Exploring Aspects of Greek students' Historical Thinking: How are they reflected in Their Writings?

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Abstract

In this study, we explored aspects of students' historical thinking as reflected in their writings. We designed a teaching intervention to bring to light 22 Greek students' implicit perceptions about evidence and perspective taking and examine how they used four reading strategies in their writings. Subsequently, we conducted focus group interviews with 11 of them to further investigate their historical thinking. We found that all students participated enthusiastically and enjoyed the teaching intervention. Most of them used the reading strategies adequately and expressed clearly articulated historical reasoning. The few rest struggled with implementing the reading strategies, especially contextualization; therefore they resorted in affective, personalized and present-oriented statements. We also noticed that, except for the teaching intervention, the teacher played a significant role in its implementation and consequently in shaping students' perceptions. We believe that history teachers' identity construction should be further explored in future relevant studies.

Keywords: historical thinking; students' implicit perceptions; teaching history; secondary education

1. Introduction

The idea that the accumulation of historical knowledge should constitute the primary goal of teaching history has been challenged since the late 20th century. Especially over the past few decades, history instruction has aimed at teaching students to "do history" rather than read history, i.e. to think historically. To think historically is to master not only the content knowledge but also the concepts which arise while doing history. Historical thinking is also commonly associated with a set of reading strategies which help evaluate sources and thus make sense of history (Wineburg, 1991).

The goal of our study is to explore students' historical thinking focusing on their implicit perceptions of historical evidence and perspective taking, as we consider these to be its fundamental aspects. This research paper constitutes a small slice of a larger study in progress in which other aspects of historical thinking are examined.

2. Theoretical Framework

Historical thinking can be described as the intricate thinking process which endeavors to reconstruct the past by studying and interpreting historical sources. According to the Canadian approach, it consists of six interrelated historical thinking concepts. So, to think historically means to be able to establish historical significance, use primary source as evidence, identify continuity and change, analyze cause and consequence, take historical perspectives and understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations (Seixas, 2006).

To use sources as *historical evidence*, readers need to analyze them and assess their reliability (Levesque, 2008, p. 115). In order to do so, it is necessary to ask appropriate questions and examine sources in view of their historical background (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning [MEAL],2014, p. IV-11). As Wineburg argues, sources need to be interrogated, so four reading strategies must be employed. *Sourcing*, "the touch-stone which distinguishes expert from novice practice" (Wineburg & Reisman, 2015, p. 636), is to consider a source's author, their purpose, intentions and assumptions (Reisman, 2011; Monte-Sano, 2011). *Close reading* refers to "considering an author's use of language and word choice"(Reisman, 2011, p. 142) while *corroboration* constitutes the act of comparing multiple historical sources against each other in order to make sense and determine reliable accounts (Monte-Sano, 2011). *Contextualization,* which will be discussed in detail further down, is to "question the

social and political circumstances surrounding the text in order to gain greater insight into the historical period"(Wineburg & Reisman, 2015, p. 637).

Historical perspective taking constitutes the difficult task of "understanding the social, cultural, intellectual and emotional settings that shaped people's lives and actions in the past" (MEAL, 2014, p. IV-45).*Contextualization*, "the ability to situate phenomena and actions in the context of time, historical location, long-term developments or particular events" stands at its core (Van Boxtel & Van Drie in Huijgen et al., 2018, p. 410). In order to perform contextualization, it is important that students be aware of their own positionality (Savenje & de Bruijn, 2017) and acknowledge how much they do not know about the issue under study ("specification of ignorance", Wineburg, 1998). Otherwise, they end up imposing their 21st century belief system on people in the past, which constitutes the problem of "presentism".

3. Previous Research in the Field

Studies have shown that students employ certain ideas when they deal with historical tasks. Lee, Dickinson and Ashby (1997) were the first to carry out an extensive research to map the progression of students' ideas about history (Project "Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches"). According to their findings, students initially consider the past as completely accessible. Progressively, they take into consideration the various aspects which affect accounts' reliability: the information available and the authors' bias and viewpoints. Lastly, they realize that accounts are by default selective and can only be assessed in relation to specific historical questions.

