

Global Perspectives on the Role of Dialogue in History Education

Socio-cultural, Psychological, and Digital Dimensions

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First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-85440-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-53589-8 (ebk)

Chapter 11

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003535898-15



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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Introduction

The case for exploring intercultural historical dialogue

Research indicates that authentic dialogue in the history classroom is for most students a rare or fleeting experience, if experienced at all: even teachers who intentionally try to foster discussion among their students find it challenging to create moments where students can converse in ways that lead to new and shared understandings (Freedman, this volume). Meanwhile, other studies have shown that dialogue is very much worth pursuing in history education, both as a pedagogical goal in and of itself *and* to achieve other learning goals such as enhanced understanding of different historical perspectives or the complexity of particular events (van Boxtel and van Drie, this volume; Reisman, 2022).

Other recent research suggests that today's students need opportunities to interrogate the past and present on their own terms, and to question how and why the past is publicly and privately remembered (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Kropman, van Drie & van Boxtel, 2018). The field also needs design-based approaches to help reimagine contemporary history education, in ways informed by student perspectives and experiences (Barton & McCully, 2010). Online intercultural exchange can potentially offer new and perhaps complementary avenues for promoting authentic dialogue in history classrooms. It is now relatively easy to digitally connect classrooms and facilitate interactions among young people situated in very different geographic, political, and

* This chapter has been possible because of the support of the project www.makinghistories.eu from the EU (Marie Curie Staff Exchanges Project 10108606), coordinated by Mario Carretero. The views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



socio-economic contexts. Indeed, there has been a recent growth in online platforms and programs broadly designed to promote intercultural dialogue among young people (The Stevens Initiative, 2020), with these efforts often falling under the general remit of global education, global citizenship, or intercultural or global competence. Such programs are increasingly popular as teachers seek to prepare students for an interconnected world, generally expand their horizons, and/or engage them in global issues, such as climate change, migration, and public health. Moreover, social media-type platforms resemble how many young people receive content and interact daily with their friends, offering a good deal of surprise and novelty and therefore an intrinsic motivation to learn (Oudeyer, Gottlieb & Lopes, 2016). These platforms are usually consistent with learner-centered, constructivist education principles which position learners as active constructors of knowledge (e.g., Tishman, Jay & Perkins, 1993). Studies have shown that students are usually excited and developmentally inclined to learn authentically from peers about different people and places (Lee & Markey, 2014), especially as a key developmental task for teens is to establish who they are, what they believe in, and how they fit into the world at large (Erikson, 1968).

At the same time, various types of global education initiatives, including digital exchange programs, have met with criticism for failing to engage young people in a critical analysis of global injustices (Gaudelli, 2016) or for being inherently biased toward Western identities or perspectives (Gorski, 2008; Xiao & Chen, 2009). Some of these criticisms—which echo ones made about dialogue and debate initiatives more generally—point to the ways in which such programs are often built to cater to the needs, interests, and communication styles of privileged students and can therefore be exclusionary, even if unintentionally so—something we sought to mitigate in this work.

Defining dialogue in a digital context

We loosely define “dialogue” as a conversation between two or more people, with the implication that the conversation will go beyond the mere exchange of pleasantries and involve mutually working through something or reaching a new understanding. The kind of dialogue promoted on the platform used in this study –The Open Canopy (TOC hereafter) but which was previously known as Out of Eden Learn (learn.outofedenwalk.com) generally aspires to the kind of intersubjective meaning making between equals espoused by philosophers such as Buber and Bakhtin, which can lead to the unlocking of deeper humanity or creative potential (Cohen, 2023). On the TOC platform, students initiate dialogue threads by commenting on any post they choose without their teachers’ intervention—conditions associated with what Freedman (this volume) defines as “dialogic discussion”. However, it is by no means guaranteed that these dialogue threads will be sustained or that students will productively build off one another’s contributions.

While the dialogue on TOC was more loosely structured and involved less vigorous or combative exchanges than is typical of a “debate” (Branham, 1991),

students did converse with one another about issues concerning controversial monuments or how the past should be appropriately remembered. Young people's interactions in the space had similar goals to "civil dialogue"—an approach to peer-to-peer discourse on (US) college campuses, that intentionally seeks to build mutual understanding across difference and new insights into other people's worldviews (Cohen, 2023). Van Boxtel and van Drie (this volume) point out that dialogue in history education can be considered a desired outcome in and of itself given that we live in an interconnected, plural world *and* a means for learning and development with regards to young people's understanding of the past and present. As explained below, the TOC curriculum aimed to facilitate young people learning to dialogue across difference and used dialogue to help young people develop their understanding of history and memory.

