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Reflections on the FUER model of historical thinking

1. Introduction

Theoretical concepts, such as historical consciousness and historical thinking, play an important role in the field of history education. They are used to reflect on aims, content and pedagogic approaches and are used in teacher training, curriculum development, research on the teaching and learning of history and the development of new pedagogic approaches. The international literature on history education shows that there is a range of overlapping but different definitions of historical thinking and related concepts (e.g. historical literacy, historical argumentation, historical reasoning). This is not surprising, because conceptualizations are socially constructed and situated. In this contribution I reflect on the FUER model, a theoretical model of historical thinking. The development of the FUER model is informed by theories of historical narrative and historical consciousness developed by German philosophers of history, but must also be understood in the context of the comparative performance studies of PISA. The PISA programme enhanced interest in the formulation of performance standards and the definition of competences. The competency definition of Weinert (2001), which is used in the PISA programme, became dominant in the German field of education and also underpins the definition of the historical thinking competency in the FUER model. Competences are learnable cognitive abilities and skills to solve particular problems in variable situations. They not only include the ability to solve problems in variable situations, but also the motivational readiness to apply knowledge and skills. Using this psychology-based competency concept to conceptualize historical thinking, the authors of the FUER model connected the discourse of the philosophy of history to the discourse of educational psychology and the concept of learning (see also Horlacher, 2018). Making this connection has contributed to the international discourse about historical thinking. German conceptualizations of historical thinking and the underlying theory of historical consciousness and historical narrative have been discussed and used by several researchers who work in other 'strands' of historical thinking research (e.g. Lévèsque, 2017; Lévèsque & Clark, 2018; Duquette, 2015; Seixas, 2016; van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018).

In this contribution, I discuss the competences that are part of the FUER model. I will highlight strengths, but also some challenges I see for further theoretical reflection and research. I will particularly address the model's potential to become a practical theory. A practical theory helps to describe and explain practice (a theory about practice) or to innovate practice (a theory for practice), for example, innovation of the curriculum or instructional materials. My reflections must be understood within the context I conduct my own research. That research takes place in the context of Dutch history education. In the Netherlands too, historical consciousness became a key category that underpins the history curriculum. But developments in the United

States and the United Kingdom left their traces in the Dutch curriculum as well. In the 1970s and 1980s, the history educator Leo Dalhuisen introduced historical skills and a form of inquiry-based learning (van Boxtel & Grever, 2011). This approach was inspired by the work of American scholars in the New Social Studies projects, such as Edward Fenton (1967) and the development of ‘new history’ in the United Kingdom initiated by Jeanette Coltham and John Fines (1971). Primary sources and historical accounts were used in case studies in which students could develop understanding of the structures that lay beneath the discipline of history. The idea was that students should ‘do history’. Since then, second order concepts, such as change, causation and evidence (in Dutch these concepts were called ‘structuurbegrippen’), and related skills have been an important component of the curriculum, although since the late 1990s there has been a renewed emphasis on a chronological frame of reference to support students’ orientation in time. My colleague Jannet van Drie and I started our research on historical reasoning in this ‘doing-history’ tradition. Our first studies focused on students’ historical reasoning during collaborative inquiry tasks (van Drie, 2005). Our research on historical reasoning builds upon empirically-grounded conceptualizations of historical thinking and reasoning that were developed in the United Kingdom, Spain, the United States and Canada (see van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018). Furthermore, it builds upon the model of domain-specific expertise development of Alexander (2003). It is mainly from a learning sciences perspective, with an emphasis on (socially situated) learning processes and the design of learning environments, that I will reflect on the FUEER model. When I refer to the FUEER model, I refer to the model «Kompetenzen Historischen Denkens» and the underlying process model «Geschichtsbewusstsein dynamisch» as presented and explained in the publication *Kompetenzen historischen Denkens erfassen. Konzeption, Operationalisierung und Befunde des Projekts ‘Historical Thinking – Competencies in History (HiTCH)’* (Trautwein et al., 2017). First, I will discuss the model. Second, I will discuss the sub-competences that are distinguished within the model.

