

# Intercultural historical learning: a conceptual framework

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This paper outlines a conceptual framework in order to systematically discuss the meaning of intercultural learning in history education and how it could be advanced. We do so by bringing together theories of historical consciousness, intercultural competence and postcolonial thinking. By combining these theories into one framework, we identify some specific and critical aspects of historical learning that are relevant for today. We have constructed a matrix with three rows of narrative abilities intersecting with three columns of intercultural dimensions. This generates a matrix that consists of nine cells. By formulating a set of questions and answers for each cell, we outline learning applications and demonstrate how the historical and intercultural concepts are mutually enriching. The framework addresses two issues: firstly, the intercultural historical competence that may result; and secondly, how it can be developed. This can be used by researchers to analyse the intercultural elements of historical learning, in schools and in society, and by educators to construct relevant learning activities.

**Keywords:** history instruction; intercultural competence; multicultural education; cultural diversity; school history

History as a subject in school has been accorded legitimacy on the grounds of its presumed capacity to provide students with an understanding of contemporary society (e.g. Symcox & Wilschut, 2009). However, it is indeed a matter of debate how we perceive contemporary society as well as what tools are needed to understand it. All school subjects are formed by the constant tension between tradition and change, and perhaps more so than others, the subject of history. While long-standing historical narratives may remain for decades, new findings widen or change what is considered established knowledge. Objectives, methods and content of education are altered as they are subjected to often contradictory pressures from teaching strategies, textbook traditions and social and political transformations. For some time now, globalization and increasingly diverse societies have challenged the understanding of what should, and could, be the task of history in schools (e.g. Banks, 2009; Carretero, Asensio, & Moneo, 2012; Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000).

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In the second half of the 20th century, history education successively widened its scope in many countries, from a narrow cultural sphere to broader perspectives (Nygren, 2011; VanSledright, 2009). Gradually losing its position as part of a homogenizing nationalistic project, history in schools was eventually rendered a new task in a new project: to foster citizens that could orient in a multicultural environment (Faas, 2011; Wilschut, 2010). Several governments and policy-makers have since proposed intercultural educational programmes that aim to include ethnic minorities and transnational identities in the community of the nation (e.g. Byram, Barrett, Ipgrave, Jackson, & Mendez Garcia, 2009; UNESCO, 2006). In spite of these intentions, the meaning of intercultural learning in history education, both as policy and practice, has remained unclear (Bracey, Gove-Humphries, & Jackson, 2010; Faas & Ross, 2012; Harris & Clarke, 2011; Luciak, 2006). Intercultural objectives have often been expressed as ideas on the policy level without any suggestions as to how the content of history education should be transformed. Schools still teach an inherently ethnocentric heritage, and this is the case even where history studies are not particularly nationalistic (Barton, 2009; Dunn, 2009; Eikeland, 2004; Nordgren, 2006; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2012). For history teaching, fostering intercultural understanding seems to be a far more ambiguous and vague project than was once the project of fostering nationalism.

The process of going from policy to practice, of turning abstract objectives into lessons, illustrates the challenge to actually reform the content and methods of history in schools, as several questions arise and need to be answered. What selection of content can present students with an image of society that is relevant to its present diversity? How can teachers outline and structure historical narratives so as to include a multitude of experiences and voices, while at the same time being cautious not to create fragmented versions of history that are pedagogically impossible to handle?

This paper addresses these issues by proposing a conceptual framework to achieve intercultural learning in history education, i.e. *intercultural historical learning*. Two questions are raised: (1) how can history as a subject in school contribute to intercultural competence? and (2) what are the consequences for history education, concerning subject matter and methods? The first question assumes that historical learning is vital with regard to intercultural understanding. The second question follows logically as new objectives will by necessity mean shifts in attributing importance to certain aspects and in deciding what aspects to emphasize, as well as in organizing learning activities to achieve this in the classroom.

Convinced that some eclecticism is fruitful, even imperative in this case, we draw on theories from various fields. The main theoretical influences are history education and intercultural education. Within the context of history education, we base our reasoning on the theory of historical consciousness (Jensen, 1997; Rösen, 1987, 2005, 2007) while also including concepts from the historical thinking tradition (Lee & Ashby, 2000; Seixas, 2004, 2012; Shemilt, 1980). In our understanding of intercultural education (see e.g. Banks, 2009; Sleeter, 2010), we draw

from mainly two inspirations: intercultural competence (e.g. Byram, 1997, 2008; Deardorff, 2006a, 2006b, 2009) and postcolonial theory (Mignolo, 2002; Young, 2012). We argue that bringing these fields together will help to clarify the meaning of intercultural learning in history education. Kenneth Nordgren (2006) has previously linked the theory of historical consciousness to theories of intercultural competence. Johansson (2012) has developed the model further by incorporating concepts from the tradition of historical thinking. In this paper we demonstrate how various theories can be made to harmonize in a conceptual framework that could be used to analyse and heuristically raise questions about intercultural dimensions in history education, or to guide the practical planning of history lessons.

‘Theoretical Approaches’ section introduces and briefly discusses the main theoretical concepts used to construct the framework. ‘Intercultural Historical Learning: Introducing a Conceptual Framework’ section (the main part of the paper) presents the framework, allowing historical consciousness to meet intercultural learning in a matrix consisting of nine intersecting cells. The practical didactic implications of each intersection (cell by cell) are then examined. ‘Shifting Viewpoints’ section, finally, summarizes the arguments for adopting this framework in, possibly, both research and teaching, and refers back to the introductory discussion about fostering intercultural understanding through history education.

