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Teaching disciplinary literacy in history: Implications for pre- and in-service training of teachers

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Disciplinary literacy

- Literacy practices connected to knowledge production practices of the discipline (Hynd-Shanahan 2013)
 - / What counts as evidence for an argument?
 - / What level of confidence does the field have in the knowledge it produces?
 - / How is the level of confidence expressed in texts?
- Connected to disciplinary thinking (Hynd-Shanahan 2013, Seixas & Morton 2013)
- Views language and literacy as socially defined practices connected to the goals and activities (Barton 2007, Swain et al. 2015)



Background

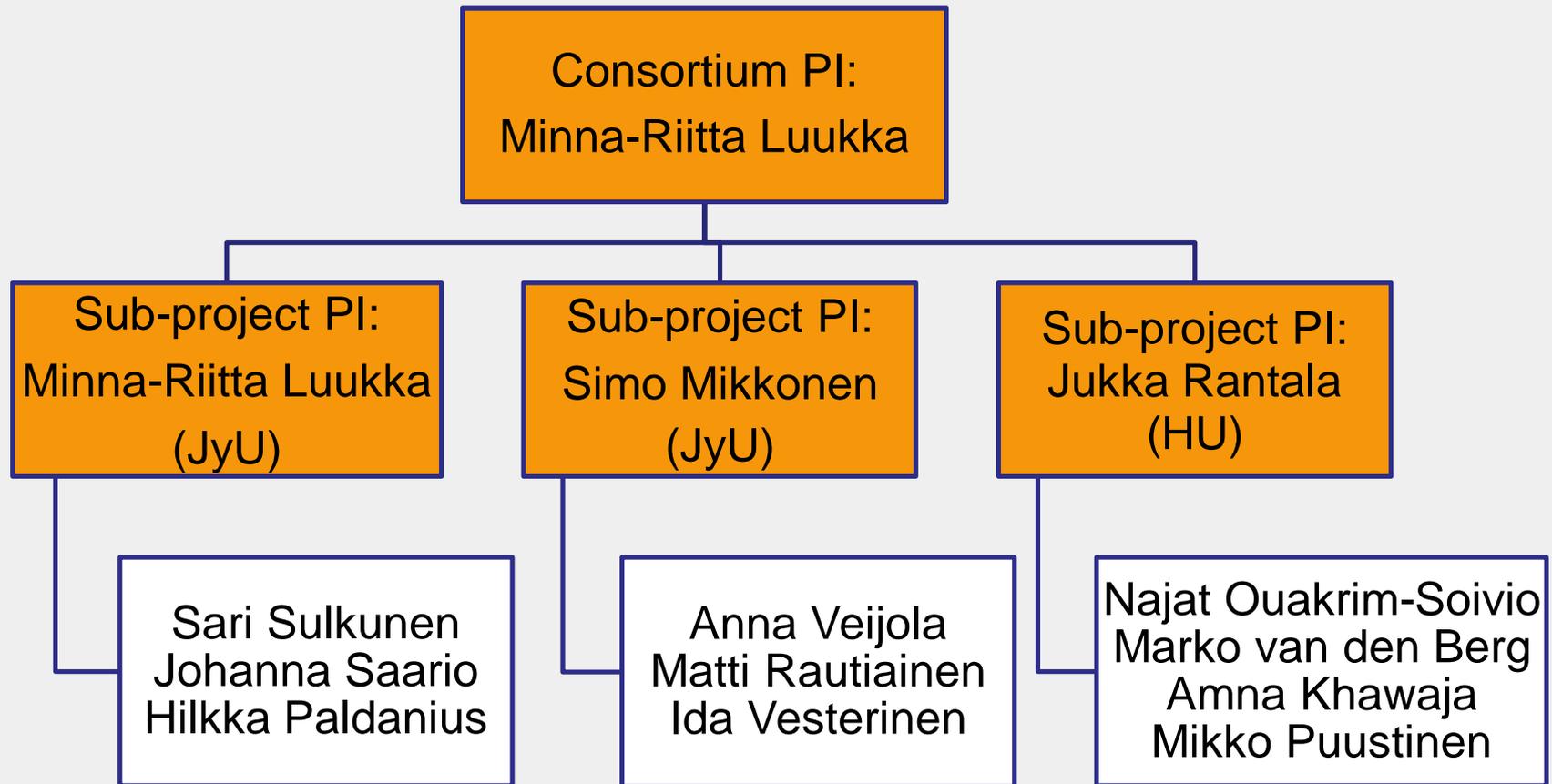
- In Finland, the national curricula introduce disciplinary literacy within the cross-curricular topic of multiliteracy
 - / Literacy-related goals integrated to the subject goals
- Teaching disciplinary literacy is the responsibility of every content area teacher
- Teaching in content areas should focus on procedural knowledge (or skills) in addition to substantial (factual) knowledge



