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'JUST IMAGINE …': STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON EMPATHY TASKS IN SECONDARY HISTORY EDUCATION
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Abstract

Historical empathy can be helpful when learning history. However, we do not know what students do when completing an empathy-task or how they perceive this type of task. In the explorative study presented in this article, we recognized different types of empathy-tasks, we saw students showing cognitive as well as affective elements in their responses on an empathy task, and we learned that students think that empathy-tasks are mainly useful to remember facts. Students also mentioned comparing the past with the present and imagining other people's lives as goals of empathy-tasks.

Keywords

Historical empathy, Cognition and affect, Secondary education, Students' perspectives

Introduction

'Just imagine: you are a young boy, working in a factory in 1850. Describe your day.'
This task, from a Dutch, ninth-grade history textbook, is an example of what we will refer to as an empathy-task. In an empathy-task, students have to try to imagine what it was like to live in the past. They are asked to connect with a historical protagonist and are expected to describe an image from the past, using either given information or prior knowledge.

Imagining the past is essential to achieving historical understanding, as defined by Husbands (1996): '[…] historical understanding […] can be characterized in a number of ways, but essentially, it rests on a concern to understand the particularity of human situations in time and context-bound situations' (p. 122).

It is very difficult for students to imagine the past without being judgmental or presentist (Husbands 1996). It demands the understanding that historical people are, on the one hand, human beings with feelings and needs like any other person, but on the other hand, people who had a different set of values and who lived under different circumstances, which may have resulted in actions and decisions to which modern people cannot always relate. Imagining the past as it really was is also impeded by hindsight: knowledge about the results of historical developments (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Yeager & Foster, 2001; Hartmann & Hasselhorn, 2010; Perikleous, 2011; Wilschut, 2011). Ignoring this knowledge and trying to imagine that you are in the middle of events without knowing how things "end" is an almost impossible achievement (Royzman, Cassidy & Baron 2003).

Yet, we ask our students to perform empathy-tasks. We do so, firstly, because of their link to historical thinking; the contextualizing that is needed to be able to imagine the past is seen as an important component of historical thinking and reasoning (Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2012; Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2012). Secondly, empathy-tasks can be a way of eliciting engagement with the past (Cunningham, 2009; Logtenberg, 2010). Although history education researchers have discussed extensively the meaning of historical empathy and described the potential of historical empathy-tasks in the history classroom, studies examining how students perceive and work with empathy-tasks are still scarce. A better understanding of how empathy tasks work for students is important for realizing the potential of historical empathy-tasks.

This study investigates students' perspectives on an empathy-task and their way of working during such a task. We define empathy-tasks as tasks that stimulate students to imagine the past from the perspective of a fictional or genuine historical person. In our study, we conducted an in-depth examination of an empathy-task about the Industrial Revolution, in which students had to imagine they were working in a factory.

Theoretical framework

Historical empathy is a much-disputed concept. Most definitions of historical empathy consist of multiple components. Lévesque, for example, distinguishes between three components: imaginative achievement, contextualization, and moral judgment. The latter he calls 'an extremely risky business' (Lévesque, 2008, pp. 147-153). Barton and Levstik (2004) define historical empathy by emphasizing personal involvement in the past: 'Appreciation for a sense of otherness of historical actors, shared normalcy of the past, recognizing effects of historical context and the multiplicity of historical perspectives, and understanding that our view on the past depends on our present context' (pp. 210-221). Additionally, there are shorter descriptions given for historical empathy, which have fewer layers: historical empathy is, according to Grant (2003) the 'disposition to imagine other perspectives' (p.76). This definition is in line with the one given by Barton & Levstik (2004). Davis (2001) states: 'it is imagination restrained by evidence' (p. 4), which coincides with the first two components described by Lévesque (2008).