2. A process model: a coherent set of historical thinking competences

The conceptualization of historical consciousness as a dynamic process, provides a description of the processes involved when an individual engages in historical investigation in order to orientate in time. Previous conceptualizations of historical consciousness (see Bracke et al., 2014) might have been more difficult to apply to the teaching of history, because they were less explicit on the activities or abilities involved in the process of historical meaning-making, and on what it exactly means to connect ‘interpretations of the past, an understanding of the present and expectations for the future’ in terms of teaching and learning processes. Although several scholars have made major contributions to our understanding of historical thinking by defining key historical thinking concepts and related strategies, most of these conceptualizations do not say much about how these concepts and strategies are interrelated. Because the German FUEER model of historical thinking is based upon a

process model of historical consciousness, the sub-competences described are clearly related to one another. This process model might be useful to get a better picture of how teachers advance students' historical consciousness through engaging them in historical thinking. To what extent and how do lessons or lesson units reflect the suggested coherence? Do teachers engage their students in the formulation of historical questions (grounded in their uncertainties or interest)? Are students investigating these questions through a process of re- and/ or de-construction using historical concepts and methods? Do teachers promote reflection on the insights students have acquired into the nature of history, everyday society or their own or others' identity in order to support orientation? In the Netherlands there are no studies that give a clear picture of how teachers teach history. It seems to me that, although many Dutch history teachers engage their students in re-construction and de-construction activities, it is often not clear for students why answering a particular question is meaningful, and the questions investigated are often not connected to *students'* interest and uncertainty. Furthermore, I expect that there is not much reflection on how the insights that are the result of historical investigations might be meaningful for understanding current society, for oneself and for others and to shape expectations for the future. More empirical research is needed to better understand how teachers engage students in historical thinking processes and try to develop students' historical consciousness.

Van Merriënboer and Kester (2008) argue that complex cognitive skills require authentic, complex, 'whole' tasks instead of atomistic approaches in which complex contents and tasks are reduced to simpler elements that can be easily taught to students by presentation or practice. From this perspective, explicit instruction and repeated practice on sub-competences, need to be embedded in more complex, whole tasks. This might also be applicable for the historical thinking competences. Engaging in de-construction without any experienced need to investigate the past, is not meaningful. Learning about the concept of nation, should not be an aim in itself, but becomes meaningful when creating or analyzing a historical narrative. Although the HiTCH-test has been developed to assess distinct sub-competences, in the history classroom a holistic or 'whole-task' approach in teaching might be more meaningful and effective than an atomistic approach.

3. *Fragekompetenz*: empirically-based and theoretical conceptualizations

In the FUER model, the ability to ask historical questions is related to Rösen's notion of 'the need for orientation' as a fundamental component of historical consciousness (Trautwein et al., 2017). A historical question is asked when experiencing uncertainty or interest. In order to answer the question, narratives are re-constructed or de-constructed, which results in an own narrative and meaning making. In history education research, the competence to ask historical questions gained much less attention than other historical competences, probably because in most conceptualizations of historical thinking, questioning is not defined as one of the core

components. The ability to question is emphasized by researchers who also work with a process model, such as researchers who focus on the process of historical inquiry or on historical reasoning processes. Voet and De Wever (2017) made an inventory of the literature on cognitive processes during inquiry learning. Questions are asked to delineate the objective of the search for information and to handle missing information. Wineburg (1998), for example, mentions the specification of ignorance. Partial understanding is addressed by expressing puzzlement, asking questions or specifying gaps in knowledge. In our conceptualization of historical reasoning, the asking of historical questions is considered an 'engine' of historical reasoning processes (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008; Logtenberg, 2012). Questions are the beginning of a reasoning process about aspects of continuity and change, causes and consequences of historical events or differences and similarities between historical phenomena or periods. However, historical questions can also develop in the context of or as a result of a reasoning, for example, when a student wants to contextualize (e.g. How did people back then thought about democracy?). From a socio-constructivist perspective on learning, learning processes are always understood in the context of learner characteristics (in this case, students' resources for historical thinking and reasoning) and the social context in which the learning takes place. In his studies on students' questioning, Albert Logtenberg (2012) investigated how prior knowledge, emotions and interest shaped the asking of questions of students in upper secondary education when reading an introductory text about the Industrial Revolution. Logtenberg concluded that a historical question is a product or a (potential) start of historical reasoning while trying to put into words a conflict or deficit in prior knowledge about historical constructs, phenomena or developments. Furthermore, a historical question can be embedded in affective processes such as interest or emotions that may drive further engagement in historical reasoning. This conceptualization has much in common with the way the question asking competency has been defined in the FUER model and how it is assessed in the HiTCH-test. Schreiber et al. (2006) defined the competence of asking historical questions as the ability to formulate questions out of interest or uncertainty grounded in a need to orientate, taking into account the limitations of constructing historical knowledge (e.g. some questions can never be completely answered). The HiTCH test includes items in which students have to identify which question fits with a particular interest or uncertainty. To conclude, Logtenberg's conceptualization of the ability to ask historical questions which was underpinned by empirical research and cognitive science theory, turns out to have much in common with the FUER conceptualization that is grounded in Rösen's theoretical elaboration of historical consciousness. As an important difference, however, the FUER conceptualization, emphasizes that historical questions originate in everyday life within a historical culture. This brings us to a challenge for history teachers. How can we create opportunities for students to formulate questions out of historical interest or uncertainty? This historical interest and 'need to know' experience is not always present in the history classroom. Some researchers argue that history teachers need to enhance cognitive conflict (triggering a need to engage in the process of historical investigation), for example, by confront-

