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The enhancement of the relevance of history for students

van Straaten, D.

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Chapter 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Two issues regarding the teaching and learning of history have been important incentives for conducting the research outlined in this thesis. The first was that many students don't seem to see the point of studying the past, which probably abridges their motivation to do so. The second is the fact that curriculum documents usually stress the importance of history for the development of personal identities and orientation on present and future without offering sufficient guidance to students and teachers to pursue these goals; as a rule these documents sum up historical content knowledge and do not specify its potentials for a better understanding of one's own identity or of present-day society. Apparently, it is assumed that studying the past yields insights into the present and future as a matter of course, taking knowledge transfer beyond subject-specific contexts for granted without any explicit educational strategies directed at achieving this aim. However, students are not inclined to use school history knowledge of their own accord.

It has been the aim of this thesis to develop tools for relevant history teaching that pursues meaningful connections between the past, the present and the future. The premise has been that relevant history teaching enables students to experience ways in which studying the past relates to their own lives and as such may affect their views on the usefulness of the subject. The main research question that has been explored is:

What are the aims and methods of relevant history teaching, explicitly focusing on connections between the past, the present and the future, and how does this type of teaching affect students' appraisals of the relevance of history?

Five studies were conducted in order to investigate this question. In the first study, a theoretical framework was developed focusing on three aims of relevant history teaching and four methods for pursuing these aims. The second study regards the design and validation of a questionnaire for measuring students' appraisals of the relevance of history in view of the aims of the theoretical framework. In the third study, the efficacy of three methods embedded in existing lesson programs was explored in three small-scale case studies conducted in two secondary schools. Based on the findings of these

explorations, a lesson unit combining two methods was designed and implemented in a large-scale intervention whose effects were reported in the fourth and fifth studies. The fourth study discusses the quantitative results, in particular with regard to students' appraisals of the relevance of history, whereas the fifth study focuses on qualitative data concerning the views and experiences of students and teachers involved in the intervention in order to learn more about the feasibility of the applied methods.

In this final chapter, the main findings of the thesis are presented and discussed. First, the results of the five studies (chapter 2-6) are summarized and general conclusions are drawn. These conclusions will subsequently be discussed and reflected upon, leading to new questions and directions for future research. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications of this study for teaching and learning history in secondary education.

7.1 Summaries

The summaries presented below contain descriptions of the design, the implementation and the main findings of the studies. For a detailed discussion of the results and limitations of each study and the embedding of the findings in existing literature, we refer to the conclusions in the previous chapters and the other sections of this chapter. As a result, no literature references are included in the summaries.

Chapter 2 presents a framework of aims and methods that can be employed for designing and implementing curricula for relevant history education. 'Relevance' was distinguished from the more commonly used concept of 'historical significance'. Operationalizations of historical significance refer to the importance of historical events for people in the past (for example the Black Death as a disastrous rupture in the life of medieval man) as well as to the importance of historical events from a contemporary viewpoint. The concept of relevance refers to the importance of (narratives of) the past in the latter sense only.

Based on insights from educational philosophy, historical philosophy and cognitive learning theory, we distinguished three dimensions of the relevance of history, i.e., relevance in view of (1) building a personal *identity*; (2) becoming a *citizen*; and (3) understanding the *human condition*. In our definition, relevant history teaching allows

students to recognize and experience what history has to do with themselves, with today's society and their general understanding of human existence.

History contributes to *identity* building in two ways. On the one hand, it offers students insight into ways in which their personal identity connects to the history of the communities of which they are part (e.g. family, nation, religious denomination). On the other hand, history confronts students with a variety of life forms that differ from their own way of life which may stimulate critical reflection on their own values and evoke opinions and ideals delineating them as unique individuals vis-à-vis their own community. History can 'qualify' and 'socialise' students into *citizens*: qualify, for example, by providing insight into the historical dimensions of civics and the academic modes of historical thinking which are advantageous to political literacy and the development of a democratic disposition; socialise, for example, by explaining the origins and meanings of societal structures whose traditions, rules, values and norms students have to become familiar with in order to function as citizens. History provides insight into three aspects of the *human condition* which are closely connected to the temporal dimension of being human. First, through historical study students may experience their own existence as an existence 'in time': with a past that has transcended into history through contemporary narratives and a future that one day will become past. This may lead to a sense of one's own historicity. Second, history shows that many societal issues are not specifically time-bound and can therefore be regarded as typical of human existence. Cognizance of people's dealings with these enduring issues in the past expands the reservoir of experiences, approaches and solutions in the present. Third, history is a narrative of the past always constructed at a later moment in time, providing occasion to see how often human actions did not unfold as planned due to coincidence and unforeseen circumstances (contingency).

Pursuing the three aims of relevant history education implies the use of historical knowledge in personal and social contexts. We distinguished four pedagogical approaches to support this educational activity: (1) teaching with longitudinal lines, for example the origins and development of scientific thinking from antiquity to modern times; (2) teaching with historical analogies, for example between the Roman Empire and the European Union; (3) teaching with enduring human issues, such as the distribution of wealth in society or relationships between men and women; (4) teaching

with ‘decision making and future scenarios’, for example using knowledge of the Cold War to predict future developments in the relations between the United States and Russia.

The four approaches all contain elements of comparisons between the past and the present and all focus on the use of historical subject matter. Yet there are reasons to keep them apart. ‘Longitudinal lines’ are about long-term historical developments culminating in present-day affairs and therefore seem to fit well with ‘becoming a citizen’. ‘Historical analogies’ focus on parallels between past and present phenomena which also seems suitable for ‘becoming a citizen’. ‘Enduring human issues’ are often morally laden and probably lend themselves in particular for ‘personal identity building’. The ‘decision making and future scenarios’ strategy aims at extrapolation of historical developments to possible future developments, implying that this approach seems to fit well with the time-orienting dimension of the human condition.