Ideas from the HisLit-project

- HisLit: Engaging in disciplinary thinking: Historical literacy practices in Finnish general upper secondary schools
- The project aims to
 1. analyse and describe the texts and literacy practices in history classrooms
 2. assess students' proficiency
 3. conduct interventions
 4. develop teaching and assessment methods and materials.

Multidisciplinary project on disciplinary literacy 2016–2020





Focus on two studies:

- 1) Sulkunen, S. & Saario, J. (2019). Tiedonmuodostus ja tekstityö: tapaustudkimus lukion historian opetuksen tekstikäytännöistä. *Finnish Educational Journal Kasvatus*, 50 (2), 149–163.
- 2) Veijola, A., Sulkunen, S. & Rautiainen, M. (2019). Historiallisen tiedon luonne ja historian tekstikäytännöt lukiolaisten kuvaamana. *Kasvatus & Aika*, 13(2), 53–67.



Case study on Literacy practices in Finnish upper secondary school history lessons (Sulkunen & Saario 2019)

- Research questions
 - / What kinds of texts are used in history lessons?
 - / What is the role of literacy practices in history lessons?
 - / How are the disciplinary literacy practices taught in history lessons?
- Data from classroom observations and videos and teacher interview
 - / Collected in spring 2017 in a middle-size general upper secondary school
 - / Experienced teacher with a background as a historian



Summary of the results

- Teacher was well aware of the historical literacy practices
 - / Actively processing what they might mean for teaching
 - / Found motivating and activating students challenging
- In his teaching, diverse texts and practices were used but content teaching dominated
- However, instruction of literacy practices
 - / was given only after assignments
 - / was often implicit and scarce
 - / was given as response to students' initiatives
- Currently, the focus of history teaching is on substantial knowledge → validated by other studies

Inquiry-based history learning in a Finnish upper secondary school



(Veijola et al. 2019)

- Engaging students in inquiry-based learning is generally considered to enhance learning of knowledge construction practices, literacy practices and content knowledge (e.g. Moje 2015)
- One school-week long project during which students worked in groups to answer to the question:
 - / Who possibly tried to assassinate President of Finland, Urho Kekkonen, in summer 1957?
- Multiple text sources:
 - / Research literature & Internet sources
 - / Primary sources from archives, e.g. a page from the president's adjutants' weekly log; journal entry by the president's daughter-in-law who was present at the time of the event and described it in an emotional tone
- Guidance in knowledge construction practices:
 - / Students were instructed to read the texts and consider their relevance and reliability as evidence of the historical event
 - / Students were challenged to ponder how authors' intentions might have influenced the texts and how to contextualize different kinds of sources

Summary of the results: what did students report learning?



- Students reported (n=19) learning about
 - 1) knowledge construction in history (15)
 - sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating
 - searching relevant sources & evaluating the veracity and bias of sources
 - meaning of various perspectives in the group (social aspect)
 - 2) the need for and importance of contextual knowledge (5)
 - from details to the big picture
 - 3) the interpretative nature of historical knowledge (8)
 - truth vs. interpretative nature of knowledge
- Inquiry-based learning also supported motivation and intellectual curiosity



Implications for the teachers' professional development (ITE & CPD)

- Teacher's awareness of disciplinary literacy practices and lack of resistance towards teaching literacy is a good foundation for PD → **develop and build on this**
- Need for teachers' professional development (PD), particularly pedagogical practices in teaching disciplinary literacy → **how to teach?**



Implications for the teachers' professional development (ITE & CPD)

One answer to the question How to teach DL?

- Engagement in inquiry-based projects provides learning opportunities that content-focused and textbook-centered teaching may not provide → **from content to inquiry / content within inquiry**
 - / Supports learning of both substantial and procedural knowledge (Nokes et al. 2007; VanSledright 2002)
 - / Supports students' agency (Voet & de Wever 2016, 2017)
 - / Makes visible the close connections between knowledge construction practices and literacy practices (Moje 2015)
- In connection to inquiry, making visible and teaching language and literacy practices (modeling & scaffolding)



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Thank you!

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