Thinking and caring about indigenous peoples’ human rights: Swedish students writing history beyond scholarly debate

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Thinking and caring about indigenous peoples’ human rights: Swedish students writing history beyond scholarly debate

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ABSTRACT
According to national and international guidelines, schools should promote historical thinking and foster moral values. Scholars have debated, but not analysed in depth in practice, whether history education can and should hold a normative dimension. This study analyses current human rights education in two Swedish senior high school groups, in classes meant to promote what has been described as conflicting ideals of historical thinking and empathy as caring. Content analysis of students’ exam essays shows intertwined relationships between critical thinking and judgements. The results also highlight how students care that people are treated unjustly; can identify different perspectives; link the past to the present and the future; and use corroboration of information to get the best grade. This analysis shows that the students focus on historical empathy as caring rather than sourcing and corroboration. However, all students combine normative judgements with the complicated act of more neutral perspective recognition in their papers. Evidently, students may combine historical thinking and empathy as caring in line with recommendations of international understanding when they write history about indigenous peoples’ human rights. These findings are significant to all researchers, teachers and decision-makers interested in furthering analytical skills or moral values in education.

Introduction
The brutal effects of nationalism and militarism in the Second World War put the teaching of history at the centre of peace education. According to UNESCO (1949), history teaching should no longer be allowed to foster Fascism, Nazism and Ultra-Nationalism. Education in Italy, Germany, Japan and worldwide should instead promote peace, international understanding and make students immune to propaganda. A more multicultural history teaching should, according to UNESCO and the Council of Europe, include critical perspectives and the history of previously marginalized groups, like indigenous peoples, and thereby support unity in diversity (Nygren 2011a, 2011b). Today, the UN, UNESCO and the Council of Europe emphasize that peace and human rights should be safeguarded by students’ critical thinking and universal values (Council of Europe 2001; UN 2011; UNESCO 1995), for instance, in how
education should promote ‘a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the moulding of attitudes’ (UNESCO 1995, 3).

In line with this, curricula worldwide state that schools and history education should foster both skills and moral attitudes. However, promoting critical thinking and universal values entails conflicting ideals. It has previously been noted, but not studied in practice, how some ideals of historical thinking are in opposition to the use of parallels and learning from the past to spread universal values (Avram 2010; Lee 1992; Lee and Ashby 2001; Lipstadt 1995).

Historians and researchers in history education debate whether history can or should be used to promote democratic values and universal moral attitudes (Barton and Levstik 2004; Lee 1992; Lee and Ashby 2001; White 1992). Some scholars claim that a focus on promoting ‘good’ values may be an obstacle to learning the disciplinary thinking of history – namely, to critically scrutinize information from and about the past. They emphasize how a moral starting point is not a neutral, scientific one necessary to promote critical thinking. Rather, they argue the opposite (Lee 1992; Lee and Ashby 2001): how, in some instances, the use of history in moral teaching ‘distorts true historical fact instead of making it relevant’ (Lipstadt 1995).

Other scholars claim that history and history teaching always hold a normative dimension. They claim that personal interest, emotional motives and democratic values make history interesting and relevant, today and tomorrow (Barton and Levstik 2004; Jensen 1997; Seixas 2004; White 1992). They emphasize how history education should promote both critical thinking and foster values, in line with international recommendations regarding human rights education (HRE) (UN 2011).

The conflicting perspectives concern especially how historical thinking and empathy should function in schools: that is, whether history education should exclusively promote a ‘neutral’ cognitive act of historical thinking (Lee and Ashby 2001) or include a normative dimension of historical empathy (Barton and Levstik 2004). But how students write history when they are supposed to use historical thinking and empathy has not yet been studied in any depth in history and social studies education.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the debated relationship between historical thinking and empathy in ongoing HRE dealing with ethically charged and pedagogically challenging historical topics. Considering the fact that HRE should promote both critical thinking and moral values makes this a relevant case for analysing the theoretical conflict in practice. This study is limited to two groups of Swedish students studying the history and the human rights of indigenous peoples in Sweden and in English-speaking countries. The central focus of the study is the students’ writing of history in their final essays that are supposed to describe, discuss and analyse the human rights of indigenous peoples from a historical, traditional and cultural point of view.

**Theoretical considerations**

Historical thinking is highlighted today as an important part of education worldwide. Wineburg (1991, 2001) has foregrounded the ability to critically scrutinize historical information, in a way similar to that of professional historians. Thinking like a historian, in terms of sourcing, corroboration and contextualization, is underscored as vital when collecting and processing information and learning about the past. In this perspective, teaching should promote non-normative thinking, not moulding of attitudes. Historians and history education should, according to this view, pay attention to the unique context in the past
and understand people in the past from their own spatial and temporal circumstances. Presentism, in which modern perspectives judge sources, events and people in the past, should be avoided (Wineburg 1998, 2001). Especially, Lee and Ashby (2001) have emphasized how historical empathy is, and should be, a cognitive act of perspective taking. Lee (1992, 30) argued for this ‘non-normative’ position when stating that:

If history is taught so that priority is given to shedding light on the present, to pointing up origins, to offering lessons, or encouraging—let alone inculcating—political or moral attitudes, it ceases to be adequate history, and fails to deliver even what it legitimately offers.

Thus, according to Lee, history should be a value-free science promoting critical thinking, much in line with a perspective describing the ‘objective historian’s role’ as a ‘neutral, or disinterested judge’ (Novick 1988, 2). History teaching should be about the past, and not deal with the present or the future.