The aforementioned definitions represent only a few of those that have been proposed in the debate about what exactly historical empathy is, and there are many more (e.g., Yeager & Foster 2001; Lee & Ashby 2001; Brooks 2009). In all of the proposed definitions, two dimensions of historical empathy are present: a cognitive dimension and an affective dimension. The cognitive dimension includes reconstructing what the past could have been like by means of collecting evidence and conducting historical inquiry. The affective dimension involves sensing with one's own emotions how people in the past would have functioned, recognizing that historical actors are human beings with feelings. Thus, empathy can be a cognitive achievement, evidenced by the ability to reconstruct the circumstances of the past – the food, clothing, political situation, working environment, etc. – and it can also be an emotional experience (i.e., elicit affective reactions), as when thinking about how people in the past would have thought and lived results in feelings of, for example, indignation or pity.

It is a much debated issue whether historical empathy is a merely cognitive or essentially an affective achievement. Barton and Levstik (2004) tried to settle the matter by splitting up historical empathy into two parts: 'empathy as perspective recognition' and 'empathy as caring' (p. 206, p. 228). The first part involves the cognitive activity of recognizing perspectives (e.g., trying to understand statesmen, politicians and their views and decisions). The latter part involves the affective activity of imagining how historical actors experienced their lives. In

education, 'empathy as caring' is usually achieved using the 'underdogs' of history, such as the child-laborer used in the empathy-task for this study, as examples.

In order to describe the cognitive process of contextualization, the term historical perspective-taking is also used (Boddington, 1980; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Hartmann & Hasselhorn, 2008). Some scholars argue that too much emphasis on affective processes may be detrimental to historical thinking and academic achievement (Lee & Shemilt, 2012; Perikleous, 2011). If students are triggered with affect, they might become more inclined to judge from their own privileged points of view (e.g., 'Romans were crazy' or 'crusaders were murderers'), which is, of course, undesirable from an historical point of view.

On the other hand, Logtenberg (2010), who analyzed students' thinking while reading a text about a nineteenth century factory, shows that affect can be compatible with historical reasoning in some instances. Affective reactions, such as pity or astonishment, can cause the reader to feel a need to contextualize the past in order to understand its perceived strangeness and resolve the experienced imbalance between what has been learned about the past and what is considered 'normal' from a present-day perspective. Thus, affective reactions can co-occur with cognitive responses. Given Immordino and Damasio's (2007) assertion that feelings and learning are closely related, this finding should come as no surprise. The authors call the large overlap between emotion and cognition 'emotional thought' and stress that emotional thought is relevant to education because 'neither learning nor recall happen in a purely rational domain, divorced from emotion'. Kahneman (2011) also notes the importance of affect in situations in which people have to decide how to react.

In Dutch, our own language, the word 'inleven' (lit.: to live oneself in) is used, which means to step into the shoes of another person, trying to think and feel like the other as much as possible.

Empathy is clearly a concept with multiple dimensions. Cognitive activities (e.g., investigating, explaining, thinking logically, and working with evidence) seem to be an important part of it, while affective reactions (e.g., identifying with the past, imagining oneself in another's circumstance) are important as well. Both activities can be considered important for realizing the potential of historical empathy tasks.

According to Cunningham (2009), teachers recognize four main goals of empathy-tasks: Providing as powerful and vivid a sense of history as possible; Making history relevant and accessible for students; Combatting misconceptions while working with sources; and Creating as clear and vivid a picture of the past as you can with what you have.

Although a lot has been said in the literature about the concept of historical empathy, and Cunningham's research shed some light on how teachers perceive empathy-tasks, little is known about how students work with empathy-tasks, and practically nothing is known about what students think about these empathy-tasks or whether they value them. Do they think empathy-tasks are optional, or do they think these tasks are a 'genuine' learning activity? And if so, what do they think they learn from empathy-tasks? In our study, we examined how students work with historical empathy, taking into account its cognitive, as well as affective, aspects.