Studies examining the way students read historical sources suggest that it differs from the way historians do. Wineburg's (1991) study indicates that novices do not attend to source information prior to reading and focus more on content rather than the features of the source when evaluating them. Additionally, they do not search for corroborative information nor manage to resolve discrepancies among sources and regard textbooks as more trustworthy than primary sources. Britt and Aglinskas (2002), who examined high school and college students' ability to source without any sort of instruction, also found that students did not spontaneously use source information, unless they were given specific instructions, and they cited information found in a novel as facts without corroborating them firstly.

Regarding students' ideas about action in the past, Lee et al. (1997) observed a progression from a concern with historical agents' personal desires to an understanding that purposes are relevant to the prevailing conditions. Hallden (1998) found that students persistently explained historical events with reference to the actions and intentions of individuals. Specifically, they believed that Great Men or Women "turn the wheel of History" (Hallden, 1998, p. 132) or more often that it was their emotional or motivational states which explains actions in the past ("mentalization"). Such states were also ascribed to political and social constructs as students seemed to identify institutions and organizations with the people of whom they consist ("personification").

Rarely do researchers study students' competency on historical perspective taking without examining their ability to contextualize. For example, Hartmann and Hasselhorn (2008), who developed a standardized measure to assess German students' competency in historical perspective taking, found that most of them displayed middle and high historical perspective taking competency. Adjusting the aforementioned measure to Dutch students, Huijgen et al. (2016) reported that they also displayed adequate and good ability to perform historical perspective taking. Furthermore, they found a small but statistically significant correlation between students' prior knowledge and their historical perspective taking competency.

As document-based skills related to historical thinking do not seem to come naturally to students (Wineburg, 1999; Reisman, 2011; Britt &Aglinskas, 2002), instruction of reading strategies is claimed to enhance students' capacity of historical thinking. For instance, Reisman(2011) designed a document-based history curriculum which integrates the study of multiple historical sources and the explicit instruction of reading strategies (sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, close reading). Students improved in historical thinking along with factual knowledge and reading comprehension. They improved the most in sourcing and close reading presumably because those were practised daily and are generally interrelated and easier to demonstrate. As for contextualization and corroboration, Reisman believes that -as intertextual strategies which require prior knowledge- they are difficult to model which makes the explicit strategy instruction an ineffective teaching method for them.

3.1 Research Methodology

3.2 Research Questions

Since identifying students' perceptions of history and taking them into account when designing teaching approaches is considered to be crucial, we decided to study how students seem to perceive some aspects of historical thinking as defined previously. However, students' perceptions are difficult to distinguish in traditional teaching settings where they are typically given few opportunities to interpret and evaluate accounts. As multiple

studies indicate (see previous research), reading strategies assist students in processing sources and engaging in historical thinking.

Therefore, we designed a teaching intervention based on the explicit teaching of the four reading strategies, so thatby examining students' use of these strategies, as reflected in their essays, we could bring to light and develop or redefinetheir perceptions about evidence and perspective taking. On that account, our research questions were formulated as follows:

1. How are students' implicit perceptions about *historical evidence* reflected in their writings through the use of *sourcing*, *close reading* and *corroboration*?
2. How are students' implicit perceptions about *historical perspectives*reflectedin their writings through the use of *contextualization*?
3. To what extent did the teaching intervention develop aspects of students' historical thinking as reflected in their oral and written responses?
4. Are there any other factors that enhanced or impeded the development of students' historical thinking?

3.3 Participants

We used the purposeful sampling technique to select our research subjects, as we wanted to select information‑rich cases for better illuminating our research questions. The rich-information cases produce *"insights and in‑depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations"* (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Thus, we selected a class of 22 students (from middle and higher social and economic environments), aged 13-14, of a public experimental Junior High school of a metropolitan area in Athens.

The history teacher of this class has been teaching humanistic subjects (Modern Greek Language, Ancient Greek Language, History& Greek Literature) for sixteen years.He holds a degree and a doctorate in History. He hasmany scientific publications on history both as an academic and a school subject in secondary education and for the past seven years he has been collaborating with the Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) as a mentor teacher for postgraduate students.