Barton and Levstik (2004) have also emphasized the importance of critical skills in history teaching and acknowledge the value of perspective taking, which they call perspective recognition. However, in contrast to the ‘non-normative’ perspective, they argue that historical empathy can and should also be considered a matter of emotions, civil and social justice, which they label historical empathy as caring (Barton and Levstik 2004). They rhetorically ask, ‘[w]hy would anyone expend energy trying to understand historical perspectives if they had no care or concern for the lives and experiences of people in the past?’ (Barton and Levstik 2004, 228). From this theoretical perspective, studies of the past hold important caring aspects, including (1) moral reactions to events in the past, (2) wishes to aid people in the past and (3) willingness to learn from the past. In addition, scholars like Jensen (1997), Rüsen (2004) and Seixas (2004) state that we all have a historical consciousness in which our interpretations of the past influence our conceptions of the present and the future. Thus, students’ conceptions of the past may influence their perspectives on the present and their expectations for the future. History teaching in a democracy can gain a lot from the fact that people care about the past, present and the future, intellectually and subjectively, according to Barton and Levstik (2004), and guidelines issued by UNESCO (1995) and the Council of Europe (2001).

How, in practice, students use historical thinking and empathy when writing history is central to analyse to better understand if the theoretical conflict is also evident in the complexity of ongoing history education. Analysing the relationship between historical thinking and empathy as caring in this practice is necessary to clarify possibilities and problems when implementing, what might be, competing ideals.

**Previous research**

Previous research has highlighted how students’ historical understandings are affected by school, society and personal experiences in complex interactions (Barton 2008). In Sweden, it has been noted in large quantitative studies how history teaching may hold moral values as well as critical thinking (Angvik and Borries 1997; Hansson 2010; Långström 2001). Students writing about history have been found to not critically review information the way historians do, in terms of sourcing, corroboration and contextualization (Greene 1994; Wineburg 2001). But students can learn the skills of using historical thinking when writing about historical events (De La Paz et al. 2014; Monte-Sano 2008, 2010; Monte-Sano and De La Paz 2012). Secondary students may use judgments and different subjective styles of writing in history
(Coffin 2006; Nygren 2011b, 2014) and studies of adolescents’ historical writing highlight how students’ texts can hold different argumentative strategies (De La Paz et al. 2012; Greene 1994). Some students write about history in descriptive ways, whereas other students critically review and problematize sources and historical narratives more (De La Paz et al. 2012).

It has been observed, but not analysed in depth in students’ writing, how it might be possible for students to be both critical and caring in their historical thinking (Brooks 2011; Endacott 2010; Kohlmeier 2006). Sarah Brooks found in observations and interviews how one teacher and her students talked about the past in cognitive and emotional ways, indicating historical empathy as perspective recognition and caring (Brooks 2011). Also, Kohlmeier (2006) and Endacott (2010) found in their own teaching how students’ narratives indicate a possibility in practice for students to use historical empathy. Brooks (2011, 193) notes how ‘the interplay of care and perspective recognition is perhaps more complex than previous related scholarship has indicated’. I investigate this complexity by analysing in depth students’ historical writing about topics challenging students’ historical thinking and empathy in ongoing practices, without influence of researchers. Paying attention to students’ writing of history gives me a chance to go beyond previous research and investigate how students may actually construe history when dealing with critical review of sources and morally charged events in the past.

Swedish students have been found to write history using historical thinking and historical empathy in different ways (Nygren 2014; Nygren, Sandberg, and Vikström 2014; Nygren and Vikström 2013), and also make moral judgements when writing history about value-laden topics (Nygren 2011b). It has also been noted how Swedish students may use the past to discuss present and future developments (Nygren 2011b). Students’ writings disclose a richness of perspectives of the past. What and how they write history is not necessarily what is stated in guidelines (Nygren 2012). The guidelines do not trickle down into the minds of the students, and studies of the fostering of democratic values in Swedish schools suggest that political and pedagogic guidelines can have unanticipated and even opposite effects in students’ education (Almgren 2006; Broman 2009). However, students’ texts can give insights into the reality of history teaching. Subjective perspectives and judgements in students’ texts may reflect preconceptions and social identities of value to clarify to improve history teaching (Goldberg, Schwarz, and Porat 2011). Monte-Sano (2010) finds that ‘[h]istorical writing reflects what it means to learn in history, what counts as knowledge, and how knowledge is constructed in history’. Analysing students’ texts created in a naturalistic learning environment gives me the opportunity to link theories and scholarly debate to students’ knowledge construction, a chance to investigate how, and if, theories of practice actually relate to practice.

History education designed to promote skills and attitudes has a wide range of practices, often labelled HRE (Flowers 2004; OSCE 2009). Suarez and Ramirez (2007) describe HRE as ‘a major theme in educational systems around the world’. Previous studies have especially focused on the need for and practice of a history teaching encouraging the cause of human rights, peace and understanding in developing countries and young democracies (Ahonen 2012; OSCE 2009). Bajaj (2004, 33) underlined how HRE is important for both underprivileged and privileged students, and how students’ perspectives should be central in HRE research. Studies of democratic Western societies have pointed out that HRE can vary between and within countries (Friezsche 2008; Müller 2009; Tomaševski 2001). Previous studies have indicated, but not studied thoroughly, how students’ knowledge and critical thinking may not
go hand in hand with their engagements in human rights (Amadeo et al. 2002; Müller 2009; Skolverket 2003; Torney-Purta et al. 2001). A normative approach focusing on the good practice of HRE has been central in previous studies of history teaching of human rights (OSCE 2009), but some studies have also stressed the need for critical analyses of this practice (Ulrich and Wenzel 2004). This article is offered as a contribution to that goal.

**Setting and participants**

In Sweden, national curricula have a long tradition of following the guidelines of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, emphasizing the importance of international understanding and the promotion of skills and attitudes (Nygren 2011a, 2011b, 2012). The current Swedish syllabus of history emphasizes the importance of historical thinking by stating that history teaching should promote students’ ‘ability to search for, examine, interpret and assess sources using source-critical methods, and to present the results using various forms of expression’ . The national syllabus also underscores the importance of historical empathy, how students should ‘be given the opportunity to develop an understanding of living conditions of different ages’ and ‘investigate, explain and draw conclusions about historical issues from different perspectives; for instance, different perspectives based on social background, ethnicity, generation, gender and sexuality (Skolverket 2011). The syllabus also highlights the importance of historical consciousness and students ‘ability to use a historical frame of reference to understand the present and to provide perspective on the future’.