Aims and research question
The aims of this explorative research are threefold. First, we want to explore which types of empathy-tasks are elicited by historical textbooks. This will enable us to select a task representative of empathy-tasks used in (Dutch) history classrooms. Second, we want to identify which processes, both affective and cognitive, occur when students work on an

empathy-task. And third, we want to gain insight into students' opinions about empathy-tasks. This research is guided by the following questions:

1. Which types of empathy-tasks are present in history textbooks?
2. To what extent are cognitive and affective elements present in students' performance on an empathy-task?
3. How do students perceive an empathy-task?

Method

Participants

This study was conducted with 16 students attending 4 different secondary schools in the city of Amsterdam. All four schools provide secondary education at the intermediate and higher levels. Secondary education in the Netherlands has three levels: 1) a lower level, which mainly prepares students for vocational training; 2) an intermediate level, which prepares students for professional education; and 3) a higher level, which prepares students for academic studies. Approximately 30% of the 12-17 year-olds in the Netherlands get their education at the intermediate level, called havo.

Havo students study history in the first three years of secondary education. In the higher grades, history is no longer a mandatory subject. We chose to study ninth grade students (havo 3, ages 14-16) because it is the last year in which many of them study history at school as a compulsory subject. Most of the participants were not yet sure whether they wanted to continue to take history classes.

Seven of the students were male; nine were female. Of the 16 students, 14 were born in the Netherlands, one was born in Turkey and one was born in Chile. All of the students were 15 or 16 years old. In a questionnaire, we asked students how well they perform in history. Three students considered themselves 'excellent' in history, three considered themselves 'below average', and the remaining students considered their performance to be somewhere in between. Seven of the students said history was dull or of little interest, while nine indicated that they enjoyed history.

All students voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Task

To answer the first research question, we analyzed empathy tasks in three chapters from four different history textbooks that were used by a substantial number of Dutch secondary schools (SLO & Stichting Kennisnet, 2014). The chapters were on the French Revolution, Industrialization and the First World War. In the textbook chapters we analyzed, a total of twenty-two empathy-tasks were found. One textbook had only one empathy-task, one textbook had six tasks, one textbook had seven tasks, and one textbook had eight tasks. We coded each task according to the type of empathy that was requested. Inter-rater reliability between the first and second coder resulted in an 87% correspondence rate

In order to answer research questions 2 and 3, we chose an empathy-task that explicitly asked the students to step into the shoes of a (fictional) person. Students were asked to study some texts and pictures and then, while imagining they were a child laborer, write about a day in a 19th century factory. The information given in the text comprised the working hours of a child laborer

including time for breaks, some statistics indicating how many children worked in factories, a story about a foreman with a whip, and information about children falling ill.

Data Collection

Data collected from the students participating in the study consisted of: (a) pre- interviews, (b) written answers, (c) post-interviews and (d) a questionnaire. In the interviews, we asked students to reflect on the task both beforehand, detailing how they thought they would handle the task, and afterward, indicating what they actually did. Additionally, we asked students their opinion of the goals of the task. We used the interviews to discover what type of thoughts and perspectives students had about performing an empathy-task.

We used the written answers to investigate the cognitive and affective aspects of the students' writing. The questionnaire asked for information such as age, grade, and native language, to gather background information about our participants.

The research took place during regular classroom time. Two students at a time were taken from the classroom to be interviewed (together) and to work on the task (individually). The remaining students worked with their own teacher on the subject they were studying at the time.

First, students were asked to read the task. The task was taken from a textbook for students in year 2 (comparable to eighth grade in the UK and USA). Therefore, we expected that the cognitive level of the task would be appropriate for the students. All participants had already studied the topic of concern (i.e., the Industrial Revolution and its social consequences). When the students had finished reading the task, the first part of the interview was conducted (10-15 minutes). Students were asked about their perception of the task in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted in pairs.

After reading the task and being interviewed about their perspectives on the task, students were asked to individually perform the task. The time allotted for completing the task was 15 minutes. Every student wrote a short essay on life in a factory using given information including text and pictures. Students were not allowed to work together. When the students were finished, the second part of the interview took place (15-30 minutes), asking students how they tried to perform the task, what they thought they needed to achieve historical empathy and whether they believe historical empathy is important for studying history and (if so) why. At the end of the second part of the interview, students completed a questionnaire.

