

Article

What If I Were the Exile? Linking Past and Present for Democratic History Teaching with Pre-Service Educators

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Abstract: The academic literature has fostered a debate in recent decades regarding the concept of historical empathy and the typology of activities that can help to treat and develop it, although there is no consensus as to the real effectiveness of narrative activities of a descriptive type that involve the projection of the person into the past. The aim of this research was to check whether the implementation of a programme that uses historical contextualisation, contact with primary testimonies, the use of sources and historical empathy, linking the situation of the exiles of the Spanish Civil War with the current refugees, can contribute to the development of tolerant attitudes towards the figure of the displaced in pre-service teachers and the degree to which these attitudes are modified after the application of the programme. The research design is quantitative and corresponds to a quasi-experimental design with a control and experimental group. A questionnaire was used to measure the attitudes of 101 pre-service teachers at a Spanish university towards refugees. The questionnaire was completed at two different times, before and after a historical empathy exercise on the exiles of the Spanish Civil War. The results indicate that programmes using historical contextualisation, testimonies close to refugees and historical empathy relating the situation of refugees to that of the exiles of the Spanish Civil War can contribute to increasing and/or reinforcing positive attitudes towards refugees in pre-service teachers.

Keywords: historical empathy; historical thinking; pre-service teachers; democratic history teaching; attitudes towards refugees; past-present connection



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1. Introduction

López and Schugurensky [1] propose a democratic model of History teaching as opposed to the traditional nineteenth-century model, in which students learn to think historically using skills linked to historical knowledge. This model includes ethical aspects aimed at developing historical awareness that allows students to relate the problems of the present to the past in order to build the future [2]. Democratic history teaching is student-centred and relies on the inquiry of primary sources and the treatment of controversial or omitted issues from traditional national narratives: people, injustices or inequalities. The analysis of relevant social problems and contentious issues necessarily involves the consideration of different points of view and perspectives, the distinction between facts and opinions or the detection of propaganda, silences and manipulation in both historical and present-day sources. Putting these skills into practice is essential for the development of informed, critical and responsible citizens. Inquiry and work with primary and secondary sources not only help students to think historically but also provide them with basic tools that they can put into practice in their daily lives when dealing with media information, establishing possible biases and intentions behind them. Thus, the discipline is essential in providing knowledge that helps to understand citizenship, to foster a critical sense in the face of the diversity of data and to provide the ability to handle different information.

According to Gómez and Miralles [3], the formative function of history is characterised by the search for personality development through the promotion of critical thinking, which involves organising different information for decision-making and problem-solving. For history teaching to make a real contribution to the promotion of a truly democratic culture, it is not enough to focus the analysis only on the past but also on the present, interrelating both with the perspective of the future in mind.

Regarding the teaching of history in Spain, the need to complement the learning of first-order concepts (chronology and facts) with analytical procedures specific to history (second-order concepts) has become apparent, although the conceptual part continues to predominate over the analytical. Hence, it is necessary to consider methodologies in which history is no longer conceived as a set of closed data, prioritising strategies that develop inquiry, the formulation of hypotheses or the interpretation of different sources and evidence. One of the conflictive but essential episodes in recent history, the Spanish Civil War, continues to be treated superficially, only from a conceptual point of view and focused on the textbook. This implies shortcomings in learning about a sensitive subject with repercussions for both the present and the future.

Historical empathy is one of the second-order concepts within historical thinking and aims to understand the actions of people in the past, taking into account the economic, social, political and cultural parameters of a given historical moment. The development of the concept implies a good knowledge of the period or epoch under study through the use of primary and secondary historical sources in order to carry out a correct historical contextualisation, free of presentisms and anachronisms.

The academic literature has fostered a debate in recent decades regarding the notion itself, its consideration as an achievement or process or the relevance of the inclusion of the term “empathy” in a concept that involves a mainly cognitive analysis. Similarly, the typology of activities that can help to address and develop the concept has also been widely debated, although there is no consensus as to the actual effectiveness of narrative activities of a descriptive type involving the projection of the person into the past.

The role of imagination, present feeling versus past feeling, the dilemma of possible encouragement of identification and emotional connection with past figures, the relationship between empathy and moral judgement [4], empathy understood as “caring” [5] and the importance of concrete personal connections to individual stories [6] were also highlighted in empathic-type exercises.

Based on all the above, this contribution includes a research study carried out with pre-service primary school teachers to see whether descriptive narrative activities linked to historical empathy about the exiles of the Spanish Civil War, relating this exile with the figure of refugees today, contribute to a better understanding of the situation of the latter by reducing pre-existing prejudices.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. *Historical Empathy in History Teaching*

Historical empathy is a second-order concept in the teaching of history, aimed at understanding the actions of people from the past, considering the historical context in which they were situated. Its correct use implies a good knowledge of the period or epoch under study using primary and secondary historical sources in order to carry out an accurate historical contextualisation free of presentisms and anachronisms.

The theoretical literature has paid attention to the use of historical empathy in the process of teaching and learning historical thinking in the classroom. In the first place, reference should be made to the work of Dickinson and Lee [7,8], who, after their research, established four levels of explanation of historical empathy, affirming that students show a higher level of cognition and empathy according to their age (the older they are, the higher the level), and that imaginative thinking plays an important role in developing historical understanding. Shemilt [9], on the other hand, established five levels in the understanding of historical empathy, warning about the need to adapt students’ previous ideas to new

knowledge for its correct development. Ashby and Lee [10] categorised the different levels of empathetic explanation, stressing the importance of interaction between students for empathetic development.

