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# What is important in history teaching? Student class teachers' conceptions

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## Abstract

In Finland, history is taught in comprehensive schools at both primary and secondary levels. In primary schools, teachers are qualified class teachers who study one or two history courses during their teacher education. The amount of history taught in teacher education is limited, but student class teachers have studied history while at comprehensive school and general upper secondary school, and they have lived experience of historical cultures as members of different groups and communities. Thus, they have conceptions of what history teaching in school is, and what it should be. In this article, student class teachers' conceptions of teaching history were examined using data (n=92) consisting of students' writings at the beginning of their history studies. A phenomenographic approach was used to identify and characterize different conceptions. The results showed that student class teachers considered understanding of the present to be the most important objective in school history. Based on their own school experiences, they highlighted the significance of the big picture instead of learning scattered facts and details. Students also stressed the importance of the motivation to study history. Their conceptions are similar to the curriculum objectives for history teaching in primary school.

**Keywords:** Finland; teacher education; history teaching; student class teachers; conceptions of history teaching; qualitative research

## Introduction

The Finnish comprehensive school is divided into primary (grades one to six) and secondary (grades seven to nine) schools. In Finland, primary school pupils begin to study history in school from the fourth or fifth grade and continue their studies until the eighth grade or the end of comprehensive school (ninth grade). Schools have the autonomy to adopt a framework for how school subjects are divided between grades. Despite this flexibility, history studies typically begin in the fifth grade, when pupils are 11 years old, and finish at the end of the eighth grade. Half the syllabus is studied in primary school (grades four to six), and the other half is studied in secondary school (grades seven to eight). Secondary school teachers are subject teachers who specialize in one to three subjects, while primary school teachers are qualified class teachers who teach all school subjects. Thus, history is taught partly by class teachers and partly by history subject teachers.

History content in Finnish comprehensive schools is built around chronology. History begins in primary school with the Stone Age and continues to the French Revolution. In secondary school, it continues from the French Revolution to the modern age. Both primary and secondary schools teach world history as well as the

history of Finland. Alongside this content, history skills and education for democratic citizenship are emphasized in the history curriculum. History is strongly connected to social studies, although traditionally, students learn history before social studies in school, because the latter uses a historical perspective to understand modern times. Teaching history in comprehensive school is challenging, and the skills required of history teachers are extensive, including content knowledge and an understanding of the nature of history and the construction of historical knowledge (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016: Chapter 14.4.8).

There are considerable differences between teacher education for class teachers and history subject teachers. History subject teachers study history as a major and complete their pedagogical studies (60 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)) as a minor. In contrast, class teachers study education as a major, and as a minor they complete multidisciplinary studies in subjects and cross-curricular thematic modules in basic education (60 ECTS). These studies constitute the professional class teacher qualification. Multidisciplinary studies in subjects consist of courses in all compulsory subjects in primary school. Thus, there are usually one or two courses of history and history pedagogy (3–5 ECTS), depending on the teacher education curriculum, which varies between universities (see, for example, *Curriculum Plans 2017–2020* – Department of Teacher Education (n.d.)). After completing their history course(s), student teachers should have a basis to teach history according to the principles and objectives defined in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016).

In this article we study classroom student teachers' conceptions of history teaching and the nature of history as a school subject. Why study this topic? School development and initial teacher education have a special relationship in Finland. All teachers are qualified and equal members of the school community after their graduation. In addition, throughout the educational system from primary to tertiary level, all teachers enjoy an extremely high level of autonomy and pedagogical freedom. However, in-service teacher education is still fragmentary and non-systematic in Finland. In other words, initial teacher education has a special role in teacher education, and its significance in the development of professional identity in Finland is highly stressed (Heikkinen et al., 2015). The courses in which the pedagogy of school subjects (for example, history) is studied in primary teacher programmes are important, because their yields provide the guidelines for teaching subjects in primary school. Because perceptions of school subjects are the foundation for student teachers' subject teaching, it is important for the developmental work in teacher education to study these perceptions and focus on those aspects of teacher education that may change or enhance students' learning. In Finland, studying perceptions of student teachers is popular among researchers from this point of view (see, for example, Kontkanen, 2018; Brauer, 2019). The group under study also has another important feature. Student teachers completed their primary and secondary school in the 2000s and 2010s, according to a syllabus that, alongside material contents, stressed history skills and democratic citizenship. From this point of view, the results also reflect history teaching in schools.

