



OPENING OR CLOSING PANDORA'S BOX? – THIRD-ORDER CONCEPTS IN HISTORY EDUCATION FOR POWERFUL KNOWLEDGE¹

*¿Abrir o cerrar la caja de Pandora? - Conceptos de tercer orden
en la educación histórica para un conocimiento poderoso*

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Abstract: In this article, I introduce third-order concepts in the history teaching as a way to reach powerful knowledge. If we understand powerful knowledge as a means to give students a competence to understand the contemporary world, to help them to engage in society's conversations and debates about itself, and to understand the grounds for accepting or rejecting knowledge claims, we must then help them to understand what ontology the discipline of history rests upon. Consequently, third-order concepts can help students as these concepts shed a light on what perception of reality the historical narratives and the first-order concepts build upon in the history classroom. However, at the end of the day, I have my doubts – what if we provide arguments for groups that have an anti-liberal and anti-democratic agenda?

Keywords: Third-order concepts; powerful knowledge; history education; historical consciousness; historical culture; use of history.

Resumen: En este artículo, presento conceptos de tercer orden en la enseñanza de la historia como una forma de alcanzar un conocimiento poderoso. Si entendemos el conocimiento poderoso

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como un medio para dar a los estudiantes la competencia para comprender el mundo contemporáneo, ayudarlos a participar en las conversaciones y debates de la sociedad sobre sí misma, y comprender las bases para aceptar o rechazar las afirmaciones del conocimiento, entonces debemos ayudarles a comprender en qué ontología se basa la disciplina de la historia. En consecuencia, los conceptos de tercer orden pueden ayudar a los estudiantes, ya que estos conceptos arrojan luz sobre la percepción de la realidad sobre la que se basan las narrativas históricas y los conceptos de primer orden en el aula de historia. Sin embargo, al final del día, tengo mis dudas: ¿qué pasa si proporcionamos argumentos para grupos que tienen una agenda antiliberal y antidemocrática?

Palabras clave: conceptos de tercer orden; conocimiento poderoso; educación en historia; conciencia histórica; cultura histórica; uso de la historia.

CONTENTS: 1. The story of the nation is no longer enough. 2. Powerful knowledge and the possibility to criticize contemporary society. 3. First- and Second-order concepts as the solution? 4. Third-order concepts to understand the use of history in the contemporary. 5. First-, second- and third-order concepts to teach and understand democracy in the Swedish history classroom. 6. Are we opening or closing Pandora's box with third order concepts? 7. References.

In 1933 Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. In elections held soon after he became chancellor; he won a massive majority of the votes. Pictures taken during his chancellorship suggest his popularity with the German people. He presided over an increasingly prosperous nation. A treaty signed with France in 1940 enabled Hitler to organize defenses for Germany along the Channel coast, and for a time Germany was the most militarily secure power in Europe. Hitler expressed on many occasions his desire to live peacefully with the rest of Europe, but in 1944 Germany was invaded from all sides by Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Unable to defeat this invasion of his homeland by superior numbers, Hitler took his own life as the invading Russian armies devastated Berlin. He is still regarded as one of the most important and significant figures of the twentieth century.

(Lee, 2005, p. 59).

Peter Lee uses the above to highlight the fact that a trustworthy historical account rests not only on singular factual statements. Although each fact in the account is true, few would accept it as a true story about Hitler and World War Two. Historical accounts, or narratives, bear a meaning that forms a plot and drawn conclusions (Ricoeur, 1984; White, 2014; Rösen, 2005). The plot and drawn conclusions in this historical account are in conflict with how we understand concepts such as democracy, free elections, peace and what defending your nation truly means. An election should, for example, include that voters have free choices and not are under threat when voting. Furthermore, wanting peace usually entails respecting other nations, not demanding unconditional capitulation, and invading other nations

to rescue people from a terrible totalitarian regime we often regarded such aspects as something desirable. According to Lee (2005), students in different ways deal with the fact that historical accounts cannot be perspective-free. Some hold them true only if the facts are true, some see it as a personal choice to believe the historical accounts most in congruence with their own beliefs, while others see historical accounts as really true stories and think that different perspectives arise from some historians having access to wrong facts as they build their historical accounts. Lee's solution to the problem is to have the students ask questions of historical accounts. Such questions are as follows: «What are the accounts trying to tell us? What questions are the historians asking? Are the historical accounts dealing with the same themes?» (Lee, 2005, p. 60). Though this is a good start, it is not enough if we, at the same time, want to relate to recent history didactics and its research results over the last decades.