However, some authors consider that fully developing empathetic explanation, i.e., putting oneself in the place of historical agents, is practically impossible because access to the historical context is through the analyses and writings of historians [11–13]. Though, Dulberg [14] considers that students' historical understanding develops along a continuum of thinking and is influenced by variables such as personal experience and family background.

The existence of problems was also pointed out when considering the weight of the empathetic element in this procedure, giving preference to terms such as "perspective taking", "understanding people in the past", "perspective recognition" or "rational understanding" [5], to avoid giving priority to the affective over the rational. Some authors nowadays prefer to refer to the concept of historical perspective taking (HPT), such as Seixas (cited by Domínguez, [15]), or to the concept of contextualised historical explanation used by Domínguez [15] to avoid the affective element. Nevertheless, Barton and Levstik [5] suggest that limiting empathy to a purely cognitive endeavour restricts its contribution to pluralist democracy and point out that the exercise of understanding must include concern for past agents and their perspectives. Endacott [16,17], drawing from psychology, advocates a model of historical empathy as a dual affective–cognitive construct and points to the importance of sustaining the balance between historical context, perspective-taking and affective responses for a correct use of the concept. For the specific case of history teaching, Endacott and Brooks [18] propose three interrelated and interdependent efforts, without which one could not speak of historical empathy:

- Historical contextualisation: in-depth understanding of social, political and cultural norms of a given time and knowledge of the facts leading up to a historical situation, taking into account simultaneous events.
- Perspective-taking: understanding the principles, attitudes and beliefs previously held by others to understand how someone else might have thought about a certain situation.
- Affective connection: an understanding of how the experiences, situations or actions lived by a particular historical figure may have been influenced by their affective response based on a connection to similar but different life experiences of their own.

In this way, historical empathy would contribute to a greater understanding of context, developing broader skills and dispositions that affect the student's life as a whole and not just in the academic sphere. Endacott and Brooks insist on the need for affective connection in the use of historical empathy, as it causes students to perceive historical figures as human beings, dealing with particular experiences that the students themselves may have lived in person, thus connecting with historical ideas, beliefs and decisions that may at first seem too complex and/or unfamiliar. A contextual understanding, accompanied by intellectual engagement, is, therefore, necessary to enhance historical understanding. If, in addition, students are able to draw parallels between historical events and current events, they may see the two as analogous and better understand today's world [19]. In this sense, Carril and Sánchez [20] state that the learning of historical content linked to comprehension and memorisation strategies is poorly related to students' empathetic skills. Therefore, an empathy that brings together an affective as well as a cognitive part must be used in order to be able to adopt the perspective of the other. Dulberg [14] also points out that the cognitive and the affective are involved in the construction of historical knowledge and perspectives, with the role of teachers being to bridge the gap to help students reach the past, starting from the personal. Otherwise, the teaching of history would rely on memorisation and recall rather than inquiry.

The exercise of putting oneself in the place of other people from the past, with different cultural parameters and values, was related to the development of positive intercultural attitudes necessary for coexistence in a democratic society. English [21] refers to the promotion of students' social competencies, especially those related to empathy and imagination,

in order to achieve intercultural understanding in culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse classrooms. Barton and Levstik, in this sense, state that “recognizing our own and others’ perspectives is indispensable for public deliberation in a pluralist democracy” [5] (p. 224). Historical empathy can be used to solve historical problems and create mutual understanding between societies by developing a different attitude towards the “other” [22]. In fact, Gelbach [23] has shown a positive correlation between the ability to adopt another perspective and conflict resolution skills.

2.2. Contextualisation and Historical Empathy

As indicated above, for a correct use of historical empathy, it is necessary to know how the people of the past thought, felt and behaved, considering their values and cultural parameters, which in some cases are opposed to those of the present. The only way to reach the imagination of the people of the past is to have a thorough knowledge of the historical context of the time by consulting primary and secondary sources. Otherwise, historical analysis can fall into what Wineburg [24] calls “presentism”, looking at the past with the eyes of the present. Seixas [25] points out in the same vein that perspective-taking is not an action separate from the consultation of historical sources. The author advocates the confrontation between the past and the present through the use of historical sources since, otherwise, the analysis “becomes an imaginative imposition of students’ present-day sensibilities on an imaginary past” (p. 601). Also, authors such as Colby [26], Levesque [27] and Prats [28] recommend teaching models based on historical research processes such as asking questions, examining primary and secondary sources, reconstructing stories and constructing historical texts. Historical research involves not only the chronology of events but also requires putting oneself in the shoes of the people of the past by using sources to recreate the social and political context of each era. Sen and Wei [29] argue that the use of historical sources that encompass different perspectives allows students to imagine and empathise with the past.

Yeager and Foster [30] indicate that historical empathy should not be based on imagination alone, over and above identification and sympathy, but should follow four phases in order to make history “come alive” for students and enable them to think critically about the past, starting with the analysis of human action in the past, the understanding of historical context and chronology, the analysis of historical interpretations and evidence and ending with the construction of a narrative framework.

