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RESEARCH ARTICLE



The representation of minorities in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for history

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ABSTRACT

Finland has long been culturally and linguistically varied and continues to grow even more diverse every year. However, this heterogeneity has not been reflected in the country's history curriculum, which has traditionally been built on the idea of a homogenous Finnish nation. This study examines the representation of both old and new minorities in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for history. It argues that inclusive and multiperspective history education is needed to increase the quality of history education for all students. The results of this study demonstrate that while the general objectives and values of the curriculum promote diversity and multicultural education, the curriculum for history lacks an adequate representation of minorities and relies on Eurocentric and Finnish historical narratives. However, the curriculum nonetheless emphasizes teaching methods that could potentially create more inclusive history education and broaden historical perspectives for all pupils.

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For decades, Finland has been celebrated nationally and internationally for its education system, emphasizing its attention to human rights and equity. However, this popular claim has recently been questioned in both academia and civil society discourse (Hakala et al., 2018; Helakorpi, 2019; Keskinen et al., 2019). For example, the indigenous Sámi people, national minorities, and other minoritised and racialized groups have voiced their concerns about underrepresentation and the lack of cultural sensitivity in the Finnish school system (Hakala et al., 2018) and wider society (Keskinen et al., 2019). Especially alarming is the underrepresentation of these minority groups in history education, which still erases the country's heterogenous past and manufactures the image of a homogenous nation (Hakala et al., 2018; Hakoköngäs et al., 2019; Rantala et al., 2020). As a result, the contents of history education, to a large extent, contradict the multicultural demographics of today's schools as well as Finland's heterogenous past.

The underrepresentation of minorities in history education creates many evident problems across a diverse spectrum. Firstly, minority pupils' motivation to study history, largely due to their inability to identify with the historical narratives taught in history classrooms, decreases and generally lowers their trust in the Finnish education system (Hakala et al., 2018; Rantala & Ahonen, 2015; Rantala et al., 2020). Secondly, the

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majority's ignorance of the nation's minorities and their history, partly contributes to the current levels of racism and xenophobia in Finnish society, and therefore the dominant practices in history classrooms have broad and long-lasting consequences (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 2019; Non-discrimination ombudsman, 2020). Finally, the omission of different historical narratives narrows all pupils' historical knowledge and thus holds negative consequences for the education of both majority and minority pupils (Wilkinson, 2014). In sum, ignorance of the histories of minorities and the country's past colonial acts sustains the myth of a homogenous Finnish nation, affecting the relations between different minorities and the state (Keskinen et al., 2019).

The education system does not exist in isolation from national sentiments and therefore reflects the dominant norms and values of the state. The national core curriculum in Finland (hereafter NCC) is the state's principal tool for influencing basic education in Finland. In fact, it is the only channel through which the state can directly influence standard schooling as there are no school inspectors, textbook evaluations, nor state-level exams, which are relatively common elsewhere (Rantala, 2018). As a key governmental instrument, the NCC is an insightful document that reflects a range of principal norms, values and knowledges that the state seeks to deliver through education (Apple, 2012; Giroux, 2006; Goodson, 1995).

This article examines how minorities are represented in the most recent NCC for history in basic education, analysing the inclusion and representation of national minorities, the indigenous Sámi people as well as immigrants, who – compared to other minorities – form relatively new minority groups. While these minorities do not form a homogenous group as their histories and present-day realities differ from each other significantly (Hakala et al., 2018), their overall representation contributes to the popular historical narrative purporting Finland's heterogenous past. Although this article focuses on history education, it also analyses the NCC as a whole and thus contextualizes history education in the framework of general goals and the values of basic education articulated in the framework set out by the Finnish Board of Education. The scope of this study covers only the NCC and does not examine local curricula and thus it does not consider curricular differences between different regions in Finland. This study is framed within the theories of critical pedagogy and multicultural education, both of which approach current educational practices critically, although from slightly different perspectives. While the former critically scrutinizes the messages that the curriculum delivers (Apple, 2012; Giroux, 2006), the latter focuses on the power relations between majority and minority groups (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2004; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). As a research method, this article applies content analysis and thus focuses on the meanings of the text in the curriculum within the chosen theoretical context (Krippendorf, 2018). The analysis will first focus on the general guidelines of the 2014 NCC in order to explain how education is constructed and to describe which norms form the value basis for education in Finland. The analysis will then proceed to examine the curriculum for history in grades 4–6 and 7–9, focusing on the selected key content areas. Based on the results of this analysis, the article will present recommendations for a more inclusive curriculum for history.