Much theorizing about dialogue and other forms of discourse assumes in-person encounters. However, in the digital age, dialogue can of course take place online and in ways that connect people across previous constraints of time and space and in ways that are both similar and different to in-person dialogue. Despite participating in a structured curriculum, students in this study had considerable freedom regarding how they chose to engage in dialogue with one another, and there were not clearly defined goals for their interactions. Furthermore, while we focus in this chapter on young people's dialogue as it relates to history or memory, extensive scholarship in discourse analysis shows that dialogue is a complex or multilayered phenomenon where speakers can be doing or achieving many different things simultaneously (Gee, 2011), including conveying information, searching for meaning, constructing identity, and/or positioning themselves relative to their interlocutors.

Dialogue in the history classroom

In the social sciences, there is general agreement on the relevance of dialogue and debate for fostering critical thinking (Rear, 2017) and, more specifically, abilities such as sourcing, argumentation, and problem-solving. Classroom debate can help students engage in proactive learning and develop fundamental abilities such as writing and presentation skills, as well as self-confidence and social responsibility (Salim, 2015). Dialogue can also promote the development of prosocial attitudes such as tolerance and empathy. Individuals can test their thoughts and views against that of their peers and qualify and even transform their own opinions. The process of dialogue or debate may also enable them to accept others' viewpoints and overcome preconceptions and prejudices (Green & Klug, 1990).

In recent years, research on civic and history education has emphasized the relevance of discussing historical issues or controversies (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Kello, 2016), showing that it can promote nuanced historical understanding and valuable understanding of contemporary society and democracy (Hess, 2002, 2009). Such discussions also enable students to explore alternative content that may be otherwise excluded or overlooked in school curricula and can lead students to examine their own ideas of history and civic

participation and how it contributes to democracy (Damico & Rosaen, 2009), or to become more self-aware of their personal values and emotions (Bermúdez, 2012). Attention has also been drawn to the specific historical skills and concepts that can be developed through dialogue. One of these historical concepts is historical empathy or how individuals combine critical thinking with judgment and ethical reflection (Nygren, 2016). One study involving American fifth graders suggested that after participating in a historical debate, they showed growth in terms of using historical evidence, contextualizing, and identifying different perspectives on the past (Bermúdez, 2012). However, other studies have shown that students engaging in historical debate have a hard time identifying and using sources and academic language to elaborate arguments and engage in discussion (Barton, 2019; Monte-Sano, 2016). Our study in some ways supports these varied findings concerning the benefits and challenges of promoting dialogue in the history classroom, but it also adds new puzzles.

Methods

Study case: The Open Canopy's Remembering the Past? curriculum

This design-based study reports on dialogue among students as part of an online curriculum called *Remembering the Past?* It was offered on the TOC platform to classes of students aged 13–18, free of charge. Like all curricula on the TOC platform, it invited young people to slow down to observe the world carefully and listen attentively to others; exchange stories and perspectives; and make connections between their own lives and bigger human stories (Dawes Duraisingh & Tishman, 2024). Groups of four to six classes completed a curriculum together in a dedicated space on the platform over 10–12 weeks, with students posting individually under a chosen pseudonym and avatar. Students engaged in a series of activities, then posted their work on the platform, and viewed and commented on other students' work. All students, regardless of background, therefore helped generate “the content” of the curriculum to learn authentically both with and from one another.

The *Remembering the Past?* curriculum invites students to explore how and why the past is remembered—or not remembered—in their local environments and how public ways of remembering compare to the ways in which individuals, families, or other groups of people remember the past. Students are encouraged to explore their own relationship and connections to the past and to think critically about contemporary debates regarding monuments and other forms of memorialization (Out of Eden Learn, n.d.-a). Students begin by sharing objects or practices in their homes or communities related to the past; take slow walks in their neighborhoods to observe how the past is publicly remembered; interview an older person in their community about their perspectives on the past and public remembering; and design a monument of

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Special Learning Journey: Remembering the Past?</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">In this curriculum of 4 footsteps, students consider how the past is remembered, and who or what is included in this remembering and why.</p>	
Footstep 1: Personal Ways of Remembering the Past	Students explore their own ways of remembering the past, focusing on objects, practices, or traditions from before they were born that have special meaning for them, their families, or their communities.
Footstep 2: Public Remembering in Our Neighborhoods	Students take a walk in their local neighborhoods, looking for ways in which the past is publicly remembered where they live.
Footstep 3: Intergenerational Perspectives on the Past and Public Remembering	Students interview an adult who is familiar with their neighborhood. They will learn about this person's perspective on the past and how this person thinks the past should be publicly remembered where they live.
Footstep 4: Publicly Remembering the Past Today	Students create a new or adapted way of publicly remembering the past where they live.

