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Ambitious aims, traditional reality? Observing historical literacy in Finnish upper secondary schools

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Abstract: This article investigates history instruction in Finnish upper secondary schools. The study revolves around the concept of historical literacy. We study what kind of texts and pedagogical activities history teachers used, and discuss to what extent the observed teaching can be characterised as disciplinary. A total of nine teachers were observed for five consecutive lessons. The data include numerical data collected using an observation instrument, as well as field notes and teacher interviews. The results reveal a teacher-led approach that emphasises substantive knowledge. Primary sources or other texts were used or analysed very rarely in the classroom. Nevertheless, in the interviews, the observed teachers indicated an understanding of what disciplinary teaching entails and considered it important to employ disciplinary practices. This disconnect indicates that the aims stipulated at the curricular level are only being partially implemented at the classroom level.

KEYWORDS: HISTORICAL LITERACY, HISTORICAL THINKING, HISTORY TEACHING, OBSERVATION STUDY

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Introduction

During the last decade or so, there has been a shift in emphasis concerning subject-based knowledge in the school curriculum (Chapman, 2021). Earlier trend, that is, emphasising general competencies, capabilities or ‘21st century skills’ has been challenged by stressing the importance of knowledge. For history education, this ‘knowledge turn’ and the riptide of different educational discourses have had different implications in different national contexts, depending on curricular orientations, for example.

Existing research indicates that in many Western countries history instruction has followed a traditional approach in which teacher-centred methods and the memorisation of a given narrative have dominated instruction (e.g. Cuban, 2016; Nokes, 2010; Rosenlund, 2016; Saye et al., 2018). In addition, in many countries, including Nordic countries, there would appear to be discrepancies, not only between ambitious curricular aims for history instruction and the teaching reality, but also between teachers’ intentions and the observed pedagogy (e.g. Knudsen, 2020; Harzler-Miller, 2001; Rosenlund, 2016; Vesterinen, 2022). For example, in Knudsen’s (2020, p. 47) case study, the teacher expressed disciplinary aims and showed disciplinary understanding, but students were nevertheless left with few opportunities to actually relate to history.

In Finland, disciplinary history has been emphasised in the Finnish national core curricula since the 1990s. Nevertheless, research suggests that students’ competence to work with historical evidence is rather weak in relation to curricular aims (e.g. Rantala, 2012; Rantala and van den Berg, 2015; Rantala and Veijola, 2016; Veijola and Rantala, 2018), and that when assessing essays, history teachers value presenting historical knowledge and have fewer expectations about the use of the source material (Paldanius et al., 2021). Most teachers taking part in surveys support disciplinary aims (Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2018; Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020), but this may not be reflected in what actually happens in classrooms. Very few Finnish studies have included observation data (see, however, Mård, 2021; Rantala et al., 2020; Vesterinen, 2022).

In this article, we examine the kind of texts and pedagogical activities that history teachers use in Finnish upper secondary schools, and discuss the extent to which the observed teaching can be characterised as disciplinary. When it comes to the possible gap between observations and teachers’ intentions, we use interview data to briefly investigate the teachers’ ideas regarding historical thinking, historical knowledge and the purpose of history teaching. In addition to reporting the empirical findings, our aim is to offer wider insights for history teaching in Finland. We begin by considering historical knowledge and historical literacy, before describing the Finnish context as well as our data and research methods.

Historical literacy and historical knowledge

Our study revolves around the concept of historical literacy, which can be defined as understanding the nature of the discipline and disciplinary concepts, and the ability

to work with historical evidence (e.g. Downey & Long, 2016, pp. 6-7; Lee, 2011; Nokes, 2010). Historical literacy is closely connected to another central concept of history education, historical thinking. Some scholars have seen historical literacy as a broad concept including nearly everything connected to history teaching, while others have assigned narrower meanings (Maposa and Wasserman, 2009; Seixas, 2006). Since our research is primarily focused on the use of different kinds of texts, we see historical literacy as fitting more within the framework of this paper than historical thinking, which can be understood as a broader concept. In addition, in a Finnish educational context, the Finnish translation of historical literacy (*historian tekstitaidot*) points to a relatively narrow definition of historical literacy. Hence, we understand historical literacy as an essential part of historical thinking (see also Puustinen and Khawaja, 2021), and use the latter concept in relation to thinking processes or pedagogical activities that are not so closely connected to interpreting historical sources. By disciplinary teaching, we refer to instruction that aims to grasp the nature of history, and hence supports the learning of historical literacy and further historical thinking.

Historical knowledge combines substantive, conceptual and procedural knowledge. Substantive knowledge is concerned with the subject matter of history knowledge, which is sometimes referred to as historical content or first-order knowledge. It can be seen as the “product” of a discipline (Kitson, 2021). Conceptual knowledge refers to the so-called second-order or disciplinary concepts, such as historical significance, change and continuity, or cause and consequence. These concepts help to organise, structure and explain the who, when, where and what questions answered by substantive knowledge and are essential for historical thinking processes (e.g. Lee, 2005; Seixas and Morton, 2013). Procedural, or strategic, knowledge addresses the epistemological dimensions of the discipline (VanSledright and Limón, 2006).

For example, C. Behan McCullagh (2004, chapter 2) has described the interpretation process conducted by historians. To begin with, a historian needs substantive knowledge in order to find and choose meaningful sources, and to ask them essential questions. The content of the sources will also become understandable in relation to the substantive knowledge that the researcher already possesses. At this point, the relationship between substantive knowledge and the sources changes. The sources and their interpretation are reflected on with each other, as well as with the original substantive knowledge.