Deconstructing dominant historical narratives through critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy as a form of educational studies examines how power is exercised in education (Apple, 2012; Freire, 2005/2005; Giroux, 2006). As such, one of the major tasks of critical pedagogy is to ask whose interests and goals does the school support and whose needs it neglects (Giroux, 2006). Additionally, critical pedagogy is interested in examining the motives behind the desire to exercise power in education (Freire, 2005) as well as identifying who form the groups that dominate in education. Embedded in the traditions of critical studies (Siljander, 2014), critical pedagogy researchers aim to institute concrete changes in education by building a dynamic relationship with the practice, people and pedagogical institutions at the grassroots level (Apple, 2012).

State-sanctioned formal curriculum is one of the key areas affecting education and therefore it commands attention from various interest groups. Although it is not the only force regulating the ways in which children and youth are taught, the presence of the state system in the creation of a curriculum makes its analysis an essential task in critical pedagogy studies (Goodson, 1995). It is therefore important to examine the curricular development as it provides essential information about a state's interests in education in a certain time and space. Regarding curriculum in practice, Giroux (2006) sees that one of the main goals of critical pedagogy is to rewrite current curriculum and reshape education in such a way that it addresses the lived experiences of different students. Thus, critical pedagogy provides a way of learning history through intersectional lenses, and as Giroux states, it can be a 'part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class and ethnicity' (Giroux, 2006, p. 5). Through these intersectional lenses, history education can provide multiple perspectives that are meaningful for the individual as well as wider society.

History education shapes children's historical perspectives and is often one of the first instances in which a child is introduced to history as a science. In the past, history education was exploited to serve nationalistic goals and collective nation-building processes through the assimilation of the minority histories. However, more recently, emphasis has been placed on the need to explain the nature of history as a science and to explicate the social use of history as well as to improve pupils' historical literacy (Rantala, 2018; Rantala & Ahonen, 2015). Given its social importance, the selection of contents and goals in the creation of a history curriculum is a complex process that includes various stakeholders. Any history curriculum is therefore always bound to its contemporary time and space, following current trends in historical research and society in general (Ahonen, 2012; Goodson, 1995; Torsti, 2009). In other words, it reflects the dominant historical narratives and thus mirrors what parts of history are emphasized and what are hidden (Apple, 2012).

Critical pedagogy aims at deconstructing dominant narratives in education while amplifying more marginalized voices (Giroux, 2006). As such, it can provide the means to deconstruct the traditional nationalistic form of history education that is often more inclined to exclusive rather than the inclusive historical narratives that push minorities further to the margins. As one-sided and nationalistic history education tends to erase or hide past atrocities committed by the dominant group in order to construct an ideal and heroic past (European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), 2017), critical pedagogy offers a way to build more inclusive and multiperspective history education by exposing the

power structures behind a society's dominant historical narratives. According to Giroux, (2006), this could be achieved by focusing on the historical narratives that constitute dominant knowledge, as well as those that do not, and also by assessing how historical texts are interpreted differently by people from divergent backgrounds.

Multicultural education as a way of understanding the heterogenous past

Another potential way of deconstructing exclusive and nationalistic history education is offered by multicultural education, which shares a similar set of working methods with critical pedagogy. While the origins of critical pedagogy lay in class struggle, Sleeter and Bernal (2004) recall how multicultural education grew as a response to the institutional racism and unjust power relations prevalent in the US education system as well as globally. It is imperative to consider these derivatives as many practices within multicultural education do not address power relations or racism critically (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). Sleeter and Bernal (2004) criticize the activities within multicultural education that depoliticize its underlying cause, because the school culture as a whole need to change before multicultural education can be comprehensively implemented. Similarly, Banks argues that in many Western countries, multiple school practices related to race, ethnicity, language and religion are disadvantageous to both minority and majority pupils, thus enhancing racist stereotypes and practices. Therefore, the superficial and depoliticized form of multicultural education is inadequate and does not address the root causes of inequality (Banks, 2019).

