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HERITAGE AS A RESOURCE FOR ENHANCING AND ASSESSING HISTORICAL THINKING

Reflections from the Netherlands

Carla van Boxtel, Maria Grever, and Stephan Klein

Introduction

In every country, there are historical issues that are vital in collective memory and repeatedly give rise to public debates. In the Netherlands, the transatlantic slave trade and its associated traces of the past aptly illustrate the sensitivity of such issues. It is only very recently and hesitantly that the Dutch government has acknowledged the historical role of the Dutch. For instance, in 2002 a national slavery monument was unveiled in Amsterdam and the annual commemoration of the Dutch abolition of slavery on July 1 implemented. It is only in the last ten to fifteen years that the topic has been integrated in both academic historiography and school history curricula, although specialists are still very critical. With respect to school history, they argue that the slave trade is often represented as a side story and that the emphasis is mainly on the abolition by the Dutch, ignoring the agency of enslaved people themselves (Van Stipriaan, 2007).

Whereas the Dutch involvement in slavery has been acknowledged at the national level, for many descendants it remains an emotionally charged issue. Part of the Afro-Caribbean Dutch community has demanded substantial “reparations” for what they call the “Black Holocaust”. The recent controversy in the Netherlands about the phenomenon “Black Pete”, which attracted international attention, can also be connected to the legacy of Dutch slavery. Every year in November, Dutch children eagerly look forward to the arrival of St. Nicholas and his Black Petes (Zwarte Pieten), coming from Spain on a steamboat with lots of presents. However, particularly since the 1980s with the arrival of migrants from the Dutch former colonies Suriname and the Antilles, some people began to protest against the performances of Black Petes: white men who paint their

faces black and wear wigs with black curly hair. But the Dutch cherish their traditions and heritage. Moreover, it is argued that the character of Black Pete has changed over time from a single servant who disciplines children to a variety of male and female Petes with various responsibilities and emotions. However, the outward appearance is still close to the (re)invented nineteenth century character, and evokes associations with a black slave.

What do students in high school learn about the ways people attribute significance to the past in everyday life and in the communities in which they participate? In this particular case, do they understand the sensitive nature of slavery history? Do they understand how their own identity and that of others affect the questions asked and the interpretations and evaluations given in the debates about the slavery monument and Black Pete? Are they aware that the attribution of significance changes over time? These questions all relate to an important key concept for the learning of history: historical significance. Recently, the upper level key-targets of the Dutch history curriculum that are assessed in a combination of school examinations and one central written examination, have been extended with two new elements under the header “significance nowadays”. The first target concerns understanding of the changing significance of the past for different groups of people in the past and in current society. The second target concerns the recognition of various present motives, values, and expectations when people make moral judgments about the past. In this chapter, we will focus on the first target, in particular on the changing significance of the past for different groups of people in *current society*.

The first target is particularly related to what has been called *present significance* (e.g. Cercadillo, 2006; Phillips, 2002; Seixas & Morton, 2013) or *memory-significance* (Lévesque, 2005; 2008). The “significance nowadays” targets of the Dutch history examination program actually focus attention on heritage practices in current society. Much has already been written about differences between disciplinary history and heritage or memory history (e.g. Bodnar, 1992; Lowenthal, 1999) and about the relationships between those practices (e.g. Lee, 2004; Rüsen, 2007). With “heritage”, we mean the selection and preservation of remains within a community—objects, monuments, trails, traditions, and memories—that people consider valuable for the present and the future. The construction and justification of identities play an important part in this process (Ashworth, Graham, & Tunbridge, 2007; Savenije, Van Boxtel, & Grever, 2014; Smith, 2006). When heritage—whether material or immaterial—becomes a resource for the learning and teaching of history, two questions arise. First, to what extent does school history itself reflect either a disciplinary or a heritage approach to the past? When school history is more like collective memorialization, not history (VanSledright, 2008), teaching present significance may result in enforcing students to appropriate particular meanings and to adapt to certain identities. Second, how can we use heritage as a resource for enhancing and assessing students’ understanding of present significance?