In this study, I analyse the outcomes from a lesson unit on Human rights and Indigenous Peoples. Two bilingual senior high school groups of students, ages 17 and 18, participated in the teaching, with 22 and 17 participants, respectively. The lesson unit was conducted as an interdisciplinary collaboration, combining the subjects of history, civics and English. The teachers designed the lessons in line with the national curriculum without any direct involvement from researchers or external organizations (see Figure 1).

The lesson unit included 35 h of lectures and student activities, and a final written exam of 2 h and 40 min (see Figure 1). Goals, aims and content of the lesson unit, presented in Figure 1, were in line with the international guidelines emphasizing how ‘education for peace, human rights and democracy must: promote respect for cultural diversity and heritage’ (UNESCO 1995, §BII). Teaching in group A was led by two very experienced teachers, a female social studies teacher with a master’s degree in social science and a female English teacher with a master’s in English. Both had over 20 years of experience from teaching and had been teaching about indigenous peoples and human rights the last four years. In group B, younger teachers with less than five years of teaching experience taught in parallel, a male social studies teacher and a female English teacher; for them, it was the first time teaching this lesson unit, but they were involved in redesigning it before the teaching started. Both English teachers were interested in social studies, the younger studied geography in university and the older described herself as a ‘social studies wannabe’. All teachers have over four years of university studies, which is mandatory in Swedish teacher education, and this includes at least three semesters of full-time studies in each subject they teach and also two to three semesters at the school of education.
Data and methodology

In this study, I analyse the written outcomes from this five-week-long unit about the history of indigenous peoples and human rights. Inspired by perspectives emphasizing the value of practice-based research in education (Carlgren 1999; Shulman 1986), I find it important to learn more about knowledge construction in naturalistic environments in the light of current research and theories (Charmaz 2006; Merriam 2009; Sebba 2004). In line with advocates of practice-based research, I find it central to base conclusions about teaching upon analysis of what is possible and problematic in the complicated reality of education. Investigating

**Indigenous Peoples**

The term *indigenous peoples* refers to those who have inhabited and made their living directly off the same land for hundreds or thousands of years.

There are many different groups of indigenous peoples in the world. In this project we will focus on the native peoples of the English speaking world and compare them with the Sami in the Nordic countries.

We will study them from historical perspective as well as their situation today. Their societies interact and meet constantly with their national communities which create a complex situation.

You will analyze the situation of these indigenous peoples from a theoretical model as well as according to Human Rights criteria which will be explained to you during class.

You will all study the Sami of the North. In addition you will choose one of the following groups: the Native Americans of North America, the Maoris of New Zealand, or the Aborigines of Australia.

Some of the basic material will be provided for you by us, but part of the assignment will also be to find relevant information by yourself from different sources.

The project will be evaluated with a written exam. Good Luck!

**Timetable:**

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<th>Monday</th>
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<td>History</td>
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<td>Civics</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Culture and identity, theory</td>
<td>Culture and identity, theory Group discussion</td>
<td>Texts/voc</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sami people</td>
<td>Sami people</td>
<td>Texts/voc</td>
<td>Kautokeino (movie) + discussion</td>
<td>Sami people (articles + questions)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Texts/voc</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Follow up (texts)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Watching movies</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Cross-sectional group discussion</td>
<td>Preparations for exam/Case studies</td>
<td>Written exam 13.00-15.40</td>
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*Figure 1. Aims and content of the unit.*
ongoing practices in the light of theories can clarify processes, potentials and pitfalls of value to better understand and improve education. Closeness to practice helps prevent oversimplification of theory, making results more relevant for education.

As a final test on the lesson unit, all students wrote an essay on the issue of human rights and indigenous peoples. The students wrote their essays individually in a computer-equipped classroom without any aid. All students had three hours to discuss ‘the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples and analyse the situation from a historical, traditional and cultural point of view’. As preparation for the test, they had five weeks of teaching including two weeks of an individual case study of the Sami and an indigenous group in an English-speaking community (see Figure 1). The teachers graded printed copies of the essays. The grading criteria emphasized the value of students’ abilities to ‘discuss and explain historical events and processes from different perspectives and aspects,’ ‘search with critical awareness relevant information’ and ‘critically use the Human Rights of the Indigenous Peoples in the analysis’. Grades were given in a system divided into five grades, quite in line with the current national grade system, from E (pass) to A (excellent). The copies of the essays with teacher comments were collected and scanned for analysis. Close and distant readings of the essays were made in the light of theories of historical thinking and historical empathy, after OCR-reading and manual text cleaning. The process of coding and analysing the data was conducted in a primarily problem- and theory-driven approach (Krippendorff 2013; Namey et al. 2008). In a reading process that oscillated between close reading and aggregated data, categories were constructed and developed (Miles and Huberman 1994). The process was supported by qualitative and quantitative data analysis software, both in the categorization and analysis. In the process, special attention was taken to stay focused on the bigger picture of research aims and theoretical considerations to avoid the ‘coding trap’ (Gilbert 2002; Johnston 2006).

In an abductively oriented process, categories were identified in the students’ texts (see Figure 2). Categories were construed by the individual researcher in dialogue with scholars of history education to make the coding valid outside the researcher’s subjective understanding (Weber 1990). In addition, after a final coding scheme was set up (see Figure 2), inter-reliability was tested by having an outside reader with knowledge of theories of historical thinking code a random selection of the text material containing all indicators of all categories (Krippendorff 2013; Weber 1990). Agreement in coding of sentences was 83%. Uncertainties regarding coding of present–past and future–past and how to code corroboration were noted and handled in the process to guarantee reliability.

