results it is noteworthy that history as a field of knowledge and a school subject was invested with a clear moral meaning ("examples of right and wrong") and seen as an opportunity to learn from the destinies of the people in the past. But it seems that it was difficult for the students to think of history as a support to one's own life-planning and self-understanding. It was readily stated that history can explain how the past has affected the present but in the open questions in the 2003 survey the students had difficulties giving examples of such cause-and-effect connections in their own life (Hakkari, 2005). It is likely that the notion that history explains the present had only been adopted from the textbook or the teacher without the student having a developed understanding of what this

notion could mean in concrete terms and at the personal level. It appears that history teaching may generate such strong expectations about what history is that the history culture of the students' own world becomes overshadowed by the history culture of the school, as Karin Sandberg (2018, pp. 131–135) has suggested.

The idea that teaching and learning of history has a moral function has been supported by Finnish students also in a more recent study. In 2018, close to 150 Finnish 15-year-old students were asked if moral questions should be discussed in the history classroom and if knowledge about the past also allows making moral judgements on the conduct of the people in the past. 63% answered the first question positively; 74% answered the second question positively; 56% answered both questions positively. Some of those who answered the first question negatively actually did not object to raising moral questions in the classroom, but they regarded it as problematic to discuss these questions openly in the classroom because of the risk of the teacher's indoctrination or pressure from fellow students (Löfström et al., 2020). Thus, there was among the students a lot of support for the idea that teaching and learning history is also moral education. There is also evidence that the students experience moral questions of history as stimulating and that these questions generate elaborate discussions in the history classroom (Ammert, 2015). In the 2018 study on Finnish students, one of the justifications for welcoming discussions on moral issues in the history classroom was that these discussions can support learning of history (Löfström et al., 2020). Further, it is worth mentioning that in a focus group study of Finnish upper secondary school students' views on historical justice and responsibility, the students were inspired by the opportunity to discuss the topic that they found very interesting but had never processed in the regular history classroom (Löfström, 2014).

In the last mentioned study, the students were capable of easily constructing diverse explanations for why historical reparations have become a prominent issue globally. Their explanations were mostly focused on the strategic interests of politicians or the need to educate people morally. This suggests that the students could easily think of that kind of uses of history. But it is noteworthy that they very seldom came up with the idea that the public demands for repairing historical injustices could be inspired by transgenerational experiences of sorrow, guilt and shame, for example. It appears that such experiences were difficult for the students to grasp (Löfström, 2021a, 2021b). It suggests there is a blind spot in their understanding of the use of history: they did not easily see history as a resource for interpreting their own life-experience or giving meaning to individual lives. This raises the question as to where the element of personal meaning-making is present in the Finnish curriculum for history. Before answering the question, it is relevant to discuss briefly some conceptual distinctions related to the topic.

## Beyond the first- and second-order concepts: the category of third-order concepts

In research on history education, the aims and the content of history teaching and learning are often discussed with reference to first- and second-order concepts. Broadly speaking, first-order concepts are about the subject matter of history and second-order concepts about the methods and analytic concepts of history as outlined in the classic text by Lee (1983; see also Sandahl, 2015). But there is variation in how some concepts are categorised as first- or second-order concepts, depending on the researcher (Kainulainen et al., 2019). Further, in second-order concepts there have also been included concepts that are not related to historical epistemology or the historical research methods but to the use of history or the moral meaning of historical knowledge that are more connected with the social and cultural meanings of history. Considering such a wide scope of second-order concepts it might be relevant to ask if a more nuanced differentiation of orders could be fruitful for the theorising of teaching and learning history. For example, in this article it is pointed out that in Lévesque's (2005) analysis, the concept of historical significance relates to a certain quality of historical interpretation as well as the personal relevance or meaningfulness of a specific historical content. If the epistemological and the socio-cultural aspects are both included in the category of second-order concepts the boundaries of the category may become stretched so far that the category loses its usefulness.

At this point it is important to emphasise that placing a concept "correctly" in a particular category is not the central point. The rationale in this discussion is rather that a more nuanced differentiation between different orders of concepts could be fruitful in analysing the aims and content of teaching and learning history. It could allow for questions about the students' personal meaning-making in their encounter with history to be approached in a more subtle and sensitive way.

