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Students' and teachers' beliefs about historical empathy in secondary history education

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' beliefs about skills play a significant role in how they teach those skills. Similarly, students' mastery of a skill is influenced by their ideas about its value and what the performance of the skill exactly entails. In this study, 10 history teachers and 17 students in secondary school (age 16–17) were interviewed about their beliefs about historical empathy, objectives, and teaching strategies. The results show that the participants primarily saw historical empathy as a skill that can be learned. As main elements of historical empathy, they named contextualization, awareness of their own positionality, personal connection, and historical imagination. Inviting an eyewitness, visiting a historic site, and classroom discussions were considered particularly effective teaching strategies. Most teachers reported that they did not provide explicit instruction. Most teachers and students connected historical empathy to empathy in daily life. Extending this connection could be a significant way to work on citizenship competences.

KEYWORDS

Historical empathy; secondary history education; student beliefs; teacher beliefs; teaching strategies

Introduction

In a world that is increasingly digitalized, automated, and polarized, empathy seems to be in decline (Krznaric, 2014). As a result of digitalization and polarization, one's own perspective is often confirmed, which may decrease the possibilities and the perceived urgency to empathize with other perspectives. Awareness of one's own positionality and the realization that one's perspective is not universal could make an important difference in this respect. Trying to understand a different person with context, history, cultural background, experiences, or a different skin color is not an easy task. This difficulty is clearly visible in the current anti-racism debate in which opposing parties do not seem to be willing or able to find mutual understanding. Empathizing is often a difficult process that requires not only knowledge of the other person's context and experiences but also a certain degree of awareness of your own positionality and the will to recognize another person's perspective. In this respect, history education can play an important role. By engaging in historical empathy with historical figures, students learn to understand the experiences, decisions, and actions of people in the past. This activity seems similar to the process of understanding someone's experiences, decisions, and actions in the present and could help students learn to empathize with different perspectives in their own worlds and current society.

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In the history education literature, historical empathy is considered important. However, it is also a confusing construct, and researchers' insights on it differ (Endacott & Brooks, 2018). It is not clear, however, whether the theoretical perspectives and insights of scholars on historical empathy are shared by secondary school teachers and their students. In this context, it is relevant to clarify the beliefs of teachers and students about these aspects of historical empathy. It is precisely these beliefs that play a significant role in the way in which historical empathy is taught and learned. Insight into these beliefs is relevant for the development of curricula and its implementation in the classroom. This development of a pedagogy for history lessons is important because it can also contribute to the development of empathy as a general skill. This study reports on interviews with 10 history teachers and 17 students in secondary schools regarding their beliefs about historical empathy.

Theoretical framework

Thirty years of research on historical empathy have produced different conceptualizations of the construct. Several issues related to historical empathy have been discussed, such as presentism, reliability of perspectives, moral judgment, and the role that cognition and affection play in historical empathy. With regard to the latter, some emphasize cognitive elements and prefer the term historical perspective taking, which can be defined as an understanding of the actions of historical figures by studying their perspective (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Huijgen et al., 2017; Seixas & Morton, 2013). In the literature, there is consensus in the field of history education regarding the importance of contextualization as a condition for historical empathy. Contextualization is the ability to situate historical phenomena or the actions of historical actors in a temporal, spatial, and social context to describe, explain, compare, or evaluate them (Huijgen et al., 2017; van Boxtel & van Drie, 2012). In addition to contextualization, students need to perform other cognitive activities, such as inquiry of historical sources, to be able to cognitively understand a historical figure's emotions, motives, and actions (Davis et al., 2001; Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Huijgen et al., 2014). This cognitive approach emphasizes that sufficient historical distance is needed to contextualize the actions of historical agents. It is important that students have knowledge of the past (context) and understand why one thing has led to another.

Sociocultural educational researchers such as Endacott and Brooks (2013) and Barton (2016) have added affective aspects to the cognitive approach. The importance of a personal connection is stressed as a condition for historical empathy. There can be a personal connection when a student feels personally involved in an assignment or a specific subject because the task or subject appeals to the student's interest or because the task seems like a real-world situation (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). When students are aware of their positionality, they should also be aware of their affective reactions. This affective dimension may involve showing interest in historical actors, caring for them, sympathizing or identifying with them, recognizing their human emotions, and feeling involved (Barton & Levstik, 2004). In addition, historical imagination has been mentioned as a component of historical empathy since imagination makes it possible to reconstruct the past (Lévesque, 2008) and bring it alive (De Leur et al., 2020).

While history education researchers discuss the cognitive and affective aspects of engaging in historical empathy and describe it as an act or skill, in psychological research, empathy is often regarded as an affective personality trait (McMahon et al., 2006). This trait

implies the ability to identify and experience another's perspective and the emotional state that perspective might imply. Sympathy goes a step further and means feeling concerned or sad about disturbing events happening to another person (Vossen et al., 2015). Although the wording may suggest otherwise, historical empathy is not generally regarded as the past-oriented counterpart of this psychological concept of empathy. The "foreignness" of the past world and the sometimes malicious or horrific perspectives that students may encounter when studying it make history educational researchers question both the possibility and desirability of experiencing the emotional state of people in the past. To avoid the idea that one can actually take on another's perspective or experience another's emotions, Barton and Levstik (2004) use the term perspective recognition.

However, researchers in history education disagree about whether an affective dimension is a part of historical empathy. According to the cognitive tradition, these added affective elements endanger an adequate historical interpretation. In this study, we follow the definition of Endacott and Brooks (2018), who describe historical empathy as the process of students' cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their experiences, decisions, or actions. In addition, we depart from the idea that students can develop the ability to engage in historical empathy, although we acknowledge that assessing historical empathy in terms of an overall "score" might be problematic (see Endacott & Brooks, 2018).

