



The Certainty Paradox of student history teachers: Balancing between historical facts and interpretation



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Student teachers' development in regard to interpretational history teaching.
- Work environments influences epistemological representations of history.
- Teaching pupils uncertainty requires teachers to be certain.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching interpretational history is known to be challenging for history teachers. This study aimed at understanding how student teachers develop in terms of representing history epistemologically. 13 student teachers were interviewed drawing retrospective storylines. Student teachers reported more factual and less interpretational history teaching than they would have preferred, yet can be influenced in different epistemological directions by their work and learning environment. A prominent finding is that student teachers need to develop confidence in expertise before allowing the 'uncertainty' of interpretational history teaching, showing a 'Certainty Paradox'. A case for careful apprenticeship selection and epistemological reflection is made.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, Dutch history teachers have witnessed a curriculum renewal for upper secondary education towards more emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of history as a form of knowledge with specific disciplinary skills and epistemological problems (Wilschut, 2009b). As a result, teachers in the Netherlands are officially required to teach history in such a manner that pupils are able to develop the epistemological insight that historical narratives are subjective interpretations, made in their own cultural contexts (Board of Examinations, 2013). Moreover, pupils should learn to judge and compare the validity of these interpretations on the basis of disciplinary criteria (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008; VanSledright, 2010;

Wineburg, 2001). The idea that pupils should learn that history involves interpretation has been introduced in the educational curricula of many countries, including the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, and Germany (Erdmann & Hassberg, 2011). For example in a recent publication of the *College, Career and Civic Life* (2013), a framework for social studies standards in the United States, it is explicitly stated that history is interpretive and that "historical understanding requires recognising this multiplicity of points of view in the past" (p. 47). Still, several studies revealed that many teachers struggle with teaching interpretational history, especially in concrete classroom practice (James, 2008; Martell, 2013; McCrum, 2013).

In the light of the internationally changing curricula it is important to consider student teachers' perceptions and practices, as they will be central actors in future education. The first year of a teacher in the classroom is known to be significant in determining his or her attitudes towards teaching and for developing long-term practice and routines (Flores, 2001; Gratch, 2001; Hawkey, 1996). Several scholars have argued that, once teachers fall into routines of 'traditional' pedagogies with a focus on content, their beliefs and

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practices hardly change (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Thornton, 1998). Until now it is unclear what factors support or constrain the teaching of interpretational history.

While factors important for the development of student teachers, including both personal and contextual aspects, have been widely studied (e.g. Hammerness et al., 2005), little empirical research has been conducted to determine whether these factors also impact teachers' epistemological representations of historical knowledge in the classroom. This study therefore investigates student history teachers' representation of historical knowledge during their pre-service teacher education programme, and which factors constrain or stimulate teaching history as *interpretational* as opposed to *factual*. Insight into these factors might help teacher educators to guide student teachers to achieve the new curriculum goals. Before going into the details of our study, we will describe how, from an epistemological perspective, historical knowledge can be represented in different ways. Then we will focus on the awareness of the subjective nature of historical knowledge which has become an important part of many curricula, including the Dutch. Finally, we will discuss factors known to impact teacher learning and development, including teacher expertise and various elements of the work and learning environments.

1.1. Factual and interpretive representations of the past

Southgate (1996) proposed that the debate about what historical 'truth' is can be simplified to seeing it as absolute, in the sense that history can be 'truthful', or considering it as relative, meaning that historical knowledge is always mediated. For those who agree that historical knowledge can be 'truthful', history can be condensed to 'historical facts'. Historical knowledge seen from this traditional, historicist and source-driven perspective can be displayed in a single objective and authoritative narrative, representing the past 'as it was'. Yilmaz (2008) proposes that this perspective reflects a more naïve understanding of history and for history education this translates, for example, into a teacher telling one specific narrative with no reflection on the epistemological status of the knowledge.

Various historiographical traditions in the twentieth century have attacked the idea that historical accounts can be truthful and objective descriptions of the past. To begin with, historians related to The Annales School broke with traditional historiography, criticising the idea that there is a one-dimensional time, from past to future, and emphasising the plurality of coexisting times. They changed the focus of history by studying long-term socioeconomic processes of the past rather than political or diplomatic themes. In essence, it was an analytical history and its methodology was strongly based upon the social sciences. They tried to revitalise the historiographical tradition, but they were still committed to what they understood as a scientific approach to the past, and believed that rational constructions of the past are possible (Burguière, 2009; Iggers, 1997). However, a more radical approach followed The Annales School, taken by historians such as Hayden White (1987) and Keith Jenkins (2003). These historians explicitly challenged claims of neutrality and objectivity in historical research (Kosso, 2009; Southgate, 2009; Yilmaz, 2010). White's and Jenkins' ideas were influenced by post-structuralism, which focuses on the role of language in understanding the past. For example, White points out that historians, when interpreting historical accounts, cannot detach themselves from their own context, meaning that their ideological and theoretical orientation will influence their explanation and construction of the past (1987). It is important to note that White, although often interpreted as a radical sceptic, did not

entirely reject historiographical enquiry, with historians being responsible for constructing the past based on the best evidence available (Yilmaz, 2010).

We have recently seen a more pragmatic stance from historians. Levisohn (2010), for example, stated that the past can never be fully represented, as it is always a matter of interpretation. However, building on the ideas of David Carr (1986), he suggested it is important to demonstrate the virtues of interpretation. He stressed that such epistemological grounding is also important for history education, which could otherwise lose its purpose. These ideas are in line with other historians who are taking a pragmatic historiographical position, such as Evans (1997), Iggers (1997), and Tucker (2004), all aiming for relative plausibility by adhering to academically accepted research methodologies. Most researchers in history education seem to adopt this more pragmatic position and advocate that teachers should incorporate epistemological reflection in their lessons, which is not the case in a factual representation of the past. For example, Parkes (2009) proposes a 'critical pluralist' stance towards history, which means the acceptance of narrative diversity in the curriculum and recognizing the inevitable different historical interpretations, but also learning pupils to make value-judgements about the historical narratives they encounter. Yilmaz (2008) proposes that understanding how different schools of historical thought construct historical explanations is a precondition for history teachers to help pupils to gain a more nuanced understanding of the past.