Hence, during this two-way process, (the original) substantive knowledge is used for supporting the interpretation, and the same interpretation can either strengthen or contest (the original) substantive knowledge. By evaluating historical sources and interpretations, students learn how historical knowledge is constructed, and become familiar with the criteria used for evaluating that knowledge (e.g. Downey and Long, 2016; Nokes, 2010). This lies at the core of historical literacy. However, for novices, the process is difficult to grasp, and sometimes referred to as being counterintuitive or unnatural (Lee, 2005; Wineburg, 2001). Knowledge-building can be invisible to students if they are not made aware of the way in which historical knowledge is constructed. As Nokes (2010) notes, historians’ interpretations of the past are often presented to the public through textbooks or historical documentaries. Hence, historical

narratives may emerge as something distinct from the historical inquiry process, and substantive knowledge is not integrated with an understanding of the methodology and epistemology of history.

History educators stress that historical literacy abilities are fundamentally different from other types of reading (Nokes, 2010; VanSledright, 2002; Wineburg, 1991, 2001). For instance, historians must be able to fill in any gaps in the evidence with reasonable inferences, view texts as evidence rather than as collections of facts, and see texts as extensions of individuals with their biases, perspectives, and personalities. This approach requires reading strategies that are specific to history, such as Wineburg's (1991) seminal and widely cited heuristics of sourcing, contextualisation and corroboration. These reading strategies were identified through investigating the reading habits of historians. Thus, as the aim of historical literacy is to interact with texts in ways similar to those adopted by disciplinary experts, these strategies play a crucial role in developing historical literacy. Sourcing, for example, is the process of posing questions about when, by whom and why a text was produced, also including the issue of author bias. Contextualisation, on the other hand, is needed to set the source in a wider historical context. Finally, whilst the process of corroborating involves comparing multiple texts, a historically literate person would already be aware of the existence of other texts when reading a single text. Hence, general literacy strategies such as summarising, making mind-maps and focusing on the content of the text (Shanahan and Shanahan, 2012) are not sufficient for engaging with texts in a disciplinary way. However, general literacy abilities form the basis for advancing towards more nuanced disciplinary strategies (VanSledright, 2002, p. 113).

Based on earlier research, it seems clear that students do not instinctively approach primary sources or other historical texts as evidence that needs to be interrogated (e.g. Barton, 1997; Khawaja, 2018; Maggioni et al., 2009; Stahl et al., 1996; Wineburg, 1991, 2001). Instead, without guidance on history-specific reading strategies, students tend to view historical sources or earlier interpretations as collections of facts. Students may perceive sources as mirrors of the past, without considering the intentions and perspective of those behind the sources (Maggioni et al., 2009). Alternatively, students may develop an epistemic stance where nothing in history is to be trusted, and argue that the historical accounts they were supposed to analyse were fake or purposefully mendacious (VanSledright, 2002). This highlights the role of teachers, whose task is to help students to understand the interpretative nature of the discipline. Even though 'truth' accessed through historical inquiry is never final, some explanations of the past are more justifiable than others.

As noted earlier, observation studies indicate that in spite of disciplinary aims at the curricular level, history teaching has often followed a rather traditional approach, namely one focused on substantive knowledge and memorisation (e.g. Bertram, 2008; Cuban, 2016; Nokes, 2010; Rosenlund 2016; Saye et al., 2018; Van Nieuwenhuyse et al., 2017). Previous research suggests that if primary sources or other relevant historical texts have been used, their main purpose has been illustrative or content-related. For example, in Bertram's (2008) and Nokes's (2010) studies, the fostering of procedural knowledge was absent from many classrooms, while Van Nieuwenhuyse et al. (2017)

report that a quarter of all primary sources in their sample were analysed as disciplinary. Similarly, Knudsen (2020) found that teachers included primary sources in their teaching but failed to explain or model the strategies needed for interpreting the texts in a disciplinary way. By and large, it duly seems that history-specific strategies such as sourcing and contextualisation are used less frequently than suggested in curricular texts or by history educators.

History teaching in Finland

History teaching starts at elementary school, where the subject is taught by class teachers. Students usually start to study history in the fifth grade, when they are 11–12 years old, and have one history lesson per week. At secondary level, history is taught by subject teachers who are specialised in the subject. History is studied during the seventh and eighth grades in lower secondary school. The Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014) for comprehensive education stipulates that in history instruction, ‘the pupils focus on critical analysis of information produced by different actors and the dimensions of historical source material’. Historical literacy is stated as an instructional aim and is defined as ‘the ability to read and analyse sources produced by actors of the past and to competently interpret their meaning and significance’. At the elementary level, there are five and, for lower secondary, six content areas, which define the topics to be studied. However, these content areas are general in nature and teachers are free to choose individual topics.

After completing their basic education, students are eligible for general and vocational upper secondary education. Typically, about half go on to vocational education and half to more academic general upper secondary education. This article focuses on Finnish general upper secondary education, which covers a three-year educational programme that consists of 75 courses. There are three compulsory and three optional history courses. The same teachers teach all six history courses as well as at least one other subject, which is typically social sciences (civics, economics, law). Students can organise their timetable by registering themselves for available courses. For teachers, this means that the class they are teaching is different for every course, and that some students may base their course choices on the teacher’s reputation. In order to graduate, students must pass the matriculation examination (<https://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/en/matriculationexamination>).

The national core curriculum for general upper secondary education connects knowledge production and critical thinking to the teaching of disciplinary literacies. The data collection was carried out while the previous curriculum was in effect (2016–2021). However, the curricular aims have largely remained the same since the latest curriculum reform in 2021 (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019). Specific targets for history during 2016–2021 included both substantive and procedural knowledge. History teachers were expected to teach historical literacy, second-order concepts and historical empathy, for example (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2015). Nevertheless, the same document also defined thirty-six substantive items that

students are expected to learn. Thus, teachers face the challenge of finding the time to focus on historical thinking, as well as go through a vast amount of historical content, leaving them balancing between conflicting demands. In addition, at upper secondary level, the matriculation examination directs instruction, at least to some extent. In history tests, the assignments have traditionally focused more on substantive than disciplinary aspects of history (Puustinen, Paldanius and Luukka, 2020).

