



## Source criticism in the classroom: An empiricist straitjacket on pupils' historical thinking?

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**Abstract:** The concept of source criticism has long had a central role in Swedish history curricula. In this essay, the concept is analysed in three contexts. First, a growing epistemological discrepancy is identified over time with regard to the ways in which the aim of history teaching and the use of source criticism is set down in school curricula. The aim of teaching history has changed towards a more post-structuralist approach, while the concept of source criticism is still described from a more empiricist, epistemological stance. In a second context, Swedish history textbooks are found to use the concept of source criticism in an empiricist, epistemological way. In a third context, upper secondary pupils seem to be confused, navigating between two incompatible epistemological views of historical knowledge. The essay ends with a discussion on how to convert the use of source criticism - from the strait jacket it seems to put on pupils historical thinking, to the necessary and helpful tool it should be.

**Keywords:** History education; source criticism, epistemology; evidence.

### Introduction

Introducing pupils to historical sources is important according to history education scholars. The value of such an enterprise is said to be that historical sources are the foundation on which historical knowledge is built; without them, no history. Teachers report that it can be a fruitful enterprise, and one that is rewarding for pupils, but equally it can be a troublesome and frustrating process for everyone involved (Barton 2005, 750). This essay addresses some problems that arise when sources are used in Swedish classrooms, discussed mainly in relation to the Swedish upper secondary school, but applicable to compulsory school as well.

In a history assignment developed on the behalf of the Swedish National Agency for Education, pupils in upper secondary schools were asked to draw conclusions, based on historical sources, about the consequences of the Industrial Revolution. In an answer to this assignment, one pupil evaluated a paragraph from the *Communist Manifesto*; 'The source is not trustworthy according to the tendency criteria, since it is written from a communist perspective. The source is from the *Communist Manifesto*. Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels have written it in a way that makes capitalism look bad. They are not neutral.' In the conclusion the pupil, referring to the *Manifesto*, claims that: 'The process of industrialization was not good for the working class since conditions were bad in the factories.' This is

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interesting since the pupil first dismisses the source, stating that it is biased and thus not trustworthy, but then goes on to use it to draw conclusions about the situation of the working classes during the Industrial Revolution. How can a source already declared untrustworthy be used to arrive at conclusions? The assumption is made that this might be a result of how pupils have been taught to use the concept of source criticism in history education; that it is taught in a manner that is contradictory to the way the subject of history is justified in curricular descriptions.

In order to address this question, the concept of source criticism will be presented and how the concept is defined in Swedish history curricula will also be described. The way the practice of source criticism is handled in history textbooks will be presented, after which a more detailed examination of pupil examples will be discussed. In a final section, possible explanations and alternatives to the present strategies will be put forward.

## **Pupils and historical sources**

The use of historical sources in the classroom has been examined from various perspectives. Of particular interest here is the research that touches on pupils' epistemic cognition in relation to sourcework in the classroom. Epistemic cognition is understood in the way it is used by Maggioni, how pupils perceive the nature of historical knowledge and how such knowledge can be justified (Maggioni, VanSledright et al. 2009, 188). This specific angle has largely been discussed from a normative and theoretical angle (Seixas 2000; Barton 2005, 747; Chapman 2011, 96–97; Lee 2011, 65). Peter Lee and Denis Shemilt (2003, 2004) have constructed empirically based progression models in which a well-developed epistemic cognition is crucial for the highest levels. A common trait among most scholars addressing issues that relate to epistemic cognition is the idea that it matters that schools move away from a history education that presents historical knowledge as objective facts; instead, they advocate that pupils are made aware of the interpretative nature of historical knowledge. The rationale for this position is that pupils, if they are given such competence, will have a greater ability to handle conflicting accounts about the past.

## **Methodology and theoretical considerations**

In order to get hold of some of the factors that can have an influence on pupils' epistemic cognition and how the concept of source criticism is used and taught in Swedish history classrooms a comparative approach is used in this study. A curricular perspective on the aim of history education and source criticism is compared with the way it is formulated in history textbooks for the Swedish upper secondary school. The curricula included in the study are from 1970, 1980, 1994 and 2011. The history textbooks are all published after the last reform of the history curriculum in 2011. The pupil responses presented in this study come from the construction of a history assignment on behalf of the Swedish agency of education. There is a geographical and socio-economic distribution in the sample of teachers and pupils participating in the construction of this assignment. The comparison between curriculum and textbooks is used as the basis for a discussion aimed at an increased understanding of the problems that may surface when pupils engage in sourcework.

