Putting the past in place: meetings with local archives in history education

Helena Strand[1],[*] iD

[1] PhD candidate, Department of Economics, Technology, Arts and Society, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden
* Correspondence: helena.strand@ltu.se

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Abstract

This study investigates how an intervention in place-based history education can be planned and implemented by history teachers and staff from cultural heritage institutions at a local archive. Through a single case study, the planning, implementation and post-processing of the participating teachers and heritage actors are analysed using interviews and observations. The results show that place-based history education can link history education with the resources of cultural heritage institutions, such as archives, and can promote local history. Logistical challenges for teachers constitute significant obstacles to collaboration between schools and cultural heritage institutions, while school digitisation policies limit the use of physical sources in history education. The study also reveals that experienced teachers adapt place-based history education differently based on their teaching strategies and motivations, with an eclectic teaching strategy being especially fruitful for collaborations with different actors within place-based history

education. The research highlights the potential of place-based history education to enhance collaboration, revealing shared goals and fostering networks among teachers and cultural heritage actors by integrating local cultural heritage into history education. By addressing logistical barriers and adapting to various educational landscapes locally, history education can effectively utilise local archives in collaborations for pedagogical outcomes.

Keywords cultural heritage institutions; place-based education; archives; history instruction; local history

Introduction

Contemporary history curricula are shaped by traditions, such as historical thinking, emphasising historical methods and 'doing history' through disciplinary methods like sourcing, corroboration and contextualisation (for example, Thorp and Persson, 2019; Wineburg, 2001). This focus has influenced how students are expected to engage with historical sources, yet often without considering the context in which such an engagement occurs.

Swedish curricula for upper secondary history also align with the historical thinking tradition, underlining that working with historical methods should be included in education. Students should search for, review, interpret and value various sources, adding theories, perspectives and tools that explain and visualise historical changing processes (Swedish National School Agency, 2025). The same aim for the subject of history further states that the use of history could impact societal changes and social identities. Therefore, students should be allowed to develop an understanding and appreciation of how diverse individuals and groups have utilised history over time. This includes the possibility of reflecting on the impact of cultural heritage on the development of students' perceptions of reality and identity (Swedish National School Agency, 2025). However, the cognitive focus in these formulations neither points to the concept of *place*, nor to *where* these activities will take place.

These wide-ranging goals present challenges in classroom practice. Teachers interpret and implement the curriculum differently depending on their experience and teaching strategies (Nygren, 2009), which shapes how and whether historical methods are enacted meaningfully. Yet the curriculum remains the common denominator for all teachers, and the curricular focus often overlooks the crucial role of place in enhancing students' historical understanding. While contemporary cultural heritage institutions (where archives are included) aim to engage students (for example, Swedish National Heritage Board, 2020; UNESCO, 1998), historical sources have long remained a component of history education in the Western sphere (Fitzgerald, 1983; Mork, 2023). However, the *spatial dimension*, where cultural heritage institutions represent certain places from a historical perspective, remains underutilised in history education.

Historians like Keith A. Erekson (2010) problematise this neglect, arguing that the focus among history educators on 'doing history' (p. 1067), aligned with notions like historical thinking, leads to ignorance of the concept of place, and that the archives should be the first place that comes to mind where one can 'do history' (p. 1068). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, archives, especially local archival sources, are frequently overlooked in history education. Students primarily encounter historical sources through textbooks or digital resources (Manley et al., 2019); however, they sometimes encounter these sources as curiosities (Eamon, 2006; VanSledright and Maggioni, 2016). This detachment from the physical places where historical sources are found limits students' ability to connect with sources' immediate historical context. The importance of place in history education, particularly from a local perspective, is underscored by the potential to provide unique insights into local historical narratives, separate from traditional nation-state perspectives and grand narratives of a nation (Åström Elmersjö et al., 2017; Gerner, 2004). Moreover, on-site visits to cultural heritage institutions offer essential perspectives that digital resources cannot fully replicate (Brooks Sundberg, 2023; Jane and Maughan, 2020; Manley et al., 2019). Despite the potential of local archives as vital educational sites in upper secondary education (Nygren, 2014), their use remains rare (Eamon, 2006; Manley et al., 2019;

Swedish National Heritage Board, 2020). Existing research lacks studies on the collaborative planning of educational encounters in local archives with a primary focus on local history. Despite emphasis in earlier studies on historical method and skills, the physical and cultural places where history unfolds, such as archives, are seldom integrated meaningfully into history education practice. This gap raises critical questions about how and whether students are given the possibility to connect with local history in their own communities.

This study aims to scrutinise the planning, implementation and post-processing of educational encounters with the past at a cultural heritage institution, here represented by a local archive, by utilising the pedagogical approach of place-based history education (PBHE), addressing the spatial dimension in history education. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the local archive as a tangible part of cultural heritage and reviewing the planning, implementation and post-processing of educational visits from the perspectives of participating teachers and cultural heritage staff. To further address this gap, this study employs place-based education (PBE) as a pedagogical approach. PBE emphasises experiential, community-based learning, fostering connections to local contexts (Yemini et al., 2023). By addressing the didactic question of *where* in history education, PBE offers an approach that enhances the students' understanding of history through direct engagement with the local past in the place where they live. By advancing PBE into PBHE, this study aims to illuminate the significance and meaning of place in history education, contributing to possible pedagogical and collaborative approaches that align with the pedagogical approach of PBHE.

Following the research aim, three research questions are explored:

RQ 1.   In which ways are the teachers' approaches to PBHE dependent on their teaching strategies when planning for educational encounters at local archives?

RQ 2.   What obstacles and challenges can teachers and cultural heritage employees face when planning and implementing collaborative educational encounters at local archives?

RQ 3.   In which ways can PBHE as a pedagogical approach be suitable for upper secondary history teachers and cultural heritage staff in collaboration?

