



Developing Historical Awareness in Elementary Teacher Education: A Narrative Literature Review from a Meaning-Making Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines the development of historical awareness in elementary teacher education through a meaning-making perspective. Responding to ongoing concerns about the limited relevance of history learning and the dominance of memorization-based approaches, this study employs a narrative and interpretive literature review to synthesize international research in history education. Historical awareness is conceptualized as a dynamic process involving sensitivity to the past, understanding the past, and self-representation in relation to history, each supported by specific meaning-making processes. The findings reveal three interconnected dimensions of historical meaning-making: experiencing historical temporality to cultivate sensitivity to the past, interpreting historical material through inquiry, narrative, and perspective-taking to develop understanding, and orienting toward practical life to construct historical presence and identity. The synthesis demonstrates that historical awareness emerges not as a linear set of competencies but as an integrative process shaped by cognitive, affective, cultural, and ethical engagement with the past. This study highlights the importance of pedagogical approaches that foreground reflection, personal connection, and ethical deliberation in history learning. The article concludes by emphasizing the relevance of meaning-making-oriented history education for preparing prospective elementary teachers to foster reflective and meaningful historical learning in schools.

Introduction

In recent years, history education research has increasingly focused on the challenge of making school history more relevant and meaningful for learners (Haydn & Stephen, 2021; L. S. Levstik & Barton, 2022; Marcus et al., 2018). This concern has become particularly urgent in the context of globalization, rapid technological change, and cultural exchange, which profoundly affect how young people perceive values, identity, and the past (Mohiuddin, 2023; Zalli, 2024; Zhang, 2019). The growing international attention to this issue was reflected in the 2019 EuroClio Annual Conference, Bringing History to Life, where history educators and researchers discussed how history teaching can better engage students and support meaningful learning. These discussions highlight a shared recognition that traditional approaches to history education often fail to connect historical knowledge with students' lived experiences and contemporary realities.

A substantial body of research indicates that many students struggle to recognize the value of school history and its relevance to their lives. Studies show that learners frequently perceive history as disconnected from their personal and social realities, leading to disengagement and low motivation (Hargreaves et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022; Teravainen-Goff, 2025). While some students may acknowledge an interest in historical topics,

they often feel alienated by instructional practices that emphasize memorization rather than understanding and reflection (Andresen et al., 2020; Firmansyah & Atmaja, 2025). This problem is particularly concerning in societies facing value disruption and identity challenges, where history education holds significant potential to support national identity, cultural awareness, and civic responsibility.

In response to these challenges, constructivist pedagogical approaches have gained prominence in history education over the past decades. Such approaches conceptualize history learning as a process of inquiry, interpretation, and reflection rather than the passive acquisition of factual knowledge (Frank & Stanzus, 2019; Siregar, 2025). From this perspective, history education aims to develop learners' ability to critically examine historical sources, understand how historical knowledge is produced and contested, and reflect on the ways in which the past shapes the present and future (Barsch, 2025; Nokes, 2022). Through this process, students are positioned not only as recipients of historical narratives but also as active meaning-makers and participants in ongoing historical processes.

Alongside these pedagogical developments, history education scholars have introduced a wide range of conceptual frameworks to support more meaningful learning, including historical thinking, historical understanding, historical reasoning, historical literacy, historical empathy, historical agency, historical identity, and historical consciousness. Although these concepts often overlap in scope and implication, they collectively signal a shift away from rote learning toward deeper engagement with historical meaning. Among these frameworks, historical consciousness has emerged as a particularly influential concept for understanding how individuals relate the past, present, and future in making sense of their lives and social worlds.

Historical consciousness is commonly understood as the process through which individuals interpret temporal relationships in order to position themselves historically (Clark & Grever, 2018; Seixas, 2017a, 2017b). Rooted in traditions such as idealism, historicism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology, this concept frames history as a form of lived experience rather than a fixed body of knowledge. Initially developed by scholars in West Germany during the 1960s and 1970s, historical consciousness gained wider attention in educational research from the 1980s onward, particularly through large-scale cross-cultural studies of young people's historical meaning-making (Cummins & Hennig, 2025; Popa, 2022). By the late 1990s and early 2000s, it had become a central concept in international history education scholarship.