In order to classify the material and clarify the discussion two ways of viewing the status of historical knowledge will be used. One where historical knowledge is regarded as objective facts - a stance very similar to an empiricist epistemology that claims that historical knowledge produced in accordance with methodological demands is a bias-free and correct reflection of the past. The historical method thus becomes a guarantee of objective

knowledge. The other view holds that historical knowledge must be seen as interpretations and that truth claims on historical knowledge is more demanding than a rigorous use of the historical method; it also involves theoretical and methodological assumptions (both conscious and unconscious) held by the historian. This view on historical knowledge is similar to a more post-structuralist view on the status of historical knowledge (Brown 2005, 16–18, 80). For the sake of clarity the two ways of understanding the nature of historical knowledge are labelled as empiricist and post-structuralist epistemological stances on historical knowledge and used as heuristic tools in the study. Even if it can be hazardous to distinguish between these two epistemological stances such a distinction is made for analytical reasons in this study.

### **Source criticism and the nature of historical knowledge**

One concept that is central when addressing historical sources is source criticism. This concept was an important part of the professionalization of the historical discipline in the early nineteenth century. In a discussion about the concept in a Swedish context, historian Arne Jarrick has outlined its historical development. As a concept it relies, Jarrick claims, on three basic assumptions: that it is possible to make true statements about the past; that it is the historian's task to make such statements; and that the testimonies on the basis of which such statements are made can be false. According to Jarrick, a source-critical procedure involves a scrutinizing attitude towards a source in order to determine whether the information it offers is true or false. In a Swedish context, he traces the source-critical criteria to the nineteenth century, when scholars dealing with historical sources started to view sources concurrent with an event as more trustworthy than other, less concurrent sources. Under the influence of Ranke and others, the second half of the nineteenth century saw Swedish historians incorporate such source-critical elements as tendency (whether a source is biased), dependency (whether a source repeats information from another source), and authenticity (whether a source is what it claims to be) into their methodology. Jarrick claims that these source-critical elements were used with some arbitrariness to begin with, something that changed at the beginning of the twentieth century under the influence of Lauritz and Curt Weibull. They advocated and gained widespread support for the strict application of the four source-critical aspects (Jarrick 2005, 2–14).

How can this description of the concept be understood epistemologically? The cornerstones of source criticism were established and developed in the era of empiricism, when history was established as a scientific discipline. This meant that a method of historical research was established that required the interrogation of historical sources. The result of historical, empiricist research is seen as a reflection of the past as it actually was. If the historical method is correctly applied to the historical sources, the truth about the past can be revealed (Gunn 2006, 5). Considering Jarrick's presentation of source criticism, it is reasonable to conclude that the concept today still can be embedded in an empiricist epistemology.

There is an ongoing debate within the historical discipline about the epistemological status of historical knowledge. The positions in the debate can be placed along a continuum with empiricists on one end and post-modernists on the other. The empiricists, clinging closely to the concept of source criticism, argue that sources can serve as direct link between the present and the past. The post-modernists on the other end of the continuum claiming that it is not possible to view sources in this way; historical knowledge is a creation of the present and all connections to the past is nothing more than a construction. In between these two positions are those that would argue that it is possible to construct true stories of the past, but that these

constructions are contingent on historians' methodological and theoretical considerations (see for example Edenheim 2010, Jarrick 2005 and Torstendahl 2005).

### **Sources in Swedish history curricula**

In what kind of epistemological environment have the subject of history and sourcework been embedded for the last fifty years or so? This is easiest to grasp by comparing the epistemology that underpins sourcework and history in the curriculum for the theoretical strands of the Swedish upper secondary school. In the curriculum of 1970, Lgy70 (Skolöverstyrelsen 1971), it is stated that the subject of history consists of a content to be mediated to pupils, and that education should give pupils a framework of facts. These facts, it is noted, should be treated with respect, and an analysis of historical events must be based on a concrete reality. Historical sources should be included as part of history education, because they help to enhance pupils' ability to make critical and nuanced evaluations of information, contexts, and problems in the past and the present, since they can help pupil distinguish between facts and opinions. The use of sources is also a way to teach pupils to objectively judge historical processes in their historical settings.