Previous research on archives and history education

Although a body of research exists on museums, heritage education and history education, few researchers have examined the outcomes of history education at historical archives in upper secondary schools. Systematic searches of the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) and Scopus databases using the keywords Archiv* and 'history education' or 'history teach*' also confirm this. According to the results from these searches, previous research studies seem to have been conducted to underscore the significance of allowing undergraduate history students to engage with historical methods in physical archives as places (for example, Dowling et al., 2018; Eamon, 2006; Jane and Maughan, 2020; Malkmus, 2008; Manley et al., 2019; Matyn, 2000). Additionally, a body of literature within archival pedagogy addresses the same theme (see Andersson, 2017; Patterson, 2021; Roff, 2007). The outcomes of previous studies have highlighted important insights applicable to this research. For example, previous results show that the expectations that upper secondary students will be self-sufficient and independently visit the archives are not reliable (Manley et al., 2019: 69). However, there are insights on what archivists and teachers could accomplish during the planning process of archival encounters so that students can have the opportunity to reflect on the past represented in the archival documents and milieu. For example, presenting historical methods to students as a first step is mentioned by scholars as an efficient introduction to archival encounters (see Eamon, 2006; Manley et al., 2019; Roff, 2007).

While several studies explore place-based and local history education (Gruenewald et al., 2007; Halbert and Salter, 2019; Henthorn, 2014; Perrotta and Cross, 2024), few explicitly examine the utilisation of local historical archives as a resource in history education for students younger than college age (for example, Beam and Schwier, 2018). However, scholars have recently explored primary students' learning in history education at local historical sites, focusing on haptics (Ludvigsson et al., 2022). Haptics as a concept derives from the research of Révész (1950), where haptics refers to active touching. However, the concept of haptics has also evolved in later research (for example, Paterson, 2009) to include internally experienced bodily sensations, where diverse human sensory dimensions are included. In educational research, this concept has been utilised to investigate students' sensorial experiences when learning history (Ludvigsson et al., 2022). Notably, Yemini et al. (2023) suggest that studies

employing a pedagogical approach to PBE, drawing on notions of place and incorporating cultural heritage institutions in history education, would be fruitful. Additionally, Sarah Karn (2024) advocates for collaborations between local cultural heritage institutions and history teachers, as local history is recognised as fostering historical empathy in students.
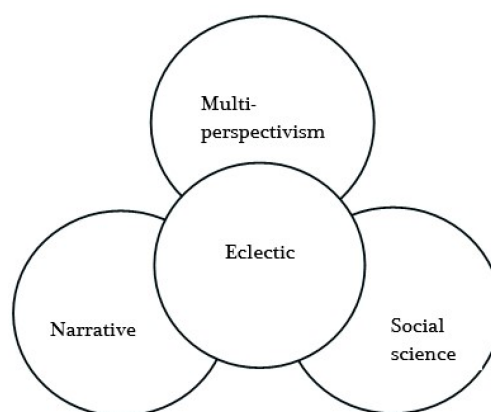
Archival visits in upper secondary education can contribute to the quality of history education, as illustrated by Nygren (2014) and Manley et al. (2019). However, apart from their studies, no further relevant research appears to have been conducted among upper secondary students that involves engagement with local archival sources on-site. Neither is there a body of work on the teaching strategies of experienced teachers as outlined by Nygren (2009). Nevertheless, teachers' epistemic beliefs and conceptions of the nature of history in connection to their behaviours in the classroom practice have been thoroughly investigated (for example, Barton and Levstik, 2004; Gestsdóttir et al., 2024; Virta, 2002; Voet and De Wever, 2016; Yilmaz, 2008) and the teaching strategies outlined by Nygren (2009) have been further employed by Gestsdóttir et al. (2021), showing that teachers adhering to an eclectic strategy notably promote historical thinking and reasoning among students. The results from Gestsdóttir et al. (2021) are also important when investigating which strategies among experienced teachers are most beneficial for planning archival visits in collaboration with cultural heritage staff in this study.

Theoretical considerations

Thomas Nygren has drawn on Evans's (1988, 1989) typologies on teachers' conceptions of history, developing the typologies into teaching strategies among experienced teachers. This study will utilise these strategies through interviews with experienced participating teachers, to analyse how they took on the planning and performance of the archival visits.

According to Nygren (2009), history and social studies teachers often utilise the social science strategy. This strategy pertains to how phenomena in the present day are situated economically, socially and politically, and how these factors relate to the past and geographical surroundings (pp. 87–8). The narrative strategy is based on grand narratives in history and a cultural history orientation, with an overarching chronology at its centre (p. 86). Multi-perspectivism is a strategy that aims to broaden students' worldviews through various themes and historical perspectives (p. 85). The eclectic teaching strategy contains diverse goals, methods and content. The common characteristic of this strategy is that it is closely connected to the social science strategy in the present time, and involves tasks such as analysing different sources from the past, including local historical sources (p. 89). The outlined model appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1. A visual conceptualisation of teaching strategies among experienced teachers (Source: adapted from Nygren, 2009: 90)

Materials and methods

This section outlines the research design, materials and methods of this study. It presents and motivates the case study as well as the analytical methods.

A case study approach

This research was conducted as a single case study, as outlined by Yin (2014), employing various methods to achieve triangulation in the analysis (see also Bryman, 2004: 454f). The case was selected to scrutinise the planning and performance of educational encounters with the past at local historical archives by utilising the pedagogical approach of PBHE. A PBHE intervention was planned and performed for this case study and is described in the next subsection. This case exemplifies how cultural heritage institutions and schools can collaborate in smaller cities, considering the results from the Swedish National Archive (2019) report and current legislation (SFS, 1990), which enables upper secondary schools to visit local historical archives run by societal authorities without requiring any further permits.