Despite its growing influence, translating historical consciousness from theory into classroom practice remains a significant challenge. In response to increasing demands for measurable learning outcomes, many education systems have adopted competency-based models that operationalize historical awareness into discrete skills and cognitive processes. These models emphasize higher-order thinking skills such as source analysis, historical inquiry, narrative construction, and multiperspectivity, and have been widely developed in countries such as Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden (Duquette, 2015; Körber & Meyer-Hamme, 2015). While these frameworks offer valuable tools for curriculum design and assessment, they often prioritize cognitive development and risk overlooking the broader social, cultural, and contextual dimensions of historical meaning-making.

This limitation is particularly relevant in the context of elementary teacher education. As future educators and early agents of historical and value formation, elementary school teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' historical awareness, identity, and moral understanding. However, history learning in teacher education programs frequently remains dominated by content transmission and memorization, limiting opportunities for reflective and meaningful engagement with the past. Therefore, rather than offering a comprehensive review of the field,

this article seeks to explore historical consciousness through a meaning-making perspective. By synthesizing insights from existing literature, it aims to propose a more actionable and educationally grounded conceptualization of historical consciousness that is relevant for the development of historical awareness in elementary teacher education.

Methods

This study employed a narrative and interpretive literature review design to examine the development of historical awareness in elementary teacher education through a meaning making perspective. This design was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was not to test an intervention or measure learning outcomes statistically, but to synthesize conceptual, theoretical, and empirical discussions on how historical awareness is formed through learners' engagement with the past. In this review, historical consciousness is defined as the tendency to engage with the past in ways that render past human experiences meaningful for the self. This disposition is understood through three interrelated capacities, namely sensitivity to the past, understanding the past, and self representation in relation to history. Each capacity corresponds to a specific meaning making process, namely experiencing historical temporality, interpreting historical material, and orienting oneself to practical life through history. This conceptualization draws primarily on the work of Carrasco and Serrano (2022) and is informed by perspectives on global and historical awareness proposed by Mansilla and Gardner (2007), as well as neuropsychological views of consciousness as an integrated cognitive affective process (Damasio & Meyer, 2009). Rather than engaging extensively with theoretical typologies of historical consciousness, this review prioritizes its pedagogical relevance and practical implications for learning as a continuous, situated, and socially mediated process of meaning making.

Based on this framework, the review was guided by the central question of how students can cultivate historical awareness through the study of history. This question was further elaborated through sub questions addressing the nature of sensitivity to the past, understanding of the past, and self representation in relation to history, as well as the processes through which historical temporality, interpretation, and practical orientation foster these capacities. To address these questions comprehensively, the review included conceptual, theoretical, and empirical studies from history education and related disciplines, including psychology, sociocultural studies, cognitive science, and critical theory. Learning was approached broadly as meaning making, drawing on Jarvis's (2018) holistic conception of learning as a lifelong transformation of experience that integrates cognitive, emotional, and practical dimensions. Accordingly, historical consciousness was not treated as a linear progression toward predefined competencies, but as a dynamic process shaped by individuals' ongoing engagement with social practices, cultural tools, and systems of meaning both inside and outside the classroom.

The literature search was conducted using ERIC and Google Scholar to identify relevant works in history education and related fields. A combination of keywords related to history education and historical meaning making was employed, including history education, historical awareness, historical consciousness, historical thinking, historical reasoning, historical identity, historical empathy, historical temporality, historical narrative, historical meaning, and teacher education. The review included peer reviewed journal articles, academic books, book chapters, and conference proceedings written in English. Both foundational and recent works were included because the study required engagement with classical theoretical sources as well as current developments in history education research. Therefore, the reviewed literature covered publications from 1998 to 2025.