Finnish teachers are autonomous professionals, who can choose their pedagogical solutions independently based on the national core curriculum (see Rautiainen et al., 2019). Teachers decide how to sequence the course content, choose the learning materials (apart from the textbooks, which are typically chosen at the school level), and plan learning activities and assessment. Teacher autonomy is reflected in the absence of school inspections and other external assessment of teachers. Permanent teaching positions require a master's degree. Trainee subject teachers spend most of the time in the subject department, where they also complete their master's thesis. In order to become qualified teachers, they undertake pedagogical studies in the faculty of education. These studies include subject didactics courses and teaching practice periods at university training schools. In an international comparison, the Finnish system resembles those found in many other countries, with 75% to 80% of the emphasis on the teaching subject rather than on general educational knowledge, being comparable to the European average (Ecker, 2018).

Data collection and analysis

Our data were drawn from a research project entitled 'Engaging in disciplinary thinking: historical literacy practices in Finnish general upper secondary schools' (2016–2020). During the academic year 2018–2019, we conducted an observation study in which a total of nine upper secondary history teachers were observed. For the majority of the lessons, only one researcher was present, but at least once in each teacher's case both researchers observed the lesson together. The teachers in the study were chosen through recommendations by administrators, teachers and researchers.

All of the observed teachers were teaching compulsory courses, either 'International politics' or 'The history of independent Finland'. The former includes topics such as imperialism, the World Wars, the Holocaust, the Cold War, and the political situation of recent years, while the latter deals with the political and societal history of Finland from the 19th century to the present day. Both of the courses are typically studied during the second year of three-year studies. For more information on the teachers, see Table 1.

AMBITIOUS AIMS, TRADITIONAL REALITY? OBSERVING HISTORICAL LITERACY IN
FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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TABLE 1

*Background of observed teachers**

Name	Years of experience	Education	Major	Observed course
Herbie	10	master's degree	political history	independent Finland
Griffin	12	master's degree	political history	independent Finland
Marvin	15	master's degree	history	International politics
Robbie	30	master's degree	history	International politics
Emily	15	master's degree	history	International politics
Luke	31	master's degree	history	International politics
Emery	10	master's degree	history	International politics
Rosalie	20	master's degree	history	independent Finland
Angela	19	master's degree	history	International politics

*All names are pseudonyms.

The decision to observe each teacher for several lessons was made in order to increase the possibility of forming a realistic view of each teacher's way of teaching history. While the approach of single-lesson observations and a higher number of participants has its advantages, it also runs the risk of observing lessons designed particularly for the benefit of researchers. Although we took the precaution of encouraging teachers to ignore our presence as much as possible, and to carry on with their instruction as normally as possible, we acknowledge that our presence may have influenced them. In addition to using an observation instrument, we also took field notes, gathered classroom materials, and carried out interviews.

The observation instrument used in this study is based on the one designed by Nokes (2010). We modified his instrument for the present study in two ways. First, as the context and traditions of the Finnish education system differ from those of the United States, the exact same categories for texts and activities could not be applied. Thus, we changed some of the categories. Second, the process of testing the instrument in local schools (none of which participated in the study) revealed that, for example, the number of categories and the length of the coding period needed to be revisited. After the modifying process, written definitions were created for each category.

The final instrument (Appendix A) consists of three sections: text types, classroom activities and historical literacy heuristics. The first section of the instrument comprises 16 text types. Within a coding period of five minutes, we coded each text that was used in the classroom. As textbooks contain several different text types (body text, maps,

visual texts, etc.), we coded ‘textbook’ whenever the book was used. However, if texts such as maps, statistics or paintings originated from the textbook, this was marked in the instrument. During the analysis, we created a new category called ‘fiction’, which combines the categories of lyrics, novels and biography.

We coded only the most prevalent activity during the coding period of five minutes. In other words, only one activity was coded per column. The categories describing teacher-student interaction include lecture, Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) interaction, and discussion. While lectures may include a question or comment, they are nevertheless dominated by teacher talk. IRF interaction, on the other hand, gives students the opportunity to participate more than during a lecture, but as IRF is usually structured around closed-ended questions, the role of the students remains marginal. Interaction was considered ‘discussion’ if open-ended questions were asked. The category of ‘instruction’ was applied when the teacher gave any kind of instruction, either content-related or concerning practical school matters.

When making our field notes, we took notes on questions, conversations and general interaction in the classroom. Our focus was on literacy practices, not for example on the accuracy of the substantive knowledge presented by the teachers. During the lessons, we sat at the back of the classrooms. Occasionally, we communicated briefly with the teachers or the students, but did not take part in the teaching. After the observation period, we interviewed each teacher and asked questions about their planning and implementation process, as well as their views on history as a discipline. In addition to acquiring insights into the teachers’ pedagogical and disciplinary thinking, our aim was to ascertain whether they experienced the observed lessons as representative in relation to the whole school year.

We included Wineburg’s (1991) heuristics of sourcing, contextualising and corroborating, supplemented with close reading (Reisman, 2012) in the instrument, and experimented with whether it could be used for making observations on literacy strategies. However, as there are no broadly accepted criteria concerning how much time is needed for each heuristic, for example, it became evident that their identification in fast-paced classroom situations was challenging. In addition, our data do not include students’ expertise. Hence, our aim is not to say that the moments we characterised as sourcing, for example, developed in students all of the expertise listed in Reisman’s study (2012, p. 112), for instance. Instead, we report incidents where teachers (or students) clearly paid attention to the author of the source and the author’s intentions (sourcing), or that led students to analyse vocabulary and meanings (close reading), for example.