Figure 11.1 Overview of the *Remembering the Past?* curriculum.

their choice or adapted an existing one for their community. Figure 11.1 summarizes the arc of activities.

While the activities themselves are designed to promote engagement with and understanding of the past, here we focus on the intercultural dialogue component of the learning experience, which consisted of the written, asynchronous comments that students left for one another. These comments were written primarily in English but sometimes students posted in their first language, which students then translated via online translation websites. The platform's in-built dialogue toolkit (Kreikemeier & James, 2018; Out of Eden Learn, n.d.-b) is designed to lightly scaffold and deepen their interactions via the comment function by suggesting "moves" that students might make, such as sharing what specifically they noticed or appreciated about another student's post, how a post or comment extended their thinking or raised a question for them, and naming how their own life experience or identity might influence their point of view. The toolkit was developed to deepen online dialogue among students when a gap was perceived early in the development of the TOC platform between the sophistication of students' reflections on their learning experiences via surveys and interviews and the relative sparseness of the online dialogue. Figure 11.2 shows what students see when they come to post a comment on the platform: when they mouse over the icons, instructions for each move appear.

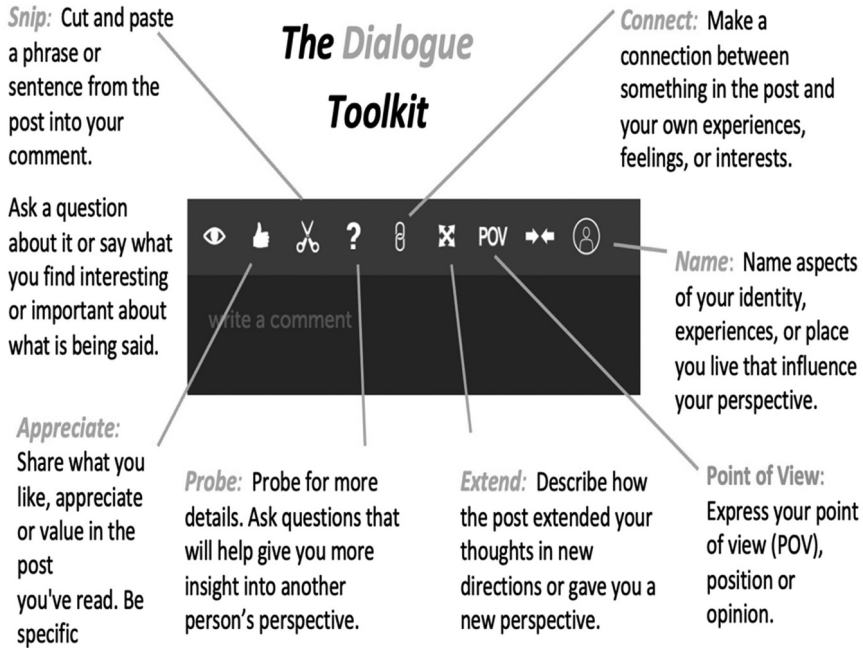


Figure 11.2 The Open Canopy Dialogue Toolkit.

Sample and data collection

We focus on two of the learning groups who participated in the curriculum from October to December 2022. The students were aged 13–18 years old and members of classes variously located in the city of Como, in northern Italy; Riga, the capital city of Latvia; a small rural town in Chiapas, Mexico; a medium-sized town close to Amsterdam in the Netherlands; a small town on the outskirts of Boston, Massachusetts, in the United States; and Salt Lake City in Utah, also in the United States ($N = 237$). Because the platform is pseudonymous and students choose which aspects of their identities to share, we cannot provide a more detailed breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the sample other than the general descriptions of the student body provided by the teachers. While we read all the posts to understand the context for the student dialogue which followed, we focused our analysis on the comments students posted to one another over the course of the duration of the curriculum.

Analysis

Our analysis was guided by the following research question: What are students learning or achieving by engaging in intercultural dialogue with peers about the past and how it is remembered? We were interested in how they interacted with each other, how they managed new information and perspectives, and what they did with the knowledge and feedback they received in these

exchanges. We initially coded the students' comments and replies to comments inductively in the style of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), while bearing in mind the goals of the curriculum, which we had co-designed with colleagues. Using the gerund form, our initial codes focused on the actions students were taking when they left comments for one another—for example, praising or validating one another's work; sharing factual information about the past; making a connection between one period of history and another; and stating opinions about what to do with monuments. We then consolidated these codes into the kinds of history-related understanding that students appeared to be *developing or actively engaging in* through their dialogue with one another, ultimately distilling these codes into the three main categories described below: finding historical meaning, exploring variation and nuance in historical representation, and problematizing history and memory-related issues. Finally, we re-examined the data according to these categories and further developed our understanding of what these broad moves looked like in this sample.