Following another study with 16- and 17-year-old students on the topic “Why did President Truman drop the atomic bomb?” divided into two groups, one using the textbook and the other using historical sources, Yeager et al. [31] affirm that students who use more sources construct more meaningful narratives about the facts by incorporating their own perspectives. Access to historical sources would be basic to the development of historical empathy, something that Kohlmeier [32] also confirms, adding group discussion to the interpretation of historical documents.

Recent research on students’ use of sources focused mainly on secondary education. Perceived problems include students’ preference for the use of secondary sources because they have more data and facts [33] and the influence of the media, which oversimplifies popular perceptions of the past [34]. Virta and Kouki [35] examined the historical understanding of 96 secondary school students, using indicators associated with historical contextualisation, perspective-taking and affective connection in relation to the topic of Finnish minors who were sent to Sweden in World War II. The authors point out that, although all the indicators were manifested in one way or another in the students’ essays, historical contextualisation was sometimes superficial, and perspective-taking, related to the affective dimension of the topic, was better handled. A deeper historical contextualisation requires knowledge of the context in which these people acted in order not to judge them according to current assumptions.

Undoubtedly, the exercise of correctly contextualising events in the past requires a great deal of background knowledge and reflection if presentism is to be avoided. Huijgen

et al. [36], following their study with 131 secondary school students, point out that historical contextualisation skills can be improved by (1) raising awareness of the consequences of a present-oriented perspective when examining the past, (2) improving the reconstruction of historical context, (3) improving the use of context to explain historical phenomena and (4) improving historical empathy. In this regard, Ohn [37] considers it essential to expose pre-service teachers to the process of developing knowledge about the past so that they can help their students investigate, question and interpret documents.

2.3. Historical Empathy and Types of Activities

The first to establish a typology of exercises related to historical empathy was Shemilt [9]. He established two basic categories: Descriptive Activities and Explanatory Activities. Descriptive Activities are those aimed at the projection of oneself into the past or the imaginative reconstruction of a situation in the past (e.g., biographies, dramas, projective exercises, reenactments and imaginative reconstructions). On the other hand, Explanatory Activities presuppose leaving the perspective of the present to understand the historically contextualised past in order to explain it (e.g., games and simulations, decision-making, culture–economy relationship activities, experimental re-enactments, confirmation of expectations, empathetic dilemmas and contrasts between past and present).

Domínguez [15] indicates that the typology of descriptive activities has been quite criticised either because it only considered the imagination without the support of the sources or because it implied identification with characters from the past that could end up prioritising the affective over the rational. In this respect, Cunningham [4] carried out a case study with four secondary school teachers to find out what strategies they used in their teaching practice to develop historical empathy. Many of the resources used by the teachers did not fit into Shemilt's typology at either level or, in many exercises, it was impossible to separate the descriptive from the explanatory. The author points to the use of videos and slides, illustrations and visuals, audio-recorded oral testimonies, reading historical fiction and poetry, guest speakers, trips to historical sites and museums, inquiry and argumentation from sources and true–false exercises, among others, as resources used by teachers. Cunningham considers that an empathic activity is not just about writing but can also be performed by thinking, listening, watching or discussing. In relation to this, Grant [38] points out that teaching through lectures does not allow for understanding the different perspectives that exist at a given moment. Similarly, Downey, cited by Brooks [39], relates the problems of historical perspective-taking to earlier poor training, focusing mainly on the details of what people did and not on how they did it or how they thought about doing it.

Foster and Yeager [40] consider that any exercise in historical empathy should have four interrelated phases: (1) an introduction that justifies the approach to a historical event requires analysis of human action, (2) investigation of the historical context and chronology, (3) analysis of the historical evidence and (4) use of the evidence to draw historical conclusions and build a perspective on the past.

Endacott and Brooks [18] establish four phases in conducting historical empathy activities: (1) introductory phase to introduce the historical situation and historical figures; (2) research phase on primary and secondary sources to develop a deep understanding of the historical context, historical perspective and related affective considerations; (3) display phase, in which students show the developed understanding and (4) reflection phase, in which students are invited to make past–present connections and check for possible changes in point of view.

Although it was noted above that the descriptive-type activities set out by Shemilt present several problems, they can be used to develop competencies associated with historical thinking. Trepát [41] defines them as a form of imaginative reconstruction by students, who must project themselves personally into the past and its context. Although the author also points out the need for the use of a different time and teaching method to those established by the curriculum, he considers that this type of activity can be very

effective. A correct descriptive activity associated with historical empathy must include the temporal dimension, the correct historical contextualisation using historical sources, both primary and secondary, and the narrative structure that can be connected to the historical explanation. When students contemplate an action performed by past and present historical agents, it creates an opportunity to broaden the common ground of understanding between past and present, allowing students to discover new ways of acting and being in the world [42]. The role of imagination, present feeling versus how they felt in the past, the dilemma of possibly fostering identification and emotional connection with past figures and the relationship between empathy and moral judgement were also highlighted in empathic-type exercises [4]. Historical empathy is more an outcome of other achievements related to historical competencies than an end in itself, as it underpins the use of evidence, influences the evaluation of motivation, uses causality and allows reference to the past in a more authentic and nuanced way [43].

