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Complex outcomes of recontextualised history: comparing lower secondary national curricula in Sweden, England and Finland

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the history curricula in Sweden, England and Finland from the perspective of curricular aims and content. Three approaches to the recontextualisation of knowledge in the curricula were employed. First, a comparative analysis of the aims of the three curricula was carried out using a simple binary contrast between history for its own sake and history for other purposes. Second, the curricula were re-examined by drawing on the articulation of history-education-specific aims, using a range of concepts organized into eight categories. Third, a three-term articulation of educational goals, namely qualification, socialisation, and subjectification, was applied to the curricula. Following the analyses of curricular aims, a comparative analysis of curriculum content is presented. The results show that while there were similarities regarding the curricular aims, there were also clear differences between the documents. The Swedish curriculum adopts a multifaceted approach with an emphasis on historical consciousness. The English document conveys a coherent national narrative, while simultaneously engaging in historical inquiry. The Finnish aims focus on interpreting history and apprenticing towards active citizenship. The findings also suggest that history may not have an entirely weak grammar. Finally, the results are discussed in terms of powerful knowledge and its 'power to' aspect.

Introduction

School subjects, such as physics and history, always offer contradictory possibilities (Young, 2013, p. 106).

One avenue for these 'contradictory possibilities' is the (national) curriculum, where a number of decisions have been made to determine the aims and content of each school subject. Bernstein (1990, 2000) developed the idea of recontextualisation to analytically examine the way knowledge transforms during these processes. In recontextualisation, knowledge is appropriated, relocated, refocused and related from one context to another, from the site of production (i.e. academic disciplines) to educational settings such as the curriculum and the classroom. Inherent in Bernstein´s framework are power struggles between agents and stakeholders, who may have conflicting aims and interests regarding what is relevant for the school subject (Bernstein, 1990). Thus, constructing a curriculum or a curriculum subject is both a societal and a disciplinary issue, and as a result, curriculum policies encompass diverse and sometimes conflicting interests and trends (Hopmann, 2003).

Apart from identifiable agents a less tangible societal level often influences the way in which the purpose of a school subject is perceived in different educational contexts at different times. History as a school subject may be particularly vulnerable to societal pressures and external influences because, as Lowenthal (2000) noted, history is 'amateurish' in the sense that the research results of the discipline are easy to access. As a result, people may erroneously infer from the easy accessibility of the products of the discipline that historiography can be made by an amateur. This accessibility is related to Bernstein's (2000) concept of (knowledge) boundaries. It is connected to history´s horizontal knowledge structure and disciplinary grammar, which is considered to be rather weak (Bernstein, 2000; Nordgren, 2021). This differentiates history from mathematics, for example. The constant use of history as a tool for political argumentation is often viewed as an example of its easy accessibility (see e.g. von Tunzelmann, 2021).

Depending on the interpretation, the word 'history' can refer to investigations into the past, to narratives about the past, to the forces driving and shaping human collective existence, or simply to things that are dead and gone, and of no interest to the concerns of the present. The discipline of history, in turn, can be defined in terms of the object it investigates (the past), the methods it employs (such as cliometrics or microhistory), or other considerations such as the functions that the consumption of its products might be held to serve in the present—including identity affirmation, orientation in the flow of time, aesthetic absorption, or the constitution of 'historical imaginaries' that organize power and temporality (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Paul, 2015; Rüsen, 2005; Satia, 2020).

History´s transformation for educational purposes has undergone many phases and trends. In the 19th century and beyond, the subject of history was understood as a vehicle for constructing nation states and the shared identities of their citizens (Berger, 2017). Typically, teaching focused on substantive or first-order knowledge, in other words on answering questions of 'who', 'what', 'when', and 'how'. This often meant an emphasis on political history and on the memorization of names and dates (VanSledright & Limón, 2006). In the 1960s and 1970s, a disciplinary shift took place in the United States, England and Germany, resulting in the emergence of disciplinary history traditions such as historical thinking (Seixas, 2017), still relevant in the present day. These traditions will be explored in more detail in the theoretical framework. However, the very emergence and co-existence of these multiple disciplinary traditions suggests that scholars and history educators have actively recontextualised history.

This paper investigates how history has been recontextualised in the (intended) lower secondary curricula of England, Sweden, and Finland. The focus is on the stated aims and content of the subject, which are the outcomes of a recontextualisation process and reflect the perceived purposes of education in that particular context. While our approach is comparative, we also take into account that the contradictory possibilities of school subjects, as pointed out by Young (2013), may exist not only between but also within curricula. To analyse the curricular aims, we employ three different theoretical frameworks: a framing of the aims of history through an opposition between historical and practical approaches to the production of knowledge about the past explored by philosophers of history such as Oakeshott (1999) and historical theorists such as White (2014); a frame developed to analyse aims in the context of history education, developed by Chapman et al. (2018); and Biesta´s framework on wider educational goals (Biesta, 2009, 2021). In addition, we use the concept of powerful knowledge to reflect on our findings.

Our data consists of three national curricula, all of which were drawn up in the 2010s, at a time when the role of knowledge in the curriculum and education was gaining more ground, often referred to as the 'knowledge turn' (see e.g. Chapman, 2021). Whereas the educational trend around the turn of the millennium emphasized 21st century skills, compet
encies and the experiences of knowers (Willbergh, 2015), the knowledge turn, with its idea of 'bringing knowledge back in' (Young, 2008), advocated a focus on the role of and relationship between knowledge, disciplines and school subjects. The concept of powerful knowledge can be seen as one of the major theoretical contributions to and of the knowledge turn. It has generated a robust discussion not only among curriculum theorists (e.g. Hordern, 2018; Young & Muller, 2016), but also among subject-

specific experts such as history educators (e.g. Bertram, 2019; Chapman, 2021). As we consider powerful knowledge useful for looking into the role and purpose of knowledge, we employ the concept, and particularly its aspect of 'power' at the end of this paper, to reflect on the extent to which, and for what purpose, curricula provide students with 'power to', and to what extent they set limits on students´ interpretations of history and thus exercise 'power over' (see Muller & Young, 2019). We begin by introducing the theoretical approaches chosen before moving on to the methodological choices and procedures.