In a pilot study, we worked with the same task and asked the students to complete the task by thinking aloud. We did this both with individual students and with pairs of students. In analyzing the results, we noticed that the students were exceptionally focused on the task and trying to produce an answer. It was difficult for them to reflect on the processes in which they were engaged, even when prompted. In this study, we decided to continue with the pre- and post-interviews, but not to ask students to think aloud. We also decided to keep conducting the interviews in pairs because we found that students talked more easily when interviewed together (see also Bosschaart, Kuiper & Van der Schee, 2014; McCulley & Barton, 2005). We worked with two male pairs, three female pairs and three mixed-gender pairs.

Data analysis

For our first research question, we collected the empathy-tasks presented in the textbooks and identified different types of tasks. A summary of these tasks is presented in the results section.

For our second research question, we analyzed the students' written answers. One student completely misinterpreted the task and wrote a summary for each part of the given information. We did not include his work in the analysis; in total, we had a sample of 15 responses. The length of the responses varied from 98 to 264 words, with a mean length of 193 words.

We coded the responses for both cognitive and affective elements (see Table 1). Coding was performed at the sentence level (or at the phrase level when punctuation or sentence structure were lacking). Inter-rater reliability between a first and second coder was 84%.

TABLE 1.

Coding Scheme used for analyzing cognitive and affective aspects of students' written work.

Category	Description	Example
Cognitive	Construction of an image or context, reproducing given information	'Five o'clock in the morning, time to go to work'
	Construction of an image or context, using prior knowledge	'From the factory chimneys, black smoke is appearing'
Affective	Expressions of disgust, wonder or disapproval	'How can they let us work this hard?'
	Description of emotional experiences of the historical actor	'Every morning I pray to God to help me with the day'

In sentences or phrases that were coded as 'cognitive', the students either constructed an image by reproducing information given with the task or contextualized the situation with information that could not be found in the texts and pictures accompanying the assignment.

We coded as 'affective' all sentences or phrases that contained elements linked to emotions, both of the student (e.g., moral judgment) as of the child-laborer.

To complement this analysis of the students' written work, we also examined what they said during the interviews about how they handled the task. We considered the interviews as a whole and did not analyze students' statements separately.

For the third research question, we searched the answers given by students in both the pre-task and post-task interviews for statements about the way students worked through the task (process) and the purpose they felt the task served (goal). We asked students what they believed the value of this type of task to be. We wondered whether students' answers would correspond with those given by teachers in Cunningham's (2009) research.

Results

Types of empathy tasks
We found two main types of empathy-tasks. The first type were tasks in which students were asked to place themselves in the shoes of an historical actor and identify completely with that person. In this type of task, students would have to imagine themselves as a person of the past and try to feel, think and act like they lived in the past. An example of this type of task is:

'Imagine <u>you are</u> a poor citizen of Paris. Why do you think it is time for a revolution?' (emphasis added). In the second type of task, students were asked to imagine what an historical actor could have thought or felt. In this type of task, students do not explicitly have to imagine being the person of the past, but they have to be able to describe how a person in the past may have felt, thought and acted. An example of this type of task is: 'Imagine a poor citizen of Paris. Why <u>would he</u> think it is time for a revolution?' (emphasis added). As such, the difference between the first and second task type is the degree to which students are asked to identify with a person living in the past.

These two main types of tasks correspond with the distinction between 'imagining oneself in' (i.e., placing oneself in the shoes of someone else) and 'supposal' (i.e., reconstructing the possible thoughts of someone else) as described by Furlong (1961) and explained by Lee (1984).