Researchers in social studies have focused on different aspects of how to make pupils good interpreters. For example, one line of research focuses on pupils' reading of, and epistemological orientations towards, historical accounts. Well known amongst these is Wineburg (2001), who points out that historical thinking can be an 'unnatural act' for pupils, as they do not automatically take a more critical and reflexive position towards the past. Another line of research focuses on how to influence the epistemological beliefs of pupils through instruction. VanSledright (2002), for example, shows that fifth graders can engage in a more interpretative and investigative approach when they are properly trained. Another line of research focuses on the societal benefits of making pupils into good interpreters, because an underlying goal can be to make pupils more humane and tolerant citizens (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Research suggests that teaching interpretation can encourage young people to 'care' for those from different backgrounds (Kolikant & Pollack, 2009; McCully, 2012). Moreover, Whitehouse (2008) proposes that studying different historical interpretations also can help understanding current society and the conditions which have led to it.

1.2. The Dutch history curriculum

Comparing historical interpretations became an important part of the Dutch curriculum when Dalhuisen, an influential editor of a Dutch textbook on historical didactics in the 1970s, started to promote the 'methodology of inquiry', an adaptation of what Fenton (1966; 1967) in the US had been propagating as the 'new social studies' (Dalhuisen & Korevaar, 1971; Wilschut, 2009b). However, the 1990s saw a change in public opinion and politicians started to criticise the focus on thinking skills in favour of learning historical 'facts'. A committee led by history professor Piet De Rooy (2001) was asked by the Minister of Education to design a new curriculum; however, this committee did not produce a list of 'historical facts' but rather a chronological framework of 'orientation knowledge'. The framework consists of ten clear-cut 'eras' with associative names and 49 distinctive

'characteristic features', and was designed with the purpose of providing a cognitive tool that can help pupils contextualise historical phenomena (Wilschut, 2009a). The new curriculum was implemented in 2007, which evoked mixed reactions of educational scholars, historians and teachers. Two important points of criticism concerned the insufficient attention given to the interpretive nature of historical knowledge and the lack of dealing with diachronic developments (History Examinations, 2006; Klein, 2010).

A second committee, appointed by the Minister in 2012, complemented the curriculum with four diachronic 'historical contexts', such as *Germany 1871–1945*, historical themes that cover more eras. A radical change from the committee, de Rooy's proposal was the addition of historical facts and prescribed historical narratives. The second committee also revisited the historical skills and specified the 'interpretive' skills (Board of Examinations, 2013). The new curriculum explicitly states that "pupils should be able to explain by means of concrete examples or source interpretations that historical narratives are constructions of the past" (Board of Examinations, 2013, p. 13). This latter goal echoes a relativist approach, but considering the entire curriculum, the designers seem to promote a more pragmatic position because pupils also have to develop skills to help them to weigh and evaluate different historical interpretations. Moreover, since pupils have to learn historical facts and narratives and simultaneously have to realise themselves that these narratives are interpretations, an epistemological tension is built into the prescribed history curriculum. An interesting question is how student history teachers try to find balance between teaching factual and interpretational history.

1.3. Teaching history as factual and interpretational

Student history teachers often enter the teacher education programme with little or no teaching expertise. Several authors have pointed out that becoming a teacher is not a steady growth process, as their beliefs are put to the test, which can lead to tensions and even can result in practice shock when they are confronted with the everyday realities of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006; Veenman, 1984). In this study we are especially interested in student teachers who are in favour of an interpretational presentation of history, and our aim is to determine which difficulties they encounter in realising their educational goals.

Many factors have been suggested that may influence student teachers' teaching. First, there is general consensus that student teachers do not develop in a vacuum, but that they are continuously influenced by their work and learning environments (Flores & Day, 2006; Opfer & Pedder, 2011), including several actors such as their pupils and school mentor (Moisan, 2010; Monte-Sano, 2011; Van Hover & Yeager, 2004), but also mediating artefacts such as the state curriculum, tests or the school book (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Wilson, Konopak, & Readence, 1994; Yeager & Davis, 2005; Yeager & Van Hover, 2006). Lovorn (2012) states that students teachers often conform to 'traditional' expectations, which means that they start to present history just as their predecessors did; as an authoritative narrative based upon facts that have to be remembered.

Second, a teacher's expertise plays a role in teaching history and to teach successfully, teachers have to integrate different types of expertise (Hammerness et al., 2005; Husbands, 2011). One area of teacher expertise involves classroom management, which is one of the most important problems for beginning teachers across the world (Authors et al., 2011; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Several scholars argue that the pedagogical approach of history teachers is

related to their perceived ability to manage a class and their urge to maintain control (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Fehn & Koeppen, 1998; Martell, 2013; Virta, 2002).

Subject matter knowledge is a second area of expertise that entails knowledge about substantive content, procedural concepts and conceptualizations of the discipline. Regarding the latter, Maggioni, VanSledright, and Alexander (2009), Stoddard (2010), and Van Hover and Yeager (2003; 2004) contend that teachers' epistemological beliefs about subject matter can impact their teaching of history. Martell (2013) and James (2008) have shown that limited subject matter knowledge can result in low teaching confidence, which may result in teachers avoiding difficult epistemological and moral questions.

A third and final area of expertise is pedagogical expertise. In research into history teaching, the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) becomes more prominent. Shulman considered PCK as: "subject matter knowledge *for teaching*" (1987, p. 9). PCK for history consists of different components (Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013). Two important components in relation to this research are as follows. First, teachers have to transform historical knowledge into lessons. VanSledright (1996) points out that student history teachers struggle to make an 'ontological switch', which means having to switch from a focus on historical content to a focus on pedagogy. In line with VanSledright, several researchers found that student teachers struggle to make source-based exercises that could enhance historical interpretation (Martell, 2013; Seixas, 1998). Second, student teachers should learn to identify pupils' thinking about the past. However, research points out that student teachers find it difficult to recognise pupils' disciplinary thinking and are often surprised by the low skill level of the pupils (Johnson & Birkeland, 2004; Monte-Sano & Cochran, 2009).