Pathways to understanding the recontextualisation of history

Bernstein (1990, 2000) distinguishes two fields in which knowledge is recontextualised: the official recontextualising field (ORF), where agents such as state departments construct curricula, and the pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF), where, for example, textbook authors and teacher educators struggle for the power to define the nature of a school subject. Of the two, the ORF is more relevant to the curricular context. The work carried out in the ORF should not be understood merely as a technical exercise to make knowledge understandable to students: as Young (2021) states, 'a curriculum is more than the stipulation of knowledge—it is knowledge that can become part of the "consciousness of pupils"' (p. 245). Furthermore, a school subject also needs an idea of the purpose of knowledge, something that motivates the studies beyond the boundaries of the specific knowledge domain (Deng, 2020). In an attempt to define this purpose of knowledge, the ORF is influenced by several agents, interest groups, as well as general societal values and educational trends. All of these can be considered extrinsic rather than intrinsic in relation to specific fields of knowledge, such as history.

We use the distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' to explore the relations between different expressions of aims in the curriculum, in other words the end result of ORF´s recontextualisation process. This distinction relates to one found in many philosophical explorations of the nature of historical engagement with the past, distinguishing between what is inherent and proper in this field of activity and what is extraneous to it. The philosopher Michael Oakeshott distinguished between what he called a 'historical' and a 'practical' approach to the past (1999), differentiating between them as approaches that approached the past in a disinterested way, without wider agendas, motivated principally by a desire to understand the past for its own sake, and a 'practical' approach to the past, approaching past worlds from a present-centred perspective, shaped for practical purposes in the present (e.g. building a sense of identity in time). This distinction is a controversial one: the notion that one might 'know' the past in a way that subtracts from one's own identity and position in time has been criticized by postmodernists like Jenkins as 'Ownsakism' (1997), and has been shown not to apply straightforwardly to historians in empirical settings (Gottlieb & Wineburg, 2012).

Nevertheless, the distinction has wide currency in both popular and academic history: prominent contemporary historical theorists have used the distinction to frame orientations to history (White, 2014); the distinction is mirrored in widely used distinctions between 'history' or 'heritage' on the one hand, and 'collective memory' on the other (Lowenthal, 1985, 1998; Wertsch, 2002). The distinction is also present in the widespread notion of 'presentism', usually seen as a vice that historians should avoid (a notion critically explored in J. Miles & Gibson, 2022), and in the notion—widespread in debates in the public sphere—of how the past should (or should not) be 'written' and 're-written' (see the introduction to von Tunzelmann, 2021).

Different traditions of history education, touched upon above, offer yet another perspective on the transformation of history. The Anglo-American tradition, which focuses on historical thinking, places 'evidence' and other second-order concepts (e.g. 'change and continuity') as the foundations for learning history (Seixas, 2017). as they help to make sense of the 'who', 'what' and 'when' of history (see Stearns et al., 2000). While there are several conceptualizations of historical thinking, they share the idea of learning history through the construction of sound interpretations (see e.g.

Chapman, 2021). Ideally, in this interpretational process, the interaction between substantive knowledge (e.g. events, dates, people), second-order concepts, and procedural knowledge (e.g. history-specific reading and writing strategies) would result in historical thinking (Downey & Long, 2016). In the US, the conceptualization of historical thinking has focused more on the interpretation of evidence than on other second-order concepts (see Wineburg, 2001). As a result, historical literacy plays a significant role in the US (see e.g. Downey & Long, 2016; Nokes, 2012). Historical consciousness, in turn, was developed as a German tradition and focused on 'a complex interaction of interpretations of the past, perceptions of the present and expectations towards the future' (Bracke et al., 2014, p. 23). All of the aforementioned history education traditions, while different, have sought to introduce features of history as a discipline, thus making them disciplinary approaches.

Alongside disciplinary traditions, and typically in tension with them, the old tradition of emphasizing national narratives remains influential, particularly among policymakers (see e.g. Smith, 2017). When Chapman and colleagues (2018) investigated the ways in which English history teachers perceived the purpose of teaching history, they found elements of all of the aforementioned traditions, ending up with 11 history-specific codes, such as understanding the discipline of history, orientation in time, and identity formation. As these codes can be seen to reflect different ways of recontextualisation in a relatively versatile manner, we employ their framework when examining the curricula from a history-specific point of view.

A third pathway to explore and compare the outcomes of recontextualisation in different curricula is Biesta's (2021) conceptualization of educational goals—qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Although Biesta as an educational philosopher is concerned mainly with the overarching notion of education, we use his conceptualization to explore how different purposes play out in a specific subject. Qualification aims to prepare young people for further educational progress, academic achievement, or a particular job. It also aims to equip new generations with the knowledge and skills to navigate the complexity of modern societies. Education will, by necessity, have socializing consequences that can be both deliberate and indirect. Authorities set goals to foster values and behaviours, and everyday practice is as such an initiation into existing traditions and ways of doing and being. This also indicates a third dimension, which Biesta terms subjectification. Education can also promote pupils' subjectification by opening up the possibility for pupils to mature as individuals among others, and by promoting qualities such as autonomy, criticality, independence, and compassion.

While qualification, socialization, and subjectification are interrelated, from a socio-political perspective, it is possible to analytically observe how the emphasis shifts between them in different pedagogical and educational policy positions (Gundem & Sivesind, 1997; Wyse et al., 2016). A strong emphasis on qualification might prioritize academic freedom over social value systems and individual freedom, while other positions prioritize other considerations. The degree to which socializing dimensions are strong or rigid may vary. The ambition to support students in navigating the world without restrictive judgements is a weaker form of socialization than requiring pupils to embrace specific beliefs or value systems. In a less democratic system, the socializing aspect can undermine both the freedom to think and the freedom to act critically. Finally, an unbalanced focus on subjectification might, as Biesta suggests, turn into 'navel-gazing therapy' (2021, p. 51).

As noted, the recontextualisation of knowledge relates to power in the form of power struggles between different agents. Another aspect of power within recontextualisation is the power that different types of knowledge or—as Bernstein put it—discourses enable (2000). Bernstein´s interest in power has been described as a major driving force behind the development of the concept of powerful knowledge (see Muller, 2022; Talbot, 2023), first used by Wheelahan (2007). Hence, it is not surprising that research on recontextualisation often features powerful knowledge, and vice versa (e.g. Nordgren, 2021; Young, 2021).

For Young (2013), the value in using the concept of powerful knowledge lay in its ability to provide a counterpoint to his earlier idea of knowledge of the powerful (KOTP). Originally, Young

(1971) used KOTP to draw attention to the fact that curricula are controlled by those in power, while simultaneously questioning the claimed neutrality of knowledge in the curriculum. In contrast, PK strives to provide students with the opportunity to think the 'yet to be though' (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 29–30) and to envisage alternative possibilities and futures (Young & Muller, 2013). The way in which PK can further this aim is by removing obstacles that prevent students from going beyond already known, often everyday knowledge and/or socio-cultural 'prisons of thought'. This requires providing a set of conceptual tools.