The framework of relevant history education outlined in this chapter constitutes the theoretical foundation of this thesis. The other studies deal with the educational implementation of the framework’s aims and methods in order to give it a more solid empirical basis.

Chapter 3 reports the design and psychometric qualities of the Relevance of History Measurement Scale (RHMS) (Appendix A). The RHMS has been designed in the absence of appropriate tools for assessing students’ relevance views according to the three dimensions of relevance of our theoretical framework.

The first draft of the RHMS consisted of 32 items which corresponded to the three relevance dimensions. ‘Building a personal identity’ and ‘understanding the human condition’ each formed a subscale, and for the broad concept of citizenship (‘becoming a citizen’) two subscales were designed driven by the need for measurable constructs: one for the understanding of present-day phenomena and one for the substantiating of opinions about current affairs. For each subscale eight items were formulated, four of which were negative and four positive in order to avoid response tendency and enhance measurement reliability. The items were reviewed by secondary school students and teachers on issues of comprehensibility and validity. The first draft of the RHMS was piloted among 135 students to explore the reliability of the four subscales of the instrument.

As a result of all these checks, revisions of items took place which ultimately resulted in a questionnaire that could be subjected to a more thorough validation study. Participants in this study were 1459 secondary school students (aged 12-18) from 29 schools across the Netherlands. These students attended the middle level (HAVO) and pre-university level (VWO) of secondary education. The ratio between males and females and between HAVO and VWO students was in line with corresponding ratios in secondary education nationwide.

The construct validity of the RHMS was investigated by asking an expert panel of history teacher educators ($N = 13$) to assign the (randomly listed) 32 items to the four relevance subscales and by executing an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) followed by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

The convergent validity was examined using the School Subject Experience Scale (SSES). The SSES is a validated questionnaire developed in the Netherlands for measuring students' experiences with school subjects (not history in particular) in terms of practical use, enjoyment, difficulty and interest. None of these aspects relates to the way relevance is defined in the RHMS, but the SSES 'practical use' subscale was used to calibrate the RHMS. In previous studies, this subscale had proven to represent a reliable and a discriminatory construct, revealing, for example, that students found English language and mathematics significantly more useful than history. Comparing students' response on the items of the SSES 'practical use' scale with their RHMS scores made it possible to explore the validity of the RHMS, assuming positive correlations between scales.

The known-group validity was examined by testing several hypotheses and assumptions. For example, based on literature, it was hypothesized that junior students would have lower appraisals of the relevance of history than senior students. The RHMS was also filled-out by first-year university students in history teacher education and by first-year university students in elementary school teacher education, assuming that the former group would find history more relevant than the latter.

Data analysis confirmed the convergent and known-group validity of the RHMS, implying, for example, that its subscales positively correlated with the SSES subscale, that junior students considered history significantly less relevant than senior students and that the history teacher trainees found history significantly more relevant than the

elementary school teacher trainees. Results of the expert panel's sorting of items substantiated the construct validity of the subscales, but factor analyses yielded three instead of four subscales, as the items of the two scales of 'becoming a citizen' merged into one scale. Factor analysis also resulted in the elimination of eight items due to low factor loadings or high cross loadings. Thus, the final version of the RHMS comprised three subscales (one for each relevance dimension) with 24 items of which 12 were negatively and 12 positively formulated. Cronbach's α for each subscale was above 0.80, indicating sufficient reliability.

Using the validated RHMS questionnaire, it was then mapped out how Dutch students think about the relevance of history. Their relevance appraisals on all three domains appeared to become more positive as students grew older, with a relatively steep increase between the age of 14 and 16 for the domains of 'human condition' and 'becoming a citizen'. Out of the three strands of relevance domains, the importance of history for personal identity building was valued the lowest by all students, regardless of age, which is in line with literature claiming that the evolution of psychological characteristics of the self occurs late in adolescence. In sum, this validation study resulted in a psychometrically sound measurement instrument which can be used to gauge secondary school students' appraisals of the relevance of history.

Chapter 4 examines the implementation of three pedagogical approaches of relevant history teaching as defined in our theoretical framework: teaching with longitudinal lines, with enduring human issues and with historical analogies. Explorations took place in three case studies (one for each approach) conducted in two secondary schools with 135 students and four teachers as participants. The approaches were applied within the boundaries of existing lesson programs to find out whether implementation is feasible without major curriculum revisions. Three indicators were used to examine this feasibility: (1) the extent to which students used historical knowledge in their orientation on current affairs; (2) teachers' experiences with integrating the approach in their daily teaching practice; and (3) the extent to which the approaches affected students' appraisals of the relevance of history. Data were collected using student questionnaires with statements about present-day phenomena related to the taught historical subject matter (indicator 1) (Appendix B); a questionnaire for collecting teacher experiences (indicator

2) (Appendix C); interviews with both teachers and students (indicator 1 and 2); and the RHMS (indicator 3). The statement questionnaires were administered in a pre-test/post-test setting enabling us to measure the extent to which students used lesson content knowledge to substantiate their views on current affairs. The RHMS was also conducted in a pre-test/post-test setting.

In case study 1, ninth-grade middle level (HAVO) and pre-university (VWO) students ($N = 56$) studied an enduring human issue within the context of eight regular lessons about the Cold War. The issue focused on the extent to which imposing value systems with a universal validity claim (e.g. communism and democratic capitalism) can be justified. During the lessons, historical subject matter (e.g. the Truman Doctrine, the Berlin Wall or the future of communism in China after the fall of the Soviet Union) was used to encourage students to reflect on this issue. In case study 2, tenth-grade middle level students ($N = 20$) studied longitudinal lines dealing with the origins and evolution of citizenship in Western society from ancient to modern times. Four aspects of citizenship were studied diachronically in twelve lessons: ‘subjects who obey’, ‘citizens who govern’, ‘civil rights and freedoms’ and ‘civic duties’. ‘Subjects who obey’, for example, regarded the subjection of people to higher authorities in Mesopotamian city states, in France during the reign of Louis XIV and in Germany during Nazi rule. In case study 3, the historical analogy approach was explored in two groups of eighth-grade students ($N = 59$) from the lower pre-vocational track (VMBO). These students made several analogies between past and present phenomena in the context of eight lessons about the First and Second World War. For example, they compared characteristics of the First World War with the war against the so-called Islamic State by US-led coalition forces (this war was going on during the lessons) in order to decide whether the latter conflict could be considered a world war.