Findings

Below we unpack each of the three history-related dialogue moves, highlighting different ways in which they manifested in student dialogue threads on the platform. We then take a deeper dive into one specific example of student dialogue to gain a deeper understanding of the dialogue moves in action, some of the dynamics of student-to-student dialogue, and their apparent contribution to students' understanding of history and memory.

Finding historical meaning

Most students made various types of connections during their interactions with one another, comparing and associating their experiences, ideas, and knowledge about the past. On many occasions, students realized that these connections hold historical significance, whether due to personal relevance or because they convey collective memories and practices that they were unaware of. The memories they share are sometimes linked to larger historical events, and students have been able to make these connections in some cases. Usually, this sense-making occurred when students dialogued about personal stories. On other occasions, family objects facilitated connections, serving as gateways to similar experiences or stories about the past. For many students, discovering personal historical meaning involved finding personal similarities, establishing cultural associations, and in some cases identifying connections among historical events or periods. Students found similarities in personal experiences related to remembering the past. For example, a student living in Greater Boston in the United States made a connection between her grandparents' experiences in rural China during the Cultural Revolution and an Italian student's account of the dire poverty his family experienced in rural Italy during World War II: "They also had to make many sacrifices in order for their children to go to

school”. These similarities also seemed to help them develop personal bonds by finding resonance in the family stories they shared. Students also find meaning in broader cultural practices. A student based in Chiapas, Mexico, for example, was excited to find cultural and historical similarities between Mexican wicker basket weaving and the Ethiopian use of Mesob to make baskets, as described by a student of Ethiopian ancestry living in Como, Italy.

Some participants discovered historical meaning by establishing links between the personal stories shared by students and broader historical issues. For example, Brym, a Vietnamese American student, shared a family story about his mother fleeing the Vietnam War, which made other students aware of the impact of the past on shaping their country's present. Two students from greater Boston in the United States linked Brym's family story with the broader values of their country; they both developed the idea that receiving refugees has strongly influenced the diverse nature of the United States. For instance, yxhs said: “this actually made me realize, the way the United States takes in refugees and make them part of our country, takes a pretty big part in how the diversity of our country was created” (yxhs). Dialogue allowed students to reflect on historical issues more broadly—as ppggt commented on Brym's story, sharing stories enabled students to “look at the bigger picture of what happened to people . . . , in addition to what happened to your family personally”.

Exploring variation and nuance in historical representation

Just as dialogue enabled students to make connections—some of them unexpected—so it allowed them to explore differences. In general, they seemed grateful for the opportunity to know about other cultures, customs, and new information about history and memory more generally. Students expressed interest in things that seemed different from their own experiences or cultures and enjoyed comparing the particularities of their own experiences and practices to those of others. In general, this helped them identify cultural variation in the ways people remember and represent the past. They were often curious about knowing about cultural differences. In some cases, this curiosity helped them realize that the past is remembered differently and represented in various ways; they found out that the view of the past is culturally conditioned. Students from outside of Mexico, for instance, were especially curious about Mexican Day of the Dead holiday rituals, which they then compared to their own local customs. Exploring differences helped them develop awareness of different remembrance forms and to learn about different representations of the past. A student in Utah, in the United States, commented with interest on a Latvian student's post about family remembrance practices in cemeteries, noting that US cemeteries tend to be “less busy”. Students sometimes probed what differences implied about attitudes toward remembering the past. A student in Latvia, for example, commented on the architectural differences between buildings found in his country and the Netherlands. His classmate noted that old buildings in his country are “mostly abandoned and trashed”

rather than preserved. They explored differences in culture and in so doing developed new insights into their own experiences or representations of the past and the idea of heritage.

Exploring cultural differences can help students recognize that there are varying perspectives on remembering and representing the past and that it is worth asking about the root causes and implications of such differences. For instance, some students found it thought-provoking that, aside from the discussion of whether to tear down, leave, or redesign a monument, the mother of Apollo11, a student from Latvia, advised him to reflect about which part of history the monument represented and the reasons behind it; in Apollo11's mother's view, you should "definitely take into account the full history of the memorial". PopeyeFloyd, a student from Utah, in the United States, commented to Apollo11 that he had a similar conversation with his father:

That is what my dad says too. Most monuments only take some of the history of the person or people being recognized, rather than the whole history. It is important to see the whole history and to not be blinded by how that person is represented in our culture today.