In order to evaluate the reliability of our observations, a comparison of the observation sheets was carried out. Both authors were present in eight lessons, which were compared. In the case of texts, we compared each row (i.e. text type), excluding those rows which had been left blank by both observers. We found that 92.1% of the observations on texts were identical. As only the most predominant activity was coded in the lessons, the reliability of activities was evaluated by comparing each column, resulting in an agreement of 77.5%. The main reason for coding either texts or activities in a different way was imprecision with timing rather than a disagreement on the

categories of texts or activities. We do not report findings regarding the time that individual teachers spent with historical literacy heuristics because those incidents were too rare during lessons observed together to compare reliability.

A full analysis of the interview data is not possible within the limits of this article. However, we briefly employ some findings concerning teachers' views on historical knowledge and pedagogy. Our aim is to address the fact that the observed teachers grasped, at least roughly and at a theoretical level, the nature of history, but did not follow this perception in their instructional actions. As a consequence of this approach, we do not present findings regarding individual teachers. Finally, before moving on to our results, it is important to note that none of the teachers said that the observed lessons were atypical of their practice.

Results

We begin by describing the observed lessons in general. We analyse the results regarding the use of different text types and classroom activities, as well as discuss to what extent the teaching followed disciplinary ideals. In the final part of the analysis, we compare our results to the teachers' own perceptions of history as a discipline and as a school subject.

Use of texts and classroom activities

The general pattern of the observed lessons was rather consistent. Teachers and students entered the classrooms at the beginning of the lessons without the school bell being rung. Teachers turned on computers and other digital devices and led the groups through the starting rituals, such as checking attendees and recalling the main points of the previous lessons. By this point, the first five minutes of the 75-minute lesson had typically elapsed. Similarly, the final minutes of each lesson were dominated by students' departure rituals, such as packing their books and laptops. Hence, the actual active teaching and learning time was somewhere between 60 and 70 minutes.

Broadly speaking, the nine teachers formed two clusters. Some favoured teacher-led lessons, after which they gave students assignments from the textbook, for example. Others began with assignments, which were completed either individually or in small groups. Many of the assignments were thoroughly reviewed and teachers often supplemented the students' answers with short lectures. Overall, and regardless of the differences, lecture-like teaching, namely taking notes or listening to the teacher's narration, was the most prevalent classroom activity. Most of the lessons included several pedagogical activities. Teacher-led instruction alternated with videos, discussions, and different kinds of assignments.

Lecture-like teaching and notetaking were closely connected. As Table 2 illustrates, the most used text type was teacher's notes, covering more than 50% of the total observed time. Practically all of the observed lessons were built around PowerPoint slides, which teachers used to support teacher-led parts of the lessons and to give

instructions to the students. In some classrooms, students wrote down the notes projected by the teacher.

Visual texts like photos, paintings, maps and statistics were present during approximately 25% of the total observed time (Table 2). Newspapers (historical or present-day), maps, and videos were each present about 8% of the total time. The share of statistics was about 5%. Most of the aforementioned texts were part of the slides that the teachers used. A significantly smaller share of these kinds of texts originated from the textbook, or the texts were part of the assignments that were completed during the lessons. Other potentially relevant texts, such as political speeches, government documents or fiction, were hardly used at all.

TABLE 2

Use of different text types (percentage of total observed time)

<i>name</i>	<i>textbook</i>	<i>teacher's notes</i>	<i>non-fiction text</i>	<i>govt. document</i>	<i>fiction</i>	<i>cartoon</i>	<i>newspaper</i>	<i>photo</i>	<i>painting</i>	<i>map</i>	<i>statistics</i>	<i>video</i>	<i>music</i>	<i>political speech</i>	<i>other</i>
<i>Herbie</i>	1.4	48.6	0	2.8	1.4	4.3	11.4	27.1	0	8.6	14.3	11.4	1.4	0	2.8
<i>Griffin</i>	2.6	64	0	10.7	2.7	0	0	6.7	5.3	1.3	8	0	0	5.3	0
<i>Marvin</i>	13.3	57.3	0	6.7	0	12	6.7	14.7	0	5.3	0	4	1.3	0	6.7
<i>Robbie</i>	18.7	34.7	18.7	0	0	8	16	21.3	9.3	16	12	2.7	0	0	0
<i>Emily</i>	28.4	40.3	6	0	1.5	1.5	3	4.5	6	6	9	9	0	3	6
<i>Luke</i>	18.7	30.7	0	0	0	9.3	16	16	6.7	10.7	1.3	22.7	0	1.3	1.3
<i>Emery</i>	16	60	0	0	0	0	0	13.3	4	10.7	0	12	0	0	6.7
<i>Rosalie</i>	12.3	54.4	5.3	0	1.8	0	12.3	36.7	5.3	3.5	1.8	10.5	7	0	10.5
<i>Angela</i>	31.6	75.4	0	0	0	0	3.5	3.5	3.5	5.3	0	0	0	0	8.8

Note: Each text used during the 5-minute period was coded. Categories other than teacher's notes and the textbook include texts that originated from notes and the textbook.

Typically, the teacher's notes consisted of a few lines of written text supplemented with one or more visual texts. The latter were seldom analysed or treated as historical evidence, but rather as elements that made the slide more attractive visually. Sometimes teachers referred briefly to these ornamental elements or explained what the particular photo, painting or map was, or how it was connected to the theme of the slide. However, they hardly ever offered a more nuanced analysis or encouraged the students to provide one and to source information, in that the names of photographers or painters and dates were typically not mentioned.