ing students with actions of historical actors they consider strange from their present-day perspective (Huijgen & Holthuis, 2015; Havekes, 2015). Others, argue that student historical interest can be enhanced by linking history to present or persistent societal issues, including generic human issues of justice and injustice or wealth and poorness (e.g. Barton & Levstik, 2004; Brush & Saye, 2014; van Straaten, Wilschut & Oostdam, 2016). When a question is asked in the classroom or in textbooks, students are often not informed about or given the opportunity to discuss the uncertainty or interest that underpins the question. More research is needed that investigates how students can be informed about the origins and functions of historical questions and how students can be supported to formulate questions that originate in their own interest and uncertainties.

4. *Methodenkompetenz*: re-construction and de-construction of historical narratives

This competency combines a large set of knowledge and skills related to the finding and analysis of historical sources and the re-construction or de-construction of narratives. Many of these skills have been investigated in empirical studies. Wineburg (2001), for example, defined heuristics historians use to critically examine historical documents and images, such as contextualization, close reading, sourcing and corroboration. Others focused on methods that can be used to construct historical explanations (Voss & Carretero, 1998; Chapman, 2016; Stoel, van Drie & van Boxtel, 2017). These studies provide an in-depth elaboration of the heuristics used to investigate the past and to construct different types of interpretations. The FUER conceptualizations contains two aspects that are different from other conceptualizations: the focus on historical narrative and the distinction between competences related to the re-construction and de-construction of historical narratives. The FUER model uses the term historical narrative. This concept might be more inclusive for the domain of history than concepts such as ‘historical argumentation’ or ‘historical reasoning’, which focus on a particular type or aspect of historical narrative. Although elements of reasoning and argumentation are always present in historical narratives because they have to make the story credible (Rüsen, 2005, p. 18), interpretations of the past are not always communicated in the form of a reasoning or an argumentative text. Stories, visual representations, plays or re-enactment are also used to communicate interpretations of the past (see also Grever & Adriaansen, 2017). More theoretical elaboration and empirical studies are needed to define the skills needed to create or de-construct a particular type of historical narrative or representation. Another characteristic feature of the the FUER model, is the distinction between re-construction and de-construction of historical narratives. Most research on historical thinking focuses on the *construction* of a historical argumentation or reasoning. A critical examination of historical narratives, is, however, important to learn about the nature of history, but also to facilitate the understanding that historical representations in newspapers, on television and the Internet, in museums, or movies, are biased, some-

times unsupported by historical evidence or excluding counter narratives. In order to de-construct students need to identify the building blocks of a narrative, but also the perspectives that are present and left out, and the meaning that is attributed by the author. Furthermore, it asks for a critical examination of the facts presented (are they in line with the evidence) and the consistency and coherence of the narrative (see also Schreiber, 2007). To what extent is it a plausible explanation? Is there attention for counternarratives? This can be practiced with written accounts, but also with historical film, museum exhibitions or online articles. History didactics could be enriched with more examples of what this de-construction process can look like in concrete history lessons and how teachers can support the development of de-construction competences.