Something other than historical methodologies causes us to invalidate the Hitler account. It is our cultural language, our moral values and a meta narrative in our historical culture that make us see the account as untrustworthy. According to this insight, critical thinking in history becomes something more than just sticking to history methods related to what is called second-order concepts.

In this article, I will outline and problematize research that promotes a history teaching containing multi perspectives and that indicates the necessity of integrating the history of minorities, immigrants and indigenous people in the history classroom. I will put this research in relation to that of powerful knowledge in the history classroom. Henceforth, my intention is to show why first-order and second-order concepts are not enough to support a history teaching for powerful knowledge. With this as a setting, I present the idea of third-order concepts as a possible solution for students to understand and to evaluate historical accounts, thereby giving them powerful knowledge. Here, I will analyse the concept democracy in the history education for the compulsory school's last year in Sweden as an example. Last, I suggest how to let students deal with historical accounts from third-order concepts, but I also warn of possible severe consequences.

1. THE STORY OF THE NATION IS NO LONGER ENOUGH

For a long time, professional historians understood and wrote history from a nationalistic perspective. In school, history education was seen as an instrument to strengthen citizens' sense of national identity through histories about the nations' heroes (Foster, 2011). Subsequently, national master narratives have played a central role in the subject of school history (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Carretero, 2011). The catastrophic 20th century with its two world wars, however, showed the destruction fanatic nationalism can lead to. This resulted in a new kind of history research and,

not least, made another teaching important (Berger, 2017; Zander, 2001), which led to a very different approach when mass schooling first became compulsory (Jenkins, 1991; Henry, 1993). Since the end of World War Two, the history education has been regarded as particularly important in stimulating democracy and peace (Nygren, 2011). Currently, there is a general discussion that history education plays an important role in teaching students to become responsible and active citizens in democratic societies – citizens not only well-informed of their civic responsibilities but also capable of paying attention to human co-existence (Barton, 2012; Martyn, 2017; Vella, 2007; Jordan *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, history education remains a strong tool to foster loyalty to the country and to legitimise the nation and its associated acts (Carretero, 2011), and it is still supporting collective national identities by telling meta stories of we and the other and our nation (Rosa & Brescó, 2017). Undoubtedly, these national master narratives give students insight into important cultural themes, heroes, values and expected ethical behaviour (Kessler & Wong-Mingji, 2009). However, this is still a simplistic history without nuances or different perspectives, and this simplistic way of understanding the nation's history involves what Wertsch (1998) calls schematic narrative templates. Such schematic narrative templates may not only underpin destructive nationalist ideas but also promote ideas about globalism, democracy, mutual international understanding and peace; yet they are often without nuances and immune to different perspectives (Alvén, 2017; Foster, 2011; Pingel, 2010; Ribbens, 2007).

Substantial research has shown that minorities do not always choose to include themselves in the school history nor perceive history as an important subject in school. This is due to their alienation and exclusion from mainstream meta narratives (Nordgren, 2006; Wertsch, 2000, 2002; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998; Barton & McCully, 2005). Instead, they cultivate counter stories that often break with that of the majority's narrative (Wertsch, 2000; Nordgren, 2006). The history teaching as a way to build the nation through patriotic feelings, often characterized as a collective memory approach (Seixas, 2007; VanSledright, 2011), has recently come to be questioned. Many researchers consider that this approach to teaching history belongs to the past – to a time when ethnically homogeneous nations were built with the help of a collective national master narrative (Carretero, 2017).