1.4. The present study

In recent years, the Dutch history curriculum has changed and more emphasis has been placed on explicitly teaching an interpretational view of history. This means that teachers have to understand the epistemological discussions underpinning their subject and need to develop pedagogy to teach interpretational history. Despite the fact that student history teachers will play a central role in future history education, little knowledge is available on student history teachers' epistemological presentation of history to pupils. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by studying the development of beginning history teachers with two central research questions:

- 1) *To what extent do student history teachers report a difference between their classroom practice and their professional preference with regard to teaching factual and interpretational history?*
- 2) *What factors constrain or stimulate teachers throughout the year in teaching factual and interpretational history?*

2. Methodology

2.1. Context and programme

This study was conducted in a Dutch university-based teacher education programme leading to a teaching degree for upper secondary education. Students first completed a master's degree in history and then participated in this one-year teacher education programme. Student teachers from two out of the six universities offering a history teacher education programme participated in this study. They attended classes weekly at the university on general and subject-specific pedagogy and had their internships in

upper general secondary education, preparing pupils for higher vocational education or university studies. During their internships the student teachers were gradually exposed to the teaching profession by giving them more responsibilities as a teacher, including an increase in the number of weekly lessons to be taught.

2.2. Respondents

For our study we aimed at questioning student teachers who initially took a pragmatic position, conceiving history as interpretational, yet that historical interpretations should be based on disciplinary criteria. All selected teachers adhered to this position and considered this to be a relevant insight for pupils in history education. Our aim was to ascertain whether they felt able to realize this objective. Therefore, we selected from a prior questionnaire study 13 teachers amongst 48 student teachers, assuming that this number would be sufficient to lead to saturation of the topics in the data. We chose participants based on their questionnaire answers when they used phrases such as [in history education it is important that] “pupils have a critical attitude towards sources and that know history is feasible and changeable.” Table 1 shows details of the participants.

2.3. Instrument

In order to answer the research questions a semi-structured interview scheme and a storyline instrument were developed. All 13 student teachers were interviewed individually for 45–60 min (audio-taped) at the end of their teacher education programme (May and June, 2012). To investigate the first research question (*To what extent do student history teachers report a difference between their classroom practice and their professional preference with regard to teaching factual and interpretational history?*), we used the storyline method. Research suggests that teachers' knowledge and beliefs about teaching are tacit, and tenacious (Pajares, 1992). The storyline instrument has been successfully used for knowledge elicitation and studying teachers' learning experiences (Beijaard, Van Driel, & Verloop, 1999; Meijer, De Graaf, & Meirink, 2011; Meijer, Oolbekkink, Pillen, & Aardema, 2014; Orland, 2000). A storyline represents a teacher's evaluation of a specific criterion on the vertical line of a graph. The combination with time on the horizontal line makes the self-perceived development on this criterion visible. According to Beijaard et al. (1999), a storyline has several advantages: respondents evaluate experiences themselves, the subjective evaluations can be quantified in order to compare between respondents, and storylines

are relatively easy to make and are a creative mode of self-expression. In this research, the respondents were provided with pre-structured graphs showing five different time periods on the horizontal line (representing the duration of the teaching education programme) and a scale from 0 to +60 on the vertical axis (see Fig. 1 in the Results Section). Respondents were asked first to draw two lines, one indicating attention over time in their classroom practices given to teaching factual history and the second to teaching interpretational history. Zero indicated no attention and 60 very much attention; examples of the storylines are displayed in Section 3.3. To investigate potential differences between their practices and preferences we asked them to draw two additional lines indicating the variation over time of their preference for teaching factual and interpretational history. To investigate which factors constrain or stimulate teaching factual or interpretational history (the second research question), participants were asked to explain changes in their storylines and were given time to elaborate on the different lines a detailed understanding of their considerations. At the end of the interview we introduced three factors related to their work and learning environments suggested in the literature (tests, mentor and teacher education programme) and asked whether these factors had impacted the storylines.

2.4. Data analysis

To answer the first research question we calculated for factual and interpretational history teaching the differences in scores between the practice and professional preference lines for all time periods and displayed these for all teachers in one diagram.

For the second research question each interview was transcribed and the first researcher removed general statements not related to the research question. Then the transcript was divided into segments consisting of one or more sentences representing one chain of reasoning. The segments were grouped into two themes indicating the segment being related with teaching factual or interpretational history. We checked the inter-rater reliability of this segmenting procedure, and a second researcher coded six interviews resulting in an unweighted Cohen's kappa of 0.79.

Next, through open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) segments were grouped into coherent categories per theme. During this analysis we used two sensitizing frameworks: teacher expertise and the work and learning environments that, after a process of axial coding (Boeije, 2010), resulted in a coding scheme including three areas of expertise (i.e., classroom management expertise, pedagogical content expertise, and subject matter expertise) and five factors related to the work and learning environments (i.e. school culture, interaction with pupils, pupils' cognitive abilities, teacher education programme, and teaching artefacts). We selectively coded all interviews and conducted an inter-rater reliability test with a second researcher coding six of the interviews. This test generated an unweighted Cohen's kappa of 0.78. In a second step, the positive and/or negative relation between all factors and factual or interpretational history teaching was coded and conducted a second inter-rater reliability test (i.e., based on six interviews) resulting in an un-weighted Cohen's kappa of 0.79.

3. Results

In this section we first describe the results referring back to the two research questions and then spell out how the different factors that are associated with the amount of teaching factual and interpretational history are combined in the practices of the student teachers.

Table 1
Information about participants in the study.

Teacher	Age	Gender	Teaching experience
1 Peter	26–30	Male	none
2 Joyce	26–30	Female	1 year
3 James	26–30	Male	days ^a
4 Betty	20–25	Female	none
5 Mac	26–30	Male	days
6 Aron	26–30	Male	days
7 Mike	26–30	Male	none
8 John	26–30	Male	none
9 Jack	31–36	Male	days
10 Waldo	20–25	Male	none
11 Diane	26–30	Female	days
12 Chris	26–30	Male	none
13 Steven	26–30	Male	1 year

^a Days: several days experience.