The inclusion criteria consisted of studies that directly addressed historical awareness, historical consciousness, historical thinking, historical reasoning, historical empathy, historical identity, narrative interpretation, meaning making, or pedagogical approaches to history education. Studies were also included when they provided theoretical or empirical insight into how learners interpret the past, connect historical knowledge with identity, or use history to understand present and future life. The exclusion criteria included practitioner oriented materials, dissertations, non peer reviewed sources, and works that were not directly related to history education or historical meaning making. To make the literature selection process more transparent, the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, representative source selection, and final synthesis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Literature Selection Process

Selection Stage	Procedure	Number of Publications	Decision
Identification	Literature was identified through ERIC and Google Scholar using relevant keywords on history education and historical meaning making.	187	Included for initial screening
Title and abstract screening	Publications were screened based on relevance to historical awareness and history education.	187	Screened for relevance
Eligibility assessment	Full texts were reviewed for conceptual fit and contribution to the review focus.	100	Retained as core studies
Representative source selection	Key sources were selected from the 100 core studies.	25	Presented in the literature review matrix
Final synthesis	Core studies were analyzed through thematic analysis.	100 core studies	Used for interpretive synthesis

An iterative screening process was conducted through title, abstract, and full text review. The initial search identified 187 relevant publications. After screening for relevance, conceptual fit, and contribution to the focus of the review, 100 core studies were retained for interpretive synthesis. From these core studies, 25 representative sources were selected and presented in the literature review matrix in the Results and Discussion section. These 25 sources were not intended to replace the full body of literature reviewed, but to demonstrate the most relevant conceptual and pedagogical foundations that informed the thematic synthesis.

The selected literature was analyzed through thematic analysis. The analysis involved repeated reading, coding, comparison, and abstraction of key ideas across the reviewed sources. The coding process focused on concepts related to the three meaning making capacities underpinning historical awareness, namely sensitivity to the past, understanding the past, and self representation in relation to history. Codes were then compared and grouped into broader thematic categories. This process resulted in three main themes and related subthemes, namely experiencing historical temporality as the foundation of sensitivity to the past, interpreting historical material through inquiry, narrative, and perspective taking, and building historical presence through identity, ethical reflection, and orientation toward practical life. The theme

of personal connection, familiarity, and care was treated as a related subtheme that bridges sensitivity to the past and ethical engagement with history.

This analytical procedure allowed the review to synthesize historical awareness not as a fixed set of cognitive competencies, but as an integrative process shaped by cognitive, affective, cultural, and ethical dimensions of learning. In this way, the method was aligned with the purpose of the article, which is to develop a pedagogically meaningful understanding of historical awareness for elementary teacher education.

Results and Discussion

The literature synthesis in this study was developed from 100 core studies selected from 187 relevant publications identified through ERIC and Google Scholar. To strengthen the transparency of the review process, 25 representative sources were selected and organized into a literature review matrix. These sources were chosen because they directly address the conceptual and pedagogical foundations of historical awareness, historical consciousness, historical thinking, historical reasoning, narrative interpretation, historical empathy, ethical engagement, and teacher education. The matrix does not represent all sources analyzed in the review, but it presents the most relevant studies that informed the thematic synthesis.

Table 2. Literature Review Matrix on Historical Awareness and Meaning Making in History SEducation

No.	Authors	Article or Book Title	Main Focus
1	Popa, 2022	Operationalizing Historical Consciousness: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature on Meaning Making in Historical Learning	Historical consciousness and meaning making
2	Clark & Grever, 2018	Historical Consciousness: Conceptualizations and Educational Applications	Historical consciousness and educational application
3	Seixas, 2017a	A Model of Historical Thinking	Historical thinking
4	Seixas, 2017b	Historical Consciousness and Historical Thinking	Historical consciousness and historical thinking
5	Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2018	Historical Reasoning: Conceptualizations and Educational Applications	Historical reasoning
6	Carrasco & Serrano, 2022	The Origin and Development of Research into Historical Thinking	Development of historical thinking research
7	Nokes, 2022	Building Students' Historical Literacies: Learning to Read and Reason With Historical Texts and Evidence	Historical literacy and evidence based reasoning
8	Levstik & Barton, 2022	Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools	Inquiry based history learning for children
9	Levstik & Barton, 2008	Researching History Education: Theory, Methods, and Context	Sociocultural research in history education