## **Theoretical approaches**

### *Narrative competence: a way of conceptualizing historical learning*

Our guiding hypothesis is that history, as a school subject, has to include popular manifestations and people’s everyday assumptions about the past, as well as expert narratives. Grounded in phenomenology, the theoretical concept of *historical consciousness* is based on an understanding of history as a phenomenon, not as a pre-defined body of knowledge. Thus, the question from this perspective is how people construct historical meaning. Karl-Ernst Jeismann (1979) describes historical meaning-making as a symbiotic interrelation between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspective of the future. Jensen (1997) stresses that people construct historical meaning at different levels of awareness. He describes historical consciousness as a continuum, extending from the pre-conscious to the fully considered and explicitly formulated. Hence, it comprises both emotional and cognitive thinking processes and constitutes part of our identity.<sup>1</sup>

Historical consciousness is closely connected to two other concepts, historical culture and use-of-history. While being individual, historical consciousness works in a communicative practice. Together people create manifestations, e.g. artefacts, narratives and memorials and distribute them through communication channels such as media, schools and museums. The concept of *historical culture* refers to this collective meaning-making practice where we define history as accepted truths about the past

(Rüsen, 2004, 2012). Taking this into consideration, we understand that history can be evoked for the purpose of influencing the future. The concept of *use-of-history* refers to such actions and can be said to be the performative side of historical culture.

Intercultural history teaching needs a broad definition of history, that is to say, a definition that encompasses history as consciousness, as culture and as use. The experience of diversity plays a significant part in a given society's historical culture and therefore has an impact on how we understand that society and on the positions we take. In this way, historical consciousness frames the article's discussion of how historical learning can contribute to intercultural learning in a fruitful way.

### *Applying historical consciousness*

On an analytical level, the mental process of making sense of history (i.e. to learn history) can be divided into three basic, although not separate, procedures: to experience the past, to interpret it as history and to use it for orientation (Rüsen, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Applying historical consciousness to history education, Rüsen (2005) conceptualizes the learning goal as *narrative competence*. He defines narrative competence as 'the ability to narrate a story by means of which practical life is given an orientational locus in time'. In this sense, all people possess a historical consciousness and, thereby, also the ability to advance their narrative competence. Thus, the purpose of history education cannot be to create historical consciousness from nothing; but to advance students' abilities to experience past phenomena, to interpret them as history and to use such interpretations in their practical lives. Drawing from Rüsen (2005), we argue that the three basic procedures can be understood as learning abilities and made into classroom objectives in the following way. (While given only an introductory and schematic treatment at this point in the article, the narrative competence abilities will be unpacked and elaborated separately at further length in 'Intercultural Historical Learning: Introducing a Conceptual Framework' section.)

- *The ability to experience* can be expressed as sensitivity to the presence of the past around us. Through learning, students can expand their content knowledge about time periods, processes of change, events and historical concepts, thereby becoming more historically sensitive and better equipped to understand the depth and variety of the past.
- *The ability to interpret* is to make sense of the past in the form of history. This implies understanding the significance (or meaning) of an event, the causes behind a process of change, and the structure of historical narratives. One way for students to advance this ability is by studying historical sources from various aspects. Ultimately, the purpose is to learn to connect different experiences into a coherent narrative.

- *The ability to orient* relates to the act of using the abilities to experience and interpret history for the purpose of making sense of contemporary situations and for identifications. The orienting ability is advanced when the study of history affords students with opportunities to take considered positions in order to formulate standpoints in practical life. With a broader knowledge base and analytic skills, students can learn to be aware and reflective in their experiences while making connections between past and present.

Conceptualizing historical consciousness in terms of competences and distinct abilities makes it possible to break down the educational goal of historical consciousness and allow it to guide history teaching in practice, not just as a lofty ideal (cf. Eikeland, 2001; Johansson, 2012; Körber, 2011). The concept of competence, when it relates to education and learning, is defined as the knowledge, skills and attitudes that people need to solve domain-specific problems. The growing interest in competences has been sparked by the trend of securing measurable outcomes (Deakin, 2008; Popham, 2009). While the use of competence in this context is primarily instrumental, it does not contradict that it can also express complex and advanced knowledge and learning processes. We understand competence in this latter meaning.

*Intercultural competence: a way of conceptualizing intercultural learning*

In this paper, we choose to discuss intercultural learning in terms of intercultural competence. We choose the term *intercultural* before *multicultural* for the following reasons. Multicultural is a descriptive term. It refers to a situation where a society (locally, nationally or globally) consists of people from different cultural communities. Their co-existence might be peaceful or characterized by conflict; the term does not imply one or the other. Intercultural, on the other hand, is a normative term. It refers to a desired condition of mutual respect and interaction that transgresses and overcomes real and imagined cultural divisions (Gundara & Portera, 2008).

One of the most commonly used definitions of intercultural competence is: ‘the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, using one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes’ (Deardorff, 2006a). Intercultural competence has cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects that can be weighted differently to deal with various intercultural situations. The term is common in educational training programmes, which deal with the practical problems of cultural misunderstandings (to secure more effective interactions, e.g. in business or in student exchange). Intercultural competence is also, and more importantly, used to develop and discuss education for citizenship in today’s multicultural and globalized society (Aldred, Byram, & Fleming, 2006; Byram, 2008). Schools play a part in developing intercultural competence in a wider context, both as part of curricular generic skills and as embedded in different school subjects as subject-specific abilities.

Before turning to the practical meaning of intercultural competence for history education, we make some short remarks about the (notoriously tricky) concept of culture. Our guiding assumption is that cultural identifications and encounters, however blurred and changing, are constituent factors of modern life and should play a part in history education. Therefore, we need an approach that provides an explanation for the cultural cohesion and allows us to explore cultural encounters, but without resorting to essentialism.