Objectives of historical empathy

There are many claims that historical empathy contributes to historical understanding (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013, 2018; Seixas, 2012). Furthermore, it can help students learn to establish connections between the past and present. For example, actions that happened in the past have consequences for the actions of people in the present. This understanding of connections between the past and present may lead to a dispositional appreciation of the complexity of situations faced by people in the past and the need to act for the good of others (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013, 2018). Another objective of historical empathy that is mentioned in the educational literature is to develop insight into multiperspectivity. Multiperspectivity refers to the idea that history is interpretational and subjective with multiple coexisting narratives about particular historical events rather than being objectively represented by one closed narrative (Colby, 2008). The last objective of historical empathy that is mentioned by scholars is to foster citizenship competences (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013). Historical empathy can help students understand the complexity of idea formation, decision making, and acting in both the past and the present. It can prepare students for their life in a democratic society. The difficult task of discussion and participation in a democracy is to agree on actions that can be taken despite differing values. History provides abundant terrain for examining such differences (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Barton and Levstik (2004) distinguished five elements that teachers should be aware of and can develop with their students in history lessons that can contribute to historical empathy and citizenship competences: a sense of "otherness," shared normalcy, historical contextualization, multiplicity of historical perspectives, and contextualization of the present. Moreover, Barton (2016) argued that when students are concerned with the fate of people in the past, they will be more inclined to consider a historical issue deeply and reflectively. Additionally, historical empathy can help students

engage in collaboration toward the common good. Several scholars consider the activities of historical perspective taking and social perspective taking (i.e., taking the perspectives of peers in class and of others in society) to be very similar (Gehlbach, 2011; Hartmann & Hasselhorn, 2008; Nilsen, 2016).

Teaching strategies

The practice of historical empathy is demanding, particularly for adolescents who are just mastering the abstract way of thinking that underlies empathetic understanding (Keating, 1990). In many studies of students' performance of historical empathy, students view the past as culturally homogenous with the present and inhabited by people who are less smart, rational, or moral than people today (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Perikleous, 2019). To avoid presentism, it is important that students understand the ways in which the present world is shaped by the past and, at the same time, how the past and present are distinct (Chapman, 2011; Seixas, 2012; Wineburg, 2001). In addition, students should be aware of both the historical figure's positionality and their own positionality (Stradling, 2003; VanSledright, 2001). A certain tension arises when students are asked to empathize with someone who has different values or backgrounds, which often makes historical empathy more difficult.

Educational literature shows the importance of the explicit teaching of historical empathy (i.e., the what, how [which steps], and why [importance] of the skill are explained by the teacher) (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2018; Veenman, 1998). Huijgen et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of explicit instruction in the acquisition of skills, such as contextualization, to avoid presentism. Cautious efforts have been made to prepare guidelines and step-by-step plans to teach historical empathy (Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Foster, 1999; Seixas, 2012) or aspects of it. Foster (1999) offered valuable suggestions for history teachers. He recommended that teachers first highlight a paradoxical situation in history to arouse students' curiosity and help them discern a distant period of the recent past. Second, he suggested that teachers offer chronology and context. Third, it is important to provide different primary and secondary sources to students depending on their level of cognitive development. Others have emphasized that primary sources, such as diaries and letters, can help students explore the thoughts and feelings of historical characters (Brooks, 2008, 2011; Doppen, 2000; Endacott, 2010; Foster, 1999; Nilsen, 2016). Other activities that are mentioned to improve historical empathy are teaching history with film (Cunningham, 2009; Marcus et al., 2010), visits to historic sites or museums (Savenije & De Bruijn, 2017), video documentaries or guest speakers (Cunningham, 2009), oral history interviews (Bertram et al., 2017), and historical empathy writing tasks (Cunningham, 2009; De Leur et al., 2020). Gehlbach (2011) emphasized the importance of classroom discussions, especially in the context of interpersonal social perspective taking and citizenship competences, so students can learn from each other that multiple perspectives are possible. Teachers can also promote historical empathy by encouraging the formation of affective connections with the historical agent based on students' own similar, yet different, life experiences (Endacott, 2010). However, several scholars have warned that such tasks can trigger misconceptions about the past, such as presentism (Brooks, 2008; Huijgen et al., 2017; Wilschut, 2012). To avoid these misconceptions, it is important to pay attention to contextualization and to the positionality of students and historical actors.

Teachers' and students' beliefs about historical empathy

Only a few studies provide insights into teachers' beliefs about historical empathy and how to teach historical empathy. van de Oudeweetering and Voogt (2018) claimed that it is important to investigate how teachers define and interpret competences and how they teach them. It is precisely these beliefs of teachers and students that determine the way in which historical empathy is taught and learned. In regard to meaningful and self-regulated learning, it is important to examine students' preconceptions about the nature and relevance of historical empathy. Self-regulation refers to the self-directive process through which learners transform their mental abilities into task-related skills (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Previous studies have shown that teachers find it difficult to define historical empathy. In a case study by Cunningham (2009) on four teachers' perceptions of the nature of historical empathy and the means of cultivating such empathy in secondary school classrooms, there were significant discrepancies between the way these teachers thought about and practiced historical empathy and how it was discussed in the educational literature. Cunningham related these discrepancies to the context of the United Kingdom at that time, which involved conceptual confusion about the term. The four teachers considered historical empathy mainly as an approach (all four) or a skill (three out of four) but sometimes confused empathy with sympathy. The results of another case study of 10 Turkish history teachers by Yilmaz and Koca (2012) showed that teachers' perceptions of historical empathy were fragmented and incomplete. On the one hand, their beliefs were more cognitively than affectively oriented because they drew on the general principles of historical methodology, such as examining past events within their historical context without using affective aspects of historical empathy. On the other hand, the teachers used the terms historical empathy and sympathy interchangeably.

With regard to the objectives, Cunningham (2009) concluded that while historical empathy and citizenship competences were linked through teachers' views of the wider purpose of empathy in creating open-minded and curious people, they seemed to be at odds with more cognitive historical skills. Regarding teaching strategies, Yilmaz and Koca (2012) concluded that teachers reported that there were not enough resources that could be used to teach historical empathy in secondary schools. Cunningham (2009) identified various learning activities that teachers used to promote historical empathy, such as written primary sources, films, guest speakers, and role-taking exercises. In their lessons, the four teachers used cognitive (contextualization) as well as affective (imagination) strategies to promote historical empathy.

To our knowledge, there are no studies on students' beliefs about historical empathy. In a small-scale study, De Leur et al. (2020) examined students' beliefs about historical empathy tasks and showed that students see these tasks as useful for acquiring knowledge and understanding of the past. A considerable amount of work has attempted to visualize how students do historical empathy, but little is known about students' ideas about historical empathy.