10	Wineburg, 2001	Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past	Historical thinking and temporal distance
11	Lowenthal, 2015	The Past Is a Foreign Country Revisited	Historical distance, memory, and heritage
12	Duquette, 2015	Relating Historical Consciousness to Historical Thinking through Assessment	Historical consciousness and assessment
13	Körber & Meyer Hamme, 2015	Historical Thinking, Competencies, and Their Measurement: Challenges and Approaches	Historical thinking competencies
14	Nitsche et al., 2022	Narrative Competence and Epistemological Beliefs of German Swiss Prospective History Teachers: A Situated Relationship	Narrative competence and prospective teachers
15	Karn, 2023	Historical Empathy: A Cognitive Affective Theory for History Education in Canada	Historical empathy
16	Miles & Gibson, 2022	Rethinking Presentism in History Education	Presentism and history education
17	Ammert et al., 2017	Bridging Historical Consciousness and Moral Consciousness: Promises and Challenges	Historical and moral consciousness
18	Stoddard, 2022	Difficult Knowledge and History Education	Difficult history and ethical reflection
19	Keynes, 2021	Engaging Transitional Justice in Australian History Curriculum: Times, Temporalities and Historical Thinking	Historical temporality and justice
20	Zanazanian, 2017	Teaching History for Narrative Space and Vitality: Historical Consciousness, Templates, and English Speaking Quebec	Historical consciousness and narrative identity
21	Jarvis, 2018	Learning to Be a Person in Society	Holistic learning and experience
22	Haydn & Stephen, 2021	Learning to Teach History in the Secondary School: A Companion to School Experience	History teacher education
23	Marcus et al., 2018	Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies	Media and meaningful history learning
24	Ashton et al., 2020	Making Histories	Public history and everyday historical practices
25	Nordgren, 2022	History Curriculum in the Anthropocene: How Should We Tell the Story?	History curriculum and future orientation

Experiencing Historical Temporality as the Foundation of Sensitivity to the Past

The synthesis of the literature reveals that sensitivity to the past is fundamentally rooted in learners' experiences of historical temporality. Unlike objects of study in other disciplines, the past cannot be directly observed, revisited, or experimentally manipulated. Its reality exists

beyond immediate experience and is accessible only through traces, records, representations, and memories that persist in the present. These traces are embedded in material artifacts, bodily memories, cultural practices, language, institutions, and symbolic representations such as textbooks, museums, and public monuments. Consequently, historical learning begins with encounters that are mediated rather than direct, requiring learners to navigate temporal distance while constructing meaning from what remains.

A recurring theme across the literature is the tension inherent in encountering the past. Wineburg (2001) conceptualizes this tension as an oscillation between familiarity and strangeness, where learners simultaneously experience the past as recognizable and alien. This duality is echoed in Lowenthal's (2015) distinction between hindsight and familiarity: hindsight acknowledges the epistemic distance and interpretive instability of historical knowledge, while familiarity enables recognition of shared references and continuities with the present. The reviewed studies consistently suggest that meaningful engagement with the past depends on learners' ability to negotiate this tension rather than resolve it. Sensitivity to the past, therefore, is not achieved by collapsing distance or insisting on detachment, but by sustaining a productive awareness of temporal difference.

Chronological understanding has traditionally been regarded as a core component of historical temporality. Research examining students' chronological reasoning emphasizes skills such as sequencing events, identifying periods, recognizing change and continuity, and situating people and phenomena within broader temporal frameworks (Dawson, 2019). However, empirical findings complicate simplistic assumptions about chronological competence. Hodkinson (2024), for example, demonstrates that abstract temporal terms such as "long ago" or "the past" can generate confusion among students, leading to calls for explicit instruction in historical time vocabulary and dating conventions. In contrast, Levstik & Barton (2008) sociocultural research illustrates that even young learners can reason meaningfully about historical time using subjective and culturally grounded temporal markers.