2. POWERFUL KNOWLEDGE AND THE POSSIBILITY TO CRITICIZE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In addition to the discussion to find a new purpose and content for the subject of history after World War Two, there has been an interest in history teaching as a way to strengthen the students' identities and to enable them to emancipate themselves from societal obstructive traditions. In Germany, the concept of historical

consciousness during the 70s was taken up by history didactics such as Jeismann and Pandel. This meant a move from seeing the subject of history as, first and foremost, a methodological discipline to a mental process where history is interpreted in support of present and future understandings about identity, collective memory and social processes (Jensen, 1997). Understanding these processes helps us to consider what people perceive as challenges and what they want to do to shape their own lives (Rüsen 2004). Rüsen (2017, p. 13) states, «everywhere and at all times human beings draw on the past to understand the present and to anticipate and plan for the future». Using the concept of historical consciousness, the human being has been described as partly being history and partly being an emancipated creature able to orient in new directions and to break cultural traditions, and in that way doing history (Jeismann, 1979; Levstik & Barton, 2011). Being history, or being in time, appeals to humanity's historicity, while doing history can be interpreted as our ability to recognize our own being in time, a temporal orientation, and thereby act as emancipated subjects (Gadamer, 2006; Ricoeur, 1988). By creating a clear connection over time, our historical consciousness helps us create historical meaning (Ricoeur, 1988). Here is also a moral imperative. If we understand humans as mainly emancipated from the frames of history and able to do history, they also are equipped with a moral responsibility for their actions.

While researchers interested in historical consciousness for history education mostly have tried to answer the didactic questions why and what history, others have tried to answer the how question: how to teach a history that emancipates and gives power to the students. Mainly two themes have surrounded this ambition. The first is how to include minorities, immigrants and indigenous students in the history teaching (Epstein, 1997; Yeager, Foster & Greer, 2002; Wertsch, 2000; Wertsch, 2002; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998; Barton & McCully, 2005; Nordgren, 2006). The second emphasizes how to handle different perspectives in the history classroom (Seixas, 2018; Grever, 2007; Lorenz, 2006; Ribbens, 2007; Nordgren & Johansson 2015; Nordgren, 2017). Grever wants to see a teaching that «combine[s] narrative templates stemming from different parts of the world, so that multiple histories and perspectives can be offered», while «students from non-Western backgrounds will have specific memory cultures linked to a cultural heritage that probably does not fit into the white subject matter they are at present offered by school history» (Grever 2007, pp. 42-43). Lorenz, on the other hand, asserts that «the most we can strive for is a sound knowledge of the different points of view, leading to a maximum empathy and to mutual understanding of past and present positions (Lorenz, 2006, p. 39).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the debate about the role of knowledge in the school curriculum gained vitality as Young and Muller used the concept powerful knowledge to ask what schools should teach and why (Young & Muller, 2010; Young & Muller, 2013). They raised the question how to offer a discipline-informed

curriculum to students to gain social justice. Chapman maintains powerful knowledge «will enable them [the students] to act in and on the world with confidence» (Chapman, 2021, p. 10). Alison Kitson (2021) explicitly suggests what this can mean in history education: to help students discover new ways to understand the contemporary world, to help them to engage in society's conversations and debates about itself, and to understand the grounds for accepting or rejecting knowledge claims. In relation to the research that calls for an inclusion of marginalized groups and different perspectives in the history classroom, this has quite profound implications for what we teach and how we educate the students to organize this knowledge. It must pay attention to the fact that not only the «past is a foreign country» (Lowenthal, 1985) but also the contemporary for those who have different (pre)conceptions than the majority of how the world works. If these students truly should be included in history as a school subject, it must refer actively to the contemporary world to make sense. Such an education should help the students to understand how history influences contemporary identities, values and choices in order to allow them to question how we have chosen to live our lives and to see what reasonable alternatives actually exist.

3. FIRST- AND SECOND-ORDER CONCEPTS AS THE SOLUTION?

An elaborated way to make ontological and epistemological categories in history visible has been to separate first-order and second-order knowledge concepts from each other. First-order concepts correspond to historical facts, narratives and content concepts one has to manage to understand history and historical processes. Concepts as historical divisions such as the Cold War, medieval, post-modernism and historical remain as feudal, knight or Jacobin. The same applies to general substantive concepts such as inflation, starvation and agriculture. First-order concepts are lexical in that they do not help to order history or to see ontological or epistemological starting points and consequences. Rather, they must be learnt like vocables, with ready-made significances, and relate to substantive knowledge and ready-made historical narratives. First-order concepts answer questions such as the «who», «what», «when» and «where» in history.