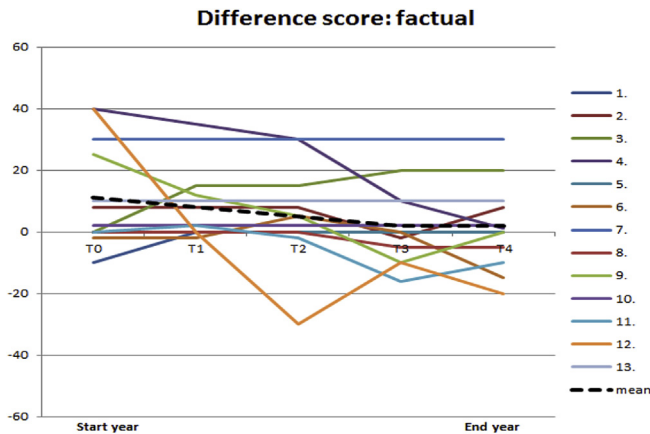


Fig. 1. Difference between reported practice and preferred factual history teaching.

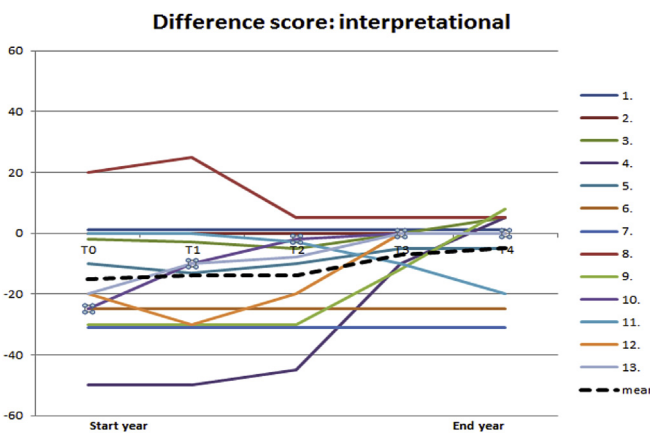


Fig. 2. Difference between reported practice and preferred interpretational history teaching.

3.1. Practice and professional preferences

Fig. 1 shows the differences over time between reported factual history teaching practice and preference and reveals that most student teachers focus more than they prefer on teaching historical facts specifically at the start of their internship. The difference scores for reported practice and preferred interpretational history teaching (Fig. 2) are mostly negative: student teachers focus less on interpretational history than they would prefer and again this specifically applies to the beginning of the school year. A comparison between Figs. 1 and 2 shows that the storylines roughly mirror each other and that the participants combine factual and interpretational history teaching during the whole year. This is not surprising as the Dutch history curriculum includes teaching factual as well as interpretational history. Moreover, some respondents explicitly argued that some factual knowledge is conditional for understanding that history involves interpretation. As one respondent stated: “... they really need to possess some factual knowledge in order to create a basis. Once they have that basis, they can let go of it”.

Fig. 1 reveals that concerning teaching factual history the discrepancy between practice and professional preferences at the beginning and end of the year is the same for five teachers, decreased for four teachers and increased for four teachers. Fig. 2 reveals that concerning teaching interpretational history the discrepancies between practice and professional preferences at the beginning and end of the year is the same for five teachers,

decreased for six teachers and increased for two teachers. Especially at the start of the year student teachers find it difficult to put their intentions and professional preference into practice.

3.2. Factors associated with the amount of factual and interpretational history teaching

3.2.1. Teacher expertise

Table 2 shows that in almost all cases perceived lack of expertise is associated with teaching more facts, and perceived confidence in expertise is associated with more interpretational history teaching. Three areas of expertise were found to be related to the teachers' way of teaching history: classroom management, pedagogical content, and subject matter expertise.

3.2.2. Classroom management expertise

The category ‘classroom management expertise’ refers to managing a class and creating a (healthy) teacher–student relationship in order to build a safe learning atmosphere. Four teachers mentioned that their beliefs about managing a class and their uncertainty about interpersonal classroom management skills stimulated them to teach historical facts. Betty said: “Because in my mind I wanted to be a powerful teacher, in terms of leadership, and you may well try to be in control but if you don't have discipline, they will wander off”. In addition, she said that teaching about interpretation caused “some kind of dissonance” in the classroom, which was not the case when merely teaching historical facts. Mac mentioned that he was afraid to question the epistemic status of the history book, because he thought it would undermine his credibility as he was a beginner teacher.

Eight teachers mentioned that creating a good interpersonal relationship with the class and feeling confident about classroom management skills were preconditions for teaching interpretational history. For example, Jack stated: “Like okay, I am able to convey this in such a way that they understand it, and the same holds for certain techniques that you master, and that makes you much less worried about taking the lead, how you start up or round off, at a certain point you just know how to do that and then you ... automatically get more attention for things such as ... for your subject: how it is structured?” Most of these teachers pointed out that focussing on interpretation could cause uncertainty and turmoil in the classroom but, during the year, they became more confident in handling these situations.

3.2.3. Pedagogical content expertise

‘Pedagogical content expertise’ refers to facilitating pupils' learning by selecting appropriate teaching and learning methodologies. Eight teachers commented that uncertainty and lack of pedagogical content expertise made them focus on teaching historical facts. For example, John responded thus to the question why he taught many facts: “As something to hold on to, I think it is easier to discuss facts in your lessons than to, you know, also because it is simply manageable”. Several other student teachers mentioned that teaching facts diminished the uncertainty caused by their need to organise the historical knowledge for themselves and to figure out how to transfer these facts to the pupils. Jack, for example, said that, at the start of the year, designing his lessons consisted merely of selecting historical facts and how to present these to the pupils. Waldo and Mike pointed out that they struggled with the transition between history being taught at a university and at a secondary school. Mike said that his expectations of teaching history were different to the real situation. This was due to differences between the way history is being taught at university and history as being taught at secondary school. He said: “I started as a historian, and I became a teacher”, meaning that the learning processes of the

Table 2
Self-reported associations between factual and interpretational history teaching and expertise.

Teacher	Teaching (more) factual history associated with expertise			Teaching (more) interpretational history associated with expertise		
	Interpersonal	Pedagogical	Subject matter	Interpersonal	Pedagogical	Subject matter
Peter						+
Joyce	–			+		
James		–	–		+	+
Betty	–		–	+		
Mac	–	– and +		+		+
Aron				+	+	
Mike		–	–	+	+	+
John		–		+	+	
Jack	–	– and +	–	+	+	+
Waldo		–		+	+	+
Diane		–			+	
Chris				+	+	
Steven					+	+
Total	4–	8–/2+	4–	8+	9+	7+

Note: – means a perceived lack of expertise; + means a perceived confidence in expertise.

pupils had become more central in his lessons than ‘transmitting’ historical facts.