Goatface, another student from Utah, commenting in this dialogue thread, appreciated the diverse perspectives available on the platform regarding this discussion as well as the opportunity to gain a better understanding of how different standpoints can vary from one another: "It's kinda funny actually, I just moved on from commenting on another's post that had an opposite view, nice to see that some people still understand the importance of history, even bad parts of it".

Problematizing history and memory-related issues

Students also tackled issues of history and memory head-on in their interactions, a primary goal of the curriculum, which encouraged ethical and moral reflections. They compared opinions on who or what gets remembered, and how and why, which in some cases helped them appreciate that there are different points of view and interpretations about history. A student living in Mexico wrote to a peer in a Greater Boston, the United States, who proposed to remember the contributions of forgotten female writers: "What you wrote is very true, women are not given much recognition for their struggles or for their important acts that they have done for the good of all". She went on to ask: "Do you think of a specific monument that you would like to see removed and what is it?", with the US-based student responding that she would like to see statues of Columbus removed. Students particularly discussed the suitability of monuments, and some of these discussions were quite nuanced. These conversations allowed them to identify that there are contrasting interpretations of how the past is or should be remembered. For instance, a student situated in Latvia asked of a US peer: "Do you think monuments should be taken down if the idea they represent is positive, but the presenter of the idea

wasn't that good of a person?" Discussions also involved trying to understand the stances of different people toward monuments. A US-based student asked a Latvian counterpart about her mother's desire to dismantle Russian monuments in her country: "I am wondering what causes her hostile thoughts towards the Russians? Was her life directly affected by the Russians or did she just not like the culture?"

Sometimes history-related discussions veered away from questions concerning how the past is remembered and moved to ethical considerations on social remembering. For example, in one thread mentioned above that followed the account of how one student's grandmother fled to the United States from Vietnam in 1975, students discussed the United States' history of welcoming refugees and the impact it had on the country's population. While two US-based students unreservedly praised their country's generosity and racial/ethnic diversity, another classmate inquired "Do you think there are possible hidden intentions [to the US welcoming refugees]?", leading one of the students to acknowledge that US immigration policies have not always been consistent or unequivocally welcoming. Students also discussed the value of heritage. Several students concurred that preserving the past is important and expressed a sense of responsibility for doing so: families that did a good job of guarding objects of sentimental value within their families were generally praised on the platform for doing so. One US student, for example, noted that she hopes to preserve her family's memories as her grandmother does: "I hope one day my kids can look back like we do now"

Taking a closer look at the categories in action

We now dig into one particularly rich exchange on the platform. Our aim is to show how these three overlapping dialogue moves— finding historical meaning, exploring variation and nuance in historical representation, and problematizing history and memory-related issues —played out in practice on the platform and to delve deeper into their potential to advance students' historical understanding. This exchange followed a post submitted by a 16-year-old male student from Riga, Latvia. Using the pseudonym Helsinki86, he shared what he learned by interviewing his father, who has lived almost continuously in Riga since the 1970s. Helsinki86's post (Image 2) includes a photograph of Riga, although he does not explain the photo's provenance or what exactly it depicts. He describes his father's general thoughts on the changes occurring in Riga in the last 50 years, and what he deems to be the pros and cons of the social drastic changes he has witnessed. As shown below in the analysis, other students were surprised by his father's nostalgia for Soviet times—"it was a lot calmer and not as noisy"—and his disappointment in what people have become. In this vein, there is some ambiguity in his father's attitudes toward preserving or remembering the past in Riga. On the one hand, he is eager for more modern housing to be built because he thinks that the protected older buildings in central Riga help give the impression that it is a "backward city".



Intergenerational Perspective on the Past and Public Remembering

Hi!

I interviewed my dad, who has lived in Riga since the 1970s. All though he had lived a brief stint away from Riga, I felt like he would be the best candidate to tell me all about how Riga has changed in the past 50 years.

First off, I want to say that he doesn't like big cities and loud noises, that's why, straight off the bat, he said that he liked Riga during the USSR times more, because it was a lot calmer and not as noisy. Nowadays, tons of cars drive throughout the city, which wasn't the case in the 70s-80s. Though, he did say that nowadays Riga is a lot more colourful, with a lot more shopping centres, modern, minimalist houses, beautiful buildings in the center and Riga is a lot greener. He's felt changes in how Riga looks, but he thinks, that the biggest change in the capital of Latvia are people. People nowadays, all though I think differently, are not as bright as they were then, he said that he could feel their soul, their persona, nowadays it's very monotone and boring.