The findings of the case studies showed that students were not inclined to use historical subject matter in their reflections on current affairs spontaneously, and even when prompted, not all students referred to lesson content knowledge. In the interviews, however, students went into more detail on the usefulness of what they had learned about the past, which suggests that the data collection method (writing or talking) may have had some influence here. Moreover, students who drew analogies used historical knowledge more often than students who worked with longitudinal lines and enduring

issues, which suggests that knowledge transfer also depends on the applied pedagogical approach. According to the teachers, the nature of the lesson content played a role as well, as the relatively abstract topics of study 1 and 2 made it more difficult for students to identify and engage.

All teachers reported that participating in this research was beneficial for their daily teaching practice and all but one teacher had noticed that students were more interested as a result of making connections between past, present and future. Integrating the approaches into existing programs did not cause serious problems according to the teachers, but they experienced a tension between implementing the method and complying with curriculum demands, especially with regard to adequately preparing the students for the regular history tests. The teachers involved in case study 3 observed that students were motivated and engaged while drawing analogies between past and present, while the teacher in case study 2 reported that teaching longitudinal lines was a demanding endeavor and not very motivating for students.

The RHMS measurements revealed that application of the enduring human issue approach in case study 1 had a positive effect on students' appraisals of the relevance of history in all three relevance domains. In case study 2, no shifts of relevance perceptions were detected, while students in case study 3 scored higher on the post-test than on the pre-test, but not significantly higher.

Based on the three indicators (i.e. the use of historical subject matter, teachers' experiences and students' relevance perceptions), it was concluded that teaching with historical analogies can be easily implemented and seems to have a strong potential for stimulating students to use history in reflections on present-day affairs. Embedding longitudinal lines and enduring human issues in the usual chronologically ordered curricula entails more difficulties. A fruitful implementation of each of these methods probably requires major curriculum revisions.

Chapter 5 reports the effects of a large-scale quasi-experimental implementation study combining the historical analogy and enduring human issue approaches of our framework. Participants in this study were grade 10 to 12 middle level (HAVO) and pre-university (VWO) students ($N = 1022$) from 24 secondary schools in various parts of the Netherlands. Building on the findings reported in chapter 4, we designed a lesson unit

with an enduring human issue as a leading principle. Because of the potential of the historical analogy method, we selected analogous cases of the enduring issue from different periods which students had to compare using general concepts and questions. The design of this implementation study was, therefore, underpinned by two educational principles: analogic or case-comparison reasoning and concept-based instruction. Scholarly literature in the field of cognitive psychology and history education has shown that both principles are conducive to knowledge transfer and the derivation of meaning from descriptive knowledge. We hypothesized that using them in the context of relevant history teaching would affect students' relevance perceptions in a positive way. Examining this premise was the main aim of this study. As teaching about an enduring issue through case-based learning is an innovative practice in Dutch history education, we also investigated students' experiences, learning performances and situational interest (i.e. interest triggered at a particular moment stimulated by environmental factors such as clarity of tasks or perceived value of lesson content).

Subject of the lesson unit was the issue of migration and integration. Five refugee groups from early modern times onwards served as exemplary cases: (1) Protestants leaving the Catholic southern Netherlands for the Protestant north during the Dutch Revolt (16th century); (2) persecuted Jews seeking refuge in the Dutch Republic (17th century); (3) Belgians fleeing from First World War violence towards the neutral Netherlands; (4) Germans being expelled from former German territory in Eastern Europe after the Second World War; (5) Cubans leaving for the US after the communist takeover by Fidel Castro in 1959.

Based on research literature, two experimental conditions were designed: a *case-comparison condition*, in which students ($n = 460$) explicitly compared the five historical refugee cases and drew analogies between these cases and a present-day refugee example, and a *separate-case condition* in which students ($n = 273$) studied the same refugee cases separately and sequentially (one at the time) without making mutual comparisons and drawing analogies with the present. Lesson goals in the case comparison condition were targeted at the use of knowledge of refugee issues in the past in reflections on refugee issues in the present. Learning activities in this condition were supported by using stages of the 'guided analogy training' model developed by Gentner, Loewenstein, & Thompson (2003) and by using a framework of key questions and

concepts. Lesson goals in the separate-case condition aimed at deepening students' knowledge about the historical contexts of the five refugee examples (e.g. the Dutch Revolt and the Cold War) which were part of the national history standards. Based on research literature, we assumed students would study the refugee examples in their isolated historical contexts without drawing analogies of their own accord.

In both conditions the unit comprised six lessons with a fifty minutes duration: one introduction lesson and one lesson for each refugee example. In the introduction lesson, students in the case-comparison condition studied issues concerning a present-day refugee group (Syrians in the Netherlands in 2016) using the conceptual framework which was designed to make comparisons in the lessons to come. Students in the separate-case condition were practicing historical thinking skills and tested their prior knowledge of the historical contexts of the five refugee examples. Each refugee lesson referred to exactly the same content subject matter in both conditions. Historical sources, texts and illustrations were identical, except for the assignments which differed in accordance with the divergent lesson goals of the conditions (Appendices D-E).