Interestingly, however, Mac and Jack indicated that, along with increasing pedagogical expertise, they started teaching more facts. The reason they gave was that they aimed for teaching history skills, but discovered that their pupils first needed a certain amount of factual knowledge in order to think about history. Mac said: “Yes, that’s the wrong order, I should have made sure first that their foundation was all right and that all of them were familiar with those events”. Jack mentioned he was shocked when, while discussing the historical significance of the attack on Pearl Harbor, a pupil asked who Pearl Harbor was.

Nine teachers said that they struggled with how to teach interpretational history because they felt pedagogically insecure and because they lacked teaching strategies. John said: “*Hmm, yes, I also think it’s very difficult to actually make that clear to pupils, to convey it as it were. You know what I mean?*” Several respondents mentioned that, during the year, they learned about specific tools and teaching strategies that they could use for interpretational history teaching. For example, Aron said that, at the start of the year, he merely had one teaching strategy, which was explicitly telling the pupils that history involves interpretation. However, during the year, his lessons became more interactive. Waldo also said that he had to learn how to structure his lessons and guide pupils towards interpretation. As a student, he worked as a teaching assistant. He said: “*here [referring to secondary school] I need to engage pupils much more, provide more structure, take the lead more [than at the university], and that is difficult when you directly point out that multiple interpretations are possible.*” Several teachers said that at the start of the year they were not aware of the epistemological beliefs of their pupils. Diane said she paid little attention to interpretational teaching: “*because I did not always realise how my pupils differed from me.*” These teachers mentioned that, during the year, it became easier to recognise and respond to pupils’ epistemological conceptions of the subject.

3.2.4. Subject matter expertise

Subject matter expertise refers to knowledge on historical content and historiography (including methodological procedures and epistemological considerations). Four teachers said that when they felt unsure about their subject matter expertise they focused on teaching historical facts because teaching facts made them feel more confident or they were afraid of teaching nonsense. Mike said for example: “*Yes, in the beginning I was still very uncertain, you know, about whether the facts that I was conveying were actually correct, that’s why I stuck to the story as closely as possible.*”

Seven teachers reported that they needed specific and profound content knowledge to teach interpretational history and they only possessed such knowledge for a limited amount of historical themes. Respondent Peter said: “*Yes that happened to be something about which I had followed a course at the university, so that was something I know a lot about and then ...*” It appeared that especially knowledge of the historiographical debate around an historical topic was deemed a precondition for teaching interpretational history.

3.3. Work and learning environments

Table 3 shows the factors related to the work and learning environment that can stimulate or constrain teaching factual and interpretational history: school culture, interactions with pupils, pupils’ cognitive abilities, the teacher education programme and teaching artefacts. The table shows that individual teachers’ environment can stimulate them into different directions simultaneously.

3.3.1. School culture

We defined ‘school culture’ as the values, beliefs, and goals within the school in which the student teacher is situated. Utterances related to the supervisor, teacher colleagues, and the broader cultural setting of the school were coded within this category.

Four teachers reported that the school culture stimulated them to teach historical facts, which constrained them in focussing on interpretation. Two teachers explicitly mentioned the supervisor as directly impacting their teaching practice. The supervisor of Betty advised her to focus on facts to gain respect in the classroom. Betty quoted her supervisor: “*You really have to make sure to have enough factual knowledge and to show enough factual knowledge in your lessons ... because that’s when they [referring to the pupils] follow you.*” Diane experienced only limited freedom and felt very restricted at her school, as she had to do exactly what her supervisor told her, which was covering mostly historical content in her lessons. She said: “*I mean, I was simply demanded to, I want you to start teaching this’ and I couldn’t make my own choices about it.*”

Two respondents described the atmosphere at their school as very ‘traditional’, referring to the traditional didactic relationship between teacher and pupils and the focus on the transmission of content. For example, Chris outlined that all his colleagues were over the age of 60 and were very rigid in their teaching style. Although he would have liked to focus more on interpretation, he adjusted to the other teachers.

Six teachers mentioned the school culture as stimulating them to teach interpretational history. Four of them reported that the

Table 3
Associations between factors in the work and learning environments and factual and interpretational history teaching.

Teacher	Teaching (more) factual history associated with					Teaching (more) interpretational history associated with				
	School culture	Inter-action With pupils	Pupils' cognitive abilities	Teacher education	Artefacts	School culture	Interaction with pupils	Pupils' cognitive abilities	Teacher education	Artefacts
Peter			–		+		–	+		–
Joyce	– and +	+	–		+	+	+	+		+
James				–	+				+	–
Betty	+	+	–			–	–	+	+	–
Mac		– and +	–	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Aron					+	+	–	+		
Mike	–	– and +	–	–			– and +	+	+	
John						+	–			
Jack		– and +	–				–	+	+	
Waldo	–	+	–		+	– and +	–	+	+	–
Diane	+	+	–		+	– and +	–	+	+	–
Chris	+				+	–		–	+	
Steven			–			+		+		–
Total	3–/4+	4–/5+	9–	3–/1	8+	4–/6+	8–/3+	10+	8+	6–/1+

Note: – means negative association; + means positive association.

supervisor was a stimulating factor. Mac said that he observed his mentor successfully engaging the pupils in a discussion about the nature of historical knowledge and that this 'best practice' inspired him to focus more on historical interpretation. Waldo received a historiographical book from his supervisor, which included several ideas about how to teach interpretation. This book made him aware that interpretation is something you can do with pupils, as before he thought it was too difficult for pupils. The other student teachers were encouraged to focus more on interpretation in their discussions with their supervisor. Two teachers said that the whole school environment was important and that they were given significant freedom. Joyce said she worked at an 'innovative' school where the pupils worked in large groups and the teacher functioned merely as coach. She described how this school worked according to the 'flipped classroom' principle. This means that the pupils had to watch short videos at home that contained a lot of historical content before these were discussed in class. She said that, due to this principle, she had more time in her lessons to focus on interpretation.

Three teachers described how their epistemological representations were influenced by differences between their supervisor and other history teachers at the school. For example, Waldo described how he and his supervisor focused on interpretation in both their lessons but that the other history teachers at this school did not. This became a problem when a colleague created a test that contained many factual questions; as a result the pupils did not do very well on this test. After this experience, Waldo adjusted his teaching style to the teachers who designed the test. Also, the other two student teachers described that the specific teaching style of the teacher with whom they interacted had impacted their epistemological representation.