While planning the teaching intervention, we had a 2-hour meeting with the teacher to inform him about its content and goal. We discussed about didactic strategies, e.g. the role of the teacher not as a transmitter of knowledge but as a teammate of the students, the freedom in students' responses, problematization of knowledge, exploratory discussion, authentic learning tasks for students (open-ended questions) and opportunities for creating common knowledge.The teacher gladly agreed to participate in it.Additionally, prior to our studyweattended 20 history lessons of this highly qualified teacher in the particular class. We foundthat the teacher used the collaborative teaching method and provided students with historical sources. However,he mostly asked them to elicit historical information usingsources as confirmation and authorization of the official narration of the textbook.

3.4 Data of the Study

The data used in this study came from a variety of sources: a) the worksheets and historical essays completed by the students, b) the direct classroom observation of a five-hour history teachingintervention (which was audiotaped), c) the two researchers' reflective field notes and d) the focus group interview following the analysis of the aforementioned data.

Observation consists of the collection of open information through the observation of individuals in their natural environment (Creswell, 2012, p. 213). The reflective field notes include the researchers' personal thoughts about what they observed, the methods used and possible directions for further research (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 406-407). The Focus Group Interview was used to collect "shared understanding" from 11 students who accepted to participate voluntarily (Creswell, 2012, p. 218).

3.5 Context of the Study

The worksheets, which included multiple historical sources, questions for each of them and an essay, were designed by the researchers. The *subject* of the instruction was, based on the section of the textbook, the entry of Greece into World War I and the causes of the National Schism that followed. It should be noted that the instruction was carried out by the teacher and not any of the researchers, so that any differences in students' performance during the teaching intervention could be attributed exclusively to the different teaching method and not the different teacher.

Based on Reisman's(2011, p. 60) "Document-Based Lesson" design, the lesson included four distinct stages: 1) reviewing background knowledge, 2) posing the central historical question, 3) reading and interpreting historical documents and 4) whole-class discussion. This instruction revolved around the following *historical question*: "Why were the Greeks divided during World War I?" (For the *structure of the worksheet* see appendix, table 1). After processing two introductory sources as a whole-class activity, students were divided into 7 groups and each group worked on one source(see appendix, table 2).

Table 1: Sources read as a whole-class activity

Sources	Questions
1st source: Venizelos' Memorandum to King Constantine	1. Who is the author of the above excerpt and to whom is it addressed? Why is he writing this? (sourcing) 2. What was the prevailing policy? Why is it now necessary to be changed according to the previous source? (close reading) 3. According to the author, which political stance should Greece take on the war? What arguments does he use to convince the target audience? (close reading)
2nd source: King Constantine's telegram to the German emperor, 7/8/1914	1. Who is the author of the above excerpt and to whom is it addressed? Why is he writing this? (sourcing) 2. According to the author, which political stance should Greece take on the war? What arguments does he use to support his view? (close reading) 3. How do the particular circumstances and the author's personal values seem to influence his decision? (contextualization)

Table 2: Sources read in groups

Sources	Questions: According to the source
1st source/ group	1. … who did the Greeks of the New Countries support and why? (close reading) 2. Which "diplomatic successes (of Venizelos) in the Balkan Wars" do you think the source refers to? How did these affect the political preferences of the Greeks of the New Countries? (contextualization)
2nd source/ group	1. … who did the foreigners of the New Countries support and why? (close reading) 2. Why do you think they "opposed to their integration into the Greek state"? (contextualization)
3rd source/ group	1. … who were the two "rival political worlds" and which supporters did they have? (close reading) 2. Which factor played a decisive role in the political preferences of the historical agents of that period? (contextualization)
4th source/ group	1. … which stance did the business bourgeoisie take regarding Greece's entry into the war and why? (close reading) 2. Which factors determined their preference? (close reading)
5th source/ group	1. … which stance did the state-run bourgeoisie take regarding Greece's entry into the war and why? (close reading) 2. Which factors determined their preference? (close reading)
6th source/ group	1. … which stance did the petty bourgeoisie take regarding Greece's entry into the war and for why? (close reading) 2. How did the "housekeepers" react to Entente's demand for their disarmament? What could they have felt? (contextualization)
7th source/ group	1. … which political figures did the workers, the smallholders farmers and the landless support and why? (close reading) 2. Which factors determined their preference? (close reading)

Four hours of the teaching intervention were devoted in the instruction of reading strategies, reading the historical sources in groups and presenting the answers to the rest of the class. During the last hour, students wrote the historical essay, which asked them to: "Read carefully all historical sources and state the reasons for the National Schism. What reason do you consider to be the most important and why? (80-100 words)".