We tested the extent to which the intervention in both experimental conditions affected students' (1) appraisals of the relevance of history; (2) situational interest; (3) views on the complexity of this type of teaching; and (4) acquisition of subject matter knowledge. Based on the theories underpinning the design of this study, we hypothesized that students' relevance perceptions and situational interest would be positively affected to a greater extent in the case-comparison condition than in the separate-case condition. We also assumed that students in the case-comparison condition would have fewer problems with a lesson unit containing several different historical cases from different periods than the students in the separate-case condition, because comparing the cases aided by a conceptual framework would enable them to see more connections between the cases. Last, we expected no differences between both conditions in terms of acquisition of lesson content knowledge. Given the effectiveness of comparison activities, as described in the literature, it seemed unlikely that students in the case-comparison condition would underperform in this respect, even though they spent a considerable part of their time on past-present analogies whereas students in the separate-case condition focused exclusively on learning about the past.

The four hypotheses were tested using closed-format questionnaires as measures (see Appendices A, H-J). The RHMS was used for testing hypothesis 1 in a pre-test/post-test setting. The RHMS outcomes of the two experimental groups were not mutually compared, but independently with RHMS outcomes of a comparable group of 10-12 grade students ($n = 289$) who did not participate in the experiment but followed regular history education. Because both the case-comparison and the separate-case condition were experimental, it made sense to set their outcomes against those of a non-treatment group.

Multilevel regression analysis was used for calculating measurement outcomes, controlling for students' background variables (e.g. educational level, grade, age, historical knowledge level). Set against the results for the non-treatment group, case-based history teaching in the context of an enduring issue had small but significant positive effects on students' views on the relevance of history in both experimental conditions. The case-comparison group showed significant positive effects for the relevance domains 'building a personal identity', 'becoming a citizen' and 'understanding the human condition', whereas the separate-case group showed effects for 'becoming a citizen' only. Thus, as expected, students' relevance perceptions were positively affected to a greater extent in the case-comparison condition than in the separate-case condition. The situational interest of both groups did not differ in terms of attention, engagement and enjoyment, but the case-comparison group deemed the lessons more valuable than the separate-case group. As expected, the case-comparison group found case-based history teaching less complex and did not underperform in terms of knowledge acquisition.

Chapter 6 describes the experiences of students ($N = 444$) and teachers ($N = 15$) who participated in the case-comparison condition of the intervention study described in chapter 5. In order to learn more about the practical feasibility of case-comparison teaching, we collected students' and teachers' views on three issues (1) the need to focus on the past as well as on the present in view of school history relevance; (2) the complexity of case-comparison teaching; and (3) the desirability of this type of history teaching. Closed-format questionnaires and interviews with teachers ($n = 4$) and students ($n = 22$; in dyads) were used for data collection. The interview questions corresponded

with the questionnaire items, so the quantitatively and qualitatively acquired information could complement each other. Teachers' experiences and views were collected after the completion of the lesson intervention and before the results (see chapter 5) were made known to them. This allowed us to compare teachers' expectations of the results with the actual outcomes. The interview data were analyzed using the three issues under examination as pre-ordinate categories for collecting and compiling data across respondents.

With regard to the first issue whether history teaching should focus on the past as well as on the present, findings indicated that both students and teachers preferred history education that includes the present. The teachers argued that connecting the past to the present enhances student engagement and allows students to see the point of studying the past. They had noticed more engagement during the lesson intervention, but, in contrast with the actual outcomes, had no high expectations of the effects of the case-comparison intervention on students' relevance appraisals. The reasons students gave for the need to link the past to the present were grouped into three categories: the fulfillment of personal interest and engagement; connectedness to the present as a means to better understand historical subject matter; and the use of the past to orientate on the present and future. The first two reasons comply with scholarly literature in the field history education and cognitive learning theory. Regarding the third reason, many students conceived historical events as precepts that should guide actions in the present, which is a common mode of how people deal with the past.

Regarding the second issue, the findings showed that students in general did not encounter difficulties with case-comparing teaching, which was in line with teachers' expectations. The framework of key questions and concepts appeared to be supportive for comparison activities. However, some students suggested that case-comparison teaching is a complex endeavor as studying cases from different eras requires a good understanding of the historical contexts involved in order to prevent anachronisms.

Regarding the third issue, it appeared that students had no preference for the case-comparison history teaching compared to traditional history teaching. In general, both students and teachers favored a combination of both ways of teaching, for example by using the extant frame of ten eras and their characteristic features as a base for teaching about analogous cases from past and present times. The teachers acknowledged the

dilemma between the duty of encountering the past on its own terms and making the study of the past useful. However, they argued that without making connections with the present history has no meaning for students. Students used knowledge of the past in their reflections on current affairs, although the elaborations on past-present analogies varied from the straightforward copying of ‘lessons of the past’ to more abstract generalizations evoking new insights and questions.

In sum, implementation of case-comparison history teaching in view of an enduring human issue is feasible in senior secondary education. Students and teachers were quite unanimous in their conviction that history should be about the past as well as the present. Teachers reported that students had not encountered difficulties with the applied method, which was in accordance with students’ experiences. The case-comparison approach triggered students to use history in their orientation on present and future, although the connections they made varied in terms of academic quality and cognitive depth.

7.2 General conclusions

Relevant history teaching allows students to actively use knowledge of the past in their orientation on the present and future. As usefulness of school knowledge in ‘real life’ is what students deem important in valuing the relevance of school subjects, it was hypothesized that relevant history teaching would positively affect students’ views on the benefits of history. The research question was:

What are the aims and methods of relevant history teaching, explicitly focusing on connections between the past, the present and the future, and how does this type of teaching affect students’ appraisals of the relevance of history?

As aims of relevant history teaching we have defined: (1) building a personal identity: seeing oneself as an individual with a personal past and developing one’s own values, opinions and ideals vis-à-vis those of the historically shaped communities to which one belongs; (2) becoming a citizen: enhancing political literacy and understanding the origins of social institutions, conventions and present-day phenomena in order to function as a citizen in society; (3) understanding the human condition: becoming aware of one’s own historicity and supplementing one’s experiences with past approaches to

human issues. Measurements with the RHMS questionnaire, specially developed for the purpose of this research, showed that students associate the usefulness of history considerably less with their own personal development than with the other two relevance domains. Findings also revealed that students conceive of ‘becoming a citizen’ and ‘understanding the human condition’ in a rather pragmatic way, as if history teaches direct lessons, although there were also indications that some students gain deeper insights.