In essence, powerful knowledge can be defined as (i) specialized knowledge that is often specific to a particular discipline, (ii) systematic—a network of concepts that are systematically related to each other—and (iii) distinct from everyday knowledge (Young & Muller, 2016). These three characteristics of PK can be applied to history, although there are some debates about the applicability (see Muller & Young, 2019). The first criterion of specialized knowledge in history consists of both conceptual knowledge (first and second order) as well as specialized procedural knowledge (about how one 'does' history). The second criterion, systematic knowledge through a network of concepts, is a more complex matter. Nevertheless, history can provide tools for abstraction and generalization (Bertram, 2019). Time, namely chronology, is an important organizing principle.

The third criterion brings us back to history´s horizontal knowledge structure (Bernstein, 2000), which can lead to an unclear demarcation between specialized and everyday knowledge. Typically, everyday historical knowledge derives from historical culture and experience, and is maintained by popular culture and by families, local communities and nation-states (Bertram, 2019; Puustinen & Khawaja, 2021). In terms of recontextualisation, this leaves history more open to external societal or political influences than other subjects that have stronger boundaries (Nordgren, 2021).

In recent years, the discussion around PK has concentrated on what the 'power' in powerful knowledge stands for (see Muller & Young, 2019; Talbot, 2023; White, 2019). Muller and Young (2019), p. 4) have underscored that 'power' should not be understood as a '"socio-epistemic" property of knowledge' but rather as '"potential or capacity" for social actors to do something', for example to navigate and find solutions to the predicaments surrounding them. As opposed to KOTP, where power is seen as a zero-sum property, PK views power as a 'non-rivalrous good' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 3), which would ideally be made available to all. This difference in the perception of 'power' has been described as 'power to' (PK) rather than 'power over' (KOTP) (Muller & Young, 2019; Talbot, 2023). In the context of teaching history, to be powerful in the 'power to' sense, knowledge should provide tools to critically evaluate how history is used for building identities, for supporting present-day aims, and for limiting possibilities in relation to the future (Nordgren, 2017; Puustinen & Khawaja, 2021).

Methods and materials

The national curricula

The data consist of national curriculum documents for history in lower secondary education in Sweden (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011), in England (Department for Education, 2013) and in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). All of these documents are available in the national languages and in English. We analyse the original English version of the English National Curriculum and the English translations of the other two curricula. Lower secondary education in Sweden and Finland covers 13–15 years of age, whereas in England, lower secondary students are slightly younger, at 11–14 years.

In all countries, the national curriculum is typically revised approximately every decade, although in England between 1991 and 2014, the cycle was considerably shorter, every 5–7 years (Hammond et al., 2024). Notably, there are significant structural differences in how curriculum development in the ORF is organized, and the power that the ORF exercises through the national curricula. Because of these differences, the three countries provide an advantageous setting for comparative work.

Curriculum revision in Sweden is organized by the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE), which is the authority responsible for curriculum development and management. The process involves several steps and actors: the SNAE conducts research and gathers opinions from various stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, researchers, and other experts. The final version of the curriculum is approved by the government and implemented in schools. The agency also provides support materials and training to help schools adapt to the new guidelines. In terms of the process, history has been the subject of public debate and political interventions. This has mainly concerned the selection of historical events to be covered in the syllabus (Samuelsson, 2017).

In England, curriculum reform, particularly in history, has been a topic of political debate. For example, in 2013, Education Secretary Michael Gove introduced his vision for a new history curriculum, emphasizing 'a clear narrative of British progress with a proper emphasis on heroes and heroines from our past' (Gove, 2013). However, this version of Gove´s reform was never adopted due to resistance from teachers (Smith, 2017). As only some state-funded schools are required to follow the national curriculum (Department for Education, 2014), it cannot be seen as an equally influential document compared to those in the two Nordic countries.

The curriculum process in Finland is relatively apolitical, as the committee in charge of revising the national curriculum is largely composed of researchers and teachers (Puustinen, 2024). Hence, politicians rarely take a stand on what the national curriculum should look like, particularly with regard to individual school subjects. However, the ORF is not entirely free from political influence, as the head of the Finnish National Board of Education is appointed by the Finnish government. It is also up to the Finnish parliament to decide when to start revising the curriculum. As the national curriculum is a binding document for all Finnish schools, the ORF exercises considerable power through the document. Moreover, in recent years, the ORF has increased this power by specifying the assessment criteria for grades levels 6 and 9 (see Khawaja, 2024).

Methods

The analytical processes comprised four phases, three of which were concerned with analysing curriculum aims and one with curriculum content. The aims were analysed through Oakshott's idea of extrinsic and intrinsic, Chapman and colleagues´ (2018) history-specific framework, and Biesta´s framework (Biesta, 2009, 2021). The word 'phase' does not imply that the phases were carried out consecutively. Phase one with Oakshott´s framework did precede the others, but the other analytical steps were carried out more or less concurrently by the authors of this paper. During the analytical process, the authors met regularly, both in Zoom and in person. The purpose of these meetings was to update the process, to discuss coding, for example, and to receive feedback from authors who were not working on a particular phase.

In phases one to three (Aims), we coded the data deductively using a theory-driven approach (see Crabtree & Miller, 1999). We used the frameworks to create three separate sets of codes, resulting in codebooks (see DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Codes were assigned to chunks of data of varying lengths, from single words to sentences, most typically phrases. As noted by M. Miles and Huberman (1994), determining the length of the unit assigned to the code varies from case to case and is based on the unit´s ability to connect to the setting and context. An inductive approach to coding was employed in the fourth phase, where we analysed the curriculum content. Although inductive coding is often associated with grounded theory (see Xu & Zammit, 2020), our aim was not to generate new theory but to find recurring meanings across the data.

Our methodological approach could be described as qualitative content analysis (QCA), which can be applied to both deductive and inductive strategies (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2020). While there are considerable similarities with thematic analysis (TA) (Vaismoradi et al., 2013), we consider QCA to be more applicable to the present study because, among other things, it allows for the quantification of data (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2020). Moreover, TA is considered less 'theoretically informed' (Braun &

Clarke, 2019, p. 583). As our approach to the recontextualisation of history has been theoretically informed, TA was therefore considered a less viable methodological candidate.

First phase: historical and practical aims

The initial analysis of the documents in terms of their aims drew on a theoretical definition of what constitutes a historical and a non-historical aim, discussed above. A coding of the three curriculum documents was conducted using categories derived from Oakeshott's distinction between the 'practical' and the 'historical' past (Oakeshott, 1999). The content of the three curricula was coded into the categories 'history for its own sake' (italics) and 'history for other purposes' (bold), as illustrated in Table 1.