Multicultural education shares similar goals with critical pedagogy in the sense that both emphasize the importance of understanding the conditions under which children from different backgrounds live. Therefore, Gay (2004) maintains that multicultural education has both personal and social implications, as well as contents and goals, which should be addressed. On the one hand, multicultural education aspires to enhance the self-image and self-empowerment of minority pupils, and on the other hand, seeks to change conceptions and attitudes towards race, ethnicity and culture at the social level (Gay, 2004). Banks echoes this statement by emphasizing that one of the main tasks of multicultural education is to lower the pain and discrimination that minoritised children face due to their characteristics, be they racial, physical or cultural (Banks, 2019). Therefore, multicultural education seeks to improve the everyday lives of minoritised children while attempting to change the broader social structures within which schools are situated. One effective way of doing this is to adopt the principles of multicultural education in history teaching, which essentially means promoting multiperspectivity as well as questioning white and Eurocentric historical knowledge and its truth-value (Bennett, 2019; Gay, 2004; Mikander, 2016). Doing so would not only help minority pupils to feel included in the school practices but also help to broaden the historical knowledge of all pupils (Wilkinson, 2014).

As such, multicultural education should be viewed as a process of transforming education rather than as a product or a separate teaching module. It demands a systemic curricular change and strategies for fighting racism and other forms of injustice in schools. Regarding history education, Bennett (2019) argues that the curriculum should be altered in order to strengthen the overall understanding of the cultures, histories and contributions of different minority groups. Other scholars in multicultural education, such as Gay and Sleeter

& Bernal, go further, arguing that what is needed is a thorough change in our understanding of what constitutes knowledges or uphold truths (Gay, 2004; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). In history education, this could entail questioning white and Eurocentric historical narratives, offering a deeper examination of whose stories are emphasized, and whose are marginalized or invisible. For instance, Mikander (2016) suggests that we need to question the way in which the 'West' and Western values have been constructed.

Even though cultural diversity has always been a part of the Finnish society, the ideal of a homogenous Finnish nation only became more difficult to uphold in the 1990s due to increased immigration from 'non-Western' states (Keskinen et al., 2019; Rinne, 2019; Zilliacus et al., 2017). Despite the need to address these demographic shifts, multicultural education has nevertheless been introduced and implemented in a rather superficial form over the past decades as it has been considered as an educational policy only relevant to the ethnically and linguistically different 'other' and not as a matter of social justice affecting all pupils (Zilliacus et al., 2017). However, an analysis of the development of multicultural education in the Finnish curricula since the 1990s shows that the development is shifting towards social justice, which is seen most clearly in the 2014 framework (Zilliacus et al., 2017).

Challenges nevertheless remain. Firstly, Finland, along with other Nordic countries, needs to tackle its strong national narrative of Nordic exceptionalism, which implies historical innocence in relation to colonialism, a reputation as a good global actor and the ideal of exceptional homogeneity (Keskinen et al., 2019; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012; Mikander, 2015). Not acknowledging a country's colonial past poses the risk of diminishing the political and social justice-oriented nature of multicultural education (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). This task also includes a thorough examination of the oftentimes silenced history between the majority and minority groups in Finland as well as Finland's role in colonialism overseas and in Sápmi (the Sámi home region). Furthermore, what is also needed is a stronger commitment from the teachers to acknowledge the power structures and racism in education (Mikander, 2016; Rinne, 2019).

In Finland, these topics have commonly been suppressed in the curriculum and their examination in the classroom has thus relied on an individual teacher's expertise and willingness to address these topics (Hakoköngäs et al., 2019; Rantala & Ahonen, 2015).

Secondly, the ideals of multicultural education have been increasingly questioned as the new political climate has generated more xenophobia and harsher discourses towards the imagined other, including both new and old minorities (ACFC, 2019; Keskinen et al., 2019; Zilliacus et al., 2017). In recent years, right-wing populists have stood in opposition to multicultural education in Finland. For instance, the Finns Party [*Perussuomalaiset*] has opposed multicultural education and demanded that state-sponsored education should maintain and promote Finnish values and culture while highlighting Finnishness instead of multicultural propaganda or political ideology (Rantala, 2018). This is particularly relevant in the planning of history education, which is a central subject in shaping a pupil's understanding of society's past, present and future.