As methods of relevant history teaching we have explored: (1) teaching with enduring human issues that have been addressed by people in past and present times either in similar or different manners, such as issues of crime and punishment; (2) teaching with longitudinal lines describing long-term political, socio-economical or cultural developments, such as the emergence of national states; (3) teaching with historical analogies between the past and the present, for example an analogy between the Roman Empire and the European Union; (4) teaching with a focus on decision making and future scenarios, for example using knowledge of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War to predict the viability of communism in China. Our findings indicate that implementation of the longitudinal lines approach is difficult to realize, whereas teaching with analogies and enduring human issues seem promising strategies in terms of feasibility and efficacy, especially when they are combined in curricula that are designed according to the learning principles of analogical reasoning and concept-based instruction.

Measurements with the RHMS as well as other more qualitative means of evaluation show that history teaching with an explicit focus on making connections between the past, present and future can positively affect students’ views on the relevance of history. Much depends on the method applied, with ‘longitudinal lines’ yielding no measurable effects and ‘historical analogies’ and ‘enduring human issues’ producing positive effects, both in lower and upper secondary education. In lower secondary education larger shifts in relevance perceptions seem possible, which is explainable because students in upper secondary education find history more relevant to begin with, which limits the scope for improvement.

7.3 Discussion

In this section, the general conclusions are discussed in detail in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the findings of this research. Four aspects will be considered: (1) the theoretical framework of relevant history teaching; (2) measuring students' views on the relevance of history; (3) case-comparison learning in the context of an enduring human issue; and (4) using the past to orientate on the present and the future. In the wake of discussing these aspects, the limitations of this research and directions for further investigation will be addressed as well.

7.3.1 Theoretical framework of relevant history teaching

The use of the concept 'relevant history teaching' may give the wrong impression that there is also such a thing as meaningless history education that serves no purpose. As soon as students learn about the past, however, meaning is irrevocably present, because learning takes place in an educational context. When students read their history textbook, there is meaning also because all texts bear elements of social or cultural position, regardless of whether the writers tried to be unbiased (Jenkins, 2010; Seixas, 2000). If students are taught how to interpret historical sources, knowledge becomes meaningful while it is produced according to the rules and procedures of the historical discipline (Barton & Levstik, 2011). We deliberately used the concept of 'relevant history teaching' to emphasize that this type of teaching explicitly focuses on the personal and social meanings of history elicited through the making of connections between past, present and future. Using knowledge of the past in contemporary contexts that are contributive to students' civic education is a rare learning activity in regular history education (Barton & Levstik, 2011; Davies, 2000; VanSledright, 1997), but potentials of schooling in this respect are recognized in history education literature (Haydn & Harris, 2010; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Shemilt, 2000).

The use of 'relevance' instead of 'historical significance' should be understood in the same way, even though the distinction between the two concepts is not watertight. We argued that historical significance refers to both 'meaning for the present' and 'meaning for the past', without making a clear distinction, whereas relevance only regards 'meaning for the present'. It should be noted, however, that every insight about the impact of historical events on the lives of people in the past is contemporary as a matter

of fact, meaning that determining historical significance always relates to the present. Nevertheless, we employed relevance to avoid misunderstandings and to emphasize that history teaching should be about narratives of the past which are socially meaningful.

There is some overlap between the aims of our theoretical framework that needs to be addressed. For example, ‘contingency’ is one of the aspects of the relevance aim ‘understanding the human condition’, but it can also be linked to ‘becoming a citizen’ as awareness of the role of coincidence and the interplay between intentions and unintended consequences fosters attitudes which are essential in democratic society. The overlap between aims complies, to a certain extent, with the outcomes of the validation study of the RHMS questionnaire. Factor analysis confirmed the existence of three separate subscales corresponding to the three aims, but these subscales substantially correlated, which is probably inevitable because all three relate to the relevance of history. Acknowledging the overlap, the three aims were kept separated for three reasons. First, the RHMS factor analysis outcomes allowed to measure students’ views on all three aims independently. Second, the aims originated from different theoretical sources: historical philosophy regarding ‘understanding the human condition’ and educational philosophy and cognitive learning theory for ‘building a personal identity’ and ‘becoming a citizen’. Third, our three domains of relevance are only three aspects to which more aspects of relevance could be added. By distinguishing them as separate aspects, we stress the idea that we are not pretending to have covered ‘relevance of history’ as a complete whole.

Both relevance aims and methods involve historical subject matter elements to a greater or lesser degree. It should be emphasized, that the methods are not to be understood as learning strategies per se but also represent approaches for organizing curricula targeted at connecting past, present and future. Teaching with enduring human issues as implemented in the main intervention study of this research (chapter 5), for example, took the issue of migration as a theme and several refugee groups from past and present as examples. Learning strategies in this intervention were analogic reasoning and concept-based instruction. Therefore we have chosen the term of ‘pedagogical approach’ to describe our interventions, and not just ‘method’, because all approaches in our framework relate to the application of certain educational strategies as well as the selection and organization of historical subject matter.

Our empirical findings provided indications that some methods align better with certain aims than others, as was hypothesized in our theoretical framework. For example, teaching with enduring human issues positively associated with students' relevance appreciations in view of 'understanding the human condition'. However, this teaching method affected students' perceptions in the other two relevance domains as well, albeit to a lesser degree. It is, therefore, too premature to make firm statements about what at first sight seemed to be plausible mutual connections between aims and methods of relevant history teaching. Their interdependence needs further research.