To address these questions, we start by describing the extent to which history education in Dutch upper secondary school (students aged 16 to 18) reflects a disciplinary historical approach to the past. Next, on a more general level, and illustrated with examples about the Dutch slave trade and slavery, we shall argue that in the context of a disciplinary school history both material and immaterial heritage may provide interesting entrances to assess and further enhance students' understanding of present significance.

Dutch History Education: Continuation of a Disciplinary Approach

In the Netherlands, debates about the teaching and assessment of historical thinking skills are no recent phenomenon. In the 1970s and 1980s teacher educator Leo Dalhuisen developed a history textbook with many assignments containing historical sources and higher level questions to enhance historical thinking and reasoning. In 1993, a new history examination program was implemented. For the first time, second order concepts (e.g. fact and objectivity, causes and consequences, continuity and change) were introduced to assess students' ability to think about history. The idea of present significance was rather implicit. Students should recognize that every time period "carries the past within her" and they should acknowledge that every individual, including the students themselves, is "bound by place and time". The central written examinations focused on in-depth knowledge of two alternating themes, while school examinations would assess other themes; each type of examination counting for 50%. After the implementation of the new history examination programs in the late 1990s (Van Boxtel & Grever, 2011), all Dutch history textbooks included a variety of historical sources and assignments to develop historical thinking skills. The implicit "present significance" targets, however, were not defined in more detail.

Not all history teachers were equally content with the increased emphasis on skills. Opponents argued that history education was not meant to create "little historians", and doubted whether these higher-order skills could be a realistic attainment target for all types of education. Furthermore, they argued that the emphasis on skills reduced the time to provide a historical overview. In the new millennium, two independently operating commissions suggested a historical overview that was subsequently implemented in the history curriculum (Van Boxtel & Grever, 2011; Wilschut, 2010). The first commission designed a chronological framework of ten eras including European and national developments. The framework consists of ten eras with round numbers, based on the pedagogical idea that this kind of periodizing is easier to memorize rather than historiographical standards. Each era carries three to six so-called key features, consisting of historical developments or structures, such as Romanization, Industrial Revolution, or decolonization. The assumption was that teachers and history textbook authors could choose dates, events, and persons themselves

to explain the key features, preventing the imposition of a master narrative. Furthermore, the designers of the framework emphasized a conceptualization of historical overview knowledge as "orientation knowledge": knowledge that can be used to situate historical and present events, persons, and developments in time (Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2012; Van Drie, Logtenberg, Van der Meijden, & Van Riessen, 2009). In 2015, the national central examination will assess this historical overview knowledge of ten eras for the first time. This shift is accompanied by a reformulated section in the curriculum on the assessment of historical thinking and reasoning skills. These are now organized in three clusters: Time, Interpretation, and Significance Nowadays. Chronological overview knowledge has to be assessed in combination with these historical thinking and reasoning skills. Hence, the disciplinary skills of history are still a substantial component of the subject of history in upper secondary school.

While the implementation of the chronological frame of reference was still disputed, under political pressure from the Dutch Parliament, the government required the development of a "genuine canon" of Dutch history and installed a second commission. This was the result of a call for a strengthening of national identity and cohesion through history, a development similar to other European countries (Grever & Stuurman, 2007). Despite the protests of historians and negative advice from the Council of State, in 2008 a canon of Dutch history and culture was implemented: *entoen.nu De canon van Nederland* (for an English translation see Van Oostrom, 2008). It received a semi-official status in primary education and the first three years of secondary education. Schools have to use fifty "windows" (specific items) from the canon to illustrate key features of the framework of ten eras. Museums, memorial centers, and heritage organizations increasingly provide schools with opportunities to use local and national heritage as a resource for teaching the windows of the canon (Grever, De Bruijn, & Van Boxtel, 2012). In contrast with the ten-era framework, the canon did not become part of the attainment targets in upper secondary education.