In the supposal category, there is variation in the degree of identification a student may experience. For example, trying to imagine a person (e.g., a German soldier), we will call 'personal identification'; imagining an abstract actor (e.g., a political party or a government), we will call 'distant identification'. In the 'imagining in' category, we see only personal identification (i.e., historical actors whose perspectives students are asked to take) (see Table 2).

TABLE 2.

Types of empathy-tasks.

Type		example	Percentage of the found tasks
Imagining in: Students are asked to think and feel like a historical person		Step into the shoes of a child laborer in a factory. You work in one of the first factories. Write about your experiences in the factory. Write about the work you have to do, the foreman, the breaks, the other laborers etc. Use 200 words. Empathize as much as possible.	41%
Supposal: Students are asked to reconstruct what a historical person would have felt or thought	Personal identification	Imagine the position of Louis XVI. Was it sensible for him to flee? Or were there other options? What could he have done better? With which argument could Louis have defended his fleeing?	41%
	Distant identification	What would the liberals have thought of this picture? (illustration given: drawing of people in a train in first, second and third class)	12%

In sixteen of the twenty-two tasks examined, students were asked to work with given information, such as pictures or historical texts. In the remaining six tasks, no mention was made as to where the students should look for the information they might need. In five of the tasks, students were asked to work in pairs or groups.

All of the tasks were pencil-and-paper tasks, asking for written answers. Only one task also required some creative work ('design a poster advertising the Revolution'); in one additional

task, students were asked to draw a graph. One task suggested the possibility of a role-play but also provided lined paper to write out answers.

For our study, we chose an 'imagining in' empathy-task that was to be done individually, using given information, and that asked for written output.

Working with the task – cognitive and affective elements
Ten students wrote a response that consisted mainly of cognitive components, and five students produced a response in which both cognitive and affective components were present in more or less equal quantities. There were no students who wrote an answer that consisted mainly of affective components. Two students wrote in the third person, thus interpreting the task as a 'supposal' task instead of an 'imagining in' task. These two students, Irene and Daniel, wrote responses with the most cognitive components. Table 3 shows the number of cognitive elements per student, compared to the number of affective elements.

TABLE 3.

Cognitive and affective elements in the students' written work.

Student	Cognitive elements	Affective elements	Cognitive/affective ratio
Daniel	12	1	92% / 8%
Irene	10	1	90% / 10%
Baris	8	2	80% / 20%
Marie	12	3	80% / 20%
Bas	11	3	78% / 22%
Cassandra	10	3	77% / 23%
Dalia	8	3	73% / 27%
Christa	5	2	71% / 29%
Urad	9	4	69% / 31%
Liv	8	4	66% / 34%
Wendy	11	7	61% / 39%
Khadija	7	5	58% / 42%
Sami	9	8	53% / 47%
Norah	7	7	50% / 50%
Simon	5	6	45% / 55%

In all written responses, we found elements that demonstrated that all of the students not only took notice of the text and pictures given but also used this information in their responses. However, there were major differences in the ways students handled the given information. Six of the students wrote a response in which they (often literally) reproduced information from the sources, meaning that (almost) all of the elements of their response could be traced back to the given information. Four students used the given information to recall what they already knew about the subject and the period; thus, their responses included historically correct information from their memory. For example, Bas wrote: 'from the factory chimneys, black smoke appears.'

Information about chimneys and smoke was not present in the material given with the assignment, so these elements were added by the student.

All of the responses contained words or phrases that depicted some type of emotional experience of the historical actor, such as: 'I do not feel good today, but I have to work on because my mother died last year' (Khadija). Because the task clearly asked the students to try to imagine themselves working in a factor 'Step into the shoes of a factory-worker. Tell about your work etc.' (emphasis added), students wrote things such as 'when I had to mend the threads, my hands burned after such a day' (Liv), to show they had tried to identify with a factory worker.

Many affective responses comprised some type of judgment about the working circumstances in the factories. Students expressed their own values, such as 'children shouldn't be forced to work', to comment on the situation in the factories. Norah had her factory worker say: 'If I could do something to stop child labor, I definitely would!'