Sewell (2005) makes a useful distinction between two different meanings of 'culture'. The first usage focuses on culture as a social category that can be separated from other aspects of human life (such as economy, politics or biology). Culture in this sense (always in the singular) is contrasted without culture. The second usage refers to culture as a 'concrete and bounded body of beliefs and practices' that adheres to a 'society' or some other social subgroup. In this second meaning, one culture is seen as different, and in some respect distinct, from other cultures (possible to use in the plural); we can talk of Swedish, Indian or Malawi cultures or of middle-class and upper-class cultures. Whereas the second usage (cultures as bounded worlds of meanings) might be criticized for turning cultures into overly strict and coherent entities, this is not how we see it. We mean that cultures can be seen as cohesive as well as subject to dynamic changes. In this sense cultures, those bounded worlds of meaning, are also contradictory (they consist of human beings that define themselves as belonging to several cultures simultaneously), loosely integrated (with internal inequalities and questioned by different groups) and changing (due to trade, migration, war, new technologies, etc.). Stephanie Rathje states that such internal differences are vital for cohesion, as our familiarity with differences, that we understand and recognize the differences within, can be seen as the actual glue that creates cultures (cf. Andreotti, 2011; Burbules, 1997). Intercultural competence can then be specified as the process of making unknown differences familiar and known. (Rathje, 2007)

Finally, one last reserve: with its goal to solve problems of understanding and create efficient, perhaps even frictionless, communication, intercultural competence tends to understate societal conflicts. Therefore, we have also found it essential to turn to postcolonial ideas and analyses as tools for understanding relations of power between majority and minority cultures on a global as well as a national level (Young, 2012). In the following discussion, we include strands of postcolonial theory in the framework of intercultural historical learning.

### *Applying intercultural competence*

Some scholars (Byram, 1997, 2008; Stier, 2003) take a hands-on approach when constructing models of how studies in specific subjects (such as foreign language) contribute to intercultural competence. These models distinguish between discrete sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Among them, we choose to highlight the following three dimensions (mostly based on Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001, pp. 4–7):



- *Knowledge of social and cultural processes.* This includes knowledge about culture as a social and historical phenomenon as well as about different cultures within and beyond national borders.
- *The ability to interpret representations from other cultures, and to relate these to representations of one's own culture.* This includes skills to take another position, interpret unfamiliar representations, and mediate between perspectives.
- *The ability to decentre.* According to Byram et al., this is 'to relativise one's own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones, and to be able to see how they might look from the perspective of an outsider who has a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours' (2001, p. 5).

These dimensions constitute essential components in intercultural learning and can be seen as objectives for history education. If this is the case, then we have to formulate how this generic competence could be supported by the distinct features of history as a school subject. Moreover, we also have to consider how the school subject has to adapt to the demands of intercultural learning.

### **Intercultural historical learning: introducing a conceptual framework**

This section introduces a conceptual framework where narrative competence and intercultural competence are brought together. In the overlap, the three narrative abilities (to experience, to interpret and to orient) intersect with the three intercultural dimensions (social and cultural processes, representations from different cultures and decentred perspectives). Expressed differently, this framework qualifies general historical abilities (relevant for all learning of history), while adding an intercultural direction.

For the benefit of clarity, we choose to present the framework in the form of a matrix. The main part of this section outlines the structure and further discusses the content of the framework. We discuss the matrix row by row, starting with introducing each of the narrative abilities on a comprehensive level, then treating each cell through the questions posed and answers given in the matrix. The method being employed, where we explore competences through questions and answers, indicates a useful way of unpacking and linking narrative and intercultural competencies. Ultimately, the conceptual framework claims to capture some prominent components of intercultural historical learning.

#### *Methodology*

We have constructed a matrix where three rows of narrative abilities intersect with three columns of intercultural dimensions (Figure 1). This

	A. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PROCESSES	B. REPRESENTATIONS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES	C. DECENTRED PERSPECTIVES
1. T O  E X P E R I E N C E	1 A ...history about cultural encounters  What historical content can contribute to knowledge about social and cultural processes?  A content that considers cultural encounters and the impact of migration as central components of historical narratives	1 B ...history as voices of diversity  Which historical content can contribute to the ability to perceive representations from different cultures?  A content that opens for a diversity of perspectives and voices from different cultures, and where the "others" enter the historical narrative as agents with voices of their own.	1 C ... history as contemporary culture  What historical content can contribute to the ability to decentre and relativise one's own culture?  A content that makes learners alert to their own historical cultures, cultures that create feelings of belonging and legitimise value judgments.
2. T O  I N T E R P R E T	2 A ... history as narrative structure?  How can the selected content be interpreted as meaningful historical narratives?  By analysing and deconstructing narratives, through concepts and perspectives, such as culture, cause and consequence, continuity and change, modernity/coloniality.	2 B ... history as sources from different cultures  How can historical interpretations contribute to the understanding of representations from different cultures?  By interpreting sources from different cultures, taking historical perspectives and analysing historical evidence.	2 C ... history as a cultural system  How can historical interpretations contribute to the ability to decentre the dominant culture?  By examining the dominant historical culture for historical significance; considering whose voices are heard and whose are silenced in different canonical narratives.
3. T O  O R I E N T	3 A ... by considering narratives about uses of history  How can a use-of-history perspective contribute to knowledge about social and cultural processes?  By integrating examples of how different social and cultural collectives use history.	3 B ...by analysing different uses of history  How can a use-of-history perspective contribute to the ability to explain and relate to representations from different cultures?  By using concepts and models to analyse different uses of history within different cultures	3 C ...by using history to relate to a multicultural present  How can a use-of-history perspective contribute to the ability to orient in the multicultural present?  By practically applying historical knowledge in order to cognitively sort experiences and ethically relate to contemporary society

**Figure 1. Matrix of intercultural historical learning.**

generates a matrix that consists of nine cells. Through the method of formulating a set of questions and answers for each cell, we outline learning applications and demonstrate how the historical and intercultural concepts are mutually enriching. The framework addresses two issues: firstly, what are the distinct features of intercultural historical competence; and secondly, how can this competence be advanced.



Each cell of the matrix has the same structure:

- (1) a summarizing statement addressing how the specific narrative ability is linked to a specific intercultural dimension,
- (2) a question about the potential of history to promote intercultural learning and
- (3) an answer given in the form of content/activities (what history studies could be about in the classroom).