Given this, it would seem there was a congruent epistemology in both aspects of the curriculum. The call for criticism and nuance can be seen as placing historical sources in an interpretative, post-structuralist context. The clarifying formulations in the document problematize such a view. Since the curriculum stresses the existence of historical facts and relates them to opinions, it is an indication of primarily an empiricist epistemology. The formulation of objective judgements is also an indication that the curriculum is characterized by an empiricist epistemology. The general view on the subject of history is similar to the one on historical sources (Skolöverstyrelsen 1971, 287). It seems safe to conclude that the 1970 curriculum viewed the subject of history from an empiricist stance, as it does not in any way problematize the content of history education.

In 1981, a supplement to Lgy70 was issued in which the view of history as a subject had changed somewhat. The shift away from an empiricist view is evident in the instruction that biased documents and contradictory statements should not be avoided. Another indication of the shift was the section entitled 'Conceptions of history', which stressed that it can be worthwhile studying certain historical processes on the basis of different conceptions of history. There was also a section in which historical periodization was relativized (Skolöverstyrelsen 1981, 6 & 8). With regard to historical sources, there were no signs of a similar shift. The empiricist orientation was still as it was originally stated—that the source-critical aspects of authenticity, tendency, dependence, and concurrency should be illustrated in a manner so that the pupils can distinguish between historical facts and falsifications. There are thus indications that the epistemological view on history as a subject had shifted between 1970 and 1981. The 1981 curriculum recognizes history as an interpretative subject, which means that there had been a movement away from the empiricist view of history that had been prevalent in 1970; this shift, however, was not visible in the formulation about sources, which was the same as in 1970.

There was a new curriculum for upper secondary school in 1994, Lpf94 (Skolverket, 2001), in which the epistemological stance was very similar to 1981. The wording about the subject of history in 1981 is there in 1994, with its adherence to the view that there are various conceptions of history and that the past can be studied from a wide range of perspectives. The similarity between the curricula is also noticeable in relation to sources. The stated aim of the subject is said to be to enhance pupils' ability to take a critical stance towards historical sources. It is further said that pupils should develop the ability to evaluate the reliability of

historical sources. The same ambiguity as in the 1981 curriculum is thus visible in Lpf94. On the one hand, the empiricist heritage about sources is still very much there; on the other hand, the subject of history is described in a way best described as post-structuralist.

The post-structuralist approach is also represented in the curriculum issued in 2011. When defining history as a subject, it states that knowledge of different interpretations and perspectives on the past is central to historical understanding. This approach is further underscored, as it spells out that pupils should develop knowledge about events and processes from different interpretations and perspectives, and that they should develop the ability to work with historical questions from various perspectives. The historical question, and its dependency on theoretical considerations, is also given the central role, since pupils are supposed to develop 'the ability to use different historical theories and concepts to formulate, investigate, explain, and draw conclusions about historical issues from different perspectives'.<sup>1</sup>

When looking at the curriculum formulations about historical sources, though, the duality in the earlier curricula is still visible in 2011. There are indications of a movement away from empiricism. True, the empiricist approach is visible in the description of sources as having immanent properties—pupils are supposed to examine and evaluate historical sources, a formulation that is possible to interpret as meaning that sources could be evaluated in isolation, independently of any historical question. The shift away from an empiricist epistemology comes in the use of the verb 'to interpret' in relation to sources, which can be construed as meaning that it is possible to extract different kinds of information from a source, depending on the question asked. It is possible, however, to construe the use of 'to interpret' in an empiricist way as well, meaning the act of extracting information that is inherent in the source—information that corresponds directly to past reality (Skolverket 2011, 67).

It is thus possible to identify an epistemological shift from empiricism towards post-structuralism in the way the subject of history is described in Swedish curricula. The curricula from 1980 onwards all have an interpretative view on the nature of historical knowledge. They all have elements that emphasize the existence of different perspectives that have to be considered. This kind of post-structural epistemology is most obvious in the 2011 curriculum, in which the concepts of 'perspective' and 'interpretation' are used frequently. The 1971 curriculum had no post-structuralist elements of the kind evident in the three subsequent curricula. With regard to the use of historical sources, though, it is debatable whether such an epistemological movement has begun, or whether the curriculum in this case still is rooted in an empiricist tradition. The way in which sourcework is presented in the curricula indicates that the strong empiricist tradition still pertains when it comes to historical sources. Despite the shift away from empiricism in the subject in general, a corresponding shift cannot be seen when it comes to sourcework, with the possible exception of a passage in the latest curriculum.

This implies that there is an inconsistency in the curricula from 1981 and onwards. On the one hand the description of history as a subject has shifted but a similar shift in the way source criticism is described can only be glimpsed in the curriculum from 2011. A common definition of sourcework is that it is the criticism of sources as such. Sources are not explicitly placed in a context where they are used in order to construct historical knowledge. The reason this is interpreted as a part of an empiricist epistemology is that it implies that sources hold information independently of the context in which they are used.