In sum, despite the pressure to assess chronological overview knowledge and a canon of national history, since the 1990s considerable attention to the development of historical thinking and reasoning skills has characterized the history curriculum in the upper level of Dutch secondary school. Interestingly enough, the implementation of the canon of national history and particularly the extension of the attainment targets for history in upper secondary education with skills related to present significance both contribute to a growing attention to heritage practices. When using (material and immaterial) heritage in an educational context that is characterized by a disciplinary approach to the past, as is the case in Dutch upper secondary school history, we cross the supposed boundaries between heritage and history and bring together different practices. Such boundary crossing may result in difficulties, but it also represents a potential to open up space for negotiation of meanings (see Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). The difficulties arise from the unpredictability of students' reactions and from the demands

of the knowledge base of teachers and their skills of guiding the process of negotiation in a particular context. Hawkey and Prior (2011) for example showed that the influence of students' ethnic identity on their positioning towards a national narrative is often diverse and ambiguous (Grever, Pelzer, & Haydn, 2011). Klein (2010) showed how teachers' knowledge, values, and skills impact their ability to deal with multiple and ambiguous perspectives in the classroom. These difficulties taken into account, we now turn to the potential of the boundary crossing, i.e. the question of how we can use heritage as a resource for enhancing and assessing students' understanding of present significance.

Using Heritage to Enhance and Assess Understanding of Present Significance

In the Netherlands, material and immaterial heritage is mainly used to enrich students' image of historical events and periods and to engage them in historical inquiry activities. The framework of the Dutch curriculum and in particular the "significance nowadays" targets do, however, provide room for several approaches to learning and assessing present significance through heritage. We will elaborate on two of these approaches, using examples from a recently developed historical website on the Dutch slave trade and slavery in the Atlantic world (Klein, 2013).

Multiple Perspectives: Fort Elmina and Slavery Monuments

The "significance nowadays" targets require that students come to understand different reasons why people in the present care about certain events, developments, or issues in history. Although in conceptualizations of historical thinking relevance for the present is often mentioned as one of the reasons to attribute significance (e.g. Lévesque, 2008; Phillips, 2002; Seixas, 2008), few scholars further elaborate this relevance for the present category. Lévesque (2008) uses the term "memory significance" when describing criteria that are less used in the community of historians: intimate interest, symbolic significance, and contemporary lessons. People can attribute significance because of a perceived connection to their ancestry, religion, culture, or nation. Something can gain symbolic significance when used for present-day national or patriotic justification. The past can also be used to draw analogies to guide present-day actions, usually away from "errors" of the past. Next to understanding why people attribute present significance, students also need to understand that what is considered significant varies from group to group. The website on slave trade and slavery in the Atlantic world contains two activities in which students can explore how people from a variety of backgrounds attribute significance to traces from the past.

The first activity is about Fort Elmina. This fort on the coast of Ghana is one of the most important locations connected with the transatlantic slave trade. Thousands of enslaved people from African kingdoms were transported from this place over the Atlantic. Today, it is visited by millions of tourists from various cultural backgrounds. It is a *lieu de mémoire* for many, but not with a fixed meaning. The learning assignment in the website takes this as a point of departure. First, students are introduced to four types of people who represent larger collectives. They are, first, tourists from Creole Suriname backgrounds who feel a close connection to the age of the transatlantic slave trade, being descendants of those who were transported. Students see an excerpt of a documentary by a Surinamese film director. The tourists perform a remembrance ritual by lighting some candles in a dark space within Fort Elmina. Second, students view a photo of the village near Fort Elmina, whose inhabitants profit from mass tourism by offering services such as transport in fishing boats. They are not descendants of slaves who were transported. Third, the website includes a photo of President Obama and his wife Michelle (and their children). Students learn that Obama does not descend from slaves in the Atlantic region, but that his wife does. Finally, students see the former Crown Prince Willem-Alexander (today: King) and Princess Maxima (today: Queen) of the Netherlands as official visitors in 2002. They represent a country that has been deeply involved in the slave trade; in fact, the Dutch owned Fort Elmina and coordinated the transportation across the Atlantic from this place. From the 1990s, there has been an active community in the Netherlands of people from Suriname and the former Dutch Antilles, who ask for recognition of this past. After this introduction, students are to read four citations pertaining to these persons. These show multiple perspectives. Students are then asked to link the citations to the persons. The target here is for pupils to learn how one and the same physical place elicits different views and emotions in the present (or very recent past), depending at least in some way on the personal backgrounds of the visitors (cultural, political, economic).