Second-order knowledge or concepts, on the other hand, order and structure historical knowledge. And to know and master them gives one tools to make valid historical accounts, or to judge and handle historical sources or the quality of others' historical accounts. Second-order concepts are knowledge that historians impose on the past to interpret it, structure it and give meaning to it. Concepts like historical evidence, historical significance, historical empathy and historical causality refer to methods historians use to interpret and to make the past understandable. Unlike first-order concepts, these concepts do not figure explicitly in the historical accounts; rather, they control the selection of historical facts and structure them

into historical accounts. In this way, second-order concepts relate to epistemology. Instead of opting to memorizing a master narrative built on first-order concepts, recent research has related to second-order concepts, thereby emphasizing that the teaching of history should consider how history is constructed. A number of models have been developed internationally to help historical knowing through second-order concepts.

In Great Britain, research that stressed second-order concepts started during the 1970s. Lee and Ashby (2000, p. 199) explain that «the changes in English history education can be described as a shift from the assumption that school history was only a matter of acquiring substantive history to a concern with students' second-order ideas», that is, second order concepts. Investment in a new way of teaching history – the New History – was started. The Schools Council History Project managed the project (Berger, 2012). Aspiring influential researchers such as Ashby, Blow, Lee and Shemilt documented results from the Schools Council History Project, and later their further development of research over the following decades (Ashby & Edwards, 2010; Shemilt, 2000, 2009; Blow *et al.*, 2015; Lee, 2004; Lee & Howson, 2009). These researchers advocate a history teaching grounded in the discipline of history. Students should thereby learn historical disciplinary methods. Much of this research is focused on second-order historical disciplinary concepts (Lee & Ashby, 2000), such as source criticism, historical causation, historical significance and historical empathy, which are supposed to help students understand the epistemology of history. Lee (1991, pp. 48-9) summarizes the totally different approach compared to views about history education that rested on memorizing narratives:

... it is absurd to say that schoolchildren know any history if they have no understanding of how historical knowledge is attained. The ability to recall accounts without any understanding of the problems involved in constructing them or the criteria involved in evaluating them has nothing historical about it.

In the wake of this project, much research about history teaching has focused on students' own construction of history, that is, how they can be encouraged to think as historians and construct historical narratives on their own (Semmet, 2012; Lavielle, 2004). In Canada, Peter Seixas, among others, developed the Historical Thinking Project from 2006 (<http://historicalthinking.ca>). Seixas and Mortons' (2013) ground-breaking book *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* is a result of this project. In Germany, Andreas Körber is involved in the project Hitch: Historical Thinking: Competencies in History (Körber & Meyer-Hamme, 2015).

Ercikan and Seixas (2015, p. 255) point out that «history educators around the world have mobilized curricular reform movements toward including complex thinking in history education, advancing historical thinking, developing historical consciousness, and teaching competence in historical sense making».

Second-order concepts help us to organize first-order concepts and to understand how they build historical knowledge. Still, they rest on a certain (historical) culture that frames their functioning. This certain culture is not exposed by them; rather, the second-order concepts confirm an ontology they are used within. Regarding Lee's quotation: with the help of historical significance, historical causation and historical evidence, we can criticize the historical account of Hitler. However, this critique does not explicitly make clear who we are and what life we want to live, or, in other words, point out our life world that opposes the plot and conclusions drawn in the account. Are we so accustomed to these concepts standing for knowledge that we take their functioning for granted and do not think to ask how they do this? For four months, VanSledright (2002) taught historical evidence in a class, resulting in most of the students learning how to use, problematize and evaluate historical sources. However, when the students were confronted with sources that presented the USA negatively, their newfound knowledge was not used. Instead, they used less trustworthy sources to build historical accounts that showed the USA as a great nation. Feelings and values were favoured rather than cognitive skills, while the students' culture limited their use of the second-order concepts. In this way, the second-order concepts did not lead to powerful knowledge that helped the students to think about how history is used in the contemporary and what that says about its' ontological starting points for understanding.