## History as a school subject in Finland

A new era in Finnish history teaching started in the 1990s, when a new curriculum was introduced that focused more on the objectives of history teaching than previous curricula. In comprehensive school and general upper secondary school, these objectives included the teaching of historical skills and the nature of history

(Opetushallitus, 1994a, 1994b; Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). In the 2000s, democratic citizenship became a third main objective. In the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, the main objective of history teaching is described as follows:

The task of the subject of history is to develop pupils' knowledge of history and cultures to encourage them to adopt the principles of responsible citizenship. Knowledge about the past is used to guide pupils towards understanding the development that has led to the present, to appreciate the value of mental and material labour as well as to reflect on future choices. Pupils are guided to perceive the importance of the individual as a historical actor and to comprehend factors underlying activities and human motivations. The aim is to support pupils in building their identity and to promote their growth into active members of society who understand diversity. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016: Chapter 14.4.8)

For the curriculum at primary school level, the objectives of history teaching are defined as:

... to familiarise pupils with the nature of historical knowledge, information acquisition, and basic concepts. The aim is to awaken pupils' interest in the past and in human activities, in perceiving their significance, and in understanding them. Learning by doing and experimental working approaches are emphasised in the instruction of the contents defined in the core curriculum. (ibid.: Chapter 14.4.8)

In other words, the main objectives in primary school history teaching are to awaken pupils' interest in history and its learning and to construct a basis for understanding history and its nature. The curriculum emphases reflect the paradigm shift in learning and teaching history. The shift concerns the way knowledge is understood in history education. Alongside content knowledge and the teaching of facts, more general competencies have emerged, aiming to develop a deeper understanding of history and democratic citizenship. In order to achieve these competencies, historical thinking skills and the ability of historical reasoning have become central aspects of history education (Lévesque, 2008; Seixas and Peck, 2004; Seixas and Morton, 2013; Stoel *et al.*, 2015; Sears, 2017). Elements of historical thinking are described as basic concepts in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, which include analysing cause and consequences, identifying continuity and change, and understanding the motives behind human actions. It is also important to understand the interpretative and multi-perspectival nature of history. This implies working with primary sources and using them as evidence (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016).

Achieving historical thinking skills requires authentic and meaningful learning. Inquiry-based learning provides an opportunity and a tool for learning historical understanding. Using inquiry in history education means engaging students in the process of constructing knowledge, which means asking questions that elicit curiosity, gathering and evaluating evidence, and formulating conclusions based on this evidence. Inquiry-based learning, on the one hand requires and feeds reflective thinking, and on the other hand it has the ability to foster deeper understanding, both of which are essential abilities in democratic societies. Historical thinking through inquiry-based learning could enhance general competencies related to identity, democratic citizenship and understanding the human condition (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Van Straaten *et al.*, 2016).

To what extent are the objectives of the basic education curriculum being attained in Finnish comprehensive schools? Finnish education is based on autonomy

and trust; teachers are not evaluated by external measures or institutions like the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in England. Rather, the focus is on self- and peer-reflection. Finnish teachers plan, implement and evaluate their work independently at school and classroom levels. Therefore, the educational system does not collect data from schools and classrooms. Researchers of history pedagogy have studied the state of history teaching in Finland. Most studies have been executed in secondary and general upper secondary schools, but some doctoral studies have focused on history pedagogy in comprehensive schools, including primary schools (see, for example, Mikander, 2016). In recent years, primary school history teaching has drawn researchers' attention (see, for example, Khawaja, 2018; Rantala and Khawaja, 2018). The results for primary schools correspond with those of studies on secondary and upper secondary school history teaching (see, for example, Rautiainen *et al.*, 2019).

The results of the studies indicate that Finnish history teaching has two faces and its nature is ambivalent. Up to the 1980s, history teaching was strongly directed towards nation building and national identity; these roots are still visible in Finnish history teaching (see, for example, Ahonen, 2017; Rautiainen and Veijola, 2020). In contrast, curricula stressing historical skills and democratic citizenship have been in place since the 1990s. The focus on these aspects was intensified during the 2000s, especially in 2014, when the current curriculum for basic education was accepted. In addition, during the 2010s, new teaching material was produced for primary schools (see, for example, Rantala *et al.*, 2016; Veijola *et al.*, 2018, 2019). As a result of these developments, learners were encouraged to take an active role as history researchers studying historical sources and making interpretations based on sources, as well as thinking about themselves as members of society and as democratic citizens.