3.6 Credibility of the Research

Multiple methods were used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Lather, 1997). We used investigator triangulation (Denzin, 2009) in order to avoid misinterpretation of data collected, and triangulation of sources, in order to cross-check the accuracy of data and *"check out the consistency of different data sources"* (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Triangulation of data "combines data drawn from different sources and at different times, in different places or from different people"(Flick, 2004, p. 78). We studied the data independently but we had research meetings whenever any inconsistencies came up.

3.7 Data Analysis

In this study, we explore students' historical thinking with a focus on their implicit perceptions about historical evidence and perspectives drawing from our observations during the teaching intervention and students' essays as

well as their oral responses during the focus group. Acknowledging that the historical concepts, which define historical thinking, are not mutually exclusive but closely interrelated, and so are the reading strategies, we decided to examine the research questions in conjunction.

Therefore, we did not proceed to forming specific sub-questions or hypotheses, but examined students' responses both in the writing assignment and in the focus group interview and searched for themes or patterns that could provide answers to our research questions. That is why thematic analysis was used to analyze and present the collected data (Creswell, 2012). In particular, we examined how students used the reading strategies (*minor theme*) in order to build our understanding of their implicit perceptions of historical evidence and perspectives (*major theme*). Subsequently, we examined students' responses in the focus group so as to elicit information regarding the development of their historical thinking (*majortheme*) and the factors which may have influenced it (*minor theme*). Students' written and oral responses combined with our observations during the teaching intervention helped us come to conclusions about our research questions.

4. Results

The findings of this research are presented in three parts: students' implicit perceptions about historical evidence and perspective taking, the factors which may have led them to respond differently in their writings and the teacher's role in shaping their perceptions. Students' answers in the historical essay, which answer our two first research questions, can be further divided into two sub-categories based on their competency in using historical evidence and taking historical perspectives.

Students' Implicit Perceptions of Evidence and Perspective Taking

First Category: in which Students' Discourse is Filled with Personalized and Affective Statements

Four students were found to have displayed adequate use of only some reading strategies; theywere able to source and read closely a couple of historical sources. However, they mostly referenced sources which describe King Constantine's and Venizelos's points of views and thus focused predominantly on their perspectives. This finding suggests that students do not seek answers in a single source yet they still view history in a linear way, as they seem to believe that it was the two agents' assertions which led to the National Schism. Moreover, as it can be seen below, they broadly discussed these historical agents' ethics and emotions: "*King Constantine, who was afraid of losing his authority and power and made changes and took drastic measures concerning the war and the alliances*"(st.6), "*There were many reasons for the National Schism. Specifically: 1. the selfishness, rivalry and patriotism*"(st.18).

Thus, except for inadequately corroborating the information, it seems that students were either drawn to psychological interpretations, as reflected in their wording ("*afraid, selfishness, rivalry*"), or they identified with the two main historical personages. Furthermore, some of these students used emotionally charged language to ascribe to King Constantine and Venizelos as well as their supporters special qualities which were not found in the historical sources available. This was evident in the following excerpts: "*(Venizelos') radicalism had dreams and expectations for the future while (Constantine's) conservatism didn't have the spirit of redeeming and restoring the country and the homeland*"(st.2), "*King Constantine's supporters seemed more conservative, reserved and non-negotiable to changes which showed their intense pessimism and also their inner fear that their power and authority would be divided equally to others and as a result they wouldn't be in control which they really wanted.On the contrary, supporters of Venizelos were open-minded people, willing to fight and stand up for what essentially belonged to them, expanding not only territorially but also financially, while at the same time gave opportunities to the Greek people to find jobs under normal conditions this time and with the necessary rights, something which was honestly very important and had to be restored*"(st.13).

The excerpts above indicate that students struggled with contextualization, since they only commented on the personal characteristics of historical agents and their supporters instead of the social and political circumstances of the time period under which they made these decisions and acted on them. They also support Hallden's (1998) claim that students explain actions in the past with reference to historical agents' emotional or motivational states ("mentalization") and ascribe personal characteristics to whole groups ("personification").