4. THIRD-ORDER CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND THE USE OF HISTORY IN THE CONTEMPORARY

Rüsen (2017) has showed us how normative elements of historical thinking are characteristic to its cognitive processes. If we want to give students powerful knowledge, we also must provide them with tools to make these normative elements visible. Ricoeur (1993) highlights our life in relation to history and postulates that we can either surrender to history's traditions and live our lives in line with them, or we can challenge this «false consciousness» (p. 101) and show how they confirm power relations. Ricoeur calls the later approach a hermeneutics of suspicion. Being history, or being in time, appeals to humanity's historicity, while doing history can be interpreted as our ability to recognize our own being in time, a temporal orientation, and thereby understand ourselves (Gadamer, 2006; Ricoeur, 1988). Using the concept of historical consciousness, the human being has been described as partly being history and partly being an emancipated creature able to orient in new directions and to break cultural traditions, and in that way doing history (Jeismann, 1979; Levstik & Barton, 2011). It is problematic to think that we can totally break free from our contexts, or our historicity. History is namely a two-way process: one process going forward from the past to the contemporary and another process where historical questions are asked in the

contemporary to the past. We cannot detach ourselves from this hermeneutic situation. However, Gadamer (2006) gives us the access to the naive question, where we allow ourselves to question what first can be seen as self-evident. Habermas (1984) maintains that our historical being asks what we need in our life, while the critic part of us can ask questions about how we want to live and how we could live.

Perhaps we never can elude history as a science with norms and values (White, 2014; Gaddis, 2002), but we should at least equip students with the tools to analyse how and why history includes these normative elements, and why, for example, historical evidence and historical causation also take a starting point in this fact. In fact, to understand historical causation, you must understand the intentions of the actors in the past. As you do that, you use a vision of what it means to be a human being with a certain will, and thereby you give her norms and values to understand her. Either we do this as historical beings, and do not question this process, or we do it as partly emancipated creatures and try to understand ourselves and our own starting points as we ask questions to the past.

The idea of third-order concepts was given to me in a discussion among history didactics in 2015 (Scandia, 2015). The discussion was investigative in nature, with the perspective being how history is used and how it orients us today. Although it is difficult to ascertain what constitutes third-order concepts, at least three concepts should be among them: historical consciousness, historical culture and use of history. As there is no room to fully describe the three concepts here, I will present them briefly and then show how they could be used as tools in the history education.

The definition of historical consciousness in the history didactic discourse is in one way similar in a broad context. The history didactics that use the concept indicate that it covers three time dimensions: the past, the present and the future (Jensen, 1997; Rösen, 2004; Karlsson, 2011; Lee & Howson, 2009; Shemilt, 2009; Seixas, 2004). Thereby, the concept of historical consciousness attempts to capture the mental and deeply human process whereby humans, by building on perceptions of the past, imagine the future to be able to act in the present. The concept of historical consciousness also contains processes of creating meaning for both the individual and the collective: the way we look at the past affects our perception of the present and what we think needs to be done for the future. The reverse is also true: the present affects the way we look at the past, and thereby the historical consciousness works under the same double process, or hermeneutic situation, as history as a discipline (Alvén, 2017). The naive question, as Gadamer puts it, working with historical consciousness as a third-order concept can give the students is the following: What does a historical consciousness look like that produces a historical account like the one in front of me?

Karlsson (2011) asserts that reflections, manifestations and articulations of historical consciousness are best analysed in what we call the historical culture. Historical culture is the arena where history is communicated. In this arena, certain

kinds of history are embraced and other ones rejected. In this selection, of what is and what is not selected, one can catch a glimpse of collective expressions of historical consciousness. Here, history that collectives find worth preserving, teaching, learning and celebrating about the past are gathered. Even what the collective wants to forget about the past can be found. In the historical culture, not only the production of history is of interest but also the mediation and consumption of history, and, by extension, the reception of history. The naive question historical culture as a third-order concept can give the students is: How does a historical account like the one in front of me fit into the historical culture?