In line with theories of neutral and critical historical thinking (Lee and Ashby 2001; Wineburg 2001), sourcing, corroboration and perspective recognition were defined as categories. As the coding scheme in Figure 2 displays, sourcing deals with questions regarding who, when, where and for what purpose was this written? Corroboration is a cognitive act of comparing different documents as evidence and perspective recognition an ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective. Since students use different types of information (both primary and especially secondary sources), sourcing and corroboration include students’ critical review of all information they refer to (see Figure 2). Perspective recognition was defined as part of historical thinking, thus emphasizing this as a cognitive habit of mind, including the skill of contextualization as defined by Wineburg (1991, 1998). The more value-based perspectives stemming from theories of historical empathy as caring (Barton and Levstik 2004) were included in categories labelled judging and compassion.
Judging, caring that people were treated unjust, and compassion, caring about peoples suffering, were used to highlight normative and emotional dimensions (see Figure 2). Two themes, present–past and future–past, were developed in line with theories of historical empathy as caring and historical consciousness (Jensen 1997; Rüsen 2004; Seixas 2004). These categories follow along the lines criticized for being unhistorical, but an emphasized part in a view of underscoring the importance of learning from the past to create a better future (Avram 2010; Barton and Levstik 2004).

Attention to the research question, theories and empirical data as well as internal and external scrutinizing of categories and coding were used to make the analysis valid and reliable. Students’ texts were treated as results of the complex processes of historical thinking and empathy, acknowledging how students hold preconceptions of history and how they may be influenced by historical narratives within and outside of schools (Wertsch 2000; Wineburg et al. 2007). Thus, their freedom to gather information from different sources of information, such as readings, lectures, the Internet and movies, makes it possible to analyse how students in a complex authentic setting may write about ethically challenging events in the past, but not link differences in their knowledge production to single influencing factors in teaching.

In order to understand the context of teaching and frame the analysis of the students’ writing, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and students (Kvale 1997; Merriam 2009). I interviewed the four teachers to find out the means and goals of their teaching practices. The interviews were conducted in the school where the teachers work. Prior to the interviews, they were given the opportunity to think through their participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCEING, considering the information’s source, date, author, and authenticity; for instance, students referring to sources by quotes and/or noting how history can be based upon assumptions and myths.</th>
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<tr>
<td>CORROBORATION, scrutinizing statements and comparing the accounts of multiple information sources against each other, and/or more general knowledge; for instance students noting conflicting interpretations and/or weak contradictory claims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERSPECTIVE RECOGNITION, interpreting the information in a temporal and spatial context, a cognitive act of perspective taking; for instance students highlighting a contemporary indigenous perspective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>JUDGING, caring that people were/are treated unjust; for instance students making judgments about events in the past and present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMPASSION, caring for people in the past (and present); for instance students highlighting suffering and/or articulating a desire to help people in the past and present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRESENT-PAST connecting historical development to present society and phenomena and/or caring to learn from the past and apply to the present; for instance students linking present problems, or welfare, to past events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FUTURE-PAST caring to predict and discuss future developments in the light of the past; for instance students predicting future problems, or continued progress, in the light of the past.</td>
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Figure 2. Coding scheme.
in the study and the questions for the interview. The taped interviews lasted between 50 and 85 min and the teachers presented their ideas and material. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with five students in each group about their perceptions of the lesson unit. Also students were informed in advance about the purpose of the interview, questions and ethical considerations. The selection of students was based upon differences in sex, ethnicity and grades. Student interviews were conducted in school in close connection to their teaching in history. The interviews ranged from 18 to 30 min and the students presented their personal perspectives on teaching when asked to describe and problematize their experiences from the lesson unit. All interviews were transcribed for analysis by close and distant reading. In line with ethical recommendations, all participation was on a voluntary basis, with the option to withdraw from the case study at a later stage (Vetenskapsrådet 2011). In this essay, the participants are made anonymous by using pseudonyms.

Data analysis

In the essays, all students make comparisons between the histories of indigenous peoples, following the directives of the test. As described in Table 1, students give more room for judging than any other category. All students write about perceived injustices and about history coded as present–past and perspective recognition. The quantity of text devoted to these categories is extensive in comparison to the categories of sourcing and corroboration (see Table 1).

Elements of historical empathy as caring are described to a greater extent than categories connected to historical thinking. Sourcing and corroboration are a very small part of the total quantity. However, as mentioned above, perspective recognition also is a part of historical thinking without explicit normative statements. The category of perspective recognition is a large category – only one category has more references and only three have more words. The complex relationship between historical empathy and thinking can be understood and visualized as a network. The network illustrated in Figure 3 shows how similarity in coding links the largest categories with strong links into a cluster including two categories of historical empathy as caring (judging and present–past) and one category of historical thinking (perspective recognition). Edges linking categories of historical empathy to sourcing and corroboration are evident but not very strong (see Figure 3).

A statistical analysis of the categories using Pearson’s correlation coefficient shows a moderate correlation between corroboration and sourcing, $r = +.44$, and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) calculation gives a significance of $p < .059$. Other correlations are weaker.

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<th>Table 1. Summary of coded categories in student essays.</th>
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but the cluster analysis using Jaccard’s coefficient indicates other relationships worth considering (see Figure 3 and discussion below). Clearly, categories of historical thinking and empathy as caring are connected when students write history.

When closely reading students’ texts, it is evident how it is possible for students to be both critically neutral and make normative statements in the same essay. In some cases, a single phrase may hold qualities of both historical thinking and normative historical empathy as caring, as in this case, when a student discusses the history of the aborigines in Australia:

Aboriginal people call themselves ‘Invisible Australians’, because during the British colonization in 17th century, when Captain James explored Australia he called the island ‘terra nullius’ – land belonging to no one, even though Aboriginal people had lived in Australia for 40 000 years as hunters and gatherers before the British exploration of Australia. The Aborigines are victims of the European ideas during the Enlightenment period. As Jean Jacques Rousseau said ‘wilds are just like children, they need to be cared for.’ During the British colonization the Aborigines experienced a very dark period of their history, in contrast to the peaceful way of life they lived before. (Keyla)

In this short text, the student corroborates different perspectives and draws tentative conclusions about the past and present. This mix of corroboration, perspective recognition and judging is a mix of critical accounts and value statements which illustrates the complexity of practice and the multifaceted image of the past a student may hold.