This article tries to answer the following research question: What kind of conceptions do student class teachers have about teaching history and the nature of historical knowledge prior to their history studies?

## Data and analysis

The data for this article were collected from first-year student class teachers during one academic year. The class teacher education programme is popular in Finland, and the criteria for student admission are strict. Only 10 per cent of the candidates who apply are selected for the programme each year. Hence, participants in this study had been successful learners during their school years. The total number of participants was 92, both male ( $n=13$ ) and female ( $n=79$ ) students, with an age range of 19–31 years, mainly under 25. The participants represented various socio-economic backgrounds and reflected Finnish teacher education in general. As part of their first-year history studies, participants were asked to write a short text about their views on history teaching. The data ( $n=92$ ) consisted of these short texts, which students wrote after the first seminar meeting of their first history study module. The assignment was to write a short answer to the question, 'What is important in history teaching?'. The writings were based on participants' school experiences and conceptions, not on a specific curriculum. The writings varied in length from half a page to one and a half pages. The task was given to students to be completed at home and they were asked to return it within a week, before the next seminar meeting. During the first seminar meeting, the participants shared their own experiences of studying history and they discussed the meaning and nature of history as a school subject. Students rarely mentioned the first meeting in their writings, so we estimated that it did not have a significant impact on

the content of the writings. For the purposes of analysis, participants were numbered consecutively. This numbering, in addition to gender and age, is used in quotations.

A phenomenographic approach was used to identify and characterize the different ways in which participants understood the nature of history and history teaching. The analysis was data-driven. In the first phase of analysis, the writings were read several times, and different expressions related to history teaching were identified and organized by frequency (see Table 1). This process revealed the emphasis of expressions, which were then compared to each other and to individual writings to find collective meanings without losing the original meanings (Marton, 1988; Marton and Pong, 2005; Huusko and Paloniemi, 2006).

**Table 1: The different expressions concerning history teaching and their frequency**

Expression	Frequency
Understanding the past to understand the present	69
Learning the big picture instead of single facts	53
Appreciate one's own and other cultures	43
Varied teaching methods and integration with other school subjects	40
Arousing motivation and/or interest	38
Common knowledge	33
Thinking ability and the ability to question	32
History as part of identity	30
Different perspectives on the past	21
Student-oriented teaching	20
Anticipating the future	18
Utilizing cultural products (films, comics and so on)	17
Becoming more tolerant	13
Meaningful learning	13
Active citizenship	12

In the next phase, expressions were categorized into larger clusters (see Table 2). Classification of the expressions into different categories was not unambiguous, and some expressions could have fitted into two different categories. In this phase, however, expressions with the same kind of purpose were combined and the expression clusters were organized into themes, which covered the varying ways of understanding. Some of the expressions concern the objectives of teaching, for example *common knowledge* and *active citizenship*, while others, such as *learning the big picture instead of single facts* and *student-oriented teaching*, focus more on the way history should be taught.

The next step was to write descriptions of themes conglomerating the various aspects of each category (see Table 3), thus describing and covering the diverse conceptions of history represented in the students' texts (Marton and Pong, 2005; Paakkari *et al.*, 2010).

## Results

The aim of this study was to identify student class teachers' conceptions about history teaching as expressed in their writings. The analysis produced four categories