Planning and performing a PBHE intervention

This research was conducted in proximity to the working practice of the actors involved in this study, with special attention paid to the working conditions of the participating actors: the history teachers in upper secondary education and staff at cultural heritage institutions, the latter, in this study represented by archive and museum employees. The research utilised a PBHE approach, documenting the design and execution of educational events for upper secondary students studying history. The planning of the educational interventions at the local historical archive and museum began well in advance of the students' visits to the archive. The data collection lasted from 2022 through to spring 2025. This period included the major central planning session, individual interviews with the four participating teachers and a final group interview with four key actors after the students' visits were complete. The initial programme outline was set after the major central planning session. The archive visits started in the autumn of 2022, with the final student visits wrapping up in the autumn of 2023.

The intervention involved four history classes, comprising 91 students aged 15 to 17, from a single upper secondary school. The planning team consisted of eight main collaborators: the researcher (who also served as the organisational moderator and took notes, included in the research data), four history teachers, an archivist, an archival pedagogue and a museum pedagogue. The learning activities were strategically devised to highlight the archive's specific resources and its role in conveying local history via primary and secondary sources (Yemini et al., 2023). To ensure a comprehensive engagement, the student visits were divided into three sequential learning environments:

- *Primary sources investigation*: Student groups engaged with specific local, historical records. This included analysing a cashbook from a twentieth-century entrepreneur, meeting minutes from local civic associations and personal letters written by nineteenth-century emigrants from the city.
- *Institutional orientation*: The students were led on a complete tour of the archival space to grasp the archive's function, organisation and comprehensive range of materials.
- *Museum contextualisation*: Students were taken on an extended tour of the museum in the same building. This element focused on how curated historical artefacts, including written sources, are selected and presented to the public; it also looked at how archival sources are linked to the narratives of the local past presented in current exhibitions in this museum.

The full team of cultural heritage actors and the researcher were present for all class visits, which occurred on separate occasions; with each of the four groups being led by their respective teachers, who were also participating in this study. Notably, the author of this study had no active role in leading the instruction or managing communications with the students during the on-site interventions.

Research setting and context

The selected location for the case study was a city in northern Sweden, where a historical archive is housed in the local museum, near the city centre. The city's history is closely connected to mining, hydropower and miscellaneous industrial enterprises. Other characteristic features of the city include

its vibrant pop and rock music scene, with some local bands gaining national recognition, as well as a history of grassroots movements tied to religion, sports and labour unions. However, sports and music remain the top associations with this city. Higher education was not established in this city to a significant extent until recent years; therefore, the city cannot be considered a university city (in this formulation, a university city refers to a city which houses the main campus of a college or university). The percentage of the population with post-secondary education was 28.8 per cent, compared to the national average of 33.7 per cent. The unemployment rate in 2024 was 3 percentage points below the national average. The median income was slightly higher than the national average, but the local income tax rate was also somewhat higher than the national average (Ekonomifakta, 2025). The municipality had been governed by the social democrats alone or in coalition with the left party in all elections prior to this study. There are three larger municipal upper secondary schools near the city centre; one of these participated, with four history teachers and their students involved. The school consisted of approximately 1,000 students and 170 teachers and offered, at the time of this study, seven of the national Swedish upper secondary programmes according to the current reform. Like many other Swedish schools, this school was also subject to austerity measures imposed by political authorities. This, of course, also affected the resources available for education in different ways: one was the ability to stretch education outside the classroom. Another aspect of the austerity measures was that new physical schoolbooks could no longer be bought. This decision was also influenced by a digitisation policy for Swedish schools, which is further discussed in this study. The teachers at this school were organised into collaborative and subject-specific teams, with those involved in this study belonging to the history subject team. As evident in the presentation, all the history teachers who participated from this school were experienced professionals. The conditions regarding the research setting described were important points of departure for this case study.

Intervention observations and field notes

The educational encounters with historical sources during the archival visits consisted, as mentioned earlier, of three different stations; the students were divided into groups and visited these stations one group at a time. The researcher's role during these events was limited to that of an observer, taking field notes on what happened during the planning of the interventions as well as during the interventions (for example, Yin, 2014). The chosen observation method was naturalistic and informal, as the researcher's role was non-intervening during both the planning of the visits and the visits themselves. The notes taken were central to the observational component of the data, complementing the interviews. The use of naturalistic observation may increase the risk of confirmation bias, as the researcher will inevitably filter observations through their own perception. However, the researcher should always consider the risk of bias, no matter the approach (see Peshkin, 1988).

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews with the teachers took place before the visits to the archive, allowing for in-depth information on the teachers' experiences and expectations of archival visits and local historical sources (for example, Lieberman and Hoody, 1998). The questions were open and consisted of formulations such as 'How have you been using local historical archives as a resource in your teaching?', 'How do you relate to local history?', and 'What expectations and wishes do you have for future visits to an archive with your students?' All teachers aimed to visit the archive with their classes.

The group interview, conducted two years after the interventions were completed, consisted of questions for the cultural heritage staff and a teacher simultaneously. The questions were less open and consisted of formulations like: 'Do you foresee any continuing opportunities for collaborations between museums, archives and schools in the future? If so, in what ways?', 'Is it a viable approach to base history education and archival/museal pedagogical activities on local history, utilising historical sources as a common denominator, as this project has been performed? If so, in what ways?', 'In retrospect, what were the primary challenges and obstacles to achieving these visits through your collaboration and what challenges persist? Has anything changed that affects the prerequisites for collaboration?'