In the theory of history and social studies education it has been suggested that it can also be worthwhile to speak of third-order concepts that focus more on what is relevant to the students in teaching and learning of history. The content of the category of third-order concepts is not identical in the articles where the category is discussed (see Christensen, 2013; Jarhall, 2020; Ludvigsson, 2015; Edling et al., 2022; Alvéén, 2021). But common to all of them is that third-order concepts are seen to relate to the social and cultural meaning that the knowledge in the focus of teaching and learning has for the student or a wider community.

Discussing social studies and civic education, Torben Spanget Christensen (2013) has suggested that self-reflection by the student could be characterised as a third-order concept in civic education, the central point being the student's own personal relationship with the topic studied:

Self-reflection [...] has a different focus, namely the focus of the students' identification and positioning in relation to the topic at study [...] Therefore I propose to name it a third order concept. Within civic education it's the position of the citizens analysing their own stance in and their own identification with the topic at study. To sum up: First order concepts are knowledge-concepts about a topic or a content matter within a discipline. Second order concepts are meta-concepts about procedures and methods within disciplines. Third order concepts are about the learners' identification and positioning in relation to the subject. (Christensen, 2013, pp. 214–215)

Here, teaching and learning in social studies is seen in the perspective of the student's relationship with the topic and how the student personally connects with it. The category of third-order concepts is introduced to capture this aspect. The concepts describing the student's "identification and positioning in relation to the subject" (Christensen, 2013) may not be subject-specific. It can make sense to speak of third-order concepts of social studies, for example.

Third-order concepts have also been referred to by Jessica Jarhall (2020), but in a slightly different way. Pondering on the meaning-giving concepts that relate to the value and identity dimensions of the school subject history, she has suggested the following:

I have thus suggested a third type of concepts that can be called meaning-giving [and] possibly could equal third-order concepts. They include, for example, concepts like historical consciousness, identity, ethics, guilt, and reconciliation; that is to say, concepts that can be connected with the History subject's existential aspect and can be thought to have a specific meaning in the study of history. (Jarhall, 2020, pp. 395–396)

Referring to meaning-giving concepts as third-order concepts Jarhall (2020), like Christensen (2013), probes a new conceptual space. She refers to the value and identity dimension as history's existential aspect, thus they are about how the student connects with the world as a person. In the case of concepts like identity and historical consciousness, the focus can be on the student as much as on society. But the common ground between Jarhall and Christensen seems to be the view of the students as the agents of their own positioning in relation to what meaning the subject can offer to them.

Jarhall's words echo Klas-Göran Karlsson who, in 2015, urged his history education colleagues to go beyond the first- and second-order concept dualism. Outlining the moral and existential aspects of people's relationship with history, Karlsson referred to the painful historical experiences that could be approached with third-order concepts. He was also confident that such concepts actually pervade all historical thinking processes:

We have first- and second-order concepts but I think it's time to start working with the truly interesting third-order concepts, that is to say, concepts that deal with suffering, victimhood, responsibility, guilt, sorrow, and loss – concepts that all the time are involved in historical and historical-didactical thought processes [...]. (Quoted in Ludvigsson, 2015, p. 23)

More recently, Silvia Edling and her colleagues (2022) have discussed third-order concepts in their analysis of how historical and moral consciousness has been addressed in research on teaching and learning of history. They have proposed that the category of third-order concepts could help build a map for the analyses of how the meaning-making processes are problematised in research and what students find meaningful in their encounters with history. The central question is what relevance to their lives the students – or people at large – find in and from history and how they articulate their relationship with the world with the help of specific concepts and verbs:

What Gadamer showed, amongst other things, was that there is a dialectical relationship between entities like time spans, body, and mind; that language and individuals' meaning-making are the sole mediators for consciousness [...] Drawing on Gadamer's reasoning, we maintain that the use of words is important to acknowledge, map and problematize in order to deepen meaning-making, which is why we have turned our gaze to research on third-order concepts in history education. [...]. To sum up, we argue that historical consciousness can be understood as what Gadamer refers to as linguistality, where third-order concepts can provide a road map for teachers, students, and researchers to reflect on, structure, and grapple with how meaning-making and moral consciousness are expressed in research on historical consciousness. (Edling et al., 2022, pp. 286–288)