**Table 2: Expressions categorized under the larger themes**

<b>Understanding the present</b>	<b>Cultural understanding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the past to understand the present</li> <li>• Common knowledge</li> <li>• Anticipating the future</li> <li>• Different perspectives on the past</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciate one's own and other cultures</li> <li>• History as part of identity</li> <li>• Becoming more tolerant</li> <li>• Active citizenship</li> </ul>
<b>The big picture</b>	<b>Motivation and integrative teaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning the big picture instead of single facts</li> <li>• Thinking ability and the ability to question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied teaching methods and integration with other school subjects</li> <li>• Arousing motivation and/or interest</li> <li>• Student-oriented teaching</li> <li>• Utilizing cultural products (films, comics and so on)</li> <li>• Meaningful learning</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Categories showing how student class teachers understood the meaning of history as a school subject**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Expressions</b>
<b>The aims of history teaching</b>		
Understanding the present	With knowledge about the past, it is possible to understand what is happening in the present and to anticipate the future.	<i>'We have to understand the past, if we want to understand the present.'</i>
Cultural understanding	With knowledge about one's own and different cultures, it is possible to build one's identity and grow more tolerant.	<i>'Learning history broadens pupils' understanding and helps them make sense of the present.'</i> <i>'History is part of our story about how we have developed.'</i> <i>'A child can understand his/her own role in life.'</i> <i>'Children learn about different cultures and grow much more open-minded.'</i>
<b>Teaching history</b>		
The big picture	History is a (national) narrative, which includes general knowledge and an understanding of causes and consequences.	<i>'The years are not important, but the big picture is.'</i>
Motivation and integrative teaching	Student class teachers try to find a way to motivate and activate pupils through varied teaching methods and integrative teaching.	<i>'At its worst, teaching history is boring.'</i> <i>'So in history teaching it is important to motivate pupils with various teaching methods.'</i>

(Marton, 1981; Renström, 1990; Niikko, 2003) shedding light on the ambivalent nature of Finnish history teaching. Content and coherent narrative were emphasized in the data, but there were also aims for teaching, such as thinking skills and history as part of identity. Every category comprised three or four pivotal aspects and could be summed up in key descriptions.

### Understanding the present

Understanding the present was the most significant conception in the data. Of all categories, expressions directly related to this conception were the most frequent (n=69) and were among the first mentioned in the writings. According to the data, the purpose of teaching history in schools seemed to be about making sense of the present. Key expressions that characterized this category were:

[We have to understand] what has led us to this point, where we are today. (21, female, age 22)

We have to understand the past, if we want to understand the present. (29, female, age 21)

Learning history broadens pupils' understanding and helps them make sense of the present. (52, female, age 22)

Students understood that the meaning of history as a school subject was to understand the present. In the data, they did not describe in detail how this understanding could be formed:

Knowledge of history is important to us all. Knowledge of the successes, conflicts and other events of past generations helps us understand how we have come to this point. (1, female, age 20)

... [to] understand and get information about things that may explain why things are as they are today. (3, female, age 22)

In the data, historical knowledge is described as content knowledge and understanding of the present is formed through the learning of content. In this context, 'understanding' means 'to have knowledge about the past'.

### Cultural understanding

Cultural understanding formed the second category of conceptions. As a conception, cultural understanding was represented in two aspects. The first related to the individual him/herself. As in the first category, where learning history makes the present more understandable, in this category, learning history helps pupils to understand themselves:

To understand an individual's behaviour, one must know one's own history. (11, female, age 22)

History does not merely seek to answer the question of who was who. History also asks the question, who are you? (5, male, age 24)

One of the main goals of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016) is to support the building of pupils' identities, and this idea was also important for student class teachers. The second aspect of this

category related to community and society. An understanding of one's own culture is crucial and could lead to an appreciation of one's own cultural background:

Cultural traditions should be cherished as an important part of the history of the Finns or people from different backgrounds. (80, female, age 19)

Understanding cultures different from the pupils' own was also a frequently mentioned aim for history education:

Children learn about cultural differences and then grow more open-minded. (25, male, age 21)

When you know your own history, it is easier to accept the roots of others. (36, female, age 21)

As in the previous category, cultural understanding was a goal, but participants were unclear about how to achieve it:

It is much easier to understand otherness when you are aware of history and know how to apply it to the present. (23, female, age 20)

The data did not reflect an active role for learners in learning, although after learning history, pupils were supposed to be capable of utilizing their knowledge. However, it was not obvious in the data how pupils learn, for example, to be open-minded.

### The big picture

Student class teachers had surprisingly convergent views on history teaching. Students reflected on their own school experiences and mentioned the lack of a coherent narrative as a weakness of their education. Expressions such as the following were common:

The years are not important, but the big picture is. (13, female, age 20)

In history teaching, I think the most important thing is not to memorize things like dates, but rather to visualize the whole. (54, female, age 21)

Students' conceptions of history teaching and reflections on their own experiences showed that in school, they learned scattered facts and missed the big picture and overall narrative in which their knowledge was contained. The big picture in students' writings could be defined as a narrative, and students usually described it as an understanding of causes and consequences:

It is important to understand and know the causes and consequences of historical events and put important eras in the right places. (36, female, age 21)

It is notable that student class teachers did not suggest that pupils themselves should identify causes and consequences, but that they should learn them from books or teachers' narratives. The interpretative nature of historical knowledge was not part of the big picture, although expressions such as the following were used:

It is important to teach children how to search for information properly and how not to believe everything. (11, female, age 22)

Written history is the history of winners. (33, female, age 20)

It is also important to look at things from multiple angles. (36, female, age 21)

However, students did not identify how this kind of learning should happen. The importance of historical knowledge itself was mentioned, although it was also questioned. In any case, historical knowledge was considered to be content knowledge rather than historical thinking skills.

### **Motivation and integrative teaching**

Students emphasized motivation as a central part of history teaching. In this category, expressions reflected the concerns students had with both their own and pupils' motivation:

If the teacher can get excited, help [pupils] and invent a variety of tasks to learn history ... then it will certainly increase pupils' motivation. (64, female, age 20)

I think the teacher should be a source of interest and enthusiasm. (72, female, age 31)

Participants' own experiences of learning history in basic education focused on remembering facts and details, and in several writings this was described as a boring and meaningless way of learning history:

History is interesting, but I still didn't like the [school] subject. We had to remember carefully the kings, different parties of the war and the years. Personally, I do not find this kind of studying motivating. (43, female, age 20)

However, constantly cramming from the book or listening to the teacher makes you bored. (64, female, age 20)

At this point in their studies, students did not have an understanding of pedagogical methods and how to teach history, and they tried to solve the problem of motivation in their writings in two different ways. First, they emphasized varied teaching methods. Learning history was seen as remembering facts or understanding the interpretations of history researchers or textbook writers, and students expressed concern about how to make pupils motivated to do this:

So, in history teaching, it is important to motivate pupils with various teaching methods. (57, female, age 21)

They mentioned engaging in drama/plays and utilizing technology as ways to deepen students' ability to remember content. Another popular way to make history learning more interesting included utilizing representations of historical culture, such as historical films or television series:

At its worst, teaching history is boring and going through things with just a textbook. Today, the media creates many opportunities to invigorate the study of history. (60, female, age 19)

In the data, these means were expressed as alternatives to reading textbooks or listening to the teacher. This reflected students' narrow view of history teaching, which was based on their own experiences as pupils:

My experience of history lessons and different teaching methods is limited, so I definitely want to emphasize interest and motivation in the lessons. (52, female, age 22)

Second, motivation and the meaningfulness of history as a school subject were tied to the integration of subjects. Students thought that history could be more motivational

and interesting for pupils if it was integrated with other school subjects, such as the visual arts or mother tongue and literature. Before the history course in which this study took place, students had taken courses in teacher education that stressed subject integration and/or phenomenon-based learning. This may have affected their focus when they defined important aspects of teaching. In addition, the data suggested that students sought a way to engage pupils in their own learning process:

Linking historical events to one's personal history also makes teaching more personal. (72, female, age 31)

However, history was seen primarily as a content-based subject that requires remembering, so finding ways to engage pupils was challenging. Although student-oriented teaching was the aim of participants, the means of achieving this were missing.

## Conclusions

The aim of this study was to identify how student class teachers perceive history education. In the data, four conceptions were identified. Three of them reflected the traditional nation-building narrative in Finnish history teaching. History is considered as a narrative or collection of narratives that pupils should learn in order to understand the present, to form a coherent view of the past and to become tolerant individuals and active citizens with the ability also to question information. Participants derived the means to achieve these goals from their own school experiences, and they differed from the goals they mentioned in their writings.

Understanding history education as a sharing of information challenged students' conceptions of teaching and of themselves as teachers. They want to be student-oriented teachers, but lecturing on content does not meet this goal. This allowed them to consider different teaching methods. Participants had a vision of the meaning of history education, but their own school experiences did not provide the tools to achieve the goals they set. From the perspective of teacher education, this is good news, because student class teachers are motivated to consider history teaching from a variety of perspectives.