This study interviewed both teachers and students to build upon earlier work by more explicitly examining teachers' strategies for teaching historical empathy and adding students' perspectives to this examination. By using ranking tasks in the interviews, our study enables a comparative study of the beliefs of teachers and students. Additionally, the ranking tasks clarify the areas to which teachers and students attribute the most importance.

Historical empathy often has multiple objectives, and this method allows us to understand what matters most to teachers and their students. The research question is as follows: What beliefs do history teachers and students have about historical empathy and about the objectives and strategies for teaching historical empathy?

Method

Participants

The participants were 10 history teachers in the Netherlands and 17 students in the 9th and 10th grades of senior secondary education in the two highest tracks preparing for college and university. A selection of 10 history teachers was made within our own professional network based on criteria of experience. First, the teachers had to have more than five years of experience in secondary education. Second, they had to be experienced in teaching historical thinking skills, which have a prominent place in the Dutch history curriculum. Dutch textbooks have consistently paid attention to skills such as positionality and historical reasoning. This group of experienced teachers (Table 1) was selected because it was important to collect as much information as possible about the teaching of historical empathy. For new, inexperienced teachers (< 5 years of experience), it is often more difficult to talk about historical thinking skills and empathy from their own perspective and experience and to convey that perspective to their students. Ten history teachers from eight schools were selected, four female and six male. Five teachers came from the northern part of the Netherlands (John, Will, Jack, Linda and Ted), three from the western part (Redouan, Yessica and Mary), and one from the eastern part (Clark). They all had experience teaching pre-university or senior secondary education in the Netherlands and were in possession of a master's degree in education. Two of them were also experienced in teacher training (Ted and Mary). One of them had a bicultural background (Redouan). All names used for teachers and students in this study are pseudonyms. All teachers gave permission to use the interview data.

In three schools (A, G, and H) of the interviewed teachers, students were asked by the teachers to participate in the study (Table 2). We approached students 16 years or older from the two highest educational tracks in senior secondary education that are preparatory for college and university. This selection by age and educational level was made because it was important that the students could verbalize their ideas about historical empathy, which is more often the case for older students and students who have the highest educational level

Table 1. Characteristics of participating teachers.

Teacher	Gender	Years of work experience	Age	Age groups	School
John	male	38	64	12–18	A.
Linda	female	10	33	12–18	A.
Jack	male	13	39	12–18	A.
Mary	female	19	44	12–18	B.
Daisy	female	17	40	15–18	C.
Will	male	45	67	12–18	D.
Clark	male	20	52	14–18	E.
Redouan	male	14	33	12–18	F.
Ted	male	14	38	12–18	G.
Yessica	female	19	49	12–18	H.

Table 2. Characteristics of participating students.

Student	Gender	Age	School
Tom	male	17	A
Dong	female	17	A
Jim	male	18	A
Yasmin	female	18	A
Martin	male	19	A
Lizzy	female	17	A
Tuan	male	17	A
Lydia	female	18	A
Mark	male	17	A
Rose	female	18	A
Megan	female	19	A
Oliver	male	16	G
Mel	female	16	G
Simon	male	19	G
Ward	male	17	G
Erdem	male	16	H
Ama	female	17	H

in secondary schools. All 17 students who responded positively to our request were interviewed. All three schools have students with migrant backgrounds, although these students were a minority in all three schools (e.g., the students' backgrounds included Dutch, Surinamese, Turkish, and Chinese). Nine of the students were boys and eight were girls. The average age of the students was 17.41 years old. Five of them had a bicultural background (Dong, Lizzy, Tuan, Erdem and Ama). All of the students followed the subject of history because it was part of their track or because they had chosen it as an extra subject. For these students, general history is taught for two or three hours per week. All participants received a letter (e-mail) two weeks before the interview in which the informed consent procedure was explained. All students gave permission for the interviews.

Data collection

The individual interviews were conducted in spring 2019. The interviews included open questions and ranking tasks about elements and objectives of historical empathy and empathy in the present (see appendix A). Although the process of historical empathy is considered to be related to the process of empathizing in the present, developing students' general empathetic skills is not explicitly part of the Dutch history curriculum. It is often mentioned as an element of citizenship education, which has been a rather undefined overarching objective of the entire curriculum in the Netherlands (SLO—National Centre of Expertise in Curriculum Development, 2019). Schools are obliged to teach citizenship competencies, but they are free to choose in which subjects and in which ways. Consequently, history teachers may differ greatly in the extent to which they consider developing students' general empathetic skills to be part of teaching history.

The interviews focused on beliefs about what historical empathy is, why it is taught, and how the respondents taught it or thought it should be taught. Every part of the interview (1. Beliefs, 2. Objectives, 3. Teaching) started with an open question, such as, "What do you need to empathize?" Questions were ranked with cards to ensure that issues were discussed that teachers and students themselves did not propose and

because a ranking provides more insight into what the respondents truly find important. Cards were used as cues to prompt reflection on aspects of historical empathy. It was possible to place several cards in a shared first or second place. We asked, for example, "What do you think is the most important objective of historical empathy during the history lesson? Make the ranking with the following cards: becoming better at contextualizing; being able to understand the past; viewing things from different perspectives; improving empathy in the present; practicing moral judgment." The concepts used are based on the history education literature discussed in the theoretical framework (Brooks, 2008, 2011; Cunningham, 2009; Doppen, 2000; Endacott, 2010; Foster, 1999; De Leur et al., 2020; Lévesque, 2008; Marcus et al., 2010). In every ranking task, participants could add their own options as well. The interview questions for teachers and students were almost the same, except that the last question about teachers' ability and training to teach historical empathy was only asked to the teachers. In a pilot study with three teachers and five students, the interview questions were tested, adjusted, and improved. During the interviews, the hands of the participants were filmed to see how the teachers and students ranked the cards. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and took place at the schools where the students and teachers were located.