The element of meaning-making is central also in Fredrik Alvéns (2021) discussion on third-order concepts but to him these concepts are about ontological questions, as distinct from the first-order concepts' substantial questions and the second-order concepts' epistemological questions. Like Nordgren (2017), Alvéns has argued that powerful knowledge is a more complex issue than simply operating with second-order concepts. Behind the procedural knowledge of critical historical analysis there are ontological assumptions concerning “who we are and what life we want to live” (Alvéns, 2021, p. 252). Alvéns has maintained that it is difficult to ascertain what the third-order concepts are, but at least these three concepts should be counted among them: historical consciousness, historical culture and the use of history. He has identified the process that the third-order concepts may capture, again focusing on the agent who constructs himself/herself in relationship to history that he/she encounters:

The process the third-order concepts can highlight is when we in the contemporary look to the past to ask questions that are important to us today. The questions shed light on who we are, what is important for us and where we are heading: in short, our contemporary culture. (Alvéns, 2021, p. 254)

To sum up: third-order concepts have been related to meaning-making in history and reflecting one's relationship with history and the uses of history. As mentioned earlier, placing specific concepts in the categories of second- or first-order concepts is not uncontroversial (see Kainulainen et al., 2019), and likewise, it can hardly be definitively concluded what the third-order concepts in history are. In line with the aforementioned authors, it is suggested here, however, that

concepts connected with people's meaning-making in relation to history can be regarded as third-order concepts. They can include, for example, concepts like remembrance, memory, identity, tradition, narrative, progress and morals. As mentioned above, Jarhall (2020, p. 396) has tentatively suggested the concepts guilt and reconciliation, and Karlsson (Ludvigsson, 2015, p. 23) has mentioned the concepts victimhood, sorrow and loss. Lists of concepts like these are tentative but may help put the finger on what kind of dimensions in history are central to the students at the personal level and what social and cultural meanings they give to history, as distinct from what history is for at the abstract societal level. The question addressed in this article is whether and where in the current Finnish history curricula the students are invited to reflect on those meanings and the student's own relationship with history.

### The research material and the method of analysis

In the Finnish national core curriculum there are sections that discuss the value base and organisation of the school, the general principles of assessment, and students' welfare and attendance in school. But there are also subject-specific sections where the general task, the aim of teaching and learning the subject, the content area in the subject, the guidelines of assessment, and in basic education the criteria of assessment are described. Thus, the Finnish core curriculum includes sections that in many other countries are placed in separate documents.

As stated earlier, the research question in this article is where and how the student's processing of his/her personal relationship with history is addressed in the general task, the learning objectives, the contents and the criteria for assessment for history teaching and learning in the Finnish curriculum. The question is analysed in the context of the two curricula currently in force in Finland: the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014* and the *National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education 2019*. The titles of the documents are here abbreviated following the Finnish practice: the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014* is called *POPS 2014*, and the *National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education 2019* is called *LOPS 2019*. Also, the *Criteria for Final Assessment in Basic Education* (here abbreviated to *Criteria*), published in 2020, has been analysed; it is a revised and more detailed version of the criteria that were included in the *POPS 2014*.

The "formal curriculum" is not necessarily the same as the "enacted curriculum", that is to say what teachers actually do in the classroom (on this terminology see Goodlad, 1979). Yet it is worthwhile to focus the analysis on the formal curriculum because it provides the general roadmap for the school-specific curricula and for the history textbooks that are often the practical curriculum for Finnish teachers when they design the lessons (Heinonen, 2005). Further, in the Finnish context the formal curriculum is important because the matriculation

examination at the end of upper secondary school is based on it. The matriculation examination is a high-stakes exam, thus the exam questions may greatly influence what topics are studied, and how, in the classrooms in upper secondary school. (Löfström et al., 2010)