Similarly, the main purpose of the videos seemed to be to offer more engaging ways of presenting substantive knowledge. Audiovisual material was used as historical evidence in only one case (Herbie). Newspapers, contemporary or historical, were mostly used as sources of information during individual or group work and no history-specific reading strategies were employed. On some occasions, newspaper clippings were used for motivational purposes at the beginning of the lesson or as an illustrative element during a slideshow. As noted, all of the other text types (photos, cartoons,

paintings, maps, statistics) were mainly present as part of the teachers' PowerPoint presentations.

Textbooks were used quite rarely in most classrooms, but there was some variation between teachers. Textbooks were largely used for locating information required in order to answer questions at the end of each chapter, or when taking part in groupwork. Luke and Angela were exceptions as they used electronic textbooks and constructed parts of their teacher-led instruction around the books.

In the case of most teachers, a pattern regarding the use of the textbook could be detected. First, students completed textbook assignments. Then, in the case of closed-ended questions, the teacher elicited the correct answers, and in the case of open-ended questions, students' views were discussed. These incidents often included spells of a few minutes when the teachers explained more about the topics. Generally, the teachers referred to the textbooks as neutral sources of information and did not comment on their content or points of view. To this end, it seems that the textbooks were mainly used for retrieving and relocating information.

TABLE 3

Classroom activities (percentage of total observed time)

name	lecture	discussion	IRF	instruction	group work	individual work	video	other
Herbie	45.7	15.7	1.4	2.9	8.6	0	8.6	17.2
Griffin	34.7	33.3	6.7	14.7	8	1.3	0	1.3
Marvin	48	8	6.7	12	9.3	4	1.3	6.7
Robbie	30.6	4	8	10.7	34.7	0	4	8
Emily	25.4	4.5	4.5	15	19.4	23.9	7.5	0
Luke	49.3	2.7	14.7	4	0	9.3	17.3	2.7
Emery	52	4	8	10.7	0	14.7	10.7	0
Rosalie	47.4	8.8	5.3	10.5	1.8	12.3	5.3	8.8
Angela	22.8	12.3	17.5	14	12.3	12.3	0	8.8

Note: Only the most prevalent classroom activity during the 5-minute period was coded.

As noted, lecturing was the most prevalent classroom activity, with an average of 40% of the time being devoted to it. Lecturing was closely connected to the teachers' notes, which were typically also displayed during discussions or closed-ended questions. In general, the teachers practised both IRF interaction and whole-class discussion, but with different emphases. Most of the IRF interaction was used for

ensuring that students had comprehended substantive knowledge. Instructions were mostly given at the beginning of the lessons, but also before activities like group work or individual work. Overall, these teacher-centred activities covered approximately two-thirds of the observed lessons, while one-third contained group work, individual work, and video viewing (e.g. YouTube, Ylen Elävä arkisto [Yle archives]).

Some of the teachers did not use any group work, while in one classroom, group work was the most prevalent activity, occupying one-third of the observed lesson. It is also worth noting that the time used for going through the outcome of the group activities is reported as discussion or IRF interaction in our results. Presentations by students belong to the category labelled ‘other’, comprising less than 3% of the total time. The ‘other’ category also includes the time taken up waiting and packing at the beginning and end of lessons and, in the case of one teacher (Herbie), reading aloud for 12.9% of the observed time.

Historical literacy – to what extent?

In general, we observed teaching which focused on substantive knowledge. There were some variations between teachers, but none of the nine teachers systematically emphasised historical literacy abilities or engaged students in the interpretational nature of the discipline. As noted, the use of historical literacy heuristics for analysis differs from the use of texts and activities. Therefore, we do not report any findings on the time that individual teachers spent on sourcing, contextualisation, corroboration or close reading. Instead, Table 4 shows the percentage of all those 5-minute periods where one or more heuristics were detected.

TABLE 4

Historical literacy heuristics

Heuristics	Percentage of 5-minute slots during which heuristics were observed
sourcing	0.6
contextualisation	2.8
corroboration	0.2
close reading	5.0

Note: Table 4 shows the percentage of 5-minute slots in which one or more heuristics were detected.

As indicated in Table 4, sourcing and corroboration were almost non-existent in our data (3,130 minutes in total). Contextualisation was observed more often, but still rarely. Most often, teachers modelled, or students applied close reading. The role of close reading in historical literacy is not straightforward, however. Even though it is included in some history-specific models (e.g. Reisman, 2012), it is not easy to distinguish

between general literacy and historical literacy. For example, in VanSledright's (2002, p. 113) model, some observed incidents would have belonged to general literacy practices. Below is an extract from the field notes that illustrates contextualisation and close reading but, at the same time, the somewhat superficial use of a source:

The teacher distributes a handout. [It is] the Finno-Soviet Treaty of 1948, i.e. the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. The text is read with the whole class. The teacher reads excerpts aloud, and asks what it [the lines he just read] means. The lines in question are Article 1 [of the treaty]. The students are quiet. The teacher does not provide any tools or more precise tasks for the students. The teacher contextualises the treaty. [He recounts a] paradox from military service in which "the red team attacks from the east", even though Finland had signed the treaty with the Soviet Union. One student asks why Finland's treaty was different from those of communist states. The teacher points out that the answer is always interpretation, speculation.

The incident described above took less than 10 minutes (the excerpt covers almost two 5-minute slots) and included short comments by students regarding the meaning of Article 1. Hence, there was no time to read the treaty text, nor to consider the intentions of Finland or the Soviet Union. The role of the source text was more illustrative or confirmative, and the students did not apply other history-specific reading strategies for unpacking the text.