**Historical thinking**

**Sourcing and corroboration**

Close reading of essays and analysing the categories on more aggregated levels show more links between and within the elements of historical thinking and empathy as caring. Critical treatment of sources and information can be found in a small majority of the papers. Sourcing is evident in 19 of the essays and corroboration is notable in 19 essays, but not all the same essays. Twenty-five students use sourcing or corroborate the information in their writing, 13 students do both and 12 either/or.

Especially when describing prehistoric events, students discuss problems of sources missing and being biased. Students describe how the early history of indigenous peoples may be based upon fragments pieced together by archaeologists. The lack of sources to the past of aboriginal people in Australia is explained by Sara as a result of their oral traditions and the British lack of interest: “Since the British did not have an interest in the Aboriginal lifestyle and
wanted to westernize the land, there are no written sources which can describe the culture and its unique customs. It has all vanished. Students may also notice how history can hold myths of creation. When corroborating different histories, Eva noted that aboriginals may state that they have always lived in what today is known as Australia, ever since the dream-time, but 'although the Aboriginals say this, those who have been studying the Aboriginals will say that they came from Asia.' Critically scrutinizing and corroborating different sources also include direct references to contemporary sources.

As previously mentioned, in students’ texts, sourcing is often closely linked to corroboration. Students may compare different accounts to decide what history is the most trustworthy. They can also find misunderstandings and contradictions in the sources. For instance, by corroborating legislation and other accounts from the present society, they may find the world to be more complex than what the human rights display:

> even though they are now recognized as the indigenous people they are and have been given the same rights as other people in the countries they live in, it is still possible to question if they are still being discriminated and affected by the bigger society to change their culture. (Sofia)

By corroborating different information, students find indications of discrimination such as how indigenous peoples today with ‘equal rights’ still find themselves being disadvantaged in terms of economic, social and health status.

Evidently, students may be aware of biases including their own, as well as those in historical writing and contemporary media. For instance, Sean links the problem of bias to the present and claims that ‘our perception of indigenous groups is usually incorrect. Most of us get our information and prejudices from media which often choose to portray the more extreme and stereotypical parts of a culture.’ Still, sourcing and corroboration are only a small part of their essays. Not all students critically review their sources of information and only a limited amount of word is devoted to this in comparison to other categories (see Table 1). However, in all essays, students address how people hold different perspectives due to spatial and temporal circumstances, which is called perspective recognition.

**Perspective recognition**

Perspective recognition is linked to sourcing in nine essays and different worldviews are linked to corroboration in seven essays, in which students discuss different public perceptions of indigenous peoples and their own self-perception. Examples of this include how the British in Australia had a ‘half-caste’ policy stating ‘Don’t kill the man, kill the Indian in the man’ and how, at the time, they thought it was humane to force the so called ‘half-breed’ into boarding schools (Berfin; Kayla). How the Swedish and British had a limited and condescending understanding of the cultures they met and ruled is explained from their historical contexts. Students also cite different sources to emphasize perspectives of indigenous people, such as how perceptions of time and individuality may differ between cultures and how indigenous individuals experience their different social contexts.

Perspective recognition in the students’ texts is primarily linked to the category labelled judging. Students care that people were treated unjustly and they make subjective judgements of events in past and present. Value statements are linked to perspective recognition in 30 of 39 essays. Acknowledging the perspective of indigenous peoples’ history is often followed by taking a stand against discrimination and oppression. Filled by intellectual and emotional empathy, Sofia draws the conclusion that ‘even though the US had founded their democratic nation on the idea that everyone should have rights such as freedom of speech
and freedom of religion they did not care one bit to hear what the Native Americans had to say. Apparently, empathizing intellectually may be accompanied by value-based conclusions; however, the statements that fit both categories, perspective recognition and judging, still hold a more neutral tone than other statements that fall solely into the judging category.

**Historical empathy as caring**

**Judging**

Caring that people were treated unjustly, judging, is evident in all essays. Twelve essays hold more than 50% coverage coded as judgement. The large coverage can at least partly be explained by the fact that students often describe actions and events they find morally unjust quite extensively, often building a case from historical facts to draw moral conclusions. Students may label historical treatments of indigenous peoples as oppression, discrimination, massacres and genocide. As mentioned above, judging is often linked to perspective recognition, in which students acknowledge the perspective of the ‘weaker’ party. Karin tries, for instance, to make the reader reflect upon historical injustices by asking the reader to visualize the perspective of the Sami:

> So, imagine how someone tries to make you behave in a way you feel uncomfortable about, how someone is treating you without any respect at all and how someone looks on your way of living as unnecessary and pointless. Would this make you feel good? Would it make you feel good to have to change your whole way of being because someone, called the state, says so?

This quote above is a value statement; nonetheless, it also holds certain qualities of perspective recognition by trying to imagine the worldview from a different spatial and temporal perspective. This combination of a moral position and an attempt to see the world with their eyes complicates the dichotomy between historical thinking and empathy as caring. But sourcing and corroboration rarely overlap students judging. In some cases, sourcing and corroboration can be part of a longer paragraph, ending up in a judgement over what happened.