«The past can be used for almost anything you want to do in the present», declares MacMillan (2009). The use of history emanates from different needs in the contemporary (Karlsson, 2009). Often, several different needs can be at work constructing the same use of history. Womens´ history became important, from several needs –as an answer to both moral and existential needs to bring new perspectives to history, but it was at the same time constructed in a scientific method and used within the discipline of history, a scientific need. History is, as an answer to a need, used for a purpose and is in that way forward-looking. What the naive question use of history as a third-order concept can give the students is thereby, who is using history and for what purpose?

Third-order concepts would be ontological, and thereby help us to see what we, or somebody else, hold true. The process the third-order concepts can highlight is when we in the contemporary look to the past to ask questions that are important to us today. The questions shed light on who we are, what is important for us and where we are heading: in short, our contemporary culture. If students are given tools to see this, they also can do what Kitson (2021) asserts powerful knowledge should mean in history education: discovering new ways to understand the contemporary world, engaging in society´s conversations and debates about itself, and understanding the grounds for accepting or rejecting knowledge claims.

Let us try to summarize the reasoning so far through a figure (see Figure 1.). The first-order concepts are substantial knowledge. As such they are the puzzle pieces for the second-order concepts. With these, students have something to apply their second order knowledge to. With the third-order concepts, they work as sources for self-understanding. How the concepts are used, perceived and interpreted in a certain context or culture gives students the opportunity to look upon themselves in a meta perspective. The second-order concepts structure the first-order concepts, and they explain how they fit in certain narratives. The relation to the third-order concepts is a qualitative one. There are still certain methods new historical narratives and understanding must meet. In that way, they are gatekeepers to opinions without disciplinary anchoring. The third-order concepts, at last, can problematize how history is used and perceived in the contemporary. If this understanding is relegated, they can bring new understanding to the second-order concepts.

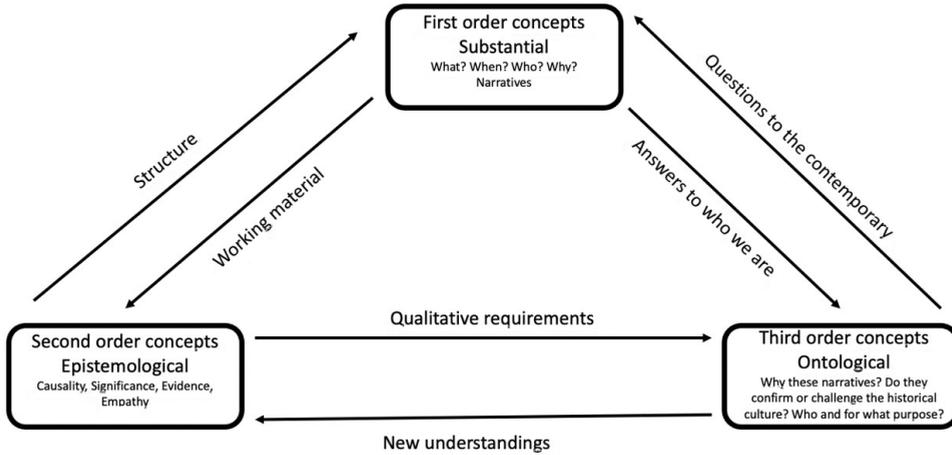


Figure 1. The three categories of concepts and how they are related to each other in the history classroom.

