

Abstract: The return of the canon: Politics of history education in the East and the West

'Canon' was introduced into the discussion about history education in the early 2000s. After a period of focusing on the skills of evidence handling and thinking critically and regarding them as the essence of history curriculum, the old ideal of a fixed substantive content of teaching was revived. The trend has been most obvious in the post-secessionist countries of Eastern, South Eastern and Central Europe, but can be observed also in some western democracies. The advocates of 'a canon' constitute two different groups: nationalists and cultural conservatives. The nationalists, prominent in the post-secessionist countries, want to use history for the purpose of nation-building, while the cultural conservatives want to promote social cohesion by providing people with a shared cultural reference point. Both groups use public history education as a medium. As the advocates in both groups are more often politicians than history professionals, the pursuit of a canon can be regarded as politics of education, and as such constitutes a threat to intellectually sound history teaching. The author refers to the epistemology and ethics of history, and ends up discussing history as genealogical practice, where people, instead of being imposed a canon, are free to ask of history the questions that are relevant in the world they live in.

Keywords: genealogical approach to history, history curriculum, politics of history education, post-secessionist countries

Jukka Rantala ja Anna Veijola

Abstract: Basics of the formation of historical knowledge missing: A case study of young Finns' historical literacy skills

The most recent Finnish history curricula both at elementary and secondary level emphasise historical literacy, i.e. students' ability to work with historical sources and to analyse and produce valid interpretations. Adolescents should learn to read and analyse documents and use historical information to create evidence-based arguments. Historically literate adolescents should also understand how historical information is created and be able to gather and evaluate information about the past. This article presents a study examining the historical literacy skills of 86 Finnish high school students from three schools in the Helsinki metropolitan area and Turku region.

We used a document-based task to acquire knowledge about their historical literacy skills. Our data indicates that students' historical literacy skills were satisfactory in two high schools and insufficient in the third. The schools with a satisfactory level were high-ranking high schools while the one with an unsatisfactory level was average in ranking. In the school with an unsatisfactory level in particular, students' difficulties in general literacy skills were reflected in deficiencies in disciplinary literacy skills. Also, the historical literacy skills of many students at high-ranking schools proved to be defective. This is most likely due to the content-based tradition in history teaching. Based on our study, reaching the aims of educating multiliterate citizens as stated in the national curriculum, a strong emphasis on the teaching of historical literacy is needed.

Keywords: historical literacy, disciplinary literacy, history teaching

Jan Löfström

Abstract: Do boys and girls favour different exam questions in the matriculation examination history exam?

Since 2006, one can take separate exams in the humanities and natural sciences (philosophy, biology, history etc.) in the Matriculation Examination in Finland. About 60 percent of the participants in the history exams are men. Considering that about 40 per cent of upper secondary school students are men, the history matriculation exam is clearly a 'male dominated exam'. The article asks whether men and women favour different exam questions, as some history teachers think they do. The article analyses what percentage of men and women respectively answered each of the questions in the exam. The difference in the male and female percentages and their odds ratios are used as a measure of differential preferences. There is no clear-cut criteria for a 'significant' difference but it is noteworthy that in 2007–2014, in one-third of the questions where the differential preferences were biggest, the difference was just what history teachers had argued: the questions favoured by men deal with political history and often include statistics, the questions favoured by women deal with cultural history and often include longer text documents. The article discusses some reservations and implications regarding these findings.

Keywords: history exam, matriculation examination, gender-specific preferences, gender and history teaching, Finland

Abstract: The objectives and the content of history in National Core Curriculum change – how about the evaluation?

History as a school subject, along with its objectives and content, has changed over the decades. Instead of teaching and learning facts and detailed knowledge, the renewed National Core Curricula (2004; 2014) have stressed the importance of different skills, also in history. In this article, changes in the norms that give instructions for summative evaluation are analysed and investigated. The theoretical framework of this article is based on Andersons' and Krathwhol's taxonomy (2001). The new skill-based objectives for history are applied in practice by using a two dimensional taxonomy. It can be justified because the objectives and evaluation norms of different subjects defined in the National Core Curriculum (2014) are based on Andersons' and Krathwhol's taxonomy. At the end of the paper, how skill-based objectives should reflect on evaluation and how this change should be taken into the consideration in teaching and learning history are discussed.

Keywords: evaluation, skill-based objectives, history, history teaching, taxonomy

Abstract: Multidisciplinary approach to expertise in history

Thousands of experts work in the field of history, yet there is no comprehensive view available of what history expertise might be. In this article, we tackle the question of historians' expertise from the point of view of expertise research, theory of history and history didactics, suggesting that definitions of expertise in history and the development of history in higher education can benefit from an approach spanning these different disciplines. Our attention is directed particularly at the specific characteristics of historical thinking and at what it is that historians do. It is here that the aspects of history expertise that we feel demand increased attention in higher education are crystallised. We take an expert historian to be someone who actively develops themselves in their thinking, actions and capacity to reflect on their profession. Their professional skills include the ability to pose questions central to their field of research, a well-structured knowledge-base, and the source-critical proficiency typical of an academic historian. Expertise in history is a complex issue, and one that necessarily needs to be examined in its specific sociocultural context.

Keywords: expertise in history, higher education, history education, theory of history