My dad still feels Riga's connection with the past - the USSR. All the "sleeping districts" built in the 60s, 70s and 80s has left a big mark on Riga, which he thinks is never going to be fixable. All though he doesn't mind it, he feels as if these are things that are keeping us always connected with the past. A thing he dislikes is that almost all of the houses in the center of Riga can't be destroyed and rebuilt with newer, more modern houses. He likes the renovated ones, but those, which are really old and run down just ruin the beautiful view of Riga. He thinks, that this keeps an unwanted presence of Riga being a "backward city". He thinks old monuments from the USSR and other countries that have been in power in Latvia shouldn't be removed, as it's history and monuments, by his thoughts, are something not needing to be destroyed. He said that there should be an informational plaque next to the monument, explaining the situation better.



Figure 11.3 Students work on the Open Canopy Platform.

On the other hand, he thinks that monuments pertaining to the USSR and other entities that dominated Latvia in the past should be kept as historical testimony, but with modifications: he thinks that informational plaques should be added, "explaining the situation better." Helsinki86's dad's reflections sparked an interesting series of exchanges between US and Latvian students, with the three moves intertwined within the dialogue.

The first student to comment is vhnstn:

Hi! It is interesting that you have this perspective on your community, dating back 50 years. Is it common in Latvia to stay in your hometown? In America, it is common to move across the country when you are an adult. I think it makes sense that your dad likes what Riga used to be better than what it is now. Even if some of the change is positive, such as more colors, shopping centers, etc., it is hard to adjust to change in a community that you are used to and enjoy.

Here there is a brief exploration of variation and nuance in historical representation when vHstn expresses surprise at Helsinki86's father having lived in Riga practically his whole life and apparently missing the old times, which she thinks would be less common in the United States;. Vhstn also seems to be trying to understand the father's apparent reluctance to adapt to change, apparently making a connection to sentiments in her own community.

This point about the difficulty of embracing change is echoed by two of his classmates, wngAr and CmpbIII, who also try to understand the perspective of the father of Helsinki86. For instance, wngAr writes:

As someone who lives in a more rural-ish area, I can understand your father's opinion on his preferred age of Riga. If my town were to become a loud, bustling city, I would probably wish for it to return to the old serene and calm age.

By examining cultural and intergenerational differences and seeking to understand adults' views of the past, students are arguably incorporating other viewpoints into their own ideas of history and memory. Another classmate, Tonyoin, whose family is of Romanian heritage, makes a more explicitly personal connection and in so doing signals that she understands the broader historical context, perhaps in ways that other students do not:

Hello! I really relate to your post, because I am Romanian, which, similar to Latvia, also a country that was at one point in time under control of the USSR and communism, and is still in the present day, impacted greatly due to the effect of being under the power of communism for so long.

Tonyoin's cultural background enables her to find historical meaning between personal experiences and broader historical issues, particularly regarding the Soviet era and the politics of public memory. She continues:

From my point of view, I also agree with the opinion shared in your interview, and also think that monuments made while under the control of the USSR should not be destroyed as they are part of an important time period to the country that they are in but should have more context added to them.

Students' thinking about an issue can also evolve through the process of interacting with other students, especially when problematizing memory-related issues. Vhstn initially expresses agreement with Helsinki86's father that Soviet monuments should remain standing, with the addition of informational plaques: "the purpose of monuments is to honor the past but also to learn about it". She surmises that some people might find Soviet monuments offensive but assumes that the father is concerned that people "might stop learning

about the history behind them”. But she posts the following comment later that same day:

When I wrote this comment, I didn't exactly know what being in the USSR meant. From reading other posts about Soviet rule, I find it much more surprising that your dad liked Riga better under Soviet rule. I also realize more so why people are fighting to take those monuments down, because what they represent is definitely oppressive, and people feel that those figures shouldn't be glorified. I definitely see that point of view, but I also see why your dad doesn't want to erase that part of history, and it is very important that those monuments being taken down doesn't mean you stop learning about that history [sic].

Through dialogue, vhnstn realizes that there are perspectives and historical background that she had not considered before. It also seems that vhnstn is eager to add nuance to her previous comment while continuing to convey that she is sympathetic to and can connect to Helsinki86's father's perspective. She is also visibly trying to gain a better understanding of opinions regarding public remembering and monuments, and seems to have realized the intricacy of this debate. Her comment also indicates that interacting with other students has led to her learning some new substantive knowledge about the Soviet Empire, as reflected in a comment she left for another Latvian student. This student described her mother's nostalgia for the annual Song and Dance Festival during Soviet times, as well as bitterness toward the period of Soviet rule when Riga was “dreary, humdrum, colorless, and lifeless”. Vhnstn writes:

I hadn't learned a lot about the Soviet Union up until reading some of these posts. You are definitely giving me a new perspective on life and the modern history of places outside of America (We haven't learned modern world history in school yet) ... It makes sense to me that your mother, who grew up in unfortunate times under Soviet leaders wouldn't want these Soviet invaders glorified in monuments. In the United States, Confederate statues are being taken down, as what they represent is oppressive.