The second activity on the website anticipates a variety of student perspectives. A study of students' views on the significance of slavery heritage (Savenije, 2011; Savenije, Van Boxtel, & Grever, 2014) shows the various perspectives on present significance they bring into the classroom. Although the study researched the age group 13 to 14, students' responses provide a good picture of how various interpretations were related to their diverse backgrounds. Students mentioned, for example, that they could understand that descendants of enslaved people would consider it important to preserve historical remains of slave trade and slavery for the future. Some students of Surinamese and Antillean background made a connection to their own families. Other students considered slavery heritage important as an historical example of inequality.

The website assignment about slavery monuments works in two steps. First, students encounter photos of five slavery monuments without any information

regarding what these represent or where they are located. Students are asked to drag and drop these monuments in one of three boxes offering the following choices: (a) I like this as a monument to remember slavery; (b) I don't like it as a monument to remember slavery; or (c) I do not understand the monument. The rationale of this first step is to let students decide first on the aesthetic appearance of the monuments. Some are specific (slaves resisting or breaking chains) while others are more symbolic. For the next step, students are offered new photos of the monuments, now as objects where memory rituals are performed. They see flowers placed at some of them and ceremonies performed. They also learn what exactly the monuments are supposed to represent, where they are located, and when they were erected. The second step is the question: "To which monument do you relate the most? Explain your answer". The rationale here is that when they possess knowledge of the monuments' intended meanings, students may change their opinion. This provides possibilities for teachers to organize discussion about the engagement of students with the topic and its present significance for them, linked to their own social and cultural backgrounds. Students in upper secondary education are able to reflect on their own identity and the ways in which it affects their ideas (Savenije, 2014, pp. 126–127). However, organizing a discussion requires teachers to be knowledgeable of student diversity and skilled in guiding learning processes that are "negotiations of meaning" rather than the learning of facts.

An old African Statue: Biography and Changed Meanings

Heritage can also be used as a resource to enhance students' understanding that the significance that people attribute to phenomena, persons, events, or objects from the past may change over time. One assignment on the website works with a museum object: a very rare statue of a woman with an oracle scale on her head. Today, it occupies a high profile place in the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde in Leiden. It has done so, however, only since 1992 when its age was discovered. The object apparently was mentioned and illustrated in a book, published in the year 1700. The author explained it as the product of an unrefined hand, which resembled—so he thought—the ancient Egyptian goddess of Isis. He saw it on the chimney shelf of the Dutch West Indian Company (WIC) in the city of Groningen. This evidence shows how the object travelled through time and space, starting in the seventeenth century. It must have been bought from the Owo-people in the environs of the old city of Benin and then transported on a slave ship to the Dutch Republic. When the Dutch WIC was dissolved at the end of the eighteenth century, the statue ended up with a baker in Groningen, from whom it was bought by a former director of the museum in 1903. It was placed in the depot until its real history was discovered. The assignment asks students to reconstruct the whereabouts of this statue in four steps and invites them to reflect on its changed meanings, when changing from owner to owner. It represents a biographical approach, suited to also foster learning about continuity and change.

Not only objects, but also monuments have their own biographies that interconnect with larger historical developments. Students do not always understand *memorials* as a reflection of the times and values in which they were built (Nemko, 2009; Seixas & Clark, 2004). Therefore, students must also learn to consider monuments as reflecting a certain stance and as a product of their time. A study by Nemko (2009) shows that although pupils practiced a critical approach to historical sources such as documents and pictures in the history classroom, they had difficulties with considering monuments as reflecting a particular stance. Understanding of present significance also includes the ability to critically assess the narratives that are constructed around objects, sites, buildings, paintings, archival documents, or other remains of the past that are selected as heritage. Enhancing historical inquiry and reasoning activities related to heritage can make students aware of possible simplifications, presentism, and inaccuracies.