Data analysis

The 27 recorded interviews were transcribed. The students' and teachers' responses from the interviews and ranking tasks were analyzed qualitatively. First, the data were arranged in Atlas.ti according to the three components embedded in the interview format: beliefs, objectives, and teaching of historical empathy. We then examined the beliefs to identify whether historical empathy was considered a skill or personal trait and whether the participants mentioned cognitive and affective aspects of historical empathy. Moreover, we coded what was considered important and less important in practicing historical empathy (e.g., contextualization, positionality, personal connection, and imagination). Regarding the objectives, we labeled cognitive and affective aspects and the categories that were used on the ranking cards (e.g., becoming better at contextualizing; being able to understand the past; viewing things from different perspectives) or objectives in the field of citizenship competences (improving empathy in the present; viewing things from different perspectives; practicing moral judgment). With regard to teaching, we coded different types of learning activities, required skills for historical empathy, and explicit teaching. When necessary, we added codes that were not related to the ranking cards but emerged from the data. For example, for the question, "What is especially important for historical empathy?," teachers mentioned the egocentric age phase (puberty) as a factor that makes the complex process of historical empathy more difficult. To illustrate our findings, we selected verbatim quotations from the interview data.

In addition, within each main category, based upon the ranking established by the participants, we calculated the percentage of the students and teachers who considered a certain aspect most important. Finally, the beliefs of students and teachers were compared with each other.

Findings

Beliefs about the concept of historical empathy

In most cases, both teachers (80%) and students (76%) mainly saw historical empathy as a skill. At the same time, both teachers and students remarked that empathizing may come more naturally for one person than for another person (personal trait) but that empathy can be improved. As the student Tom said, "It's a personal attribute because some people can empathize better than others, but you can also improve it by doing it a lot. That is the case with many things." A teacher, Ted, clearly stated that historical empathy is a skill and that he believes that historical empathy is both cognitive and affective:

> There are some people, there is an interesting debate going on about historical empathy: is it an affective something? [...] or is it more a kind of cognitive strategy that you can learn? And I think it is both. You cannot completely ignore the affective component, but you can also simply practice it.

A student, Ward, explained the affective component of historical empathy:

> I think that if you make a clear emotional connection with a German person who first had no bread on the shelf and suddenly had money after the arrival of Hitler and see that his country and everyone around him is doing well—if you have that connection, then I can empathize much better with a German person who voted for Hitler.

In this student's view, it became clear that historical empathy is affective because a personal and emotional connection can be made between the student and the historical actor whereby the student shows interest in the historical actor—in this case, the German man.

What contributes to historical empathy, according to the teachers? Table 3 shows the most important findings. All teachers put the awareness of their own positionality in the (shared) first place, but only 29% of students did so. Being aware of one's own positionality also means that one is aware of emotions toward something. Redouan noted,

> You understand that sometimes others have a different view of the world than you do. Yes, I think that is the most important thing. And that you don't necessarily assume that everything you think, that is the only right thing, right? So that you might also doubt your own views. The moment that your own perspective is always confirmed, empathy generally decreases.

Table 3. Teachers' and students' beliefs about historical empathy.

	Students *(N = 17)*	Teachers *(N = 10)*
What it is	1. skill 2. personal attribute/trait	1. skill: cognitive and affective 2. personal attribute/trait
What helps to promote it	1.historical context 2. awareness of own positionality 3. awareness of multiple perspectives 4. recognize yourself and connect with someone	1/2. awareness of own positionality 1/2. historical context 3. awareness of multiple perspectives 4. recognize yourself and connect with someone
Objectives of empathy in daily life/ citizenship competences	1. understanding of another person/ situation 2. awareness of different perspectives & nuancing of own positionality	1. understanding of another person/ situation 2. awareness of different perspectives & nuancing of own positionality
Objectives of historical empathy	1. understanding the past 2. looking from different perspectives 3. citizenship competences	1./2. understanding the past & citizenship competences 3. looking from different perspectives

Teachers mentioned awareness of multiple perspectives as an important precondition and incentive for historical empathy. Thus, the danger of students' own bubble that confirms their own positionality or perspective is reduced. The last element that was mentioned to promote historical empathy is recognizing oneself and connecting with another person. According to teachers, a certain tension may arise when students are asked to empathize with people who have different values or backgrounds. The data show teachers' caution in discussing the moral aspects of historical empathy. As Jack said, "We don't have to make a moral judgment, but we can talk about it." Regarding the affective component of historical empathy, he continued,

> I think that affective aspect is important, yes, also to make it more human. They are also just people with feelings. The world has changed a lot, but those people back then are actually more or less the same people as now. Napoleon had more or less the same cognitive and emotional housekeeping as we do. That affective approach can help to better understand people from history. I think this makes it easier for students to empathize with people from the past. To realize: Oh yes, they are just people who made choices and fell in love, had to cry and laugh. Like us. That makes the past more tangible.

However, most teachers were unsure about how to bring this affective aspect of historical empathy in line with exercises in history textbooks and tests of the Dutch examination program.

According to the students, historical empathy required having enough context information. This context strengthens both cognitive and affective processes because it is important to receive information about the feelings of a person to make a personal connection. A student, Oliver, said about context and personal connection,

> You have to know what is going on around it, you have to know how and what the situation around it is and the framework in which it takes place [...] And also knowing the person you want to empathize with because it is important to know how that person reacts to things or how his emotions and so on work together. What he does when he is angry or sad.

Second, the interviews revealed that it is important to be aware of one's own positionality. The combination of being aware of one's own positionality and understanding the context was mentioned most frequently. Third, students mentioned awareness of multiple perspectives as an important precondition and incentive for historical empathy.

Objectives of historical empathy

With regard to the objectives of historical empathy, teachers noted that historical empathy contributes to historical understanding and emphasized the link between the past and present. When establishing relationships between the past and present, teachers could extend the link of the importance of the context from history to the present as, for example, Yessica does: she is not afraid to discuss sensitive history, such as the history of slavery, in her classroom to confront the students with a different perspective.

The teachers all mentioned the link between historical empathy and empathy in daily life as an objective. It was mentioned that citizenship competences involve nuanced thinking and participation in a social discussion and (ultimately) as a citizen in a democracy. Teachers were asked what exactly was taught regarding historical empathy within the framework of citizenship education. First, the teachers mentioned that it cultivated empathy and understanding. Second, historical empathy taught nuance and multiple perspectives and postponed (moral) judgment. John clarified this belief:

> When you are stuck with each other, for example, in trade or in politics or by migration in a social context, you cannot function if you cannot understand the other person. And a lot of misunderstanding has to do with being unable to empathize with another context.