Simultaneously, we noticed that some of these students' responses were present-oriented. A close reading of the last sentence of the previous example ("*gave opportunities to the Greek people to find jobs under normal conditions this time and with the necessary rights*") reveals that the student's wording, when referring to unemployment and poor working conditions, which were not even the focus point of the discussion, bears a strong resemblance to the current political discourse. In a more transparent way, one student criticized the Greek political system of the 20th century (Parliamentary constitutional monarchy) considering the King's authority "excessive", thus making a false analogy with the current democratic system: "*The government as well as the king had power and consequently they disagreed over some issues. In my opinion, the main reason for the National Schism was that the king had more power than he should have. This excessive power affected Venizelos' and the government's*

decisions. Just like today if our Prime Minister overused his power to overthrow democracy in spite of the President of Hellenic Republic's authority" (st.1). Another student offered an over-simplistic generalization to support her view: "*I believe that the most important cause (of the National Schism) is the economic one as it is the one that always affects citizens' lives significantly*"(st.19).

Taking these statements into account, we come to the conclusion that they seemed more likely to engage with the historical agents in an "affective" rather than "cognitive" way (emphasis on the "affective" dimension of historical empathy, Endacott and Brooks, 2013). Therefore, we assume that students are not incompetent at corroborating but rather focus on information that they personally consider the most important (cognitive bias). Furthermore, students drew more information from sources with character focalization –that is sources whose perspective lies with a character who participates in the events narrated– than sources with external focalization –in which the perspective lies with an anonymous agent (Savenje & de Bruijn, 2017, p. 3). So, we should consider the fact that students may be more susceptible to character focalization.

Second Category: in which Clearly Articulated Historical Reasoning is Reflected

In these students' answers we were able to distinguish adequate use of all reading strategies and thus clearly articulated historical reasoning. Fourteen students drew from multiple historical sources, which presumably means that they acknowledge the value of multiple sources.Hence, they were able to identify and classify the multiple reasons which led to the National Schism, as this representative excerpt shows:"*Initially, the causes of the National Schism had to do with various factors such as economic, ideological and political beliefs in general. In particular, we could characterize as economic reasons the attitude of the bourgeois businessmen who, due to their trade relations with Great Britain, supported Venizelos. Ideological are the reasons that pushed the popular basis of Constantinism to support it, that is, the strong feeling of nationalism. Issues of political beliefs also played a major role, with workers supporting Venizelos and the Liberal Party*"(st.14).

Both the last excerpt and the following one reveal that as these students relied on historical evidence, they referred to multiple historical perspectives. So, students included the perspectives of the various social classes mentioned in the sources and referenced their argumentation. Thus, we distinguish lack of what Hallden defines as "mentalization". "*There were serious differences between the positions of Constantine and Venizelos. Venizelos wanted Greece as an ally of the central powers and the other considered that the English and French would prevail so he decided that Greece should ally with the Entente in order to preserve its profits, the King supported "permanent neutrality" after consulting with the German emperor arguingthat Greece would be protected from war*"(st.11).

Another element, which indicates students' clearly articulated historical reasoning, is that they took into consideration the historical context while explaining the contrasting viewpoints or referred to historical agents' emotional states. That is, instead of assuming that citizens were deeply influenced by the two leaders and thus considering their supporters as an undivided group, they recognized people's personal motivations (e.g. social, ideological or financial) and experiences. The following illustrative excerpts are representative of students' good use of contextualization and lack of personification:"*Economic factors also played an important role in the National Schism as some people benefited more from Venizelos' policy and others from King Constantine's. In addition, another cause was patriotism, xenophobia and religion, which were mixed up and interconnected and supported by the anti-Venizelists. Finally, the different images citizens had formed about Constantine and Venizelos also played a big role. Venizelos was considered a "liberator" in the new countries while Constantine was considered a "recruiter" in the old countries*"(st.8); "*Venizelos had the support of the popular classes and the bourgeoisie (the "Great Idea") while the King had the support of the petty bourgeoisie (exhaustion from the constant wars)*"(st.9);"*National Schism as a phenomenon had several causes. Initially, the people, depending on what they believed, were divided into two separate groups. In the one group were those who believed that the country should expand (national aspirations, the "Great Idea") and in the other those who believed that we should improve the Greece we already had. Another cause of the National Schism was the personality and ideological background of the two leaders, e.g. Constantine had fought in Crete to join Greece so the populations of the unredeemed areas would be in his favor. Last but not least to me the most important (cause of the National Schism) were the personal interests of people, a worker for example would side with the one who would usually help him financially*"(st.3). Nonetheless, the final part of the previous answer ("a worker for example would side with the one who would usually help him financially") indicates that even students who use contextualization while reading historical sources seem to still hold on to present-oriented or commonsensical views.

