

Historical Thinking in Schools in Sweden and Canada

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The aim of my report is to provide an overview of the purposes, activities and outcomes of my visit to Malmö University to work with Dr. Per Eliasson, Associate Professor of History, and three of his Ph.D. students in history didactics, David Rosenlund, Joel Rudnert and Fredrik Alven. This visit was generously funded by the Visiting Doctoral Student Program of The History Education Network/Histoire et éducation en réseau (THEN/HiER).

Purpose of Visit

In the statement of purpose for my Visiting Doctoral Student Program application I stated that during my ten-day visit to Malmö University I planned on attending a seminar organized by Dr. Eliasson, engaging in a variety of other formal and informal conversations with Dr. Eliasson and the other Ph.D. students about their experiences developing the National Test in history for Grade 9 students in Sweden, presenting my dissertation research proposal to Swedish history educators, and finally learning more about Swedish history and history education by visiting schools, talking with teachers, and visiting other Swedish cultural and historical institutions.

I hoped that my visit to Malmö University would improve my understanding and conceptualization of historical thinking, further develop and improve my dissertation proposal, add to my knowledge and understanding of history education in a different context, and finally, strengthen the relationship between Canadian and Swedish history educators who in many ways are pursuing similar research and reform goals.

Activities in Malmö

I arrived in Malmö, Sweden by train from Copenhagen, Denmark on the afternoon of Monday August 20, 2012. Much to my surprise, Malmö was a very busy place upon my arrival, as Scandinavia's biggest festival, the week-long Malmö Festivalen, began on August 17. Every August since 1985, the Malmö Festivalen takes place in the heart of the city where 1.4 million visitors per year encounter art, music, culture and a variety of food that reflects the intercultural makeup of Malmö.



Beyond the Malmö Festivalen I engaged in a variety of other activities during my visit. I visited the Malmö Museer (Malmö Museum) that includes a variety of different museums including the Malmöhus Castle, the Antiquity and Middle Ages Collection, and the Science and Maritime House.

The Malmöhus Castle was originally built as a minor citadel in 1434 by Erik of Pomerania, king of the Kalmar Union which united Norway, Sweden and Denmark under a single monarch. In the 16th century King Christian III of Denmark and Norway rebuilt the castle as a modern defensive fortress and the home of the Governors of Malmöhus County. Denmark's money was coined here during the Middle Ages, Crown Prince Frederick of Denmark held wild parties here in the 16th century, and the castle served as a prison during the 19th century where several prisoners were decapitated in the courtyard.



Several times between August 21 and 26 I met with David, Joel and Fredrik (Ph.D. students in history education) at Malmö University and also at other locations in the city, including at David's house where I was invited to enjoy a meal with his family. All three students are part of the team led by Dr. Per Eliasson, and are tasked with designing the Swedish National History Test for grade 9 students. This exam aims to assess students' understanding of the curriculum content as well as their ability to think historically. Throughout our conversations we discussed a variety of topics including the differences between historical thinking and historical consciousness, the difficulties of assessing historical thinking for different types of test questions and constructs, similarities and differences between Ph.D. programs in history education at Swedish and Canadian universities, as well as the recent history curriculum revisions that have been adopted in Swedish schools.

The main purposes of my visit were two seminar presentations organized by David Rosenlund that I delivered at Malmö University on August 27 and 28. Preparations for the presentations occupied considerable amounts of time in the days prior as I tried to do my best to make these presentations relevant and clear for the two completely different audiences that I was presenting to.



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My first presentation on Monday August 27 from 4:15 to 6:00 pm was called "Introduction to the Historical Thinking Project." The audience included history teachers from schools in two Swedish cities, Malmö and Linköping, as well as history educators and graduate students from Malmö University. In the presentation I provided a brief history of the Historical Thinking Project, introduced the six historical thinking concepts included in the HTP framework, discussed potential classroom assessment activities for each concept, and concluded by outlining the successes and limitations of the HTP thus far.



After the presentation Per took four teachers from Linköping involved in piloting the Swedish National Test, as well as David and me, out for dinner at a traditional Swedish smorgasbord restaurant. The food was outstanding and the discussion revolved around the difficulties Swedish history teachers face in their schools, as well as Per's beliefs about the importance of the uses of history as a concept that should be included in any history curriculum and evaluated on any major history assessment.

My second presentation on Tuesday August 28 from 1:15 to 3:15 pm was geared to a more academic audience than the previous day's presentation. The audience included Joel, David, Fredrik and Per from Malmö University as well as Dr. Johan Samuelsson from Karlstad University, Dr. Niklas Ammert from Linne University, and Dr. Henrik Rosengren from Lund University. My presentation, titled "Understanding Teachers' and Students' Ethical Judgments in Secondary School History Classes," aimed to present my dissertation research proposal to a group of academics with the purpose of getting feedback on how to improve it methodologically and conceptually. In July I completed the first draft of my Ph.D. dissertation and submitted it to my committee for review. At this time I also sent it to David and Per so that they could disseminate it to the other scholars who were attending the presentation. In the first part of the presentation I highlighted the key aspects of the dissertation for a little over an hour, and then we had a roundtable discussion about its strengths and weaknesses as well as a general conversation about other theoretical issues in history education research. I left

Malmö early in the morning on August 29, 2012 aboard a train to Copenhagen Airport where I then flew home to Kelowna.

Outcomes of my visit

My visit to Malmö University was a great success for a number of reasons. Firstly, it improved my knowledge, understanding and conceptualization of historical thinking. Swedish history education researchers and scholars are greatly influenced by two traditions of history education literature, the German school focused on history didactics and historical consciousness and the British and North American tradition (which the Swedish label as Anglo-Saxon research) that is focused more on teachers' and students' historical thinking. The conversations and readings that I conducted while there increased my understanding of historical consciousness, especially Per Eliasson's interpretation of the purpose of historical consciousness which focuses on students' ability to think about the past, relate it to the present, and use it to guide action in the future.

My visit also improved the development of my dissertation proposal. Going through the process of preparing a presentation on my proposal increased the clarity of my research questions, my procedures and the data collection process. Furthermore, attendees at my presentation offered several suggestions that will improve all aspects of the proposal including readings for the literature review, and the quality of the instruments I am going to use.

Perhaps the most important upshot of my visit to Sweden was that it strengthened the ties between history educators in both countries. History education in Canada and Sweden share many significant similarities and differences, and both countries stand to benefit a great deal from sharing their respective research, theories and practices. We have much to learn from the experiences and findings from the Swedish National Tests in grade 6 and 9, Swedish teacher training, the Licentiate Ph.D. program in history education for practicing teachers, and the history curriculum revision that was just completed. Swedish history educators are interested in many aspects of our work on "historical thinking," including the Historical Thinking Project's approach to systemic change, and our insights on assessing historical thinking. Three Swedish teachers attended the July 2012 Historical Thinking Project Summer Institute, and the National Test researchers at Malmö University are interested in doing a course with Dr. Peter Seixas at UBC's Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness. Per Eliasson also discussed the possibility of me coming back to Malmö in the upcoming years to teach a summer course in historical thinking for teachers and graduate students.



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Thank-you,

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