These contrasting findings suggest that chronological understanding should not be viewed as a uniform cognitive achievement measured solely against disciplinary standards. Instead, it emerges through interaction between formal instruction and learners' everyday experiences of time. Students often draw on family narratives, popular culture, religious traditions, and media representations to situate historical images and stories. Phrases such as "when cowboys were around" or "like in *Little House on the Prairie*" function as culturally shared reference points that enable temporal reasoning even in the absence of formal dating systems. From this perspective, sensitivity to historical time is less about mastering abstract chronology and more about participating in what Levstik & Barton (2008) describe as a "historical community."

Beyond sequencing and dating, understanding historical temporality also involves grasping concepts of change, continuity, and contingency. Research conducted in the British context reveals that students frequently misinterpret historical change by projecting everyday assumptions onto past societies (Blown & Bryce, 2013). Learners may attribute historical outcomes to intentional progress or moral improvement, overlooking unintended consequences and structural constraints. To address this issue, scholars advocate explicit engagement with second-order temporal concepts, arguing that conceptual progression is necessary for deeper historical understanding (Carroll, 2019; Crooks, 2023; Keynes, 2021; Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2018). Yet, sociocultural approaches caution against treating these concepts as purely cognitive tools detached from lived experience.

Another strand of research highlights the role of temporal frames of reference in supporting historical understanding. Temporal frames often described as "big pictures," overviews, or

narrative schemata provide orientation by linking specific events to broader historical trajectories (Popa, 2022). Empirical studies indicate that students rarely activate such frames spontaneously and often struggle to connect past events to present concerns or future implications (Duquette, 2015). Instructional approaches that emphasize imaginative and associative frameworks, incorporating narrative cues and evocative descriptions, have been shown to support students in constructing more integrated temporal understandings (Larison, 2018; Rose & Johnson, 2025). These findings suggest that sensitivity to the past is fostered when learners perceive history as an interconnected temporal landscape rather than a collection of isolated facts.

Taken together, the literature indicates that experiencing historical temporality involves a dynamic negotiation between distance and proximity, abstraction and familiarity, and cognitive understanding and cultural participation. Sensitivity to the past emerges not as a linear developmental achievement but as an ongoing meaning-making process shaped by learners' interactions with temporal representations, cultural tools, and social contexts.

Personal Connection, Familiarity, and Care as Dimensions of Historical Meaning-Making

While much scholarship emphasizes temporal distance as a defining feature of historical understanding, another substantial body of literature foregrounds the importance of personal connection in making the past meaningful. This perspective challenges the assumption that emotional engagement necessarily undermines historical rigor by fostering presentism or anachronism. Instead, it conceptualizes connection as a form of familiarity that enables learners to recognize the humanity of past actors while maintaining awareness of temporal difference.

Large-scale survey studies provide compelling evidence that individuals frequently engage with the past through everyday activities outside formal education. Research conducted in Australia, Canada, and the United States demonstrates that people regularly visit museums, watch historical films, research family histories, preserve heirlooms, and participate in commemorative practices (Ashton et al., 2020). These activities contribute to what researchers describe as “history-making practices,” through which the past becomes integrated into present identities and concerns. Importantly, such engagements highlight that historical meaning-making is not confined to academic settings but is deeply embedded in social and cultural life.

Within educational contexts, experiential and inquiry-based approaches have been shown to foster similar forms of connection. Henderson et al (2019) study of an archaeology-based curriculum illustrates how object-centered learning can motivate students and stimulate historical imagination. Handling artifacts, participating in fieldwork, and engaging in speculative interpretation allowed students to experience discovery, uncertainty, and curiosity elements often absent from textbook-based instruction. Such practices align with Popa (2022) emphasis on historical imagination as a pedagogical resource that bridges empirical inquiry and creative reconstruction.

Closely linked to personal connection is the concept of care, which has been theorized as both an affective tool and an ontological orientation in history education (Karn, 2023). Care involves emotional engagement with past lives, concern for historical injustices, and ethical reflection on the moral implications of historical knowledge. From a sociocultural perspective, care functions as a mediating tool that enables learners to form affective bonds with historical content. From a philosophical perspective, it represents an existential stance that recognizes the moral claims of the past upon the present.