Factors Influencing the Differentiation of Students' Responses in their Writings

Having analyzed students' writings after the teaching intervention, we started to wonder what might have caused the differences between some students' responses, which led to the categorization described above. We were interested in searching to what extent our teaching intervention helped to develop students' thinking based on how they experienced and dealt with it. In order to look into that, we conducted a focus group with 11students. The

focus group questions were: 1. Do you like history as a school subject? 2. What do you think about the way you are regularly taught history in your class? 3. What did you think of the teaching intervention?

Seven of the eleven participants of the focus group expressed their great satisfaction with this teaching intervention, in contrast to the way their teacher taught the lesson. As for the teaching intervention, they gave us very positive feedback. According to their comments below, they enjoyed the process of investigating historical sources, sinceit made them feel like little historians. Additionally, it seems that it helped them realize that interpretation comes from considering multiple perspectives. Last but not least, they emphasized that the particular historical material as well as the collaboration with their classmates helped them to start thinking about various issues, for example that contemporary reality cannot be viewed one-sidedly. Nevertheless, they emphatically stated that their teacher, even though he made a considerable effort, could not help them much, as they felt that they did not have enough time to think and work collaboratively, and that he often prejudged their answers with his own comments. The illustrative examples of students' speech below are revealing: "*I really liked it, because I got into the process of thinking about something, exploring, combining information from sources, collaborating with some of my classmates*" (st.3); "*I felt like a little historian, as I got to read sources closely in order to find information, check if it was true and draw conclusions. It was the first time our teacher encouraged us to do so. I wish we were taught history this way from now on*"(st.8); "*The historical material given to us was a surprise! I realized how many perspectives there can be about a single issue. Isn't that the case today as well? You can't really know about something if you don't find out about the opposing views*"(st.22); "*I like history but sometimes it is quite complicated and difficult to study, because it is presented to us by the teacher as an endless line of events*"(st.9); "*I noticed that, although we had different sources in front of us, the teacher seemed to want to guide us to his own opinion. He usually does that.*" (st.14). One student's answer surprised us: "*The teacher seemed to have ready answers. How nice would it be if he was looking with us instead of feeling like we had to find the correct answer?*" (st.11)

These seven students were generally quite favourably disposed towards history. They claimed that they liked history and acknowledged the value of learning about the past. They even displayed remarkable enthusiasm about history as a school subject: "*I really like history as a subject. I read a lot, especially about the historical periods which I am very curious of*" (st.11); "*I like learning about history. Especially this year it has helped me understand some of problems we have now, for example the situation in the Balkans*" (st.9); "*I think history is an important subject because we learn about a lot of things. I wouldn't say I read history in my free time, but I do look up information when I don't know something*" (st.18).

As we observed prior to and during the teaching intervention, the more historical knowledge students had the better they responded in the teaching intervention and in the written essays. Students who appeared to acknowledge that history is more than a series of past events, engaged more actively in interpreting historical sources and taking historical perspectives.

The other four students of the focus group, also expressed quite positively towards the teaching intervention despite the difficulties they encountered, as the excerpts below show: "*The teaching seemed very organized, but I got a little tired, because I was not accustomed to this way of teaching*" (st.18); "*I'd like to have more lessons like this to understand it better. In my opinion one wasn't enough*" (st.6); "*It was the first time we were faced with so many sources. I didn't understand all of them but it was very interesting*" (st.2); "*This teaching intervention was very organized and I liked that we looked into many different perspectives. If we were taught history this way every time, I think the lesson could be exciting*" (st.13); "*It's a pity that we were not accustomed to such a way of teaching. I was curious to find out what was happening during that historical period. If our teacher kept giving us that kind of motivation, I think I would start to like history as a school subject*" (st.19).