Research material and methods

This article was driven by the following research questions: How does the curriculum address the histories of different minority groups and how does it enable/disable the deconstruction of a dominant historical narrative of a homogenous Finnish nation? The

research material included the 2014 Finnish NCC for basic education. The 2014 NCC entered into force in grades 1–6 in 2016 and grades 7–9 gradually in 2017–2019. The NCC is a 549-page long policy document, and its drafting involved multiple actors and is thus a product of long political negotiations (Rantala & Ahonen, 2015). The current NCC consists of a general section depicting the mission and essential values of basic education as set out by the Finnish National Board of Education, including its definition of learning, the way education is structured, the principles for assessment and finally the goals and contents of each separate school subject. The NCC also describes the aims for developing the working methods, learning environment as well as national school culture. Additionally, it includes a section describing the special questions of language and culture. This section stipulates the goals for Sámi, Roma, sign language and other plurilingual education.

In order to answer the research questions, the NCC was analysed by following the principles of content analysis. Following Krippendorff, content analysis is a research method ‘for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use’ (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 24). Content analysis is a scientific way of reading a text and thus differs from other manners of examining what is written, which nonetheless does not imply that the content analyst’s interpretation would be better or unravel the true meaning of the text. Rather, the results of the content analysis are formed in the synthesis between the data (text), research questions, context (theory) and the researcher. This means that content analysis conducted by a different researcher driven by unconnected research questions and discipline-specific contexts also creates different results (Krippendorff, 2018).

In this study, the context within which the content analysis was conducted was built upon the theories of critical pedagogy and multicultural education. Therefore, the utilized content analysis approached the research questions by focusing on the theoretically relevant concepts such as diversity, equity, minority, multiculturalism and identity in the research material. In other words, this study analysed the contextuality and frameworks of the concepts in the NCC and thus focused on the meanings that they produced.

The first stage of the analysis consisted of a repetitive reading of the NCC, which helped the author to familiarize herself with the specific terminology and internal logic of the framework. As the purpose of this research was not to thoroughly examine every section of the NCC, after the first stage of reading, a more extensive focus was given to the specific parts in the NCC holding high relevance to the research question. In addition to the subject-specific instruction for history teaching in grades 4–6 and 7–9, which are the focus of the first research question, the study examined sections concerning the obligation and underlying values of basic education (Section 2), the mission and general goals of basic education (Section 3), the operating culture of comprehensive basic education (Section 4) and the specific questions of language and culture (Section 9). These sections were chosen for the analysis as they, for their part, describe important relevant instructions for inclusive history education. These sections also form the core of the fundamental values of the NCC and therefore provide relevant information regarding the second research question.

The representation of minorities in the curriculum

Curricular values

As laid out in the NCC, the obligations and underlying values of basic education are firmly rooted in international human rights treaties and the Finnish constitution. The principles of equality and non-discrimination should guide all activities within education and therefore no child should be subjected to discrimination in school on the basis of characteristics such as gender, language or ethnic origin (National Core Curriculum, 2014, pp. 14–15). Therefore, the values and obligations of basic education imply that all pupils, regardless of their belonging to either a majority or minority group, should be treated equally in school and receive high-quality education. Furthermore, the NCC explicitly states that education is founded on a diverse cultural heritage in Finland which has been shaped in interaction between various cultures (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 16). Therefore, the NCC acknowledges Finland's historically formed cultural diversity and encourages education that promotes both cultural identity-building as well inter-cultural learning, thus creating a strong normative framework for inclusive and multiperspective history education.

The transversal competences were first introduced in the 2014 NCC, where they are concisely described as a set of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. They were created to respond to the needs arising from changes in the surrounding environment and therefore offer a set of goals to the basic education which should be integrated to every subject and school activity (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 22). Their shared aim is to 'support growth as a human being and to impart competences required for membership in a democratic society and a sustainable way of living' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 22). One of them is the transversal competence on the cultural competence, interaction and expression, which can be viewed as a response to the increase of multiculturalism in Finnish society. As such, this transversal competence seeks to enhance the recognition and respect for cultural meanings in pupils' environment as well as the construction of their own cultural identity in basic education. The inclusion of minorities in the transversal competence on cultural competence, interaction and self-expression is possible, although their involvement is not explicitly mentioned in this regard (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 22). It instructs that 'the pupils learn to know and appreciate their living environment and its cultural heritage as well as their personal social, cultural, religious, philosophical and linguistic roots' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 22).