Besides discussing ethical and moral issues to do with the ways in which the past is remembered, we see vhnstn finding historical meaning between debates in the United States and Latvia regarding controversial monuments and tentatively exploring the nuances in historical representation in those two countries' recent pasts. Helsinki86's thinking also seems to evolve through the exchange, as he transitions from reporting his father's opinion to expressing his own perspective on the matter:

About the monuments—I think that they definitely leave a mark on our land, that the USSR once ruled here, but I don't think that something

associated with history and culture should be destroyed. By destroying those monuments it won't mean that history will be erased, we'll just show how hurt we still are by the events that happened.

However, he concludes by noting that his opinion does not represent the viewpoint of everyone in Latvia: “It's a very complicated matter in my country with everyone having different opinions”—an insight that is likely helpful for all participating students in terms of warning them against oversimplifying or overgeneralizing about issues regarding the past and memory.

Discussion

Our findings point to the potential of asynchronous intercultural dialogue to enhance history education in ways that are responsive to the realities of an interconnected world and students' digital lives—at least in the context of this curriculum design. The opportunity for students to learn from and with each other arguably enabled them to recognize significant relationships between different experiences with the past and grand historical narratives and between the past and the present. Intercultural dialogue allowed them to broaden their understanding of the past and consider new ideas and viewpoints. Perhaps most importantly, it also introduced them to diverse and opposing perspectives on how societies remember the past and why. In this section, we discuss the implications of our findings for history education and address some of the limitations and puzzles we encountered.

Pedagogical benefits

Promoting young people's engagement with history and memory

The vast majority of students generally responded enthusiastically to this curriculum and the learning format of asynchronous intercultural dialogue. They took pride in sharing aspects of their family and community's past, posting about their own families' traditions, customs, and personal objects—such as paintings, photographs, newspapers, books, kitchenware, letters, cooking recipes, and clothing—and showed interest in what their peers posted, as evidenced by the kinds of comments and questions they left for one another, as well as explicit expressions of enthusiasm or fascination. They recognized the value of culture and historical heritage, realizing that any cultural production can be a valuable historical source. In a series of exchanges, students from different cultural backgrounds asked one another about their own experiences with the past, contrasted ideas on cultural differences and similarities in public memory, and sometimes connected those reflections to national historical narratives and global historical issues. They explored historical culture (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017) in far more expansive ways than is typical of history classrooms. Additionally, they entered into ethical discussions about private, public, and

national remembrance. In some cases, their interest in history was piqued such that they sought to find out more about an event, era, person, or place, such as the nature of the Soviet Union. In other words, educators seeking to boost their students' interest and engagement with history might find this format of learning to be a helpful complement to other forms of history education.

Were some aspects of intercultural historical dialogue more engaging than others? While we would need to interview students to learn more, during our observations, we came across some fascinating dynamics that seemed to encourage students to engage in dialogue. We noticed that certain topics and concerns sparked historical discussions among students, such as comparisons between past and present ways of life, differences across societies and generations, and the social debates surrounding monuments. We also observed how affective responses and ethical questioning seemed to drive engagement with history and foster collaborative moral reflections, promoting a more nuanced historical understanding for students. The dynamic relationship between emotions, moral judgment, and historical understanding in the context of student dialogue merits further investigation.

Enhancing young people's sense of connectedness to the past

The teacher of the students from Italy recounted that his students initially thought there was very little history to be found in their local communities—and certainly none of interest or significance. However, they quickly took a more expansive view of what counts as history and became increasingly curious about the past and memory through their interactions with other students. Making connections with other students and across different places and time periods can help young people to feel part of something bigger than themselves and to become more aware of their unique situatedness in time and place—or perhaps to build some version of what Rüsen (1994) calls “historical identity”. Particularly in situations where students do not see themselves or their communities represented in official historical narratives or textbooks, the opportunity to dialogue with other youth about their own connections to the past and their perspectives on it—and to, in many ways, *teach* other young people about what they know or care about—can be powerful.