Empirical research suggests that cultivating care can enhance both motivation and ethical engagement. Mujtaba et al (2018) observed that students who were allowed to explore personally meaningful topics exhibited heightened emotional responses and sustained interest in historical inquiry. Similarly, studies on teaching controversial and sensitive issues indicate that engaging students' moral emotions can deepen reflection on historical responsibility and justice (Ammert et al., 2017). Practices such as oral history provide particularly powerful opportunities for fostering care by enabling students to encounter lived experiences through voice, memory, and testimony (Llewellyn, 2022).

Importantly, care does not imply uncritical identification or moral relativism. Rather, it creates conditions for ethical deliberation by encouraging learners to grapple with difficult questions about responsibility, suffering, and remembrance. As Stoddard (2022) argues, engaging with traumatic histories demands a form of learning that acknowledges pain and loss while resisting closure or simplification. In this sense, care becomes a pathway to democratic deliberation, enabling learners to reflect on how historical knowledge informs present action and collective responsibility.

Interpreting the Past Through Inquiry, Narrative, and Perspective

While sensitivity and connection provide the affective and experiential foundation for historical meaning-making, interpretation plays a central role in transforming encounters with the past into communicable understanding. Interpretation involves organizing traces and records into coherent representations that explain what happened, why it happened, and why it matters. Across the reviewed literature, interpretation is conceptualized not merely as a cognitive skill but as a socially situated practice shaped by habits of mind, cultural tools, and epistemological beliefs.

From a disciplinary perspective, history education has often been framed as training students to think like historians. This approach emphasizes inquiry-based reasoning, including sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, and argumentation (Lehtinen, 2025). Such frameworks have contributed significantly to clarifying the components of historical reasoning and informing instructional design. However, critics argue that an exclusive focus on disciplinary norms risks marginalizing learners' everyday reasoning and cultural resources (Warren et al., 2020).

Sociocultural approaches offer a complementary perspective by conceptualizing history as a set of intersecting domains characterized by semiotic practices (Levstik & Barton, 2008). From this standpoint, historical understanding emerges through participation in meaning-making practices that extend beyond academic inquiry. Inquiry, therefore, involves not only formal analysis of sources but also engagement with narratives, images, and discourses encountered in everyday life. Research on epistemological beliefs supports this view by demonstrating that students' assumptions about the nature of historical knowledge shape their interpretive strategies (Nokes, 2022).

Narrative emerges as a particularly powerful habit of mind for organizing historical meaning. Drawing on narrative psychology and philosophy of history, scholars argue that narrative is a fundamental mode of human sense-making that structures experience temporally and causally (Andersen et al., 2020). Empirical studies suggest that students possess greater narrative competence than is often acknowledged and are capable of critically reflecting on the constructed nature of historical narratives (Nitsche et al., 2022). Moreover, sociocultural analyses highlight that historical interpretation involves negotiating multiple narratives encountered in textbooks, family stories, media, and public memory (Nokes, 2022).

This negotiation process is central to meaning-making. Understanding history does not involve identifying a single authoritative narrative but engaging creatively and responsibly with a “confusing series of stories.” Roth (2021) distinction between specific narratives and schematic narrative templates further illustrates how cultural frameworks shape historical interpretation. Students may know an official narrative without believing it, or believe an alternative narrative without fully understanding it, highlighting the complex relationship between cognition, identity, and narrative belief.

Perspective-taking, often conceptualized through historical empathy, represents another crucial interpretive habit of mind. Early models emphasized empathy as a rational explanatory skill grounded in contextual knowledge (Yokuş, 2022). More recent research, however, conceptualizes historical empathy as a fluid process integrating cognitive, affective, moral, and social dimensions (Karn, 2023). Studies demonstrate that imaginative engagement and emotional connection do not necessarily lead to fantasy or presentism, but can motivate deeper contextualization and ethical reflection (Miles & Gibson, 2022).