Generally, texts were analysed mostly through general literacy strategies. As described in the field notes, in one classroom the teacher demonstrated how statistics can be interpreted: Stalin's regime. Statistics [about industrial production]. The teacher demonstrates how to interpret statistics. Among other things, a change from 4 to 20 is equal to quintuple.' Even though this kind of statistical literacy is important, it can be approached through general literacy. Another short incident deals with a cartoon on the teacher's slide:

On the slide [there is] a 19th-century cartoon parodying the carving up of China [<https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:3293809>]. The teacher asks which nations the characters represent, but does not explain how the caricatures are linked to the respective nations (some students grasp it, others don't). The teacher mentions that it is important to take the French cartoonist into account. [Immediately moves to the next topic].

This excerpt covers just a few minutes. Some students were able to make suggestions about the imperialistic states described in the cartoon but, as noted in the field notes, for many the caricatures were beyond their grasp. In addition, the mention of possible bias does not fulfil the criteria for sourcing, which would have required analysing the intentions of the cartoonist, for example, and noticing how the figure representing France is presented differently from the other imperialistic nations. Moreover, the wider historical context was lacking. Hence, the potential of the cartoon is reduced to somewhat trivial knowledge concerning the stereotypical caricatures.

Based on his data, Rosenlund (2016, pp. 132–133) points out the strong connection between sourcing and contextualisation in students' expertise. His results emphasise that sourcing activates historical thinking, and that contextualisation supports

interpreting the purpose of a source. Here, one can notice the similarity to McCullagh's (2004) view regarding historical knowledge. When looking at our data from this perspective, our results are not encouraging. We observed few incidents in which texts visible on the slides or other materials were contextualised. Most of the time, this was done by the teacher. Yet these moments were not connected to sourcing and we observed almost no analytical progression from sourcing through contextualising towards holistic interpretation. There were two exceptions, however. First, one of the teachers carefully led students through a manifesto that Tsar Nicholas II had signed in February 1899 (see Puustinen and Khawaja, 2021). The manifesto was interpreted as an act of oppression for many contemporaries and in nationalistic historiography, but from a wider perspective, it was part of the governmental reforms that Russia introduced at the end of the 19th century. The second was a presentation made by students. In the presentation, students analysed a cartoon dealing with international politics during the Cold War. Guided by instructions given by the teacher earlier, they approached the cartoon using sourcing, contextualisation, and close reading. However, these reading and interpretation strategies were not used in any other parts of the observed lessons in the particular classroom, and the teacher did not refer to this kind of interpretation even once.

To conclude, history teaching at the upper secondary level seemed to be characterised by the pedagogy of picking. Instead of engaging with historical literacy, substantive knowledge was picked up from one location (teacher's notes, textbooks, etc.) and moved to another (students' memory) (see VanSledright, 2002, p. 75). Primary sources and other relevant texts were largely used for confirming the given narrative. Two excerpts from the field notes illustrate the point:

The teacher distributes a handout. Some students work alone, others in small groups. The assignment requires putting (trivial) events [during the national socialist regime in Germany] in chronological order. A concrete example of picking is that the events are listed in the margin on the handout, and the written assignment instructed students to add more specific timing: year, spring/autumn, if given.

In another classroom, students analysed a cartoon:

A task concerning a cartoon [...] [The teacher] asks students to analyse the cartoon. The students write their answers in the textbox in their digital textbook. Many do something completely different, which is also noticed by the teacher. This assignment basically calls for picking up English terms from the cartoon and translating them into Finnish.

Comparison of the interviews and observation data

Each of the teachers were interviewed after the observation period. Here, our analysis is limited to findings concerning the teacher's perspective on historical knowledge and pedagogy. Our aim is to investigate whether there is a gap between the teacher's intentions and the teaching we observed. To this end, we first briefly investigate the teachers' ideas regarding historical thinking, historical knowledge and the purpose of history teaching. At the end of this section, we report on how the nine

teachers valued the core practices presented in Round 1 of Fogo’s (2014) Delphi Panel Survey. A more nuanced analysis of the interview data falls outside the scope of this paper.

When asked about historical thinking and knowledge, six teachers acknowledged the interpretational nature of history. The difference between (natural) science and history was also emphasised. Another frequently occurring qualifier was the idea of cause and consequence. Furthermore, understanding the connections between the past and the present, as well as the ability to step into the shoes of people who lived in the past were mentioned by more than one teacher. None of the teachers referred to history merely as a collection of substantive knowledge. Regarding the purpose of or need for history teaching, teachers gave two main reasons: the ideal of an all-round cultivated person and the need to understand historical development in order to understand the present-day world. The latter was mentioned by eight teachers, and the ideal of a cultivated person by five. Three teachers mentioned (critical) thinking skills.

TABLE 5

Teachers’ evaluation of core practices presented in round 1 of Fogo’s (2014) Delphi Panel Survey

Practice title	Mean	Herbie	Griffin	Marvin	Robbie	Emily	Luke	Emery	Rosa -lie	Angela
Employing Historical Evidence	4.44	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5
Use of History Concepts and Big Ideas	4.67	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5
Making Connections to Personal/Cultural Experiences	3.22	3	2	3	4	4	5	2	4	2
Explaining Historical Content	4.1	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4
Conducting Re-Enactments and Simulations	3	2	2	2	5	4	4	2	3	3
Modelling Historical Thinking Skills	4.56	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4
Test Preparation	3	4	3	2	3	5	3	2	3	2
History Textbook Use	2.89	3	2	3	3	4	4	2	3	2
Selecting and Adapting Historical Documents	4.33	4	5	5	4	4	5	3	5	4
Facilitating Discussion	4.56	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	5