3.3.2. Interaction with pupils

The category 'interaction with pupils' consists of utterances in which the pupils were actively named as an influencing factor. Five teachers said that pupils influenced them to teach facts because the pupils directly requested them to, as they were used to learning facts. Peter said that, in his perception, pupils were more like passive consumers and were not really interested in history. They directly asked for teaching facts in line with the test that mostly contained factual questions. Three teachers said that the pupils reacted rebelliously or became bored when he merely focused on teaching facts. These teachers described teacher-centred lessons in which they used MS Powerpoint for 'transmitting' historical knowledge for the duration of almost an hour. They noticed that,

after several lessons, the pupils could not concentrate anymore and became rebellious; one teacher even spoke of a: "*revolt among pupils*". To adapt, the teachers changed their pedagogies, their lessons became more interactive and they started to teach fewer historical facts and their focus on interpretation slightly increased. Eight teachers said that the pupils limited them in teaching interpretational history because they asked for simplicity and 'truth'. These teachers struggled with the uncertain reactions of pupils when they taught that history involves interpretation. Peter explicitly mentioned the reaction of the pupils: "*more like a kind of irritation and then you are telling us that you can also look at this differently, or that there are different opinions about that*". It should be noted that teachers who especially struggled with interpretational history teaching had to teach classes that were used to a factual representation of historical knowledge. According to the respondents, these pupils were used to a specific teaching style and often did not like change.

Three teachers mentioned the enthusiastic reactions of the pupils when they emphasised that history involves interpretation, which stimulated them to experiment with interpretational history teaching: "*They were enthusiastic and they also wanted to understand why it [certain events] happened. And accordingly I was thinking: we will continue this. To boost it some more*". It should be noticed that the idea that history involves interpretation was not totally new for these pupils as their previous history teacher had already focused on interpretation.

3.3.3. Pupils' cognitive abilities

The category 'pupils' cognitive abilities' refers to the intellectual abilities of the pupils which influences factual or interpretational teaching. Nine teachers pointed out that they focus less on teaching facts if the cognitive level of the pupils is higher. In addition, 10 teachers stated that, when teaching older pupils they gave more attention to interpretational history teaching. The main argument they provided was that pupils in the upper classes of secondary education have a greater intellectual ability to understand that history involves interpretation. Aron said: "*... upper classes because their cognitive level is further developed. They can reflect on their thinking processes, as 'is this true?'*"

3.3.4. Teacher education programme

The 'teacher education programme' was mentioned as an influencing factor. Mac said that the literature provided by his teacher educator taught him that pupils first need factual

knowledge before they can be taught historical skills, which influenced him to teach facts. Two teachers emphasised that the teacher education course helped them to learn about different teaching strategies that helped them to teach fewer facts. Betty stated: *“Here the decline is much stronger as a result of the stimulating effects of teacher education courses for example, and also because I followed some workshops and learned more about teaching methods, etc., and about skills”*. Eight teachers mentioned teacher education as an influencing factor in teaching more interpretational history. All these eight teachers said that the teacher education courses helped them to acquire more specific teaching strategies. Several of these teachers pointed out that the discussions about the purposes of history education also helped them to reflect on their own goals and made them realise that interpretation is an important aspect of history teaching.

3.3.5. Teaching artefacts

Tools that teachers (have to) use in their teaching were categorised within the category *teaching artefacts*. We distinguished three types of artefacts: tests, schoolbooks, and the curriculum. The student teachers associated all artefacts as stimulating factual and constraining interpretational history teaching. Within this category, five teachers reported the school department tests as stimulating them to teach historical facts because these contained many factual questions. As teacher Peter pointed out: *“I think it’s very important that they know in which date something happened. No, not that at all. It’s more like just pragmatic—the test”*. These teachers had to use their supervisors’ tests. Six teachers mentioned the history book as stimulating their focus on teaching facts. Three teachers said that the school tests did not contain questions about historical interpretation. Joyce, however, was allowed to make her own test, which enabled her to include questions involving interpretation. Two teachers reported that they strictly followed the history book, which limited them to focus on interpretation. Two teachers said that they felt restricted by the curriculum and therefore had no time for interpretational history teaching. In contrast, two other teachers said that the state curriculum was a stimulating factor to teach interpretational history. Waldo explained: *“The exam curriculum. I didn’t know much about that when I started the course. So we dealt with that clearly. And there I realised that I needed to pay more attention to it in my lessons, because it was a really important part of the exam programme”*.

3.4. Combined impact of factors over time

As Tables 2 and 3 above indicate, teachers are stimulated in various ways to teach factual or interpretational history. These tables do not give insight into the combined impact of the factors on an individual teacher over time. We will describe therefore the storylines of four teachers to illustrate that factors can either align or cause tension in their impact on teachers’ reported practices Figs. 5 and 6.

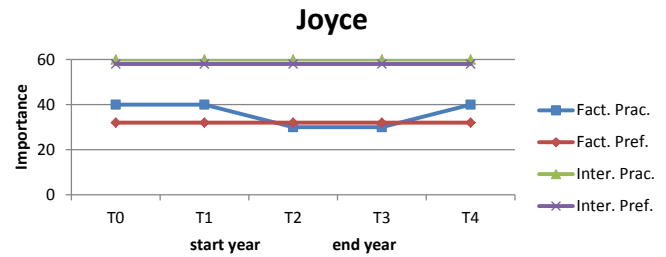


Fig. 4. Sustained interpretational teaching.

Figs. 3 and 4 show teachers who use a particular epistemological way of teaching from the start of the year that hardly changes. In the case of Peter the focus on historical facts was dominant throughout the year. Peter said that facts were important because of the school tests: he started to teach more facts because the pupils scored very badly on the factual questions of the first test, which explains the increase in his *factual knowledge* line. Peter drew a stabile low line for interpretational history. He explained that the pupils became frustrated when he taught historical interpretation; moreover, nothing in the school culture stimulated him to teach interpretational history. He experienced time pressure, as he had to cover the whole prescribed curriculum, which made him focus on teaching facts. *“Haha, but it holds you back a little, because you’re stuck to a fixed teaching programme and you have to deal with a chapter, and these and those chapters are being tested”*. Although Peter said that his professional preferences align more with interpretational history, he accepted that this was difficult within this school and with these pupils.