For this article, the curricular documents have been analysed qualitatively. The sections concerning history teaching and learning in the lower and upper secondary school (POPS 2014, pp. 415–418; Criteria, pp. 245–252; LOPS 2019, pp. 280–289) have been analysed from the perspective of what references there are to the student as an agent of personal meaning-making in relation to history. History is here understood broadly as the school subject, the field of knowledge, the past, and the ability to orientate in time and build interconnections between the past, the present and the future (historical consciousness). A relevant reference can be made, for example, to the student's use of history, interest in history, evaluation of history or identity connected with history. A reference is not necessarily transparent: curricular texts are dense so that multiple elements can be present in a passage that describes the task, aims, and content of history teaching and learning. In this analysis the focus is on what can be seen as references to the student's social and cultural position, actions, experiences or personal development. But the difficulty is that it can be problematic to distinguish between the individual and the societal level in our relationship with history, as was pointed out in the beginning of the article. The curricular texts typically speak of the student as an abstract particle in society, rather than a person processing his/her encounter with history. In this analysis the focus is on whether and where in the history curriculum the latter can be found. It is here suggested that references to the student as a meaning-making agent who has a personal relationship to history and experience of history are made with the help of concepts that are tentative third-order concepts. Let me also repeat that the point in this analysis is not allocating concepts "correctly" in the categories of second- or third-order concepts but probing the theoretical value of further differentiation of the available categories.

### Third-order concepts in the core curricula for history

The kind of concepts that are here tentatively referred to as third-order concepts in history or, as in Jarhall (2020), meaning-giving concepts, are found in the Finnish national core curricula primarily in the parts of the subject-specific section where the general task of history teaching and learning is described. They are less often present in the parts where the aims of teaching and learning history, the content of history teaching and the assessment criteria are described. Let us look at this more closely.

In the section on history in lower secondary school (Grades 7–9) in the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014* there are references to the student's meaning-making activities in history in the general tasks of the subject

and in the objectives of instruction. It is stated, for example, that studies in history are supposed to be relevant to the student's identity work: "The aim is to support the pupils in building their identity and to promote their growth into active members of the society who understand diversity [...] instruction supports the pupils in developing their own identity" (POPS 2014, p. 446). In the aims of history teaching a reference is made to the student's interest in history as a support to his/her identity work and ability to orientate to the future: "[The aim is] to strengthen the pupil's interest in history as a field of knowledge and as a subject that builds his or her identity [...] to guide the pupil to evaluate alternative futures based on his or her knowledge of history" (POPS 2014, p. 447).

In the criteria for final assessment in history (POPS 2014, p. 449) there are very few references to the aforementioned objectives. Regarding the aim of strengthening the student's interest in history as a subject that supports his/her identity work it is stated that the student's interest is *not* assessed as part of grading the student, but the student is "guided to reflect on his or her experiences as part of self-assessment" (POPS 2014, p. 449). This can be pedagogically wise but the question of how the student develops in using history as a resource in identity work is here relegated to an area that the teacher is not allowed to enter, perhaps because it concerns the student's personal relationship with history. As for the aim that the student is able to reflect upon the uses of history and think of alternative futures, the criteria explain that the skills assessed in connection with these aims are that the student "is able to evaluate the reliability of interpretations of historical events or phenomena [and] describe how interpretations of the past are used to justify choices made for the future" (POPS 2014, p. 449). It appears that the focus is on the student's ability to interpret and evaluate the uses of history at the societal level where "the reliability of interpretations of historical events" and their use in "justifying choices made for the future" are central issues. But how understanding the use of the past could also be instrumental to the student in reflecting on his/her own life-plan and personal development is not raised in this context.

That the student may give personal meaning to history is briefly mentioned in the description of the key content areas of history teaching. The *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014* states: "In the key content areas, attention is paid to the history of the pupil's family, region, and local area when appropriate" (POPS 2014, p. 447). The content of teaching in Grades 7–9 is divided under six headings for each of which there is a brief description of the historical processes that are studied. The time period covered in history teaching in Grades 7–9 is Finnish, European and global history from the Napoleonic era to the present. The six headings are: *The origins and development of the industrial society; People changing the world; Creating, building and defending Finland; the Great War era [the World Wars]; Building the welfare state; The origins of the world politics today* (POPS 2014, pp. 447–448). None of the headings or the descriptions under them include references to the relationship between the

student's meaning-making activity and the historical topics that are studied, nor are there references to historical consciousness, the use of history, ethics of history or historical identity that could be relevant for how the student gives a personal meaning to history.