Second phase: history educational categories of history education

The second phase of our analysis drew on history-education-specific categories developed inductively in a study (Chapman et al., 2018) that set out to code the range of aims that a group of London beginning teachers drew upon when debating the purpose of school history. The definitions and examples of the codes that we developed in dialogue with the coding are presented in Table 2.

One of the authors coded all the data. This coding was then repeated by another author and the results were compared and discussed to reach consensus on coding. We only coded words that were relevant to the aims or content. There was 60% agreement on the initial coding and when the definitions of the categories were discussed further, no disagreement remained on the coding. The framework covered the three curricula to varying degrees. While more than 95% of the text in the English curriculum could be coded using this framework, the corresponding percentages for the Swedish and Finnish curricula were 81% and 68%, respectively.

We identified two reasons for the different percentages of document coverage. First and perhaps foremost, the Swedish and Finnish documents were official translations of the original documents and lacked the conciseness of the English document. Second, the different structures of the curricula also played a part. The Finnish curriculum presented the aims in the form of a table containing a substantial number of technical words and symbols. For example, abbreviations such as O1 (Objective 1) were excluded from the coding. Moreover, the Finnish document contained more introductory phrases that did not in themselves convey anything about the aims or content.

Third phase: Biesta

In the third phase of our analysis, we used qualification, socialization, and subjectification as heuristic devices to analyse curriculum goals in the curricula. First, we interpreted goal formulations from Biesta's (2021) perspective on the overarching functions of the curriculum, that is, goals that extend beyond the boundaries of the subject, making the school subject a means of achieving broader goals. Subsequently, we analysed the same text from a theoretical subject-didactic understanding

Table 1. Examples of coding aims into 'history for its own sake' and 'history for the sake of other purposes', drawing on an Oakeshottian conceptualization. Text in regular font is not coded. Text in italics is consistent with studying history for its own sake, while text in bold is consistent with studying history for practical, contemporary purposes.

Country	Illustration
Sweden	Teaching in history should aim at pupils developing not only *their knowledge of historical contexts*, but also their development and historical consciousness. This involves an insight that the past affects our view of the present, and thus our perception of the future. *Teaching should give pupils the opportunities to develop their knowledge of historical conditions, historical concepts and methods*, and about how history can be used for different purposes.
England	*Know and understand* the *history* of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day: how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world know and understand significant aspects of the history of the wider world.
Finland	The task of the subject of history is *to develop the pupils' knowledge of history and cultures* and to encourage them to adopt the principles of responsible citizenship. Knowledge about the past is used to guide the pupils to understand the development that has led to the present time, to appreciate the value of mental and material work as well as to reflect on future choices.

Table 2. History-education-specific categories developed to code ideas about aims in the three curricula.

Code	Definition	Example
1. Know about/Understand the past.	Text relates to acquiring knowledge about the past (e.g. factual information) and to understanding the substantive past in a first-order conceptual or integrative manner.	'... developing a chronological overview of how women and men throughout the ages have created and changed societies and cultures' (Swe)
2. Understand the discipline of history	Text explicitly uses a phrase indicating learning about how historical knowledge is constructed (second-order issues).	'... the ability to read and analyse sources produced by actors of the past and to competently interpret their meaning and significance' (Fin)
3. Orientation in time/ Historical consciousness	Text explicitly uses a phrase indicating orientation in time and/or it explicitly connects past, present and future.	'... developing historical consciousness ... insight that the past affects our view of the present, and thus our perception of the future' (Swe)
4. Identity formation	Text relates to developing individual identity and/or national identity.	'... understand their own identity ...' (Eng)
5. Generic citizenship competencies	Text relates to developing competencies explicitly tied to citizenship and/or refers to general competencies (e.g. critical thinking) that are often understood as generic citizenship competencies in international literature.	'... encourage them to adopt the principles of responsible Citizenship'. (Fin)
6. Understanding the uses of the past	Text relates to developing an understanding of the diverse ways in which the past is used in the present (and/or has been used in the past).	'... developing understanding of how historical narratives are used in society and in everyday life'. (Swe)
7. Understanding cultural difference understanding cultural difference	Text identifies the understanding of cultural differences as an aim for history education.	'... understand the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups'. (Eng)
8. Aesthetic engagement/ intrinsic enjoyment of Learning about history	Text identifies enjoyment as a reason for learning history.	'... inspire curiosity to know more about the past'. (Eng)

(Vollmer, 2024), which focuses on learning within a specialized field of knowledge. Although this is an unorthodox application of Biesta's functions, it opens an additional level of thematization of subject goals that can add a perspective to curriculum research that is often underdeveloped–namely, the role of subject views in the overarching functions of the curriculum.

Fourth phase: curriculum content

In addition to the analysis of aims, the content of the three curricula was analysed. We did not employ a pre-existing analytical framework, but conducted a data-driven, inductive analysis, which resulted in four categories: 1) periodic/temporal frame; 2) organization of content; 3) perspective; and 4) the paradigm of history. The first category refers to the time periods covered by each of the curricula, and the second to whether the content is organized thematically or chronologically, for example. The third category arose from the realization that the three curricula differed in their focus on national, European and/or global perspectives. The last of the four categories was formed to address whether the curriculum content emphasized political, societal, religious, cultural or other types of history for the most part.

Results

Comparing aims

Practical and historical aims

The results of the first phase of coding into 'history for its own sake' and 'history for other purposes' are reported in Table 3. These data suggest clear contrasts and commonalities in our three cases. First, in all three countries, what Jenkins (1997) calls 'Ownsakism' dominates the aims statements (accounting for more than or close to two-thirds of the text in two cases and more than half of the

text in the third case); and second, it enables us to posit a ranking of the emphasis on 'Ownsakist' articulations of what school history is for, with the Finnish and English documents emphasizing this most and the Swedish document least.

Despite the apparent clarity that coding enables, some challenges also arose by coding in this binary manner. For example, in the Swedish case, text coded as emphasizing 'history for other purposes' could be understood as referring to two different, albeit related, things—'historical consciousness' and 'uses of the past' – see Table 2. In the English example in Table 2, text coded as emphasizing 'history for other purposes' could be understood as expressing nationalist or statist aims (a focus on the home nation). In the Finnish case, text coded as emphasizing 'history for other purposes' (see Table 2) seems to express both generic citizenship aims and present-centred under-standings of aspects of life in the present. Clearly, the 'other purposes' category was very wide indeed and capable of containing multiple meanings. A finer-grained analysis, more attentive to the nuances of different traditions of epistemic and historical consciousness-oriented approaches to history, was attempted to more adequately capture differences in the ways in which these curriculum texts aimed to put history to work in schools.