Regarding the objective of empathy in daily life, two clear objectives can be identified in the data: first, the understanding of another person or situation; second, the nuancing of one's own views and opinions (awareness of one's own positionality makes it easier) in combination with the awareness that there are several perspectives.

The teachers believed that empathy has generally decreased and that it is a skill that has become more relevant in our current society. For example, Mary explained,

> I think, if you now see with social media how people show absolutely no understanding of someone else, they only burn down negatively. In the context of citizenship competences, I think that empathy is a fairly important skill.

Students chose the understanding of the past as the most important objective of historical empathy (70%). Through historical empathy, especially by making a personal connection, students reported that they liked and remembered history better. Given the context of the subject of history, this choice seems obvious. At the same time, the interviews revealed that students indirectly mentioned citizenship competences as an objective of historical empathy and that they saw a connection between the past and present. Seventy percent of the students mentioned the importance of historical empathy for promoting empathy in the present or saw a clear link between the two. The question that arose was how to develop the ability to contextualize and enhance understanding of the past in such a way that it also contributes to citizenship competences or personal formation. How can the transfer be made from historical empathy to empathy that relates to citizenship competences? Dong explained, "I think that historical empathy is what gives consciousness in general. I think that it helps. It just makes you very aware that you can do that now with people too."

Similar to the teachers, two objectives can be identified in the students' data regarding empathy in daily life: first, the understanding of another person or situation; second, the nuancing of one's own views and opinions (awareness of one's own positionality makes this easier) in combination with the awareness that there are several perspectives. Students mentioned that empathy makes living together easier because they could understand the other better and learn to think in more nuanced ways. Students mainly considered this aspect of empathy as better understanding of the other (small context), while teachers extended this more widely to society as a whole (large context). The student Tuan clarified that historical empathy helped him to understand more perspectives in a contemporary issue on the folkloric character Black Pete[1]:

> Yes, well maybe a current topic that we discussed. Well, we talked about Black Pete once, I believe, so, if you are all talking about it and people have their own point of view and you hear it from different sides, then I think it can also help …

Tuan believed that historical empathy helped him to see a greater connection between the past and present; moreover, it gave him more insight into multiperspectivity in an emotionally charged discussion about Black Pete.

Explicit teaching of historical empathy in Dutch classrooms

Seventy percent of the teachers reported that they did not explicitly name the skill or emphasize why and how they discussed historical empathy. John said,

> If you deal with historical empathy, then I don't know whether or not you explicitly address that. I think that you should introduce it in a way like, "Okay, we will try to understand why someone has acted the way he acted." [. . .] I do not think I said, "We are going to use empathy or empathy as a strategy." I don't think I'm that explicit.

John indicated that explicit instruction is not necessary because students can already empathize with another character, as they show in their computer games. However, he believed that students can easily empathize and move in a different character or context.

On the other hand, 30% of the teachers made explicit to the students how they should apply historical empathy. The main reason mentioned for this approach was that students must know what skill they are practicing. The term positionality was used. Daisy explained, "We will also figure out what the use of it is and what you actually have to do for it." Ted explained how to promote the skill:

> It is also in the assignments you give. For example, I made a project with colleagues about terrorism with lectures by Beatrice de Graaf (a Dutch specialist in terrorism). Then they started to study terror organizations, and we confused them a bit . . ..And that is also explicit, so let's try to think out loud. Why should I have set it up this way, this assignment? What do we want to achieve, and to what extent do we achieve that, and do you agree with it? [. . .] That is an example of such a step. You can do it well . . . you can teach them well as long as you are going to practice it structurally and explicitly with them.

With regard to making the importance of historical empathy explicit, 30% of teachers explicitly explained to the students the importance of empathizing in history, for example, because it allows them to better understand the past, to score better on a test, and to participate better in discussions about social issues. Terms that were used by teachers were positionality or contextualization. We also asked about the extent to which the teachers felt able to teach students historical empathy. It appeared that only a few (20%) of the teachers felt truly capable of teaching historical empathy to the students, not so much because they were trained in it but because it was their passion or they had a drive for history education. Most of the teachers indicated that historical empathy is rarely discussed in the study program of teacher education and that little attention is paid to it in the history textbooks. Mary explained,

> Well, as far as I know, I am not trained in that. Uhm, I think that textbooks may offer little support in that. They are very much focused on understanding a text, processing a text. In the textbooks we use, I don't see much historical empathy. So it comes down to what you yourself do as a teacher, and then you can end up a bit in your own cocoon. That you think that what you do is good. That is based more on intuition and ideas. But I can imagine that there is still a step-by-step plan to develop.

In accordance with the results for the teachers, just over 20% of the students mentioned that their teacher explicitly explained the skill of historical empathy, for example, because the teacher used the word positionality or the assignment began with "imagine that . . . ." As Ward explained about his teacher Ted,

> Yes, my teacher does that. That story often starts with, "You have to imagine, you have to imagine that you have a Jewish background, or a German soldier," and then you try to imagine what it was like to be a German soldier or what it was like to be a Jew in the Netherlands. So that happens sometimes.

More than 50% of the students thought that the teacher did not make it explicit but that the students nonetheless empathized with the historical events or actors, which is more or less in line with what the teachers said. Mel confirmed the description by her teacher Ted above: "It could be, we often ask the question, 'What would he do, what did he think?' So basically, he (the teacher) does it, but he never called it that." Slightly less than 30% of the students did not recognize historical empathy in the implicit way it was taught, as described by the teachers. One of John's students, Tuan, said, "No, I don't think I ever heard that it was really about historical empathy." Yasmin contributed, "Not that I can actually remember. No, mainly just gathering information because you have to know historical things, but not necessarily empathize, no, I never got that with it anyway."

With regard to making the importance of historical empathy explicit, 33% of the students said that the importance of historical empathy was explicitly mentioned by the teacher, particularly through the use of the word "positionality". Half of the students said that the importance of historical empathy was not explicitly mentioned. For 17% of the students, it became indirectly clear that the teacher considered historical empathy important, for example, because the teacher was talking about historical empathy in a very enthusiastic and engaged way. Rose remarked about her teachers John and Will, "Well, you notice that a lot of teachers can relate to the past. So when a certain teacher tells a story, you sometimes notice that that teacher can really empathize well with that and emphasizes its importance."