Helping young people to connect with other young people and to consider different perspectives

Exploring differences in terms of how people remember the past enabled students to consider new ideas and viewpoints—such as when students in the United States considered Latvian people's potentially complicated relationship to the Soviet era. Actively discussing moral and ethical issues to do with how to remember difficult historical events introduced them to diverse and opposing perspectives on how society should remember the past. Through conversations with one another, they were able to exchange ideas and even modify or

develop their viewpoints. Strikingly, we observed a sense of sympathy and care in their interactions. While promoting care and interest in one another arguably lies beyond the remit of history education, we live in an age when *all* teachers need to consider the wellbeing of their students. Creating spaces for young people to communicate with one another feels important, especially when the spaces feel safe. While we cannot know what students did not feel comfortable saying, or if some students felt alienated or even traumatized by the invitation to explore and share personal and local ways of remembering the past, we do know that at least some students felt comfortable sharing quite personal or difficult aspects of the past with one another and discussing sensitive personal and political issues. For instance, some shared the loss of a beloved grandparent who had taught them about the past or talked about family members being caught up in or participating in war or violence. Here the pseudonymous nature of the platform and the asynchronicity of students' interactions may have been helpful. The Dialogue Toolkit also supported young people to talk about their point of view in a way that did not negate or diminish other people's perspectives.

Pedagogical challenges and complexities

Classroom dialogue is arguably envisaged as something coherent and critical and highly participatory and consensual. However, we found that dialogue in an online context can be much more dynamic, multidirectional, and unpredictable, like the kinds of online exchanges that young people are used to engaging in socially. Our study does not account for how students experienced the process. But students seemed to engage in dialogue in various ways: at times, they seemed to instantly rush into the interaction, jumping in to comment on a post that had caught their interest and potentially initiating a cascade of other comments that followed the same direction. At other times, students may have taken more time to make a comment or even stepped back from the dialogue to think about the issue, read others' opinions, and then go back to share their thoughts. Conversations on the platform also unfolded unpredictably. A dialogue thread might start on one topic but suddenly turn to a different direction; other times, students might touch upon various points but eventually converge on one specific topic. About a third of posts did not receive comments from other students, which may have been disheartening for those posting. This complexity points to the multidirectional nature of online dialogue, which can take place at different stages and through different layers: interactions may switch on and off or continuously go back and forth.

This unpredictability and complexity helped make asynchronous intercultural dialogue engaging for young people. But this unpredictability and complexity also mean that it is not easy to track or assess the learning that is taking place. Students did not discuss issues in a straightforward manner, but rather in a simultaneous fashion, with multiple layers of interaction. For instance, they touched on a range of subjects such as identity, ethics, and culture at the same

time as discussing personal and public ways of remembering the past. Given the complexity of this intercultural online space, where they had to interact with unknown peers from different backgrounds, what should “good” dialogue look like and who gets to decide that? Do we need to separate out learning to dialogue and dialoguing to learn to make sense of what is happening, and is that even possible? In learning situations that involve students from different countries where different conceptions and norms of history education are in place, can different ideas about good dialogue be accommodated simultaneously?

There were other challenges too. We found that some students circulated incomplete or even inaccurate knowledge—in part because many factors influence their ideas about history, such as their identity, family background, ideologies, or social media discourses. We did not emphasize the need to use evidence or cite sources in this curriculum, which could go some way to mitigating this problem; however, that approach might risk creating more stilted dialogue and less enthusiastic student participation. Some students also seemed to steer away from critical engagement around monuments, in part because they were wary about offending peers in their own or other countries, and in part because their ‘regular’ history curricula were built around content acquisition rather than “thinking like an historian” (Wineburg, 2018), and so they did not necessarily know how to. A small minority of US-based students stated in post-surveys that they found the dialogue on the platform “forced”; however, most students reported being very excited to have the opportunity to converse with other students, which was perhaps the primary driver in terms of how they formulated their posts and comments. However, a good deal more research could be conducted into the variation across different student experiences.

Conclusion

Overall, we found that discussing historical issues in an asynchronous, intercultural format proved effective in promoting students’ engagement with the past and history and in facilitating sustained discussion around current civic debates related to memorialization and monuments—at least in this context. Perhaps aided by the curriculum design and Dialogue Toolkit, we observed students discussing these issues with one another in an informed and constructive manner, even if there was sometimes room for more critical analysis or greater factual accuracy. We also observed that on many occasions, engaging in dialogue did not necessarily mean reaching an agreement, which was not in any case an intention of the curriculum. Instead, at least some students seem to have gained a greater appreciation for differences and diversities in perspectives on the past and a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of deciding who or what to publicly remember and why. While further research is needed to explore the learning potential of intercultural historical dialogue, this chapter points to some of its affordances and suggests that experiences such as TOC’s *Remembering the Past?* could be highly valuable for engaging young people and enhancing at least some dimensions of their historical thinking.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to particularly thank their Project Zero colleague Sarah Sheya for helping to develop the Remembering the Past? curriculum, and Shari Tishman, who co-directs the project.

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