Joyce reported practices that were aligned with her professional preferences. She reported focussing on interpretational history teaching throughout the year. She had her internship at an innovative school where she was given much freedom to teach in her own way and develop herself. Historical facts were important for Joyce too and for specific themes she focused more on factual knowledge (causing the fluctuations in the storyline) because pupils didn’t have sufficient prior knowledge to engage in more complex historical thinking. Interpretational history teaching, however, was her main focus during the whole year. She explained that her supervisor also focused on interpretation and therefore the pupils were already acquainted with ambiguity in history. In addition, she was given freedom to create all her teaching materials and tests.

For eight teachers, however, a gradual development towards interpretational history teaching is visible throughout the year. This was not only due to a development of expertise, but also to the environment stimulating particular directions. This development for example in the case of James, took place gradually, and he

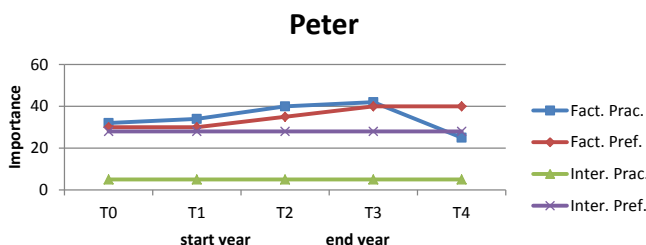


Fig. 3. Sustained factual teaching.

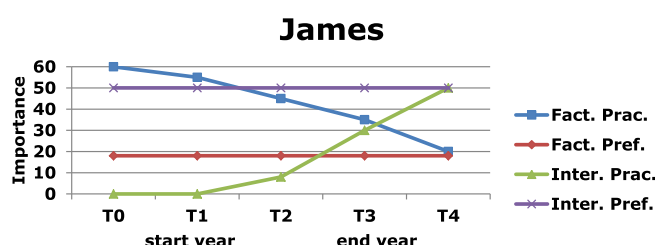


Fig. 5. Gradual development.

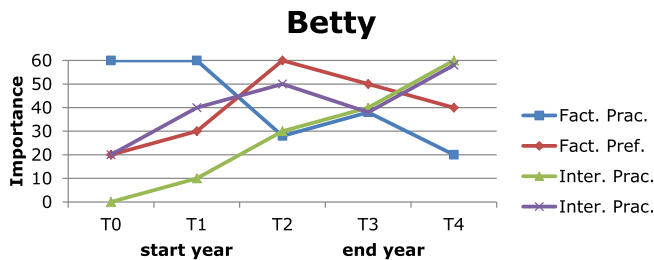


Fig. 6. Development full of tensions.

explained that at the start of the year he felt insecure and therefore he strictly followed the book and represented the content of the book as facts: “I have mmm, in the beginning I just followed the book, actually the book simply tells the truth”. It was due to the teacher education course that he learned that it is an important curriculum goal to teach pupils about interpretational history. Moreover, he had to reflect on his teaching goals and practices and in doing so he became conscious of his “uncritical” history teaching. He mentioned that he developed more pedagogical expertise during the year and gained more confidence to teach interpretational history. He said that confidence in subject matter knowledge was an important condition before teaching interpretational history. In contrast to most teachers, James did not mention school culture or the pupils as an influencing factor on his practice.

The development of teaching interpretational history can also be fraught with tension, as the example of Betty demonstrates. Betty described significant classroom management problems during the year. Her supervisor advised her to focus on teaching historical facts, believing that, by telling facts, she would gain respect as an historical expert. Betty also mentioned that the school tests contained many factual questions. During the year, Betty experienced friction between herself and her supervisor, as she wanted to focus more on interpretational history teaching. However, Betty experience is that, if she started to question the epistemic nature of historical knowledge, the class was thrown into turmoil. She described a hostile class environment in which a few pupils were interested in interpretation but these pupils were afraid to actively participate in the lessons. Moreover, Betty pointed out that, at the start of the year, she did not have the pedagogical knowledge to teach interpretational history. However, during the year, via the teacher education programme, she gained more knowledge of different teaching methods, which enabled her to start experimenting with teaching interpretational history. During the interview, she still constantly mentioned the struggle between her own beliefs about dealing with her classroom problems and those of her supervisor. In addition, Betty also struggled with her own epistemological beliefs about what good history teaching is. Betty emphasised the interpretive nature of historical knowledge; somewhat paradoxically, she also thought that a good history teacher has to know everything in order to act as an authority. She said: “If I only know one narrative and nothing else, then yes ... I am not the history teacher who knows everything which I should actually be.”

4. Conclusions and discussion

In the Netherlands, as in many other countries, student history teachers have to master new pedagogies for teaching interpretational history. This study aims to understand how student history teachers currently report representing historical knowledge in their classes and what factors impact the epistemological focus of teaching. To start with, we want to note that factual and interpretive representations should not be seen as dichotomous, as pupils

need to have at least some factual knowledge to construct a historical context for interpretation (Havekes, Coppens, Luttenberg, & Van Boxtel, 2012; Lee, 2005; VanSledright, 2010).

The first research question focused on potential differences between teachers' perceived classroom practice and professional preference. Most student teachers report focussing more on teaching historical facts than preferred, especially at the start of their teacher education year. They also report focussing less on teaching interpretational history than they prefer. In the interviews the student teacher pointed out that especially at the start of the year they find it difficult to put their intentions and professional preferences into actions, a problem that Kennedy (1999) called “the problem of enactment”. This finding seems to correspond with the body of literature proposing that teachers develop through phases, as for example Fuller (1969) stated moving from an early concern with their “self” and their (in)ability to control the classroom towards more complex teaching skills (which in this research concerns interpretational history teaching). Our findings do not, however, corroborate the idea of a natural, linear developmental path as the interviews revealed that learning to teach interpretational history is also highly situational and continues to be experienced by the student teachers as full of tensions and pitfalls.