In this way, the development of historical narratives as an activity becomes important. Rüssen [44] considers that through storytelling students connect their own identity in a temporal dimension in relation to others, which leads to the acquisition of future perspectives. Historical narratives are the representation of students' historical thinking and promote the analysis and understanding of both historical and current events and processes [45]. For their use to foster historical thinking, consideration should be given to the reading of primary sources, writing guidelines focused on historical perspectives and written guidelines for the synthesis of the main issues [46].

Some studies claim that students' performance of historical empathy exercises, adopting the role of historical agents, can lead to problems in terms of correct contextualisation. Brooks [39] analysed different written tasks on historical empathy, some in the first person from the perspective of a historical agent and others in the third person from the perspective of historical agents. His study suggests that first-person written activities are more likely to include inferential thinking and contribute to empathic consideration, but only to the extent that historical evidence is considered. With respect to activities written in the third person, the author notes that they are more historically accurate but less prone to inferential thinking. Research conducted in the Netherlands with secondary school students also confirms that activities written in the first person using historical empathy show more presentism and moral judgements about the past than those in the third person [47]. However, Volk [48,49] obtained positive results in the implementation of the "Avatar" project in a Latin American history course (Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) from the late 1960s to the present. The project was based neither on a role-playing game nor on the recreation of historical figures by means of "in" conversion. The students had to create avatars living in the context of Latin America for forty years, which involved researching and considering democratic contexts, dictatorships and wars. This required in-depth research of the period from primary and secondary sources. In writing their own testimonies from the perspective of their own vicissitudes, some students felt that writing a letter or narrative as a primary source carried more responsibility than reading or analysing an authentic one.

2.4. Can Historical Empathy Change Past and/or Present Attitudes?

Barton and Levstik [5] allude to the subjective component of historical empathy as care, defined as an attitude and/or feeling one may have towards others from the past and their situations, establishing four types of relationships:

- Care about: concern for people and facts, considering some to be more interesting than others.
- Care that: personal or emotional reactions to past events.
- Care for: a desire to help victims of past injustice.
- Care to: action in the present, involving helping others.

Historical empathy exercises can help to make connections between the past and the present by understanding different cultural contexts and parameters. Endacott and Brooks [18] point out that historical empathy can foster a desire to prevent past mistakes

in the present in similar circumstances, developing an awareness of current needs and possible responses and a better understanding of the world today. Students should be able to find an affective connection between the lived experiences of people in the past and similar experiences of their own. If historical empathy is not approached from one's own experience, one runs the risk of falling into what Endacott and Brooks call "selfish drift". However, if one only identifies affectively with characters who lived through tragic situations, one can end up projecting one's own feelings onto those of others, which implies sympathy rather than empathy. Brooks [19] also argues that taking care of historical content helps to shape present-day beliefs and behaviour, although incorrect use can lead to the assumption that humans think and act the same at all times, regardless of context.

On the other hand, history teaching must include "problematic" or unjust approaches to the past and provide students with tools that enable them to deal with controversial and sensitive human issues. In this regard, Virta and Kouki [35] point out that contextualised historical empathy, perspective-taking and multiperspectivity should not lead to neutral relativism and acceptance of all perspectives when dealing with injustices. Regarding the treatment of traumatic events, Gubkin [50] considers that empathic understanding (simply through the affective element) may not be the best pedagogical tool and advocates its replacement and the use of what he calls "engaged witnessing". The latter would involve teaching historical context, presenting multiple positions to analyse complex problems, making representations explicit and incorporating emotions as a source of knowledge.

Some experiences demonstrate the importance of historical empathy when it comes to understanding foreign or past cultures and even thinking historically about situations of conflicting identities. Sáiz [51], through a practice set in medieval Spain, points out that the recreation of participation in the Christian conquest as an experience of historical migration in which some students are the children of immigrants can serve to introduce possible content on the causes of migrations. The experience carried out by Burgard and Boucher [52] during a field trip to historical sites on the Underground Rail Road linked to racial segregation in the United States showed an uncomfortable but necessary past in order to avoid racist attitudes in the present. In another case, the aim of the experience is contact with the multicultural past as a new kind of intergroup contact. The programme described by Stefaniak and Bilewicz [53] familiarised Polish students with Jewish historical heritage in the places where they lived. The students transformed their attitudes, manifesting greater knowledge of Jewish history and local history, greater inclusion of Jews with more positive attitudes towards them and even an increased perception of equality with respect to other non-Jewish groups. In Colombia, to introduce plurality and an appreciation of difference in the classroom, the use of primary and secondary testimonies of war victims was implemented [54]. The results show that not only the suffering of the victims is understood but also that students learn about the configuration of the conflict, its actors and territories and its causes and consequences. Recently, a case study conducted in a museum in The Hague with upper secondary school students confirmed an increased connection with the people of the past after a learning session on the lives of children during World War II [55].

These experiences indicate that historical empathy is basic to education for democratic citizenship, enabling an understanding of other people's motivations, thoughts and feelings in the past, ultimately having implications for actions in the present day.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Methodology

This research is a continuation of an earlier exploratory study [56]. It did not include a control group, which may pose a threat to internal validity, and it should be noted that the approach to the current refugee situation was limited. This is why the study was replicated in a more comprehensive way, with an intervention that includes activities related to historical contextualisation, contact with primary testimonies, the use of sources and historical empathy.