What is evident in the students’ texts is also how they often link human rights to judgements. Human rights references and judging overlap in 22 of 39 essays. Treatments of indigenous peoples are deemed violations of the human rights. Judgements are also closely connected to compassion, a will to help people in the past. Here, students express empathy with people in the past and criticize actions in the past. A combination of sympathy and verdicts can be found in students’ descriptions of the treatment of Native Americans in North America, stating, for instance, how ‘white soldiers […] were merciless and slaughtered everyone, even helpless children’ (Fred). Empathy for indigenous peoples is expressed in various ways and past injustices should, according to some students, be compensated. What happened in the past can become quite personal. Six students write in a first-person plural tense, as if they are partly responsible for past actions committed by the majority culture. Hilda states this clearly when expressing ‘I think it was a big mistake what we did, trying to force people to become something they weren’t’. Hilda is one of the three students that very explicitly declare that we, the oppressors, committed injustices against the indigenous people and stole their identities.
Compassion
Compassion for people in the past and present is expressed by students in 19 of 39 essays. Unfair treatment of people who suffer and die is depicted in various empathetic ways. The Swedish and British are portrayed as perpetrators causing suffering by planned actions and unintentionally bringing diseases from which 'lots of people died in misery' (Sam). Five students expressing compassion link past suffering to the present, one of whom finds that 'As with many defeated, they have suffered tremendously from alcoholism and suicide. They have been robbed, humiliated, and removed from all they know' (Kenan). Students may set forth how suffering and marginalization have not ended for many indigenous peoples and how today alcoholism, unemployment, lack of identity and suicide among indigenous peoples may be consequences of the past. Unjust treatments of people in the past make many students write history in a way that indicates sympathy and willingness to aid, but compassion for people suffering in the past and present can also be expressed without passing judgements.

Judging and present–past
An analysis of text coverage devoted to each category shows a significant relationship between judging and present–past in the essays. In general, students who focus on problematizing the present do not focus as much on judging, and vice versa (see Figure 4).

Sixteen students who focus a lot on discussing the present in the light of the past do this in combination with a relatively limited focus on judging, whereas 13 students who focus a lot on judging pay relatively little attention to the present situation of the indigenous peoples. Thus, there is a significant negative relationship between two of the largest categories. This relationship may be explained by historical developments, distances and narratives further discussed below.

Figure 4. Trends in essays in the relationship between judging and present-past.
Note: Percentage of words in each essay devoted to category. Number of essays: 39.
Past, present and future

All students link the history of indigenous peoples to the present. A common theme in the essays when linking the past to the present is that the indigenous peoples had a history in three parts: a good life before colonization, followed by an era of oppression (during and after colonization) and finally better conditions from the latter part of the twentieth century. However, the present situation is still often problematized. Students writing in this theme also describe discrimination, social stress, health issues and lack of implementation of human rights as contemporary problems.

Finding conflicting interpretations and narratives is a part of five students’ essays that consider the past and present in a corroborating way. But students do not discuss the present situation in relation to historical sources in their essays. More commonly, students draw lessons from the past and present to make judgements; in 30 essays, the coding of present–past overlaps with the coding of judging. In line with the narrative of colonial oppression, students track the origins of contemporary problems to historic injustices, for instance, Heidi states that ‘Problems that Indigenous groups of people have today can easily be traced back to discriminations and intolerance from the bigger society.’ But, as mentioned above, students writing a lot about the present–past give little room for judging.

Learning from the past to improve the present and shape a better future is another common narrative among students. The link between past, present and future is evident in 21 essays. In 15 essays, the categories of present–past and future–past overlap. Students highlight how the future holds challenges, not least when healing ‘wounds’ from the past. Tensions and problems from the past remain. Reflecting upon the past, present and future of indigenous peoples makes a few students really worry about future cultural diversity: ‘I can’t help but feel frustrated: Why did we have to wait until there were almost no Indigenous Peoples left in the world?’ (Belinda). To build a better future, students emphasize the value of understanding across cultural borders, like Paula stating that:

A different culture does not have to be anything strange or something that needs to be changed. If everyone could just accept the differences in other cultures and maybe even try to live side by side with them, people would realize that there are also many similarities between the cultures. That should be something all human kinds should strive for.

Safeguarding cultural diversity and creating a more inclusive future is a common theme. The historical, present and future situations of indigenous peoples are in general a mix of expressions of historical thinking and empathy as caring in the students’ texts, but when writing about the present and future, they clearly tend to make subjective judgements and speculations.

Historical thinking and empathy in different groups

Dividing students’ essays into groups based upon their grades, sex, indigenous group of study and course group shows some interesting relations in the use of words. In general, using more words correlates with higher grades. Table 2 shows how the amount of words in each group matches the grade given. However, more the number of words used may explain grades given. Three essays containing less than 1500 were given the highest grade (A) and three papers using more than 1900 words were given the lowest grades (E–D).

Acknowledging that the amounts of words may have an impact on the grading, it is still relevant to analyse the average distribution of words in different categories (see Table 3).
Clearly, students in general pay more attention to perspective recognition and historical empathy as caring than to sourcing and corroboration. All categories of historical thinking and empathy can be found in essays given all grades from E (pass) to A (excellent).

However, students given the highest grade (A) tend to write more about how they critically review their information. Table 3 shows how students with high grades focus, as a group, more on corroboration than students with lower grades, whereas students given the lowest grade (E) focus much less on corroboration and sourcing \((t(2) = 1.63, p < .113)\). Another difference can be found in the focus on caring for people in the past. Considerations coded as compassion are more common in essays given a low grade than in texts given a higher grade. Differences in the distribution of words also underscore how discussing possible future scenarios is more common in essays awarded higher grades than in essays given the lowest grade (see Table 3).

Female students, in general, got better grades than male students. Sourcing and corroboration, which are closely linked to higher grades, are more evident in female students’ essays (see Table 3). Female students also link the past to the future to a greater extent than male students. The category compassion, which is correlated with lower grades, is as common in essays written by male as well as female students. In general, male students tend to make more judgements and get lower grades.