In the section on history in the *National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education 2019* the same pattern is found. In the task of the subject it is maintained that teaching and learning of history supports the student's identity work and values like equality and equity are central in the subject: "As a subject promoting cultural awareness history reinforces the students' individual, national, European, and global identity as well as it supports their growth into active members of society who understand diversity" (LOPS 2019, page numbers not given in the digital version of the English document). Further, in the general objectives of instruction the aforementioned values and ethical principles are mentioned. There is also a reference to the experimental element of the study of history and the aim that the students perceive themselves in the light of historical connectedness:

[The aim is that the students] acquire capabilities for forming a worldview in which human rights, equality, democracy, and a sustainable way of living are valued [and that they] gather experiences that deepen their interest in history and develop their understanding of its significance. [The students] are to perceive their era and themselves as part of a historical continuum as well as to advance their awareness of history. (LOPS 2019, page numbers not given)

That the students can develop their self-understanding, identity and ethical judgement in the study of history is clearly present in the section that is titled *Transversal competences in the subject*, in the *National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education 2019*. These competences are cross-disciplinary and include, among others, well-being competence, interaction competence, societal competence, ethical and environmental competence and global and cultural competence. They are themes that must be addressed in all the school subjects and in the operational culture of the school. In this section it is stated:

History supports the students in developing their identity and their growth towards ethical agency. [...] History strengthens the students' well-being competence by developing ethical thinking, empathy, and capabilities for taking other people and their perspectives and needs into account. The subject supports the students in finding their identity, helps them analyse their self-image as well as promotes the recognition and use of their personal strengths. [...] Studying history helps the students become aware of, interpret, and evaluate the use of history in society and politics. [...] Historical empathy reinforces the students' ability for versatile ethical reflection. [...] The subject stresses everyone's right to their cultural roots." (LOPS 2019, page numbers not given)

In this passage, the references to identity, empathy, ethical thinking, ethical reflection and cultural roots point to the multiple ways of how history can be meaningful to the students and support their "transversal competences". But like in the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014*, it is only in the

general task of history teaching this connection to meaning-making is made; it is not mentioned in the section where the specific content of the history courses is described. In the key content of the history courses there is no reference to historical empathy, identity, ethical reflection or other similar concepts. For example, in the course *Encounters between world cultures* one of the aims is that the student will “recognise manifestations of cultural values and worldviews in daily life and social relationships [...] analyse cultural interaction in both the historical and present-day context [and] evaluate critically statements on cultural differences, stereotypes related to different cultures as well as the way cultures influence individuals.” (LOPS 2019, page numbers not given). These aims could be characterised as anthropological rather than historical. The reference to daily life and social relationships suggests that the student should process his/her own experiences and give meaning to them in a social-historical and cultural-historical framework but in the key contents of the course there is no mention of any activity like that. Also in the course *Finnish history in the era of independence* one of the aims is to support the students’ identity work and social and cultural connectedness with history: the students should be “able to analyse the traits, images, and ideals associated with Finnish identity and culture in different times as well as their influence on modern-day Finland”. But in the key contents of the course no identity- or ethics-related topics or questions are mentioned that would connect with the aforementioned aim.

To sum up, in the sections on history in the national core curricula that are currently in force in Finland there is very little information about what the student as a meaning-making agent will personally get from the study of history. The social and cultural meaning of history to the student – their knowledge *from history*, so to speak (Björkgren et al., 2019, pp. 59–60) – features in the general task and the aims of history teaching and learning and to a minor extent in the criteria of assessment but practically not at all in the content of teaching and learning history. Concepts like identity, self-image, interest in history, use of history or ethical reflection, are in this article understood as tentative third-order concepts or meaning-making concepts in the student’s encounters with history. They do not feature in the core curricula in those sections that can be assumed to most directly define the content of what is taught in the history classroom. Why is this the case, and why can it be seen as problematic?

### Discussion: Why is there a lack of third-order concepts in the history curriculum and why is it a problem?

To explain why the student as a meaning-making agent and the third-order concepts have only a marginal space in the Finnish curriculum for history, it is relevant to consider some general features in the development of the history curriculum in Finland. There is a long tradition of history teaching being used as

a support for nation-building and the reproduction of narratives of the national history where the (alleged) qualities of the Finnish nation were emphasised (Ahonen, 2017). In that context questions of identity were also present but only implicitly: the concept of national identity was not problematised in the curricular texts, which means that the student was not invited to reflect on his/her personal connection with the identity-related meaning-giving aspect of history. In the current core curricula for history, the student's identity is referred to in such a way that the student's own agency is more in the focus and the plurality of identities is recognised: "The aim is to support the pupils in building their identity [...] instruction supports the pupils in developing their own identity" (POPS 2014, p. 446). But this view has been introduced quite recently and it is only visible in the general parts of the core curriculum for history, as mentioned earlier.