The questions in the cells have been deduced from our theoretical understanding. Narrative competence has guided us when discussing what abilities are required to advance intercultural learning in history classrooms; in a similar way, intercultural competence has directed us when considering what content might be particularly beneficial. To be more precise, we have let the ability to experience (to perceive the past) generate questions about how to select a relevant content. We have specified and sharpened them by relating to the intercultural dimensions. In turn, this has resulted in questions that address what content may (a) facilitate students' opportunities to experience a multicultural past, (b) let students meet a diversity of voices and (c) provide students with the grounds to decentre their own culture. Correspondingly, from the ability to interpret, we have generated questions about procedural knowledge and from the ability to orient, questions about the use-of-history. We have further specified them through the addition of intercultural dimensions. On the one hand, it is important to stress that these questions should not be regarded as exclusive questions; other intercultural qualifications might enhance different perspectives. On the other hand, given this reservation, our choice of perspectives links intercultural learning to specific theories relevant for history education.

The answers that we suggest have been constructed in a hermeneutic process where we have started from our knowledge of history as a school subject and from previous research. We have also considered specific theories, where the historical thinking concepts (Seixas, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2012) have been valuable, particularly for exploring the ability to interpret. However, the answers are tentative and need to be further developed and empirically validated.

### *To experience intercultural dimensions of history*

To experience history is to perceive 'traces' of the past, a perception that goes on even when we do not have a clear idea of their meaning. To make sense of the past, we have to understand these traces as parts of a coherent narrative. The presence of the past is a fundamental dimension in life but nonetheless our ability to sense this presence can be advanced. Therefore, the ability to experience is both a passive and an active act. Just as an experienced botanist is able to observe more of the variety in a summer meadow than a novice, so a learner of history can become more sensitive to perceiving the experiences of the past.

Our concern here is what historical content is particularly relevant in order to develop intercultural competence and how this content relates to the learners' experiences and preconceptions. What criteria should we apply for selecting relevant content in order to become sensitive to a multicultural society's past? Regardless of a focus on local, national or global historical themes, there are relevant multicultural perspectives to highlight. The past speaks to us with countless voices, and any chosen selection will mean that some of these voices sound stronger, while others are silenced. However, we cannot avoid this. History teaching inevitably excludes some narratives since it would be impossible to incorporate 'everyone's' history. Furthermore, governments do not generally set out to foster cosmopolitan identities but continue to strive to foster national identities, even though these might be of a more up-to-date, multicultural kind (Sleeter, 2010). In view of this, the critical issue is what metahistorical perspectives could be used to guide the selection of content in an intercultural direction.

For a metanarrative to be viewed as historically significant it must present society with some degree of self-understanding. In a multicultural society, in a globalized world, nations, collectives and individuals relate to their own experiences. When discussing and deciding on historically significant content, we have to take into account three perspectives. First, the generalized global level; second, the national project; and third, the myriad of diverse experiences; all must be present.

The ability to experience the past relates to the intercultural dimensions in three cells. The first cell (1A) considers the selection of historical content. We suggest that teachers might choose cultural encounters and migration as suitable metahistorical perspectives. The second cell (1B) considers how historical content can open for a variety of voices and perspectives from different cultures. The third cell (1C) raises the issue of discovering one's own position within historical culture, a position from which we are bound to make our experiences of the past.

*1A. What historical content can contribute to knowledge about social and cultural processes?* The first intercultural dimension of the ability to experience deals with selecting content that is appropriate for providing knowledge about social and cultural processes. In today's history education, the plot that structures the historical narratives is still how (European) nation-states formed and developed. However, the idea of one people, with one common heritage, is no longer a viable basis on which to build an imagined community. It might not be reasonable to expect that teachers will formulate an alternative guiding perspective on their own. We suggest that one way to teach intercultural competence is to study the historical processes of cultural encounters and migrations. This would ensure that knowledge about social and cultural processes be put into focus (Byram, 1997) and could offer an alternative plot and alternative meanings to the narratives that students encounter in class.

The exchange of knowledge, technology, beliefs, traditions, products and diseases are often preconditions of development. This exchange is

usually an on-going activity, sometimes violent but often peaceful, in which people act and live. Understanding the Neolithic, industrial or digital revolutions through the lens of cultural encounters entails a shift away from ethno-national models of explanation. Instead of depicting Sumerian farmers, the British economic thinkers in the 18th century or today's IT-geeks as examples of specific geo-political cultures (Mesopotamia, England, Silicon Valley), these actors could be understood differently if placed in broader social and cultural contexts. Such narratives of, for example, the vibrant meeting places along the river systems of communication, the growing international economy or the global flow of information, give possibilities to perceive the dynamics and complexity of cultural encounters. They tell us about individuals and collectives creating and transforming (their) history through cultural networks. Accordingly, ethno-national actors could be seen as changing and flexible constructs, not as given entities.

Bringing forward stories of migrations would result in a similar narrative shift. Whereas the settled person has been the norm, the nomad and the migrant have been construed as anomalies. The migrant only enters history during specific periods characterized by conflicts and cultural disasters. People's spatial movements need to be included as an integral part of economic, social and cultural history, and the constant movements of people, over short or long distances, should be seen as active causes of historical change. Focusing on migrations and their impacts on social collectives and cultures would enable an enhanced understanding of the past as well as the present (Sheidrake & Banham, 2007).