Learning resources and activities that promote historical empathy

The ranking assignment showed that 40% of the students and 55% of the teachers chose inviting an eyewitness to the classroom as the ideal way to promote historical empathy (see Table 4). Above all, students and teachers mentioned that an eyewitness has experienced the events in real life. This is a personal context that makes it easier for students to make an emotional connection and therefore to understand the person and his or her history more easily. The student Martin said, "When you see the person, you truly see the erratic facial expressions and things like that [...]. Yes, maybe it interests you quicker, that you are caught faster, if someone is there." The teacher Linda believed that live contact and

Table 4. Learning activities and resources that are considered most suitable (ranked at the top) to promote historical empathy and the learning activities and resources that are most applied in practice, according to students (n = 17) and teachers (n = 10).

	Most suitable (students)	Most suitable (teachers)	Practice (students)	Practice (teachers)
Eyewitness	40%	55%	0 %	0 %
At the historic site	25%	20%	0%	0%
Documentary	15%	0%	5 %	0%
Diary	20%	5 %	0%	0%
Texts and images in the textbooks	0%	0%	45%	15%
Teacher's story	0%	0%	50%	65%
Other	0%	20%	0%	20%

emotions are very important to promote historical empathy: "The moment a person is present who tells what he or she has experienced, because that is something very tangible, you see that you hear that from the person himself, you can squeeze it (laughs), then you know it is real. That always makes a great impression." Another advantage that was mentioned was the ability to interact with a guest speaker, both verbally and nonverbally. The teacher Jack also believed that live contact and interaction promote historical empathy:

> I think that empathizing, engaging in conversation with people not only to listen to that person but also to actually engage in a conversation with that person, that is the closest thing to that. For example, I would bring refugees from Syria who are in Groningen (city in Holland) to class to just talk about their experiences. Only then you understand a little about what is happening.

The interviews revealed that there were both practical difficulties and substantive objections to inviting eyewitnesses to the history class. With regard to practical difficulties, the most frequently mentioned issue was that eyewitnesses from only a few time periods are still alive. The student Ward said, "I'd truly like to interview Stalin once about his horrific acts, his five-year plan and how he thought it was smart." Moreover, teachers often mentioned the efforts of the organization and the invitation of an eyewitness. Other substantive objections that were mentioned were the one-dimensional perspective and sometimes a lack of connection with the students.

The historic site also scored high with both students (25%) and teachers (20%). In practice, there are many practical and financial difficulties with this teaching method (e.g., insufficient budgets or no time for excursions in daily practice). The diary also had a high score, but for teachers, the practical problem was mainly that there are few usable specimens available. Regarding the documentary (fourth place), teachers discussed the advantages compared to eyewitnesses. Other activities that were mentioned were class discussion, role play and empathy writing assignments (see Table 4).

It was interesting that for both students and teachers, the sources in the textbook and the stories of the teacher were not ranked as the most ideal way of practicing historical empathy. In addition, it was striking that the ideal methods mentioned by students and teachers and the methods used most in practice differed. With regard to this issue, the student Yasmin said, "What is at the bottom of my list is what we do the most … [laughs]."

Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to answer the following research question: What beliefs do history teachers and students have about historical empathy and the objectives and strategies for teaching historical empathy?

Beliefs

Regarding beliefs about historical empathy, it can be concluded that both teachers (80%) and students (76%) primarily see historical empathy as a skill. At the same time, both teachers and students partly describe historical empathy as a personal attribute. With regard to the required skills to promote historical empathy, teachers indicate that attention must be paid to both cognitive and affective aspects of historical empathy. Students also recognize and mention both aspects, which is in line with Endacott and Brooks (2018), who have

described historical empathy as both cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures. As the main elements of historical empathy, students and teachers named contextualization, positionality, a personal connection, and historical imagination. The combination of awareness of one's own positionality and understanding the context was mentioned most frequently. The strong connection between these two aspects is also reflected in the literature (Endacott & Brooks, 2013). These elements of historical empathy partly overlap with what students and teachers mention when asked what is needed to empathize: contextualization, awareness of one's own and others' positionality, multiperspectivity, and a personal connection. However, imagination was not mentioned.

Regarding these elements, first, having sufficient information about the historical context enables contextualization, but having information about the feelings of a particular person is also considered important for affective processes. Second, the interviews revealed that teachers and students recognized that it is important to be aware of one's own positionality. The students' answers differed somewhat from the teachers since the students put sufficient (historical) context at the top, while the teachers considered the combination of context and awareness of one's own positionality most important. Students put awareness of positionality in second place, a sign that students recognize that perspectives may also represent deep-seated ethical challenges that should be examined but not necessarily dismissed. Although some scholars have argued that activities to promote historical empathy might provoke presentism, this finding may suggest that students are more aware of the difficulty of ensuring objectivity when engaging with the past than critics of historical empathy often assume. Of course, we do not know whether they are inclined or able to contextualize in particular tasks or the extent to which their understanding is the result of their history lessons.

The way in which teachers and students articulate their views on historical empathy is consistent with the conceptualization of historical thinking skills in the Dutch examination program and exercises in history textbooks. Historical empathy is not identified as a specific historical thinking skill, but recognizing the positionality of historical actors and oneself receives attention in the context of developing students' ability to evaluate the reliability of historical sources and make judgments about the past. The view of historical empathy as affective engagement seems more difficult for teachers to articulate. The results of our study showed, however, that students and teachers think that historical empathy is also an affective process and that it is possible to practice reflection on the role of emotions. Students, for example, can reflect on the difference between their own emotions and those of others and how emotions can strengthen or hinder their willingness to reconstruct the actions and thoughts of historical actors. Teachers in our study seemed to suggest that students can develop the knowledge (understanding of positionality, multiperspectivity), skills (historical contextualization) and attitudes (willingness to explore or contextualize other perspectives) that constitute historical empathy. From this perspective, it makes sense that teachers believe that historical empathy is more than a process of engagement and prefer the term "skill." The term skill is used in a broad sense here. Perhaps the term "competency" might be more useful than the term "skill" because competencies cannot be reduced to their cognitive components but include interrelated attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills that together make effective action possible (Weinert, 2001).