History education-specific aims

The results of our second phase of coding are reported in Table 4. The table shows the relative importance of each category by country. Each row indicates the percentage of the text in each curriculum document that was assigned to each code (as well as the word count for each code). This allows the relative importance of each code within each curriculum to be identified (by reading the table vertically by column and comparing the percentages in each code). It also allows the relative importance of each code by country to be identified by reading the table horizontally by row, comparing the relative importance of each code in each country.

Table 4 shows an interesting interplay of differences and similarities. To begin with similarities in emphasis, the first three codes clearly dominate all three curricula, accounting for 56.9% of the Swedish document, 78.2% of the English document, and 51.6% of the Finnish document. This points to similarities in all three documents in their emphasis on specifically historical aims. However, the comparison also reveals that the English document attaches much greater importance to acquiring knowledge about the past than the other two texts, as Code 1 accounts for 50% of the text in the English case, a striking difference compared to the Finnish document, where the equivalent figure is

Table 3. Coding aims into 'history for its own sake'/'history for other purposes'.

	Sweden	England	Finland
Word count	$N = 438$	$N = 305$	$N = 541$
Not coded	6.6% (29)	4.6% (14)	6.8% (37)
History for its own sake	53.4% (234)	65.6% (200)	68.2% (369)
History for other purposes	40.0% (175)	29.8% (91)	25.0% (135)

Table 4. The importance of each history-specific category in each curriculum document.

Code	Sweden $N = 438$	England $N = 305$	Finland $N = 541$
1. Know about/Understand the past	11.4% (50)	50.0% (152)	3.5% (19)
2. Understand the discipline of history	26.5% (116)	26.6% (81)	41.4% (224)
3. Orientation in time/Historical consciousness	19.0% (83)	1.6% (5)	6.7% (36)
4. Identity formation	3.2% (14)	1.3% (4)	3.5%(19)
5. Citizenship competencies	2.1% (9)	9.5% (29)	6.8% (37)
6. Understanding the uses of the past	8.5% (37)	0.0% (0)	2.4% (13)
7. Understanding cultural difference	9.4% (41)	3.3% (10)	2.8% (15)
8. Aesthetic engagement/Intrinsic enjoyment of learning about history	0.9% (4)	2.6% (8)	0.7% (4)
Total percentage of text coded	81.0% (354)	95.1% (289)	67.8% (367)

only 3.5%. On the other hand, understanding the discipline of history (Code 2) accounts for 41.4% of the text in the Finnish case, which is significantly higher in comparison to Sweden (26.5%) and England (26.6%). Finally, reading across the rows reveals striking differences in the relative importance of particular ideas by country—Codes 4 (identity formation), 6 (uses of the past) and 7 (understanding cultural differences) have much greater importance in the Swedish document than in any of the others, while Code 5 (citizenship competencies) has greater significance in the Finnish document.

Reading Table 5 vertically, comparing values within columns, underlines a key commonality in the conceptualization of the aims of school history across the three curricula. The commonality is Code 2 – the only history-specific aim that is clearly a top priority in all three documents. Beyond this, Code 3 clearly differentiates the English curriculum from the two Nordic curricula, with orientation in time/ the development of historical consciousness being a top priority in both the Swedish and Finnish curricula, but not in the English curriculum. Citizenship (Code 5), on the other hand, is a leading priority in both the English and the Finnish curricula, but not in the Swedish document.

Qualification, socialisation and subjectification
The third step in our analysis, which explored the interrelations and tensions between the goals, encompassed two phases: first, we used Biesta's conceptual triptych of 'qualification', 'socialisation' and 'subjectification' to delve deeper into the utilitarian perspective and to identify goals that are not specific to, or reducible to, history as a field of knowledge. Second, we applied Biesta's triptych in a more unorthodox way. As our interest is subject-specific, we returned to notions of what constitutes history as a specific knowledge domain. Hence, we explored specific academic/intrinsic dimensions of the categories of 'qualification', 'socialisation' and 'subjectification' (see Table 6).

Extrinsic characterisation: qualification. In all three countries, it is claimed that history qualifies pupils to orient themselves in their present world. According to the Swedish curriculum, history teaching can provide pupils with a 'set of tools' for both interpreting and influencing the world. The English curriculum follows a similar logic, stating that history can 'equip' and 'help' pupils to think critically and to understand 'the challenges of their time'. In Finland, history is expected to 'guide' and 'support' pupils to grow into active citizens. Hence, all three accommodate the idea that history is epistemically demarcated by tools that are instrumental to goals that go beyond understanding history, and that history helps students to gain perspective on their present and possible future. This ambition overlaps with socialization and subjectification.In the Swedish curriculum, teaching history should develop pupils' 'historical consciousness'. The Finnish curriculum does not explicitly mention 'historical consciousness', but past, present and future are connected to pupils' identity. In the English curriculum, there is a connection between the past and the present, but not with the future. Hence, history provides tools that link the past to the contemporary, and to pupils' identity formation.

Table 5. Extrinsic/Utilitarian dimensions of educational purposes.

	Qualification: mastering	Socialisation: adopting	Subjectification: approached as
Sweden	Tools to understand and shape the present world	A common frame of reference and understanding diversity	Individuals developing historical consciousness
England	Skills and abilities to understand the present world and one's own identity	A coherent narrative of Britain's past, and understanding diversity	Apprentices, to be helped process their own identity and the challenges of their time
Finland	Guidance to understand the present and to reflect on future choices	Principles of responsible citizenship, and understanding diversity	Citizens developing their historical consciousness

Table 6. Intrinsic/Academic dimensions of educational purposes.

	Intrinsic qualification: Understand and interpret historical structuring principles, perspectives and concepts	Intrinsic socialisation: Socialising epistemic norms	Intrinsic subjectification: Qualifying a subject-specific repertoire to think beyond everyday contexts
Sweden	1. Historical frame of reference 2. Basis for creating historical knowledge 3. Use of history	1. History as specific perspectives and skills 2. Content as substantiated interpretations 3. Content as cultural heritage: a common frame of reference	Developing pupils' historical consciousness, involving an insight that the past affects our view of the present and thus our perception of the future
England	1. Historical content 2. Methods of historical enquiry 3. Historical interpretation	1. History as specific perspectives and skills 2. Content as substantiated arguments 3. Content as cultural heritage: a coherent chronological narrative	Helping pupils understand the complexity of people's lives, their own identity and challenges of their time
Finland	1. Historical knowledge 2. Historical literacy 3. Different uses of historical information in different situations	1. History as specific perspectives and skills 2. Content as substantiated interpretations 3. Content as cultural heritage: recognize society's values and tensions within them	Pupils as individuals and citizens: building identity and promote active members of society who understand diversity

Extrinsic characterisation: Socialisation. In the Swedish curriculum, history is perceived as important for identity formation, although no explicit directions for this formation are stated. The aim, according to the Swedish document, is to develop a common 'frame of reference', which indicates an ambition to socialize common narratives, as the substantive content is focused on Western political history. The English curriculum is the only one with an explicit ambition to socialize students into national identity as a coherent narrative. The Finnish curriculum addresses students as future citizens who, by studying history, are expected to 'adopt the principles of responsible citizenship'. Students should also learn to 'appreciate the value of mental and material work' and thereby 'grow into active members of society'.