On a theoretical level the question arises to what extent de-construction competences differ from re-construction competencies. In our conceptualization of historical reasoning, we depart from the idea that the asking of historical questions, contextualization, the use of substantive and metahistorical concepts, historical argumentation and the critical examination of historical sources (which include not only 'primary' historical documents and images, but also contemporary authors' texts) are activities that students engage in when *constructing* a reasoning but also when *evaluating* a given reasoning. Our conceptualization of historical reasoning is rooted in our analysis of students' reasoning in the context of writing essays, inquiry learning in small groups and whole-class discussions. Thus, most of this research focused on contexts in which students were asked to construct a reasoning (for example, a historical explanation or an argumentation about historical significance) using multiple sources. The research on reading and writing history shows that re-construction and de-construction processes are often very much intertwined (e.g. De La Paz, 2005). Historians de-construct historical accounts in order to construct a historical narrative. Re-construction activities might be important to develop de-construction competences and the other way around. More theoretical reflection and empirical research is needed to better conceptualize the distinction between re-construction and de-construction competences. Furthermore, existing descriptions of historical skills that are at issue during the investigation of historical questions and can be found in the international research literature might be helpful to provide a more domain-specific elaboration of the rather broad and generic construction and de-construction competences.

5. *Sachkompetenz*: categories of knowledge

The 'subject-matter competence' includes the ability to use knowledge of substantive historical concepts (concepts that can be used in different contexts and situations) and second order concepts and procedures. The ability to use knowledge of procedures seems to overlap with the methodological competence. The ability to construct, for example, a historical explanation (methodological competence), is difficult to distinguish from the ability to apply knowledge of the second order concept historical

causation (subject-matter competence). VanSledright and Limón (2006, and discussed in Carretero, Castorina and Levinas, 2013) made a useful distinction between second order conceptual knowledge (e.g. ‘cause’, ‘change’, ‘progress’, ‘historical context’, ‘evidence’) and procedural knowledge, for example, knowledge of how to evaluate sources, to interpret an event within its historical context or elaborate an argument. Voss and Wiley (2006) distinguished three categories of procedural knowledge: evaluation of evidence, analysis and construction of narratives, and reasoning and problem solving. From this point of view, procedural knowledge would better fit the methodological competence.

The ‘*Sachkompetenz*’ does not include specific knowledge; knowledge of individual cases and contexts. Körber (2015) explains it with the underlying competency concept. A competency refers to the ability to solve *new* problems. Competences need to be applicable in new situations. The application of more specific knowledge for solving problems in the domain of history is therefore not rated as a competency. It seems, however, difficult to draw a line between case-specific historical knowledge and knowledge that can be used in different contexts. What do we consider a new context or situation? Knowledge of the construction and dismantling of the Berlin wall is knowledge of specific events, but this knowledge can be applied in a variety of new contexts. For example, when discussing the implications of the current construction of walls to keep people out, such as along the US border with Mexico or at the Westbank, a comparison with the construction of the Berlin wall can be useful.

In the Netherlands, there is a debate about the substantive knowledge (e.g. development of agricultural societies, the Enlightenment, rise of feminism) that should be part of a historical (chronological) frame of reference that can support students when constructing or evaluating historical interpretations. In the framework that we developed for the analysis of historical reasoning, the use of substantive knowledge is a key component. This knowledge is used, for example, to contextualize, explain or compare. When evaluating the quality of students’ historical reasoning it would be rather strange not to look at the way students use historical facts, concepts and chronology. I think that including the use of first order knowledge in our conceptualization has made it more practical, because teachers aim at both the development of students’ first order knowledge and the development of historical skills. In schools it is not very common to assess far transfer. When teachers primarily aim at the assessment of historical thinking competences instead of knowledge of specific historical events, persons and processes, they still teach about specific historical topics and practice historical skills within the context of these topics. Subsequently, they assess the competences using the same topic, but asking different questions or using different historical sources. Although assessment that measures ‘far transfer’ would enrich the practice of history education and might be a powerful tool to demonstrate the usability of historical thinking abilities, when focusing on near transfer, the ability to use first order knowledge should not be disregarded.

In the UK, researchers introduced the idea of ‘powerful knowledge’. Michael Young (2008), a sociologist of education, describes powerful knowledge as the knowledge that gives intellectual power to those who have access and that provides more

reliable explanations and new ways of thinking about the world. This knowledge provides students with the language for participation in political and moral debates. From this perspective, Counsell (2017) has argued that teaching knowledge of second order concepts without careful attention for substantive knowledge excludes too many children from the debates to which disciplinary understanding ought to give them access.

Future research could focus on how different types of substantive knowledge shape students' ability to apply procedural and second order conceptual knowledge successfully, on the definition of a progression model for knowledge of historical concepts and instructional strategies that contribute to the ability to apply substantive knowledge in both new and familiar contexts.