Although all eleven students were impressed by the teaching intervention, the last 4 students seem to share some characteristics which the other 7 don't. Firstly, they consider history a difficult subject and they do not find the past relevant to them in the present ("*I don't like history, because it's too difficult for me to understand*", "*I don't read history if it's not for school*", "*I feel that the past does not concern us at all. Only the present has value*"). Secondly, they enjoy listening to stories and appear to be content with the narrative approach of teaching history ("*Our teacher knows a lot about history and he presents it to us in an interesting way*", "*The teacher has a nice way of narrating the stories and I somewhat understand them*"). These differences may be due to their limited historical knowledge as we realized from our observations during the teaching intervention.

The focus group data illuminate a very interesting finding: the teaching intervention itself appears to have been a factor which influenced positively students' historical thinking and written historical essays to a great extent. As all students participating in the focus group stated, they found the teaching intervention "very interesting", or even a "surprise", which stimulated their thinking and scaffolded them to read the multiple historical sources and construct historical reasoning. This was particularly evident from the fact that even students, who had a little difficulty to source, corroborate and contextualize, participated enthusiastically in the teaching intervention.

In parallel, the other students' speech about the discrepancy between the historical material and the teacher's teaching strategies, was quite revealing, leading us to another important factor which we believe may have impeded students' thinking: the teacher's role.

The teacher's Role in Shaping Students' Perceptions about Evidence and Perspective Taking

Our research findings yielded some significant insight about the way the teacher's practices –and therefore his own perceptions– may have influenced how students approached historical evidence and perspectives. This factor essentially answers our fourth research question. The observation of the 4-hour teaching intervention showed that while the teacher agreed to follow the researchers' lesson plan, he also preserved some of his old teaching practices; he still dedicated about 10 minutes at the beginning of each teaching to assess students' content knowledge of the previous lesson. While implementing the researchers' lesson plan, he asked a significant number of close-ended questions which did not encourage interpretation (Barton & Levstik, 2003). Finally, after students' collaborative work and the announcement of their findings, he did not intrigue students to see the historical sources as evidence in order to answer the historical question but he mostly summed up himself the reasons which led to the National Schism. At the end of each teaching, he asked them to study the textbook instead of the historical sources that they had been working on. To conclude, although he included our lesson plan in his teaching, he did it in a decontextualized way without guiding students into an inquiry orientation toward perspective taking but by transmitting historical "structured knowledge" (see Kember, 1997).

This teacher seems to not have pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Although he had remarkable historical knowledge due to his studies and he was familiar with effective history teaching practices (e.g. cooperative learning, using historical sources), he seemed to encounter difficulties in how to co-construct historical knowledge with his students. All these were reflected in his teaching practices: he required students to read the textbook, listen to his lectures (which he called "discussion"), locate answers to specific questions and repeat the information in oral or written essays (Barton & Levstik, 2003).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The goal of our study was to explore students' implicit perceptions of two aspects of historical thinking: historical evidence and historical perspective taking along with their use of the corresponding strategies (sourcing, close reading, contextualization and corroboration). We conducted a teaching intervention, which was designed to shed light to students' implicit perceptions, observed it and studied their answers to a historical essay. In parallel, we studied their responses during focus group interviews aiming at exploring a/ to what extent our teaching intervention developed their historical thinking and b/ which factors might have enhanced or impeded it.

We found that almost 80% of students sourced and read closely the historical sources and corroborated the information, thus they were able to provide more comprehensive and accurate answers. Moreover, as they discussed the actions and decisions of historical agents' with reference to preceding events in addition to the prevailing conditions of that period of time (contextualization), they were able interpret the various historical perspectives and by doing so they could more insightfully identify the causes of the National Schism. Although some students' answers indicate that they treated historical agents in a stereotypical way, Hartmann and Hasselhorn (2008, p. 6) argue that it still constitutes "a step forward from a presentist view to a contextualized".So, it is safe to say that students, who used the reading strategies efficiently, relied heavily on historical evidence and expressed clearly articulated historical reasoning.