*1B. What historical content can contribute to the ability to perceive representations from different cultures?* The second intercultural dimension of the ability to experience concerns opening the content to diverse voices. Adopting a plot of cultural encounters and migration does not by itself guarantee that students have the opportunity to perceive diversity. There is a risk, as in all pedagogical projects, that any overarching perspective simplifies and silences (Johansson, 2012; Sharp, 2012). To counter this, actively including different voices and perspectives could make narratives more open. One strategy could be to allow students to meet the historical testimonies of different cultures. For example, the Crusades or the Second World War would possibly be more comprehensible with knowledge of how people from different sides interpreted what happened to them. In history textbooks, people outside of Europe are often mute. Those who were colonized or enslaved are generally described as passive victims. Responding to the voices of others does not only provide ways and means of understanding other cultures. Meeting representations from the periphery about encounters with the 'centre' may further generate insights into the majority society. When historical narratives are opened to a diversity of perspectives and voices from different cultures, the 'others' will enter as agents with voices of their own.

In school, students meet syntheses and adaptations of historians' works, commonly in the form of textbooks. Textbooks often obscure (or

take for granted) their perspectives, use of concepts and criteria of selection. To highlight such preconditions in class could be one way of opening the narratives. Adding non-western geopolitical experiences could possibly help to discover alternative ways of describing concepts such as development, enlightenment, modernity and colonialism (Mignolo, 2005; Okere, Njoku, & Devisch, 2011) For this to happen, students would also have to meet the explanations of African, Arabic, Latin American or Inuit scholars, to see what historical issues concern them.

*1C. What historical content can contribute to the ability to decentre and relativize one's own culture?* Finally, we want to discuss a third intercultural dimension of the ability to experience, namely the ability to decentre and to see the relativity of one's own values (Deardorff, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). History provides rich possibilities to encounter different systems of thought and cultural outlooks. However, history is also part of the value system on which we base our view of the world. Public stories as well as stories emanating from everyday life create cultural positions. To catch sight of such positions may be one way of discovering one's own historical culture and gaining insights from which the ability to decentre could be developed.

History teaching needs to be open to students' preconceptions and own stories, whether these are consistent with disciplinary history or if they draw on popular culture and family history. Students would then get the opportunity to study narratives that are not arranged beforehand. This might be considered a difficult or sensitive task for history teachers, as the purpose of such public or everyday stories is to create identities and belongings rather than to rationally explain historical processes.

In some cases, the historical narratives usually told in schools conflict with the self-understanding and narratives of minority groups, for instance, when there are competing narratives about guilt and abuse in a society (Epstein, 2000, 2007). To make students' historical cultures the objects of study is to make their collective memories significant.

We suggest that one way of developing an understanding for other representations of the world is for students to learn to be more sensitive to the historicity of shared values and contemporary identities.

### *To interpret intercultural dimensions of history*

Above, we argue that teachers' selection and outlining of historical content knowledge are important for building an understanding of contemporary, multicultural society. This understanding needs, however, a further qualified ability to interpret different sources, cultures and values. To interpret the past in the form of history is to connect different experiences into a coherent narrative.

The ability to interpret embraces three dimensions: (a) to construct meaningful historical explanations, (b) to investigate sources from the past and (c) to deconstruct the value system behind different interpretations

and narratives. It can partly be conceptualized through the historical thinking framework that has been elaborated in British and Northern American educational research (Lee & Ashby, 2000). Historical thinking skills often come in the form of lists (with some, albeit small and variations). Peter Seixas' six thinking concepts—*historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives* and *the ethical dimension*—are particularly useful when discussing in what way historical interpretations can contribute to intercultural historical learning (Seixas, 2006, 2012; Seixas & Peck, 2004). We will use historical thinking concepts (for the purpose of constructing and investigating) as well as narrative concepts (for the purpose of deconstructing) together with the theory of historical consciousness. In our view, these perspectives are possible to combine, and each brings an important perspective to the other. Historical thinking concepts provide structure and narrative logic to historical accounts. However, they primarily handle procedural aspects of historical knowledge (as shown in the article). They, therefore, have to be supplemented with concepts from the historical consciousness tradition, which puts historical accounts into a broader context, relating them to different cultural master narratives and to the stories of everyday lives, in other words all those things that influence our historical consciousness. To summarize, even though the thinking concepts are formulated from a more cognitive position that contrasts with the phenomenological, and more philosophical, position of historical consciousness, we see these traditions as compatible when discussing the advancement of historical consciousness.

The ability to make historical interpretations relates to the intercultural dimensions in three cells: The first cell (2A) focuses on interpreting narratives about cultural and social processes, examining the structures of concepts, how change and continuity are communicated as well as cause and consequence. The second cell (2B) focuses on sourcing and perspective-taking as tools to build adequate historical explanations. Such historical methods are useful for avoiding (as much as possible) that we impose our present assumptions and values on other historical cultures. The third cell (2C) highlights historical significance as a tool to explore the construction and legitimization of historical canons in different cultures.

*2A. How can the selected content be interpreted as meaningful historical narratives?* The first intercultural dimension concerning the ability to interpret involves historical narratives on a structural level. A narrative is organized around a plot with its basic structure and its signifying concepts. Here, we discuss how and why it is important that students be given the opportunities to investigate how the logic and meaning of historical content is organized. We raise three issues: concepts, explanations and patterns of meaning.

When describing today's multicultural societies from a historical perspective, we use certain concepts (classificatory as well as analytical) and certain types of explanations. Classificatory concepts express the differences we (within a historical culture) have chosen to consider important.

To exemplify, an *immigrant* is someone who moves, migrates, from one country to another. It is in contrast to the *citizen* (who is settled, not moving) that the meaning of immigrant is signified. When the migration started or ended is contextual and does not ascribe any importance to the meaning of the concept. Choices about using or not using concepts, or about stressing or not stressing differences are decisive for the meaning conveyed. Ethnic or national epithets are often used routinely in historical narratives. But who is labelled a Byzantine, a Swede or an Arab—someone who has citizenship, lives within certain borders or is a native speaker? Is the definition historical, for instance, in the way that it differs before and after the early modern period? Teachers will have to actively direct students' attention towards such otherwise concealed questions in order that they develop their ability to interpret.