The interview data underwent a subsequent coding process, employing an analytical method grounded in the principles of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). MS Word was facilitated in this coding (see Isangula et al., 2024), where the research questions and the theoretical framework, as conceptualised by Nygren (2009), served as a foundation for the coding process. Nygren's

(2009) theoretical model on teaching strategies among experienced teachers was applied, where each of the four strategies equalled a thematic category for the coding when analysing the teachers' answers beforehand. This coding, therefore, integrated both conventional and directed approaches. The conventional dimension was characterised by an abductive methodology, drawing on existing theory (for example, Kondracki et al., 2002). However, the theoretical perspectives were predetermined rather than emerging solely from the empirical data, thereby directing the coding process. The number of categories after the coding process still equalled the same number of strategies developed by Nygren (2009). To strengthen the intercoder trustworthiness (see Braun and Clarke, 2013; O'Connor and Joffe, 2020), another colleague in the same field coded some randomly selected passages from the interviews.

Ethical considerations

The archivist, archival pedagogue, museum pedagogue, teachers and students were informed of the current jurisdiction and research ethics customs (SFS, 2003). All participants received written and oral information about the study. Informed consent was obtained from everyone participating. In addition, no questions were asked concerning sensitive matters or topics revealing private opinions, and students could cease participation at any time – everything aligned with the Swedish National Research Council and ALLEA (All European Academies) codes of conduct. No personal data was collected and all reproductions of the interviews have been anonymised. The Swedish Ethical Review Authority approved the study's ethical review (SFS, 2003).

Results

The teachers involved

This section presents the interviewed teachers involved in the planning process. In addition to preparing for the educational encounters at the archive, individual semi-structured interviews were held with the history teachers involved in planning the visits. Lieberman and Hoody (1998) mention in-depth teacher meetings as necessary when conducting a PBE study. Furthermore, teachers engaged in previous PBE studies have noted that the pedagogical notion of PBE requires considerable time, as the planning process is likely to encounter bureaucracy and require much organisation when collaborating with other actors (Powers, 2004). Additionally, by stepping away from the general orientation of learning, teachers could be placed in a more vulnerable situation. This fact will set requirements for teachers, where the ability to shift perspective is demanded (Smith, 2002). It is essential to underscore the teachers' work experience during this process, as experienced teachers have developed various teaching strategies (Nygren, 2009).

The teachers all worked at the same school, expressed interest in participating and had different experiences and wishes for using archival sources in history education (Table 1). They also had varying teaching experiences in general, depending on the length of their respective career.

The cultural heritage employees involved

This section presents the cultural heritage employees who were interviewed and involved in the planning process and performance of the PBHE intervention. Table 2 presents the staff involved.

Even though the cultural heritage actors involved in this collaborative project expressed different previous experiences of collaborations with schools, they aligned in the view that school visits were central to their work but that unfortunately, prior to the present day, these had been dependent on individual teachers' efforts, and that upper secondary school students had rarely been included in these visits.

Table 1. An overview of the participating teachers

Name *	Years of experience	Subjects	Experience with archival sources in history education	School type
Teacher One	>30 years	History, social studies	Extensive experience, both in the classroom and by taking students on visits	Municipal upper secondary school
Teacher Two	13 years	History, social studies	Moderate experience, especially concerning students' family history	Municipal upper secondary school
Teacher Three	12 years	History, social studies	Moderate experience, and wishes to bring students to archival visits, mainly to business archives	Municipal upper secondary school
Teacher Four	20 years	History, social studies	Little experience, and wishes to involve students in local history through historical archives	Municipal upper secondary school

Note: * All teacher participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Table 2. An overview of the participating cultural heritage employees

Name *	Years of experience	Expertise	Experience of collaborations	Employer
Archivist	20 years	Archivist	Vital experience of guiding and instructing visiting school classes at the archive	Municipal museum and archive
Archival pedagogue	7 years	Archival pedagogy	Vital experience of pedagogical collaborations with all ages. Regarding school activities, mostly primary and lower secondary classes	Archive in connection with the municipal museum and archive
Museum pedagogue	3 years	Museum pedagogy	Background as an upper secondary teacher, collaborations mostly with primary classes on local history	Municipal museum and archive

Note: * All cultural heritage staff participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Interviews with the teachers: approaches and strategies in relation to PBHE

Interviews with the teachers made up the first step in planning the intervention in the archive. The interviews, being semi-structured, started with the same questions but also allowed for individual and spontaneous reflections. All teachers interviewed mentioned logistical challenges as obstacles to overcome in order to accomplish archival visits. Teacher One mentioned his former workplace, at a school situated near the local historical archive and museum:

> When I started working at the NN school, one could teach some advanced courses – both History 2 and 3 – and then new worlds were literally opened. Above all, more time was revealed. Besides, that school was situated relatively close to the museum and archives. So that worked well; we collaborated a lot there.

Another situation, depending on logistic limitations, was brought up by Teacher Four:

> The problem is that if you are going away [on the archival visit], you will have to plan for at least an afternoon or forenoon, and that could also include trading lessons with some other teacher at the loss of his or her math class or anything. Moreover, that is not easy either. Because they often have much to achieve in their planning, and there is no certainty that you can exchange lessons and so on. So that is also a challenge.

Teacher Three discussed the possible challenge of bringing many students to an archive:

> Well, it is both good and bad. Not everyone wants to bring 30 students to the archive. Maybe by all means, if it is also very narrow there. Now, I have understood that archives are generally narrow, so bringing large groups there is not perfect.

Teacher Two, in turn, wished not to turn the focus from the content of the interventions, instead pointing to the importance of simply starting a functional collaboration:

> Yeah, I do not think I should go into too many details, but I do think it is positive that, first and foremost, there is a desire for collaboration. Moreover, I'd probably imagine some kind of get-together first, where you kind of sketch out a plan and what you think. It's good for lots of different reasons, like. I mean, from my perspective, I don't need to go so much into terms of, you know, course content and stuff like that. So yeah. I think this is a pretty yeah, just the fact that it's a change of scenery, and they do get to anyway. They'll probably spark their interest much more clearly when they do this. No, but first, maybe we should have a get-together between the staff and stuff.