## Discussion

In this study, the conceptions of student class teachers clearly reflected the two faces of Finnish history teaching: the traditional emphasis on narrative and remembering on the one hand, and an understanding of the nature of history and historical skills as stressed in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education on the other hand. The conception of history as aiming at understanding the present was the most commonly mentioned, and this is probably no accident. The present is a continuation of the past and, along with solutions we are working out now, forms a frame for the future (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). The broad perspective of history can be narrowed down into fragmented facts or cause–consequence processes, which are two key formal concepts needed to understand history. However, if causes and consequences are seen only as part of certain narratives, then pupils will only learn the history of one voice rather than the history of different voices and experiences (see, for example, Veijola and Rautiainen, 2016).

Although there are only a few studies focusing on student-teachers in history, the results of this study were similar to those that emerged from data collected ten and twenty years ago (Rautiainen and Saukkonen, 2013; Virta, 2001). The results of this study

are therefore surprising. The informants of this article studied history in school during the 2010s, when the shift in national curricula towards history skills and democratic citizenship had been implemented in Finland for approximately twenty years, both in basic education and in general upper secondary education. However, although our data do show changes, they were not as conspicuous as we expected them to be. We think that there are two main reasons for this. First, in an autonomous education system, the normative level – in curricula – is only loosely connected to the practical level – in teaching in classrooms. Curricula follow educational policy, yet classroom reality also follows tradition (Raiker and Rautiainen, 2017). In addition, the traditional subculture of history teaching in Finland is strong and cohesive, which was strongly connected to national identity and nation building during the 1980s and 1990s. Content-oriented history teaching has its roots in this tradition, and it seems to be still at the core of history teaching in Finland (Rantala *et al.*, 2020).

In terms of the objectives of history teaching in primary school, students' conceptions were promising. Students underlined the significance of historical understanding, and they stressed learners' interest in and motivation to learn history. Thus, their conceptions resonated with curriculum objectives for history teaching in primary school, apart from the idea of democratic citizenship, which was represented only in fragmentary remarks. This conflicted with students' emphasis on the meaning of history as a way of understanding the present, which is connected with the idea that history students must learn how to be active democratic citizens within a democratic society.

In educational systems in which there is great autonomy and pedagogical freedom, initial teacher education plays a special role. Teachers become 100 per cent qualified via their MA studies. However, according to our study, students' starting points for their history studies varied. In other words, student class teachers' conceptions of history teaching and the nature of history as a school subject were heterogeneous. Thus, history studies in class teacher programmes should focus very clearly on history and history teaching as a theoretical entity, as well as on exposing students to challenges in practice, so that their experiences contribute to the development of a new kind of approach (Rautiainen and Veijola, 2020).

The Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä delivers its class teacher programme in the following way (*Curriculum Plans 2017–2020* – Department of Teacher Education (n.d.)). There are two history courses (both amounting to 2 ECTS) in multidisciplinary studies within the class teacher programme. The first study module emphasizes two major aims. The first aim is to understand the nature of history as a school subject, and the second is to develop in students the capability to teach according to the principles of inquiry-based learning, including critical thinking and historical literacy (Rüsen, 2017; Van den Berg, 2007; VanSledright, 2011). An important part of the course is the opportunity for students to reflect on their own experiences of learning and teaching history (Loughran, 2002). In the second study module, students implement in practice what they have learned about the nature of history and inquiry-based learning during the first study module. They plan and carry out a learning/teaching experiment in local schools or a broader project with other stakeholders, such as museums. Once the project is completed, students edit their materials and experiences into digital learning materials. This process is part of their reflection on the entirety of their history studies.

These two courses aim to create meaningful learning experiences for student teachers to reinforce their learning outcomes. In this context, meaningful learning involves learning experiences that have special meaning for students of the class teacher

programme. Such experiences are apparent when students/learners are involved in the learning process. This requires studies to emphasize authentic practices and active and intentional processes in creating meaningful learning experiences (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Hakkarainen et al., 2007; Kostiainen et al., 2018; Kostiainen and Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2019). Future research will determine whether the class teacher programme changes students' conceptions of history teaching and the nature of history as a school subject, and whether it produces meaningful learning experiences.

## Notes on the contributors

**Riitta Tallavaara** is a PhD candidate and is currently working as a university teacher in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research interests are teacher education, pedagogy of history and meaningful learning. Her thesis examines student class teachers' conceptions of history teaching during the history studies of the class teacher programme and the change of those conceptions through meaningful learning.

**Matti Rautiainen** is a senior lecturer in pedagogy of history and social sciences in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. His research interests are pedagogy of history, education for democracy and teacher education.

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