Continuity and change ('what has remained the same over time and what has changed') and cause and consequence ('how and why certain conditions and actions led to others') are important concepts for promoting historical thinking (Seixas, 2008). Whether we discern continuity or change in a narrative depends on the historical question and the subsequent framing of the narrative. Some narratives focus on continuity, others on change. Naming Ancient Greece as the cradle of Western civilization implies a story about continuity. Furthermore, describing migrations as disasters that resulted in, for instance, the collapse of the Roman Empire and the extermination of native populations, or in some cases as upheavals leading to change (the Mongol invasions), is to stress differences before and after a turning point. In this way, the narrative structures link the past to the present by implying strands of similarities and discontinuities between then and now, and them and us. One way to historically explain contemporary multicultural society is to treat cultural encounters and migrations as on-going processes, not as mere events.

Narratives of change tend to signal either progress or decline. Periodizations of the past are clear examples of this. When we read history as cultural encounters and open it to a diversity of voices, patterns of contradictions will occur. Events and historical processes that have meant progress for certain groups have meant injustice and oppression for other. As Mignolo (2002) points out, period names such as 'the Renaissance' and 'the Enlightenment', in effect, tend to conceal the dark sides of modernity. They are on the one hand integral elements in Western self-understanding and thereby building blocks toward progress, and on the other intertwined with the traumas of colonialism and racism. Mignolo encourages us to treat the period names as pedagogical opportunities that reveal something about the metanarratives: for example, how 'the Antiquity' westernizes ancient civilizations and how 'the Middle Ages' overshadows dynamic developments in Asia (as well as the problems of 'the Renaissance' or 'the Enlightenment').

*2B. How can historical interpretations contribute to the understanding of representations from different cultures?* The second intercultural dimension of the ability to interpret is about using historical disciplinary methods in



order to understand representations from different cultures. We have emphasized the need to open historical narratives to many voices and perspectives. It may, however, be difficult to explain, examine and relate representations from different times and cultures.

Wineburg (2001) has shown that there are specific educational problems in advancing students' interpretative skills. In some respects, students could benefit from learning to use some of the methods of professional historians to become critical and independent historical thinkers. Learning to think historically can be said to be an exercise in putting a distant time and culture at the centre of one's attention. A challenge for students might be to avoid imposing presentistic and preconceived notions on their interpretations of various sources. History teaching needs to provide students with opportunities to critically and systematically *use primary source evidence* ('how to find, select, contextualize and interpret sources for a historical argument'). Students also need to get the chance to *take historical perspectives* ('with its different, social, cultural, and even emotional contexts that shaped people's lives and actions') (Seixas, 2006, 2008, 2012). The skills to handle these methodological procedures could be useful in interpreting other cultures on their own terms.

Sourcing and other historical methods might lead us to believe that we are in a safe and neutral place from where we can interpret the world. This, however, might be false. Western science and historiography have, in themselves, been complicit in creating colonial ideologies by categorizations such as civilized/uncivilized, developed/undeveloped and human/savage. Through ethnographic collections, museums have constructed knowledge about 'the others' in a supposedly neutral way (Bancel, 2013; González de Oleaga, 2012). Skills in interpreting and using primary sources will therefore have to include skills in deconstructing earlier interpretations and detecting remnants of colonial thought systems.

*2C. How can historical interpretations contribute to the ability to decentre the dominant culture?* The third intercultural dimension of the ability to interpret is about examining the dominant historical culture. This requires the basic understanding that no unprejudiced historical interpretations exist. In the heterogeneous historical culture that surrounds us, we can perceive a dominant canon. History education conveys what contemporary society regards as historically significant ('why we care, today, about certain events, trends and issues in history' Seixas, 2008). A past event finds its way into history education on the grounds that it says something about this past, but also because it does so about the present (Reisman & Wineburg, 2012). There is a mythical dimension in the meaning of Plymouth Rock in 1620 for American historical culture, in the meaning of 1789 for French culture, in the meaning of the free peasant in Sweden as well as the memory of the empire in Italy or Britain. Those stories are charged with presumed ideas and notions of the souls of a nation. While their explanatory functions today are reduced, they still survive as identity-building narratives. In this way, as sources of identification they are

still significant within the historical cultures of modern societies. History education could give students opportunities to interpret events, trends, and issues and analyse by which criteria they have been included in various historical cultures. The historical thinking tradition uses the concept of establishing historical significance for this process (Counsell, 2005; Seixas, 1997).

An additional challenge is to discover the mechanisms of power underlying the processes of ascribing significance. Science institutions, schools and museums have all evolved inside a world with a colonial outlook, a world that made Western culture the norm and placed it at the centre of the world (Mignolo, 2009). Consisting of cultural rules and conditions, a 'discursive order' determines whether or not certain events are worth including in a historical canon. By these mechanisms, some voices are amplified and others muted. To decentre our own historical culture involves being able to recognize those power relations and to relate the narratives to other possible narratives. Issues that could be raised to challenge students to question such narratives are: What narratives create feelings of belonging? What symbols and commemorations are important? What narratives legitimize dominance and resistance? Who are the senders of certain narratives and do we trust them?

*To use intercultural dimensions of history for the purpose of orientation*

Orientation is one of the overarching aims of history education. To orient is to use history to understand life, to build and reshape identities, and to influence our situations. In that respect, history is a competence to act as well as it is knowledge about the past (Rüsen, 1987, 2005). Without the purpose of providing practical orientation in everyday life, history in schools has no meaning. However, a scholarly debate about this aim is conspicuously absent, unlike the extensive educational discussions about content knowledge and interpretative skills (e.g. Counsell, 2000).