5. FIRST-, SECOND- AND THIRD-ORDER CONCEPTS TO TEACH AND UNDERSTAND DEMOCRACY IN THE SWEDISH HISTORY CLASSROOM

According to the Swedish syllabus in history, the students are supposed to be taught about democratisation in Sweden (National Agency of School, 2011). This is assumed to be taught in the compulsory school when the students are 15-16 years old. The syllabus contains three parts: aims, core content and knowledge requirements. They answer to the following didactic questions: Why history? What history? How to assess the students' knowledge? In the core content, there is a heading «Democratisation, the post-war period and globalisation, from around 1900 to the present» (p. 213), beneath which you can, for instance, read «Democratisation in Sweden». This core content relates to a ready-made narrative telling us how Sweden became a democracy. The democratisation narrative contains first-order concepts such as democracy, equality, voting rights, gender equality and class struggle, all concepts that can be interpreted in different ways and anchored to different values and perceptions of justice. The first-order concepts in this ready-made narrative also contain certain actors, such as Hjalmar Branting, Gustav V, Elin Wägner and Kerstin Hesselgren, but also political parties and different movements. The second-order concepts can be used to order these first-order concepts in a timeline, in causal relations or to find significant course of events, or to handle evidence from the period, and even to judge historical acts in moral terms. The third-order concepts could, on the contrary, be used to shed light on contemporary society and its basic ideas about democracy and Sweden as a democratic country. Let us start with single concepts in the narrative about the Swedish democratisation. What

does democracy, equality, gender equality and class struggle mean in the narrative about Swedish democracy? Who is excluded and included, and why? How do these concepts relate to the main actors in the narrative? Who is democratic and why in the narrative? When this is done, questions can be applied to the narrative; for example, in a text book, who has written the narrative and for what obvious purpose? What does the narrative say about what is desirable and not desirable in our society? How does the author look upon history, and what can we say about his wishes, or implicit purposes with the narrative? How does this fit the students wishes and perceptions of democracy? How does it fit in a broader conception of democracy, and how it is used in the historical culture? Does the narrative confirm or challenge this historical culture? Questions like these would emanate from concepts such as historical consciousness, historical culture and use of history. That is, concepts that deal with how we orientate in time, how we identify ourselves, with or against others: in short, concepts that make history a subject that is current for the student here and now. If the ontological knowledge for, say democracy, changes in the classroom, the second-order concepts can help to build new narratives or fill the first-order concepts with new meaning. Depending on what happens in the classroom, the democratisation narrative in the syllabus might then be changed to a narrative with the headline «How Sweden during the eighteenth century approached a democratic society». This might be a narrative that shows who still stands outside the democratic rights: immigrants and children, for example.

6. ARE WE OPENING OR CLOSING PANDORA´S BOX WITH THIRD ORDER CONCEPTS?

With this article, I have argued for the introduction of third-order concepts into the teaching of history. This, I maintain, would give the students a truly powerful knowledge – a knowledge based on history one can use to understand one’s own being in a certain context. Third-order concepts can, by extension, help students to understand the contemporary world, engage in society’s conversations and debates about itself, and understand the grounds for accepting or rejecting knowledge claims. Working only with first- and second-order concepts certainly qualifies the students to act and to be successful in contemporary society. However, if we want to help them to be critically engaged in building a society through education and to interrogate counterhegemonic possibilities, this is not enough. For that, we must not only give them substantial and epistemological knowledge, but also ontological knowledge. That is, the knowledge that gives us the framework for what we are able to see and learn. Third-order concepts are all about ontological knowledge.

That said, I must admit I have my doubts and concerns regarding introducing third-order concepts to the teaching of history. We live in a time when past (Krause,

2019) horrors are threatening what we thought were to be stable democracies. In measurements from 2020, the Economic Intelligent Unit points out that democracy, both as a democratic form and as cultural expressions, is decreasing in the world. It has reached the lowest level since 2006. Threats towards democracy are far from new, but lately they have accelerated in terms of increased support of authoritarian regimes (Kellemen, 2017; Lührman *et al.*, 2018; Lührman & Lindberg, 2019), far-right movements, post truth (Edling & Macrine, 2021), and a tendency to use history education as a means to foster narrow patriotism (Carretero, 2011). Can a teaching of third-order concepts provide such groups with this agenda? Will they be able to move our ontology in a direction we do not want? Or, are the second-order concepts enough as qualitative gate keepers against such tendencies? Undoubtedly, these groups have an ontology other than what liberal democracy builds upon. This is an urgent question, as the history education in liberal democracies still has problems including groups with other life experiences than the common ones (Abdi & Carr, 2013). Consequently, are the third-order concepts opening or closing Pandora's box?

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