This transversal competence also promotes the importance of cultural identity-building while emphasizing the necessity of understanding one's roots and background. When transversal competence is kept in mind, it can enable a multicultural history education that considers both majority and minority pupils as part of the same diversity instead of holding the majority pupil's background as the norm upon which minorities are mirrored (Banks, 2019). Furthermore, it gives an opportunity to broaden pupils' historical perspectives as everyone is provided a chance to reflect on their own past as well as learn from others (Giroux, 2006). However, transversal competence does not explicitly mention different minority groups nor consider the power structures between majority and minority cultures. Therefore, this transversal competence closely

resembles a superficial form of multicultural education that promotes appreciation and knowledge of different cultures rather than focusing on deep power structures between majority and minority groups (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Zilliacus et al., 2017).

However, the NCC does take a rights-based approach to the promotion of cultural diversity as it describes cultural variety as one of the values guiding school culture by stating that 'it [the school] brings up the importance of the Sámi culture and various minorities in Finland. (. . .) The community recognises the right to one's own language and culture as a fundamental right' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 29). For the first time, the NCC specifically mentions the significance of Finland's indigenous people and minorities and emphasizes the pupil's right to their own language and culture, thus placing school culture within a human rights framework.

Instructions for minority education

The NCC approaches different minorities specifically through linguistic groups. The section on the special questions of language and culture stipulates specific instructions for the Roma, Sámi and Sámi language speakers, sign language and other plurilingual education. This particular section is complementary and thus adds to the common objectives of the NCC (National Core Curriculum, 2014). The instructions for each different linguistic and cultural group are slightly different, but the NCC articulates as a common principle that the aim is to guide the pupils to strengthen their linguistic awareness and skills while guiding them to respect different languages and cultures. Furthermore, it stipulates that teaching should be based on the knowledge that the pupils and their communities have (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 90).

The emphasis is on the pupils' language skills but also on the appreciation and distribution of cultural and historical knowledge from different cultural and linguistic groups, which resembles a celebratory and non-critical form of multicultural education (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). This is repeated in the subsections advising on the education of different groups. With respect to Roma education, the NCC stipulates that a specific aim is to guide the pupils to develop their identity and awareness of Roma history and culture. Additionally, it articulates that teaching must be based on the position of the Roma as an ethnic and cultural minority (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 91).

While this guideline includes many positive aspects for identity building among Roma pupils, it nevertheless raises the question of why this guideline is not directed towards steering common education for all pupils (Banks, 2019). In particular, the goal of strengthening pupils' awareness of their own history and culture should not be directed solely to the Roma but rather should be aimed at all students. Additionally, teaching about the position of the Finnish Roma as an ethnic and cultural minority should equally concern everyone, regardless of their origin, in order to strengthen all pupils' historical understanding (Banks, 2019; Giroux, 2006). Similarly, the NCC language around the education of the Sámi and Sámi language speakers states that 'the instruction builds up the pupils' appreciation of their personal linguistic and cultural background and their understanding of its significance for themselves, the community, the society and other indigenous people alike' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, pp. 90–91).

The underlying issue is that while the minorities are expected to learn about both minority and majority cultures, communities and histories, these instructions do not affect other pupils, which thus excludes them from learning about said minorities and their histories. According to Banks (2019), this is a common mistake in applying the ideas of multicultural education to any curriculum, and this is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, not educating all pupils about minority cultures and histories shifts the responsibility to maintain the knowledge of minorities to the minorities themselves. Helakorpi (2019) raises this issue by asking why a school institution expects the minorities to build a picture of themselves, and further, why majority pupils do not share the need to study the histories of minority groups. The point is not to argue that the minorities should not be key actors in building their historical narratives and representations in schools and elsewhere but rather to question why minority issues and histories are not taught to all pupils (Gay, 2004).

Secondly, the exclusion of minority histories distorts the historical narrative and therefore impedes the most comprehensive study of history possible. Multicultural education aims not only to strengthen minority pupils' feelings of belonging and identity building but also to contribute to the quality of learning of all pupils (Banks, 2019; Bennett, 2019). For instance, in his analysis of Muslim representation in the history curriculum in the UK, Wilkinson has illustrated how the gaps and absences of this particular dimension of historical knowledge damage the quality of all pupils' historical learning and does 'injustice to a coherent narrative of history' (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 430). These omissions in the curriculum are particularly dangerous today when societies are becoming increasingly multicultural.