The current study had the following objectives:

1. To test whether the implementation of activities linking the situation of the exiles of the Spanish Civil War with current refugees can contribute to the development of tolerant attitudes towards the figure of displaced persons in trainee teachers.
2. To ascertain the extent to which these attitudes are modified after the implementation of the programme.

The research design is quantitative and corresponds to a quasi-experimental design with non-randomly selected control and experimental groups. Some studies [57,58] indicate that this type of design provides reasonable control over most sources of disability and is more robust than pre-experimental designs. In the design followed in this study, established groups of subjects were used without altering them. Once the pretest was applied, a different treatment was conducted on one of the groups, and subsequently, the posttest was applied to both groups. The baseline situation of both groups was checked to determine their homogeneity and, thus, avoid possible threats to internal validity.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 101 students in the 3rd year of their Bachelor's Degree program in Primary Education at a Spanish university, 50 of them in the control group and 51 in the experimental group. In terms of gender, 74 of the students were female, and 27 were male. Ages ranged from 18 to 38 years, with a mean age of 21.12 ($SD = 3.745$).

3.3. Procedure

The intervention and research were carried out with two specific and different class-groups, using a convenience sample, for two months. To carry out the research, the relevant permissions were requested from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of the University and the personal permission of the participating students for the use of the data, considering that they were of legal age. The experimental group was divided into two subgroups during the practice sessions, taking advantage of the natural breakdown of the group in these sessions, except for the session dedicated to the situation of people located in the Ritsona refugee camp. Students were asked to fill in the questionnaire at two different times: in the first session before the educational intervention and in the last session after the intervention. The questionnaires were handed out in physical paper format and were filled in with a biro. All sessions took place in the corresponding practice room, except for the second session, which took place in the usual theory room. All face-to-face sessions were supervised by the same two lecturers. The final practice was assessed using a rubric developed for the purpose of measuring the adequacy of each narrative to the original practice script provided.

3.4. Intervention Programme

With respect to the experimental group, in the first session, after detailing the objectives of the study and guaranteeing the anonymity of the responses, the students were asked to fill in the questionnaire. To carry out the repeated measures analysis, each student was asked to enter a personal alphanumeric code. During the remainder of the session, the refugee issue was addressed through a discussion between teachers and students.

The second session provided students with first-hand accounts of the diversity of displaced people, their circumstances of origin and their situation based on the Greek refugee camp of Ritsona. It should be noted that this was the only session that was not attended by all students, as it was a theoretical session without compulsory attendance.

In the third session, students handled primary and secondary sources related to the exiles of the Spanish Civil War, accessible on the Internet (testimonies of exiles, documentaries and websites of interest) through their viewing, reading and subsequent debate. As a related assessable practice, students had to write, during their personal work hours for the subject, an individual composition in the form of a letter written by an exile of the Spanish Civil War, using historical empathy and the use of primary and secondary sources

as procedures. The script for the practical was outlined, with students having to historically contextualise the exile's account. The students had to adopt the role of a person who is forced or who decides to leave the country where they live due to war. Each student could choose the role of the main character (woman, man, boy or girl) and the family and/or work circumstances of the character. The reasons that prompted the character to leave their country had to be historically justified, so it was necessary to allude to an episode of the Civil War that caused the character to choose the path of exile (battle, the advance of the conflict, repression for ideological or labour reasons and economic reasons, among others). It was also a guideline to detail the circumstances of the host country chosen by the student, based on historical data about the countries that were the destination of the exiles of the Civil War obtained during the third session or selected from other contributions of the student's choice. Finally, it was necessary to allude to the context that the character found in the host country, additionally explaining what their destination was based on the country chosen previously (if France was chosen, the context of the Second World War and what happened to the Spanish exiles in that country had to be considered). The practical experience, about one page in length, had to be narrated in the first person in the form of a letter, diary, reflection or similar. In addition, the Appendix A had to include the origin of the historical sources used to carry out the practice. This narration was the only activity in which students had to reveal their identities.

For the design of the practice, the models of integrative empathy of Davis [59,60] and Fernández-Pinto, López-Pérez and Márquez [61], and that of social empathy of Segal [62], were considered from the perspective of psychology. From the didactics of history, the presence of the three efforts of Endacott and Brooks [18] was considered. The students had to adopt the role of a person (girl, boy, woman or man) who, during or after the Civil War, was forced into exile, similar to Volk's avatar project [48,49], historically justifying their motivation. Also included as obligatory aspects to be taken into account were the vicissitudes that occurred during the journey to the destination country and the situation of the exiles upon arrival, both based on verifiable historical references. The script was based on Grau's proposal for a historical account [45]: title, initial situation, development and final situation.

Finally, in the fourth and last session, the students handed in their internships to the teachers, and once all the material was collected, in a single session, they completed the questionnaire again. All sessions lasted one hour except for the session on refugees in the Ritsona camp, which lasted one and a half hours. In all sessions, students were asked to fill in a registration form with their personal code.

With respect to the control group, students had to complete the same questionnaire on the same dates as the experimental group, without any intervention or treatment of refugees or exiles in the classroom.