## Sources in school history textbooks

One way of studying how a certain concept is used in an educational setting is by examining school history textbooks. In this section the approach to the concept of source criticism in some of the most popular textbooks in Sweden will be described.

The aim for historians, according to the textbook *Perspektiv på historien 1b* ('Perspectives on History 1b', Nyström et al. 2011) is to find out what actually happened by the use of source criticism. Thus, it is implied, source criticism is what pupils should expect to learn. Its central role is further underscored by the chapter on source criticism, which deals solely with sources, defining the four elements of the source-critical method in detail. Authenticity is said to highlight the need to establish whether a source is genuine or not; concurrency is presented as if it is relevant for any kind of source, but by definition it only addresses the issue of memory and there is no discussion of the ways in which it might be relevant to different kinds of sources; for dependency, it stresses the importance of dealing with first-hand information; and when discussing tendency, the argument is that tendentious sources all deliberately set out to influence the reader (Nyström et al. 2011), enforcing the view that it turns on whether the source is true or not.

In another textbook, *Samband historia* ('History Connections', Ericsson & Hansson 2009), source criticism is given a similarly central role, with a chapter of its own at the beginning of the book. In the presentation of the concept of source criticism, it is defined as a means of deciding what is true and what is false. The book goes on to state that the basic assumption in source criticism is that everyone is lying. The more detailed description of the cornerstones of source criticism is similar to the one in *Perspektiv på historien 1b*.

In a textbook named *Historia 1a1* ('History 1a1', Öhman 2010) the structure is identical to the two already described. This book is more explicit, though, about the consequences the four elements of source criticism have for the usefulness of the sources. With regard to concurrency, Öhman states that a source written long after an event is unreliable and that a contemporary source always is more reliable than a source from a later date. With regard to tendency, it states that tendentious material should not be used in historical studies. The questions of authenticity and dependency are not addressed.

The more advanced courses in Swedish upper secondary schools (years 2 and 3) are directed at the methodological and theoretical parts of the subject. In a textbook intended for these courses (Larsson et al. 2012), the role of source criticism is described as a method for deciding which sources that are useful and trustworthy, and which can be used on all sources that contain elements that can be true or false. Authenticity is not mentioned in the discussion of source criticism; dependency and concurrency are described in the same way as above; but tendency is treated in a slightly different manner. It is said that the best source is one completely free of bias. If there are tendencies in a source, this information must be compared with other sources.

There are some interesting patterns in the textbooks with regard to epistemology. All of them state that it is possible to make a useful distinction between information that represents the truth and that which does not: source criticism, rather than helping the pupil distinguish between different perspectives, exists to separate truth from falsehood. Since the textbooks signal that a source-critical evaluation of a source, correctly done, can result in a statement about what actually happened in the past, it is reasonable to label the epistemological stance in the textbooks as empiricism.

## Source criticism as an obstacle

What strategies do pupils use as they approach historical sources? Examples of such strategies presented here are taken from pupil answers to a task focusing on historical sources. The responses were collected as a part of the process of putting together material to support upper secondary teachers in their pupil assessments on behalf of the Swedish National Agency for Education. The material consists of a task for the pupils—to use a set of sources to draw conclusions about the consequences of the Industrial Revolution—accompanied by instructions for the teachers' assessments. The pupil responses are in the author's possession.

The responses show that a large proportion of the pupils use source-critical criteria in a mechanical way to evaluate the sources without regard to actual historical questions. The concurrency criterion, for example, is often interpreted as if relevance and trustworthiness automatically decreases as the temporal distance grows between an event and the time when the source was created. One pupil writes that a specific source 'has a good place in time', and that another source 'does not have a good place in time'. The latter source is problematic, according to the pupil, and 'is not so good to use, really, since it was written in 1972, 100 years after the start of the Industrial Revolution.' The source the pupil was referring to is a thesis about the spread of cholera in Sweden in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the source that was deemed trustworthy because of its temporal proximity was the excerpt from the *Communist Manifesto* mentioned earlier. This rather mechanical way is also used with reference to the other criteria. One pupil, discussing two sources in the material in terms of dependency, states that 'none of them are dependent on any other source, which is a good thing'. Another pupil draws the same conclusion: 'It is not dependent on any other source which makes it a good one.' In these very typical answers, an absence of dependency automatically makes the source trustworthy.