The activities provided by the website are meant to enhance students' understanding of the variety and changing perspectives on the significance of a particular history. The aim of the website activities is not to assess this type of understanding. In particular, students' reflection on the way they personally relate to a particular heritage is difficult to assess. However, assessment of students' understanding of *present* significance should be preceded by activities such as those provided by the website or a visit to a museum, monument, or site of remembrance. When students have explored different (including their own) and changing perspectives on the significance of particular remains of the past, they can be asked, for example, to construct an oral presentation or write a reflection that displays their understanding. In that case, one needs to elaborate a rubric specifying levels of understanding present significance. A paper-and-pencil assessment task could present two or three different perspectives in the debate about the erection of the national slavery monument or about Black Pete. Students could be asked to identify and explain different or changing perspectives within the historical context (also using their chronological overview knowledge). Or, when no background information is provided about the authors, students could be asked to identify the kind of extra information needed in order to better understand the debate. It might even be possible to develop multiple-choice questions in which a heritage practice becomes a resource; for example, in what VanSledright (2014) describes as upside-down weighted multiple-choice items in which several answers are possible but the most compelling option receives most points.

Conclusions and Discussion

Heritage is often associated with essentialist narratives focused on self-confirmation, patrimonial pride, and a lack of historical distance. From this perspective heritage does not seem to be an attractive "partner" for history education that aims at historical thinking and reasoning abilities. However, students regularly come

across heritage in everyday life outside school and become participants in heritage practices themselves. In many school subjects the question is raised as to how to connect learning in school to the contexts in which knowledge and skills taught need to be applied. We consider heritage as such as a context for history education. When we want to achieve transfer of students' historical thinking and reasoning ability to situations external to the school setting, we need to think about heritage as a potential resource for history learning. In this chapter, we explored how heritage might be a resource to enhance and assess students' understanding of present significance. It is self-evident that to enhance this understanding, school history itself needs to adopt a disciplinary approach allowing for a dynamic notion of heritage (Ashworth, Graham, & Tunbridge, 2007; Smith, 2006). Heritage must be viewed as a continuous process of selection and meaning making related to our (changing) orientations towards the future. In this chapter, we first discussed the extent to which history education in Dutch upper secondary school reflects a disciplinary approach. We concluded that, despite the pressure to teach a chronological overview and a canon of national history, the official attainment targets, history textbooks, and national examinations positively contribute to a practice in which relatively much attention is paid to historical thinking and reasoning skills. In this context, Dutch historians who work as history teachers or educators in museums, archives, or heritage organizations have an important role. They can be considered mediators who must manage and combine multiple, divergent discourses and practices in order to further promote students' historical thinking and understanding.

Our examples showed how material and immaterial heritage can be used as instructional resources. Students can explore how the past is used in the present by different people in different ways. They also learn how perspectives on significance are shaped by identity and change over time. When they are stimulated to think about how they themselves attribute significance, they can learn something about how their own identity can play a role. When teaching about such issues, we need to be careful. People's identities may play a role in how they attribute significance, but they do not necessarily result in particular perspectives. Negotiating between different perspectives on the past is a difficult task. It requires teachers with deep content knowledge and the skills to organize a genuine dialogue by asking questions, listening to answers, and prompting students to make sense of differences of opinions by taking into account the underlying knowledge, experiences, and values of people in the past and in the present.

Heritage can also be used as a resource for assessing students' understanding of what is called "present significance". The most obvious way is a visit to a museum, monument, or heritage site, or a research project in which students have the opportunity to explore how people today or in the past attributed significance. This can be done by a written reflection or an oral presentation. However, a well-designed case about a particular heritage practice might also be included in test items. Further research is needed to describe in more detail what it means

to understand present significance and what subtypes can be discerned. In order to examine students' progression, we also need to discern levels of understanding. Finally, more research is needed to further explore the potential of heritage as a resource to teach historical thinking. We believe that crossing the supposed boundaries between heritage and history and bringing together different practices will open up new possibilities for enhancing historical thinking and reasoning.

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