Table 5 shows the teachers’ evaluation regarding the core practices listed in Fogo’s (2014) study. During the interview, we asked every teacher to choose a numerical value that they thought would best represent their evaluation regarding each core practice and to use a think-aloud strategy to indicate their thought processes. The answers reveal significant differences compared to the observation data. The teachers highly evaluated ‘Employing Historical Evidence’, ‘Modelling Historical Thinking Skills’, and ‘Selecting and Adapting Historical Documents’ – practices that were very rare in the

observed lessons. When it came to the other two highly rated practices, ‘Use of History Concepts and Big Ideas’ and ‘Facilitating Discussion’, the latter was observed regularly, although there was a major difference between teachers concerning the time used for open-ended discussion. Since our observation instrument was not developed to capture the use of historical concepts in the form of substantial or first-order concepts, the practice of the ‘Use of History Concepts and Big Ideas’ falls outside the scope of our analysis.

The practice of ‘Explaining Historical Content’ was rated rather high (4.1), but nonetheless lower than the aforementioned practices that are more closely connected to historical literacy skills. When the interview data are compared with the observation data, an inconsistency between the teachers’ thinking and actions is evident. The observed lessons paint a picture of content-driven, teacher-led instruction, while the interviews reveal a deeper understanding of historical knowledge, and the teachers’ evaluations of the core practices are quite closely aligned with North American experts in the third round of Fogo’s (2014) Delphi Panel Survey. The experts favoured practices that can be framed under the idea of ‘historical inquiry’, and raised concerns about whether the practice of ‘Explain and Link Historical Content’ (the name of the practice was modified during successive rounds of the Delphi Panel Survey) leads to teacher-centred explanations.

In their survey of 151 Finnish upper secondary history teachers, Rautiainen et al. (2019) report a similar imbalance. Most teachers in the survey gave the highest ranking to the objective ‘Understands contemporary times as the outcome of historical development, and a starting point for the future’. In addition, the objective ‘Understanding the ambiguity and relativity of the past’ was selected by most of the teachers in the survey. The respondents generally appreciated the aim of mastering key historical processes and assessing their significance, but only rarely mentioned the objective ‘Construction of knowledge of the past by using relevant sources’ as important (Rautiainen et al., 2019). Regarding teaching methods, the surveyed teachers chose ‘Tell the students about the issue at hand’ as the most common method. The second most frequent method was ‘Tell the students about the issue at hand, but also use inclusive methods (such as ask questions and discuss in between)’. Rautiainen and colleagues (2019, p. 302) conclude that even though there were some statistical connections between the aims of teaching and classroom activities, ‘what the teachers considered essential for teaching history was not associated with their teaching methods’.

Discussion

This study investigated what kind of texts and pedagogical activities history teachers use in Finnish upper secondary schools, and the extent to which the observed teaching can be characterised as disciplinary. The results reveal a rather teacher-led approach that emphasises substantive knowledge. In general, the observed lessons cannot be characterised as particularly disciplinary. For example, primary sources or other

relevant texts were used or analysed very rarely. Nevertheless, in the interviews, the observed teachers indicated an understanding of what disciplinary teaching entails, and favoured pedagogical practices that are considered disciplinary. Our results are validated by other recent studies which report similar results (Paldanius et al., 2021; Rantala, 2012; Rantala and van den Berg, 2015; Rantala and Veijola, 2016; Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020; Rautiainen et al., 2019; Veijola and Rantala 2018; Vesterinen, 2022), and these studies are in turn mutually validated by our findings.

Taking notes, explaining historical content, occasionally asking questions and facilitating discussion are very traditional ways of teaching history (see also Cuban 2016, p. 179). The use of textbooks, which dominated instruction in primary schools (Khawaja and Puustinen, in press), was rare in these upper secondary classrooms. Teachers displayed slides which included notes, as well as quite a few photos, paintings, statistics, maps, and sometimes even written texts. Yet their function was ornamental rather than evidential, thus not requiring history-specific interpretational tools. This is not to say that there is no point in using visually stimulating learning material. However, for the purpose of developing historical literacy and furthering historical thinking, it is the way that the texts are used rather than their quantity that counts. Moreover, as in the study by van Nieuwenhuysen et al. (2017), we observed that primary sources were almost never corroborated, and in the case of visual texts, for example, photographers or painters were typically not mentioned.

We stress that regardless of pedagogical trends at any given time, any kind of teaching can be successful or meaningless. Teacher-centred instruction can just as easily involve the meaningless dispensing of information as it can activate learning and thinking processes. Similarly, group work or other learner-centred activities can either be a way to productively engage with a topic, or to merely spend time on a topic. By the latter, we refer to situations that may look engaging but which ultimately do not support disciplinary learning (Puustinen and Khawaja, 2021). An example could be a history classroom where students discuss historical topics or evidence without sufficient substantive and procedural knowledge. Despite these reservations, during the data analysis we stopped every now and then to consider the extent to which and on what basis lecture-like teaching was justified.

After a tentative comparison between primary and secondary observation data, it was startling that historical literacy practices were not exercised more at upper secondary level than at elementary level (see Khawaja and Puustinen, 2022). Based on curricular aims and the education of history subject teachers, one would have expected different results. At upper secondary level, the small number of close reading and even smaller number of other strategies typical of history cannot be considered to fulfil the disciplinary aims stipulated in the national core curriculum.