Most students who chose to study the situation of Native Americans clearly care that they were treated unjustly (see Table 3). This group of students writes history emphasizing primarily historical empathy. Sourcing and corroboration are more common in essays on aboriginal Australian and Maori. When writing the history of the Maori culture, students corroborate information more and they articulate less of a desire to help people in the past, in comparison to students’ texts on Native Americans and aboriginal Australians. The present situation of the

### Table 2. Grades and use of words in students’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Words/X</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1625</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1531</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1449</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1222</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Average of coverage in per cent of words in groups of essays in relation to categories of historical thinking and empathy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of essays</th>
<th>Sourcing (%)</th>
<th>Corroboration (%)</th>
<th>Perspective recognition (%)</th>
<th>Judging (%)</th>
<th>Compassion (%)</th>
<th>Present–Past (%)</th>
<th>Future–Past (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade = A</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>18.38</td>
<td>37.64</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>25.07</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade = B</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>20.89</td>
<td>44.06</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>21.67</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade = C</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>22.92</td>
<td>41.85</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>24.13</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade = D</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>17.67</td>
<td>37.74</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>31.16</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade = E</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>20.88</td>
<td>40.03</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>31.26</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex = Male</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>21.07</td>
<td>44.35</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>25.63</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex = Female</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>18.56</td>
<td>36.27</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>28.14</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>19.78</td>
<td>41.80</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>25.93</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Australians</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>20.59</td>
<td>42.05</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>21.85</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>8.11</td>
<td>16.98</td>
<td>28.73</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>41.82</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group = A</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>18.97</td>
<td>42.06</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>27.25</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group = B</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>20.67</td>
<td>35.68</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>26.83</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maori culture is described as not as terrible. Essays on aboriginal Americans and Australians also consider their present situation, but, in comparison, focus more on the future.

In the interviews, the teachers emphasized somewhat different goals in their teaching. All of the teachers described how it was important to have students make comparisons in order to see similarities and differences in historical developments and contemporary societies. A common theme in the teacher interviews was also how they wanted students to see problems regarding power, identity, culture and diversity, in addition to the tensions between the majority society and indigenous peoples, near and far away. The teachers also underscored the importance of a more nuanced understanding of conflicts as a foundation to problematize and map out possible solutions from.

Teachers and students in group A described teaching with a social justice approach to history. The experienced female social studies teacher stated the importance of ‘solidarity’ and teaching the students to ‘stand on the side of the weaker part.’ Her students described how it was evident that ‘she likes the Sami.’ Also, the English teacher in group A expressed a moral position regarding the aims of the lesson unit, emphasizing how an important aim of the teaching was to make students aware about the fact that different groups ‘do not have the same rights’.

In group B, the young male social studies teacher emphasized the importance of theorizing history and human rights. He also stressed the importance of problematizing the concepts of culture and identity more than other teachers involved. The young female teacher emphasized how the dark history of Sweden may be a revelation for some students and ‘shake up the students a bit.’ The students in group B described how the theorizing and problematizing of human rights seemed to be quite important, but also rather difficult.

In the group supervised by the experienced female teacher, students focused more on different aspects of historical empathy as caring than the group taught by the younger male teacher (see Table 3). Noteworthy differences can be found in the amount of text devoted to sourcing and corroboration. Students in group B focus more on sourcing and corroboration. Thus, teachers emphasizing ideas of social justice had more students focusing on historical empathy as caring, whereas the group with more theoretical emphasis had students focusing more on critical review of their information.

Concluding discussion

All essays include content indicating that students care that people were and are being treated unjustly. Judging is a major part of how students write history about indigenous peoples and human rights. In the light of the debate and theories of historical thinking and empathy as caring, it is striking how sourcing and corroboration are given little coverage in the essays in comparison to perspective recognition and judging in this case of HRE. Still, it is important to note that a majority of the students focusing on historical empathy as caring also critically scrutinize historical information. Making a strict separation between historical thinking and empathy as caring is problematic in this practice. Students tend to use both when addressing the problems of indigenous peoples and human rights, with much less attention being given to sourcing and corroboration than to perspective recognition and judging. In the students’ essays, perspective recognition is closely connected to historical empathy as caring as set forth by Barton and Levstik (2004). It is evident how students can
consider perspectives from the past in a cognitive way, in line with the perspective of Lee and Ashby (2001), and combine this with more normative standpoints.

Statements indicating historical thinking and empathy as caring are often mixed in phrases. The fact that perspective recognition and categories of historical empathy as caring are evident in all papers underscores indications in previous research by Endacott (2010) and Brooks (2011) about how thinking and caring may be combined in history classrooms. The analysis of students’ texts shows how tightly interwoven thinking and caring can be in students’ knowledge production. Links between the different categories of historical thinking and empathy are perhaps better understood as networks and clusters. When calculating correlations and visualizing networks, a small cluster of sourcing and corroboration and a bigger cluster of historical empathy, including perspective recognition, are evident (see Figure 3). Sourcing and corroboration are linked to the central part of students’ reasoning. When closely reading the texts, it is evident how sourcing and corroboration may be a starting point and a basis for more elaborate formulations centred around comparisons, perspectives and drawing conclusions.

It is important to consider how sourcing and corroboration may not be a major quantitative part of any historical text. Previous research on students’ writing history in Sweden indicates how students’ methodological considerations are limited by the per cent of total words used to write historical papers (Nygren 2011b, 2014). For instance, students of the same age and in the same course, with same syllabus as the ones in this study, who wrote about a history topic of their own choice and were told by their teachers to explicitly use methodological considerations, devoted only 9% of their papers to the methodological considerations (Nygren 2014, 92). Trained historians do scrutinize their sources, more so than students (Wineburg 1991, 1998, 2001), but this may be more of an inner cognitive process that is not always displayed in terms of textual coverage. Thus, sourcing and corroboration in the students’ minds may not be as marginal as their texts indicate. It is also important to bear in mind how perspective recognition is an important part of historical thinking. In the network analysis and on a scale from thinking to empathy as caring, perspective recognition is a major category, evident in all essays and given plenty of space. The many links from perspective recognition to other categories in the cluster analysis in Figure 3 highlight how the processes of historical thinking and empathy may be considered to be separate and also interlinked. In students’ texts, a single paragraph may hold qualities of sourcing, perspective recognition and judging, showing how interconnected the categories may be.