Extrinsic characterisation. *Subjectification* is a goal that is enacted rather than defined by curricular measurements. Nonetheless, there are intentions in the curricula that address students as individuals and possibly as agents who are (or will be) acting upon the world. The curricula frame subjectification partly as an individual project. This is most evident in the Swedish document, where education aims at personal formation (*Bildung*). In England, the goal is identity formation, framed partly within the national context and partly as a personal capacity to meet the challenges of the time. The English and Finnish curricula address students as apprentices who, over time, will become subjects with agency and capabilities.

There are tensions between the above-mentioned dimensions in all the curricula. This is most evident in the English curriculum, where students are expected to absorb a national narrative ('the history of these islands') on the one hand, and to develop a critical mindset to inquire into history on the other. These aims are likely to be in tension with each other, since one result of the latter might be to question the former. The Finnish curriculum has a clear socializing agenda towards citizenship along with an emphasis on interpretation. The socializing dimension is more general and individualistic in the Swedish curriculum.

Intrinsic characterisation. As discussed above, epistemic boundaries are not arbitrary, and the curricula organize their aims both in relation to utilitarian goals (see Table 5) and to the epistemic

grammar specific to history (see Table 4). To better understand how the curricula frame this grammar, we use Biesta's triptych once again, but now from a reversed perspective. Accordingly, we ask: what in the curricula serves to *qualify* students as knowers of history? How does the selection of content and perspectives in the curriculum also *socialise values* related to *upholding the epistemic community of history*? Finally, how might the introduction to specialized knowledge also become a springboard for thinking the not yet thought and, thus, serve to *subjectify* students (see Table 6).

Intrinsic characterisation: qualification. The categories of Table 4 indicate that there is a specialized epistemology to master. In the Swedish curriculum, the substantive dimension (*know about/understand the past)* is described as a 'historical frame of reference', while the English document refers to 'content', and the Finnish one to 'historical knowledge'. The procedural dimension in all curricula is about critically examining, interpreting and evaluating sources. Perhaps a major difference is that the two Nordic curricula also have a category for a meta-perspective, which has a more muted counterpart in the English curriculum. In the Swedish curriculum, the goal is for pupils to learn to 'reflect on their own and others' use of history in different contexts and from different perspectives' (p. 209), and in the Finnish curriculum: 'to explain why historical information can be interpreted and used differently in different situations' (p. 497). In both cases, students seem to be involved as agents or potential agents in the 'use' of history. The English equivalent envisages students understanding how others ('historians') have constructed 'contrasting arguments', and how 'interpretations of the past have been constructed'.

Intrinsic characterisation: socialisation. Framing history as a knowledge domain indicates an initiation into the norms of what is epistemically accepted as history. A similar socializing discourse can be found in the curricula. Swedish students should learn the 'basis for creating historical knowledge' and 'notable figures, cultural encounters and development trends'; English students are expected to encounter 'well-informed' historical claims based on 'rigorous inquiries'; while Finnish students are expected to learn to be 'open to interpretations' through acquiring historical literacy.[1] However, historical content is also a cultural heritage that signals a more existential meaning. In the English curriculum, this cultural socialization is nationally oriented, insisting that 'the history of these islands' be told as a coherent narrative. In Finland, when learning history, students are expected to 'adopt the principles of responsible citizenship' and 'to appreciate the value of mental and material work'. As evident, this phrasing does not mention national context explicitly. In Sweden, the term 'historical frame of reference' indicates that history should also be understood as a collective identity project.

Intrinsic characterisation: subjectification. Lastly, we turn to the intrinsic dimension of *subjectification*. This dimension relates to the freedom and responsibility to act in and with the world. Therefore, connecting subjectification to a subject-specific category demands some further explanation. According to Biesta (2021), what distinguishes subjectification from socialization is that it has less to do with identity formation, but rather with bringing identity and agency into play and addressing students as individuals that are already in the world, rather than training them to become agents or responsible citizens. In this sense, subjectification is not independent of the qualification of specialized knowledge. Rather, we can argue with Bernstein (2000) and the powerful knowledge frame that specialized knowledge can empower students to think beyond the restrictions of lived experience.

Tensions exist within the intrinsic aspects of qualification, socialization and subjectification. A strong and narrow emphasis on cultural heritage can end up being at odds with the scope for critical examination. If there are certain narratives that are excluded from critical examination, it can undermine the qualification of the procedural domain. At the same time, access to nuanced content with many voices can provide access to multiperspectivity accordingly, also in one's own culture. As all three curricula invite students into a specialized knowledge domain, combined with an ambition

to explore the complexity and diversity of the present, they provide a basis for both socialization and subjectification. How the intrinsic aims of qualification and socialization actually affect pupils' subjectification is, of course, ultimately an empirical question, as is the question of how different curricula organize their specific content, which is the theme of the next section.

Comparing the content

All curricula include specific sections describing content, which is referred to as either subject content (England), key content areas (Finland), or core content (Sweden). This substantive knowledge is determined most concisely in Finland (242 words), while Sweden (544 words) and England (826; including non-statutory examples) have longer content sections. Our findings are presented in Table 7.

The English curriculum includes broadly substantive content, most of which is non-statutory. At the beginning of the content section, there are two introductory paragraphs that aim to guide the use and selection of content. These guidelines partially overlap with earlier stated aims, for example regarding disciplinary concepts and the use of historical sources. The time frame begins with the Norman Conquest in 1066, which is several hundred years earlier than in Finland and Sweden, and ends with the present day, as in the other two countries.

Table 7.