One pupil's analysis of an excerpt from a farmer's diary about a summer of drought in the mid nineteenth century strengthens the impression that pupils use the criteria in an mechanical manner. The source seems to be treated in the same way as the excerpt from the *Communist Manifesto*: the pupil claims that the source is relevant 'because it is a diary excerpt'. This pupils and others ascribe certain properties to the sources, without discussing the relation between the source and the question that they are about to answer.

Tendency is used by many pupils to dismiss sources. One example comes in a pupil's discussion of the excerpt from the *Communist Manifesto*: 'The source has an interest in what it says, it is biased to the author's advantage. This source, because of that, is not trustworthy according to the tendency criterion.' Much the same is said by another pupil: 'Because of that [tendency] I think that, even if the situation was hard, the information must be taken with a pinch of salt.' These two examples show a similar approach to epistemology as found in the textbooks: bias is not seen as something that can reveal a certain perspective, but as something that disqualifies a source altogether.

There is one striking similarity between several pupils with regard to how they apply the criteria in their sourcework: they all dismiss a source based on a source-critical analysis, but then go on to use it when answering the assignment. Witness the following quote: 'Then there are the kids. Kids had to work at this time and they had a problematic situation. They got a lot of diseases, and had to work long hours, and sometimes several shift a day, we can see that in source G. This source is not trustworthy, though, considering that it is biased, since it is not written by the one who experienced it. It is also bad in relation to the concurrency criterion, since it was written 30 years after the event.' The pupil first uses the source to say something about children's circumstances during the Industrial Revolution, then dismisses the source as untrustworthy. Another pupil applies a similar strategy when dismissing a diagram—

'Unfortunately the source was made in the late 1980s, with the result that it is not so trustworthy'—and then using it nevertheless, concluding that 'Source C shows positive while the others are showing negative. That means that the Industrial Revolution was both positive and negative.' The pupil decides that the diagram is not trustworthy based on the concurrency criteria, but still uses it to conclude that industrialization was positive in the long run. These two responses indicate that while some pupils use sources to answer questions, at the same time they have to dismiss them because of their view that the sources are either trustworthy or not. One possible reason to this contradiction may be that these pupils have been taught to use the concept of source criticism in a way similar to how source-critical method is explained in the school history textbooks.

The fact that pupils rate the sources as trustworthy or not, as 'good' or 'bad', without any reference to the historical question being asked, makes it possible to say something about their epistemic cognition, as expressed in the answers. When pupils reject some sources as being untrustworthy, highlighting others instead, it gives the impression that they are looking for a source that makes it possible to say what actually happened. Bias is not considered as a possible perspective, but as an attribute that disqualifies a source. This kind of reasoning suggests an epistemic cognition close to a more empiricist epistemology, since they are looking for an answer that is an objective reflection of past reality.

### **A tentative explanation**

The source-critical criteria entered Swedish historical research in the era of empiricism. The view shared by most historians at the time was that the results of empirical research could result in a true reflection of past reality. What impact has the source-critical method had in a Swedish context? According to Torstendahl (2005), the concept of source criticism has come to be treated in a fundamentalist manner in Sweden, the signs being that many historians equate the discipline of history with the use of source criticism, as defined above by Jarrick, and do so without any philosophical or epistemological reflection. The result is that many historians forget to ask themselves what kind of knowledge and results will be the end product of using their chosen method. This fundamentalism also has the effect of making historians treat source criticism as *the* method, instead of one method among many (Torstendahl 2005, 2–10).

The same conviction that source criticism is the sole method can be detected in Swedish school curricula and in school textbooks. It is no exaggeration to say that source criticism plays a central part whenever the school subject of history is discussed. So, how has the focus on source criticism been transferred from academics to educators and textbooks? In order to explain why certain content is covered in school history, Jensen (1990) refers to a trickle-down mechanism. He argues that knowledge created by academics trickles down to the classroom via textbooks and teachers, in a one-way communication in which the quality of textbooks and classroom activities are judged by their resemblance to their respective disciplinary equivalent (Jensen 1990, 132–3). In this context, the trickle-down mechanism is one factor that can help explain why curricula and history textbooks promote source criticism as a tool characterized by an empiricist epistemology. The mechanism does not, however, help us understand why the debate within the historical discipline has not had any impact on how the concept of source criticism is described. To do this one can turn to Jack Schneider since the concept seems to have some of the characteristics he uses to understand why certain ideas from academia are incorporated into the practice of teachers; perceived significance, philosophical compatibility, occupational realism and transportability (Schneider 2014, 32). The concept can be viewed as relevant because it has been in the curricula for a long time. That the concept can be viewed as philosophically compatible may be due to its well-known

connection to the historical discipline. A perceived realism and transportability may be due to the criteria included in the concept, that can be construed as relatively easy to, in a superficial way, teach and assess in the classroom.