Objectives

With regard to the objectives, students considered understanding of the past and present the most important objective of historical empathy. Through historical empathy, especially by making a personal connection, students also reported that they liked and remembered history better. At the same time, the interviews revealed that students think that the ability to empathize is relevant for citizenship competences. For teachers, the most important objective is often the combination of understanding of the past and citizenship education, which corresponds with objectives that are described in the history education literature (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013, 2018). It is also in line with the ways in which teachers in the case study by Cunningham (2009) described the dual purpose of historical empathy and the tension it could produce. The teachers all mentioned the link between historical empathy and the empathy needed to participate as a citizen in society or in the context of personal formation. Students noted in their answers that historical empathy helped them to understand connections between the past and present and to understand contemporary discussions about, for example, Black Pete and the history of slavery. This finding shows that students understand that historical empathy not only helps them understand history in their history lessons but also contributes to skills in daily life, such as empathy. Teachers and, to a lesser extent, students believe empathy is a skill that has become more relevant in current society, which is in line with researchers who argue that the necessity of teaching historical empathy has become more urgent in a world that is increasingly digitized, automated, and polarized (Krznaric, 2014).

The interviews revealed that teachers believe citizenship competences are important, but explicitly integrating and teaching them is a struggle. The history curriculum focuses more on other historical thinking skills, such as source evaluation and causal reasoning. In addition, in the Dutch curricula, citizenship competences are not explicitly elaborated for specific subjects. The fact that both teachers and students see this connection between historical empathy and empathy in daily life can offer clues to further expand this understanding. Endacott and Brooks (2018) also noted that we do not know whether exercises in historical empathy contribute to empathy in the present: "Little is known about the extent to which instructional exercises in historical empathy actually achieve the ultimate purposes that scholars such as Barton and Levstik (2004) believe they might" (p. 216). The question remains how teachers and students can give words to the importance of historical empathy. The available curriculum documents and history education materials provide few starting points to answer this question.

Teaching of historical empathy

With regard to the explicit teaching of historical empathy, the interviews revealed that a minority of the teachers explicitly stated to students the what, how, and why of historical empathy. A term that was often used was positionality, especially when the students had to practice an assignment that explicitly stimulated historical empathy. However, a majority of the teachers reported that they did not explicitly name or explain historical empathy or its importance. Almost half of the students reported that their teacher explicitly mentioned historical empathy, for example, because he or she used the word positionality or the assignment began with "imagine that . . . " More than half of the students thought that the

teacher did not make it explicit but that students nevertheless automatically empathized with historical actors. In a way, this finding deviates from the recommendations in the literature to teach historical thinking skills as explicitly as possible (Huijgen et al., 2017). However, these findings also suggest that teachers could pay more attention to consciously and explicitly teaching historical empathy. Teachers might need more support to teach historical empathy and consider whether they have enough support from school methods.

A strategy of contextualization, which was also revealed in the interviews, poses questions to students such as "What circumstances would have led to this particular point of view?," which is also encouraged in the literature as a strategy to develop multiple perspectives (Gehlbach, 2011; Huijgen et al., 2017; Nilsen, 2016). To achieve awareness of multiple perspectives, teachers can repeatedly confront and expose students to these different perspectives. Foster's (1999) step-by-step strategy was also used by a teacher. According to teaching strategies for personal connection, tension may arise when students are asked to empathize with people who have different values or backgrounds. In this case, the role of the teacher is most important since in the preparatory phase, the teacher can pay more attention to, for example, general or connecting human aspects, backgrounds, or values. Another issue is whether the teacher should transmit values or stimulate students to develop their own thinking about values, which is more common in Dutch schools. The interviews showed that teachers want to be careful in the transmission of values. The data show teachers' caution in discussing the moral aspects of historical empathy. Here, too, the idea of conceiving historical empathy as a comprehensive competency can provide a solution. Teachers can pay attention to positionality and discuss how their own values play a role when empathizing with, for example, a supporter or opponent of Black Pete.

Although almost half of the students and half of the teachers chose eyewitnesses as the ideal way to promote historical empathy, both teachers and students explained that this practice is not common. Previous research on eyewitnesses in the history classroom (Bertram et al., 2017) has shown that an oral history approach can increase engagement with and motivation for the history course, which in some (but not all) cases led to a better understanding of the past. However, the effect of eyewitnesses on learning about and appreciating historical empathy as affective engagement remains unclear. Based upon the remarks of the participating teachers and students, we might hypothesize that the interaction between an eyewitness and an audience reinforces the urgency to empathize with the eyewitness. The process of both cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures or actors is stimulated by the personal accounts of eyewitnesses (Savenije & De Bruijn, 2017). It is interesting that for both students and teachers, sources in the textbook and the stories of the teacher were not ranked as the most suitable approach.

Other learning activities that were mentioned by the teachers and students were in accordance with the literature and the case study by Cunningham (2009), which showed that teachers selected from broad repertoires of strategies, including major activities as well as small-scale discourse strategies. Classroom discussions of sensitive history mentioned by the teachers can cultivate students' multiperspectivity and help them better understand their peers and themselves, which is reflected in the literature that suggests cultivating students' perspectives helps them understand controversial issues from different perspectives (e.g., Gehlbach, 2011; Nilsen, 2016). In addition, this process allows teachers to assess students' prior knowledge, beliefs, and misconceptions about a topic. With this extra information about students, teachers can better determine optimal pedagogical approaches.

The contribution of historical empathy to teaching students to engage more empathetically with different perspectives about particular controversial issues shows its relevance in a larger and more socially important perspective.

Limitations and further research

Our study of interviews with 10 teachers and 17 students is small but provides a rich picture of the different views of students and history teachers on historical empathy. The study is limited because the students were all 16 years or older and were in the two highest levels that are preparatory for college and university in the $9^{th}/10^{th}$ grade. This selection by age and education degree was made because it was important that the students could think and formulate in an abstract way about historical empathy, which was apparent from the students' answers. The answers to the interviews showed that the students could clearly discuss the objectives and teaching of historical empathy in the classroom. However, more research is needed to examine how historical empathy is conceived and taught among younger pupils and students in other tracks, such as vocational tracks. Furthermore, the teachers all had a master's degree, had more than five years of experience in secondary education, and were experienced in teaching higher-order historical thinking skills. As with the students, this group was specific in terms of educational attainment and experience.