This is also true for teaching with 'decision making and future scenario's', the fourth method of relevant history teaching. Predicting the future course of events seems to be a powerful tool for mobilizing historical knowledge, but one that is easily susceptible to speculation and unrealistic scenarios (Shemilt, 2000). An assignment that we carried out in the wake of one of the case studies showed that students instinctively rely on their everyday knowledge to support decisions for the future, which is in accordance with other research (Lee, 2004). The design of multiple, plausible and non-deterministic future scenarios requires thorough subject matter knowledge, which students usually do not have (Foster, Ashby, & Lee, 2008). This calls for further research.

7.3.2 Measuring students' views on the relevance of history

The RHMS has proven to be a reliable and valid questionnaire for gauging students' thinking about the relevance of history. As this questionnaire has been developed and validated in the Netherlands, it is unclear whether it is suitable for use in other countries. It seems unlikely, however, that the RHMS could not be applied in other Western countries with a similar educational system and pedagogical culture, considering the similarities in students' attitudes towards history as has been shown by comparative international surveys (Angvik & Von Borries, 1997; Grever, Pelzer, & Haydn, 2011).

It should be emphasized that the RHMS relates to three relevance aims which were specifically formulated in the context of this research, implying that the questionnaire does not include all conceivable domains of relevance. Validation procedures led to the removal of items that belonged to the original draft of the RHMS, reducing the initial scope of the scale constructs which correspond to the three relevant domains. This has

been to the detriment of the original design, but it was necessary from a statistical point of view in order to realize reliable and valid RHMS subscales (Spector, 1992).

RHMS measurements among a large sample of 12-18 year old secondary school students showed that junior students attribute less value to history than their senior peers with regard to all three relevance aims. This was according to expectation and in line with scholarly literature about the interdependence between age and metacognitive thinking (e.g. Wigfield, Byrnes, & Eccles, 2012) and age and historical insight (Lowenthal, 2000). It should be noted, however, that the senior students had opted for a curriculum that included history, while history was compulsory for the junior students of the sample. This may have influenced the relevance perceptions of both junior and senior students, although there are reasons for not overestimating this effect. First, the outcomes for junior students correspond to findings of other studies indicating that many junior students have difficulty in seeing the point of studying the past (Haerberli, 2005; Haydn & Harris, 2010, VanSledright, 1997). Second, the senior students opted for a curriculum, either Culture and Society or Economy and Society, of which history is just one out of several compulsory school subjects. This means they may not have deemed history relevant in advance, which applies in particular to students in the Economy and Society curriculum, which focuses less on the humanities. Third, further analyses of our sample data showed that grade 10 pre-university students who had not yet opted for a curriculum did not find history less relevant than grade 10 middle level students who had chosen a curriculum which included history.

All students of the sample, regardless of age, associated the relevance of history much less with building a personal identity than with becoming a citizen and understanding the human condition. Apparently, students are not inclined to associate history with their personal lives in terms of behavior, moral beliefs and the personal self. This is in line with findings from other surveys on students' attitudes towards history (Fink, 2005; Foster, Ashby, & Lee, 2008; Haerberli, 2005; Van der Kaap & Folmer, 2016). Students valued the usefulness of history for their own identity higher as they age, which accords with the notion that developing characteristics of the self in the process of identity building occurs late in adolescence (e.g. Steinberg & Morris, 2001). With regard to these findings, it probably makes sense to distinguish between 'formal' history taught at school and 'informal' history students encounter in their personal life. Rosenzweig and Thelen

(1998) asked 1500 Americans about their interests in history and how it influenced their daily lives and expectations for the future. School history left most people cold, but people assembled personal past experiences into narratives that formed identities and gave direction to life. Thus, even if students did not see any personal interest in school history, they may have felt emotionally attached to history outside school. However, this informal, personally related history did not play any role in the empirical studies. This can be regarded as a limitation of this research, as the personal-past factor is part of the identity relevance domain of the theoretical framework.

7.3.3 Case-comparison learning in the context of enduring human issues

The main intervention study of this research gives reason to believe that case-comparison learning in the context of an enduring human issue is an effective approach in view of relevant history teaching. Comparing analogous cases from different periods, organized around problem-based issues, allows students to reflect on similarities and differences between past and present and to use history in meaningful ways. Three issues concerning the intervention study need to be discussed.

First, although the intervention positively affected students' relevance perceptions, effects sizes were small. Several explanations for this have been given in the discussion section of chapter 5, such as the short duration of the intervention, the relatively high RHMS pre-test scores (leaving little room for improvement) and the focus on cognitive learning activities whereas factors such as motivation or ability play an equally important role in attitude and opinion change (e.g. Mason, 2001; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Wood, 2000). In addition, we need to bear in mind that the intervention aimed at making connections between the past, present and future and not at teaching students about the relevance of history. It was hypothesized that the use of historical knowledge in contemporary contexts would stimulate students to reflect on the benefits of history. More direct, explicit teaching about the purposes and functions of history, comparable to the 'use of history' which is part of the Swedish and Norwegian curriculum (Nordgren, 2016), may well sort out larger effects. Explicit teaching strategies can have positive effects on ways in which students think and reason historically (Stoel, 2017). Research conducted by Haydn and Harris (2010) has shown that in schools where teachers taught about the goals of school history, students were better able to explain why history

matters. The explicit approach seems attractive and certainly deserves further investigation.

A second point to be addressed is the extent to which the efficacy of the case-comparison method depends on the topic that is selected as an enduring human issue. The case studies (chapter 4) indicated that ‘impersonal’ topics such as politics and citizenship constrain students’ engagement and competence to attribute meaning. This complies with research literature showing that students (1) tend to relate the past to the present when they are personally involved (Grant, 2003; Seixas, 1994), and (2) show interest in topics that involve human agency, emotions and morality and allow for personal identification (e.g. Barton, 2008; Den Heyer, 2003). The topic of the main study – dealing with refugees in past and present times – was selected to meet these requirements for engagement and meaning making. This topic was subject of debate at the time of the intervention due to Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Europe, which may have affected the outcomes – either in a positive way by triggering students’ engagement or in a negative way by evoking feelings of aversion or saturation. No retention study has been conducted to see whether the observed effects of the intervention would hold on the longer term. An application of the same method, but with a different enduring issue, did not take place either. This makes it difficult to properly assess the extent to which the topical lesson content affected the results. Further research should, therefore, deploy various enduring issues and repeated measures in order to test the retention of the effects found in the intervention study.