On the other hand, we found that a little over 20% of students struggled with implementing the reading strategies and especially contextualization; these students concentrated their attention on specific historical sources and emphasized on particular historical agents. They also resorted in affective and personalized statements as well as psychologically oriented interpretations in order to explain historical agents' actions. Similarly, five students could not avoid present-oriented interpretations to explain actions and events which led to the National Schism. Not having taken into consideration the different historical perspectives, students failed to appreciate the complexity of decision making and acting; instead they displayed what Lee, Dickinson and Ashby (1997, p. 242) name "empathy based on generalized stereotypes" and "everyday empathy" (2nd and 3rd type of empathy respectively).

Undoubtedly, the insufficient use of close reading and corroboration puts a lid on historical perspective taking; how can students take into account the different historical perspectives if they do not examine all historical sources? However, we believe that there is more to it. We noticed that students who focused predominantly on the historical perspectives expressed by statesmen and referred to their specific characteristics, desires and actions, seemed to have the most gaps in knowledge during the lessons. As Huijgen et al. (2016, p. 6) would agree, it is likely that students concentrated on historical agents' characteristics due to their lack of deeper historical context knowledge. Similarly, these students often expressed present-oriented views as to why things happened the way they did.

Their lack of historical knowledge combined with the fact that the teacher did not encourage them with appropriate questions or other teaching activities (i.e. problematization of the knowledge, exploratory discussion) may explain their insufficient use of close reading and corroboration.

Students' speech during the focus group seems to confirm our observations and reinforce our conclusions. Students, who had some difficulty attending to historical sources, admitted to not understand history and have little interest in the past, as they regard it irrelevant to the present. Nevertheless, what mostly emerged from their responses is the significant value of the teaching intervention itself. Based on the conceptualizations of all 11 students, this teaching intervention intrigued them to think differently; according to them it would be much more useful if their teacher included more of the intervention's features in his teaching and did so for longer.

Apart from the above findings an unexpected one was the role of the teacher himself. Although he was highly qualified, he seemed not to have sufficient pedagogical knowledge, so he had difficulty in implementing the researchers' lesson plan. While trying to follow the lesson plan, he also presented the historical knowledge in his own structured way (see Kember, 1997). He was really making an effort to teach in a constructivist environment but he often went back to his previous teaching habits. Most importantly, he did not seem to be capable of creating a condition of problematization for his students. Some of his questions were too closed-ended and he seemed impatient to get a quick response from the students and reach a conclusion. So,he weakened a key-element of constructivist teaching: confidence in students' personal and collaborative work and students' correspondence (Fosnot, 2013).

Based on the aforementioned observation, we strongly propose "the need for history teachers to be educated in order to deal with the important concepts which history, as a school subject, provides nowadays; teachers should be trained to see themselves as active agents of historical development in order to shape a conscious path for their students' lives" (Mamoura, 2013, p. 56). We also agree with Yilmaz, that "if the teacher has not yet built a strong sense of why history is taught, he or she is unlikely to make reasoned and informed decisions about planning […] and instruction" (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 40). Subsequently, educational research needs to focus more on the dynamics of the processes and negotiations through which educational theory and educational identity are constructed and transformed –and in particular the history teacher (Sachs, 2001)– rather than to be limited to static recordings of their perceptions and practices or in attempts to improve practices, when it has not firstly been sought where these perceptions come from and why they are what they are (Mamoura, 2018, p. 14). The focus on history teachers' identity construction could be further explored in future studies.

6. Limitations of the Research

The limitations of our research include the small size of the sample and the limited number of our teaching implementations. These, along with the qualitative characteristics of the data, do not allow for generalizability. An interesting question which arises from our research but could also constitute a limitation is the following: would the research findings be similar if the historical issue concerned the distant past (i.e. ancient Greece)? National Schism is an important issue of Greek modern history which reappears in the public debate and public Greek history. Many historians and politicians deal with it more or less scientifically, so more often than not they either utilize the National Schism as an example for contemporary issues or they result in anachronisms. Thus, we believe that some students are inevitably influenced by and led to anachronisms or presentism. Another issue, which came up and needs further investigation, is the fact that students seem to be more susceptible to character focalization. While it surely reflects students' low competence on critical thinking, perhaps it also suggests how complex it can be for students to read primary sources. We believe that our study poses important questions concerning the challenges of teaching historical thinking but also provides significant indicators about the ways history teachers could be empoweredto foster students' historical thinking.

7. References

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