Importantly, historical empathy also involves recognizing one’s own positionality. Hermeneutical perspectives emphasize that understanding the past is shaped by learners’ historically situated perspectives, which cannot and should not be suspended (Wadhvani, 2023). Rather than striving for neutrality, students are encouraged to engage in dialogical exchange with historical texts, reflecting on how their own assumptions shape interpretation. This approach reframes empathy not as adopting another’s perspective, but as recognizing and negotiating perspectives in conversation with the past.

Building a Sense of Historical Presence and Self-Representation

The final theme emerging from the literature concerns the cultivation of a sense of historical presence, understood as learners’ ability to represent themselves as historical beings embedded within ongoing temporal processes. This theme shifts the focus from historical knowledge and skills to questions of identity, orientation, and being. Historical presence involves recognizing oneself as both shaped by history and capable of shaping it.

Drawing on Rüsen’s theory of historical consciousness, scholars argue that historical meaning-making encompasses both epistemological and ontological dimensions (Clark & Grever, 2018; Seixas, 2017b). Orientation in practical life requires not only understanding past events but situating oneself within temporal continuities and discontinuities. This sense of orientation supports identity formation and ethical agency, enabling learners to navigate present challenges with historical awareness.

Research on historical positionality highlights the importance of acknowledging students’ culturally mediated memories, identities, and experiences in history education. Teachers who engage students’ positionalities through questioning, listening, and contextual investigation can foster learning environments that value reflection and dialogue. Empirical studies demonstrate that such approaches promote both cognitive growth and personal development by encouraging learners to interrogate how their perspectives evolve through historical inquiry.

Collective memory and popular culture also play a significant role in shaping historical presence. Wineburg et al (2018) show that intergenerational narratives and media representations exert powerful influence on how students perceive themselves as historical beings. These findings challenge rigid distinctions between curriculum knowledge and everyday memory, suggesting the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that integrates students’ lived experiences with academic history.

Research on heritage and identity further underscores the importance of enabling learners to connect national and global histories with local and personal narratives (Clark & Grever, 2018; Peck et al., 2024). Studies involving students from diverse cultural backgrounds reveal that inclusion of family histories and heritage fosters rigorous historical thinking alongside ethical reflection (Zanazanian, 2017). Such approaches allow students to negotiate pride, shame, silence, and responsibility within historical legacies.

Models such as Nordgren's (2022) concept of historical use and Hiryanto's (2017) pragmatic pedagogical approaches demonstrate how history education can support orientation toward contemporary issues and future action. These frameworks emphasize history as a communicative and practical resource used to explain the world, shape identity, and exert influence. Collectively, the literature suggests that cultivating historical presence enables learners not only to interpret the past but to situate themselves meaningfully within historical continuities for the purpose of ethical and civic engagement.

Conclusion

This literature review demonstrates that historical awareness is best understood as a dynamic and integrative process of meaning-making that involves experiencing historical temporality, interpreting historical material, and orienting oneself toward practical life through history. Rather than functioning as a linear set of cognitive competencies, historical awareness emerges through the interaction of cognitive, affective, cultural, and ethical dimensions of learning. The synthesis of research highlights that sensitivity to the past is cultivated through negotiating temporal distance and familiarity, understanding the past is developed through inquiry, narrative, and perspective-taking, and self-representation is formed through recognizing oneself as a historical being embedded in ongoing social and temporal processes. Collectively, these dimensions emphasize that history education should move beyond memorization and narrow skill-based models toward pedagogical approaches that support reflection, personal connection, ethical engagement, and identity formation, particularly within the context of elementary teacher education.

Based on these findings, future research and educational practice should focus on designing learning environments that intentionally support historical meaning-making rather than solely measuring historical competencies. Empirical studies are needed to examine how meaning-making-oriented pedagogies can be effectively implemented in teacher education programs and how they influence prospective teachers' pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices. For educators, this review suggests the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds, everyday historical experiences, and ethical concerns into history learning through inquiry-based, narrative, and dialogic approaches. By foregrounding historical awareness as a process of becoming rather than merely knowing, history education can better prepare future teachers to foster meaningful, reflective, and socially responsive historical learning in elementary classrooms.

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