6. *Orientierungskompetenz*: a rationale for engaging students in historical thinking

A central element in the FUER model entails the competence to orientate. This competence refers to the ability to utilize interpretations of the past (the insights that are the result of the re-construction or de-construction process) for the practical purpose of orientation. The competence includes the ability to adjust one's understanding of history or historical consciousness, 'picture of the past', the present or expectations for the future. Defining this competence, the FUER model emphasizes an aspect of historical thinking that is less elaborated in other conceptualizations of historical thinking. Reflection on how a constructed historical narrative or evaluation of a given narrative contributes to an understanding of ourselves, the world around us and our ideas about what can or should be achieved in the present or future, is highly relevant when aiming at meaningful history education. However, some questions also arise.

First, in theories on learning and teaching it is not common to conceptualize the change of one's knowledge, understanding or (epistemological) beliefs as a competency. Such change would be described in terms of, for example, 'knowledge transformation', 'conceptual change' or 'meaningful learning'. What kind of knowledge, skills and dispositions are needed to be able to *change* your understanding or to develop ideas about the future? Let's consider the following example. A student is interested in local traditions and investigates how they originated. As a result of this investigation, the student concludes that what is presented as an 'old tradition' is actually a quite recent invention. As a consequence, at a later moment, when hearing or reading about a tradition, she asks the question how and when the tradition originated. Furthermore, she expects that the tradition will be subject of change in the future. What enabled this student to use the information gathered during her investigation for personal orientation in the present and the future? Especially the *willingness* to revise one's notions ('traditions have a long history'), the ability to remember previously acquired historical knowledge, and willingness to use this historical knowledge in a new situation, might be relevant. This willingness might be developed by showing students

how historical knowledge is used by people in society and by enhancing classroom discussions or the writing of research reports in which students are asked to reflect on what they personally learned from the investigation. This is in line with the suggestion of Nordgren (2016), who argued that the analysis of the role and function of history in contemporary life should be an important aim of learning history. From this point of view, the tasks that were developed in the HiTCH-project to measure the competence to orientate are very interesting and need to be further developed and tested, also internationally. It seems, however, difficult to assess the orientation competence, because it is difficult to define criteria for the quality of this orientation, especially when it is about moral judgment. A categorisation in types of orientation might be more helpful than a categorisation in terms of levels.

The FUER model includes a broad variety of ways in which the results of a historical investigation can be used to orientate. More theoretical reflection is needed on the relation with theories on the ability to construct moral judgments, conceptual change, the ability to take other perspectives and epistemological beliefs. The attention for the relation between past, present and future also entails a link with other subjects, such as citizenship, geography, social science and philosophy education. In other subjects too, educators not only think about how to prepare students for the future society, but also about how to enhance reflection on what this future might look like (see, for example, Hicks, 2006). Collaboration with researchers from other subjects might be interesting.

Finally, when we conceive historical consciousness as the ability to orientate in time, it is urgent to do more research on *how* people (particularly young people) use their understanding of the past to orientate in the present and think about the future. In the field of history education research such studies are still scarce.

7. Conclusions

In this contribution I highlighted several strengths of the FUER model. The model is well embedded in theories about historical consciousness and historical narrative and makes those theories more practical for practitioners in history education. The process model results in a coherent set of sub-competences. The model also adds to the history education literature by defining the ability to ask historical questions, the ability to de-construct historical narratives and the ability to use historical knowledge for personal orientation in time. Furthermore, it contributes to national and international debates about the aims and outcomes of history education. Why should we teach historical thinking? Several scholars have argued that historical thinking can enrich students' intellectual, critical thinking skills, develops the ability to deal with multiple narratives, to understand processes of continuity and change, to read and write history, etcetera. The FUER model suggests that these insights and abilities actually contribute to an overarching ability, the ability to orientate in time, which is a contribution to both personal development and citizenship (see also Lévesque & Clark, 2018). The FUER model connects historical thinking to both the academic discipline of his-

tory and to historical culture. Defining historical thinking in terms of concrete behaviour facilitates its use in history education.

More theoretical analysis and empirical research is needed to provide more elaborate, precise and domain-specific descriptions of the knowledge, skills and dispositions that are involved in the sub-competences of historical thinking and the instructional strategies that have potential to promote competency development. Exchange, discussion and collaboration in the international community of researchers can advance this research on historical thinking.

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