All teachers interviewed, except one, reported visiting a historical archive with students on various occasions. However, these occasions had been strictly related to the teachers' own interest and planning: they had no experience with any existing infrastructure that could have made the visits easier to accomplish, even though they mostly felt welcomed by the archival staff when visiting. Teacher Four explained that he had been teaching introductory courses almost exclusively during his career and that neither time nor the curriculum allowed him to find the space to take his students on such an expedition. Teacher One also pointed to the infrastructure of the introductory courses: the curriculum not allowing time for activities outside the classroom and the amount of individual planning making the potential visits even harder to achieve:

> Right now, I'm only teaching the introductory history course, and that's like 100 credits. What could that be? Maybe 80 hours? And from those 80 hours, you're supposed to go from, you know, the first humans and then get all the way to … well, my goal is to finish the Cold War at least … It's like … It's a lot (laughs).
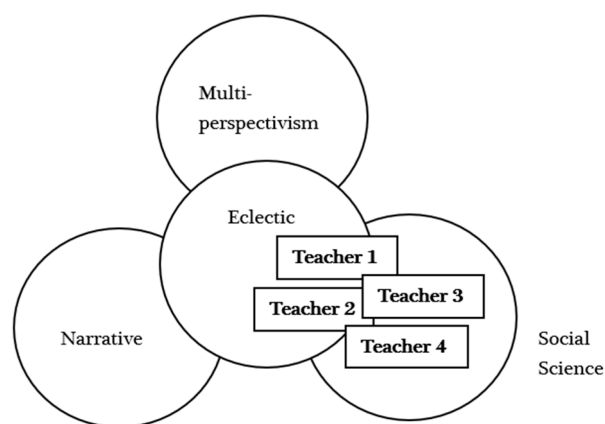
Teacher Three pointed to the Swedish digitisation strategy for schools as a possible explanation why archival visits were not an educational priority in history. (*The National Digitalization Strategy for the School System in Sweden was part of the Swedish digitisation strategy.* This policy, meant to achieve a high level of digital competence among students, was adopted in 2017 and lasted until 2022 [see, for example, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023].) It turned out that most teachers felt obliged by this policy to primarily use digitised online historical sources for their teaching:

> You know, we're really trained in digital materials from steering committees and principals, and that we should work digitally. I have been a bit old-fashioned in my way of teaching, but it's becoming more digital, and this whole corona pandemic has really sped things up, for better and for worse, but yeah.

However, all the teachers recognised the highest potential in archival visits regarding the sensorial experience of encountering old documents in their authentic context, as also described by Manley et al. (2019: 68). They mentioned the city's local history as a crucial introduction to old documents: that the history of the place itself, found in the historical sources, was the common denominator for all students, no matter their birthplace.

All teachers interviewed also aligned with the teaching strategy of social science in the coding of their answers, focusing on present-day phenomena and how these are situated economically, socially and politically, linking to the past and geographical surroundings (Nygren, 2009: 87–8). This may not come as a surprise, as all the teachers participating in the interviews had this subject as their second area of expertise. However, two teachers also aligned with the category of eclectic teaching: Teacher One and Teacher Two. Teacher One, having worked for a long time and invested a large amount of personal interest in his teaching, also advocated for his interest in local history and local historical sources in archives, places he had been bringing students to for a long period before this intervention (p. 89). In contrast, Teacher Two was explicitly interested in connecting students' family history to history education and linking the students to the local place, thereby connecting them to local historical sources. It turned out that Teachers One and Two were also the most motivated of all teachers. Nygren (2009) connects the eclectic teaching strategy to the use of local historical sources in history education. This could explain why the motivation was higher among the two teachers mentioned. The positions among the teachers are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The distribution of teaching strategies among the teachers interviewed

Results from the observations

Internationally, there are examples of educational encounters for undergraduate students at historical archives, as investigated by scholars (for example, Dowling et al., 2018; Eamon, 2006; Jane and Maughan, 2020; Malkmus, 2008; Matyn, 2000). Regarding upper secondary students, Manley et al. (2019) and Nygren (2014) provide insights into encounters with archives by this particular student group, as mentioned; however, they do not specifically discuss how cultural heritage institutions and schools could cooperate.

The Swedish National Archive (2019) report provides insights into how collaborations between archives and schools in Sweden are currently functioning, the forms of cooperation that are taking place, the development of the partnership over time, potential obstacles to collaboration possibilities and how those gaps can be addressed. The report concludes that collaborations between schools and archives should be established in many places in Sweden, as there are also good opportunities to visit archives throughout the country, partly due to Swedish legislation. (The Swedish Archives Act regulates the function of the archives. In the Archives Act [SFS, 1990: 782], societal authorities are included, and the third paragraph mentions the purpose of the archival contribution. This paragraph states that archives managed by authorities are part of Sweden's cultural heritage and should be preserved and arranged to fulfil the common right-to-access acts, the need for information from the administration and the requisites from researchers [p. 782].) However, a teacher visiting an archive with students can face logistical challenges, as illustrated in the teacher interviews conducted for this study. The report's results also reveal geographic inequality in visits to archives as a source of local heritage resources, both digitally and physically. According to the report, teachers need to learn about the existence of archives and the resources they can utilise in education (Swedish National Archive, 2019).

As early as the planning stage, practical questions about logistics and scheduling were central to conversations among the planning actors. As described in the report, it has been hard to establish collaboration with schools. The planning meeting participants discussed all the obstacles described in the report (Swedish National Archive, 2019). Despite almost a year of planning and scheduling, the intervention took significant time to finalise, primarily due to logistical and scheduling-related reasons.