We will examine two responses more closely: one response with more cognitive than affective components (example 1) and one response with an equal number of cognitive and affective components (example 2).

> (Example 1)
> *'[…] Together with my brother and mother and father I live in a very small house. We have little food, so all of us work. I work in a textile factory. I am 13 years old and the work is hard and my wages are very low. We have few breaks to eat or go outside and these [breaks] are forty minutes. I work fourteen hours a day and that is a lot, that's why I can't go to school and it is too expensive. Often when I come back from work I get ill and sometimes when I worked to slowly I was whipped. Many children my age were there.'* (Cassandra)

Most of the elements in this response can be traced back to the given information. Only the lack of food and not being able to go to school were added by the student herself. The response is descriptive and quite factual.

> (Example 2)
> *'For children, life in the factory is hard. I am one of the very young children working there. I have to work more than 12 hours a day with almost no break. […]There was a boy who had to mend the threads and who refused because he was afraid to get hurt. That's why he was whipped. It was horrible to see the boy suffering. And my wages, that's nothing, even if my workload is very heavy! […] So many children die, sometimes two a day. […] I wanted to help another girl but the foreman saw it and I was whipped. I still have the wounds on my body.'* (Norah)

As in Example 1, we see a description of the working hours, the whipping and the heavy workload, which were present in the information given to the students. In Example 2, we additionally see that this student tried to feel like the child laborer, with an expression of indignation as a result. We see an affective element used to illustrate a cognitive element: 'the boy was whipped. It was horrible to see him suffer'. The student judges the environment in which young children had to work, suffering long hours and punishments. These comments most likely reflect the student's own emotions in response to the given information. The student described facts from the given information (cognitive) and then gave her opinion on them (affective); the cognitive elements form the framework of this response, the affective elements

are illustrative. We observed a similar pattern in the other more mixed cognitive/affective student responses.

In their interviews, all students mentioned activities that can be considered cognitive, such as working with sources or providing explanations. Before performing the task, the majority of the students indicated that they intended to complete the task using the information given. After the task, most of the students indicated that they actually did so. Christa said: 'I already knew a lot about it (…) so I took all that I knew and all that was here on the paper, and with all the information, I imagined the situation'. When asked, students explained that they can better imagine the past when provided with many types of information. 'How I work, depends on the information I find', said Simon. Sami thought, 'with pictures it is easiest'. Wendy and Marie both said that they tried to imagine they were the boy in the given picture and started thinking from there.

The role of affect, when working with an empathy-task, was stressed by most students. In only two interviews, students did not mention that they were relating emotionally to the child laborer. Some students talked about the importance of identification. They said that they are more motivated to imagine the past when they feel related to an actor from that past. 'When an empathy-task is about children our age', said Sami, 'it is easier to imagine their life'. However, Khadija says, 'one can never know how someone else thinks'.

When students expressed affective reactions in their interviews, the reactions involved more judgment than identification, although that judgment was not visible in all of the written responses. Students said they pitied the young factory workers, they compared the obligation to work to their own school attendance, or they thought it was important for them to feel the difference between the past and their own lives. Irene said: 'Now you see how you would experience [working in a factory] yourself, instead of only reading some information about it.'

Students' perception of the empathy task

In the post-task-interviews, we asked the students' opinions about why they should have to work with historical empathy.

Most students talked about cognitive goals, indicating that empathy-tasks helped them to remember and understand history better. In every interview, the point was made that after an empathy-task such as the one they did, one would most likely get better results on a test. Students said they would gain knowledge from the tasks, remember that knowledge, and understand what they had learned. Apparently, the students believed they learn many facts when working with empathy. When asked why, Dalia answered, 'Because this way, you have to summarize everything', Sami explained, 'You will remember things that happened', and Kiran replied, 'Because of the story'.