3.5. Data Collection Tool

A developed questionnaire on students' perceptions and attitudes towards Syrian refugees (PREFSIR-1) consisting of three blocks of questions [63] was used as a measurement instrument. Block A, called "Attitudes", was composed of 30 variables associated with the students' perceptions of Syrian refugees and their situation in terms of affective, religious, economic-labour, social and political issues. The items are answered on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the student strongly disagreeing and 5 indicating the student strongly agreeing with the statements presented. A list of variables is included in Annex 1.

The items in group A were grouped into five dimensions called "Affective", "Religion", "Economic-labour", "Social" and "Immigration policy". The "Affective" dimension measures students' attitudes towards refugees from the point of view of personal relationships. The "Religion" dimension tries to find out the degree of student acceptance of the different religions that refugees may profess and whether there is a tendency to link terrorism with religion. The "Economic and Labour" dimension includes a series of items related to the possible scenarios that may arise after the arrival of refugees in the

labour market and in the context of the economic crisis. The “Social” dimension measures students’ perceptions of the level of integration of refugees from a social and cultural point of view. The last dimension, “Immigration Policy”, groups together different variables concerning students’ beliefs about what the role of different countries should be in terms of refugee reception policies. Negative statements were reverse-coded and then averaged with positive statements. Thus, higher values on the scale indicate more positive attitudes towards refugees.

Finally, questions of a social and personal nature were also considered in terms of age, the type of school where compulsory education was studied, area of residence and the education and employment situation of both parents.

3.6. Analytical Methods and Techniques

Prior to the intervention, a multivariate analysis (MANOVA) was carried out using as independent variables the group (experimental, control) and sex (male, female), and as dependent variables, the factors studied (“Affective”, “Religion”, “Economic-Labour”, “Social” and “Immigration Policy”).

To find out the results after the intervention programme, a repeated measures MANOVA was carried out, considering as inter-subject variables the group (control, experimental) and time (pre, post) and sex (male, female) and the factors studied as intra-subject dependent variables.

A linear contrast was performed to establish how each group changes (or not) over the implementation of the programme. Cohen’s d was the statistic applied to calculate the effect size and thus provide an estimate of the effect due to sample size. Cohen’s d [64] was taken into account, where d = small effect (≥ 0.15 and < 0.40), medium effect (≥ 0.40 and < 0.75), large effect (≥ 0.75 and < 1.10) and very large effect (≥ 1.10 and < 1.45).

Cronbach’s alpha statistic was used to measure the reliability index.

Once the items in block A were grouped into the five dimensions explained in the previous study, we proceeded to descriptive analysis, applying tests of central tendency and dispersion (mean, standard deviation, variance, skewness and kurtosis).

SPSS 27.0 and G*Power 3.1 were used for data analysis, the latter for effect size estimation [65,66].

4. Results

The results of the calculation of the distribution values of the five factors under study in the pre-test groups (control and experimental) show a skewness and a kurtosis ≤ 1.00 ; therefore, it presents a good sampling distribution. The results of the MANOVA revealed that no statistically significant differences were found in the group \times sex interaction (Wilks’ Lambda = 0.952, $F_{(5, 93)} = 0.931$, $p > 0.05$). It can be said that we start from homogeneous groups and that before the intervention, they showed no differences between them.

Cronbach’s alpha indicated a good reliability fit, both for the questionnaire as a whole and for each of the dimensions, with $\alpha > 0.700$ for all of them (see scale and subscale values in Table 1).

At the end of the intervention programme, a significant multivariate effect emerged for the interaction group \times time, Wilks’ Lambda = 0.817, $F_{(5, 93)} = 4.172$, $p < 0.005$, $\eta^2 = 0.183$, in the results of the application of the MANOVA statistic for repeated measures. Univariate analyses show that the experimental group at the end of the programme scored higher than the control group in all the dimensions studied, presenting statistically significant differences: “Affective” [$F_{(1, 100)} = 4.157$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.041$], “Economic-Labour” [$F_{(1, 100)} = 13.040$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.119$], “Social” [$F_{(1, 100)} = 13.893$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.125$] and “Immigration Policy” [$F_{(1, 100)} = 4.543$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.045$]. We also calculated whether differences appear for the $2 \times 2 \times 2$ interaction (group-time-sex), and the results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences for this model in any factor.

Table 1. Comparison of pre-post scores between groups: univariate analysis and reliability analysis.

	Control Group						Experimental Group						ES <i>d</i>		
	α	Pre			Post			M	Pre			Post			
		M	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	M	SD		M	SD	Skew.	Kurt.		M	SD
A.Ref.	0.911														
Affec.	0.701	4.13	0.595	−0.276	−0.924	3.98	0.694	4.19	0.560	−1.003	0.910	4.24	0.605	0.09	
Rel.	0.721	3.24	0.782	−0.408	0.375	3.23	0.815	3.32	0.761	−0.600	0.167	3.54	0.637	0.32	
Eco.Lab	0.717	3.38	0.739	−0.245	0.014	3.27	0.762	3.25	0.658	−0.168	−0.592	3.59	0.614	0.54	
Social	0.706	3.71	0.685	−0.371	0.114	3.68	0.701	3.52	0.432	0.172	−0.259	3.79	0.416	0.64	
Pol.Emi	0.753	3.62	0.732	−0.301	−0.673	3.59	0.774	3.79	0.718	−0.799	0.752	4.06	0.600	0.41	

Legend: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Skew. = skewness; Kurt. = kurtosis; ES = effect size; Cohen’s $d = d$; α = Cronbach’s alpha.