From the notes taken during the planning meetings, it was clear that the archival and museum staff were pleased to have upper secondary students visiting the archives, as the cultural heritage mission involves reaching out to schools at various educational levels (Swedish National Heritage Board, 2020). The upper secondary student group had long been hard to reach in this city, just as described generally in the report, partly due to an existing archival pedagogic programme that focused on reaching primary school students, but also due to logistic challenges mainly connected to school schedules and geographical distances between the schools and the archive, as also confirmed through the interviews with the teachers and the discussions during the planning of the intervention.

Yet the upper secondary teachers supported the initiative, as it allowed them to visit the archive and museum with their classes more easily. Otherwise, the visit would have required much more individual planning, something the teachers would not have had the time to do. As mentioned earlier, Teachers One and Two had conducted archival visits on their own initiative in the past. However, they both acknowledged the effort required to make these visits happen.

Furthermore, during the central planning meeting, the teachers and archival and museum staff agreed on the content and aims of the intervention, which would follow the Swedish curriculum and align with the school history objectives (Swedish National School Agency, 2025). The upper secondary curriculum was mandatory for both teachers and cultural heritage staff, but for different reasons. The curriculum served as a convenient point of departure due to this mandatory requirement. However, as mentioned, the archival pedagogue aimed to reach out to school students with the archival content, as she described in her mission, by 'combining diverse pedagogical choices from various archival sources … and letting students try to read old handwriting' (oral communication, 3 March 2022). Although all teachers wanted the students to be able to read handwritten documents as well, the archivist and archival pedagogue, highlighting this specific element during the visits, convinced the others of the importance of making space for this in the upcoming interventions.

Teacher One insisted on introducing source criticism and historical methods in the classroom before the visits, and all other teachers agreed on that (see Eamon, 2006; Manley et al., 2019; Roff, 2007). Manley et al. (2019: 69) highlight the particular challenges of introducing and teaching historical methods and research when visiting an archive to a secondary-school age group, which confirms that the teachers had made a good decision to introduce the aforementioned content to the students before the visits.

The archivist and archival pedagogue, who had extensive experience in guiding younger students more particularly, asked for possible themes that the teachers wished to introduce. The teachers provided diverse examples, all of which were connected to the local past. The suggested topics included:

- The First World War from a local perspective
- Swedish 1800s popular movements that were present in this city
- Nationalism and imperialism from a local perspective
- The period during which city privileges were given to this specific town.

All suggestions from the teachers included wishes for a variation of local historical content on both historical actors and events to be presented during the archival visits. Teacher One wished that some of this content could be connected with the historical sources already presented in the museum exhibition, which all actors agreed on. The participating actors also agreed to use the same content for all classes, allowing for the evaluation of the intervention. In the end, the suggestions and wishes from the teachers were negotiated into a range of source material differing between larger movements and events in this city from a longer perspective until recently. The source material also consisted of a balance between significant actors in this city and previously unknown people who also had led interesting lives in this place. From the range of source material in the archive, the chosen material focused on movements in this city consisting of association material connected to music and sports. Regarding the actors, both renowned and unknown individuals who lived there and left letters, cash-books and other documents were selected from the vast amount of source material available for study. The use of local, historical sources aimed to increase students' and teachers' engagement, as described in the goals of PBE (for example, Yemini et al., 2023: 1). Here, the students' possibility of discovering the meaning of cultural

heritage was also considered (see Savenije and De Bruijn, 2017; Smith, 2021; Stone and Molyneaux, 1994).

The cultural heritage staff were generous in addressing any logistical issues, such as accommodating a group of students with lockers or a space to store their jackets. They were also ready to adjust the time for the visits to better fit the school schedule. During the meeting, the archivist and archival pedagogue repeatedly emphasised their cultural heritage mission and how they would greatly benefit from having this student group visit and interact with the historical sources on-site. The teachers appreciated these initiatives, and the dialogue was progressive, focusing on solving logistical issues in order to move on to the more content-related topics of which the interventions would consist. However, even though logistical, such topics were also related to a spatial dimension: the geographical distances between the school and archive, and the limited space capacity to welcome the students. A central topic, however, remained the quest for ways in which the transport and accommodation of the students could be addressed, since the archive and museum were a relatively long walk from the upper secondary school, and each student group consisted of at least 30 students. The teachers decided to swap lessons with their colleagues or extend their lessons as long as possible to fit in the time for the visit, which would last approximately 2.5–3 hours. That way, they would have the possibility of walking there with the students, which would take about 30 minutes each way.

The participating actors performed the visits as scheduled until the project was finalised. The visits began, as mentioned earlier, in the autumn of 2022. During the observations of the interventions, it became clear that many students viewed the visits as something they were obliged to do. Here, it is valid to discuss the age group of secondary students, who, in earlier research, were described as complex to motivate in relation to historical research on primary sources (see Manley et al., 2019). However, the archival staff were helpful in guiding the students around the building, even though the students also needed much thorough guidance in interpreting, reading and understanding the document collections. According to many students, the handwritten documents were particularly challenging, even though they had practised studying similar texts in the classroom before the intervention. The teacher's role during the visits shifted to that of an assistant, rather than assuming overall responsibility. Regarding the coding of handwriting, teachers were more or less obliged to assist students on various occasions, as the task was seemingly complex to perform. However, the archival staff expressed pleasure with that division of tasks.

Together, the cultural heritage staff and the teachers managed to introduce the visiting students to a previously unexplored local past of their hometown via the historical sources presented to them, and all participating actors achieved both the external and internal aims of their respective missions: the cultural heritage actors by fulfilling the cultural heritage mission regarding the upper secondary group and the teachers by fulfilling much of the aim of the subject of history concerning the students' ability to reflect on their own identity in relation to the local history they encountered at the cultural heritage institution.

Post-visit interviews

Nearly two years after the last archival visits, an interview with the cultural heritage staff and Teacher One was held in spring 2025. It turned out that the logistical problems had reached another level since the last visit, as the archival pedagogue explains:

> Well, for starters, physically, we've closed the archive, so we haven't been able to have classes there. Plus, all our time is being devoted to preparing this new archive. So we've got this really obvious logistical issue where we're basically waiting for a new place we want to move into.