Secondly, there is in Finland a long tradition of history teaching focusing on transmitting factual knowledge about history. As mentioned earlier, the power of this tradition is visible in how teaching and learning the skills of historical literacy are not as much in focus in the history classroom as one could assume, considering that they have been central in the formal history curriculum since the early 2000's (Rantala & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020; Rantala et al., 2020). But it is noteworthy that also in the parts of the core curriculum where the teaching and learning of historical literacy is discussed, the student as a meaning-making agent cannot be seen. Thus, a shift in the formal curriculum from transmitting factual historical knowledge to teaching the skills of historical literacy, has not entailed a heightened attention to the question of how the study of history could be personally relevant to the student. This underlines the importance of Kenneth Nordgren's (2017) comment in his discussion on powerful knowledge in history education: for all its merits, the disciplinary approach in history teaching may fail to connect with the student's personal meaning-making processes and leave the student without the experience of there being something meaningful to him/her in history.

Here it is important to emphasise that the criticisms levelled in this article are also self-criticism as I have also been involved in preparing the current national core curricula. This testifies to the power of tradition in the curriculum development. The shareholders in the curriculum development include teacher educators, teachers, textbook publishers and representatives of the central administration of education. Novel solutions need to pass the shareholders' scrutiny and convince them before being accepted into the curriculum. Thus, it would need considerable effort, for example, to introduce more anthropological perspectives in the history curriculum where the central element has been factual knowledge of history and, more recently, historical literacy.

Why should it be a problem if the meaning-making element and third-order concepts are not more central in the history curriculum and in the content of history teaching and learning? The role of the core curriculum must not be exaggerated: as pointed out earlier, the enacted curriculum need not be identical

to the formal curriculum (Goodlad, 1979). The school-specific curriculum can be more detailed than the national core curriculum, thus there may exist school-specific curricula where, for example, questions of identity and morals in history are explicit in the content of history teaching. Still it is likely that the description of the content of history teaching in the national core curriculum directs the enacted curriculum in schools because it gives the roadmap for the textbook authors, and the textbooks serve as a guideline for the teachers' lesson-plans (Heinonen, 2005). The connection between the content of the history textbooks and the core curriculum is clear in the upper secondary school but less direct in basic education where the content of history teaching is described in more general terms in the curriculum. As mentioned before, the constructors of the matriculation exams also have to pay attention to how the history courses are described in the core curriculum, and the exam questions influence what topics are raised in the history classroom and how (Löfström et al., 2010).

My argument is that because the social and cultural meaning of history to the student is not present in the content of history teaching and learning in the curriculum, it easily remains in the margins in the history classroom. Including meaning-giving concepts, or third-order concepts, explicitly in the history curriculum – also as the content of the history courses – would encourage and obligate teachers to raise questions about the personal meaning of history to the student in the classroom. It has been found that the Finnish students have difficulties understanding history-related meanings in people's life as a motivating force, like in the students' scepticism regarding the transgenerational experience of shame and guilt as a lynchpin of social identity and political mobilisation (Löfström, 2021a, 2021b). Reflecting on their own relationship with history and the history-related aspect of their own values, worldview and identity, the students might understand the societal uses of history in a more nuanced way and thereby also understand why history can be such a powerful force not only in institutionalised politics but in the life of "ordinary people".

The aim in bringing the student as a meaning-making agent in focus in the history curriculum is to make the study of history more relevant to students and more supportive of their understanding of themselves. This article has only discussed the formal curriculum and it is possible that there are history teachers who concentrate on the students' meaning-giving processes. The available data does not suggest this but teachers are free to interpret the curriculum in this direction. This is a topic that researchers in the future could address. In a recent study of Finnish primary school student teachers' views on what is important in history teaching, most of the student teachers mentioned, unsurprisingly, that understanding the present and giving the pupils a good overview of history is important (Tallavaara & Rautiainen, 2020). There were, however, also answers where the pupil is seen as a meaning-making agent, as in the following quote that can serve as positive and encouraging final words for this article. The student teacher maintained: "History does not merely seek to answer the question of who

was who. History also asks the question, who are you?" (quoted in Tallavaara & Rautiainen, 2020, p. 235).

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