	Sweden	England	Finland
Temporal frame	From the 18th century to the present day (although there is a quick glance at earlier periods).	From 1066 to the present day	From the 19th century to the present day
Organisation of content	Thematic. Themes are organized chronologically.	Thematic. Themes are organized chronologically at first and through British history. In the latter part, chronological organization is replaced by local and world history perspectives.	Thematic. Themes are organized partly chronologically and partly by their national or global nature.
Perspective	National, European, and global. Swedish history is largely examined as part of Nordic, European and global events. The history of continents other than Europe is explicitly mentioned.	The vast majority of content focuses on national, state-level history. However, with the exception of one bullet point, global issues connected to British history, particularly through the Empire and its governance, are also present.	Emphasis on national and European/Western perspectives. Europe is not explicitly mentioned but frames the basic selection of content by focusing on industrialization, WWI, WWII, the Holocaust, the Cold War and the welfare state. When global issues are explicitly mentioned, they are framed in terms of developed and developing countries.
What kind of history?	In addition to political and state-level history, the history of ideologies and changes in people´s thinking are included. The role and experiences of individuals and groups are also emphasized.	Political and religious history dominates. Mainly state level, which is closely linked to the Church and its development. Although societal history is mentioned in the headings, examples of content include few cases of social movements. The contribution of individuals, other than prominent politicians and one scientist, is not foregrounded and there is little emphasis on the history of everyday life.	Emphasis on societal history (industrialization, welfare state), as well as local history and experiences of individuals, with less focus on state-level and political history.
Length	544 words	826 words (including non-statutory examples)	242 words

The content primarily focuses on national history and the British Empire. While the curriculum mentions world history at a general level, the content and non-statutory examples present an overwhelmingly British-centric perspective. The role of the Church is more prominent than in the other two national curricula. The curriculum is organized thematically, with themes arranged chronologically and through British national history, and in the latter part according to local and world history perspectives.

In Finland, the content of the curriculum is very compact and loosely described according to six themes, partly organized chronologically, and partly based on the national or global perspective that the themes involve. The organizing principle of the curriculum is that the content should be used to support the learning objectives, which in turn are defined in detail (these objectives do not include substantive aspects of history). The beginning of the periodical framework is not explicitly stated in the curriculum text, but it can be interpreted that the first key content, 'The origins and development of the industrial society', refers to the end of the 18th century and to the first decades of the 19th century.

In Sweden, the curriculum is broad in terms of both content and aims. Some aims related to disciplinary thinking or to the use of historical sources are part of the list of core content. The time frame is about the same as in Finland. Both start from industrialization and end with the present day through international politics. Another common aspect in Finland and Sweden is the emphasis on European history with global excursions, while the national perspectives are more prominent in the English curriculum.

Summary of results

In order to draw together the results of several analytical tools, country-specific curriculum profiles were constructed. These profiles are an attempt to describe the way in which the three curricula approach aims and content, as well as the interaction between the two.

Sweden: a multifaceted approach with an emphasis on historical consciousness

While the 'historical' aspects in the Oakeshottian sense were slightly more common, the aims also rely heavily on non-historical aspects. This equilibrium is consistent with the findings of the finer-grained history-education analysis: the Swedish curriculum can be described as multifaceted, with none of the eight history-related categories playing a dominant role. This differentiates Sweden from the other two countries. While 'Understanding the discipline of history' was the most coded category, 'Historical consciousness' also plays a central role in the curriculum. In fact, historical consciousness was a recurring concept in both the external and internal dimensions when analysing the aims through Biesta´s framework. This analysis indicates that the curriculum seeks to socialize towards identity formation through a common narrative, which is not explicated as a national frame, however. Based on the content section of the curriculum, this common frame takes into account global perspectives but focuses on Western national political history and thus has a rather Eurocentric approach as a whole.

England: adopting a coherent national narrative and engaging in historical inquiry

The English curriculum leans heavily towards history 'for its own sake'. It consists mainly of knowledge about the past and an understanding of the discipline, with the former accounting for half of the aims. The predominance of knowledge about the past is one of the distinctive features of the English document. Moreover, the perspectives and themes stated in the content section are consistent with the aims. Both emphasize the construction of a coherent, chronological national narrative. Global issues are dealt with mostly in relation to the British Empire´s past. On the other hand, the aims simultaneously require students to employ disciplinary tools for investigating history, potentially creating some internal tension within the curriculum. In the third analytical phase, national identity was clearly visible, although identity was also seen as a personal skill to be

developed. Students are modelled as apprenticing towards future agency rather than exercising agency in the present. An analysis of the disciplinary grammar corroborated other findings, namely that the English curriculum relies on content and historical methods of inquiry.

Finland: Interpreting history and apprenticing towards active citizenship

The Finnish curriculum has commonalities with the other two, but is nevertheless different in nature. The curriculum contains aspects that are largely intrinsic to history. Furthermore, the intrinsic aspects in the Finnish document mainly include understanding the discipline of history through procedural knowledge: knowing the past through substantive knowledge had a minimal role in the aims section of the curriculum. As the content section is also short, the document leaves most matters concerning substantive knowledge to the discretion of the teacher. When looking at the utilitarian aspects of the curriculum, the idea of citizenship emerges repeatedly in different forms. As in the English curriculum, students are seen as developing agency over time rather than already possessing it as students. The focus on European and Western perspectives in the content section points to socializing students into national and European rather than global citizenship.

Discussion

In this paper, we have compared history curriculum documents in England, Finland, and Sweden. As the profiles above show, there are clear differences in the way history a school subject is perceived at the curriculum level. Some differences are readily detectable, such as the emphasis on knowledge about the past in the English curriculum compared to the Nordic curricula. On the other hand, many of the differences are nuanced and subtle, such as the role of global history. Both the English and the Swedish curricula mention a global dimension, but the former associates the global perspective mainly with the historical British Empire. The latter addresses the global question in relation to a wider European history. These differences may not be drastic, but they do reveal history-related preferences and emphases in the curricula. The findings also indicate that the Nordic curricula are more internally consistent than the English curriculum.

On the other hand, there are also several overlapping features. All three prioritize history for its own sake rather than for any other purpose. Finer-grained similarities include connections to the present day and a fairly clear disciplinary grammar, reflecting in particular the historical thinking tradition. In addition, all three curricula are similar in emphasizing diversity in the aims sections, but also in not evidencing much commitment to diversity in the substantive content, which can be seen as largely Eurocentric in all three cases. Possibly the most significant similarity we found in the documents concerns the language used: the documents use similar language when referring to concepts and methods typical of history, suggesting that in all three cases, history has been given rather strong boundaries. These strong boundaries could be interpreted as being indicative of a grammar that is not as weak as suggested by Bernstein (2000).