The archival pedagogue and the museum pedagogue had been reflecting on the project in retrospect and what they thought this PBHE project for upper secondary school could achieve in the future. They had seen such good benefits from their collaborations with upper secondary schools that they wanted this project to be part of their basic service from now on. As the archival pedagogue explained:

> When I've talked about this, and we also often discuss how we reach different target groups, just now we had the Swedish National Agency for Education telling us about the new curriculum for upper secondary school and all that. So, I constantly feel that this research project, and what it's about, really fits into our work. We're thinking, 'Yeah, this is a way to

work, and we really want to understand what teachers need from us and our materials, and how that should actually happen.' I think that's precisely what this project really focuses on, and it's perfectly timed.

The archival pedagogue further pointed to the uncertainty among many archival pedagogues she has met in Sweden regarding collaboration with schools and being able to undertake projects in line with school curricula. Much depended on the new curriculum for upper secondary schools in Sweden, which was to be released that year. As she continues:

> Because right now the thoughts are a lot around (the new) curriculum, and if there are going to be any changes and how we are going to plan ahead, and that is where this [project] is just right.

Teacher One also brought up the new curriculum and considered it a generator for future archival visits. However, Teacher One was personally keen on continuing the visits with future classes anyway:

> Yes, absolutely. The students starting this fall, those entering first grade in 2025, will be on the new curriculum. But that's no problem, really. The documents actually mention the importance of archives and similar concepts, so that part works fine … I'm a bit curious: I know about the closed area for the archive, as you said, during this year. But what's the plan for going forward, then?

The museum pedagogue informed Teacher One that the archive would reopen in approximately one year's time. However, the museum pedagogue added that it had been hard to reach out to more teachers since many of them are unaware that, regarding the formulations in the curriculum, they should allow students to visit the archive. However, they lack any personal interest in organising the visit or preparing the students for it. This could also be considered a logistical issue. However, the museum pedagogue emphasised the importance of the teachers' own motivation in both preparing and accompanying the students, in order to maximise the benefits of their visits. The museum pedagogue also emphasised the importance of collaboration between teachers and museum and archival staff prior to such visits.

Teacher One added that new logistical problems would arise in the upcoming semester: the teaching time for all teachers in municipal upper secondary schools would increase by 20 per cent, which would include one additional class to teach, but decrease the time allocation for all courses. This would allow even less time for archival visits and other external events to be realised.

Even if the logistical problems had increased since the last visit, the teacher and cultural heritage staff still saw new possibilities for history teachers to become even more interested in the future of collaborations with the archive. One reason was a new directive in the curriculum, which highlighted upper secondary students' obligations to learn about Sweden's national minorities in their history education. Because northern Sweden is home to some of the largest populations of national minorities, and because this archive and museum house sources concerning these minorities, highlighting this incitement was an important topic of discussion when exploring future collaboration possibilities.

Another original logistical problem that was followed up was the students' ability to read primary and secondary sources. Because this activity was closely related to the cultural heritage mission mandatory for the cultural staff, the museum pedagogue raised a question on just that:

> I mean, how accustomed are the students to reading sources, like, written sources? We had lower secondary schoolers who were supposed to read two pages of typewritten text from the seventies, and it just didn't work. Or one and a half pages, I mean, they just couldn't do it.

Teacher One confirmed that the reading ability among upper secondary students had not substantially improved, and that they continued to practise reading handwritten texts in history classes; however, this remained a challenge for history teachers. He reconnected to the issue brought up by the time of the visits – the problem of not having access to printed books in the classroom because of municipal decisions relying on Swedish digitisation policy:

> So, with textbooks … for ages, we've been asking for actual physical books, because there are so many good things about just flipping through a book. It all ties together better, and as you're going to the page you need, you might stumble upon other interesting things. Yeah, I mean, there are just loads of benefits that we don't quite get with digital [books], but they just keep saying no to us.

Teacher One added that there was no budget at all for physical books among the school's subject departments, and that if someone wanted to try to buy such books, they would have to ask the principal, but be prepared for rejection. These results show that some of the logistical obstacles described in the initial process were still in effect: the Swedish digitisation strategy for schools, although abandoned nationally two years ago, continued to influence the politics in the current municipality. (The Swedish digitisation policy for schools was not renewed but instead abandoned in 2023. The government then announced that the Swedish National School Agency's proposed digitalisation strategy for preschools, schools and adult education for 2023–7 had been definitively discarded. Instead, the School Agency was commissioned to develop general guidelines or recommendations concerning the selection and utilisation of learning tools in teaching.) Still, the reading abilities among secondary students continued to decrease, according to Teacher One and the museum pedagogue, which led them to call for an even greater need for practising reading handwritten and even machine-written older primary and secondary sources.

The reading and interpretation of hand- (and machine-) written material was, as mentioned, not just a goal for the history teachers when presenting historical methods. It was also a direct goal for the archival pedagogue, who described the importance of maintaining this activity, as it was closely connected to her mission. However, all actors considered the possibility of developing some kind of online preparation material for students to review before future visits. They discussed this, since time, as Teacher One put it, 'is a problem for us all in some way'.

However, the cultural heritage mission remained the top priority for the cultural heritage staff, as did the goal of incorporating local history into history education for Teacher One. Still, they adhered to their mutual aim, which was to follow the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary history education. According to what was shared during this interview, the cultural heritage staff and Teacher One made it clear that this project had to continue, despite logistical issues still being present and, in some cases, having increased.

Discussion

This single case study scrutinised the planning performance and post-processing of educational encounters with the past at cultural heritage institutions, here represented by a local archive, using the pedagogical approach of PBHE.