The second research question focused on identifying the factors constraining or stimulating student teachers in teaching factual and interpretational history. Two sets of factors impacted their reported practices: teacher expertise and the work and learning environments. We found that perceived lack of expertise is associated with more factual teaching. In line with previous research, several student teachers reported that at the start of the year they were overwhelmed and reverted to practices that felt safe (Moir, 1999; Veenman, 1984). A strong focus on teaching factual history felt safe because this allowed the student teachers to represent the past in a predictable and unambiguous way “as it really was”, thereby avoiding difficult epistemological questions from the pupils.

As opposed to the case of factual history teaching, more interpretational history teaching is associated with perceived confidence in expertise. In line with results by Martell (2013), we found that student history teachers have to feel confident in their classroom management expertise to counter their fear that they cannot control the class during whole class discussions. In addition, the lack of pedagogical expertise constrained the teaching of interpretational history because the student teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of specific teaching methods. Therefore, we agree with Martell (2013) that teacher educators should provide practical tools and teaching methods about how to teach interpretational history. We agree with VanSledright (1996) that student teachers have to make an ‘ontological switch’, which means that many student teachers fundamentally have to revise their thinking about instruction. We found several examples of student teachers who expressed ‘traditional’ instructional beliefs resulting from their educational experience as a student at the university. We do not deny the benefits of teacher-centred teaching and lectures, but we agree with Windschitl (2002) that student teachers have to learn multiple teaching strategies to actively involve pupils into interpretation. However, a focus upon pedagogical expertise is not sufficient. Several respondents report that they perceived having confidence in their own subject matter knowledge, and especially knowledge of specific historiographical debates as a condition for teaching interpretational history. In line with Yilmaz (2008), we propose that teachers need to have sophisticated epistemic understanding of the nature of the discipline themselves if they are to teach effectively interpretational history. In accordance with several authors, we therefore suggest that historiographical training is important for history teachers (Fallace & Neem, 2005; Parkes, 2009; Whitehouse, 2008). Several examples of these

trainings have already been developed and described (Fallace; 2007; Lovorn, 2012; McDiarmid & Vinten-Johansen, 2000). Drawing upon these examples we suggest that in such training teachers should be actively engaged in historiographical debates and translating these debates to the classroom practise.

An important result of this study is that student teachers want to feel certainty based on a sense of confidence in their own expertise before engaging pupils in the uncertainty inherent in interpretational history. This result leads to a remarkable paradox, which we here refer to as the 'Certainty Paradox' of student history teachers: (factual) certainty is needed to be able to cope with and engage in (interpretational) uncertainty. Interestingly, this shows that teachers might easily and perhaps counterproductively convey their own psychological need (i.e., for certainty) to their pupils.

Besides expertise we found five different factors related to the work and learning environments that influenced student teachers' teaching, including school culture, pupils' cognitive abilities, interaction with pupils, the teacher education programme, and teaching artefacts. It is well known that the school culture, and specifically the supervisor who is part of that, plays an important role in the development of teachers (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Our results show that the supervisor can also impact teachers' epistemological focus in teaching practice by emphasising that factual or interpretational history is important. Our finding that the cognitive abilities of pupils can also impact the epistemological focus of history teachers is also in line with the literature. Moisan (2010) for example found that teachers generally consider upper secondary education easier for teaching interpretational history than lower levels because of the higher cognitive abilities of the pupils. In addition to this we found that pupils can also have an active role in constraining or stimulating the teaching of interpretational history, as interactions with pupils were reported by history teachers to impact their behaviour. Several teachers mentioned that their pupils gave the impression that interpretations were too difficult or that facts were too simplistic. It is not clear to what extent pupils have explicitly mentioned this, or whether teachers have concluded this based on pupils' reactions in the classroom. In line with previous research artefacts such as the curriculum, school tests, and the history book directly impacted the reported practices (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Mayer, 2006; Monte-Sano, 2011; Yeager & Davis, 2005). We found that student history teachers perceived the artefacts mainly as constraining them in teaching interpretational history, and as influencing them to teach factual history. Whereas the school as a working environment was not necessarily defined as stimulating in one specific epistemological direction, the teacher education programme was exclusively associated with interpretational history teaching.

When looking at the work and learning environments of individual student teachers it becomes clearer how a teacher can be stimulated in a single direction (to either teach factual or interpretational history) or in conflicting directions. When stimulated in a single direction, a teacher may feature a particular epistemological way of teaching from the start, which hardly changes. In some cases, however, tensions were found within the teachers' reported practices. We found several cases in which the student teacher described socio-cultural differences between the teacher education programme and the actual school context that led to so-called 'discrepancy experiences' or tensions between the idealistic notions of the teacher education programme and the pressure from schools to rely on traditional patterns (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Cole & Knowles, 1993). It is important that teacher educators, in allotting student teachers to schools, deliberately take into consideration the school's orientation in history teaching. As this study makes clear, a training place can either stimulate or frustrate

the initial preference of the student teacher. As a case can be made for both the usefulness of alignment (i.e., safety, confidence) and of tensions (i.e., awareness of different teaching realities, reflexivity) for teachers' development, it might be wise to have two or more apprenticeships during teacher education, as this might provide a basis for student teachers to discuss teaching orientations and the impact of work and learning environments on a meta-level.

For our study we used the storyline method. The student teachers appreciated the method as it helped them to structure their experiences over time. For us, it allowed us to retrospectively distil the development of student teachers, without potentially impacting it along the way. Nevertheless, a simultaneous disadvantage of the storyline method is that it requires a respondent to think about a long period of time; student teachers might gloss over important aspects, and their reports are limited by the limitations of a person's conscious self-knowledge (Conway, 2001). Moreover, Nisbett and his colleagues have pointed out that people do not always know *what* influences their behaviour (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). We acknowledge these limitations of self-reported data. Barker, Pistrang, and Elliott (2002) propose that the most important problem of self-reported data might be that people are not always truthful. Given that the new Dutch curriculum explicitly focuses on teaching history as interpretation, it might be the case that student teachers are more inclined to draw lines favouring interpretational history teaching. Therefore the student teachers might have provided more idealised versions instead of their actual teaching practices (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Kennedy, 1999; VanSledright, Kelly, & Meuwissen, 2006).

A challenging task for further research would be to study whether the 'Certainty Paradox' also applies to experienced teachers. What considerations do experienced teachers have before teaching interpretational history, and more specific, what content do they find appropriate for teaching that history is a construction? In doing so we might gain more insight into more subject-specific considerations of teachers and how they try to strike a balance between facts and interpretation.

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