The concept of use-of-history enables us to discuss competing narratives in a multicultural society. Peter Seixas (2012) relates how educational ministries in Canada decided to incorporate an aboriginal perspective into the curricula. For history studies, this meant a welcome interest in the aboriginal colonial experience, but to Seixas a problem appeared concerning different epistemologies, for example, when textbooks presented aboriginal stories as historical myths or alternative ways of knowing. If the textbook way of knowing incorporates an allegory like 'Why the Salmon Came to Squamish Waters' as an explanation (of the origin of salmon), then, says Seixas, the field could as well be opened to rendering creationist or fundamentalist explanations the same status as natural science or history.

To us, however, this way of reasoning appears to be a dead end. A possible way out, instead of handling stories such as the aboriginal myth above as an alternative way of knowing, is to take a use-of-history

perspective. This directs attention to an understanding of how narratives, symbols and other historical references are used to satisfy different needs. Thus, the focus shifts from epistemological claims to acknowledging the myth's meaning-making capacity. Human actors use history in communication; orally, in writing or physically by raising monuments and performing ceremonies. Even remaining silent, avoiding sensitive history, is a form of use-of-history (Karlsson, 2004). Consequently, use-of-history is the performative side of historical culture, in order to describe, to build identities and to change.

The ability to orient relates to the intercultural dimensions in three cells: all cells consider how students understand the uses of history in life and society. The first cell (3A) emphasizes that historical narratives should include actual examples of how different social and cultural groups use and have used history. The second cell (3B) demonstrates how a use-of-history perspective is a valuable tool to understand different cultures. The third cell (3C), finally, discusses how students can utilize history in order to understand their own multicultural present, and, not least, be able to relate ethically to the present.

*3A. How can a use-of-history perspective contribute to knowledge about historical social and cultural processes?* The first dimension of the ability to orient is about engaging students in the study of how different cultures now and in the past have used history for different purposes. We argue that it is important, as well as productive, to have students not just learn history in the sense of learning about the past but to actually learn how history is used. One task for textbooks, or history teachers, is to present different examples of uses, both in the past and in contemporary society (Kitson, Husbands, & Steward, 2011; McAleavy, 1993). The idea is that when the students meet Sumerians, Mongols, Incas or Americans they also meet the self-images of those groups and the constructions of how they wanted to be remembered through their uses of monuments, symbols and tradition.

People use history to orient in time. One way to develop this ability is through the examples of others. Narratives about conquerors or victims, about victories, injustices or claims of reparations, are plentiful and frequently evoked by different groups. Such uses of history take various forms, from stories and myths to statues, memorial days and symbols. The purpose, then, is not to give historical explanations about what actually took place in the past. In these instances, people use history for guidance in the present and for the future in order to understand the events they were part of, to strengthen identification and to mobilize for change. A use-of-history perspective as an integrated component in history education could thus benefit the study of cultural and social processes.

*3B. How can a use-of-history perspective contribute to the ability to explain and relate to representations from different cultures?* The second dimension of the ability to orient moves from having students meet and see different

uses of history (3A) to engaging them in explaining and relating to these uses in analytical ways. This section discusses three separate ‘uses’ that could be examined in the history classroom, how history is used to describe the world, how it is used to build identities and how it is used to promote change. These uses are not to be seen as mutually exclusive; instead they are each other’s preconditions.

People need history to make their lives, and the societies they live in, comprehensible. Science is one kind of representation; myth is another. However, both claim to describe the world. To understand how people with different backgrounds and experiences use history in order to describe and understand the world, and how these representations generate different worldviews, is essential from an intercultural point of view. (The same descriptive narratives can then be used for purposes of identification and for purposes of change.)

People turn to history for purposes of identification and feelings of security. Much has been said about the relationship of history and identity. Nietzsche (2006) discusses how past events can be made into a heritage of worship, thereby creating emotional ties to places and collectives. Different groups use traditional narratives to create recognition or to strengthen a threatened identity (as for a diaspora group). Narrating these emotionally strong narratives demonstrate and build cohesion. At the same time, cultural encounters lead to changing identities.

People make use-of-history when they want to influence the surrounding society and change the world. History can be used for this purpose in many ways: as an argument for support of, or challenge to, the established order of life; as an expression of moral indignation, when people feel that crimes in the past have not been dealt with or when people feel that a valuable heritage is about to be destroyed. History can be used as symbolic examples when political leaders try to evoke nationalism before a conflict, when racist organizations try to exclude immigrants from the national community or when revolutionaries rally against the establishment.

Just as history didactics has developed concepts to analyse sources and historical explanations, we need tools to understand and discern aspects of how history is practically used. Such an understanding could possibly be an important component in intercultural learning, since the use-of-history is an essential dimension of any cultural practice.

*3C. How can a use-of-history perspective contribute to the ability to orient in life and the multicultural present?* The third dimension of the ability to orient is about students’ dispositions to relate, cognitively as well as ethically, to their own multicultural present. It concerns the ways we comprehend the past, define our understanding of the present and what actions we consider possible or not (Rüsen, 1996). History is not a map, nor is it a compass that leads our way, but a powerful foundation from where we discuss and judge present life and future possibilities. This orienting power ought to be fundamental to history education, and provide opportunities to practically use historical knowledge and interpretations to relate

to the present as well as reflect on the possibilities and limits of using history for the purpose of orientation (Nordgren, 2011). From an intercultural point of view, we raise three perspectives: first, adding a historical perspective in order to sort out contemporary issues in a deliberate and cognitive way may help us when we try to make considered assumptions about the future. Contemporary issues should be found at the heart of history studies, both for asking questions about the historical background and for students exploring their own present and considering possible actions (Barton & McCully, 2010). A second way of using history for the purpose of orientation is to explore the historical dimension of identifications. School history does not, and is not meant to, provide students with identities, but could contribute to an understanding of the processes of identifications (Barton, 2012). Relating the present to the past, thereby recognizing that all human beings have a history and are part of a historical culture would be a relevant starting point for students that are in the process of preparing to become participatory citizens in a multicultural society. Thirdly, history education has an ethical dimension. When we render meaning to the world around us, we assume ethical positions. The historical perspective teaches us to understand how different interpretations of the past reflect different moral stances and cautions us to judge past actors from our position in the present (Lee, 2005; Wineburg, 2001). Nevertheless, to make the past a meaningful history we need to let history studies affect our values; history is useless if it does not lead to moral orientation (Rüsen, 1996; Seixas, 2005). Undertaking and having the willingness to relativize one's own culture and to take the perspectives of other people is a fundamental element of intercultural historical learning. It is to ask about the consequences of actions in the past, allowing for differing worldviews and reflecting on the limits of cultural and moral relativism.