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this single case study, as it provides insight into only one local historical archive regarding the dependence on teachers' strategies and the planning and follow-up of visits. However, according to Yin (2014), the case study can be considered credible due to its integration into a theoretical framework. The analysis in this study can provide insight into the processes and obstacles occurring while planning encounters with local historical sources at a local historical archive. The results could also contribute to a broader understanding of what PBHE could entail for the collaboration between upper secondary history teachers and cultural heritage institutions.

Planning the archival visits required a significant amount of time for all participating actors. The participating museum and archive staff expressed relief at reaching the upper secondary students, who had previously been difficult to reach due to the aforementioned logistical challenges. Sweden's governmental cultural heritage mission involves cultural heritage institutions reaching out to schools at various educational levels. This was a way of reaching the upper secondary students in this city. Therefore, in a way, the staff at the archive and museum fulfilled a part of this mission during these visits. The teachers involved participated in the planning and had to overcome some difficult logistical obstacles to implement the intervention in the classes. The introductory interviews with the teachers recalled the obstacles that preceded the interventions. Relatable obstacles in similar collaborations are also presented in the report from the Swedish National Archive (2019) and from Powers (2004), making these conclusions easily applicable to this planning process. However, the teachers also benefited by allowing their students to reflect on their own identity in relation to the local past they encountered in the carefully chosen historical sources from the local cultural heritage institution that the archive represented.

The process of PBHE has been proven to take considerable time, especially as the planning phase is likely to face bureaucracy and much organisation when collaborating with other actors, as described by Powers (2004). However, earlier unknown obstacles turned out to be more subtle but not unimportant. The digitisation strategy for Swedish schools was such an obstacle, as mentioned by the teachers and

cultural heritage staff interviewed. As this policy has striven to implement more digitised sources in education, it was harder for teachers to motivate students to engage with physical, historical sources, and even more so in a physical context such as the archive, regardless of the teachers' own experience or strategy. This kind of obstacle on a policy level could imply that years of teaching and developed strategies are sometimes insufficient for a teacher to remain resilient in projects like this. As Smith (2002) mentions, teachers could be placed in a more vulnerable situation by stepping away from the general learning orientation. However, all teachers interviewed had at least 10 years of working experience and implemented archival visits in their teaching, empowered by their respective educational strategies. Here, the teaching strategy of social science, as represented among all interviewed teachers, helped teachers promote the archival visit as relevant to both a societal context in history education and the current geographical context. The eclectic strategy further demonstrated that encounters with local historical sources can enhance history education by connecting to contemporary society and various themes, facilitating interdisciplinary collaborations, or employing a range of methods.

PBHE was an effective pedagogical approach for creating collaborative interventions in history education with cultural heritage institutions, as it also empowered the participating actors to manage the planning and implementation of the interventions through close collaboration between history teachers and cultural heritage actors. PBHE stimulated determination and stability among the participating actors, as shown in the teachers' interviews, notes from the planning meetings, field notes from the interventions and the interviews after the visits. Regardless of the teachers' strategies, all participating teachers were also experienced in their work, as were most of the cultural heritage staff – a partly unexplored variable but worth mentioning. However, the eclectic teaching strategy among teachers was especially fruitful when collaborating with cultural heritage actors. This strategy among teachers is also renowned for promoting historical thinking among students to a high extent, as Gestsdóttir et al. (2021) have shown. This implies that this teaching strategy among experienced teachers is not only valuable when planning for external events and collaborations with other actors in history education, but also that combining it with a focus on historical sources is fruitful for students' learning in history education overall. The interview afterwards reveals that even though logistical obstacles can persist and become more challenging to overcome, motivation and close contact between individual cultural heritage actors and teachers, as well as maintained respect for all actors' respective missions, are crucial to strive for when working with PBHE. As scrutinised in this study, PBHE helps put the past into place, and an archive as part of one's cultural heritage could undoubtedly constitute a context where one can 'do history' locally.

Limitations and implications for future research

The constraints of this single case study should be acknowledged, as it offers insights into only one local, historical archive, and the design, execution and appraisal of educational visits to the site. Nonetheless, this case could be considered representative, as it is based in a Swedish city and adheres to the same national curriculum as all other upper secondary education across the nation. It is important to underscore that the Swedish legislation regarding public access to archives is exceptionally permissive (SFS, 1990: 782).

This may not hold true for archival legislation in all countries and, thus, this factor should be regarded as a potential limitation. It is also important to note that various formulations concerning cultural heritage and the use of historical sources are present in other nations' curricula and syllabi for history education; these must be factored into the evaluation of this research.

A further limitation of this research is that the archival material featured in this project was pre-selected and negotiated by the involved actors during the initial planning stages, with the researcher as a part of this process. The researcher was also known to some of the teachers involved in the study. This may have influenced the manifestation of the results regarding how the teachers and cultural heritage employees described their experiences, both before and after the PBHE project.

Finally, the analytical perspective, informed by theoretical notions of teachers' strategies, may also have restricted this study, even though a theory-driven approach in a case study can significantly bolster its trustworthiness (see, for example, Yin, 2014).

Subsequent investigations are required in other countries with different archival statutes, local contexts and curricula. This could further contribute to evaluating the results and consequences of PBHE in upper secondary education, particularly in collaborative settings involving teachers and cultural

heritage employees. Such research could investigate how these approaches can be implemented in diverse ways in various places and under different circumstances.

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Data and materials availability statement

Due to restrictions demanded via the research ethics approval for this study, supporting data is not available.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

No questions were asked concerning sensitive matters or topics revealing private opinions, and students could cease participation at any time. The author declares that research ethics approval for this article was provided by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (SFS, 2003: 460). The study was conducted in alignment with the Swedish National Research Council and ALLEA codes of conduct. No personal data was collected, and all reproductions of the interviews have been anonymised.

Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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