The linear contrast shows, in the experimental group, a statistically significant increase at the end of the application of the programme in “Religion” ($t = -2.558, p < 0.05$), “Economic-labour” ($t = -4.196, p < 0.001$), “Social” ($t = -4.445, p < 0.001$), “Immigration Policy” ($t = -3.306, p < 0.005$). In the control group, decreases were observed in all variables, and this was specifically statistically significant in the variable “Affective” ($t = 2.401, p < 0.05$).

Effect sizes in the experimental group were tested between the pre- and post-test, with the strongest effect size being the “Social” dimension ($d = 0.64$), followed by the “Economic-Labour” dimension ($d = 0.54$). The results can be seen in Table 1.

On the other hand, knowing the attendance of the students to the sessions through the requested codes, the performance of a repeated measures analysis with two subgroups was decided: those who attended the lecture on refugees and those who were absent to check if there were differences between the two. The results indicate that the subgroup that attended the talk shows a statistically significant increase in “Religion” ($t = -2.808, p \leq 0.01$), “Economic-Labour” ($t = -2.887, p \leq 0.01$), “Social” ($t = -3.825, p \leq 0.001$) and “Immigration Policy” ($t = -4.525, p \leq 0.001$).

In the group that did not attend the talk, there is a statistically significant increase in the dimensions “Economic-Labour” ($t = -3.068, p \leq 0.005$) and “Social” ($t = -2.637, p \leq 0.05$). The results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Pairwise comparison between those who did and did not attend the talk (repeated measures).

		M	SD	t	p
Yes attended	Affec. ¹ —Affec. ²	−0.173	0.683	−1.269	0.217
	Relig. ¹ —Relig. ²	−0.393	0.700	−2.808	0.010
	EcoLab. ¹ —EcoLab. ²	−0.387	0.670	−2.887	0.008
	Soci. ¹ —Soci. ²	−0.286	0.373	−3.825	0.001
	Pol.Emi. ¹ —Pol.Emi. ²	−0.533	0.589	−4.525	0.000
Not in attendance	Affec. ¹ —Affec. ²	0.064	0.365	0.895	0.380
	Relig. ¹ —Relig. ²	−0.045	0.439	−0.522	0.606
	EcoLab. ¹ —EcoLab. ²	−0.308	0.511	−3.068	0.005
	Soci. ¹ —Soci. ²	−0.253	0.489	−2.637	0.014
	Pol.Emi. ¹ —Pol.Emi. ²	−0.006	0.423	−0.077	0.939

Legend: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; t = empirical value of Student’s t -test; p = statistical probability assuming H_0 is true; 1: Pre; 2: Post.

5. Discussion

This research initially set out an objective related to fostering positive attitudes towards refugees through a programme using contextualisation and historical empathy, the use of sources and contact with primary witnesses. The study analysed the effectiveness of

the programme in fostering positive attitudes towards refugees in pre-service primary school teachers.

The results confirm that the implementation of the programme using contextualisation and historical empathy and the use of primary testimonies regarding refugees contributes to an increase in positive attitudes towards refugees in prospective teachers. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant increase in the experimental group's attitude scores towards refugees, especially in attitudes related to religion, economic–labour, social and immigration policy, which is in line with and improves on the results of the previous study [56]. Affective attitudes started from a good score in the pre-test and improved significantly in the post-test. On the other hand, there were no gender differences in terms of higher positive attitudes towards refugees, which indicates the validity of the intervention programme and its suitability regardless of the gender of the students to whom it is applied. The results show that the implementation of the intervention programme helps students' understand the refugee situation, regardless of gender.

Although there is a lack of studies that measure the change in attitudes towards certain groups through programmes that use historical empathy, the results suggest that didactic experiences that combine historical contextualisation and the comparison of historical events with similar, current situations closer to the students are effective in reducing prejudices and stereotypes, which must be related to the results obtained by Stefaniak and Bilewicz [53]. Exercises using the procedure of historical empathy appear to be a valid instrument for understanding and approaching past situations from the present, as well as from the past to similar, current situations, as in the case of people displaced by armed conflicts.

Some recent studies claim that students' performance of historical empathy exercises, adopting the role of historical actors themselves, can lead to problems in terms of correct contextualisation. Brooks' study [39] suggested that written activities in the first person were more likely to include inferential thinking and contribute to empathetic consideration but only to the extent that historical evidence was taken into account. With respect to third-person written activities, the author, like De Leur [47], noted that they were more historically accurate but less prone to inferential thinking. The results of the present study suggest that educational programmes that include written activities, taking the role of an exile from the Spanish Civil War, using historical empathy as a procedure and correctly contextualising the story through the use of primary and secondary sources, help students to understand more about the situation of refugees in the present, perhaps because of this ability to draw inferences. In addition, the practice script's requirement for accurate and credible historical contextualisation reduces the use of anachronistic assertions. In line with Volk [48,49], activities that involve putting oneself in someone else's shoes can help to incorporate other people's points of view by perceiving historical people as human beings.