The fact that judging holds a significant negative correlation with present–past (as illustrated in Figure 4) is interesting, and this relationship can be explained by a theme found in essays describing developments for indigenous cultures as positive progress over time; how indigenous peoples in the past were treated unjustly by colonizers, and how current politics are more in line with human rights. Another explanation may be that it is easier to judge people in the past than in current situations. Simplified histories of villains and victims are easier to construe at a distance. Distance in time, space and culture may influence a lack of nuances. Closer contact with people and events may increase the understanding of complexity, thus making it harder to judge and easier to understand the perspective of ‘the other’. In any case, it is central to note that a more current focus seems to make students less willing to judge.

The way students write history is much in line with the recommendations from UNESCO and the Council of Europe, especially when considering the idea that history and social
studies should promote international understanding and attitudes safeguarding human rights and cultural diversity. The skills and attitudes that students seem to perform in this HRE are tended towards knowledge and understanding as formulated by UNESCO (1995), ILO (1989), the Council of Europe (2001, 2010) and the UN (2011). The skills and attitudes towards historical empathy indicated in the essays show how students engage with the past and present of native and foreign cultures, drawing conclusions emphasizing the value of international understanding and diversity, like conclusions about how ‘multiculturalism should be the role model, with increased acceptance and wider perspectives and tolerance from the larger society’ (Sara). Embracing the values of human rights, students refer to the human rights as universal. No student explicitly criticizes human rights. In line with the recommendations for HRE, students express a will to defend human rights and take a stand against racism and prejudices.

In agreement with the standpoint of Barton and Levstik (2004) students care; they care about the past, care that people were treated unjustly, care for people suffering and care to link the past to the present and the future. They offer a normative, but also critical, history primarily concerned with problematizing the situation of indigenous peoples in vulnerable situations. In the light of theories of historical consciousness (Jensen 1997; Rüsen 2004; Seixas 2004), it is interesting to see how students use the past to explain and/or problematize the present and also to make statements about the future. Their descriptions of the present and the future are coloured by their understanding of the past. An understanding of the past is often linked to historical empathy and conclusions from making comparisons. The image of the present is directly linked to perceptions of injustices in the past in three out of the four essays. International ambitions to promote international understanding dating back to the interwar period (Nygren 2011a) seem to be fulfilled in this lesson unit. Studying the historical and present situations of indigenous peoples seems to stimulate students to empathize with perspectives beyond cultural borders.

The fact that a number of students did not explicitly scrutinize their sources must, however, still be considered as problematic. These results are somewhat in line with concerns raised by Lee and Ashby (2001) regarding how history teaching may become a moral tool at the expense of historical thinking. Evidently, students may be able to combine historical thinking and empathy, but in this lesson unit, a large minority (15 of 39) does not corroborate or use sourcing in their papers. Perhaps this could be addressed by changing the design of the lesson unit. A greater focus on primary sources and critical thinking in the assignment and in the instructions may strengthen students focus on scrutinizing the sources (cf. De La Paz et al. 2014; Monte-Sano 2008, 2010; Monte-Sano and De La Paz 2012; Reisman 2012). Perhaps when studying ethically charged topics, it may be especially useful to pay special attention to the balance between thinking and caring in the selection of teaching material, making sure students will read different sources that stimulate critical review of information.

A stronger focus on sourcing and corroboration may also be key for students to get better grades. This study shows how too much focus on compassion and too little on corroboration may give students a low grade. This is wholly in line with the Swedish national syllabus for history, which highlights the importance of critical thinking (Skolverket 2011). Teachers may emphasize and interpret the syllabus in different ways and grade students' work somewhat subjectively. This study shows how in practice teachers primarily reward students for writing longer essays and corroborating their material. This finding is much in line with previous research noting how students' critical review and use of evidence is an important part of
more skilled students’ historical writing (De La Paz et al. 2012). Compassion seems to have a negative correlation to high grades, whereas, somewhat surprising, text coverage devoted to judging did not have any direct relation to grades. The fact that judgements are as common among students getting higher grades as students given lower grades might indicate that the basis for making judgements, namely historical thinking, decides the quality of judgements made when writing history. This result can at least to some extent be explained by the fact that even professional historians might be influenced by their beliefs and make normative conclusions (Gottlieb and Wineburg 2012; Voss and Wiley 2006).

The results from this study, in line with previous research (Brooks 2011; Endacott 2010; Kohlmeier 2006), highlight how the theoretical conflict between historical thinking and empathy as caring may not be a clear-cut divide in the complexity of practice. This study demonstrates how combining non-normative ideals of historical thinking with more normative historical empathy is possible in the multifaceted act of writing history. It is notable how students, when they corroborate material and describe different historical perspectives, engage in the complicated and important act of perspective recognition. Perspective recognition seems to be a vital cognitive and emotional part of both historical thinking and empathy as caring. Imagining the world from another person’s view point has been described as a cognitive and emotional psychological process which may reduce stereotypes and promote social interaction (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000; Preston and Hofelich 2012; Todd et al. 2011). Students in this study manage to take someone else’s perspective across time and space; this is perhaps an even more complicated intellectual operation than understanding people in the present. However, the fact that some students write about historical oppressions of indigenous peoples in terms of ‘we did it to them’ may be interpreted as difficulties in self–other differentiation. It could also be interpreted as a political statement and a willingness to acknowledge past events as part of a common historical heritage. To what extent the past is and should be part of our present worldview needs to be further investigated. Future research of history education is necessary to better understand how different educational designs may support students’ historical thinking and empathy. What topics, materials, tools, instructions and settings can stimulate students to skilfully and ethically navigate ideologically and emotionally charged issues in history? Since historical thinking is supposed to be useful outside the classroom, it is important to further investigate students’ skills, attitudes and knowledge construction when facing the abundance, biases and ambiguity of information in a digital era.

Bearing in mind that school history should prepare most students for life, rather than work as historians, it is of great value to find that students may be able to use both thinking and empathy in HRE. The results from this study suggest how the history of indigenous peoples and violations of human rights might be a good starting point for an engaging, challenging and vital learning process of thinking and caring.

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