Next to the gained knowledge, some students saw the task in a broader context (i.e., as helping them to relate to the past in comparison to the present). When students have a clear picture of the past, they feel they can appreciate the present: 'You can see the differences between then and now in the task. And I think that when I read and write this, I will think more about how it was then. You can think about how it was for somebody' explained Marie. Simon said, 'You learn that we have it better now and we should not be complaining.'

Finally, some students said that one of the goals of the task was to identify with the factory boy. Daniel stated it was about 'trying to think the emotion'. He was aware of the fact he can never

really feel what the factory boy has felt, but that he could surely try. And, Wendy concluded her interview with: 'Learning about the past can be interesting, but sometimes is a bit boring, but when you really are getting to know a person, that I find really special.'
In summary, the answers given by students when they were asked about their perceptions of the empathy-task can be split up into three main categories: deep processing, comparing past and present and imagining (see Table 4).

The 'deep processing' category includes all student answers regarding remembering and understanding information; students mentioned better test results, working with the historical context and obtaining new knowledge. The 'comparing' category entails students' answers about seeing differences between the past and the present and about them valuing these differences. The 'imagining' category includes student answers about trying to see the past like a historical actor would have done.

Table 4.

Students' perceptions of the goals of empathy-tasks.

Category	Sub-category	Example	Frequency	Total
Deep processing	Being able to remember facts / better results on a test	'When we get a test then we will know the answers because we have done this task'	9 times in 4 interviews	22 times in 6 interviews
	Being able to place the facts in an historical context (i.e., non-reproductive)	'you can understand what we are learning about'	6 times in 4 interviews	
	Learning new things	'you see how many people worked and how old they were'	7 times in 4 interviews	
Comparing the past with the present	Identifying differences in time	'How it is now is very different from the past. Such a task makes it easier to imagine'	7 times in 4 interviews	12 times in 4 interviews
	Realizing things are better now	'that we are not to moan about how we have things now'	5 times in 3 interviews	
Imagining	Imagining how people must have felt or lived	'Looking through the eyes of someone else means you are learning how that someone thinks and feels'	9 times in 4 interviews	9 times in 4 interviews

Conclusion

We discerned two main types of empathy-tasks: the 'imagining' type and the 'supposal' type. In the imagining-in tasks, students have to imagine themselves as someone from the past; the supposal tasks ask for a reconstruction of the thoughts and feelings of someone from the past. Most tasks ask for more or less the same involvement from the student: students have to study a text or a picture, imagine a situation and then produce a written product.

Students used both cognitive and affective elements in their responses to the empathy-task given in the study. Some students focused mainly on the cognitive elements; none focused mainly on the affective elements. Most students used affective elements to illustrate cognitive elements. The more affective components of their responses sometimes seemed to reflect students' own judgments of the past or responses from a present-day perspective.

When asked about how they had completed the task, students focused on working with the given information (cognitive) and less on imagining feelings or emotions (affective).

Students considered empathy tasks useful. When asked what they think the main goal of empathy-tasks is, they answered that it is to remember or better understand historical information. Students also mentioned comparing the past with the present and imagining other people's lives as goals of empathy-tasks.

Discussion

We need to take into account the limitations of our study. Because we studied only 4 textbooks, 16 students and one type of empathy-task, the results of this study are, of course, limited. Further research is needed to investigate whether the types of empathy-tasks we identified are useful for describing empathy-tasks in the history classroom. Research using a larger variety of empathy tasks is needed to better understand how students complete the affective and cognitive components of the tasks and how they make sense of empathy-tasks.

Below we discuss the main results of our study and questions for further research.

Types of empathy tasks

The distinction between 'imagining in' and 'supposal' tasks seems quite clear, but how students perceive this distinction is another matter. The task we selected for this study was an 'imagining in' empathy task. Still, two students wrote in the third person, as though they were completing a 'supposal' task. Apparently, what we ask of students and what they do is not always the same. This contradiction is important because with 'imagining in' we ask students to place themselves in the past; in these tasks, they can easily include their own values and beliefs in their answers. In the 'supposal' type of task, students are explicitly instructed to adopt the view of someone else. It is possible that students think more historically when 'supposing' than when 'imagining'.