Curriculum for history education

According to the NCC, the subject of history is intended to support the pupils' identity-building, their growth into active members of society as well as to strengthen their understanding of diversity. The NCC states that 'the pupils are guided to understand that historical information is open to interpretations and has multiple perspectives and to explain changes and continuity apparent in historical development' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 275). As such, the NCC supports the teaching and learning of history that emphasize multiple perspectives and thus could offer space for different historical narratives from both majority and minority cultures, based on the lived experiences of different pupils (Giroux, 2006). In fact, the NCC directs that the goal of history education is 'to support the pupils in building their identity and to promote their growth into active members of the society who understand diversity' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, 9. 275). Consequently, the tasks entailed in the NCC call for history education that is inclusive, multiperspective and thus distances itself from exclusive and nationalistic history education (Giroux, 2006). In this respect, the objectives of history education support the underlying multicultural values of the NCC.

Both multicultural education and critical pedagogy theorists suggest that inclusive and multicultural history education can be promoted through family or communal histories, which will help the pupil to view history from their historical location (Freire, 2005; Sleeter, 2015). Therefore, one of the strengths of the NCC regarding multicultural history education

is its emphasis on family history. The NCC suggests that pupils are introduced to history by using their family or community histories. As such, while handling the key content areas the focus should be on the pupils' family or community histories when appropriate (National Core Curriculum, 2014).

Harris and Reynolds (2018) argue that students from both majority and minority cultures should have an opportunity to broaden their historical perspectives by examining their family's history in their home region or across state borders. Therefore, the NCC's emphasis on family and local histories can contribute to the goals of multicultural education by broadening pupils' historical perspectives (Sleeter, 2015). In addition, one of the objectives of history instruction in grades 4–6 directs teachers 'to help pupils identify changes in the history of his or her family or community and to understand how the same changes may have meant different things to different people' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 276). However, focusing on family history may pose the risk of situating minority students as 'cultural experts, which in turn can further marginalize and essentialize them (Helakorpi, 2019; Non-discrimination ombudsman, 2020).

Each school subject has its own selection of key content areas as listed in the NCC that should be covered in history textbooks (National Core Curriculum, 2014). The selection of the key content areas in the curriculum helps to determine what is considered as valuable historical knowledge and what is not (Apple, 2012). Therefore, it is quite telling that none of the minority groups are mentioned on the lists of the key content areas for history education in grades 4–6 and 7–9. This omission does not come as a surprise, as the manner through which the relations between majority and minority groups, as earlier mentioned, have often been silenced and considered as marginalized and sensitive topics in history education in Finland (Hakoköngäs et al., 2019). Furthermore, the emphasis on the national and Eurocentric narratives in the NCC for history is clearly visible, mirroring a society's dominant historical narratives (Banks, 2019).

The lists of the key content areas follow a chronological order and thus create a historical narrative starting from the pre-historic era and concluding on a global scale in the present day. Rantala and Ahonen (2015) argue that chronological order is typical, especially for nationalistic history education aimed at building a pupil's national identity. However, the NCC notes that the key content areas can be explored either chronologically or thematically (National Core Curriculum, 2014, pp. 276–277), thus the order of the events being discussed depends on the individual teacher's personal preferences. The key content areas in grades 4–6 are presented in the table below.

As it is visible in Table 1, each of the key content areas emphasize either the Finnish or European historical perspectives or leave the geographical and cultural context unspecified. For instance, the first key content area does not specify any geographical area to be examined nor name the civilization of whose birth should be taught and learnt (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 276). However, the remaining content areas indicate a quite strong inclination towards European or Finnish national history. The second key content area addresses the evolving democracy in Greece and the Roman society – the nests of the European civilization – as well as the settlement of Northern Europe during classical antiquity (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 276). This content area contributes to a historical narrative that emphasize European history and the political and cultural roots of modern Western states while omitting other ancient civilizations and their impact on ancient Greek and Roman societies. This omission is prevalent in dominant European

Table 1. Key content areas in grades 4–6.