It is thought-provoking how our results resonate with the responses of the larger teacher population in Rautiainen et al.'s (2019) survey (see also Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020). Both analyses indicate a similar disconnect between teachers' aims and classroom activities. The aims of educating all-round cultivated people and understanding historical development could be important factors in explaining our results and are corroborated by other studies (Rautiainen et al., 2019; Rantala and

Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020). Teachers may feel that in order to cultivate young people and offer a comprehensive historical framework, they need to cover considerable substantive knowledge. This may lead to glossing over procedural knowledge even though it is valued in principle (Cuban 2016, pp. 175–179; van Nieuwenhuysse et al., 2017). In addition, teachers may view learner-centred activities as too time-consuming in relation to the perceived need to proceed from one topic to another.

Our findings address similarities as well as the two disconnects that have been observed in other Nordic countries and globally. The first disconnect between curricular expectations and observed teaching is clear. However, the second – between teachers' views in the interviews and their teaching – is harder to verify, but our data certainly indicate a gap, which is also supported by larger survey data (Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2018, 2020; Rautiainen et al., 2019). In Sweden, Olofsson (2011) found that the observed teacher used sources for inspiration, but not for illustrating how to construct historical knowledge. Knudsen (2015) obtained the same kind of results in Denmark. The rapid and ornamental use of texts indicated that there was no possibility of analysing them. Our data overall and the short lesson extracts described in this article show that many teachers approach texts through general literacy strategies. Even though more research would be needed to confirm the hypothesis, we suggest that the observed teachers were not familiar with history-specific reading strategies. Similarly, Jarhall (2012) found that Swedish history teachers used source criticism based on social sciences, not on history. Moreover, the previously mentioned study by Nieuwenhuysse et al. (2017) reported a hasty use of sources.

Hence, to sum up, although the disciplinary aims have been, at least to some degree, accepted by the teachers, there is considerable variance between individual teachers, and their views are only partially reflected in their instruction. How can this be explained? In his analysis of stability and change in history teaching, Larry Cuban (2016, p. 6) separates *incremental* changes, such as new courses or textbooks, from the *grammar of schooling*, namely the deep structures of schooling. Our findings, as well as other recent Finnish studies (e.g. Rantala, 2012; Rantala and van den Berg, 2015; Rantala and Veijola, 2016; Veijola and Rantala 2018; Rautiainen et al., 2019) form the basis for a hypothesis that curricular changes in recent decades have generally been too minor to change the fundamentals of instruction. It is possible that lecturing and focusing on substantive knowledge was the teachers' solution to the feeling of lack of time. It was obvious that they had to juggle the content demands laid out in the curriculum with other aims. Another but not mutually exclusive possibility is that disciplinary strategies typical of history are not pedagogically familiar to teachers, even though they have engaged in historical research during their university studies in the department of history.

It is also possible that when caught between the demanding curricular and discursive aims, some teachers are somewhat confused about what is important in history teaching. As Vesterinen (2022) shows in her ethnographic study, the tradition of teacher-centred and content-driven teaching, a national core curriculum that covers a plethora of substantive knowledge *and* disciplinary aims may be difficult to navigate for an individual teacher (see also Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015). In a recent Finnish

survey, most history teachers approved of the disciplinary approach, but at the same time, nearly half of upper secondary teachers said some important content was missing (Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020). When this is connected to the need to memorise information, which is deeply ingrained in the school structures and also in many young people's minds, our results can be discussed in the wider context of schooling.

Education in Finnish upper secondary school has largely remained unchanged. Kemmis (2009) has used the term 'practice traditions' within the frame of practice architectures. These practice traditions can 'encapsulate the history of the happenings of the practice, allow it to be reproduced, and act as a kind of collective "memory" of the practice' (Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 27). In history education, deep traditions and the collective memory of the profession emphasise pursuing a 'complete' overview of history in terms of historical content (e.g. Rosenlund, 2016; Sears, 2014; van Nieuwenhuysen et al., 2017), which is often echoed by textbooks even though the curriculum does not require it (Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020; van Nieuwenhuysen et al., 2017). As noted, this may lead to a situation whereby teachers either consciously or unconsciously emphasise substantive knowledge. Perhaps more importantly, textbooks reproducing the content-driven approach make it hard for an individual teacher to implement a more disciplinary pedagogy. It is conceivable that not all teachers have either the tools, ideas, time or other resources to create new kinds of pedagogical activities and assignments.

Probably the biggest change in Finnish upper secondary schools in recent years has been the digitalisation of teaching and the matriculation examination, the impacts of which are not yet fully visible in our data. Prior to digitalisation in 2017, textbooks and the history test in the matriculation examination (Puustinen, Paldanius and Luukka, 2020; Rautiainen et al., 2019; Rantala and Ouakrim-Soivio, 2020) remained largely unchanged, namely focusing on substantive knowledge. This is also reflected in teachers' perceptions of assessing essays (Paldanius et al., 2021). It is likely that without a proper means of assessment, teachers will not adopt new learning objectives (Seixas, Gibson and Ercikan, 2015). Since digitalisation, the history test in the matriculation examination has included more texts and text types (Puustinen, Paldanius and Luukka, 2020).

To conclude, our findings paint a rather traditional picture of Finnish history teaching. A thorough discussion of ways to strengthen disciplinary pedagogy is unfortunately not possible within the limits of this article. Yet two issues seem evident. First, curricular or other incremental changes will not break persistent traditions. Despite our reservations regarding the role of incremental changes, we nonetheless want to emphasise the role of textbooks, other learning materials, and assessment practices that support historical literacy. Second, individual teachers and teacher communities can achieve change, but it requires analytical discussion about learning and teaching, as well as readiness to question traditions and structures that support the old habits (see Rantala et al., 2020). When it comes to teacher education, the intentions to support the disciplinary approach have only a limited capacity to change the teaching tradition if contextual factors such as traditions of classroom teaching and school organisations are

not connected to didactical aspects and student teachers' understanding of history as a discipline (Puustinen, 2022).

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