We utilized Biesta's conceptual framework of 'qualification', 'socialisation', and 'subjectification' to examine the utilitarian or extrinsic viewpoint more thoroughly. This helped us identify educational goals that extend beyond the specific domain of history (i.e. becoming a qualified citizen; being socialized into democratic values or forming an independent identity through studying history). We then went further and applied the triptych concept to explore intrinsic subject-specific aspects of history education. This approach allowed us to bridge general educational theory with the specific requirements and characteristics of history as an academic discipline. In all three curricula, the intrinsic qualification focuses on learning the grammar of the subject. Subject-based learning is not only a matter of receiving transmitted knowledge, but also of acquiring a specific gaze, which can be a powerful asset in the pursuit of active interaction with the world (Bertram, 2012). Hence, (intrinsic aspects of) subjectification are supported if a subject-specific repertoire empowers students to think beyond everyday contexts. This supports the building of powerful knowledge. However, this

can be undermined by a strong socialization into a specific cultural heritage or other external forms of socialization.

As discussed above, there are internal tensions in the English curriculum, which on the one hand expects pupils to engage in historical inquiry and develop argumentational capabilities, while on the other hand emphasizes the importance of a national narrative that points to a static and predetermined idea of history. The latter—if implemented—limits students´ opportunities to use their 'power to' think the unthinkable (Muller & Young, 2019; Nordgren, 2017; Puustinen & Khawaja, 2021), as interpretations are expected to be accepted at face value.[2] Education may thus become an instrument for transmitting the 'knowledge of the powerful'. It is worth noting, however, that aims foregrounding argumentation and historical method far outweigh the reference to a singular national narrative in the English case, suggesting that the latter may, in reality, have a far greater influence on outcomes (see also Smith, 2017).

Another finding in relation to 'power to' was that, in terms of subjectification, the Finnish and English curricula conveyed an idea of apprenticing towards agency rather than already having such agency in the present. This may also suggest that socialization towards a certain external aim—the national narrative in England and active citizenship in Finland—has been an important but perhaps unconscious part of the recontextualisation processes. A more apparent example of socialization in the curricula is their Eurocentric content. Either intentionally or unintentionally, the curricula represent the coveted aims of education—to connect students with the current society or the nation. Apart from this type of external socialization, it could also refer to socialization into the discipline, creating context-free thinking—intrinsic socialization. As local and national narratives vary according to cultural and national contexts (e.g. Barton, 2001), ideally, powerful knowledge would offer ways of thinking that transcend these culturally and contextually dependent narratives. While the idea of intrinsic socialization through powerful knowledge requires a theorization that is beyond the scope of the present paper, we welcome discussion on seeing socialization as a more complex construction than simply representing the knowledge of the powerful aimed at instilling certain ideological mindsets.

All three curricula expect students to engage in disciplinary thinking. This is considered a prerequisite for powerful knowledge (Puustinen & Khawaja, 2021; Young & Muller, 2013). The focus on the interpretative nature may enable students to question hegemonic narratives, as history educators in both traditions have long tended to argue (Davies, 2017; Wilschut, 2010). When academic history is recontextualised into a national curriculum, local or school curricula, textbooks and other learning materials, agents in the ORF and PRF transform knowledge (Bernstein, 2000). In these processes, different understandings of history confront ideologies, economic demands, views on the purposes of education, pedagogical trends and traditions of history teaching. In these power struggles (Bernstein, 2000), the established grammar and boundaries of the curriculum subject help to ensure that disciplinary knowledge is not lost in the many stages of recontextualisation. Wilschut (2010) shows how politicians used history education during the 20th century for 'forging nations' and transmitting certain citizenship perceptions. Our findings suggest that while political guidance is still clearly visible, the established history education traditions seem to create a countervailing force that strengthens disciplinary aspects in the curricula.

Unfortunately, there are few similar comparative studies on history curricula, particularly those exploring the transformation of knowledge which complicates efforts to situate our findings within the context of previous research. While some studies have taken a comparative approach, their focus differs from ours. For example, the work by De Groot-Reuvekamp and colleagues (De Groot-Reuvekamp et al., 2014), comparing English and Dutch curricula, addresses only historical time and is set at the primary level. Bleeze (2024), on the other hand, compares how historical consciousness and empathy are addressed in Australian and Singaporean curricula. Although Hammond and colleagues (Hammond et al., 2024) examine geography rather than history, their paper on English, Swedish and Finnish curricula offers interesting points for reflection. Their results show that the Finnish curriculum highlights active and responsible citizenship in geography, just as we found in the case of history. This may suggest that

ideological preferences related to aspects outside the subject are at work across subjects. On the other hand, our results differed in the case of England. We found that the influence of the British Empire in English history documents was discernible in terms of the geographical areas given attention. However, in the case of geography, the document focused on Africa, Russia and Asia (Hammond et al., 2024).

Our aim in the present paper has been to address the 'what' question in relation to curricula—in other words, what do the curricula say? Answering the 'what' question helps us to understand the state´s preferences in terms of what kind of history the school system should convey. Employing several analytical frameworks, as well as numerical and thematic approaches, allowed us to look at the curricular aims from different angles. For example, the percentage of history-specific aims reflects their importance, and the history-education-specific categories revealed significant differences between the curricula. The analysis of extrinsic and intrinsic aims opened a new window on different aspects of socialization, especially in the later stages of the analyses. Finally, the content analysis provided a context for the aims and revealed the narratives that the curricula are intended to convey.

One limitation of our approach is that it did not allow us to address the 'why' question—that is, the reasons behind the observed differences and similarities. Curricula, as a type of document, only reveal the end result of the recontextualisation process and do not provide access to the thought processes of those constructing the documents. For example, in order to answer the 'why' question, it would have been necessary to interview those responsible for producing the curricula. It is possible to hypothesize that the 'glorious history' of the British Empire influences English conceptions of history in a way that differs from Nordic self-understanding. Moreover it is possible to ponder the possibility of political intervention in curricula in the different countries, which is greater in England, less in Sweden, and least in Finland. Thus, the more politicized curriculum process in England may explain the role that national history plays in the English curriculum and the differences in substantive content between England and the Nordic countries. However, it remains for future research to explore and possibly confirm these assumptions.

Finally, it should be noted that curricular aims are put into practice by teachers in classrooms. Even if the curriculum enables certain aims, in this case building powerful knowledge, it is ultimately the teachers who determine whether this potential is realized. The question for future research is therefore how the curricula are implemented in practice. From the perspective of fostering powerful knowledge, this points to the need for research into how teachers engage in the pedagogical recontextualisation of the curriculum.

Notes

1. The official translation uses the term 'textual skills'. However, the Finnish term *historian tekstitaidot* means historical literacy. See Puustinen and Khawaja 2022.
2. It is worth noting that the tension that we point to here is between the first aim in the English document and all the others. The remaining aims are internally coherent, and the tension that we point to is only between the first and the rest. This anomaly might be explained by the fact that such documents are typically written by committee, with the first aim perhaps expressing the ideas of policymakers and the rest the aims of history educators.

Disclosure statement

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