Key content area	Topics
1) Prehistoric era and the birth of civilization	The hunter-gatherer culture, the revolution of farming culture, the birth of civilization.
2) Ancient times and the heritage of the classical period	The dawn of democracy in Greece and the Roman society, the settlement of the Nordic countries.
3) Middle Ages	The medieval worldview, cultural similarities and differences in the East and the West, the dawn of the historical era in Finland.
4) The revolution of the modern times	Changes in science, arts, and people's beliefs.
5) Finland as a part of Sweden	The development in Finland in the 17 th and the 18 th century.

(National Core Curriculum, 2014), p. 276

historical narratives, and it has been stated that since the 18th century, neglecting to acknowledge the influences of other cultures on European civilizations has been a deliberate act (Bernal, 1987; Isaksson & Jokisalo, 2005). As such, having this content area as the starting point of history education contributes to the dominant historical narrative that emphasizes white and European history (Alemanji, 2021; Bennett, 2019; Giroux, 2006; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004).

The key content area covering the Middle Ages focuses on the worldviews and cultural similarities and differences between the East and West (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 276). Here, the dichotomy between the East and West is treated as a given and therefore may easily promote history education that contributes to a Eurocentric historical narrative that essentially divides the East and West and their respective people (Kincheloe, 2004; May & Sleeter, 2010; Mikander, 2016). The same content area also covers the beginning of Swedish rule in Finland and thus narrows the focus to local or 'national' history – inasmuch we can talk about Finnish national history in the Middle Ages. In doing so, the curriculum takes a nationalist turn and thus begins to construct a narrative of Finland as a part of Sweden, historically belonging to the West.

The fourth key content area focuses on changes in science, arts, and people's beliefs in the modern times without specifying any location or specific people, thus enabling, in principle, a wider examination of the time period across different cultures and continents. However, it does not refer to the beginning of colonialism nor the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which still influence today's societies, rendering a prominent absence in the curriculum (Wilkinson, 2014). The last key content area covers the 17th and 18th century in Finland but does not determine which topics from that era should be examined. It thus continues the focus on the national Finnish past without any providing references to minorities or other regions during this time frame.

In grades 7–9, the time spectrum covered in history education spans from the industrial revolution in the 18th century until the present day. The key content areas are presented in Table 2.

As stated earlier, the minorities are non-existent in the description of the key content areas and the selection of contents only supports European or Finnish historical perspectives. This builds a narrative of a homogenous Finnish nation, while similarly ignoring the historical and contemporary existence of different minority groups in Finland. In doing so, it does not adequately address culturally heterogenous pupils and their historical roots (Bennett, 2019; Giroux, 2006).

Table 2. Key content areas in grades 7–9.

Key content area	Topics
1) The origins and development of the industrial society	Industrialization and its consequences to people and nature
2) People changing the world	Ideologies and their significance and consequences
3) Creating, building, and defending Finland	Identity-building during the autonomy, beginning of the independent Finland
4) The Great War era	World Wars, Cold War, human rights issues, Holocaust
5) Building the welfare state	The origins of the current way of life in Finland, change in the economic structure
6) The origins of the world politics of today	The shared history of developed and developing countries, contemporary political tensions

(National Core Curriculum, 2014), p. 447–448

The first key content area focusing on industrialization is central to the Eurocentric historical narrative, depicting the development of modern and rational Europe (Isaksson & Jokisalo, 2005). Similarly, the second key content area concerning social ideologies and their significance contributes to the historical narrative of modernity and rationality mentioned above. The third and the fifth key content areas focus solely on Finnish national history: while the former focuses on the importance of culture in identity building in the 19th and early 20th century Finland, the latter examines the social and economic developments in postwar Finland. Once again, minorities are not mentioned and therefore whether minority perspectives are included or not in studies of these time periods is dependent on an individual teacher's preferences and knowledge (ACFC, 2019). According to Banks (2019), this is a common practice in non-multicultural education in which the historical perspectives of the dominant group form the core of the common knowledge.

The fourth key content area concerning the World Wars and the Cold War contains instructions that allow for a human rights approach to understanding that period. In fact, it is the only key content area that explicitly mentions human rights as it advises that the wars should be approached from the perspective of ordinary people and human rights (National Core Curriculum, 2014). This content area has a strong connection to the values presented in the general guidelines of the NCC as it emphasizes the historical examination of human rights and the histories of ordinary people. It also provides a platform for discussing past human rights violations and their connection to today's different forms of oppression and racism, thereby potentially opening up discussions about past relations between different minorities and the state (Alemanji, 2021; Gay, 2004).