Last, alongside the case-comparison condition a separate-case condition was designed in which students studied the same historical cases of the enduring human issue, but one at the time without explicit attention being paid to comparing them or drawing analogies with the present. The type of lesson goals and assignments in the separate-case condition were similar to the goals and assignments students were familiar with, i.e., targeted at using frame of reference knowledge to contextualize historical data and practicing historical thinking skills. It should be emphasized, however, that the applied teaching approach in this condition was novel too because the regular curriculum is not organized around themes exemplified by cases from different periods. The separate-case condition, therefore, did not function as a control condition but was actually seen as a second experimental group. Students in this condition also received an experimental

treatment program and it is plausible that this approach had an effect on their relevance perceptions. Consequently, the results in both experimental groups were set against RHMS measurements in a comparison group comprising students who received no treatment at all and followed the regular history curriculum. As these students were sampled from different grades and educational tracks (similar to the grades and tracks of the experimental conditions), they were taught various regular historical topics, ranging from the Enlightenment to the Cold War. It was assumed that the ‘usual’ history education in the comparison group would not significantly affect students’ relevance views. This could have been the case if a certain topic or teacher’s approach would have stirred students’ thinking about the benefits of history, but as there were many different topics and teachers, this could go either way, with regular teaching negatively affecting students’ relevance perceptions as well. In this way, potential effects of lesson content or teachers’ approaches were considerably neutralized.

7.3.4 Using the past to orientate on the present and the future

The case studies (chapter 4) indicated that students were not inclined to use knowledge of the past beyond subject-specific contexts spontaneously, which is in line with other research findings (e.g. Foster, Ashby and Lee, 2008; Mosborg, 2002; Shreiner, 2014). Apparently, it never occurred to them that history could be used for that purpose. This may have been due to the fact that these studies were embedded in existing lesson programs which primarily taught students to memorize factual knowledge in order to understand the past. Knowledge transfer does not easily occur in educational settings predominantly focused on lecturing, memorizing and replication (Illeris, 2009; Russell & Pellegrino, 2008). Students’ epistemological beliefs about history may also provide a clue, because junior students in particular conceive of history as a given body of facts and dates about a world which no longer exists and therefore can bear no meanings for their own life. They perceive a historical account as a copy of the past – not as the outcome of historical research resulting in narratives that meet present-bound needs and interests (e.g. Lee, 2005; Maggioni, Alexander, & VanSledright, 2004; Stoel, Logtenberg, Wansink, Huijgen, Van Boxtel, & Van Drie, 2017).

In order to encourage knowledge transfer, it is more effective to design a curriculum with the methods of relevant history teaching as leading principles. Students in the case-

comparison condition of the intervention study referred to a greater extent to what they had learned about the past in their consideration of present-day affairs. It should be noted, however, that these were senior secondary students whose epistemological beliefs were probably more sophisticated. Even in this study, in which explicit comparisons were made between the past and the present on very concrete issues, not all students used lesson content knowledge to substantiate their opinions and views. This may have been due to the available lesson time, which was limited, in some occasions leaving less room for exchanging and discussing the results of the past-present analogies. In order to achieve larger effects, some teachers suggested to spend less time on processing historical knowledge and more time on comparison and active learning activities in order to achieve larger effects.

Although the drawing of academically valid analogies between the past and the present was not an aim of this research, some remarks in this respect must be made. Students employed history in a way which Rösen (2004) has called 'exemplary', i.e. they conceived of the past as a strong guidance for decision making in the present – a common mode of how people think about the meaning of history (e.g. MacMillan, 2008; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). In some occasions, this encouraged presentism and a neglect of differences between past and present times, which according to scholars like Lowenthal (2000) is the downside of teaching problem-based themes instead of chronologically ordered epochs. This would argue for restraining or even avoiding the teaching of past-present analogies in order to prevent history being abused. In Lowenthal's view, the 'otherness' of the past should play a pivotal role in history teaching, which may imply that history should not serve goals originating outside the discipline itself. The focus will then be on the pedagogy of historical thinking, which aims at the mastering of epistemological concepts such as evidence, causality and change or what Shemilt (2000) has called the 'form of knowledge'. Relevant history teaching as proposed in this research, however, advocates a more instrumentalist view on education in which history holds a reservoir of narratives that can be socially meaningful in view of preparing students for citizenship. This implies that the goals of the school subject originate in part from outside the academic discipline, which is in line with the work of other scholars (e.g. Barton & Levstik, 2004; Davies, 2003; Laville, 2002; Thornton & Barton, 2010). According to Rösen (2017), presentism is inherent in the construction of

historical narratives and, as a matter of fact, trying to exclude the ‘present’ would undermine the orienting function of historical knowledge. That said, the historical thinking pedagogy may bolster students’ competence in connecting the past and the present, in particular regarding the mastering of epistemological concepts such as change, development and continuity, which probably are conducive to these kind of mental operations (Blow, 2009; Foster, Ashby, & Lee, 2008; Shemilt, 2000). Emphasizing the ‘otherness’ of the past can foster students’ awareness of time-bound differences, which may prevent them from drawing simplistic analogies that favors their own point of view (Boix-Mansilla, 2000). According to Rösen (2017), experiencing a discrepancy between past and present is even required to evoke the use of knowledge of the past as an orienting tool. All of this needs further research, but it seems plausible that sophisticated epistemic stances are conducive to the ability to connect the past, present and future and stimulate reflections on the benefits of history.