### *Shifting viewpoints*

History has not yet found its forms of adapting to the changes brought about by the multicultural society, neither at the policy level nor at the teaching level. The legitimacy of history as a subject in schools rests firmly on the conviction that it offers us important perspectives on contemporary life. Without this, history loses its relevance. This article explores the meaning and the components of intercultural historical learning. Initially, we raised two questions. Firstly, how history as a subject in school can contribute to intercultural competence, and secondly, what the consequences are for history education when it comes to subject matter and methods?

When answering the first question, we have examined what fundamental knowledge and discrete abilities that might capture both intercultural and historical aspects. We have outlined a conceptual framework by bringing together theories of narrative and intercultural competencies. Whereas narrative competence is rooted in history education and points

to specific historical learning, intercultural competence is of a more generic kind, with the purpose of promoting citizenship in a multicultural society.

The article demonstrates that the theories of narrative and intercultural competencies can be combined without compromising their core ideas. We have taken care to keep an open and dynamic line of reasoning, being careful not to produce exclusionary or definitive answers. The framework does not take into account specific conditions such as students' age, progression of learning or different national curricula. Rather, it should be understood as deductively generated and as a systematic way of identifying some critical aspects of intercultural historical learning. The next step, on the other hand, will have to be to test the framework empirically, considering the restrictions and possibilities of practical teaching and learning.

We conclude that history in schools can contribute to intercultural learning. It can do so by providing a relevant body of knowledge, skills of interpretation and preparedness for action. Nevertheless, having said this, we also want to stress that this will likely not happen by itself. On the contrary, there is a narrative structure that dominates history in large parts of the world and positions all societies in, more or less, the same trajectory from homogeneous agricultural settlements to modern nation-states. This can actually hamper and be an obstacle to the advancement of intercultural learning. Within this narrative, societal diversity can only be explained as a contemporary phenomenon with no connection to the past. It simplifies (and hides complexity), gives prominence to certain ideas (a natural path of development) and constructs an image of a homogeneity that was never the case. Thus, it does not help us when we want to explain and understand contemporary diversity and multiple identities. As an alternative (to linking agricultural societies to modern nation-states), we therefore suggest that history education might benefit from another focus, such as cultural encounters and migrations, and the fundamental and radical influences of such processes on the history of mankind, thereby providing an understanding of the societal diversity of today. We also suggest that history education, to be relevant to this diversity, will have to include the histories of everyday life and the histories that students bring into the classrooms.

The second question raised in the introduction considers the consequences of intercultural learning for subject matter and methods. It points to the need to reflect upon the epistemological grounds for history teaching and learning: What should it be about, *vis-à-vis* an intercultural goal? To answer this, we seek a viewpoint from where we can perceive history as a phenomenon that effects society and everyday life, a phenomenon that includes academic historical knowledge without being restricted to it. Of course, as a school subject, history is firmly rooted in the domain of academic history. In short, this has meant that the overall aim for schools has been to transfer a canon of historical knowledge, or, as an opposite position, to teach students to think like historians in encountering historical inquiries and primary sources. However, although relevant, both these positions give a restricted field of vision. More often than not history in schools omits the study of the historical culture of everyday life and



collective memory, a culture that ranges from statues and street names to myths and traditions as well as including fragmented ideas about the world. When students' everyday ideas about the past are actually included, they tend to be treated either as preconceptions that could be used to develop advanced historical thinking (Bain, 2005; Barton & Levstik, 2004), or as misconceptions that have to be overcome to give place to such thinking (Lee, 2005). Consequently, contemporary uses of history are not seen as topics of study in their own right. We believe it is time to shift viewpoints.

The multicultural challenge, the need to make history studies relevant to contemporary society, has highlighted, but not caused, the built-in tension between political purposes and current disciplinary practices. History as a school subject has been given its form through two opposed ideas: on the one hand as a political project to create cohesion by providing society with a narrative (whether clearly stated or just implicitly understood), on the other hand as an epistemological project of interpreting history. To put it bluntly, school history is somewhat of an unrecognized partnership between a nietzschean use-of-history and a 'Leopold von Ranke tradition', that is, between a political 'history for life', where the past is above all a tool for contemporary usages—and a source-based history with a focus on (inter)national affairs. For history studies to be relevant, we have to recognize that such a tension exists, and construe the purpose of history in school from there. We need to find a viewpoint, with a broader field of vision, expanding the historian's outlook on the past by adding to it an anthropologist's understanding of the meanings of historical cultures and a historical sociologist's appreciations of how people use history with an impact on both life and society.

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### **Notes**

1. *Historical consciousness*, in this meaning, gives an open reference to how human beings make sense of their experiences of the past, and is not confined to Western modernity (cf. Gadamer & Fantel, 1975; Koselleck, 2004). The educational goal to advance

historical consciousness (into a modern historical understanding) has been referred to as a *genetic* historical consciousness (cf. Rösen, 1987).

2. Rösen gives examples of procedures of historical learning, sometimes five (1996), sometimes three (2005) or four (2007). We perceive the three procedures: ‘experience’, ‘interpretation’ and ‘orientation’ as the key categories (2005); the others are not as independent and not as frequent in Rösen’s texts. The procedures to ‘ask’ and ‘produce’ are related to a discussion on narrative theory (1996) and ‘motivate’ (2007) is a dependent aspect of orientation.

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