On the other hand, it may be that the analysis of historical sources for practice, including primary testimonies of family members, may facilitate an understanding of the refugee situation as a reflection of the experience of their family members, which would be in line with Sirin, Valentino and Villalobos [67] in their study within the framework of group empathy. The authors indicate that historically disadvantaged groups (e.g., minorities and women) may find it easier to imagine themselves in the position of a person who is treated unfairly, even when that person comes from a different group. Because of their higher levels of empathy for disadvantaged groups, many members of minority groups support extending protection to others, even when their own interests are threatened. These historically oppressed minorities may perceive and relate better to other minorities facing discrimination, especially when they mirror the experiences of their own group. This empathy for out-groups would emerge at an early age as a result of socialisation experiences. In this sense, social empathy (understanding others by putting oneself in the shoes of those living in unequal situations in order to take actions that lead to positive change) may play an important role in the process, following Segal's model [60] as students

had to exercise individual empathy, contextual understanding and social responsibility for a greater understanding of refugees after “experiencing” their experiences.

Undoubtedly, direct contact with refugees and their life stories is a major learning resource. The analysis of the study indicates that students who attended all sessions increased their scores on four of the dimensions studied (attitudes towards religion, attitudes towards economic–labour, attitudes towards social and attitudes towards immigration policy) in a statistically significant way, while students who did not attend the second session, the one related to the testimonies from the Ritsona refugee camp, only increased their scores on two of them (attitudes towards economic–labour and attitudes towards social). These results may indicate the need for contextualisation, both past and present, when implementing this type of programme.

Having presented the analysis of the application of the programme based on contextualisation and historical empathy, the use of sources and contact with primary testimonies to reinforce tolerance towards refugees in future primary school teachers, it is worth mentioning some of its limitations, as well as suggesting lines of work for future studies. Among the general limitations of the present study, the limited sample size, which conditions the generalisability of the results, and the non-random nature of the experience, as it was carried out with specific class groups, should be highlighted. As a future line of research, comparison with other similar educational programmes is necessary to determine their effectiveness. It should also be noted that the involvement of the evaluators in the intervention may have introduced a bias in it, as well as its short-term nature that does not consider the maintenance of long-term effects. Hence, it would be advisable to carry out a longitudinal study to assess this effectiveness in the long term in order to check whether these positive attitudes are maintained over time. On the other hand, it would be of interest to test the validity of the programme at other levels of compulsory education with the necessary adaptations to the cognitive level of the students. It should also be said that research has already begun to analyse students’ narratives, carried out in recent years, based on different indicators related to historical thinking in order to determine the level of historical training of students of primary pre-service teachers. Thus, there are several lines of work that will open up at the conclusion of this research, some of which were already initiated and will allow us to delve even deeper into strategies that facilitate both the promotion of tolerant attitudes towards refugees and other groups and the development of historical thinking in future teachers.

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Appendix A

The following is a list of the variables of the questionnaire used, translated from Spanish into English.

Regarding the arrival of refugees in Spain, do you think that. . .

- A1. Many people must leave their countries for military reasons (wars, conflicts, etc.).
- A2. I wouldn't mind having refugees as pupils.
- A3. Because of our cultural differences, I don't think I could have a refugee as a friend.
- A4. I wouldn't mind if my brother or sister had a refugee as a partner.
- A5. Having refugees in the neighbourhood can be a source of problems.
- A6. I would not feel comfortable living in a neighbourhood where there were many refugees.

Regarding issues related to religion, do you think that. . .

- A7. The reception of refugees in Europe will lead to a growth of the Islamic religion in Spain.
- A8. I would not like to have a mosque next to my house.
- A9. The fact that most of the refugees are Muslims could mean a greater risk of attacks, as jihadism is related to this religion.
- A10. The state/autonomous community/city council should provide certain places of worship for Muslim believers.
- A11. The education system should take other religions into account through a curricular or extracurricular subject.
- A12. The school canteen should consider students who cannot eat certain foods for religious reasons.

Regarding economic and employment-related issues, do you think that. . .

- A13. Welcoming refugees will have a negative impact on the European and Spanish labour market.
- A14. Only highly qualified people in terms of employment should be welcome.
- A15. The reception of refugees can be very positive for the labour market.
- A16. Refugees have more rights than Spaniards, they are given houses and jobs.
- A17. The reception of refugees is not a threat to the Spanish economy.
- A18. The situation of Spaniards is so difficult, the money dedicated to refugees could be used to help Spanish families with problems.

Regarding socially related issues, do you think that. . .

- A19. Refugees are fleeing war, not terrorists.
- A20. Welcoming refugees will negatively affect the rights of European and Spanish women.
- A21. The reception of migrants will not lead to an increase in social unrest.
- A22. Refugees have a different religion and/or culture, which can be detrimental to our Spanish and European identity.
- A23. The reception of refugees will not increase the risk of terrorist attacks.
- A24. Contact with refugees can help mutual understanding and better coexistence.

Regarding the immigration policy, do you think that. . .

- A25. Europe and Spain should only take in migrants fleeing war.
- A26. Europe should close its borders to refugees until it creates a way to prevent the passage of terrorists.
- A27. Europe and Spain should only take in children fleeing war.
- A28. The acceptance of migrants should be broader and extended to other job seekers.
- A29. It is logical and lawful for some countries to close their borders to refugees out of fear of terrorism.
- A30. Europe and Spain have a duty to take care of those people fleeing war in their countries.

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