Rösen’s (2004) four modes of historical consciousness – traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic – were presented as a possible aid in supporting students making connections between past, present and future. The first three modes were clearly recognizable in the writings and statements of students, but none showed genetic historical consciousness, which is in line with the findings of a study conducted by Chapman & Facey (2004). According to Rösen, the four modes cannot be strictly separated because people often deal with the past in various ways simultaneously. However, it is tempting to see them as development stages ranging from naïve or ‘traditional’ epistemological ideas about history (the past account as authority) to sophisticated or ‘genetic’ ideas (the past account as a dynamic interplay between past, present and future). This has not been elaborated in this research because Rösen’s model does not seem to be without complications from a pedagogical point of view. It remains to be seen whether the genetic mode can be operationalized and whether pursuing this complex stance of historical consciousness is feasible in educational practice. The critical stance (i.e. challenging traditional narratives, drawing attention to deviations from exemplary rules) does not seem to represent a cognitive level like the other three modes, which made Rösen (2017) to exempt this stance as a separate level of competence in historical learning. Lee (2004) wonders whether the four modes of historical consciousness represent different levels of historical thinking. Students may distance

themselves from a traditional narrative – and thus show a critical historical awareness – because of what he has heard from others and not as a result of own research. Lee therefore advocates teaching disciplinary ideas and concepts within a framework of diachronic themes using general concepts in order to help students to make general inferences about societal issues. This resembles the case-comparative method developed and tested in the main study of this research. In short, Rösen's theory provides good starting points, but further research is needed to gain a better understanding of the complex interplay between historical consciousness, epistemological thinking and the use of generic concepts in making connections between the past, present and future.

7.4 Implications for the educational practice

In research about the pedagogy of history teaching, much attention is being paid to ways in which students learn to think and reason historically (e.g. Ericikan & Seixas, 2015; Lévesque, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008). This field of research is unmistakably valuable and useful, because historical thinking entails epistemological knowledge and skills that may foster democratic convictions and may help students to operate as critical citizens in society. Therefore, historical thinking plays an important role in relevant history teaching. However, relevant history teaching should also focus on something that is usually not the subject of research, i.e., the usefulness of factual historical content in view of citizenship education. Research into the societal relevance of content knowledge is much needed, because it may be assumed that in daily educational practice much time is being spent on teaching historical content, also if its relation to pedagogical functions – like qualification, socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2010) – of education is unclear.

The present research has yielded tools that practitioners and researchers can use to design curricula that allow students to use knowledge of the past to orientate on present and future. Pursuing this orienting function of history may help tackling the difficulties that many (young) students have in articulating the benefits of studying the past. It has become apparent that it is feasible to positively influence students' appraisals of the relevance of history, which is important because school-subject value awareness has a favorable effect on student motivation and engagement (Brophy, 1999; Eccles, 2004; Martin, 2003; Pintrich, 2003). This research has also yielded a valid and reliable

instrument (RHMS) for gauging students' appraisals of the relevance of history, in case teachers would like to evaluate the results of their efforts to renew the curriculum. To date, no such measurement instrument was available.

Applying the design principles that this research has provided is no sinecure. It requires a reconsideration of the goals and methods of teaching history. The present objectives of the history curriculum already provide important means that can be supportive of a new kind of history teaching. Framework knowledge of ten eras can help students to orientate in time while drawing analogies or distinguish longitudinal lines. A number of historical reasoning skills are very useful not only to distinguish causes and consequences or continuity and change but also to avoid anachronisms – a danger that may arise when comparing past and present. Yet important revisions of the history curriculum will be necessary to really honor the principles of relevant history teaching.

A traditional approach to teaching feudalism, for example, would focus on the replacement of Roman rule based on public institutions and values by a system of government based on personal loyalty of a vassal to a lord. Typically, the lessons would deal with the fall of Rome in 476, the rise and development of the Frankish empire, the coronation of Charlemagne in Rome in 800 and the division of the Carolingian empire between the three sons of Louis the Pious according to the Treaty of Verdun in 843. A relevant history teaching approach would focus on general mechanisms and concepts underpinning the phenomena of feudalism and vassalage, such as the personal allegiance in exchange for the protection of someone stronger, a phenomenon still occurring today in parts of the world where there is insufficient functioning public authority (e.g. warlords in countries like Somalia and Afghanistan or capos of the Mafia). In such an approach, making comparisons would be a core teaching activity in order to increase students' understanding of social and political phenomena. Based on experiences of teachers and students who participated in the studies of this research, implementing this pedagogical approach is feasible and worth pursuing. However, it presupposes a certain type of history education teachers are not familiar with.

Teachers are used to teaching chronologically ordered historical topics or in-depth knowledge of certain historical themes. They are not familiar with making comparisons between historical periods or past and present. They are not used to discerning the deeper conceptual frameworks behind historical phenomena. Yet, this is what they need to

create a new kind of history teaching. A history teaching in which students are confronted with intriguing questions like: ‘Why did the 1914 crisis result into a first world war and why did the 1962 Cuban missile crisis not end up in a third world war?’ ‘Is there a general pattern in revolutions, from moderate changes to radicalism to a final compromise of acceptance of dictatorial rule? – a question which could be studied in the context of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. The results of this research show that teaching such questions can positively affect students’ perceptions of the relevance of history.

In order to realize this kind of history teaching, changes are needed in the curriculum, in teacher education and in assessment methods, including national examinations. In the curriculum more time should be devoted to comparative historical themes and working with conceptual frameworks. In teacher education, student teachers should be thoroughly trained in analyzing historical content in such ways that comparisons can be made and factual phenomena can be interpreted in the contexts of enduring human issues. In school assessments and national examinations students should be tested on their ability to draw analogies and make comparisons between a range of historical situations. All of this would open up perspectives on a new type of history education, not only appropriate for the shaping of responsible citizens of 21st century democracies, but also solving the problems of teachers struggling to explain their students why they should learn about things about a distant past seemingly dead and gone.