When we want to separate 'imagining in' from 'supposal', we have to make a clearer distinction in how we phrase the task. Further research is needed to investigate the effect of different types of tasks (e.g., supposing versus imagining in) and the formulation of the task on students' ability to take a historical perspective.

When reviewing the empathy-tasks, it was striking almost all tasks asked for written output. During the interviews, most students said that they found it difficult or discouraging to have to write a certain number of words. It is worthwhile to explore how students' complete and experience empathy-tasks with other forms of output, such as role-play or drama.

Working with the task – cognitive and affective elements

In the written responses, we see that cognitive and affective learning processes can complement each other. However, it is noteworthy that the two students who misinterpreted the task as a 'supposal' task wrote the most cognitive responses. It would be interesting to know

if 'supposal' tasks indeed produce more cognitive elements while 'imagining in' tasks produce more affective elements in students' responses.

In the interviews, students expressed that being able to relate to the historical actor (e.g., when the actor is of the same age as the student) helps them to engage in learning (see also Husbands & Pendry, 2000). This would be an argument for personal identification - whether in 'imagining in' tasks or in 'supposal' tasks - rather than distant identification.

When asked about how they worked through an empathy-task, students were quite outspoken. Again, there was a focus on the cognitive elements of the task in students' responses. Working with the given information was at the core of all the strategies adopted by the students. Students used the texts and pictures to check their own ideas, or simply copied the information given in their written work. Additionally, students indicated that they used their imaginations. The students who indicated that they tried to imagine that they were the boy in the picture are interesting in this context; firstly, because these students described how they actually stepped into the shoes of a person from the past, which is what we assume they will do when working on an empathy-task and, secondly, because these students showed that they used the picture to help them to engage with the past. In five of the interviews, students explained that pictures make history more easily accessible to them. Apparently, an image can act as an incentive to imagine the past. It could be worthwhile to further explore the possibilities of pictures in empathy-tasks.

When interviewed, most of the students said that they condemn the practice of child labor or said that they were glad to live now and not 'back then'. It is possible that the students' fixation on pity for the factory worker is a result of this particular subject matter. In all the textbooks, the narrative of the poor little child laborer is present. When Barton (2004) explains his two forms of empathy (perspective recognition, when working with statesmen and caring, when working with 'victim' groups), he gives child labor as an example of empathetic pity. We can wonder whether students' feeling that 'now is better' would be present in performing empathy-tasks on historical subjects other than child labor.

Perception of empathy-tasks
Students said that they experience history as a knowledge-based subject. Therefore, it is understandable that students automatically think of reproductive knowledge when asked to describe the goal of a learning activity. Based on our present research, we cannot tell whether empathy-tasks are truly helpful in remembering factual knowledge or not. However, it is noteworthy that students think empathy tasks lead to better test results.

Cunningham (2009) showed that teachers mention a variety of goals, such as making history vivid and understanding other humans, when discussing empathy-tasks. The students in our study only agreed with the teachers in Cunningham's study with respect to empathy-tasks serving as a way to create a picture of the past and identify with historical actors. Differences between students' and teacher's perceptions of the goal of a particular empathy task might be problematic. Teachers and textbook authors should be more explicit about the goals of an empathy task. The stock-answers in the textbooks are not helpful in this respect: in most cases, only a generally described formula like 'any answer given by the student' is provided; little guidance about criteria to determine the quality of the answers or about the learning goals is given.

Empathy-tasks, like the one in this study, can stimulate an imagining of the past, as our students have shown us.

Further research is needed on what exactly we want to achieve with empathy-tasks.

Additionally, the specifics of the tasks themselves (e.g., the use of text and/or pictures in the task and the type of product the students have to produce) are useful subjects to study.

Finally, because empathy-tasks clearly elicit some affective reactions, we need to know if and why affective reactions may be helpful and how to guide students to use these reactions for further historical thinking.

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