The empiricist view of epistemological matters is shared by a smaller proportion of historians today than it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is common today for historical research to be seen as an interpretative endeavour (Gunn 2006, 16–18). This shift has its parallels in the curricula, where a similar change can be identified in the way the aim of history education is described. When it comes to source criticism, only fragments of a post-structuralist epistemology is visible in the most recent curriculum. The combination of these two different epistemological views in the curriculum, together with the unambiguous empiricist stance towards sourcework in the textbooks, seems to put some pupils in an educational bind: they have to negotiate the clash between using empiricist tools in a post-structuralist environment. Pupils are supposed to apply source-critical criteria, which they are instructed to use in an empiricist manner. These criteria will be applied in an educational environment that often asks questions based on an interpretative, more post-structuralist epistemology.

A reason for the persistent description of source criticism from an empiricist epistemological angle, with a possible shift in 2011, and textbooks might be found in the relationship between the three contexts described in this article; the historical discipline, the process of constructing curricula and the educational context, including textbook authors. Further research might look into if and how the ambivalence within the historical discipline has had an influence on the construction of curricula and the writing of textbooks. These are very interesting questions that are not possible to address in the scope of this study.

### **What is the alternative?**

There are two major factors that must be considered in order to help pupils come to grips with the handling of historical sources. The first is the issue of aiming for a consistent epistemology in the educational context. Since the overarching epistemology stated in the Swedish history curriculum is described in a post-structuralist manner, it is recommended that teachers adapt to such a stance in their teaching—and that includes sourcework. This is possible since the 2011 curriculum can be construed as meaning that sourcework is an interpretative endeavour. In the present context, that would mean that sources should not be treated as if they have an inherent value, irrelevant of the question at hand; rather, they should be chosen depending on the possible information pupils can elicit from them given the historical question they are to ‘answer’. The issue of historical questions brings us to the second factor to be considered: what is the purpose of bringing sources into the classroom? Considering the ability that pupils are supposed to develop in upper secondary school, there should be more to it than mere source criticism. The relationship between a historical question and the sources is central in the curriculum. The concept of source criticism can be problematic in this context - if it is used as described in the textbooks and curricula. It might be more efficient to start off with the question of how we create knowledge about the past. The act of doing history in the classroom would then shift from an empiricist dismissiveness to a more constructive, interpretative engagement with the sources in order to answer historical questions. The criteria that constitute the concept of source criticism must not be forgotten, however, since they definitely have a role to play in a post-structuralist environment. But in order to contribute in a constructive way, they have to play a more secondary role. That would be possible if they were incorporated when determining sourcing and contextualization, as discussed by some scholars (Wineburg et al. 2011, v–vi; Seixas 2013, 42–7; Ashby 2011, 137–41); the source-critical criteria would then be incorporated in a more constructive approach to historical inquiry, facilitating the inquiry instead of being the

concept around which the inquiry revolves. How these ideas best can be communicated from the ivory tower to the classrooms is a very important question.

Bringing historical sources into the classroom has many advantages. It is an essential part of pupils' education about how historical knowledge is created, for it gives them the possibility to develop the ability to use historical questions to transform historical sources into evidence. Sources are also good way to bring agency into history education, combining the prevalent structural perspective with the history of ordinary people. Connected to the issue of agency is the role of empathy in history teaching. The use of sources can facilitate the inclusion of emotive aspects in the classroom. In order to make historical sources the effective tool they can be, it is necessary to rethink the epistemological considerations underpinning the concept of source criticism. Pupils are given assignments that are very difficult to solve, since they are based on a post-structuralist stance on historical knowledge and the tools with which pupils are expected to handle the assignment are loaded with empiricist assumptions. One such new approach might be to listen to Torstendahl and view source criticism not as *the* method of historical research but rather as one element, relevant when asking good historical questions of a set of sources. That would make the various elements subsumed in the concept of source criticism a helpful tool for Swedish pupils, instead of the straitjacket they otherwise can be for their historical thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> The official translation of the Swedish concept *historisk frågeställning* as *issue* is questionable. *Historical question* or *historical problem* might be more appropriate.