The NCC does not offer any guidelines about how to teach about colonialism, although the legacy of colonialism, in many ways, still affects modern societies and influences the forms of global migration in the 21st century (Keskinen et al., 2019; Mikander, 2015). The last key content area on the origins of the world politics goes perhaps closest to the topic as the instruction of the key content area instructs the pupils to explore 'the shared history of developed and developing countries' and 'the origins of new kinds of political tensions in the world as well as solutions for them' (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 448).

There are a few problematic issues arising from the wording and aims of this key content area that can be criticized. First, the choice of words reinforces the Eurocentric division between 'developed' and 'developing' countries, which is based on the European

understanding of the modern and rational Europe and ignores the historical reasons propelling, for example, the transatlantic slave trade or behind the unjust distribution of power and wealth in global politics (Banks, 2019; Bennett, 2019). Secondly, even though this content area offers an opportunity to discuss the pressing issues of today's politics and their root causes, it is worth asking why the exploration of this side of history is not initiated earlier or integrated into earlier key content areas. In light of the normative framework of the NCC, colonialism should be preferably fully integrated into Finnish history curriculum, given the fact that Finland benefitted and still benefits from the global colonialism and was itself an active colonizer in Sápmi (Keskinen et al., 2019; Mikander, 2015; Weiss, 2016). In the British context, both Wilkinson (2014) and Figueroa (2004) have indicated that the inadequate teaching of British colonialism and its long-lasting and harmful consequences in its former colonies contributes to the current weak understanding of today's politics and racism as well as the root causes of contemporary migration in Britain. Teaching about colonialism would also contribute to social justice-oriented multicultural education as it would create the opportunity to critically address historically rooted power relations and racism (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). Therefore, the teaching of colonialism should also be prioritized in Finland in order to make history education more comprehensive and inclusive.

Conclusion

The content analysis conducted in this study shows that while the underlying values of the NCC promote understanding and respect for diversity and thus build a framework for multiperspective history education, the key content areas of the curriculum for history still emphasize Eurocentric historical narratives and do not explicitly mention any of the minority groups in Finland. The European historical narratives are central to the curriculum, starting from ancient Greece and Rome as the nest of the European culture and concluding in the present day of 'developed' and 'developing' countries. Thus, the selected content areas do not offer much space to deconstruct the historical narrative of the homogenous Finnish nation. As such, there is a clash between the values of the NCC and the curriculum for history especially in regard to diversity and multiculturalism.

The general guidelines in the NCC emphasize interactive learning between the pupils from majority and minority cultures, which can however easily betray any good intentions because the burden to teach about the minorities and their history is put solely on the shoulders of minority children, while the majority children can be the beneficiaries who have no responsibility to change the narrative (Helakorpi, 2019). For instance, the non-discrimination ombudsman's report on discrimination against African descent shows how this form of education has been experienced as othering and excluding (Non-discrimination ombudsman, 2020). It is therefore imperative that teachers acknowledge these sensitive issues in their teaching and do not, for their part, contribute to othering and excluding behaviour in schools which is against the underlying values of the NCC.

On the one hand, the NCC emphasizes the importance of pupils' identity-building regardless of their cultural or linguistic background, in many instances highlighting the opportunities that history education can bring about in relation to this matter. The

curriculum for history also recognizes this and provides tools for inclusive history education by emphasizing the importance of family history in teaching and learning history. On the other hand, the key content areas – guiding both the contents of history textbooks as well as history lessons – do not emphasize as diverse a historical narrative as would be necessary in multicultural history education. Therefore, the inclusion of minorities in history education largely depends on history teachers' own preferences as well as on the authors of different history textbooks. This reliance on individual teachers and textbooks may pose the risk of minority cultures and histories being ignored as there are no explicit demands for teaching minority histories (ACFC, 2019).

Based on these findings within the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and multicultural education, this study proposes that the next NCC, and particularly the curriculum for history, should explicitly include the history of different minorities in Finland in its key content areas and thus strengthen the underlying values of the NCC through history education. Furthermore, it proposes that future curriculum for history should explore the history of colonialism in more detail, including Finland's own role in colonization. In this way, the curriculum could offer more tools to deconstruct the historical narrative of a homogenous Finnish nation as well as more comprehensively address the lived experiences of different minority groups.

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