Because of the design of the partly task-based interviews, the responses were shaped by the cards provided to the participants. Although we started with an open question and used a blank card in each task for the participant's own input, another selection of cards might have produced different results. The advantage of this method was that it supported an in-depth discussion of different aspects of historical empathy with teachers and students and that the responses of the teachers and students could be compared.

Another limitation is that in the interviews, historical empathy and empathy in general sometimes started to mix, and it was sometimes unclear which one the participants were discussing. We can conclude that students and teachers see a clear link between historical empathy and empathy in daily life. Further research could more precisely disentangle how historical empathy and empathy in daily life are related, which may first include providing clearer descriptions of the relationship between historical empathy and daily empathy, which are accessible to teachers. Second, it may involve teaching material in which that connection is made.

Implications for practice

This study shows that teachers seem to have few leads to promote historical empathy. Based on the results of our study, we suggest that more attention should be paid to the question of how teachers can promote historical empathy. We suggest that to develop historical empathy in their students, teachers should specify historical empathy more explicitly. To do this, teachers need to develop insight into the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are important to engage in historical empathy and understand the cognitive and affective processes involved. The interviews showed that teachers also consider the process of historical empathy important, but they do not know how to make it explicit, which suggests implications for teacher training. Teachers believe that they pay attention to historical empathy, but they usually do so implicitly, as their students confirm. If teachers teach historical empathy more explicitly, it

may be easier for students to recognize it. When teaching historical empathy, concerns may include contextualization, nuance (positionality and multiperspectivity), and creating opportunities for affective engagement. For example, a connection with historical figures can be made by using diaries or empathy tasks or inviting an eyewitness. Eyewitnesses were chosen as the ideal way to promote historical empathy, but it is important that students have context for the eyewitness and can make a personal connection and communicate with him or her. Therefore, teachers need guidelines and supportive materials to supervise such lessons and scaffold students' empathetic engagement with eyewitnesses.

Finally, it would be valuable for teachers and teacher educators to reflect on the transfer from teaching historical empathy to empathy in daily life. The results show that historical empathy may strengthen the relationship between the past and present by practicing skills that are also important outside of history lessons. An interesting approach would be to find ways to help teachers extend what they already know about positionality and connect this knowledge with broader societal issues. To achieve this transfer, teachers could link current events to the past. When using current events, the teacher could extend the link of the importance of context from history to the present and pay explicit attention to the process of historical empathy. Such an approach is an important way to work on citizenship competences that allows students to see the usefulness of historical empathy not only for the history lesson but also for empathy in daily life, now and in the future.

Note

1. Every year on the fifth of December, the Dutch celebrate Sint Nicholas (Santa Claus) and his servant Black Pete. The two distribute presents among children. However, the way Pete is depicted has caused controversy. Many Black people do not identify with the way Pete is depicted, as a servant with a black painted face and red painted lips. Many White Dutch people seem unable to grasp the racism of Black Pete and believe that this folkloric character is at the core of Dutch culture. Since 2015, the United Nations has urged the Netherlands to stop the portrayals of the Black Pete character.

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Appendix

This interview protocol was the guideline for both students and teachers. The last question was asked only to teachers. The teacher variant is occasionally shown in brackets if it differs from the question to the students.

We start with a question about empathy in general.
1. What do you need to empathize?
We are now moving from empathy in general to historical empathy.
2. Is there a difference between empathy with a historical person and with a person in the present? If yes, what are the differences?
3. a. What do you think historical empathy is?
b. Try to make a ranking.
On the cards:
- Something you do when you investigate the past
- A skill that you can practice
- An exercise/method in class
- A trait of someone
Then ask: or do you think historical empathy is something else?
4. Sorting task: What is especially important for empathy in a history lesson? Make two piles for important and less important:
- Understanding the context of the historical person: the time and background of that person
- Imagining and sympathizing with a different time or person
- Awareness of your own positionality
- Being able to handle your own emotions well
- Being able to recognize yourself in a historical person: same values, background, age, etc.
Then ask: or do you think something else is important in historical empathy?

B. Objectives

We start with a question about empathy in general.
1. What do you think is the most important objective of empathizing in general?
We are now moving from empathy in general to historical empathy.
2. What do you think is the most important objective of historical empathy?
Make the ranking. On cards:
- Being able to conduct more critical historical research
- Strategy to improve in the historical context
- Being able to understand the past
- To view things from different perspectives
- To also improve empathy in the present
- To practice moral issues
- Something else
3. Do you think that identification and an emotional connection with people in the past should be encouraged in history lessons?

C. Teaching strategies

1. Finish: I find it harder to empathize with someone when …

Make two piles: things that make it harder to empathize and things that do not have much influence on empathizing.

- I have a very different background than that person (cultural, socioeconomic)
- I hold very different values than that person
- There is a large age difference
- I know little to nothing about the time/culture in which that person lives
- Something else

2. Which way do you think is good to promote historical empathy? Make two piles of a good way and a less good way to practice historical empathy.

On cards:

- When the teacher (you) tells a nice story about someone
- When I can see that person live (guest speaker/eyewitness)
- When I see a documentary about that person
- When I read that person's diary
- When I read/view a source about this (in the textbook)
- When I am at a place where something historical has taken place, for example, in an old building or in a museum (historical sensation)
- Something else

3. This is how we practice historical empathy most often in the history lesson: activities or work forms

Make two piles: one often, two less often

- When the teacher tells a nice story about someone
- When I (the students) can see that person live (guest speaker/eyewitness)
- When I (the students) see a documentary about that person
- When I (the students) read that person"s diary
- When I (the students) read/view a source about this (in the textbook)
- When I (the students) am at a place where something historical has taken place, for example, in an old building or in a museum (historical sensation)
- Something else

4. Does the teacher (you) sometimes make it explicitly clear in class when you are practicing historical empathy?

5. Does the teacher (you) sometimes make explicitly clear in class how to empathize historically?

6. Does the teacher (you) also make explicitly clear in class why he/she considers historical empathy important?

This last question was asked only to the teachers

7. To what extent do you, as a teacher, feel able to teach students historical empathy/to practice this with students? Are you trained in this?